Ears Taut to Hear:
Sound Recording and Twentieth-Century American Literature

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ABSTRACT

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"Ears Taut to Hear" investigates the sustained engagement between American literature and sound reproduction technologies during the twentieth century. Through an analysis of texts by Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, Alan Lomax, Sidney Bechet, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and August Wilson, I explore how literature across a number of genres and modes extended formal techniques in response to the advent of the phonograph, tape, and LPs. I contend that the development of sound recording technology not only shaped many of the formal innovations that we now associate with modernism, but that it compelled writers to theorize sound. For instance, Gertrude Stein's broken-record repetitions in "Melanctha" (1909) illustrate new ways of thinking about listening and repetition in the era of the "talking machine," while Langston Hughes' "LP Book," *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961), conceptualizes the relationship between stereo recording and the spatial dimensions of sound. Tracing the shifting role of sound over the century, each chapter features a pairing of literary texts alongside key historical events in the development of sound technology and the recording industry, including the invention of the phonograph (Stein and DosPassos), ethnographic uses of recording (Lomax and Bechet), subversive uses of the tape-recorder (Kerouac and Burroughs), and the advent of long-play albums and stereo (Hughes and Baraka). The final chapter reflects upon August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and encapsulates the ongoing tension between live and recorded performance. Ultimately, I contend that while literary innovations were shaped by phonographic technologies, texts also played a key role in tutoring the ear to listen amidst a modern multimedia environment.

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Prelude

> *"There's always a rhythm to the space between things. Pause, hold the thought, check the moment. Repeat. Wait. There it goes again. Another thought, another pause in the stream of consciousness in another abstraction—the reader, the listener. Speak these words out loud, and the same logic applies—there's always a rhythm to the space between things."*
>
> —DJ Spooky (aka Paul D. Miller), *Sound Unbound* (2008)

The prologue to Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man* has become an oft-repeated example of a text that incorporates phonographic sound and listening. References to phonographs and popular recordings percolate throughout twentieth-century literature, but in Ellison's prologue, the phonograph and a recording of Louis Armstrong are the central figures through which Ellison endeavors to introduce the concept of invisibility and the complex relationship between race and history. Speaking to the reader from the confines of his basement "hole," Ellison's nameless narrator—a self-proclaimed "thinker-tinker" who compares himself to Thomas Edison—uses sound technology beneath the glow of 1,369 electric light bulbs to plot his eventual reemergence into a world that refuses to see him. While putting a record on his radio-phonograph, the narrator enters a scene of imaginative listening:

> There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole, and when I have music I want to *feel* its vibration, not only with my ear but with my whole body. I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue"—all at the same time. (8)

The scene has become a touchstone for discussions about literature and sound because it so elegantly depicts the distinctly modern sensation of listening not just to music but to a music recording. For what is the voice of the phonograph but the voice of an invisible man?

Evan Eisenberg, author of *The Recording Angel,* has suggested that Louis Armstrong had in fact become synonymous with the phonograph. Recording made it possible for anyone to

imitate his gravelly voice, and "any critic could recognize in him the voice of the phonograph, the voice of invisible man" (121). As both Robert O'Meally and Alexander Weheliye have pointed out, the scene is one in which the narrator is probing for a sense of identity in light of his invisibility and locates a potential identity in sound when the visual fails.[1] Armstrong becomes an important figure by which Ellison introduces the concept of invisibility, and in this example, Ellison not only suggests the visual element of invisibility (i.e. the metaphoric invisibility of blackness), but the sonic as well.[2] As a recorded sound, Armstrong is invisible in the literal sense: he has no bodily presence and exists only as a technologically reproduced vibration or a disembodied voice. He is a sound taken in through the ear and felt through the body. While listening to Armstrong, the narrator imagines hearing "unheard sounds" and traversing space and time, leading many scholars to suggest that the scene is a parody of the act of listening.[3] Yet Ellison's text here must be understood as a serious investigation into the possibilities of listening. The narrator thus continues:

> Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music. (8)

The narrator's description is, from one perspective, a reframing of black experience through the syncopated rhythms of jazz; read another way, it is a description of what the invention of the phonograph did to sound. By taking sounds that were once ephemeral and making them

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[1] *See* Robert G. O'Meally, ed. *Living with Music*, 139; Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 47-48.

[2] *See* Goble, 159; O'Meally, 139.

[3] In *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (2010), Mark Goble has pointed to this "scene of maximum technology" as marked by "terrific irony" in its appeals to Ford, Edison, and Franklin (159).

repeatable, recording ripped sound from the strictures of time and made it possible to fast-forward and leap back, to play sounds at different speeds and pause them at will.

Ellison's Prologue also encapsulates many of the ideas and themes that one encounters when examining the broader relationship of literature to sound reproduction technologies: a heightened approach to listening, the paradox that sound is both disembodied and felt within the body, and the ability of the machine to evoke voices of the past while allowing the listener to traverse time and alter its tempo. In *Listening and the Voice* (1976), Don Ihde describes how "listening makes the invisible *present* in a way similar to the presence of the mute in vision" (51). By listening not just to a performance of Louis Armstrong but to a recording of Armstrong that the narrator had no doubt listened to many times already, he is able to hear elements within the recording which he had not heard before. It is not exactly that these aspects of the recording were previously *silent*, but they were not *present*. Listening to the record is thus a multilayered activity—one distinct both from hearing and from other kinds of listening, for this listening is analytical and allows Ellison's narrator to detect sounds that the ear alone would not detect.

> I discovered a new analytical way of listening to music. The unheard sounds came through, and each melodic line existed of itself, stood out clearly from all the rest, said its piece and waited patiently for the other voices to speak. That night I found myself hearing not only in time but in space as well. I not only entered the music but descended, like Dante, into its depths. And *beneath the swiftness of the hot tempo was a slower tempo and a cave and I entered it and looked around and heard an old woman singing a spiritual as full of Weltschmerz as flamenco, and beneath that lay a still lower level…* (8-9)

As the narrator continues to listen, he uncovers a depth of history contained within black music, from the Negro spiritual to the call-and-response rhythms of the black church and narratives of slavery. The dream is sparked by accidentally smoking marijuana, but the revelatory hallucination of sound is dependent upon his repeated listening to a phonograph record that he has heard so many times before. Thought of in this light, the narrator's desire for further amplification via five radio phonographs is in fact a kind of desire for simultaneous repetition. Under the spell of this hyper-sonic space, he realizes, "I know now that few really listen to this music," because when listened to closely "this familiar music had demanded action" (12). As Alexander Weheliye puts it, listening cuts through "the opacities of the sonic" (50).

One of the things we often overlook when reading this scene is that although Ellison was writing at a time in the late 1940s and early 1950s when high-fidelity and stereo technologies were in their nascent stages, the scene in which the narrator imagines listening to Louis Armstrong's 1929 recording of "What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue" hearkens back to an older technology, and an early encounter with a popular jazz record. Although portraying a historical moment when phonographic sound was just recently electrically amplified, the allusion to the five radio-phonographs *implies* the spatial dimension that high-fidelity and stereo would bring. Sound technology was incredibly important to Ellison, who self-identified as an audiophile. As he recalls in his 1955 essay for *High Fidelity* magazine, "Living with Music," he was "obsessed with the idea of reproducing sound with such fidelity that even when using music as a defense behind which I could write, it would reach the unconscious levels of the mind with the least distortion" (11).[4] Ellison was always at the forefront of technological advances in sound

[4] Ellison described the piece-by-piece assembly of his sound system, which included "a fine speaker system, a first-rate AM-FM tuner, a transcription turntable and a speaker cabinet. I built half a dozen or more preamplifiers and record compensators before finding a commercial one that satisfied my ear, and finally we acquired an arm, a magnetic cartridge, and—glory of the house—a tape recorder" (*Living With Music* 10-11).

and in later years when tape recording technology became available, Ellison would also use tape to dictate and listen back to his writing in order to better hear its rhythms.[5] For Ellison, writing and sound reproduction technologies were always intertwined. Not content to merely *hear* sounds, listening gave Ellison access to another plane.

Invisible Man illustrates a strain in American modernism that reveals the extraordinary importance of listening and sound recording technology for how we mediate issues of American cultural identity and what O'Meally calls "the discovery of a black self that applies to us all" (139). If what W.E.B. DuBois said was true and the "problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line," then Americans needed to find a way to temper the visual sense and reinvent it through the ear.[6] In other words, vision should not be blinded or erased, but twentieth-century writers had to find a way to elevate a sense that allows us to hear around the corners, as Ellison might say, and to detect resonant frequencies amid difference. *Invisible Man* is a helpful point of departure, for it allows us to ask: what did the invention of the phonograph mean for literature? How do encounters with sound recordings transform writerly practices? And, perhaps most importantly, how did sound reproduction technologies change the ways we listen to texts? We know how sound recording transformed the way we listen to music, but its impact on literature has been relatively unexplored.[7]

Because of the ways the phonograph was positioned in relation to the voice and writing, it opened the doors for writers to take up the technology and to shape it for themselves. The

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[5] Footage of Ellison recording and listening to himself on tape as he dictated passages that would later appear in his posthumous novel *Juneteenth* was captured on film and is featured in the PBS American Masters documentary *Ralph Ellison: An American Journey*, produced, written, and directed by filmmaker Avon Kirkland.

[6] The very presence of the sorrow songs at the beginning of each chapter of DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) is a testament to this fact.

[7] Examples of studies about the relationship between sound recording technology, music, and the music industry, include: Michael Chanan, *Repeated Takes* (1995); Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound* (2004), David Suisman, *Selling Sounds* (2012).

kinds of questions that sound recording raised about the phenomenology of sound—about its relationship to temporality, space, liveness, and voice—suggest that sound recording has been adopted as a metaphor for understanding our relationship to modernity. Furthermore, many of these conceptual issues made prominent by recording technology are ones embedded in the technology of writing as well (writing being, in many ways, our earliest recording technology). In this sense, the phonograph and the technologies that came after have continued to reinvigorate the idea of writing as a technology for experimentation. Poetry has always worked along the sonic line between literature and music, but in the twentieth century, these sonic traces were bleeding into literature across genres, including novels, autobiography, and theater. And in poetry, that line between literature and music became even more blurred when poets like Jean Cocteau and Gertrude Stein started making their own recordings.

This dissertation investigates the sustained engagement between American literature and sound reproduction technologies during the noisy twentieth century.[8] Through an analysis of texts by Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, Alan Lomax, Sidney Bechet, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and August Wilson, I explore how literature across a number of genres and modes—ranging from fiction and poetry to autobiography and drama—extended formal techniques in response to the advent of the phonograph, tape, and LPs. I contend that the development of sound recording technology not only shaped many of the formal innovations that we now associate with modernism, but that it compelled writers to theorize sound. For instance, Gertrude Stein's broken-record repetitions in "Melanctha" (1909) illustrate new ways of thinking about listening and repetition in the era of the "talking machine," while Langston Hughes' "LP Book," *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961), conceptualizes the

[8] For one of the first instances of the phrase "noisy twentieth century," see E. O. Randall, "Editorialana," *Ohio History* 11.1 (Jul. 1902): 163. (Special thanks to John Hay, who first noticed this reference.)

relationship between stereo recording and the spatial dimensions of sound. As I show, these texts gave readers new ways to hear.

Tracing the shifting role of sound over the century, each chapter features a pairing of literary texts placed alongside key historical events in the development of sound technology and the recording industry, including the invention of the phonograph and the rise of mass-produced recordings, ethnographic uses of recording and transcription, the advent of long-play albums and stereo sound, and experimental uses of the tape recorder. The pairings of texts serve as case studies of how writers encountered or shaped these different moments in the technology's development, but the choice of pairings carries different inflections from chapter to chapter, sometimes designating a historical transition or shift and other times reflecting resonant authorial motivations. Rather than restrict myself to perfect synchronicity, my readings of these texts purposefully insert space and at times syncopated differences. In doing so, I offer a counter-narrative to the tendency to treat the advent of sound recording as an apocryphal event that forever and indelibly impacted the way that we understand sound, showing instead that the way we encounter sounds continued (and continues) to evolve, as did literature's attentiveness to the nuanced differences between media.[9]

As a metaphor, phonographic technologies and the peculiarities of listening to them became a way for writers to work through a number of issues—race first and foremost, but also class and geographic difference (which often register as dialect).[10] At other times recording

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[9] Edison's own words helped to perpetuate the myth of the phograph's amazing potential. In his notebook entry from July 18, 1877, he wrote "now doubt that I shall be able to store up & reproduce automatically at any future time the human voice perfectly" (qtd. in Stross 30). The article published that year in *Scientific American* announcing the invention marveled at the phonograph and thought it "utterly astounding"—according to Edison's biographer Randall Stross, the news was sensational, attracting interviews with most major newspapers. "Thanks to *Scientific American*, Edison would never again enjoy the sweetness of anonymous obscurity" (Stross 32).

[10] For more about the topic of dialect and modernism, *see* Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-century Literature* (1994).

technology became a way for writers to address the very issues of a mediated culture and the dual concerns that mass media was both homogenizing America (and erasing differences, regional and otherwise) and dividing us from each other—a concern even more prevalent today in the age of Facebook and Twitter. In fact, in today's digital world, we are so attuned to the *multi-* in multimedia that it is hard to imagine a time when text, image, and sound were not so neatly integrated and synchronized. We often forget that when Edison invented the phonograph in 1877, it was not yet a foregone conclusion that the device was destined for musical entertainment; until the 1920s the phonograph was simply referred to as the "talking machine."[11] However, by making sounds repeatable, the phonograph raised philosophical-acoustical questions about sound in its spatial and temporal dimensions. When we consider the role writing has played as a recording technology, the stakes of sound recording for literature are quite high, especially for American literature, which spent the better part of the nineteenth century struggling to assert its unique voice, often through vernacular transcription of regional dialects like those heard in the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884).[12] And yet, we find that most scholars of sound have focused their explorations on the impact of this technology on music, overlooking the fact that, as the phonograph went from talking machine to mass-media device, literature in the twentieth century documented not only the sounds of voices but also a diverse array of technologically mediated sounds, which required a new kind of listening from readers—listening not just for speech or music, but how "the needle went rasp rasp."[13] My project reveals how listening has become a key mode of engaging sounds across time and space, whether in

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[11] As David Suisman notes in *Selling Sounds,* "by the early twentieth century, "talking machines" were doing much of America's singing, featuring selections from record catalogues hundreds of pages long" (Suisman 19).

[12] As Lionel Trilling remarked of Mark Twain, "He is the master of the style that escapes the fixity of the printed page, that sounds in our ears with the immediacy of the heard voice, the very voice of unpretentious truth." Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (1950; Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 113.

[13] *See* John Dos Passos, *42nd Parallel*, pg. 43.

Sidney Bechet's attempts to listen back to slave ancestors in *Treat it Gentle* (1960) or in Amiri Baraka's desire to project new black sonic spaces on his LP *It's Nation Time* (Motown 1972). Sound recording technologies changed American modernism in ways that have been overlooked by scholars. But I am not simply making a techno-determinist argument that treats changes in literary style as effects of the separate development and proliferation of new audio equipment. Ultimately, I contend that while literary innovations were shaped by phonographic technologies, texts also played a key role in tutoring the ear to listen amidst a modern multimedia environment.

Writing as/vs. Sound Recording

When bringing the phonograph into a discussion of literature we are faced with several impediments: first, we tend to think of sound reproduction technologies as devices for making music; second, if we talk about the relationship between literature and sound, it is usually in terms of *orality* and the voice in opposition to reading and writing; and third, scholars of sound not only tend to privilege music but tend to define sound *against* the visual. However, as this project shows, literature that takes up sound reproduction technology challenges these binary models and reveals their fluidity. Through extensions of literary form, writing reshapes and rethinks the relationship between music and recordings and creates new possibilities for literary uses. Engagement with recordings also places pressure on the orality of texts and the kind of non-vocal sounds writing can contain. By meditating on the specificities of technological developments, twentieth-century texts explode and rework the tensions between audio and visual by imagining sonic spaces.

In order to understand these literary innovations, it is helpful to revisit the origins of these preconceptions. The second part of this introduction will touch briefly upon the cultural origins

of modern sound reproduction technology, outline the ways that literature and sound have been discussed, and offer an introduction to contemporary criticism about the intersections of literature and sound. The third and final section suggests a working definition of listening as a critical and methodological approach to phonographic texts.

Those who participate in the field that has recently come to be known as sound studies often position themselves against what is perceived as the dominance of the visual; indeed, one of the most prevalent postulates in sounds studies scholarship has been that Western culture since Aristotle has tended to privilege the visual in the hierarchy of the senses. Yet as Patricia Kruth and Henry Stobart note in the introduction to *Sound* (2000), "This primacy of the visual . . . has not always been constant; in medieval Europe, for instance, hearing as the sense through which the word of God was perceived often displaced sight, and the ranking of the senses itself was a popular literary theme" (3). Scholars such as Douglas Kahn, Don Ihde, and Frances Dyson among others have lamented the privileging of the visual in Western culture, but have a difficult time resisting the hierarchy of the senses.[14] Similarly, early attempts to categorize the impact and the uses of the phonograph defined it against another visual form: writing.

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[14] In *Listening and the Voice* (1976), Don Ihde's attempts to create a phenomenology of listening seem to depend upon the notions of sound and vision defined against one another: "Silence is the horizon of sound, yet the mute object is silently *present.* Silence seems revealed at first through a visual category" and "the invisible is the horizon of sight" (23). As Douglas Kahn notes in his Introduction to *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde* (1992), there are several difficulties when attempting to write a history of sound in its literary and conceptual manifestations, namely the privileging of music as the art of sound in western culture, and the privileging of visual in modern culture generally (Kahn 2). As such, non-musical sounds tend to be treated as part of a broader audio-visual litany; as Kahn remarks, "sound functions poorly [as an object]: it dissipates, modulates, infiltrates other sounds, becomes absorbed and deflected by actual objects, and fills a space surrounding them," and therefore sounds "are necessarily cultivated amid the clutter of the sensorium and episteme" (4). Frances Dyson, in *Sounding New Media* (2009), also tends to define the auditory sense in contrast to sight: "Whereas eyes have a visual range of 180 degrees, projecting from the front of the subject, ears cover a 360-dgree expanse, hearing all around. Whereas eyes can be closed, shutting out unwanted sights, ears have no lids" (4). "These very characteristics rattle the foundations of Western metaphysics and Western culture generally, by questioning the status of the object and of the subject, simultaneously," continues Dyson. "Because of this, the aural has been muted, idealized, ignored, and silenced by the very words used to describe it" (4).

From Mouth to Ear: The Nineteenth-Century Development of Aurality

Perhaps the biggest difficulty in understanding the history of the phonograph is the name itself. Derived from the Greek *phono-*, "of or relating to sound or the voice," and *–graph*, pertaining to writing or "that which writes" (OED), the term phonograph and its variations (e.g. gramophone) loosely translate to *sound writing*. This misnomer stems from the first successful device to record sound: the phonautograph. Patented in 1857 by Leon Scott, who hoped "to create an automatic form of sound writing," the phonautograph used a boar bristle attached to the eardrum of a human cadaver to make a visual etching of the voice on a piece of smoked glass (Sterne, *Audible* 41). The problem with Scott's automatic sound writer, however, was that once sound was recorded there was no way to "read" its scribblings, despite Scott's belief that one day "hearing and speaking would be equivalent to reading and writing" (45). It would not be until Edison's phonograph twenty years later that a sound recording device could be said to successfully read itself.

Like the phonautograph, the phonograph had from its inception been placed in relation to writing and literature. In the first article to announce the invention to the public (the December 22, 1877, issue of *Scientific American*) the writers described the machine in terms of its abilities both to write and to "read":

> Now there is no doubt that by practice, and the aid of a magnifier, it would be possible to read phonetically Mr. Edison's record of dots and dashes, but he saves us that trouble by literally making it read itself. The distinction is the same as if, instead of perusing a book ourselves, we drop it into a machine, set the latter in

> motion, and behold! the voice of the author is heard repeating his own composition. (384)

From the tone of the article, one might think that the phonograph would soon encroach upon the terrain of writers. Of course, the phonograph did not eliminate writing any more than the television, computer, or cell phone did. Yet those who would marvel at the phonograph would continue to depict the machine as a writing device. When Edison published an article in *The North American Review* in 1888, announcing his "perfected" phonograph, he stressed the dictation function of the phonograph and spoke of the storage capacity of the new wax cylinders in terms of word count: "Each wax blank will receive from 800 to 1,000 words; and of course several blanks may be used for one document, if needed" (648). Even as late as 1934, Theodor Adorno described the phonograph's curves as "a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing" (Adorno, "Form of the Phonograph" 56). However, Edison's invention emerged from a much broader cultural shift surrounding how we understand sound: a shift from mouth to ear.

Prior to Edison, attempts at sound reproduction tended to fall into two camps: speaking automata and writing machines. Since at least the eighteenth century, tinkers and inventors had attempted to create automata that could produce human speech. Such experiments focused on the mechanisms by which speech and human vocal sounds are produced, rather than on the way speech is received and apprehended, thus these automata were modeled on the human vocal organs—lips, mouth, teeth, tongue, larynx, and lungs.[15] But such machines had more in common with musical instruments that could produce human-like sounds than they did with later sound

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[15] See Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past*, pg. 74; also, Friedrich A. Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* 74. As Sterne notes, there were at least four people who produced speaking machines between 1770 and 1790. Such machines included ceramic heads that could exchange sentences about the King of France, an automaton that could accurately simulate vowel sounds using the positions of an artificial larynx, tongue, teeth, palate, etc., and a head with a wooden mouth and leather lips attached to a bellows. Perhaps most impressive, Wolfgang von Kempelen of Vienna constructed an automata "made from bellows and boxes with hinged shutters" that could reportedly say "papa, mama, Marianna, astronomy" and other words (Sterne 74).

reproduction technologies. This was sound production, but not sound *re*production. In the nineteenth century, inventors like Leon Scott and later Alexander Graham Bell developed machines that would "write" (i.e. visualize) speech in order to more perfectly capture the voice and as aids to the deaf so that they could learn to speak (Kittler 74). Scott had thought that "hearing and speaking would be equivalent to reading and writing" while Bell and his father had hoped for "visible" speech that would lead to a purely phonetic alphabet (Sterne 45). Such interest in phonetics, diction, and the desire to eradicate linguistic differences was also an abiding interest of the British playwright George Bernard Shaw and became the theme of his popular play *Pygmalion* (perhaps better known to modern audiences as the musical *My Fair Lady*). And yet, despite the dreams of Scott and Bell, writing and recording are not in fact interchangeable. In both cases, sound reproduction was intimately tied to desires to reproduce speech and the sound of the voice, and yet the ability to *write* sound was dependent upon the functioning of the ear.

Sound reproduction as we know it today was the outgrowth of a number of scientific and technological developments at the end of the nineteenth century, including new discoveries in medicine regarding the anatomy of the ear and inventions such as the electric telegraph. For example, the ability to study the inner workings of the tympanic membrane and the small bones within the ear allowed Hermann Helmholtz in the 1860s to observe that the small bones vibrated sympathetically with the vibrations of the eardrum. Helmholtz's discovery led him to treat sound "as a determined *effect* that could be created irrespective of its cause, and he offered a theory of hearing as sympathetic vibration" (Sterne 66). Despite the desires to record and reproduce the sound of the voice, the importance of Helmholtz's discovery is that the source of the sound made

very little difference since all that mattered was how sound waves affect the ear. In this way, the ear became a model for sound reproduction.

As media scholar and cultural historian Jonathan Sterne has aptly noted, "The ear could get attached to machines in part because ears were already being treated as mechanisms" (57).[16] Rather than mimic the mechanics of the vocal apparatus, the phonograph's sonic reproductive powers were inspired by the ear—mirroring not the *source* of sound but the *effects* of sound.[17] Edison's phonograph drew upon recent innovations in telephone technology and was modeled on the sympathetic vibrations of the *tympanum membrani* or ear drum. By attaching a stylus to a small diaphragm and pulling it along a piece of wax paper (and later a piece of tin foil) while speaking into a mouth piece attached to the diaphragm, Edison could record the vibrations produced by the voice (Stross 455-506). By pulling that same stylus through the resulting groove, the sounds could be reproduced. Although the phonograph itself bore little physical resemblance to the human form, the ear and its tympanic function would forever be embedded inside it.

The shift from an oral-centric to an aural-centric understanding of sound was not immediate, nor was it a wholesale rejection of the desire to reproduce speech; in fact, the endurance of names like phonograph and "talking machine" and marketing catch phrases that stressed fidelity to "his master's voice" all indicate the stubborn adherence to an oral understanding of sound reproduction. This tension between voice-based motivations and ear-

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[16] During early tests in 1874, Bell and Blake used actual ears from human cadavers as the sound-reproducing agent, literally gluing a make-shift straw stylus to the small bones of the ear as they attempted to further develop Scott's phonautograph (Kittler 74, Sterne 52).

[17] Jonathan Sterne speaks at length about the shift in how we fathom audio perception that took place during the nineteenth century, from an understanding based upon the sources that produce sound to an understanding of sound as an *effect* of vibrations upon the ear. In particular, Sterne looks to advancements put forth by physiologists Charles Bell of Scotland and Johannes Müller of Germany in offering a theory of the separation of the senses. Hermann Helmholtz's experiments in acoustics can be credited with treating sound as the result of external stimulus (*see* 60-79).

based technologies also underscores the persistent understanding of writing and language as primarily oral. Although my project is less concerned with debates about orality than it is about the increasing attention to *aurality* and the listening ear in literary texts, it is useful to briefly revisit this discussion.

Listen Up, Write Down: Literacy and Orality

The emergence of the phonograph at the end of the nineteenth century had brought forth questions about the relationship between speech, sound recording, and writing, and yet discussions about writing and the phonograph have been overshadowed by critical debates surrounding writing and orality more generally. Such conversations have generally relied on positions taken by Walter Ong and Jacques Derrida. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1978), Walter Ong asserts that "more than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness" (77). Treating writing as a technology, Ong's work implicitly assumes the primacy of oral language and privileges and idealizes sound and hearing. In doing so, Ong makes broad assumptions about sound's relation to the visual (and writing's relation to orality) that necessarily pit the two against one another—a phenomenon that Jonathan Sterne has referred to as the "audiovisual litany." Among these assumptions, Ong asserts the "unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses" (69). He further asserts that whereas "sight isolates, sound incorporates," and that "sound pours into the hearer" (70). Ong's observations are not invalid—culturally, they reflect the experience of sound in a Judeo-Christian context—but whereas other aspects of his writing account for the influence of technologies on experience, his assertions about sound in relation to the visual treat sensory experience as somehow outside history or culture.

Ong's argument about the primacy of speech is a kind of inversion of Jacques Derrida's critique of what he called the "phonologism" that treats speech as primary and therefore more basic and closer to the essential nature of language (*Of Grammatology* 97). Ong maintains that language is the "residue" of speech and that sound is always at the core of writing (11).[18] Derrida, on the other hand, cautions against the stance that treats writing as merely "derivative" or as a kind of notation of speech; he refuses to equate writing with the phonetic and the "exterior expression of language, and speech and sound with the interior.[19] However, in reasserting the primacy of writing and critiquing the "motif of presence" that a speech-oriented approach to language produces, Derrida unfortunately reasserts the dualistic relationship between vision and hearing. Derrida is right to alert us to the problems of treating writing as merely the notation of speech—indeed, his critique makes only more glaring the problems contained within early encounters with the phonograph that suggested it might be a kind of automatic writing technology. But as Jonathan Sterne has pointed out, "Deconstruction inverts, inhabits, and reanimates the sound/vision binary, privileging writing over speech and refusing both speech-based metaphysics and presence-based positive assertions" (17-18). These debates have been rehearsed and restated across literary studies for many years now, and to do so again here would be redundant.

The field of African American studies has been one of the areas that has rightly pushed back against and reworked post-structuralism. Both Alexander Weheliye and Fred Moten have pointed to the limitations of Derrida's deconstruction of phonocentrism which, as Moten points out, "has at its heart a paradoxically phonocentric deafness" (*In the Break* 185). Or as Weheliye

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[18] Ong further asserts that and "Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings" (8).

[19] *See* Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 29-31.

terms it, the deconstructive argument betrays an "unacknowledged muteness to the lower frequencies ([…]in the full Ellisonian sense) that covertly underlie many poststructuralist-inspired academic debates" (*Phonographies* 34). Weheliye articulates the problem quite clearly, writing that "Derrida's model does not quite allow us to conjecture the very "real" (re)formulation of the sound/source relationship occasioned by the phonograph, since, in Jacques's part of the universe, any vocalization always already appears as phonography" (35). Accounts like those of Derrida and Ong that reinforce the audio/visual binary do not always stand up well against the already complicated relationship between literacy and orality at play in the history of African American cultural production, and have made it difficult to assess sound and its reproduction in its cultural and historical contexts.

In *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (2003), Jonathan Sterne offers a possible way out of these binary approaches to sound, suggesting, "why not redescribe sound?" (18). In rejecting the "audiovisual litany" that pits hearing and vision against one another, making hearing subjective and vision objective, Sterne has helped to open the doors for a new area of critical inquiry that has started to refer to itself as *sound studies*. Rather than assume the transhistorical and transcultural properties of sound, Sterne adopts a methodology that treats sound and the advent of its reproduction within historical and cultural contexts. For example, Sterne shows how attempts at visualizing sound like Leon Scott's phonautograph "coincided with the construction of sound as an object of knowledge in its own right" such as the development and use of the stethoscope in medicine (43). Sterne's book aims to dispel the simplistic myth that with the invention of sound technologies the world suddenly changed. He also refutes the idea that the twentieth century is all about visual culture. Tracing interest in sound and its reproduction to the 1700s and the Enlightenment, Sterne argues that technologies

like the telephone and the phonograph emerged from cultural desires for sound reproduction as well as from a shift in the scientific understanding of sound production and hearing:

> Our most cherished pieties about sound-reproduction technologies—for instance, that they separated sounds from their sources or that sound recording allows us to hear the voices of the dead—were not and are not innocent empirical descriptions of the technologies' impact. They were wishes that people grafted onto sound-reproduction technologies—wishes that became programs for innovation and use. (8)[20]

Histories of the invention of sound technologies at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century like to tout the revolutionary impact of these inventions. Sound technologies "are said to have amplified and extended sound and our sense of hearing across time and space," but what Sterne finds remarkable is how "banal" the inventions were and how quickly they were absorbed into the activities of our daily lives (6). The delay in the emergence of studies such as Sterne's is perhaps evidence of the hindsight necessary to understand the impact of sound technologies.

Among the misconceptions Sterne endeavors to correct is the notion that sound production technologies suggest "a certain disembodiment of sound," when in fact, the "tympanic mechanism—the mechanical function that lies at the heart of all sound reproduction devices—points to the resolutely embodied character of sound's reproducibility" (50). It is the ear, rather than the voice, that is abstracted from the body. It is the ear that produces sound. Sterne cautions that it would be a mistake to put too much emphasis on sound *recording* rather

[20] Sterne is likely responding to Friedrich Kittler's lengthy exploration of the trope of sound recording, death, and speech's "immortality" in his essay "Gramophone." As Kittler demonstrates, from the 1877 *Scientific American* articles that proclaimed "Speech has become, as it were, immortal," to the advertisements featuring Nipper the dog seated atop a coffin, to the experiments of Jean Cocteau, the theme of dead or disembodied voices persisted. *See* Kitler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1999).

than sound *reproduction* and to treat recording "as a historical subspecies of writing" (50). However, this dissertation focuses its attention on recording rather than on sound reproduction generally, precisely *because of* the tendency to conflate recording with writing. Other forms of sound reproduction such as the telephone, radio, etc., also abstracted sounds from their sources and gave the impression of disembodied voices, but the listening experiences still take place *in time*. Recordings made sound itself repeatable, an important step toward the objectification and commoditization of sound. Furthermore, the ability to listen to sounds in repetition has shaped our very experiences of them.

One limitation of works like *The Audible Past* is that they tend to investigate the invention of sound reproduction technology and perhaps the early formation of the recording industry (such as Suisman's *Selling Sounds*), but they do not consider the many innovations and developments in sound reproduction technology that took place over the course of the twentieth century, such as stereo or magnetic tape. Sterne may be right to say that the *invention* of sound reproduction technology was not as revolutionary as we usually think, but by stopping his chronology in the early years of the twentieth century he implicitly reinforces this mode of thinking. Although sound theorists have more recently begun to investigate the technologies that followed the telephone and phonograph, writers of the twentieth century were theorizing them all along. Even before R. Murray Schafer introduced the term *soundscape* in 1968 with his book *The New Soundscape*, Langston Hughes was building stereophonic soundscapes in poetry. While Sterne provides an important methodological model for a historically and culturally grounded approach to sound, my own project seeks to extend this kind of analysis to a media-specific investigation of literature in relation to sound recording technologies.

Liveness and the Record

Debates about the relationship between writing and the voice are at least as old as Plato's *Phaedrus*. Most are familiar with Socrates' critique that writing will lead to forgetfulness and the deterioration of memory, but perhaps more interesting is his critique of text's silence:

> "I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. . . . You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer."[21]

The critique begins with the visual nature of writing but concludes with a point about inanimacy. Written words cannot answer back, and if they are abused "they cannot protect or defend themselves." The well-known irony of this dialogue is that we remember Socrates' critique precisely because Plato wrote it down; however, Socrates' appraisal of written language's divorce from the aura of presence and the possibility of an interlocution has continued to pervade the discourse about the relationship between speech and writing, as well as sound recording. If the first way we talk about the phonograph is as a sound writer, the other most prevalent way to critique recording is in relation to *performance*. These two strains are the result of sound reproduction's two functions: recording and playback. With playback, one is faced with the presence of a sound without a source.

Issues of presence and the abstraction of the voice from the speaker were reignited with the invention of the phonograph, and when we talk about how sound recording technology changed the way we experience sound, the abstraction of sound from source is one of the

[21] Translated by Benjamin Jowett, available http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/phaedrus.html

primary ways we distinguish recorded sounds from other sonic phenomena. Hearing the recorded voice was equated with hearing the voices of the dead, and in an 1878 article in the *North American Review*, Thomas Edison explained the role of the phonograph in terms of a captivity narrative in which sounds "heretofore designated as 'fugitive'" could be caught, preserved, and reproduced "without the presence or consent of the original source" (Edison 530). The emphasis on reproduction without the source points to the ways in which phonographic sounds are denied their bodies and bodies are denied agency over their sounds. Among those who felt the separation of voice and body to be problematic was Theodor Adorno. In his 1927 essay "The Curves of the Needle," Adorno complained that with female voices in particular, the presence of the body was required and yet "it is just this body that the gramophone eliminates, thereby giving every female voice a sound that is needy and incomplete" (54). Adorno was critical of the lack of *presence*, and as a result found records to be "spatially limited" (50). Walter Benjamin, however, rejoiced that art in the era of its technological reproducibility would be relieved of *aura* and subservience to ritual precisely because of the absence of presence.

Walter Benjamin's assessments of technological reproducibility have loomed large over the field of media studies, and have helped those interested in media-specific analysis to understand how technological developments such as film and the phonograph shaped our modern sense of temporality and spatiality. Rather than lament the separation of art from its source, Benjamin celebrated this division, arguing that "technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual" and thereby releases the "aura" of originality from art (24). Benjamin defines aura as the "strange tissue of space and time" that confirms art's authenticity in relation to the "here and now" (23, 21). Benjamin's "Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" is usually considered one of the founding texts of media studies

and was, at the time he was writing in the 1930s, an important antidote to critics who bemoaned technological reproduction and the mass production of art, setting the stage for the works of Marshall McLuhan, and others. However, the very kinds of media-specific analysis that Benjamin provoked has often continued to deploy his work uncritically, and as a result we seldom discuss what *aura* actually is. We rarely consider, for instance, that Benjamin's central argument relies on the notion that technologies like recording and film remove art not only from its temporal dimension but also from its spatial dimension. As we shall see in chapter four, the stereophonic poetics of Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka challenge us to reconsider whether Benjamin's argument holds true in an era of "live" recordings and stereo sound. In my final chapter, August Wilson's play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* complicates the relationship between recordings and presence.

Theories about the relationship between recording, presence, and originality, or what Benjamin called aura, have continued to play an important role in debates about the impact of recording technology. Though Benjamin felt the aura of originality was detrimental to art, and praised the possibilities of technological reproduction, his view has not always been widely shared. Writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, the French economist Jacques Attali lamented the loss of the aura (though he did not call it such), and argued in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977) that "reproduction, in a certain sense, is the death of the original, the triumph of the copy, and the forgetting of the represented foundation: in mass production, the mold has almost no importance or value in itself" (89). In *Noise,* Attali attempts to show that our socio-political structures are often foreshadowed by developments in music, and as such Attali is critical of musical forms in the era of recordings, or what he calls "repetition." Critics from Adorno to Attali have been skeptical of the capitalist model of mass production of culture that

recording technologies make possible. According to Attali, "recording," by which he most nearly means *writing*, "has always been a means of social control regardless of the technologies used" (87).

Perhaps the greatest skepticism of recording technology has come from performance studies, and discourses around the relationship between the "live" and the recorded. The term "live"—whether referring to live broadcasts on television or radio, or so-called live performances like concerts and plays—has become pervasive in popular culture and has come to stand in for the kinds of ideas around presence that Benjamin associated with *aura*. The word itself perpetuates the stereotypes developed early in recording history that associated sound-recording technology with death and has created a dualistic relationship between recorded sounds and other kinds of performance. In his book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (2008), the performance studies scholar Philip Auslander has insisted that "the meaning of liveness be understood as historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences" (8). Liveness, according to Auslander, came into being as a concept with the age of recording and broadcast technologies and therefore has no inherent qualities. As such, liveness can be defined only as what recording is not. Auslander's definition of liveness responds to the prevalent discourse among performance studies scholars, who have tended to treat live events as "real" and recorded or broadcast events as secondary or unreal (3).

While Auslander rightfully points out the flimsiness of such an argument, he is unable to escape the dichotomy inherent in these debates that poses so-called live events against the recorded ones. The result of this antagonistic dialectic is that one cultural form necessarily dominates and subordinates the other. However, this dichotomy does not withstand scrutiny in the face of jazz and blues practices, for example, in which the relationship between the live and

the recorded are intertwined. For jazz, a musical tradition that developed in tandem with the evolution of recording technologies, it would be difficult to say that one medium simply dominates or determines the other. Such an assertion would exclude important aspects of the tradition. These tensions are especially evident when recordings are put in conversation with theatrical performance.

Nowhere are these discussions about sound and its relation to recording more lively than in the emerging field of sound studies, and there are a number of recent works that do an excellent job of unpacking the unique triangulation between writing, recording, and performance. In the last few years there have been a number of journals that have released special issues on sound, including *SocialText's* 2010 "The Politics of Recorded Sound" and *American Quarterly's* 2011 "Sound Clash" issue. The scholarly blog *Sounding Out!* also regularly posts peer-reviewed essays on short topics, and a few sound studies readers have also recently appeared.[22] As an interdisciplinary field, *sound studies* is porous and brings together scholarship from musicology, anthropology, history, architecture, engineering, as well as literature.

Mark Goble's *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (2010) is perhaps more in the vein of media studies than sound studies, but Goble is one of a small number of authors who have given serious consideration to literature's relation to technologies like the phonograph. Goble explores how technologies of mass communication at the beginning of the twentieth century fostered fantasies of connection and argues that these technologies were central to American Modernism, calling modernism "a moment of 'ubiquitous communication'" (13). Goble's book, which takes seriously Marshall McLuhan's claim that the medium is the message, argues that "the technology itself gives shape and character to experiences of sexuality, racial

[22] See *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (2004), ed. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner; *Sound Unbound* (2008), ed. Paul D. Miller; and *The Sound Studies Reader* (2012), ed. Jonathan Sterne.

identity, class, and history" (19). However, Goble's techno-determinist argument can sometimes feel a bit heavy-handed and fails to account for the nuanced ways literary forms were also participating in the technology's uses and developments.

Studies such Goble's that have emerged from literature are few and there are far more studies of sound emerging from musicology. Josh Kun's *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (2005) traces the utopian underpinnings of music in the construction of American identity through popular and ethnic musical traditions. Audiotopias, Kun explains, suggests that "music functions like a possible utopia for the listener, that music is experienced not only as sound that goes into our ears and vibrates through our bones but as a space that we can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, be safe in, learn from" (2). Kun's idealistic understanding of musical sounds resonate with Ellison's descriptions as he brings popular music into conversation with musical writers like Langston Hughes. *Audiotopia* initiates ideas about the relationship between sound and imagined spaces that is useful to my own explorations of literature and the stereophonic dimension. In Kun's 2011 introduction to *Sound Clash: Listening to American Studies*, a special edition of *American Quarterly*, sound and listening have ushered in new ways to access a number of areas of critical inquiry in American studies, including race and gender, subjectivity, citizenship, and the public sphere (450). It is perhaps not surprising that some of the best work that has emerged focusing on the cultural impact of the phonograph and other sound technologies has been in the fields of African American Studies and Jazz Studies.[23] Weheliye's *Phonographies: Grooves in Afro-Sonic Modernity* (2005) helpfully resituates African American cultural production in the twentieth century in relation to sonic technological developments. As the strong presence of African American writers and musicians in my dissertation hopes to show,

[23] See Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality and Experimental Writing* (1993); and also Fred Moten, *In the break: the aesthetics of the Black radical tradition* (2003).

any thorough discussion of the phonograph's relation to literature requires a consideration of the ways these technologies mediate issues of race.

Although my dissertation foregrounds the *technology* of sound reproduction as it relates to literature, it would be impossible to examine the phonographic without addressing music. After all, recordings of music, not of poets or presidents, would make records and phonographs popular commodities and launch them into the realm of mass media. It is no mistake that Ralph Ellison's narrator is listening to Louis Armstrong. Jazz, as the popular music during the first half of the century, is a recurring strain throughout many of these texts, as well as an important point of intersection for literature and sound reproduction technology. At that time there was a growing sense that America's one true original contribution to the world was to be found not in literature but in jazz—a music that grew from African American and creolized roots. As the "new jazz studies" has shown, jazz aesthetics and practices came to inform works of art across genres, including dance, the visual arts, and literature.[24] These influences have come to characterize much of what we think of as American modernism, but the jazz influence was felt in areas around the globe as well. When someone like Evan Eisenberg talks about the ways that Louis Armstrong became synonymous with the phonograph and when we think about Ellison's conflation of Armstrong's sound with a kind of technological ecstasy, we can begin to witness just how intertwined our notions of recording and jazz have become.

[24] The new jazz studies is characterized by several interdisciplinary essay collections from the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (1998) edited by Robert G. O'Meally, *Representing Jazz* and *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995) edited by Krin Gabbard; this influence can also be seen in Alfred Appel's *Jazz Modernism* (2004) and other works.

Listening: Ears Taut to Hear

When it comes to defining listening practices in relation to sound recording technology and literature, I am cautious of over-eager proclamations that recording fundamentally or irrevocably transformed sound. However, in at least one aspect, the invention of the phonograph and the ability both to record and to playback sounds did crystallize an important shift in how we listen. It is a shift that differentiates the phonograph from other technologies of sound reproduction like the telephone or the radio and that differentiates it from other shifts in listening practices that took place during the nineteenth century as a result of advances in medicine and communication. By making sounds repeatable and reproducible, the advent of sound recording technology drastically altered the way we listened to sounds and in particular to music. Records allow us to experience intimacy not just with songs, but with recordings of particular performances and with the sounds of individual musicians and voices. It is not just about knowing every note of a melody, but knowing every contour of sound—from the rhythm of the guitar's backing chords to the mellow muted piano to the pop and hiss of the recording itself. As Jack Kerouac will show us, a person can listen to a record by Coleman Hawkins that he has heard a million times and yet still hear something new in it when listening in just the right way. And this is just as true when listening to speeches or the recording of a poet like Stein reading her work with her characteristic round, mellifluous alto voice.

There have been a number of terms developed to account for the kind of "analytical listening" that the narrator of *Invisible Man* discovers. Terms like deep listening, musical listening, literary listening, and close listening appear across a range of fields.[25] Attempts to

[25] Sound artist Pauline Oliveros's *deep listening* combines musical practice, meditation, and healing. More recently, poet and editor Craig Dworkin assembled *A Handbook of Protocols for Literary Listening* as part of an exhibition at the 2012 Whitney Biennial in New York, which included a kind of A-Z survey of terms and examples of listening in radical conceptual writing.

append adjectives to *listening* as a way to define a listening practice implicitly acknowledge listening as a kind of prosthesis. And yet, most definitions of listening suggest that it already contains within itself the possibility of an analytical practice. We are familiar with close reading, but what might it mean to *close listen* to texts?

I am borrowing the term "close listening" from *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (1998) edited by Charles Bernstein.[26] Although Bernstein does not venture to define the term outright, he frames close listening as a way to approach poetry that treats "sound as material where sound is neither arbitrary nor secondary but constitutive" (4). This can mean poetry in performance, but also poetry that is recorded or performed visually on the page. Bernstein's *Close Listening* is primarily interested in modernist and post-modernist poetry, but the term and practice of close listening need not be limited to poetry and can serve as an analogous activity for close reading when applied to any text that concerns itself with sound.[27] In his attempt to bring attention to sounded poetry, Bernstein is careful to distinguish his emphasis as distinct from orality, and puts greater stress on the term *aurality*:

> By *aurality* I mean to emphasize the sounding of the *writing*, and to make a sharp contrast with *orality* and its emphasis on breath, voice, and speech—an emphasis that tends to valorize speech over writing, voice over sound, listening over hearing, and indeed, orality over aurality. *Aurality* precedes *orality*, just as

[26] *Close Listening* is a collection of essays by various authors about the sound and performance of poetry.

[27] Sound need not be narrowly defined as acoustic phenomena and, as Bernstein puts it, "Such elements as the visual appearance of the text or the sound of the work in performance may be *extralexical* but they are not *extrasemantic*. When textual elements that are conventionally framed out as nonsemantic are acknowledged as significant, the result is a proliferation of possible frames of interpretation" (5).

> language precedes speech. Aurality is connected to the body—what the mouth and tongue and vocal chords enact—not the presence of the poet. (13)[28]

The term that Bernstein assigns to this attitude is *a/orality*. The slash both divides and bridges the gap between aurality and orality, and it superimposes aurality *over* orality such that the two remain distinct, even as aurality is given precedence. Aurality is indeed connected to the body, but not quite in the way Bernstein posits here, for aural pertains to the ear rather than the mouth; however, the point here is to divorce presence from orality as such. In returning "speech back to sound," Bernstein paradoxically suggests that the interpretive possibilities for poetry are greatest when we "stop listening and begin to hear" (18, 22). That is to say, close listening requires that we rethink our definitions of listening to allow for the sensuality of language to enter back into the equation. Bernstein offers a useful place to begin thinking about close listening, but I hope to extend this term to think more critically about what it is we are actually doing when we listen, and how our notions of listening shift when we think of it in relation to recordings and to text. For example, Bernstein points toward the idea that there are differences between hearing and listening, but how does close listening or a/orality bridge this divide?

In his 1976 essay "Listening," Roland Barthes offers a helpful distinction, noting that "*hearing* is a physiological phenomenon; *listening* is a psychological act" (245). At its most basic level, listening makes "what was confused and undifferentiated become distinct and pertinent" (248); it is the alert listening that other animals also practice as they listen for predators and prey. According to Barthes there are three kinds of listening, alert listening being the first; the second kind of listening "is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure,

[28] In Bernstein's assertion of aurality over orality, we can hear echoes of Derrida that language must precede speech. In fact, later in the essay he argues against Walter Ong directly and says "writing does not eclipse orality" (20). The position of a/orality, which stresses the performance of the work rather than the poet performing also resonates with post-structuralist arguments about the death of the author.

blurred, or mute" (249). Barthes views this kind of listening as inherently religious—decoding the word of God—but we might also think of it in terms of kinds of the listening that the narrator of *Invisible Man* performs as he unearths new truths and histories from Louis Armstrong's recording. Within this second mode of listening we can recognize aspects of close listening that resemble the active practices of close reading that help us to open and decipher a text. However, for Barthes, listening offers yet a third capacity—one that involves "signifying" and creating an "inter-subjective space." In this state "second listening metamorphoses man into a dual subject" (252).

For Barthes, listening in this third way produces a kind of idealized state that he characterizes as "an interlocution in which the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech" (252). Listening thus contains the possibilities for an active kind of communication in which "*listening speaks*" (252). This definition requires Barthes to push back somewhat against religious and psychoanalytical approaches to listening, but in this third more complicated space, listening opens the possibilities for an empathetic and reciprocal relationship between dual listeners.[29] Again, *listening speaks*, he reiterates, for "listening to the voice inaugurates the relation to the other: the voice by which we recognize others (like writing on an envelope) indicates to us their way of being, their joy or their pain, their condition; it bears an image of their body" (254-255). But what does is really mean to call for an active silence, to say that *listening speaks*? Is this state achievable in our interaction with texts? Socrates was not wrong when he complained that texts, being silent, cannot answer back when we ask them questions; but our silent reading might yet speak to texts. In his enthusiasm for a new definition of listening that makes it, if not interchangeable, then more on par with speech, Barthes suggests that

[29] By this religious and psychoanalytical listening, Barthes is referring to the confessional where one person speaks and the other listens. *See* "Listening," pg. 254.

"freedom of listening is as necessary as freedom of speech" (260). By bringing listening closer to speech in this way, Barthes confers upon the listener certain rights that, taken to their logical ends, would cause serious reconsiderations of our current laws regarding authors and copyright. Barthes' concept of listening raises a few questions about what such an active listening can actually perform: if we can thus close listen to texts, can texts be said to listen to themselves? That is, can they perform listening? Can writing itself listen?

Jean-Luc Nancy's 2007 essay *Listening* (published in French as *À L'écoute*) has become an important theoretical work in the field of sound studies that extends and refines many of the themes raised by Barthes. Nancy also distinguishes between hearing and listening, but for him there is a productive space between the kinds of auditory experience Barthes defines as hearing and the more attentive act of listening; as he explains, "To hear a siren, a bird, or a drum is already each time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context if not a text" (6). What makes Nancy particularly helpful for literary scholars is this sense in which he treats sounds as texts, because in doing so he also makes it possible to treat texts as sounds. Nancy reconfigures sound not as an object or a symbol, but as a sense, and he suggests that "to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible" (6). And yet part of the difficulty with designating between hearing and understanding is located in the French words used to describe the activities of hearing and listening: *"Entendre*, 'to hear,' also means *comprendre*, 'to understand,' as if 'hearing' were above all 'hearing say' (rather than hearing sound), or rather, as if in all 'hearing' there had to be a 'hearing say,' regardless of whether the sound perceived was a word or not" (5).[30] Although the connotation of terms is slightly different in English, the point still applies that we often

[30] In English, this double meaning of "to hear" translates into phrases like "I hear you," or even in the legal sense of having a hearing.

equate hearing (as in the colloquial, *I hear you*) with understanding rather than the apprehension of sound. And yet, Nancy's definition of listening requires the opening of a space (not wholly different from Barthes' inter-subjective space). For Nancy, whose other philosophical writings have post-structuralist leanings, listening is a philosophical act that favors an ontology of singular-plural, refusing to reside merely in the subject listening or the sonorous object.

Perhaps Nancy's greatest contribution to our understanding of listening is in the idea of *resonance*, or what he refers to as musical listening.

> To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin—at least the sound that is musically listened to, that is gathered and scrutinized for itself, not, however, as an acoustic phenomenon (or not merely as one) but as a resonant meaning, a meaning whose *sense* is supposed to be found in resonance, and only in resonance. (7)[31]

Reading Nancy can be difficult because of the sense in which his sentences never quite arrive but instead perform the action of ever-reaching *toward* meaning. And ideally, this is what listening does. Listening resides in an in-between space that implies striving for something beyond signifying sense, and because of its edgy disposition, Nancy privileges listening over hearing (though not in place of it). Nancy's concept of *resonance* draws from the actual acoustic phenomena and extends it, suggesting that all sounds are already resounding, for sound "re-emits itself while still actually 'sounding,' which is already 're-sounding' since that's nothing else but referring back to itself. To sound is to vibrate in itself or by itself" (8). Nancy here describes that

[31] Nancy later explains the relationship between music and listening thus**:** "Music is the art of the hope for resonance: a sense that does not make sense except because of its resounding in itself. It calls to itself and recalls itself . . ." (67); "It is not a hearer [*auditeur*], then, who listens, and it matters little whether or not he is musical. Listening is musical when it is music that listens to itself" (68).

strange property of the ear that is *already* a sound reproduction technology; as the ear sympathetically vibrates and produces its own re-soundings of the initial sound, it produces what Nancy calls "acoustic otoemissions" (16).[32] In this way, we are always listening to our listening—and our listening itself has its own sonorous qualities. Nancy is of course playing between the literal sense in which the mechanisms of the ear listen to themselves (what I consider the phonographic aspect of the ear), and the metaphoric sense of listening as a constantly recursive relationship between the self and the sonorous object. But I am less interested in Nancy's claim that listening is always about the formation of the self than I am in his claims about the returns and repetitions implicit in sound and in our attitudes toward listening, as he explains:

> All sonorous presence is thus made of a complex of returns [*renvois*] whose binding is the resonance or 'sonance' of sound, an expression that one should hear—hear and listen to—as much from the side of sound itself, or of its emission, as from the side of its reception or its listening: it is precisely from one to the other that it "sounds." (16)

Resonance or re-sonance has to do with residing in the space between the sonorous object and the listening subject, but it also has to do with that space between the sound itself and its meaning. There is a sense of this too in Bernstein's concept of *a/orality,* which creates a space in which meaning moves beyond the mere voice and toward its sound. Close listening is therefore always *close* but never fully arrives, like a parabola approaching its asymptote, or like Louis Zukofsky's formulation of his poetry as "upper limit music / lower limit speech."[33] When

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[32] These acoustic otoemissions are "produced by the inner ear of the one who is listening: the oto- or self[auto]-produced sounds that come to mingle with received sounds, in order to receive them . . ." (Nancy 16).

[33] *See* Louis Zukofsky, *A* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 138, 349.

listening between texts and recordings, this striving toward resonance as a recursive path becomes even more pronounced. This is a move that I call *elliptical*, which I will discuss at length in chapter two. As a form of punctuation that expresses what is *not* there—a pause, a break, or even a silence—the ellipsis is one of the ways that writers attempt to account for and overcome the mediated difference and create a space for listening in the text.

A certain degree of almost naïve optimism in these accounts of listening can be detected in a number of works across fields (I am thinking especially of Josh Kun's term *audiotopia*). Listening, as reframed by these authors, not only promises new pathways into the critical analysis of sound, music, and the voice, but even seems to promise new ways of empathizing with one another. Sympathetic vibrations become a metaphor for a persistent utopian vision of listening. But of course, with listening, as with the other senses, our ears are prone to mislead us; we misunderstand and misinterpret sonic information and hear voices or sounds that are not there. Listening poorly can lead to the misappropriation of sounds and the erasure of rich cultural and historical contexts. Case in point: jazz in the recorded era brought the sound of African American voices into the homes of white Americans, but it also made it easier to appropriate and exploit African American sounds without acknowledging their multi-layered origins. And yet, these limitations having been acknowledged, listening remains an underexplored mode of critical inquiry that contains exciting possibilities for approaching actual sonic materials, as well as for treating expression that aspires toward sound. Close listening in particular, becomes a way to reinvigorate the ear in textual analysis.

For me, close listening is not about challenging or critiquing close reading. Rather, I prefer to think of close listening as a kind of *extended technique* for reading—one in which we

blend the strategies of actual listening (to speech, music, or our acoustic environment) with an ear-oriented approach to reading.[34] As in music, extended technique is required when a composer (or writer) experiments with form in such a way that the instrument (our reading eye and listening ear) must be used in a nontraditional way. In this sense, the extended technique of close listening requires readers to become a bit more like musicians and make "ear training" a part of our practice. In music, the activity of ear training enables musicians and scholars to hear and identify musical elements (tone, intervals, chords, rhythm)—an activity that often requires transcription as a way of learning and identifying. Such an activity has been made much more possible by recordings, which enable repeated listening. For writers, transcription also became a kind of ear training. Through repeated acts of close listening and through the transcription of sounds, we familiarize and internalize them. To the extent that text is silent, close listening to literature is always something of an aspirational activity that requires a degree of synaesthesia. When we bring close listening to the realm of text we must become like Bottom (from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), who hears with his eye and sees with his ear; describing his dream near the end of the play, he proclaims (inverting the text of *1 Corinthians* 2:9), "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was" (4.1.205-207).[35] As Charles Bernstein has suggested, we must "get a nose for the sheer noise of language" (Bernstein 22). Punning and wordplay that engage both the eye and the ear are just a couple of the ways that texts engaged with sound recording technology invite us to listen.

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[34] The term extended technique comes from music and describes the phenomena that emerged in the twentieth century when musicians needed to learn new ways of playing their instruments to accommodate the demands of contemporary composers. Examples of this include reaching inside the piano to pluck the strings, or blowing air through wind instruments without actually playing notes.

[35] The poet and critic Louis Zukofsky speaks about this turn at length in *Bottom: on Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

The gentle pun between ears *taut* to hear and ears *taught* to hear in the title of this dissertation reinforces the kind of work the ear already performs when reading. Taken from the prologue of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy, the phrase describes a young man navigating a crowded urban scene and straining to hear snippets of speech and sounds amid the city noise with ears "caught tight, linked tight by the tendrils of phrased words" (xiv). It is a scene in which listening is presented as the sense by which we come to understand America as a nation. The ears *taut* to hear relate back to Nancy's claim that listening is always on the *edge* and "straining toward a possible meaning" (6). But the pun on taut/taught also pushes us to think about the ways we must be trained to hear, and alludes to the role writers like Dos Passos play in tutoring the ear. It is perhaps the perfect model of what it means to close listen to texts, for close listening requires that we extend and cultivate our ability to let the playful qualities of language's sounds rise from texts that are not explicitly poetry and allow them to resonate, and it requires that our ears perform and hear the multiple meanings of words that shift and change by inflection of the readerly voice.

My story begins in 1909 with the publication of Gertrude Stein's novella "Melanctha," just a few years after Emile Berliner's invention of the disc-playing gramophone made it possible to mass-produce recordings—for it was this moment, rather than Edison's invention in 1877 that finally brought the technology into listeners' homes. "*Come on and Hear!* Close Listening to Gertrude Stein and John Dos Passos," centers on Stein's "Melanctha" story from *Three Lives* (1909) and Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930, 1934, 1936), and shows that although both writers claimed to aspire toward the visual—cubism for Stein, film for Dos Passos—their texts require "greedy ears taut to hear" (in Dos Passos's words). Close listening becomes a requisite skill for

readers who wish to navigate these texts. While *Melanctha*'s dialogic aesthetic of "talking and listening" causes the repetitive sounds of words to become more important than their sense, *U.S.A.* broadens the possibilities for listening to ambient noise, jackhammers, and most notably, popular song. I argue that such close listening both shapes, and was shaped by, the phonograph and its proliferation during this period, as Edison's "talking machine" gave way to Berliner's gramophone and the mass production of music.

Given the increasingly important role that music, especially jazz, played in the American literary soundscape, my second chapter, "Ghostly Listeners and Elliptical Transcription," explores two instances of jazz auto/biography: Alan Lomax's *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz"* (1950), and Sidney Bechet's *Treat it Gentle* (1960). My research investigates the Library of Congress recordings of Jelly Roll Morton, and Sidney Bechet's archives at Tulane University and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France to raise questions about what it means to be a "recorded book." Although the texts incorporate transcriptions of recorded interviews—a practice rooted in ethnography—these books are not simply oral histories, but *aural* histories that require readers to think critically about the sonic identities of musicians who themselves used recording technology in experimental ways.

My third chapter investigates the use of tape recordings as a mode of composition for early post-modernists in Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* (written 1951-52, published 1972) and William S. Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded* (1967). In both books, tapes are not only important tools within the plot, but tapes themselves were employed in the construction of the text. For Kerouac, the impulse was toward improvisatory transcription, but for Burroughs tape was an integral part of his cut-up method. I focus on the emergence of commercially available

tape recording technologies in the 1950s and 1960s, which enabled amateurs to record as well as edit, loop, and manipulate tape recordings in other imaginative ways. As friends and collaborators with largely different approaches to tape, Kerouac and Burroughs demonstrate how the transformation of agency from mere consumer to producer of recordings shifted the ways writers imagined their literary projects and constructed narratives.

In chapter four, I turn to Langston Hughes's LP book, *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961), and Amiri Baraka's poetry album *It's Nation Time* (1972), recorded for Motown's Black Forum label, in order to discuss how the stereo LP opened new black sonic spaces at a contentious moment in history. While many poets made recordings during the 1960s, what distinguishes these works is their ongoing dialogue with the specificities of stereo sound, the LP, and sound in its spatial dimensions. For Hughes, stereo's dual channels manifest as a literal division of the page into two channels of poetry. For Baraka, the album offers a new space in which to project a Pan-African nation. Although one work is a book and the other is an LP, in both instances, we find Hughes and Baraka invoking the new technology's ability to create previously unimagined auditory spaces that help negotiate the difficulties African Americans faced in being able neither to return to Africa nor disappear into white America as integration was underway.

Later in the century, August Wilson would look back to recording during the 1920s in order to stage the ongoing struggle between live and recorded sound. In my fifth chapter, which appeared in *American Quarterly* as "The Recording Studio Onstage: Liveness in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*," I look to Wilson's landmark 1984 play as a way to reflect upon how recorded sounds continued to serve as sites of improvisation for writers, and how the gap between sound and text is continually thematized and formalized in literary engagements with sound. In

Wilson's play, the disjuncture among media was reconfigured as a blues "break" and allowed for the possibility of unrecorded sounds and imagined performances to find a listening audience. By locating a recording session within a play and exploring the intermediality of theater as live and recording as not live, Wilson was able to perform the fraught tension between recorded sounds, performance, and text that pervade this project.

Although a growing number of scholars have begun to consider the relationship between literature and sound, most tend to focus on modernist poetics. My project brings literary listening into an American context and works across fiction, poetry, autobiography, and drama to illustrate a broader range of literature that formally and thematically engage sound technology. Bringing an ear-mindedness to these texts allows me to reinvigorate formal analysis in order to hear previously silent historical resonances; thus, listening across time and space is not only a thematic concern but a methodological tool. As this project demonstrates, listening has become increasingly important to the ways we encounter literature in a new media environment, but we are only beginning to teach our ears to hear.

Come On And Hear! Close Listening to Gertrude Stein and John Dos Passos

> *"The patient iteration, the odd style, with all its stops and starts, like a stubborn phonograph, are a part of the incantation. The reader must take it or leave it—but always, taken or left, it remains astonishing"*
> – Miss Georgiana Goddard King on Gertrude Stein's dust-jacket remarks on *Three Lives* (1909)

> *"He heard our voice and recorded it, and we play it now for our solemn contemplation"*
> – E.L. Doctorow's "Introduction" to John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*

Of the many legends perpetuated by Thomas Edison about the 1877 invention of the phonograph, one of the most oft-repeated is that the first words the phonograph ever spoke were "Mary had a little lamb."[36] The story has become so well known that we tend to take the relationship between the phonograph and the nursery rhyme for granted. Pleased with his device's ability to reproduce its master's voice, Edison began calling it the "talking machine"—a moniker that the phonograph retained into the 1920s. We forget, however, that before learning to *talk* the phonograph had to learn how to *listen*. Modeled on the tympanic function of the ear, Edison's phonograph drew upon the advances made by Alexander Graham Bell that modeled the sympathetically vibrating apparatus of our own ears to replicate sound reproduction. Within Edison's laboratory, "Mary had a little lamb" was used as the test phrase to ensure the consistency and clarity of the various tympanic diaphragms in development, and the rhyme was repeated again and again until the phonograph could repeat the phrase with sufficient fidelity. Early in the phonograph's development, Edison declared it "perfected," but human ears still strained to hear the machine talk.

[36] "Mary Had a Little Lamb" is an American poem by Sarah Josepha Hale first published in 1830.

As Andre Millard has pointed out, "It took practice to recognize speech," and the first phonographs were not suitable for use by the average listener (27). Even in 1889, *The Atlantic Monthly* called the so-called talking machine "a caricature upon the human voice" (Hubert, *The Atlantic*). Thus, both Edison and Bell looked for ways to frame the sounds emitted by their devices and hosted public demonstrations that helped new listeners hear the phonograph's voice. The marvel that the phonograph could say "Mary had a little lamb" was not completely arbitrary. The cadence of the nursery rhyme along with its cultural ubiquity meant that audiences would be able to hear and understand the words transmitted by the phonograph if only because they had heard the words before. Conventional expressions such as "good evening" and "do you hear me" were easy enough to recognize, largely because such phrases are repeated in everyday speech, and the phrases themselves became markers of how we use the device.[37]

The story of the phonograph and Mary's little lamb teaches us an important lesson about how sound reproduction technology works, and how we listen to it. In a rhyme that borders on song, Mary's lamb copies her movements and follows her wherever she might go, but Mary and her story are secondary to the pleasure of the rhyme in repetition. The phonograph cannot *know* that the lamb's fleece is "white as snow," just as it does not *know* whether it records speech or song. Sound is the result of an effect upon the ear; the source merely emits vibrations.[38] Like our

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[37] They perform what Roman Jakobson called the *phatic* function of language, which assures that the channels of communication are open. In the age of mobile phone technology it has become a well-worn joke when someone says "Can you hear me now?" The phrase is a commonly asked question in the age of dropped-calls and spotty coverage, but it also refers to a popular cell-phone commercial in which a Verizon employee travels to the ends of the earth testing the cell phone's reception. The emergence of such phrases is indicative of the developing period of an audio-communications technology, when we strive to establish intelligibility through the repetition of conventional language.

[38] As noted elsewhere, Hermann Helmholtz's studies in the 1860s explained "the tympanic membrane worked to focus and direct sound into and through the middle ear" (Sterne 66). Helmholtz "treated sound as a determined *effect* that could be created irrespective of its cause, and he offered a theory of hearing as sympathetic vibration" (66). The importance of Helmholz's discovery is that the source of the sound made very little difference since it was a matter of how sound waves affect the ear—in some ways, we might say that this discovery allows us to imagine sound reproduction with any kind of fidelity. It allows us to believe that a recording can sound just like the original.

ears, the mechanisms of sound reproduction themselves do not distinguish between speech and other sounds, even if the reproduction of intelligible, recognizable human speech is the desired effect. Speech that was recognizable as such was a challenge to reproduce, and as Edison's assistant Charles Batchelor recalled, when they replayed the first test recording, "Out came 'ary ad ell am.' It was not fine talking," Batchelor recalled, "but the shape of it was there" (qtd. Stross 494). As media theorist Friedrich Kittler has put it, the phonograph is "a machine that records noises regardless of so-called meaning" (85). Not surprisingly, this lack of distinction meant that the early iterations of sound reproduction technologies produced sounds that were *shaped* like speech, but the words themselves were fragmented and unintelligible. Though Edison and others persisted in calling the phonograph the "talking machine," stressing the ability to make recordings of one's own voice, the phonograph required a new kind of listening to hear it talk—a listening for repetition, for the musical shape of language, and indeed for music itself. Soon enough, makers of phonographic technologies began to capitalize on the musical capabilities of the machine, and with the introduction of Emile Berliner's disc playing gramophone in 1895, the music industry as we know it was born. The phonograph lost its ability as a device for making home recordings of the voice, but it would take many years before people would stop calling the phonograph the "talking machine" as listeners and readers continued to retrain and retune their ears.

* * *

The beginning of the twentieth century registered a marked shift in how people understood and listened to sound recording technology—a fact that was not lost on modernist writers, who were faced with negotiating with a machine that purported not only to write sound but to speak. The shift in listening that occurred and the ways that writers marked this transition

in their writing is the subject of this chapter, which investigates the ways writers deploy the tension between repetition, communicability, and the sound-shapes of language that phonographic sounds amplify. In particular, I bring together works by two authors that we usually do not think of together—Gertrude Stein's novella "Melanctha" (1909) and John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930-1936)—in order to show how their experiments with prose form are in conversation with the phonograph. As a result, "Melanctha" and *U.S.A.* help to define new ways of listening to literature.

As examples of American literary modernism, "Melanctha" and *U.S.A.* could not be more different. Though both are works of prose, "Melanctha," which is one third of Stein's *Three Lives*, is a novella that employs a deceptively simple, repetitive style to sketch the life of an African American woman in Bridgepoint (a fictionalized Baltimore) as she navigates relationships and looks for "true wisdom." *U.S.A.* is a novelistic trilogy that spans nearly a thousand pages as it chronicles the lives of a range of characters whose stories are interrupted and intersected by experimental collages of newspaper headlines, song lyrics, and stream of consciousness remembrances. "Melanctha" is more like a portrait of a very particular American; *U.S.A.* endeavors at a sweeping landscape of the entire nation. However, both, in their way, were exceptionally influential works in modernist circles. Yet another reason Stein and Dos Passos may seem like strange subjects for a discussion of sound and literature is that they are two of the writers most frequently cited as visual modernists, and the vast majority of scholarship about these authors and these particular works tend to focus on the influence of the visual. For Stein, critics point to her cubism;[39] for Dos Passos, the cinema, and in particular the montage strategies

[39] For examples, *see* Earl Fendelman, "Gertrude Stein Among the Cubists," *Journal of Modern Literature* 2.4 (1972): 481; and Ulla Haselstein, "Gertrude Stein's Portraits of Matisse and Picasso," *New Literary History* 34.4 (2003): 723–743.

of Sergei Eisenstein.[40] And yet, it is precisely for these reasons that it seems right to begin with Stein and Dos Passos. As case studies of highly variant expressions of American modernism written nearly twenty years apart, "Melanctha" and *U.S.A.* offer a ranging scope of sound's cultural embeddedness at a moment when the phonograph was undergoing a rather significant transformation from "talking machine" to mass-music device.

Considering the relationship between modernism and the phonograph is not entirely new terrain; however, when we think about the phonograph and modernism, it is usually in regard to the sound of the disembodied voice. To be phonographic, it is assumed, has to do with capturing the sound of the voice and abstracting it from the body.[41] We think of the source-less voices of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) singing the phonographic rhythms of "O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag." There are several works that attend to sound in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Hart Crane is known for writing while listening to records.[42] John Dos Passos himself is notable for his renderings of working-class voices, just as Stein is known for portraying African American and immigrant voices.[43] Early theorists of the technology such as Theodor Adorno echoed common anxieties about the machine's ability to displace voices from their bodies and even to resurrect the voices of the dead.[44] Friedrich Kittler explores the trope of death and

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[40] For example, *see* Justin Edwards, "The Man with a Camera Eye: Cinematic Form and Hollywood Malediction in John Dos Passos's 'The Big Money,'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 27.4 (1999): 245–254.

[41] *See*, for example, Allen Weiss, *Breathless: Sound Recording, Disembodiment, and the Transformation of Lyrical Nostalgia* (2002).

[42] *See*, Jack Weaver, *Joyce's Music and Noise: Theme and Variation in His Writings* (University Press of Florida, 1998); and Brian Reed, "Hart Crane's Victrola," *Modernism/Modernity* 7.1 (2000): 99–125.

[43] Regarding Dos Passos's portrayal of voices, *see* Schweighauser 23.

[44] In 1927, Theodor Adorno proclaimed the prospects of the "talking machine" to be very limited, in part because of the way the phonograph abstracts the sound from its source ("The Curves of the Needle" 54). Among Adorno's whimsical assessments of the gramophone, he proffers that "wherever sound is separated from the body—as with instruments—or wherever it requires the body as a complement—as is the case with the female voice—gramophonic reproduction becomes problematic" (54). He worried that as the technologies improved they would continue to create distance between the voice and the apparatus ("The Curves of the Needle" 48).

phonography at length in his essay "Gramophone," noting the ways advertisements and literature perpetuated the idea that sound recordings could "immortalize" speech (51-73). And yet, as early accounts of the machine attest, it was not at first clear that the phonograph *could* speak. That Adorno complained "the expression 'mechanical music' is hardly appropriate to talking machines" suggests that even in 1927 the use of the phonograph was still in flux (Adorno "The Curves of the Needle" 50); in fact, demonstrations and tone tests of phonographs continued into the 1920s, giving us some sense of the perceived need to *teach* people how to hear the new technology. Drawing from Charles Bernstein, my readings of Stein and Dos Passos hope to complicate the tendency to equate the voice with writing and recording sound, asserting instead a sense of *a/orality,* that stresses the emerging interest in the ear.[45]

U.S.A. and "Melanctha" demonstrate an intuitive understanding of phonographic technology as *ear* based, and invite us to reconsider what it means to represent voices and sounds on the page.[46] Although the term phonograph suggests sound-writing, and Edison and others initially called the phonograph a "talking machine," this chapter shows how characterizations of the phonograph in terms of the voice or "talking" were the hold-overs of an outmoded approach to sound reproduction which attempted to reproduce speech sounds and the vocal apparatus, when in fact phonographic technologies modeled themselves on the human ear and the sympathetic vibrations of the tympanum. In different ways, "Melanctha" and *U.S.A.* model a kind of writing that we might call phonographic. I do not mean simply that these writers are trying to *write* or *record* sound by mimicking the sounds of voices and transcribing them to the

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[45] *See* Bernstein, "Introduction," *Close Listening*, 13-14.

[46] In Jonathan's Sterne's *The Audible Past*, he writes that although the tendency has been to think of sound reproduction technology as a *disembodiment*, "The tympanic mechanism—the mechanical function that lies at the heart of all sound reproduction devices—points to the resolutely embodied character of sound's reproducibility" (50).

page. Rather, each finds ways to represent how sounds are heard in the age of its technological reproducibility.

Through "Melanctha," Stein constructs a portrait of listening that accounts for the complex and recursive properties of acoustic practice in an increasingly ear-minded, phonographic culture. Although we may read Stein today for her affinity for cubism, those who were reading her contemporaneously remarked most often on her *sound*. Writing about Stein's prose in a 1913 article in *Arts and Decorations*, Mabel Dodge argued that rather than read Stein we ought to listen to her, for "in Gertrude Stein's writing every word lives and, apart from the concept, it is so exquisitely rhythmical and cadenced, that when read aloud and received as pure sound, it is like a kind of sensuous music" (*Critical Essays* 30). However, hearing Stein produces more than just this effect. In *Three Lives*, how Melanctha hears and how we hear Melanctha register the increasingly dynamic range of sonic engagement with race, class, gender, and interpersonal relationships. And in this way, an African American woman came to stand in for the American *listener* as much as the voice of American modernism.[47] In *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos's experimental writing does not just capture the American voice but demonstrates the ways our listening shades the voice, mishears it, and misinterprets it—not unlike the phonograph itself. Recreating the experience of walking through the streets of the city and hearing how speech sounds (though not recreating speech itself), *U.S.A.* exaggerates the ways our ears must strain to hear the semblance of our own voices in those of others through a kind of sympathetic vibration. But what is more, Dos Passos also restructures the way that musical and other kinds of sound inflect everyday audio experience.

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[47] Carla Peterson argues that "in 'Melanctha' Stein appropriated African-American musical traditions to assert her Americanness in opposition to European high culture" as well as the dominant American culture that made Stein an outsider (144).

Gertrude Stein's Sympathetic Vibrations

> *"Nothing makes any difference as long as some one is listening while they are talking…. If the same person does the talking and the listening why so much the better."*
> – Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition"

How do you say *I love you*? Of all the phrases in the English language, *I love you* may be the one that causes the most misunderstanding. In the 1914 review "How to Read Gertrude Stein," Carl Van Vechten remarks that English "is a language of hypocrisy and evasion" (*Critical Essays* 34). In a language like French, "The phrase, 'Je t'aime' means everything. But what does 'I love you' mean in English?" (34). As Stein reveals in her novella "Melanctha," from *Three Lives* (1909), *I love you* is a phrase whose meaning lies not so much in the words themselves but in their repetition and how they are said. "Melanctha" is the story of a "graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress" who charts a journey through various relationships from young adulthood to her unhappy death (125). Although Melanctha "always loved and wanted peace and gentleness and goodness," Melanctha was always blue: "All her life for herself poor Melanctha could only find new ways to be in trouble" (130). Melanctha, who Stein time and again describes as a wanderer, is "subtle" and "complex" in a world where so many others are dull, and "she wondered, often, how she could go on living when she was so blue" (125). As a result, Melanctha does not stay long in friendships or relationships, and when she finally finds herself with a suitable partner, Dr. Jefferson Campbell (a "serious, earnest, good young joyous doctor" who "liked to take care of everybody and he loved his own colored people"), she cannot seem to stay in love (143). In a conversation with Campbell near the end of their relationship, he asks:

> "Oh Melanctha, darling, do you love me? Oh Melanctha, please, please tell me honest, tell me, do you really love me?"

> "Oh you so stupid Jeff boy, of course I always love you. Always and always Jeff and I always just so good to you. Oh you so stupid Jeff and don't know when you got it good with me. Oh dear, Jeff I certainly am so tired Jeff to-night, don't you go be a bother to me. Yes I love you Jeff, how often you want me to tell you. Oh you so stupid Jeff, but yes I love you. Now I won't say it no more now tonight Jeff, you hear me. You just be good Jeff now to me or else I certainly get awful angry with you. Yes I love you, sure, Jeff, though you don't any way deserve it from me. Yes, yes I love you. Yes Jeff I say it till I certainly am very sleepy. Yes I love you now Jeff, and you certainly must stop asking me to tell you. Oh you great silly boy Jeff Campbell, sure I love you. . . ." (194)

Melanctha goes on to restate variations of her plea, repeating "I love you" no less than eight times in this passage alone. Despite her insistence, her words do not make the desired impression: "Yes Jeff Campbell heard her, and he tried hard to believe her. He did not really doubt her but somehow it was wrong now, the way Melanctha said it" (195). What Jeff alludes to is a disjuncture between the words that are spoken and how they *sound*. There was something wrong in the intonation. This is the problem with "I love you"—the phrase is the prime example of words that in themselves cannot possibly carry the weight of their meaning because the impact of "I love you" so often depends upon repetition and the way the words are said. The words themselves, even when repeated, struggle to convey their meaning and ultimately fail. Here, it is an act of attuned listening that allows Jeff to discern that love is absent, as *hearing*, *listening*, and *knowing* prove to be misaligned. In these scenes of "talking and listening"—a concept Stein would later define as central to her early style—Stein defamiliarizes the reader's relationship to language through repetition in order to allow us to hear it.

When readers first encountered Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, and in particular the story of "Melanctha," there was much controversy about Stein's use of language; the question the book most often provoked was *how ought one to read Stein*? Although modernist writing is known for its difficulty, Stein's highly repetitive and deceptively simple language gave readers pause. And yet, Stein herself ventured in "Portraits and Repetition" that there was no such thing

as repetition: "Is there repetition or is there insistence. I am inclined to believe there is no such thing as repetition" (in *Writings 1932-1946* 288). The art patroness Mabel Dodge, Stein's close friend, suggested that one must read Stein aloud; she insisted that by "listening one feels that from the combination of repeated sounds, varied ever so little, that there emerges gradually a perception of some meaning quite other than that of the contents of the phrases" (*Critical Essays* 30).[48] Similarly, Carl Van Vechten raptured that Stein "has really turned language into music, really made its sound more important than its sense" (34). But perhaps most telling is the book jacket description on the first edition of *Three Lives* by Georgiana Goddard King, who remarked, "The patient iteration, the odd style, with all its stops and starts, like a stubborn phonograph, are a part of the incantation" (qtd. Charters xviii). While all three of these directives instruct readers to *listen to* rather than read Gertrude Stein, it is King's comparison of Stein's style to a "stubborn phonograph" that suggests *how* we ought to listen: not simply to the sound of the voices or to the musical qualities but to the aural-mechanical aspects. King's analogy implies not only that Stein's writing has phonographic qualities but that readers' familiarity with the phonographic technology would have helped them to read Stein. Attention to the aural qualities of Stein's prose, however, links it not merely to the recorded medium but to a mechanical glitch.

Sometimes called a "broken" record or a "skip," the "stubborn phonograph" refers to that all-too-common moment when the needle jumps out of the groove and the same few seconds of a record repeat again and again until a person lifts the arm of the phonograph and resets the needle

[48] Mabel Dodge remarked, "In Gertrude Stein's writing every word lives and, apart from the concept, it is so exquisitely rhythmical and cadenced, that when read aloud and received as pure sound, it is like a kind of sensuous music" (*Critical Essays* 30). Dodge's suggestion that we must "receive" Stein's "sound" rather than words implies a passive listener. And yet, even Dodge recognizes that "receiving" Stein requires a different kind of listening. In comparing Stein's writing to the patterns in Picasso's paintings, she offer that "listening to Gertrude Stein's words and forgetting to try to understand what they mean, one submits to their gradual charm" (30). Dodge wants to call the effect of the repetitions magical, but the hint toward perceptible meaning points to a new relationship between sound, text, and reader that she cannot quite articulate.

in the groove. It is a suspension of the forward motion of time. The error reveals what is mechanical about the machine and exaggerates the very thing that distinguishes phonographic sounds from other kinds of sound production: repeatability. A record repeating in this way is called broken, but language too can break when submitted to repetition. In the monotonous reiteration of *I love you* in the passage above, one can hear precisely how broken these words have become, and their repetition causes Jeff to hear the distance between the words and their meaning. It is impossible to say whether Stein's repetitive language in "Melanctha" is a direct attempt to imitate the phonograph, but the phonograph and the kinds of repetitive listening it engendered became especially important to how readers heard and continue to hear Stein. Attuned to a broader cultural shift in our understanding of sound as an *effect* on the ear rather than the product of a voice, Stein creates a portrait of listening in which the repetitive speech of her characters creates sympathetic vibrations much like the phonographic apparatus. Through these innovative formal effects, "Melanctha" gave readers new ways to hear.

More so than any of her other works, "Melanctha" would influence a number of modernist writers who were inspired by her ability to capture speech rhythms, including Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, and Richard Wright. In a 1929 letter to Stein from Nella Larson enclosing a copy of her novel, *Quicksand*, Larson praised "Melanctha," stating, "I never cease to wonder how you came to write it and just why you and not some one of us should so accurately have caught the spirit of this race of mine" (qtd. Blackmer 230). In "The Remaking of Americans: Gertrude Stein's Melanctha and African-American Musical Traditions," Carla Peterson has even referred to Melanctha as a "blues woman" and suggests that the portrayal of black voices in "Melanctha" would have drawn upon Stein's exposure to "coon songs" while

living in Baltimore.[49] However, while admirers often noted Stein's ability to represent Negro voices, in doing so they often commented upon their own ability to *hear* the voices. As Richard Wright admitted, *Three Lives* helped him to "hear" English as he'd never heard it before; he commented in his journals, "I heard English as Negroes spoke it," and "'Melanctha' was written in such a manner that I could actually stand outside of the English language and hear it" (qtd. Weiss 16). What Wright refers to as "standing outside" language illustrates the paradoxical desire to have one's native language made to sound foreign; that is, for language to be disassociated from itself, and for the voice to be abstracted from language.[50] On some level, what Stein performs for Wright is a phonographic move; by abstracting sound from its source and the sounds of language from its sense, Stein enables a listening moment on the page that parallels the experience of listening to a phonograph.

Not unlike the phonograph, Stein's writing challenges readers to approach the sounds of language anew and to become aware of their listening as an active process. These playful qualities of language are more prominent in later works like *Tender Buttons* (1914) and the portraits she wrote throughout her life, for example her 1913 portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire:

> Give known or pin ware
> Fancy teeth, gas strips.
> Elbow elect, sour stout pore, pore caesar, pour state at.
> Leave eye lessons I. Leave I. Lessons. I. Leave I lessons, I
> (*Portraits and Prayers* 26)

Even more so than in "Melanctha," the words are chosen for their sonic qualities. Those of the first line in particular pun on the sound of his name, Guillaume Apollinaire, without actually

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[49] Peterson gives a clarifying history of "coon songs" and blues in the Baltimore area, *see* 145-152.

[50] Stein's use of the English language was often characterized as "foreign" by others. *See* Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 6.

conveying particularities about Apollinaire's appearance or personality. The eye alone does not convey the portrait; the ear must strain to hear it.

At the time that Stein was writing "Melanctha," sound and listening were beginning to take on a new social role that was increasingly shaped by sound technologies such as the phonograph. One could argue that the desire to record sound is as old as writing, which in phonetic alphabets functions as a kind of voice recording technology. Interest in reproducing the human voice led inventors in the eighteenth century to experiment with automata modeled after the human speech apparatus. However, the late nineteenth century bore witness to a marked shift in how we think about sound perception, from an understanding based upon the sources that produce sound (e.g. the mouth) to an understanding of sound as an *effect* of vibrations upon the ear.[51] Advances in medicine such as the stethoscope led doctors to develop methods of auscultation (the medical term for listening) by which they would listen to their patients' bodies in order to ascertain illness. Greater understanding of the inner workings of the ear that came about from dissection would eventually enable the invention of technologies such as the telephone and phonograph. As Sterne aptly noted, "The ear could get attached to machines in part because ears were already being treated as mechanisms" (57).[52]

This history of sound as it relates to medical and technological advances might seem only tangential to our understanding of Gertrude Stein's approach to sound in her writing were Stein herself not an active member of the scientific community at the end of the nineteenth century,

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[51] In particular, Sterne looks to advancements put forth by physiologists Charles Bell of Scotland and Johannes Müller of Germany in offering a theory of the separation of the senses. Hermann Helmholtz's experiments in acoustics can be credited with treating sound as the result of external stimulus (*see* Sterne 60-79).

[52] As I discussed in the Introduction, observations of the tympanic membrane and the small bones within the ear, which vibrated sympathetically with those of the eardrum, led to a number of related discoveries and inventions, but perhaps most notable is Alexander Graham Bell and Clarence Blake's use of actual cadaver ears to create the telephone in 1874. And likewise, Thomas Edison would soon build upon Bell's innovation to create the phonograph in 1877, which also mimics the tympanic function of the ear.

first as a researcher of normal motor automatism under William James at Harvard, and then as a medical student and neuro-researcher at Johns Hopkins University.[53] As a medical student Stein would have been trained in techniques of auscultation using a stethoscope, and in her earlier experiments in automatic writing at Harvard, she explored how subjects listened and took dictation in various states of distraction (Stein and Solomons 497). Describing acts of dictation that focused on the words' sounds and ignored their meaning entails depicting the experimental subjects as not so different from phonographs, which *hear* and record without knowledge of the messages.[54] Interestingly, in her descriptions of automatic writing, Stein and her collaborator Leon Solomons relied upon auditory metaphors. In the article Stein and Solomons published on the topic, "Normal Motor Automatism," they refer to automatism as "a general background of sound, not belonging to anything in particular" (504). After some training, they found that it was possible to focus the attention on the reading such that the subject could take the dictation without being distracted by it. "For overcoming this habit of attention we found constant repetition of one word of great value" (498). Soon enough, the writing becomes "non-voluntary" such that "we hear the word, have an idea of how it should be written, and then it is written," but the sense of effort is completely gone (498). Stein and Solomons report that when asked later what words they wrote, they would be conscious that they had written something but could not remember the words or phrases (501). Stein and Solomons display a nascent understanding of the auditory principles by which the phonograph operates and thus portray the body as hearing

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[53] Stein herself was loath to compare her writing to the experiments in "normal motor automatism" and automatic writing, but as Barbara Will points out, Stein did not completely deny that there is an element of the automatic within her writing (172). Careful not to simply treat Stein's writing as a kind of laboratory curiosity, Will suggests that Stein's interest in "bottom nature" and "rhythm" in her early literary works, including *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*, may well be an "extension of Stein's early 'scientific' convictions about human automatism" (170).

[54] Friedrich Kittler describes the phonograph as "a machine that records noises regardless of so-called meaning" (85).

and recording sound without actually understanding it. The subject does not record the voice or speech so much as what Stein viewed as the "ground-zero murmur of the psyche, the sound-hum of the human motor" (Will 170). What is notable in these various descriptions is the way that Stein treats the body as a mechanism for recording sound. According to Barbara Will, when Stein turned to writing *The Making of Americans*, the narrative impulse was overtaken by Stein's interest in the *process* (or the mechanical aspects) of writing, in which we find Stein's "recording of the vibrations of the writing arm as it moves across hundreds of pages" (171). It is easy to see parallels between Stein's arm and the arm of the phonograph—or better yet, the *phonautograph*, for in these experiments, the human body becomes an automatic sound writer. But in her literary experiments, Stein would eventually reject the "automatic" aspects of writing. The same impulse by which Stein becomes a kind of sound-writer can be observed on a smaller scale in "Melanctha" in moments of hyperbolic repetition and the writing of the sound-shape of words. As Stein says in the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, "I don't hear a language, I hear tones of voice and rhythms" (70).

Stein's experiments in normal motor automatism stressed writing, but they might also be considered tests of the boundaries between hearing and listening. As noted earlier, Roland Barthes distinguishes between hearing and listening, observing that "*hearing* is a physiological phenomenon; *listening* is a psychological act" ("Listening" 345). Interested in the physiological relationship between speech, hearing, and writing, Stein's experiments at Harvard attempted to force the writing hand into a hearing position, transcribing the words heard but not understood; in "Melanctha," Stein actively investigates this line between hearing and listening, and her writing presents what speech itself records.

While Wright's, King's, Van Vechten's, and Dodge's descriptions each encourage readers to listen to Stein, perhaps more notable is the way "Melanctha" itself models listening. Early in the novella, Melanctha is described as a *listener*. In her youth, Melanctha spends time among working men who tell her stories, for Melanctha "always loved to watch and talk and listen with men who worked hard" and "listen to their lives" (137). For her part, "she would listen with full feeling" (136). Melanctha's emotive listening attracts others to her and paradoxically expresses more than she might in words. In "Melanctha," Stein traces the relationships between Melanctha Herbert, her female friends, and Doctor Jefferson "Jeff" Campbell through complex scenes of talking and listening. Melanctha becomes a model listener: "There was one, big, serious, melancholy, light brown porter who often told Melanctha stories, for he liked the way she had of *listening with intelligence and sympathetic feeling*" (135; emphasis added). Indeed, Melanctha's abilities as a listener become coveted by those around her because her listening is active and sympathetic. Her listening makes these stories understandable, and without Melanctha there to listen we are given to understand that these stories would not be *heard*; they would only be recorded. This is not to say that Melanctha is a cipher—far from it—but by describing Melanctha as a listener first, Stein inverts the way we typically come to know protagonists and resituates the listener's role in meaning making.

Stein's portrayal of Melanctha anticipates Roland Barthes' description of an ideal listening as "an interlocution in which the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech: *listening speaks*" ("Listening" 252).[55] Barthes' formulation is paradoxical and collapses

[55] In his essay "Listening," Roland Barthes explains that listening is a psychological act (which he defines against the merely physiological act of hearing) that makes "what was confused and undifferentiated become distinct and pertinent" (248). Listening can occur on varying levels of attentiveness, but in higher levels listening not only allows us to decode messages that were previously obscured but becomes itself a mode of "signifying" and creating an inter-subjective space (249). Here "second listening metamorphoses man into a dual subject" leads to the

a distinction between the speech and auditory functions; if listening speaks, it is also possible that speech fails to listen. However, as "Melanctha" shows, this kind of dual-subjectivity is hard to achieve. The ongoing exchanges between Melanctha and Jeff exemplify the difficulties of listening as they fall in and out of love over the course of their ritualized, repetitive conversations. Stein is interested in exploring the space between the sounds of words and their communicative capacity when talking and listening fails to produce understanding. Melanctha "always listened very well to all he told her," but their conversations are plagued with doubts as to whether the other person is listening (146). As complex characters with vexed relationships to race, gender, and social mores, both Melanctha and Jeff have so much they would like to express (about their individual lives and actions, about aspirations for the Negro people), but they find that real communication is more difficult. In the early stages of their relationship, Stein depicts Jeff as a *bad* listener: "Jeff Campbell spoke now with some anger. Not to Melanctha, he did not think of her at all when he was talking. It was the life he wanted that he spoke to" (148). Jeff's failure to consider his listener—or more precisely, to listen to his listener—leads to a failure of communication: "Melanctha Herbert had listened to him say all this. She knew he meant it, but it did not mean much to her" (148). Melanctha *heard* him, but the meaning was blocked. Such exchanges characterize the text, but what does it mean to "truly listen" as Jeff and Melanctha so often wish for? Can one listen to listening? Charles Bernstein has suggested in *Close Listening* that the "sounds" of a text "may be *extralexical* but they are not *extrasemantic*. When textual elements that are conventionally framed out as nonsemantic are acknowledged as significant, the result is a proliferation of possible frames of interpretation" (5). In "Melanctha," we must

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interlocution cited above (252). In this way, listening is always double, and this dual-consciousness "inaugurates the relation to the other" (254).

therefore read for those moments when the mechanics of speech override its communicative function, and listen for the compatible rhythms of speech that repetition and resonance produce.

In "Melanctha," highly stylized forms of repetition reveal the already repetitive aspects of language and demonstrate how speech listens. For when Jeff and Melanctha are truly listening, their speech sympathetically vibrates; they resonate because they literally re-sound one another. Stein achieves this effect through the repetition of select words and phrases—in this case, the word "certainly." Although the words "I love you" would lose their meaning, in the early moments of Melanctha and Jeff's courtship "certainly" acts as a token of understanding and a verification that one has listened to the other, even when they disagree. At first, "certainly" appears sparingly and is primarily used by Melanctha, for whom it is something of a favorite word—one that is characteristic of her *sound*. But as the conversation picks up momentum, the repetition of the word by both Jeff and Melanctha is overwhelming:

> "Melanctha, I *certainly* do like everything to be good, and quiet, and I *certainly* do think that is the best way for all us colored people. . . . But you *certainly* do know now Miss Melanctha, that I always mean it what I say when I am talking."
>
> "Yes I *certainly* do understand you when you talk so Dr. Campbell. I *certainly* do understand now what you mean by what you was always saying to me. I *certainly* do understand Dr. Campbell what you mean you don't believe it's right to love anybody." "Why sure no, yes I do Miss Melanctha, I *certainly* do believe in strong loving, and in being good to everybody, and trying to understand what they all need, to help them." "Oh I know all about that way of doing Dr. Campbell, but that *certainly* ain't the kind of love I mean when I am talking." (152; emphasis added)

Although my analysis has been less focused on the issues of race in "Melanctha," it seems important to acknowledge Stein's particular interest in African American voices and patterns of speech in the context of a conversation about the place of "colored" people in America, and the negotiation between Melanctha and Jeff's individual desires and those for African American people as a whole. Stein is frequently critiqued for her flat depictions of black characters that

carelessly rank intelligence based upon varying shades of skin, but we can read complexity in the rhythmic structure she assigns to her characters' conversation. "Certainly" comes to mediate a debate that balances between Jeff's more cerebral assessment of how black people ought to behave (ostensibly, to raise their social standing *as a people*) and Melanctha's more emotional ideas about how individual people ought to love. Although Jeff and Melanctha do not reconcile their viewpoints, their speech rhythms reveal a different kind of understanding. By definition, "certainly" is an assurance, a confirmation of truth, and a dispelling of doubt. Because the word is passed back and forth between them and repeated (or one might say, copied), the word performs within the text the action that it describes; it certifies or verifies that one person has heard the other. "Certainly" and its repetition is also characteristic of the ways that we often take on the speech patterns of those with whom we speak most often, or with whom we have intimate relationships, and thus the repetition of this single word helps to establish the growing connection between Jeff and Melanctha.

On the one hand, the repetition and exchange of "certainly" between Melanctha and Jeff performs the exchange of information and understanding that previously the two had been unable to achieve. On the other hand, the very repetition of the word accounts for some loss of meaning as its rhythmic quality and its sound within the text take precedent. If I were to remove all of the "certainly's" from the text, for instance, the meaning of the sentences would not change much. Yet, precisely this rhythmic and mutually-affirming quality of the words makes them meaningful. In the context of Stein's experimental writing, the repetition of words like "certainly" makes her prose sound strange and allows one to "step outside" language, as Richard Wright suggested, much as the phonograph was allowing listeners to hear sound as an acoustic phenomena abstracted from its source for the first time. And for Stein, the African American

voice in particular allows her to separate the impulses *hear* language as well as to *listen* to it.[56] Through her repetitions, Stein performs the sympathetic vibrations that make sound reproduction possible.

Reflecting upon the period of her writing during the composition of "Melanctha" and many of her portraits, Stein accounted for the importance of talking and listening to her style and for her express use of repetition. She explains in "Portraits and Repetition," from her 1934 *Lectures in America*, that while she was living with her eleven aunts in Baltimore, the house was filled with constant and repetitive conversations: "I began then to consciously listen to what anybody was saying and what they did say while they were saying what they were saying" (289). It was during this time that she came to realize that "nothing makes any difference as long as some one is listening while they are talking" (290). What is more odd about Stein's account of talking and listening is that they must happen simultaneously, and the same person can perform both the talking and the listening: "If the same person does the talking and the listening why so much the better," she says. On a practical level, Stein's characterization of talking and listening seems counterintuitive, but by blurring the distinction between the two, she brings them closer together functionally. We might also think about the blurring of this function of talking and listening that occurred in the early years of phonographic technology.

A membership ticket that advertised the series of lectures Stein delivered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1934 included a tagline from Stein: "You see words and you hear them.

[56] Following from Toni Morrison's assertion that we must investigate the "Africanism" in American literary texts, Carla Peterson has pointed to the ways blackness helped white writers like Stein to negotiate their own "definition and redefinition of themselves as white" (144).

The trouble is to know the difference between seeing them and hearing them."[57] Such is the challenge and pleasure of reading "Melanctha." Though we are told we must *hear* Stein, understanding her requires an act of reverse transcription as we hover someplace between *hearing* the words in their sensory capacity and visually *listening* for the patterns in her idiosyncratic recordings of speech. It is impossible to say whether Stein was explicitly imitating the "talking machine" when she wrote the novella, but her writing reflects a changing relationship to sound and speech that readers like King could only understand as phonographic.

From Talking Machine to Mass Music Device

The exact date upon which Gertrude Stein would have acquired her own phonograph is somewhat unclear, but we do know that at least as early as 1910, Stein and Alice B. Toklas spent many of their evenings together listening to the phonograph.[58] Over the years, Stein frequently exchanged records with her brother Mike and his wife Sally, and as Stein and Toklas' letters during WWI indicate, Mike would send them "tobacco, oatmeal, maple syrup, and Victor phonograph needles" while they worked for the American Fund for the French Wounded in Nîmes (Wagner-Martin 138). Like other staples, it would seem that phonograph needles were essential to the care of soldiers. And in wearing down the needles, Stein proved that the pleasure of the phonograph came from its repeated use. As she would recall in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine as a song made a lasting appeal" on her, and

[57] References to these archival materials appear on the Brooklyn Academy of Music website, "This Week in BAM History: Gertrude Stein's American Lectures" (Nov. 8, 2011), http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2011/11/this-week-in-bam-history-gertrude.html.

[58] As Linda Wagner-Martin notes in her biography, *Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and Her Family*, as Stein and Toklas settled into life together at 27 Rue de Fleurus after the departure of Gertrude's brother Leo around 1910, the phonograph was an important part of their evening activities, filling many hours (116). Free from the overpowering influence of Leo Stein, "the two women attended concerts, plays, and films; listened to music on their phonograph (often exchanging records with Mike and Sally)" (102).

given the chance she would "inevitably would start The Trail of the Lonesome Pine on the phonograph and play it and play it" (895).[59] The 1913 song was based upon a novel by the same title, and in listening over and over again, Stein developed an understanding of the song and felt she understood why the soldiers on the front had loved the book so much; it was, as Stein might say, a kind of *loving repeating*. And yet, for Stein, the nostalgic air of the novel seemed better expressed in three-minute popular song.

This story is representative of shift that started to take place at the turn of the twentieth century as the phonograph's primary use had started to transition from "talking machine" to mass-music device. When Stein composed "Melanctha" around 1906 and 1907, the phonograph was just beginning to become a commercial commodity; during that time the cylinder recording devices marketed by Edison's company still allowed listeners both to record and to playback, and in this sense it truly was a "talking and listening" machine. Following the introduction of Emile Berliner's gramophone in 1895 with its flat discs, the phonograph lost its ability to record, and listeners could only playback pre-recorded records.[60] Berliner's innovations were two-fold: instead of recording in the bottom of the groove, he recorded in the sides of the groove, a process that allowed him to increase the volume of playback (Morton 34); and by using a chemical process, Berliner made a negative copy of the gramophone's recording and could thereby stamp an infinite number of copies of the recording. As the gramophone (and Victor Talking Machine, which purchased Berliner's gramophone patents) rose to prominence, listeners lost the ability to

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[59] The song "Trail of the Lonesome Pine" was composed in 1913 by Ballard MacDonald and Harry Carroll and was based upon the 1908 novel by John Fox, Jr. The most popular version was a 1913 recording for Edison by Manuel Romain. *See* the Cylinder Preservation and Digitization Project of UC Santa Barbara, http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu.

[60] In the 1890s people beginning to see pre-recorded discs as a business opportunity, and Berliner's introduction of disc recording allowed for the mass production of recordings through a process of stamping. By 1899 the disc began to eclipse the popularity of the cylinder, and soon companies stopped producing cylinders—in 1910 (Pathé), 1912 (Columbia), 1913 (Edison)—until the cylinder became obsolete. *See* David J. Morton, *Sound Recording*, 31-39.

make their own recordings. Instead, Berliner stressed the possibility of using the gramophone both for the mass production of music and for mass communication—recording the speeches of politicians and other important figures (51).

In *Selling Sounds* David Suisman writes that "Berliner envisioned that sound recordings could become a source of considerable revenue if only licensed reproductions were issued. 'Prominent singers, speakers or performers may derive an income from royalties on the sale of their [recordings],'" Berliner had prophesized (51). The commercial advantages of gramophone recordings, which were easier and cheaper to produce, as well as the public's increasing demand for recorded music would thus lead to the gramophone's prominence and the emergence of the music industry. According to Friedrich Kittler, "Berliner's gramophone is to the history of music what Edison's phonograph is to the history of literature" (59). Instead of thinking of sound reproduction technologies as "talking machines" whose purpose is to preserve and reproduce speech, sound reproduction became associated with musical sounds. As a number of scholars have pointed out, this transformation gave music a new cultural status, and as Suisman points out: "As a result [music] became stitched into the fabric of the nation as never before" (36).[61] Perhaps aware that mass-produced music had the potential to rival literature as cultural marker of a nation's identity, John Dos Passos found ways to incorporate popular melodies into his writing.

By the time Dos Passos began writing the *U.S.A.* trilogy in 1927 or 1928, twenty years had passed since Stein wrote *Three Lives*, and the aural landscape had changed significantly. When Stein was writing, it was still unclear what phonograph ought to be used for—whether for speeches or the last words of loved ones, a talking doll, a dictation machine, or music. In this regard, her approach to sound and its repetition was on a much more theoretical level. By 1927,

[61] *See also*, Austin Graham's *The Great American Songbooks: Musical Texts, Modernism, and the Value of Popular Culture* (2013).

the phonograph had come to be understood as a primarily musical device, and recordings were mass produced commodities. The phonograph and its offspring (the gramophone and the victrola) could be found in nearly every home, and they had become synonymous with music. Like Stein, Dos Passos was attuned to this changing sonic environment and made listening a central concern of his text.

"And the needle went rasp rasp": Listening to John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* Trilogy

In the opening prose poem of his *U.S.A.* trilogy, John Dos Passos depicts a young man walking alone through a city landscape.[62] The passage buzzes with the swift pulse of urban imagery and nameless faces in the street, but as these images scatter Dos Passos insists:

> Only the ears busy to catch the speech are not alone; the ears are caught tight, linked tight by the tendrils of phrased words, the turn of a joke, the singsong fade of a story, the gruff fall of a sentence; linking tendrils of speech twine through the city blocks. . . . It was speech that clung to the ears, the link that tingled in the blood; U.S.A. (Dos Passos, *42nd Parallel* xiv)

The depiction of this solitary young man with his "greedy ears taut to hear" frames the trilogy and creates a model for the kind of listening that *U.S.A.* requires of its readers. For Dos Passos invests "only the ears" with the power to forge connections, not simply between the characters but across the various sections of his book. The pun between ears *taut* to hear and ears *taught* to hear underpins the kind of work the ear can do when reading for abstract meaning and connection, similar to the effect of Stein's play on the name Guillaume Apollinaire in her portrait

[62] Dos Passos added the prologue after all three books were finished (in 1936) and assembled as a trilogy. *See* John Dos Passos, "Chronology," *U.S.A.*, ed. Daniel Aaron & Townsend Ludington (New York: Library of America, 1996), 1254.

of him. In approaching a novel as lengthy and with as many characters and storylines as *U.S.A.*, one must develop new reading strategies. The metonymic use of the ear stands in for practices of listening that must be cultivated in order link the disparate narratives of the novel. But the actual image that Dos Passos paints with his aural metaphorology is quite strange and borders on surreal as disembodied ears are linked together as though along a vine or a piece of twine, are "caught tight, linked tight." On the one hand, he is thinking through the connections that are forged by repetitions and resonances of speech sounds and imagining the difficulties of deciphering sonic connections amid the noise of the city.[63] But on the other hand, these surreal disembodied ears hearken to the dissected cadaver ears that Bell used in his early telephone experiments on the tympanic function. In such experiments, the ear itself was charged with producing the speech with its sympathetic vibrations. As the prologue continues, the tendrils linking the ears spread out over the streets and avenues and alongside trucks and planes and eventually from coast to coast. For Dos Passos, the listening ear makes sense of the broad expanse of a nation, and as he says, "Mostly U.S.A. is the speech of the people" (xiv).[64] Not unlike the prologue of *Invisible Man* that Ellison would write over a decade later, Dos Passos's opening prose-poem depicts a scene in which the listening ear must forge the connections among a disparate people and a disparate history. America is made up of the voices of its people, but only when there are ears to hear them.[65]

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[63] In *The Noises of American Literature 1890-1985: Toward a History of Literary Acoustics* (2006), Philipp Schweighauser has suggested that "modernist formal experimentation and innovation can be seen as responses to problems of representing the noise of modernity not only in its metaphorical but also in its literal, acoustic sense.

Literature, already severely challenged in its claims to verisimilitude by photography, film, and the phonograph, entered a crisis of representation, and modernist experimental forms are a response to that crisis" (24).

[64] Dos Passos's claim that U.S.A. is the speech of the people has affinities with Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism in *Imagined Communities* (1983, 1991), which expands the definition of communities to extend beyond face-to-face interaction.

[65] The relationship between the community and listening was not entirely new. In an allegorical short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne titled "The Celestial Railroad" (1843), Hawthorne writes that "literature is etherealized by

Through this imaginary scene of dissected ears, the phonographic impulse of the prologue in its abstraction of the ear and its capacity for listening is clear. As E. L. Doctorow has said of Dos Passos, "He heard our voice and recorded it, and we play it now for our solemn contemplation" (xi). The tendency of Dos Passos's contemporary reviewers to remark upon the phonographic qualities of Dos Passos's writing shows similarities to the early reception of Stein.[66] When grasping for ways to describe their *sounds*, critics latch upon the phonograph. In a review of *Manhattan Transfer*, whose style would lay the groundwork for *U.S.A.*, D. H. Lawrence remarked that "if you set a blank record revolving to receive all the sounds, and a film-camera going to photograph all the motions of a scattered group of individuals, at the points where they meet and touch in New York, you would more or less get Mr. Dos Passos' method" (*Critical* 75). Lawrence's remarks are revealing not only of the affinity between Dos Passos's all-encompassing style and the new technologies, but revealing of particular moments in the technology's history when sound and film were not yet synchronized. The first so-called "talking picture," *The Jazz Singer* (1927), was released the same year that Dos Passos began writing *U.S.A.* Lawrence's comment also reveals the contemporaneous attitude toward the technology as an objective record. Prior to this point the technology of film and phonograph isolated the senses from one another, and in *U.S.A.* Dos Passos writes in isolated modes such as "Newsreel" and "Camera-Eye." But try as he might to isolate and attach the senses to their related media, even the most visual sections are permeated by sounds of voices, music, machinery, and noise that

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assuming for its medium the human voice; and knowledge, deposing all its heavier particles—except, doubtless, its gold—becomes exhaled into a sound, which forthwith steals into the ever-open ear of the community." Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Celestial Railroad: And Other Stories* (New American Library, 1963), 175.

[66] Upton Sinclair referred to the "jazz effects" (*Critical* 88); V.S. Pritchett of *Spectator* thought of *42nd Parallel* as "making noise. Sometimes it is amusing noise and alive; often monotonous" (93); Mary Ross of the *New York Herald Tribune Books* writes of *1919* in terms of a complex symphony, with each instrument playing its own part separately.

echo across the sections. On a structural scale, *U.S.A.* presents a disynchronous novel that encourages the ear to make the connections.

U.S.A. places immense pressure on the traditional novel form, making Dos Passos a modernist innovator more clearly aligned with the formal experimentation of a poet like William Carlos Williams than with the novelistic prose of his friends Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Eschewing a traditional narrative arc or a single narrator, the novels instead weave back and forth between the more realist narratives of individual characters, the brief biographical sketches of historical figures that take the form of prose-poems, the collage of Newsreel headlines and popular song lyrics, and the autobiographical stream-of-consciousness Camera Eye sections. The primary bulk of the text follows the individual lives of several fictional characters at the beginning of the twentieth century (just prior to and following WWI) whose lives overlap in tangential and serendipitous ways. They come from various walks of life, including the working-class socialist, Mac, the ambitious secretary, Janey, and the wealthy public relations mogul J. W. Moorehouse. These fictional figures are recognizably modern, and their occupations reflect the changing socioeconomic scene; they are innovators in aviation, Hollywood starlets, revolutionary labor organizers, and interior decorators. As their stories unfold and intersect, some stories are conveyed multiple times from different points of view, all against the backdrop of the noisy mass media, history, and subjective experience. Readers often note the unique idiomatic voices of Dos Passos's characters and their use of slang, but my analysis will focus on the experimental Camera Eye and Newsreel sections as sites in which Dos Passos evokes phonographic listening. Although the Camera Eye sections would seem to evoke the realm of the visual, in these sections Dos Passos offers arresting portraits of how one encounters technologically mediated sounds.

Much of the scholarship about *U.S.A.* has tended to touch upon Dos Passos's invocation of visual technologies like film and photography and yet has a difficult time reconciling the aural qualities of what purports to be visual.[67] In *Camera Works,* Michael North aptly notes "the suspicion that it [*U.S.A.*] is not nearly so visual as it claims to be," yet he forcefully asserts the visual lens of Dos Passos's subjectivity in the Camera Eye sections (143). North explains that the discontinuity of the lives in *U.S.A.* "is a feature not merely of their having been lived under industrialism but also of their having been lived in a field of vision delimited by the camera" (150). I would not want to discredit the important influence of the cinematic on Dos Passos's style, but North's assertions about the "eyemindedness" of Dos Passos's writing do not fully account for the important role of the aural within *U.S.A.*, or for Dos Passos's distrust of what he once called the "chilly fantasmagoria of the movies" (*Prose* 75). Stephen Hock also remarks upon the strangely aural qualities of the Camera Eye but like North subjugates the aural in *U.S.A.* to the assertion of a subjective camera angle that narrows the line of vision.[68] Dos Passos himself remarked that while the rest of his novel aims "at total objectivity," he felt he could only do so by distilling his "subjective feelings" into the autobiographical Camera Eye sections (*Prose* 247). However, part of the confusion of the audio and the visual in the Camera Eye arises from the fact

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[67] For more about Dos Passos and the visual, *see* Justin Edwards, "The Man with a Camera Eye: Cinematic Form and Hollywood Malediction in John Dos Passos's 'The Big Money,'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 27.4 (1999): 245–254; and Michael Spindler, "John Dos Passos and the Visual Arts," *Journal of American Studies* 15 (1981): 391–405.

[68] Stephen Hock rightly acknowledges that in contrast to the Newsreels, critics have "often ignored the relation of the Camera Eye to the cinema" in part because the section causes "critical confusion, disagreement, and outright derision" (20). Hock attempts to reclaim the Camera Eye sections for cinema by thinking of them in relation to the theories of André Bazin (who championed sound in film), but the title of Hock's article is telling: "Stories Told Sideways Out of the Big Mouth" reminds us of the ways aural the qualities pervade Dos Passos's Camera Eye sections.

that hearing, not vision, is usually recognized as the interior, subjective sense. To achieve the subjective interiority he seeks, he paradoxically turns to the listening ear.

The Camera Eye interludes are written in a stream-of-consciousness style with few capital letters and light punctuation that is meant to immerse the reader in sensory descriptions drawn from Dos Passos's own life. But in spite of the visual title, early in the first novel of the trilogy, *42nd Parallel*, Dos Passos depicts a youthful encounter with the phonograph, linking it to the heightened aural qualities of his writing. The effect could be called synesthetic because he conflates the senses of sight and sound, but it is a purposeful synesthesia that points to an emerging and evolving understanding of the senses amplified by technologies such as film and the phonograph. Dos Passos recounts listening to a gramophone during a visit with a family friend:

> . . . and here was Mr. Garnet come to tea and he took a gramophone out of the black box and put a cylinder on the gramophone and they pushed back the tea-things off the corner of the table Be careful not to drop it now they scratch rather heasy Why a hordinary sewin' needle would do maam but I ave special needles
>
> and we got to talking about Hadmiral Togo and the Banyan and how the Roosians drank so much vodka and killed all those poor fisherlads in the North Sea and he wound it up very carefully so as not to break the spring and the needle went rasp rasp Yes I was a bluejacket myself miboy from the time I was a little shayver not much bigger'n you rose to be bosun's mite on the first British hironclad the *Warrior* and I can dance a ornpipe yet maam and he had a mariner's compass in red and blue on the back of his hand and his nails looked black and thick as he fumbled with the needle and the needle went rasp rasp and far away a band played and out of a grindy noise in the little black horn came *God Save the King* and the little dogs howled (*42nd Parallel* 43)

Despite the fact that Dos Passos mistakenly calls a phonograph a gramophone (gramophones use discs, not cylinders), his attention to the specificity of the technology captures the disorienting experience of hearing sounds abstracted from their source and creates a model of phonographic listening. The sounds emitted by the recording are markedly mechanical and the needle rasps

twice as it settles into the groove. Through the ears of a child, the spatial orientation of the sound is skewed. The band plays "far away," and the song, "God Save the King," emerges from a "grindy noise in the little black horn." Dos Passos, the boy-listener, does not distinguish between the mechanical sounds emitted by the phonograph and its music; his ear must work to situate the sounds spatially in relation to the horn, and synthesize their coexistence. But such a process of simultaneous synthesis and articulation is disorienting due to the fact that the presumed band seems to be at some distance, when in fact there is no band to speak of. The rasps, the grinds, and the band are the product of the phonograph, but at this particular moment in the history of the technology, such noises had not become naturalized into the practice of listening to the music. Later in the twentieth century, such rasps and scratches were incorporated into the aesthetic practices of DJ's and hip-hop artists, and in the age of digital music, the rasps and hiss of records are sometimes added to recordings as sound effects in order to lend a nostalgic sound. But as this early encounter with the phonograph reveals, the kind of listening for which we are now conditioned is not a natural but a cultivated practice.

In addition to modeling an early scene of listening, this passage also acts as a kind of sonic landscape portrait of listening more generally. By removing the punctuation breaks between Mr. Garnet's accented speech with its aspirated vowel sounds and Dos Passos's account of the phonograph's sounds, the passage models the undifferentiated manner in which ears receive sonic information and foreshadows the way later writers would push against punctuation with ellipses and the long dash.[69] At the same time, the selectivity of Mr. Garnet's amputated speech and the phonograph's hiccups illustrates how *listening* mediates the sounds. The textual representation of these sounds may run into and overlap with one another, but the ear of young

[69] Jack Kerouac was one of the most direct proponents of the long dash (or em dash) in his writings on spontaneous prose. See Chapter Three.

Dos Passos is actually selectively arranging these sounds. These passages from the Camera Eye are not easy to read precisely because they resist the eye's expectations of the text and require a work on the part of the reader to decipher the relationship between the various sounds that Dos Passos transcribes and the speech that is mixed therein. In this regard, Dos Passos's writing is phonographic in the sense that he records all sounds in an undifferentiated manner regardless of origin. The phonetic transcription of words like "ornpipe" and "miboy" is reminiscent of Mark Twain's dialect writing and helps to situate Mr. Garnet's speech geographically. Thus, it is important that the song "God Save the Queen" come from a far away place, like Mr. Garnet and his British drawl. The passage alerts the reader to the complex negotiating between hearing and listening during which the sound itself comes to inform an audible geography.

A later Camera Eye in *1919* (the second book of the trilogy) finds Dos Passos in a WWI hospital attending to wounded soldiers. In pain and in shock, there is an automatic quality of their speech that is both alarming and disorienting. As with Stein, Dos Passos could be said to complicate the ways in which our speech is already phonographic. The voice of one soldier in Camera Eye (34) seems disconnected from his ailing body, talking about events of a past time and place:

> his voice was three thousand miles away all the time he kept wanting to get up outa bed his cheeks were bright pink and the choky breathing No kid you better lay there quiet we dont want you catching more cold that's why they sent me down to stay with you to keep you from getting up outa bed […]
>
> all the time he kept trying to get up outa bed Kiddo you better lay there quiet his voice was in Minnesota but dontjaunerstandafellersgottogetup I got a date animportantengagementtoseeabout those lots ought nevertohavestayedinbedsolate I'll lose my deposit For chissake dont you think I'm broke enough as it is? (*1919* 135)

By positioning the feverish soldier's voice "three thousand miles away" in Minnesota, Dos Passos is not only evoking the Midwestern accented speech but portraying the voice as somehow

literally displaced from the body. Similar to the earlier Camera Eye in which the band is playing from a far away place, Dos Passos draws a parallel scene in which the sound and its source have been divided across space (as well as time). If the phonograph was notable for separating sounds from their source, in this scene Dos Passos records the voice as already separated from its body. In complicating the relationship of voices to the bodies that produce them, he also remarks upon the other phonographic qualities of the body that become agitated by the sounds of war, such as the ears that continue to vibrate long after the noisy disturbance: "they've cut off their motors the little drums in my ears sure that's why they call em drums" (136). It is a jump cut of a realization and an incomplete thought, but this brief meditation upon the eardrum amplifies how the sympathetic vibrations can produce a ringing or drumming after a high level of sonic input, even when the motors have been cut off. Within our own ears the sound and the source can become disconnected when sound plays upon the ears with its ghostly drumming.

As the section continues, the sounds of speech and the sound effects of mortar blasts run together into a seamless cacophony. Only through close listening can the reader synthesize the complex harmonies created by the sound-sense of these run-on words within the context of the scene:

> not that time but wham in the side of the head woke Curley and the glass tinkling in the upstairs windows the candle staggered but didn't go out the vault sways with my shadow and Curley's shadow dammit he's strong head's full of the fever reek Kiddo you gotto stay in bed (they dumped the applecart allright) shellfragments hailing around outside Kiddo you gotto get back to bed
>
> But I gotadate oh christohsweetjesus cant you tell me how to get back to the outfit haveaheart dad I didntmeannoharm itsonlyaboutthose lots
>
> the voice dwindles into a whine I'm pulling the covers up to his chin again light the candle again smoke a Macedonia again look at my watch again must be near day ten o'clock they don't relieve me till eight
>
> way off a voice goes up and up and swoops like the airraid siren ayayooTO (*1919* 136)

These frenzied recordings of Dos Passos's experiences working for the Red Cross again place pressure upon the reader's ear to make sense of a scene through words and their repetitions in the absence of punctuation and other formal demarcations of speech in text. This treatment of language differs from the alternate spellings of words that Dos Passos earlier employed to create Mr. Garnet's British accent. In this instance, the reader must sort through the undifferentiated onslaught of sounds and speech as it hits the ear. The coherence of the feverish soldier's words is less important than the very fact that his words are senseless utterances. As Friedrich Kittler has remarked, the phonograph "draws out those speech disturbances that concern psychiatry" (86). The repetition of the same phrases, such as "I gotadate," make the young man sound like a broken record—repeating the memory of times past. The rhythmic qualities of colloquial phrases ("haveaheart"; "didntmeannoharm"), when treated as units of language, override the articulation of individual words; but like "ary ad ell am" (Charles Batchelor's transcription of the phonongraph's first "words"), we still hear the meaning even though the eye must struggle to see them. In challenging his readers to *listen* to slurred phrases rather than simply to read them, Dos Passos, like Stein, makes more audible the qualities of language that were already phonographic while simultaneously playing upon the reader's familiarity with phonographic practices of listening.

Of the various sonic elements of *U.S.A.*, the most recognizable feature is undoubtedly the presence of popular songs running throughout the trilogy, most notably in the Newsreel sections. Here again we have a section named for a cinematic form (one that was initially silent) that has a decidedly sonic quality to it, for the Newsreels are constituted by headlines from actual and fictionalized newspaper clippings and the lyrics of songs. The Newsreel in itself was not radical,

for other writers of the period had begun to add collage effects to their writing; however, Dos Passos's use of songs contributes to the phonographic qualities of his text. By including of a vast array of popular songs in the trilogy—from patriotic war songs and tin pan alley tunes to ragtime, blues, and African-American spirituals—Dos Passos makes several assumptions about his readers: that they would be able to recognize these songs; that the songs had acquired some kind of cultural cache; and that readers would know the songs well enough to "play" the melodies in their heads, and even fill in the missing lyrics.

In interviews Dos Passos remarked that the "Newsreels were intended to give the clamor, the sound of daily life" (*Prose* 283). Donald Pizer has asserted that the effect of all this "noise" is to show how essentially meaningless it is—that it is just empty "nonsense" (*Critical Study* 84). The popular songs, like the popular press, are representative of a "mindless expression of the platitudinous heart of American feeling and belief" (80). Others have noted the role of nonsense within modernist writing, with Gertrude Stein the anointed queen; Friedrich Kittler goes so far as to assert that Edison's invention ushered in an "epoch of nonsense" and that "nonsense is always already the unconscious" (86). The notion that the songs in *U.S.A.* are merely part of the "clamor" may be an important reason for Dos Passos to include them. However, this would seem short sighted; Pizer's dismissal of the songs does not explain the compulsive and careful attention Dos Passos paid to selecting the songs and accurately transcribing the lyrics.[70] With the exception of John Trombold's investigation into the political aspects of the soldier songs, critics have tended to shy away from the lyrics or explain them away as yet another method by which Dos Passos incorporates the broad cultural milieu of the time period.[71] The songs help to situate

[70] "He came to depend especially on his old college friend Ed Massey, who had a reliable and encyclopedic recollection of old popular songs" (Pizer, *Critical Study* 81).

the various narrative lines historically, but they are also a crucial aspect of Dos Passos's attempts to engage readers' ears and express the strong cultural power that songs had acquired as technologies such as the gramophone allow for their mass production.

Of course, John Dos Passos was not the first of the modernists to incorporate phonographs, gramophones, and popular recordings directly into his writing. Notably, Hart Crane's long poem *The Bridge* asserts that America is united by its ears, and Crane builds sonic landscapes in which "the phonographs of hades in the brain / are tunnels that rewind themselves and love" (Crane 98). Crane, a friend and neighbor of Dos Passos in New York, was known for listening to his phonograph repeatedly and at high volumes while composing poetry, as Brian Reed has noted. Although Dos Passos did not adopt Crane's strategy, his journals and letters, not unlike the Camera Eye sections of *U.S.A.*, reveal that he was often occupied by his sonic landscapes (especially while in Europe during the war), writing down songs he hears coming from phonographs along with their lyrics, and describing the sounds of laughter, airplanes, footsteps, marching, and even mortars blasting with "the twang of fragments like a harp broken in the air" (*Fourteenth Chronicle* 95).[72] Dos Passos frequently received phonograph records from his friends Gerald and Sara Murphy, wealthy expats living in France who were part of the social circle that included Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Picasso, and others (Trombold 290). Gerald Murphy was an important musical mentor in this sense, and it was through this friendship that Dos Passos would have the good fortune meet Cole Porter (along with Picasso and others) while visiting at

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[71] Trombold's essay on the use of popular song in *U.S.A.* primarily traces the way that the soldier songs offer political resistance within the text through lyrical evocations of parodied patriotism and soldier dissatisfaction.

[72] See Dos Passos, *The Fourteenth Chronicle,* a collection of letters and diary entries. For example, "*Jan 10th* [1918] . . . "in the next room, the billiard room—the Section is playing craps-wonderful ejaculations & a primeval clink of the bones—come in to me, mixed with the crinkle of notes—A phonograph plays sentimental pieces fed to it by the Schubert-man" (123); "*Midnight Jan 15th* [1918] Reading Butler. Someone is playing the *Seraphina* on the phonograph—There's a festival brass in it that makes me think of health resorts—a continental watering place on a warm summer's night with lights & crowds walking about & sharing cafés and a ship—a long string of lights—coming into the harbor from the sea" (128).

the Murphy's villa in Cap d'Antibes in the summer of 1923 (Carr 197).[73] A number of popular songs by Porter would make their way into various sections of *U.S.A.*, including "I'm in Love Again" (1925) and "Fifty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong" (1927).[74]

The difficulty of incorporating music into texts has never been fully resolved by writers, and it would become only more complicated as popular recordings gained greater cultural currency. For someone like Dos Passos, music pervaded the landscape, and yet when struck with the necessity of incorporating songs into his trilogy, the best he could do was incorporate snippets of lyrics and italicize them. But what is the music's relationship to the text? Is it meant to form an accompaniment or *sound track*? Are readers expected to sing along or at least imagine the music and allow it to become stuck in their heads, as it does for many of Dos Passos's characters? Other writers have tried to overcome the silence of the printed page by including lyrics, descriptions of music, or even pieces of musical notation (e.g. W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*). In more recent years, writers have included "playlists" or even cd's with their books. The result of such attempts is that there is always a space in the text that must be filled in by the reader.

In order to activate his reader's ear, Dos Passos literally calls the reader to "*Come on and hear*" in a rather clever appropriation of lyrics from "Alexander's Ragtime Band" in Newsreel II. Taken on their own, the lyrics to Irving Berlin's famous 1911 song are not especially complex. They are highly repetitive and offer a meta-commentary on how great the band is ("*It is the best / It is the best / It is the best band in the land*" [*42nd Parallel* 18]). And although the song is

[73] Murphy and Porter had been good friends at Yale, and many attribute Murphy with launching Porter's music career (Carr 197).

[74] John Trombold had created an excellent index of all the songs referenced in the Newsreel sections of *U.S.A.*, including the names of composers and lyricists as well as publication dates (*see* "Popular Songs as Revolutionary Culture"). The index, unfortunately, does not include corresponding recordings or performers.

already repetitive, Dos Passos exaggerates the almost mechanically repetitive lyrics to the point that a "listener" would assume the record was broken. He repeats "Come on and hear" an extra time, skips forward to another part of the song, and then repeats an earlier section:

> *Come on and hear*
> *Come on and hear*
> *Come on and hear*
>
> In his address to the Michigan state Legislature the retiring governor, Hazen S. Pingree, said in part: I make the prediction that unless those in charge and in whose hands legislation is reposed do not change the present system of inequality, there will be a bloody revolution in less than a quarter of a century in this great country of ours.
>
> CARNEGIE TALKS OF HIS EPITAPH
>
> *Alexander's Ragtime Band*
> *It is the best*
> *It is the best*
>
> the luncheon which was served in the physical laboratory was replete with novel features. A miniature blastfurnace four feet high was on the banquet table and a narrow gauge railroad forty feet long ran round the edge of the table. […]
>
> *It is the best band in the land* (17-18)[75]

Only a selection of the lyrics appears in the text, spliced between news headlines and stories of politicians and industry moguls, and underpinned by signs of labor unrest. The effect of these exaggerated cuts and repetitions is to emphasize the repetitive qualities of phonographic sounds that would in turn become characteristic of pop songs. If the lyrics as quoted by Dos Passos seem nonsensical, they are not much improved upon listening to the entire tune. And yet, "Alexander's Ragtime Band" was not only one of the most popular songs of the period, it also provided inspiration to budding songwriters such as George Gershwin, setting the standard for American

[75] "Alexander's Ragtime Band" has been recorded dozens of times over the years, but it was first recorded in 1911 by the Arthur Collins and Byron Harlan (Victor 16908). It became a hit yet again in 1927 when Bessie Smith recorded it.

songs that would follow. The highly repetitive qualities of the lyrics, the incorporation of pseudo-African-American patterns of speech ("that's just the bestest band what am, ma honey lamb"), the brief quote of Stephen Foster's "Swanee River" ("and if you care to hear that Swanee River played in ragtime"), and the quote of a bugle call point to the fact that the song is already a kind of collage or pastiche that benefits from certain practices of listening that were developing during this period of incessant musical exposure.

The repetitions and rhymes built into the songs themselves worked as mnemonic devices that helped people to memorize them, but with phonographic recordings, the process of memorizing songs changed. Kittler asserts that our vast cache of songs is a result of well-worn neural pathways: "Records turn and turn until phonographic inscriptions inscribe themselves into brain physiology. We all know hits and rock songs by heart precisely because there is not reason to memorize them anymore" (Kittler 80). More recent studies of the relationship between music and memory by Oliver Sacks and others reinforce this assertion.[76] Dos Passos intuitively understood enough to know that he need not include the entire lyric for the song to be heard. The samples of lyrics he provides offer enough information to imply the full song. His writing assumes the reader will be able to fill in the blank spaces. Even the few lines of reference to "Alexander's Ragtime Band" are able to open the full scope of the song. It is a song that has not been memorized, but rather engraved in the brain such that 1930s readers could have accessed and "played" the song at any time.

Dos Passos uses the songs in the Newsreels to different effects. "Alexander's Ragtime Band" reflexively reminds readers to listen, but Dos Passos gestures directly toward the recorded medium when he chooses to transcribe the lyrics of songs as though sung by a particular

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[76] *See* Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (Knopf, 2010); and D. J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (Penguin, 2006).

performer. In Newsreel XLV, he cuts between W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues," ads for Ford cars, and headlines heralding murders, holdups, and gang violence, but rather than simply quote Handy's lyrics, he attempts to evoke the song as sung by Bessie Smith.[77] Borrowing inflections from both in her 1925 recording and 1929 film version, the song drops and adds d's and incorporates unusual contractions: "*'Twarn't for powder and for storebought hair / De man I love would not gone nowhere*" (*The Big Money* 14). For Dos Passos, this kind of transcription does not serve the purpose of merely trying to capture how a blues singer would phrase the lyric, but attempts to spark the memory of a particular recording. The effect of "playing" the Bessie Smith recording in one's head is that Dos Passos resituates the phonographic replay within the body and draws upon the way in which the body was already its own sound reproduction technology. Kittler has said that the brain is "an infinitely perfected phonograph"—perfected in the sense that it both records and replays, but is also conscious of its sounds (33). The implication of having the reader "play" Bessie Smith's "St. Louis Blues" in the head rather than simply on a phonograph is that her voice becomes re-embodied within the reader's ear.

At other places in the text, songs travel between the Newsreels and the character narratives as Dos Passos mobilizes the lyrics to catalyze moments of tension. One such case is Dos Passos's repeated use of the "Hesitation Blues"—a song that reappears in many of the texts discussed in this dissertation. In Newsreel XLVII, the juxtaposition of the "Hesitation Blues" with a list of want-ads creates a moment of irony as ads heralding "opportunity" are undercut by the plaintive, "*Oh tell me how long / I'll have to wait*" (*The Big Money* 23). The Newsreel comes at a moment in the novel when Charley Anderson has returned from the war and is faced with the

[77] In the context of the Newsreel and the sections that come soon after, the selection of the lyrics reinforces the pull of the material/commercial desires of women on the men—not only the way that Doris seems to push Charley to find a career making more money, but as is reinforced by the newspaper ads: "*Just as soon as his wife discovers that every Ford is like every other Ford and that nearly everyone has one, she is likely to influence him to step into the next social group, of which the Dodge is the most conspicuous example*" (14).

prospect of being a newspaper boy. Charley eventually works his way into the airplane manufacturing business, but the juxtaposition at this moment in the text highlights the "lost generation" dilemma: soldiers return from the war with no sense of purpose except for making money, but the only ads in the papers are for errand boys and clerks. When the song recurs near the end of the trilogy in the narrative of Richard Ellsworth Savage ("Dick"), it is whispered in his ear by a black transvestite named Gloria in a Harlem nightclub, Small's Paradise. Dick started his narrative as an aspiring young poet at Harvard, but after returning from the war he becomes the protégé of the public relations pioneer J.W. Moorehouse—a job he finds meaningless and empty even though he excels at it. For Dick, Gloria's insinuating "Do I get it now . . . or must I he . . . esitate" speaks to a different kind of opportunity—an opportunity to break from the conformity of the role he has assumed in society (*The Big Money* 414). The lyrics themselves hesitate and are broken by ellipses, but seizing upon the moment, Dick brings Gloria home with him. When he wakes the next morning, it becomes clear that he has been beaten up and robbed by Gloria, who had seized upon *her* opportunity (414). In moving between character narratives and the Newsreel, the "Hesitation Blues" help to contextualize a historical moment and link together two narratives that otherwise do not intersect.

As time passes in the novels, Dos Passos's characters become more adept at reading sounds (musical and otherwise), and *U.S.A.* expects its readers to become better at hearing the resonances between certain kinds of sounds as well. The blast of bombs and shrapnel in one section resonates with the "shrilly clattering" riveters in another. But sounds are just as easily recast to reflect the shifting mood of characters. Dick, the former poet and PR man, has a special knack for reading sounds. On a bad day in the office, the riveters of a neighboring skyscraper ring "inside his head like a dentist's drill," but just a few pages later when Dick's prospects have

changed, he describes the riveters as "music to our ears, they make us sing like canaries in a thunderstorm. They mean business" (*Big Money* 384, 397). After a while, all sounds have the potential to become musical in this way, but it is how they are listened to that matters.

When we think about the relation songs and musical sounds have to the larger shape and structure of the novel, it is helpful to return to "Alexander's Ragtime Band," which offers insight into Dos Passos's rhythmic approach to time in the novel. The song is called "Alexander's *Ragtime* Band," but the song itself is not, strictly speaking, written in ragtime. Ragtime (or "ragged" time) was a popular style of music from the mid-1890s through the beginning part of the twentieth century, characterized by syncopated rhythms that have their roots in African American music. In its piano form, the left hand keeps a steady striding rhythm, playing between the octaves, while the right hand plays a syncopated melody. To watch a ragtime player, one immediately notices the way in which the right and left hands seem to be moving completely independently from one another in order to achieve a complex orchestration of rhythms. It is perhaps not a perfect metaphor to call Dos Passos's writing *ragtime*, just as it is something of a stretch to call "Alexander's Ragtime Band" *ragtime*, but in its aspiration toward a polyrhythmic sense of time that moves between newspaper headlines (historical time) and song lyrics (musical time), Dos Passos could be said to extend the metaphoric sense of ragtime. This polyrhythmic approach to time extends across the various modes of the novel (narrative, biographies, newsreels, camera eye) as each section projects its own independent sense of time, which must in turn be synthesized by the reader.[78] For Dos Passos, the phonograph and the music that it helped make popular became a helpful way to structure the kinds of listening required to unpack his multimodal text.

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[78] It is no mistake that E. L. Doctorow's novel that pays homage to *U.S.A.* is titled *Ragtime* (1975).

* * *

Stein was often quoted as saying, "I am because my little dog knows me" (*Geographical History of America* 401). Innocent though the phrase may seem, it has been suggested that the phrase inadvertently refers to the image of Nipper the dog listening to "his master's voice" in advertisements for the Victor Talking Machines. What Victor and Stein both seem to realize is that in order to convey the sense of an audible voice, one must also somehow represent the listening. Thus, Melanctha's listening presence is therefore as necessary as Nipper the dog is to instructing the public on how to hear the phonograph. In different ways, "Melanctha" and *U.S.A.* demonstrate how the phonograph complicated and troubled ideas about how to represent the voice on the page. Underscoring a larger cultural shift from a mouth-based to ear-based understanding of sound production, these texts experiment with a kind of phonographic writing—a writing that does not simply write or record by transcribing voice, but by transcribing the way sounds are heard. Stein's understanding of this relation between talking and listening was no doubt just as informed by her experiments with normal motor automatism as her exposure to the phonograph, and yet her writing reveals an acute understanding of the ways that the ear must be trained to listen. In the more than twenty years that passed between the publication of "Melanctha" and the *U.S.A.* trilogy, the phonograph had gone from a novelty to a household commodity—from a "talking machine" to a gramophone. By the late 1920s, Dos Passos could expect to rely on his readers ears, taut to hear, to listen musically for resonances. He could say *Come on and Hear!* and they would.

Chapter Two

Ghostly Listeners and Elliptical Transcription in *Mister Jelly Roll* and *Treat it Gentle*

> *The amplifier was hot. The needle was tracing a quiet spiral on the spinning acetate. "Mister Morton," I said, "how about the beginning? Tell about where you were born and how you got started and why . . . and maybe keep playing piano while you talk. . . ."*
>
> –Alan Lomax, *Mister Jelly Roll*

Such were the words of a young Alan Lomax as he embarked upon the now-famous recording session of Jelly Roll Morton at the Library of Congress in 1938. Sitting on the floor with a Presto Portable Disc Recorder at his side, the twenty-three-year-old Lomax (1915-2002) would gather over one hundred tracks of Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton LeMenthe (1885-1941) as he told the story of his life with piano accompaniment. The recordings were the first of their kind and laid the groundwork for the field of oral history. Lomax referred to the recordings as an "autobiography" of Morton, and yet the fact that they turned out to be so was almost purely by accident. Lomax had invited Morton to the Library of Congress to record a few folk songs, and as Morton played, he began to speak about how jazz emerged in New Orleans. Lomax recalled, "As I listened to it, I realized that this man spoke the English language in a more beautiful way than anybody I'd ever heard" (Szwed 123). Seizing upon the opportunity, Lomax took a bottle of whisky from his office and a stack of acetate-plated discs and urged Morton to start at the beginning. However, Morton needed little plying. He had come to the Library of Congress with the express intent of setting the record straight about jazz.[79] As Morton viewed it, he had not received his due as one of the originators of the music, and although he had been one of the most popular recording artists of the 1920s, he had fallen on hard times. The recordings he made with

[79] Several years earlier he had begun to conceive of his own autobiography and had even appeared on Radio WOL, Washington D.C., in 1936 to tell the history of jazz.

Lomax are considered foundational documents of jazz history, and ten years later Lomax would use the recordings to write what he referred to as "the first altogether recorded book": *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz"* (1949) (xvi).

But what does it mean to write an "altogether recorded book"? David Bolter and Richard Gruisin have termed the tendency of one medium to refashion and imitate older media forms *remediation*; however, remediation fails to account for the reciprocal relationship between an new medium and the older one that adopts it. Why is a book even necessary when we could simply listen to the recordings? Lomax's desire to invent a new term to describe the hybrid genre that is neither biography nor autobiography and straddles two media suggests that we must find innovative ways of thinking about such a text. *Mister Jelly Roll* may have been the first book to use recordings and transcripts in the writing process, but it certainly was not the last. Lomax's book would inspire numerous others and became a model for many jazz autobiographies that have employed precisely this strategy, including the poetic *Treat it Gentle* (1960) by clarinetist and saxophonist Sidney Bechet (1897-1959). Both *Mister Jelly Roll* and *Treat it Gentle* incorporate transcriptions of recorded interviews—a practice rooted in ethnography—and yet these books are not simply oral histories told by jazz originators, but rather *aural* histories that require readers to listen and think critically about the sonic identities of musicians who themselves used recording technology in experimental ways.

The impulse toward autobiography was partly a product of the particular moment in jazz's development. When Lomax recorded Morton in the late 1930s, the histories of jazz were just beginning to be told, but more often than not these histories were told by white critics and bandleaders and focused on distinguishing jazz styles during a period of transition between the

"hot" music originated in New Orleans, swing, and (soon) bebop.[80] Perhaps most egregious of these was the bandleader Paul Whiteman's "What is this thing called jazz?" from the June 1939 issue of *The Rotarian*, which casually glossed over the music's African American roots and asserted George Gershwin to be the most important figure in jazz (34).[81] By the 1940s, the jazz scene had changed significantly as commercially successful white bands were threatening to erase the music's complex roots, and even Alan Lomax had been skeptical of jazz's commercialism. Although the emergence of bebop in the late 1930s and early 1940s offered resistance to what many perceived as the whitewashing of the music, for players like Morton and Bechet, who remained committed to the older New Orleans styles, it seemed like the music was being taken away from them; as Bechet put it, "These people don't seem to know it's more than a memory thing. They don't seem to know it's happening right there where they're listening to it" *(Treat it Gentle* 2). It is thus not surprising that autobiographies of jazz musicians began to appear not long after these first histories, including Louis Armstrong's *Swing that Music* (1936) and later, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1954), W.C. Handy's *Father of the Blues* (1941), and Mezz Mezzrow's *Really the Blues* (1946). Autobiography gave musicians some semblance of control over the narratives surrounding their music, but as Daniel Stein writes in "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography," many of these texts "invent elusive autobiographical

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[80] One of the earliest attempts at a comprehensive jazz history was the French critic Hugues Panassié's *Le jazz hot* (1934), translated for American readers as *Hot Jazz* (1936), which distinguished jazz from European styles and attempted to define "hot" jazz in relation to other emerging styles. Other early histories include Herbert Asbury's colorful *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (1936), and Charles Edward Smith and Frederic Ramsey, Jr.'s *Jazzmen* (1939). Numerous long articles also appeared in magazines such as *Esquire, Downbeat,* and *Metronome* in the early 1940s by the likes of George Avakian, Rudi Blesh, and Leonard Feather. For an overview of these early jazz histories, *see* Scott Deveaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition," in *Jazz Cadence* (483-511).

[81] Whiteman also penned an earlier history of jazz (deemed by most to be unreliable and anecdotal) that briefly pointed to the African roots of the music, but focused on Gershwin and other Tin Pan Alley composers. *See* P. Whiteman and M. M. McBride, *Jazz* (Sears, 1926).

personas" (174). In the case of autobiographies that used recordings in the process of writing, those personae move between the slippery zone of sonic and textual presence.

Like Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet was a New Orleans Creole who felt that he needed to correct the record and tell the story of where the music came from. Although Morton liked to claim the title "inventor of jazz," the story of jazz's beginnings is intertwined with a number of New Orleans players, including Sidney Bechet and, of course, the younger Louis Armstrong. Morton along with Bechet invented many of the sounds that we now associate with jazz. Morton wrote dozens of standards, developed masterful arrangements, and possessed a nimble and powerful style of piano playing that distinguished him from his contemporaries. Bechet was noted for his "hot" solos, which rivaled Louis Armstrong's soaring improvisations, and helped to transform the way the music was played. Moreover, Bechet possessed a truly unique tone, and his fast, wide vibrato makes his recordings instantly recognizable. Thus, for pioneering jazz musicians like Morton and Bechet, the possibility of using recordings to "write" a book was, in many ways, a natural outgrowth of their other artistic pursuits because recordings had become such a central part of their musical output. Morton and Bechet were also key innovators in popular recording—a fact that is sometimes obscured by official histories told by the recording studios. As musicians with vast discographies, their public identities were intertwined with their music and the particularities of their individual sounds; using recordings to write their autobiographies promised a much closer relationship to their sonic identities. But when we read these texts, what do we hear?

Reviews of the books at the time of their publication advertise the musical-sonic qualities of the text and the authenticity of the voices therein. A *Chicago Daily Tribune* review of *Mister Jelly Roll* remarked, "Lomax has woven a narrative symphony that will endear him to hot

waxheads, and wax hot-heads alike; this is the diskophile's dream book" (Savage H4). Of *Treat it Gentle*, the *New York Times* said, "Sidney Bechet played his clarinet and soprano saxophone with a soaring lyrical passion, and he produced an intense, full-bodied music uniquely his own. Some of this same lyricism, a projection of this same inner vision, appears in his autobiography, 'Treat it Gentle'" (Wilson BR3). The review goes on to praise the editors for preserving Bechet's speech, "for he can make words sing with that vividness and excitement that was so much a part of his great talent." Reviews such as these imply that the voices contained within recorded books promise a higher degree of authenticity because of the fidelity to the musician's *sound*, but few question what happens in the space between the recording, the transcription, and the editing of these books.

The complexity of how an "altogether recorded book" comes into being and the role of editors and recording devices in the process, however, has been largely unexplored. The process varies from subject to subject, and the degree of collaboration is not always explicit. In Count Basie's introduction to *Good Morning Blues* (1986)—an autobiography that also employs tape transcripts—Basie compared his co-writer Albert Murray to a staff arranger or even an accompanist, stating: "he comps for me pretty much as I have always done for my soloists. . . . And of course, we have also done quite a bit of four-handed piano playing, just like Bennie Moten himself and I used to do, sometimes with two separate pianos and sometimes on the same keyboard" (xii). As Basie's shifting metaphors suggest, there are varying degrees to which an editor/collaborator takes a hand in the writing process; but whereas a later autobiography like Basie's fully acknowledges and celebrates its complex, dual-voiced (or four-handed) authorship, the same cannot be said for the first books that experimented with the genre. Those who have written about *Mister Jelly Roll* and *Treat it Gentle* tend to accept the authenticity of the

musician's "voice" without question in part because these texts are generally only studied in the context of jazz history or by eager fans. Indeed, the scholarship seldom acknowledges the collaborative authorship, opting instead to discuss thematic elements of race and representation, or jazz autobiography as a generic concern; such genre defining has isolated them unnecessarily both from the music and from literature more generally.[82] Even fewer critics attempt to unpack the transcription practices or how sounds permeate these texts. In this chapter, I attempt to correct this deficiency by exploring the intermediality of these understudied texts, situating them within traditions of ethnographic recording, and bringing them into the broader discussion of modernism's engagement with sound reproduction technology.

At the core of this chapter is the question of the relationship between listening and transcription. Unlike a traditional biography or autobiography, recorded books require multiple authors and editors, and from a generic standpoint, such books are difficult to pin down. *Mister Jelly Roll*, the first recorded book, draws from ethnography and anthropology, slave narratives, classic and modern literature (among other forms), and these influences have infused the books that follow its lead. Moreover, recorded books make implicit and explicit decisions about how to

[82] Due to the great number of jazz autobiographies that emerged in the twentieth century, attempts by critics to organize the books into various categories have been a popular approach. Christopher Harlos's essay "Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics" (1995) attempts to categorize four frameworks in which to consider the jazz autobiography: those that desire to set the record straight; those that aspire toward literary and self-expression; those that illustrate collaboration between musicians and editors or interviewers; and those that feel the need to bring in authenticating texts. In "Narrating the Jazz Life" (2006), Holly E. Farrington classifies the jazz autobiographies in terms of classic models of narration: epic, mythic, and labyrinth. While Farrington's essay brings these autobiographical writings closer to literary models, she does little more than categorize the texts for the purposes of comparing them to one another. These categorizations are useful, so far as they go, but they do little to help us actually consider these texts as part of broader literary practices.

I am more interested in critical models that link jazz autobiographies to broader literary practices, such as those provided by Brent Edwards and Daniel Stein that argue for the aesthetic autonomy of these works. Edwards, in "The Literary Ellington" (2004), suggests that Duke Ellington's *Music is My Mistress* extends the literary qualities already at play in Ellington's music, whereas Stein, in "The Performance of Jazz Autobiography" (2004), proposes a performance-based lens for evaluating the personas developed within jazz autobiography. Similar to Stein and Edwards, Gerald Early has suggestively proposed that these forms of writing "reestablish and renew the tradition of jazz as a music that must be rhetorically rehearsed, even rhetorically realized" (133). Such an assertion points to the inherently literary and rhetorical aspects already at work within the music, and illuminates the ways in which the texts and the musical sounds are part of the same performance.

transcribe the sonic elements of speech—decisions that are politically charged and driven by larger institutional forces. Transcription is generally defined as the action or process of copying (OED). Although the act often implies turning speech into text, it can also apply to the process of turning heard music into notation. And yet, the idea that a transcription is simply a copy is problematic. When the element of music is introduced to the mix, as it is in these jazz autobiographies, the notion of *transcription* as a way to define the recorded book seems even more unsatisfactory, and we find that these texts place pressure on our notions of transcription as a transparent activity.

Transcription might also be said to evoke aspects of transitoriness and transition as authors are faced with writing *across* media. Working in the space between vision and hearing, between text and recording, the recorded book thematizes *listening*—the unacknowledged activity at the center of all transcription. However, because print is an inherently silent medium, listening to text is inevitably a theoretical activity, more aspirational than actual. In *Mister Jelly Roll,* Lomax introduces "ghostly listeners" who take on the spectral shapes of long-passed New Orleans inhabitants in order to model listening for his readers as well as to suggest a new avenue for accessing the past through sound. It is a mode of listening that is self-contained within the music, similar to the way phonographic recordings double the act of producing sounds and listening (via the sympathetically vibrating apparatus). Lomax introduces the frame in the Prelude to *Mister Jelly Roll* and describes:

> As the legend grew and flowered over the keyboard of that Congressional grand piano, the back seats of the hall filled with ghostly listeners—figures dressed in Mardi Gras costumes, fancy prostitutes in their plumes and diamonds, tough sports from Rampart Street in pegtop trousers and boxback coats, cable-armed black longshoremen from the riverfront, octoroons in their brilliant *tiyons* giggling at Morton's tales, old ladies framing severe parchment faces in black shawls, jazzmen of every complexion playing a solid background on their horns—

> for this was their legend that Jelly Roll was weaving at the piano, a legend of the painful and glorious flowering of hot jazz in which they had all played a part.
>
> *In New Orleans, in New Orleans,*
> *Louisiana town* . . . (xx-xxi)

Much like frame tales employed in the transition between oral and written literature (as in *The Decameron* or the *Arabian Nights*), these ghostly listeners serve to resituate readers in relation to an aural or audible text.[83] In returning to this older literary device, Lomax does not simply adopt the form in hopes of returning to oral literature, but revises and adapts the framing device. What strikes me about these scenes is that Lomax insists that the ghosts are *listeners* who emerge from, or are implied by, the recordings of Morton's music and speech. Usually, the relationship between sound and listener is inverted; the audience listens *to* music, the music does not produce listening. It is a subtle move, but the depiction of a performance that generates its own audience—a kind of self-contained performance and listening—parallels our engagement with recorded sounds.

In *Treat it Gentle*, Sidney Bechet improvises upon the notion of ghost listening in the chapter about his grandfather, Omar, as he re-versions the legend of Bras-Coupé and invokes the sounds of Africa. For Bechet, listening has less to do with the recorded interviews used to write the book than it does with a theoretical framework in which to access an unwritten (and unrecorded) past—it is Bechet's way of linking the heard text and written text. I argue that in locating themselves on the cusp of two different media, *Mister Jelly Roll* and *Treat it Gentle* occupy a unique transitional space between reading and listening that is characterized by ghosts

[83] As Walter Ong has noted, such frame tales were common during the transition from an oral culture to a literate culture but had largely disappeared with the rise of the novel in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*Orality and Literacy* 99-100).

and elusive ellipses. By emphasizing *aurality*—that is to say, what is heard—these books frame listening as both an actual and theoretical activity and extend the notion of what sound can mean.

Origins of the Recorded Book: Ethnography, Transcription, and the Archive

Since its inception, sound recording technology has been predicated on the notion of the fidelity and the scientific transparency of sound reproduction. Edison's tone tests and public demonstrations of the early phonographs at the end of the nineteenth century insisted that audiences could not tell the difference between the recorded sound and the original. Early in the phonograph's history, even before the mass proliferation of the phonograph as a music-making machine, ethnographers and early anthropologists recognized the potential of recorded sound to transform the nature of fieldwork and to lend a new scientific accuracy to their transcriptions. Alan Lomax and his father John Lomax were among those to pioneer the uses of recordings in the study of folklore, and they helped to establish the division of Folklore at the Library of Congress. Indeed, it is out of ethnography, folklore studies, and debates about the representation of voices on the page that Alan Lomax would develop his own elliptical methods of transcription; traces of the ethnographic tradition can be seen across a number of recorded texts.

Belief in the transparency of the machine was not new but rather the outgrowth of the scientific rhetoric surrounding the phonograph and the kinds of ideals espoused by Franz Boas, the "father of anthropology," whose theories Lomax had encountered early in his career. Boas, who is credited with bringing the scientific method to bear on the study of cultures, had advocated the use of the recording machine, which fit well with his mandate for the study of folklore, or what he called "people['s] records of themselves in their own words" (Brady 66). The desire to represent the oral quality of voices in literature and to preserve dying "primitive"

languages had been a particular concern throughout the nineteenth century, and as early as 1890, Jesse Walter Fewkes was using a phonograph to make cylinder recordings of the Passamaquoddy Indians in Maine.[84] In *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography,* Erika Brady notes that the first ethnographers to employ the phonograph tended to focus, as Fewkes did, on the documentation of "primitive" cultures and the preservation of languages of non-literate peoples. Others such as Benjamin Ives Gilman were using the phonograph to record what Brady calls "'exotic' representations of non-Western societies presumed to be a window on civilization's primitive past" (16).[85]

For ethnographers, the phonograph offered paradoxical possibilities: on the one hand, it provided a kind of magical access to the secret and the ancient, while on the other hand, it offered a scientific mode of preservation with an unprecedented degree of accuracy and objectivity. Recordings enabled ethnographic subjects to "speak for themselves" to a much greater degree, and they helped researchers create more accurate transcriptions that were less dependent on imperfect memory and field notes. Ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst claimed that ethnomusicology "could never have grown into an independent science if the gramophone had not been invented" because it alone enabled objectivity (qtd. Katz 2).[86] And yet, as Mark Katz argues, such claims fail to account for the ways the technology would eventually shape music.

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[84] Traveling as an archaeologist among Native American tribes, Fewkes was struck by the idea that the phonograph "should be used in the study of fast disappearing languages of races, and in making records of those which are rapidly becoming extinct" (Brady 55). Recordings of Native American languages and music were of particular interest to late nineteenth century Americans who romanticized the disappearing tribes as the last vestigial traces of a wild American frontier. As the interest in primitivism grew, increased attention was paid to African American culture as well, which was naively viewed as harnessing this raw energy.

[85] The desire to preserve languages and music in the pursuit of a national character were the offspring of German philosophers such as Herder and even the folktale-collecting Brothers Grimm. *See* Brady 24.

[86] In his book *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music,* Mark Katz also points out that since the beginning, recording technology has been equated with the "ideal of realism" (2). Evidence of this can be seen in advertisements at the turn of the century that called phonographic sounds "'lifelike,' 'a true mirror of sound,' 'natural,' and 'the real thing,'" but also much later when in the 1970s ads asked: "Is it live, or is it Memorex?" (2).

Claims to the objectivity of recordings and subsequent transcription are always fraught by the complicated relationship between the collector, the subject, and the recording device.

The use of recordings has become fundamental to the social sciences, and transcriptions continue to be critical across a number of fields ranging from anthropology and psychology to linguistics and education. And yet transcription as a practice continues to be under-theorized. In the field of ethnography we find that despite the scientific promise of phonograph recordings as tools of preservation, the wax cylinders were used primarily for the purposes of transcription and treated almost like scratch paper. The "derived" text and not the recordings were the basis of descriptive and analytical work, and as Brady points out, "particular performances were important only insofar as they could be used to reconstruct a paradigm for song, story, narrative, or myth in a given culture," and thus it was assumed by most ethnographers that one would need to "improve" the material (62, 63). The narrative value was prized above all, and the presence of the machine and even of the ethnographer was made invisible in most of the ethnographic work done between the 1890s and the 1930s despite widespread use.[87] Implicit trust in the scientific objectivity of the machine and the transcriber belie the fact that both recordings and transcriptions contain, according to Brady, "a full measure of characteristics resulting from subjective motivations, conscious and unconscious, of collector and performer" (7). In other words, not only does the machine affect the performance that is recorded, but the transcription is merely the record of one person's listening. Even today, social scientists recognize the deficiencies of under documented, subjective transcription practices.[88]

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[87] Conspicuous mention of the machine would have revealed the artificiality of the relationship between the ethnographer and her subject, and thus it was felt best not to mention it. As a result, even though the *Journal of American Folklore* contains hundreds of transcripts from field recordings during this period, only a dozen articles mention the phonograph at all (Brady 60-61).

[88] In one recent study of transcription, Judith C. Lapadat and Anne C. Lindsay argue that the persistent assumption of transcription's transparency is problematic, and that those who are treating language as data must make greater

Brady's critique of transcription in ethnography resonates with contemporary discussions about archival practice and illuminates the tension between a desire for 'authenticity' or 'truth' and what Van Wyck Brooks called a "usable past."[89] In Antoinette Burton's introduction to *Archive Stories* (2006), she frames the relationship between archives and history by suggesting that, "history is not merely a project of fact-retrieval . . . but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention" (8). To the extent that acts of transcription in the era of recordings always involve an encounter with an archive, Burton's assessment is just as true for those who write recorded books. Such frames are especially helpful to keep in mind when we consider the roles of Alan and John Lomax in creating the recorded archive (at the Library of Congress) and defining our uses of it. Today it is difficult to imagine a library that does not house recordings, but at the time, the practice was still quite radical. While one might critique Alan Lomax of engaging in what Derrida called "archive fever" as he crossed the globe making and collecting recordings of as many sounds as one could imagine, it is worth noting Lomax's commitment to making his collections available and useful to as many people as possible, whether through books, or his radio show, or the posthumous "global jukebox" that was recently digitalized made available online by the Association for Cultural Equity.[90] Although

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efforts to document transcription methodology. "Transcription is inherently selective" state Lapadat and Lindsay, but in the early years of mechanical recordings, the step was seen as so technical as to be ignored (70). Over the years, there have been different attempts to standardize and encode transcription practices in the social sciences. Alan Lomax himself would develop an extensive theory called "cantometrics" for use in categorizing field recordings and transcription. However, the impossibility and inflexibility of such systems of coding have been abandoned in more recent years in favor of more pragmatic approaches that are adapted to individuals' research purposes. But even for Lapadat and Lindsay, the *subjectivity* of transcription seems limited to the social scientist; they do not ask whether the presence of the recording machine itself might be an important environmental factor to record.

[89] *See* Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *Dial* 64 (April 11, 1918): 337-41.

[90] In 2012, Lomax's foundation, the Association for Cultural Equity began making Lomax's recording available to the public on its website, www.culturalequity.org.

Lomax has been criticized (sometimes rightfully so) for his use of others' voices, he was not unaware of the problem.

Quite early in his career Lomax sensed that the transcription of voices required something more than simply writing down the words spoken on a recording. As anyone who has ever used a dictation machine knows, transcribing speech to text can be a tedious process as listening and typing fall in and out of sync with one another. Cases in which the speech is muffled, unintelligible, or spoken too quickly require one to deduce words from the context and make a best guess.[91] Transcription also necessitates decisions about whether to codify redundancies, pronunciation, and non-verbal utterances (such as coughs, laughs, or pauses). As such, transcription always involves a question of representation. How to represent folk voices—and in particular, black voices—therefore was a problem for Lomax in his early work, as he traveled the south with his father recording cowboy ballads and blues in their Model A Ford with its mobile recording studio.[92] In writing a brief character study of Lead Belly for *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly* (1936), Lomax had attempted to capture something of Lead Belly's

[91] As Paul Benzon has pointed out, "The typewriter builds error into the act of writing," and in the process of dictation in particular, "technological efficiency and dispersive textual uncertainty were intertwined" (94, 92). For Benzon, this fact is nowhere more evident than in Andy Warhol's *a: A Novel* (1968), which is constituted of unedited transcripts of tape recordings.

[92] John Szwed writes about these early trips at length in Lomax's biography (*See* 31-59). The Lomaxes made their first recording expedition in 1932 with a cylinder phonograph borrowed from none other than Thomas Edison's widow, making recordings of folksingers (ranging from cowboys and laborers to black blues singers) at a time when only a few were treating such music seriously. The success of these recordings prompted the Library of Congress to promise a small amount of funding to the Lomaxes to outfit a Model A Ford with an office Ediphone (better suited to recording voices). Thus they set out, eventually recording in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Many of their subjects were African American working class people: a washerwoman, tenant farmers, prisoners. As they passed through Baton Rouge, they were able to purchase a vastly improved recording system that included a 315-pound disc-cutting recorder as well as amps, microphones, mixing equipment, and recordable discs. With the improved equipment, they were able to make much better recordings in more natural settings. It was also on this trip that they met blues singer and twelve-string-guitar player Huddie Ledbetter, a.k.a. "Lead Belly," whose collaboration would prove to be one of the most fruitful of their mutual careers as they promoted Lead Belly's music and raised the visibility of their project.

characteristic speech by writing in dialect, but recognized that doing so could be perceived as patronizing.[93]

In his quest for a better model, Lomax was "dazzled" by the phonetic transcriptions of Zora Neale Hurston, whom he believed had "the editorial style necessary to transmit the whole plangent sound of black folks' speech onto the page then confused by mistransliteration or the redundancies that no eye can accept" (qtd. Szwed 79).[94] Although Hurston did not initially use recordings in her fieldwork, when Alan Lomax came across her writings on "Hoodoo in New Orleans" in the *Journal of American Folklore* he found the intellectual and literary mentor he had been searching for. According to Lomax's biographer John Szwed, "Hurston represented to Alan what was possible for an intellectual of a certain type, and pointed the way toward how he, too, might come to write in a deeply personal and expressive style and still be an ethnographer and folklorist true to his subject" (Szwed 78). Not everyone agreed with Hurston's strategy of phonetically transcribing black voices—Richard Wright was a notable critic of her style and accused her of propagating minstrel stereotypes—and her ethnographic methodologies were considered unorthodox. But even though her phonetic transcription is notable for its sonic qualities, Hurston's writing is not strictly phonographic. Rather, her writing reflects her interpretation as a "participant-observer." Lori Ann Garner has noted that in *Mules and Men* (a 1935 collection of folklore from Hurston's hometown of Eatonville, Florida) "her depiction [of voices] is necessarily selective and her writing becomes an artistic construction of speech, a form of *performance* in itself" (222).[95] Hurston had already published various works of fiction when

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[93] George Herzog at Yale had wanted John and Alan to make the Lead Belly book a model of anthropological musicology, but Herzog himself recognized the great difficulty of transcribing Negro folk songs.

[94] This assessment is from a letter from Alan Lomax to Hurston's biographer Robert Hemenway; *see* Szwed 78-79.

[95] Garner's essay "Representations of Speech in the WPA Slave Narratives and Writing of Zora Neale Hurston" (2000) looks to the various ways Hurston represents voices in both her fiction and nonfiction writing in order to

she produced her first collection of folklore, and critics have remarked upon how Hurston *borrowed* stories from her fiction for *Mules and Men*. The phonetically transcribed tales are linked together by a first person narrative account of her various encounters, spoken in "straight" English, and conversations with Eatonville's storytellers, in which Hurston slips into the dialect used by her subjects.[96] The shifts elegantly represent the code-switching required to be a participant in the culture she studied. The result is a blend of literature and ethnography, rather than a strict anthropological study, but at the time, Hurston was criticized for breaking the rules of serious ethnography. For Hurston, it was about getting the right sound;[97] to Lomax, the combination of personal narrative with the voices of ethnographic subjects made for much better reading, and a more useful access to culture. In the summer of 1935 under the auspices of the Library of Congress's new Folklore division, Lomax and Hurston took a road trip together through the southeast collecting folklore and it was through Hurston and her unique methodology that Lomax was introduced to the Boasian tradition of anthropology.[98] This strange

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reveal how the two inform one another. As Garner points out, the WPA slave narratives were far from the consistent, scientifically recorded documents that WPA editor John Sterling had hoped for, due to the high degree of editing (223). Garner argues that we ought to read these slave narratives the way we read Hurston, and understand that these representations of speech are performances in themselves (*See* 222-226).

[96] For example, Hurston explains in the introduction to *Mules and Men*, "It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that" (9); but several pages later as she is entering Eatonville and narrating her encounters with the storytellers, she switches codes: "Calvin, Ah sure am glad that you got here. Ah'm crazy to hear about John and dat frog" (14).

[97] In Hurston's "Works in Progress for The Florida Negro," she privileges not language or music but sound: "Way back there when Hell wasn't no bigger than Maitland, man found out something about the laws of sound. . . . He found out that sounds could be assembled and manipulated and that such a collection of sound forms could become as definite and concrete as a war-axe or a food-tool. So he had language and song. Perhaps by some happy accident he found out about percussion sounds and spacing the intervals for tempo and rhythm. Anyway, it is evident that the sound-arts were the first inventions and that music and literature grew from the same root" (in *Folklore* 876).

[98] In his biography of Lomax, John Szwed offers a detailed account of this trip (*See* 77-86). As Szwed points out, Hurston and Lomax along with NYU Professor Mary Elizabeth Barnicle made a strange trio: Lomax was just twenty, Huston and Barnicle were in their forties, and yet Alan was officially in charge. The trip, which has its own brand of epic adventure story, complete with romantic intrigue and a run in with the law, allowed Alan to break from his father's influence. With recording equipment in tow, Hurston introduced Lomax to black communities (including her native Eatonville, Florida) in ways that had previously eluded him. Among their recordings of singers and musicians was the first recorded interview with a former slave, which they made on St. Simons Island, Georgia.

genealogy by which ethnography comes to the recorded book is not without problems, and Lomax like Hurston would occasionally receive criticism for his portrayal of folk voices.

Hurston and Lomax would continue to find themselves at the center of an ongoing debate about the representation of black voices as a result of their participation collecting slave narratives for the WPA Writer's Project in the 1930s. Under the direction of Sterling Brown, collectors were encouraged to adopt an idiomatic (rather than phonetic) approach to transcription. Brown praised Zora Neale Hurston's writing as an example, but cautioned writers against writings "ah" for "I" and "poe" for "poor," etc. (Brown, *Slave's Narrative* 38). Instead, Brown suggested "simplicity in recording the dialect" in order to keep readers' attention, adding that "truth to the idiom is more important, I believe, than truth to pronunciation" (37). For example, phrases that give a local flavor such as "durin' of de war" were considered acceptable, but various pronunciations of "master" (such as marsa, massa, etc.) were not. Brown's directive is indicative of the politically charged ideas surrounding representations of the black voice. It is arguable whether misspellings and the overtly incorrect grammar of literary dialect demeaned ex-slaves and their story, because as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Charles T. Davis acknowledge, in the longer tradition of slave narrative, the sense of *presence* evoked by the black voice was crucial to the genre of black life writing: "The very *face* of the race, representations of whose features were common in all sorts of writing about blacks at that time, was contingent upon the recording of the black *voice*. Voice presupposes a face but also seems to have been thought to determine the contours of the black face" (*The Slave's Narrative* xxvi). However, given the correlation between literacy and political rights in African American history, there was a sense of unease surrounding representations of speech that suggested a lack of sophistication or

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It was during this trip and his later trip to Haiti that Lomax would solidify his commitment to collecting folksongs and helping the voices of the masses reach Washington D.C.

education. Lomax was thus driven to negotiate the line between these conflicting impulses: the scientific transparency afforded by recordings, the desire to translate sound to the page, and literary motivations.

Mister Jelly Roll and the Library of Congress Recordings

"A folksong in a book is like a photograph of a bird in flight" –Charles Seeger[99]

We tend to think of Alan Lomax as simply a folksong collector and pioneer of ethnomusicology, but on a philosophical level, Lomax was deeply invested in literature and believed that the recording machine would lead to new kinds of writing and reinvigorate what he called "the kind of epicene prose that had taken possession of everybody." In a *New York Times* interview from 1950, he argued that writing had reached a "dead end" and claimed that he was "interested in doing for language what recording was doing for music" by employing recordings in the writing process. When pressed by the interviewer, "How would recording the people and then writing out of the recordings liberate us from the dead-end?" Lomax responded:

> The ordinary people are alive and have kept alive truth and beauty. Even Jelly Roll—his is the story of corruption and yet it has a terrific optimistic kind of bounce. Shakespeare really reported. He had a golden ear. Anyone less good ought to look at himself three times and say, "Hadn't I really better use a recording machine?" ("Talk with Alan Lomax")

The actual technique of transcription to which Lomax alludes is somewhat shrouded by the high ideas that drove it. Coming into the heady and prosperous 1950s after a long stint working with the Federal Writers Project at the end of the Great Depression, Lomax was charged with a

[99] Quoted in Evan Eisenberg's *The Recording Angel* pg. 102.

populist patriotism, and declared: "I believe this is the beginning of a technique which will make novel writing and biography a profoundly democratic thing." Clearly part of the democratic "truth and beauty" of which he speaks has to do with the *sound* of the voice, but Lomax says little about the difficulties and complexities of transcribing sounds to text aside from his admittance that the process required "a lot" of editing. Indeed, the resulting book is a combination of edited transcriptions of Jelly Roll Morton's speech, as well as "Interlude" chapters in which Lomax provides historical context and additional biographical information that draws upon research and other interviews with New Orleans jazz musicians.

I have been pointing to ethnography, slave narrative, and the writings of Hurston as a way to lay the foundation for *Mister Jelly Roll*'s unique approach to transcription, but the transformation of the Library of Congress recordings of Jelly Roll Morton into a book was not a foregone conclusion. In fact, more than a decade lapsed between the time Lomax recorded Morton and the publication of *Mister Jelly Roll* in 1949, and a limited number of the recordings had already been released as a box set by Circle Records in 1947. It is worth asking whether a book was necessary since we can simply listen to the recordings of Lomax's interviews with Morton. There are in fact a number of recorded jazz autobiographies that have no correlating book such as *Coleman Hawkins: A Documentary* made in 1956 for Riverside.[100] *Mister Jelly Roll*, however, is not simply a transcription of the Library of Congress recordings but rather a multimodal text that resists generic classification; combining first and third person narration, it is what might be called *auto/biography*. Rather than a present cohesive biographical narrative, the book is a wrangling of disparate parts, and it bears resemblance to the multimodal writing of

[100] Other recorded autobiographies include: Louis Armstrong's *A Musical Autobiography* (Decca, 1957), Lil Armstrong's *Satchmo and Me* (Riverside), Baby Dodds, *Talking and Drum Solos: Footnotes to Jazz, Vol. I* (Folkways, 1951), Art Hodes's *Recollections From the Past* (Solo Arts Records); Bunk Johnson, *This is Bunk Johnson Talking, Explaining to You the Early Days of New Orleans* (American Music), Willie "the Lion" Smith's "Reminiscing the Piano Greats" (Vogue, 1959).

John Dos Passos, who was one of the models the publishers suggested to Lomax when writing his book.[101] Through the mobilization of ghostly listeners and an elliptical method of transcription, Lomax seeks both to supplement and extend what is heard on the recordings. At its core, *Mister Jelly Roll* is Morton's story, but it is also a record of the experience of recording.

It was just three years after Lomax's trip with Hurston that he would encounter Jelly Roll Morton in Washington D.C. and bring him to the Library of Congress to record. Lomax was initially skeptical of recording Morton because he thought of jazz as part of the commercialization of culture that was killing folk life in America. However, Morton proved to be a gateway into a different understanding of jazz as an African American folk music that emerged from the unique cultural mixing of New Orleans. For Morton's part, he hoped to retune the ears of those who, like Lomax, could not hear the richness of jazz music, for as Morton put it, "A lot of people have a wrong conception of jazz. Somehow it got into the dictionary that jazz was considered a lot of blatant noises and discordant tones, something that would be even harmful to the ears . . ." (Lomax, *Mister Jelly* 81). Recording—and specifically phonographic recording—offered the possibility of a permanent engraving of speech, and outside the constraints of the commercial recording studio, Morton could re-narrate the meaning of his music for the historical record. This was sound-writing in the literal sense. For African Americans, whose voices had been both functionally and figuratively suppressed, recording at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. was an important symbolic action. When Morton arrived at the Library, he was dressed in his best suit and approached the building with the gravity one carries when going to court.

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[101] As Christopher Harlos argues, the genre question was already an issue for jazz autobiography, and "some of the handy and traditional distinctions (i.e., fiction/nonfiction, biography/autobiography, written/oral) when superimposed on contemporary critical issues of race, class, and gender leave an array of alternatives to ponder" (161).

What becomes clear in listening to Morton is that he had rehearsed these stories his whole life over. Like set pieces, Morton retold versions of the same stories again and again, but these stories never made it onto the hit recordings of his music. At the time Morton met Lomax, he was in fact down on his luck and playing in an unremarkable Washington D.C. club, having acquired a reputation for being difficult to work with. The state of affairs was a far cry from the height of his career in the late 1910s and 1920s when Morton had been one of the most successful and in-demand players. Born into what Morton described as a modest Creole family in New Orleans, Morton was exposed to a rich musical milieu from a very young age.[102] With the encouragement of his godmother, Morton took guitar and piano lessons, and by his early teens he was playing in the sporting houses of Storyville—an activity of which his grandmother and guardian did not approve.[103] Morton would continue playing in New Orleans for a few years before heading out on the road, playing vaudeville and minstrel shows, and eventually writing new compositions and arrangements for his own groups. With a hustler's bravado, Morton always had other gigs on the side, whether pool sharking, running nightclubs, or taking on other business ventures.

But what would set Jelly Roll apart was his sound. When he reached Chicago in the 1920s, he signed a recording contract with Victor and gained representation with MCA.[104] The recordings he made with the Red Hot Peppers were among the most popular and influential of

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[102] Though he described his family with reverence to Lomax, the truth was that his father was largely absent, his mother died when he was fourteen, and he was passed among various family members and friends throughout his upbringing.

[103] Despite his success, his grandmother (and guardian at the time) did not approve of Morton's playing in the redlight district and kicked him out—a kind of blues motif of rejection that would set him on his journey.

[104] Lomax points out that although Morton put together some of the greatest touring bands and made some of the most noteworthy records in Chicago, he never had a regular orchestra gig in town. This was due to part to his reputation for talking back, but also because the mobsters and others who ran the nightclubs wanted to stop Morton's ambitions of running his own racket. *See* 222-224.

the period and helped to establish Jelly Roll Morton as one of the biggest names in jazz. With songs like "Black Bottom Stomp" and "Doctor Jazz," his "hot" sound became his hallmark on his records and in dance halls. Of course, Morton was always working to distinguish his sound from the others, and he explained:

> All these people played ragtime in a hot style, but man, you can play hot all you want to, and you still won't be playing jazz. Hot means something spicy. Ragtime is a certain type of syncopation and only certain tunes can be played in that idea. But jazz is a style that can be applied to any type of tune. I started using the word in 1902 to show people the difference between jazz and ragtime. (77)

The notoriety achieved by jazz musicians in the first few decades of the twentieth century afforded them a unique status within American culture and access to the mass media forms of recordings and radio. Due to consumers' repeated listening to popular records, jazz musicians like Morton were able to establish sonic identities marked by their unique style of playing. Although musicians such as Morton and Bechet were skeptical of the recording industry and its influence on the music, recordings allowed them to tell one kind of story through the music and then later enabled a more direct kind of testimony.

The intertwined nature of the music and the autobiography must have become clear to Lomax from the moment Jelly Roll started playing. Asking Morton if he knew the song "Alabama Bound" as a test of his folksong knowledge, Morton happily obliged, sat down at the piano, and sang a version of the song that impressed even Lomax. While playing "Alabama Bound," Morton began talking over the introduction. "It came out of nowhere, the fact that he decided to do that," said Lomax (123). Telling the story of losing a piano contest and leaving New Orleans establishes why Morton went out on the road, playing pool in honkytonks, ending

up eventually in Mobile.[105] As Morton explained, "The frequent saying was any place you was going why you was supposed to be bound for that place. So in fact it was Alabama Bound and when I got there I wrote this tune . . ." which he proceeds to sing (*my transcription*). [106] Listening to "Alabama Bound," we find that talking, playing, and singing are part of the same performance for Morton. Establishing convincing narratives of authorship and authenticity around tunes such as "Alabama Bound" and "King Porter Stomp" helped Morton to legitimate his claims to ownership, and affect a kind of copyright on the songs that the legal system was not successfully protecting.

During the recording session the stories unfolded a-chronologically, and it was unclear where they might lead; but as a whole, the Library of Congress Recordings constituted an improvised autobiography—a substantial work that could stand on its own. Stretching over eight hours and 128 tracks, the recordings consist of Morton accompanying himself on piano while talking, demonstrating different styles, and performing songs that had a significant role in both his life story and in New Orleans jazz history.[107] Yet, the four-and-a-half minute tracks are more like loosely related vignettes. Morton's storytelling is shaped by associative thought and memory, and the occasional prod by Lomax. He remembers different details at different times, and his vision of New Orleans and the beginnings of jazz are built piece by piece; the whole picture emerges from the assembled fragments. Like a song, themes and motifs recur, both

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[105] Morton plays a few bars, and then says: "When I was down on the gulf coast in nineteen-four I missed going to the St. Louis Exposition to get into a piano contest which was won by Alfred Wilson of New Orleans. I was very much disgusted because I thought I should have gone" (*my transcription*, The Complete Library of Congress Recordings: Jelly Roll Morton, Disc 1, Track 1).

[106] Morton claimed to have written the song about 1905, but others credit Robert Hoffman 1909; Lead Belly was also known for the song.

[107] "He had a totally original style" remarked Lomax. "This man who had been associated with gun thugs, living in this very cruel environment . . . proceeded to speak the most fantastically elegant and sensitive English about culture, and character, and so on" (Szwed 123).

musically and verbally. In addition to the overlapping of beginnings and endings of tracks necessitated by the four-minute limitations of the discs, there is a substantial amount of repetition and recursion as Morton retells and revises certain stories more than once.[108] Everyday speech is filled with these kinds of repetitions and returns, and indeed, our ability to comprehend speech is predicated on the emphasis of repeated information. But then again, so is song. To a listener, these returns in Morton's story are not jarring so much as they are rhythmic and important to our ability to link various aspects of the narrative, which do not so neatly flow. The connective tissue between the music and stories is forged by the listening ear. However, the fragmented and overlapping nature of the four-minute tracks does not directly translate to the page, where the reading eye is more accustomed to a linear narrative. For Lomax, the challenge in bringing Morton's story to the page was in defining a mode of transcription that preserved Morton's unique voice and sonic identity, while adhering to the more standard conventions of autobiography.

One of the first things a reader notices when beginning *Mister Jelly Roll* is that the book opens with an ellipsis. These three little dots start every chapter in which Morton is speaking in the first person and they are one of the ways Lomax indicates that this is a "Morton" chapter rather than an "Interlude." Jelly Roll begins: ". . . As I can understand, my folks were in the city of New Orleans long before the Louisiana Purchase, and all my folks came directly from the shores of France, that is across the world in the other world, and they landed in the New World

[108] The episodic qualities of his stories share commonalities with the epic oral poets who, Walter Ong points out, understood episodic structure as the only way to deal with a lengthy narrative (141).

years ago" (*Mister Jelly Roll* 3).[109] Beginning in this way, the ellipsis creates the feeling of *in medias res*. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, an ellipsis represents "the omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense." It points to an absence in the text and suggests that Morton's story was already in progress. As alluded to earlier, the recording "Jelly Roll's Background" (Disc 1, Track 5) is not the first track that Morton and Lomax recorded; this track begins with a few chords on the piano, followed by Morton asking Lomax: "Ready?"—an interesting role reversal of interviewer and subject. Lomax proceeds to ask him to start at the beginning and Morton replies: "Well, I'll tell ya. As I can understand […]." The ellipsis accounts for the actual omission of the meta-dialogue and the music at the beginning of the track, but it also creates a more general sense of omission, loss, and the inability to fully express Jelly Roll's voice. The ellipses at the beginning of these chapters point to that other dimension of Morton's speech that cannot be expressed on the page: his tone, pacing, and manner. Piecing together the narrative sentence by sentence, the ellipses may also serve as a blanket statement of omission, for Lomax's patchwork transcription style is characterized by his deletion of repeated phrases, superfluous information, and other verbal tics.

Describing *Mister Jelly Roll* as *elliptical* is useful in the multiple senses of the term because it stands in for a complex of narrative strategies necessitated by the "recorded book." Elliptical encompasses both punctuation and a narrative mode; it describes the shape of an ellipse, which is an ovular closed curve with two foci. Thus, not only is the narrative characterized by ellipses as a way of accounting for the auditory loss and the actual omission of

[109] As Lomax and others have pointed out, Morton's relationship to his African-Creole roots was vexed. Though he almost certainly had slave ancestors, he insists on his French and European roots. Such discrimination by creoles against those of darker skin was not uncommon in New Orleans, where creoles were afforded a higher social standing.

words, but the ellipsis also seeks to account for Jelly Roll Morton's elliptical oratory style, which is circumlocutory and repetitive. Perhaps because Morton had told his stories so many times before, he repeats certain tales in the course of the Library of Congress recordings more than once. In moving from recording to text, Lomax compresses these stories into a single one for the sake of narrative cohesion. An example of this occurs in Morton's story about the lice-ridden St. Charles Avenue Millionaires. In order to better illustrate how Lomax constructs this passage as a composite, I have placed the text side by side with my transcript of the two versions Jelly Roll tells, distinguished by red and blue text:

From the *Mister Jelly Roll*

[…] and many times you would see St. Charles millionaires right in those honky-tonks. Called themselves slumming, I guess, but they was there just the same, nudging elbows with all the big bums—the longshoremen and the illiterate screwmens from down on the river.

[…]So in those days in honky-tonks the St. Charles millionaires would bump up against the fellows that was on the levee, some of whom didn't bathe more than once in six months and, I'll go so far as to say, were even lousy. They would reach up in their collars, when they saw anyone that was dressed up, get one of these educated louses and throw it on that person when his back was turned. Then maybe a St. Charles Avenue millionaire would be in the same situation they were—lousy—and didn't know how they got to be that way. It was a funny situation. And away in the dark there would always be an old broke-down piano and somebody playing the blues and singing something like this . . .

I'm a levee man,
I'm a levee man […] (65)

From the Library of Congress Recordings

"New Orleans was a Free and Easy Place" (Disc 1, Track 13):

Many times you would see some of that St. Charles Avenue bunch right in one of those Honky Tonks. They was around, they call themselves slummin' I guess but they were there just the same. Nudgin elbows with all the big bums. And I would go so far to say that some of them were even lousy. [*Here, he's talking about the millionaires, not the unbathed levee folks*] You would meet many times with some of those fellows that was on the levee such as the inferior long shoremans . . . what is it? Long shoremans, is that right? And screwmans, and many I would doubt . . . they were very unclean . . . some of them was even lousy, I believe. I've known many cases where they'd take a louse and throw it on another guy that was dressed up to get him in the same fix they were in [Alan laughs]. Oh, it was funny situation. [Alan asks if he remembers what they used to sing, and then Morton sings "Levee Man] (0:30-1:24)

The other instance of the story occurs on "Honky Tonk Blues" (Disc 3, Track 16)

And the men I have personally seen some

> of 'em that was actually lousy. They would reach up maybe in their collar if they seen a decent person coming and formed a dislike for 'em and get one of those educated louses I guess and positively throw onto the person when his back was turned. There was a many that became lousy and didn't know how they got to be lousy. (3:10-3:37)

As these passages show, at the level of the phrase and of the sentence, Lomax provides a nearly direct transcription from the recording. But at the level of the paragraph, Lomax stitches together the disparate pieces in order to make chronological or narrative sense—it is a *rhapsody* in the Greek sense of stitching together song.[110] He reorders phrases and compresses longer ones as he eliminates those "redundancies that no eye can accept" (in the manner of Hurston). While Lomax preserves much of Morton's phrasing and maintains the rhythmic patterns of his syntax, his desire to create readable sentences must account for the differences between the practices of reading and listening. In forgoing phonetic transcription, Lomax's approach reflects the influence of Sterling Brown, but in reshaping Morton's speech, Lomax demonstrates a residual tendency to "improve" the material (as early ethnographers and folklorists did) in order to reconstruct a paradigmatic tale.

Lomax also uses ellipses to indicate the absence of the accompanying music, a feature that distinguishes the book from the recordings. Without the accompanying piano, the voice transcribed in *Mister Jelly Roll* is like listening to a singer a cappella. In this passage, the ellipsis leads the reader into a brief citation of the "levee man" lyrics which Morton sings on the recorded track "New Orleans was a Free and Easy Place" (Disc 1, Track 13). In order to create a sense of the missing music, Lomax paradoxically adds a visual description of the honky tonk

[110] For more on rhapsody, *see* Ong 23.

scene, with its "old broke-down piano" and blues singer. This description situates the reader spatially within a scene of performance in order to arouse listening. However, in doing so, Lomax puts the words in Morton's mouth in order to create a cohesive storyline. As evidenced by this example, Lomax erases his own presence from the transcript and turns the interview into a monologue in the "Morton" chapters, but in doing so, he must find other ways to account for this lost presence of the interlocutor and listener, which he does by adding the description of the performance.

In addition to the spaces left by the ellipses, Lomax alludes to and makes space for the missing recordings through footnotes and other supplementary paratextual materials. When writing about the famed piano player Tony Jackson, Lomax footnotes that "Jelly, after thirty years, not only recalled the names of these bygone musicians but remembered their music, and as he named them one after another, he paused to play a selection in their various styles . . ." (54). In another footnote, Lomax clarifies the pronunciation of Morton's nickname and famous song, "Wining Boy": "*Wining* (pronounced with a long ī) is the term Jelly preferred to *winding* [which] also means rotating the hips in dancing or sexual intercourse" (59). Some references to omissions are precisely because of the explicit nature of the songs Morton sang for Lomax that, as he put it, "would burn the pages they were printed on" (60). This is to say nothing of the seventy-three pages of appended materials that include an annotated discography, a list of compositions, and transcriptions of several of the songs Morton played on the Library of Congress Sessions. Footnotes and supplementary materials such as these, which point the reader to the "source" recordings, make bold the limitations of the book while providing a feast for serious audiophiles. Because a large selection of the Library of Congress sessions were released in 1947 on 78

records (and later LPs) as "The Saga of Mr. Jelly Lord" by Circle,[111] and many of Jelly Roll's Victor recordings had also been re-released, it was quite possible for fans to read *and* listen side by side, at least to a degree. The possibility—indeed, aspiration—of supplementary reading and listening is evident in the references to the recordings in the book, as well as the marketing materials that framed the album released by Circle that treated each disc as a book chapter. In this way, the book and the recordings have a supplementary relationship to one another. Although the text and recordings can easily stand alone, the intermedia aspirations express themselves as aesthetic gestures of gaps and phantom sounds.

In this space between the text and the recordings Lomax urges listening; only through the ear can we access the full range of signifying that Morton's testimony embodies. In addition to the various strategies Lomax uses to evoke the oral qualities of speech, the performative qualities of language, and the gaps between the text and recordings, "ghostly listeners" serve to orient readers to their position as listeners. In the Prelude to *Mister Jelly Roll* mentioned earlier, these ghostly listeners are the faceless specters of a bygone New Orleans, but when this scene is then echoed in the final pages of the book as a coda, the ghosts are fleshed out from mere types to individual characters:

> The warm magic caught Jelly Roll and lit up the somber auditorium. One could feel the back seats filling up with ghostly listeners: Mimi and Laura in their black shawls, Eulalie holding a John-the-Conqueror root, Mamie Desdoumes smiling a

[111] The records contained notes by Rudi Blesh, who also wrote the Preface to Bechet's *Treat it Gentle.* Blesh compared the set of twelve albums to "chapters" in a book ("Doctor Jazz" 24). It is worth noting that the tracks were edited into a new narrative order by historian Harriet Janis, with some titles edited, and some of the more obscene/violent tracks omitted. Blesh helped bring about the transfer of the recordings to LP in the early 1950s, and they were released again, in the same edited format, by Riverside in 1959. For a more complete account of the reissue history, *see* Szwed's "Doctor Jazz" liner notes to the Complete Library of Congress Recordings: Jelly Roll Morton (2005).

> fuzzy drunken smile […]—all these ghosts leaned forward to listen to Morton tell their story. (289)

Recordings by their nature already imply a previous or repeated listening. In that sense, recorded sounds are like ghosts of a previous performance, which can suggest a presence that is ultimately not there. The tendency to talk about jazz, and especially jazz recordings, in terms of *loss*, *absence,* or *haunting* are prevalent themes in the critical discourse. Wilson Harris has written of music as a kind of "phantom limb," which is a trope that Nathaniel Mackey describes as a "feeling for what is not there that reaches beyond as it calls into question what is" (606). The ghosts that frame the book thus share an affinity with the ellipsis. To the degree that Lomax's ellipses point to the presence of something that exceeds what can be represented on the page, the ellipsis might be thought of as a kind of phantom or ghost. Like the ghosts, the sounds of recordings both real and imagined haunt the text. As Mackey puts it, "*Phantom*, then, is a relative, relativizing term that cuts both ways, occasioning a shift in perspective between real and unreal, an exchange of attributes between the two" (606).[112] Recordings in particular make for ideal phantoms because they have always been imagined as such—Edison and other early pioneers of the technology claimed that the phonograph could preserve the voices of the dead, and some have suggested that the dog in the RCA Victor ads who listens to "his master's voice" is in fact depicted sitting on top of his master's coffin.[113]

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[112] Music's tendency to act like a phantom limb is illustrated by the opening letter of Mackey's *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* (2010) in which "N" describes a dream in which he thinks he is performing "Naima" (a ballad by John Coltrane), but instead realizes that he is "playing" a recording of Archie Shepp soloing on another Coltrane song—scratches and all. The layers of displacement at play in this scene are numerous as N "performs" a recording of a song that is in fact a version of another Coltrane recording, all of which take place in a fictionalized dream. The recording becomes the perfect phantom limb because it both *is* and *isn't* a performance, and is at once there and not there: a material object (the record) as well as a performance that took place in a recording studio on a specific day and time in the past (Mackey 12).

[113] For more about Nipper the dog, *see* Sterne 302.

Lomax frequently conflates Morton's talent with that of the phonograph. Just as the phonograph could supposedly resurrect long silent voices, "[Morton] brought his old friends vividly alive by playing their music in their style in a series of dazzling performances right there on the Library of Congress grand. He recreated piano styles of ivory wizards a generation dead, re-creations which turn out to match the exact sound of the old piano rolls" (290). Describing the phonograph as preserving and unleashing the voices of the dead is a trope as old as recording technology itself, but what is unique about this description is that it transposes the image of the recording machine onto Morton, who has internalized and can reproduce these long-dead sounds. He is the equal of a mechanical piano.[114] For Lomax, it is crucial that his readers internalize this process of reproducing the sound to which they are listening; in the act of transcribing Morton's voice to the page, Lomax himself must engage in this phonological ventriloquism. And when the sound becomes too faint to hear on the page, one can return to the recordings.

Listening, as an act of reckoning, begins to take shape in *Mister Jelly Roll*, and in its pages and on the acetate records, "New Orleans and her boy, Jelly, were getting their hearing at the bar of history itself" (290). Repositioning the "altogether recorded book" as not merely biography or literature but as a *hearing* in the juridical sense raises the ethical threshold of what sound can mean, the role listening can play, as well as the place of jazz within America's cultural history. The ghostly listeners thus perform a number of roles and become a kind of jury of peers. Giving voice to these various Creole and African American characters who enter Morton's story

[114] The other implication of the piano roll reference is that Morton was able to posthumously make the recordings of artists who pre-dated the phonograph and popular recordings. As mute listeners, these ghosts are given "a hearing" in the course of Jelly Roll's stories.

is part of the underlying political thrust made by Lomax, in which black voices evoke presence that must be produced by the reader's ear.[115]

One of the ways Lomax does this is through the use of synaesthetic-aural imagery, which neither serves to approximate the voice nor transcribe it, but rather to reinscribe Morton with an abstract sense of sonic identity. Unlike onomatopoeia, meter, rhyme, alternative spellings, or other poetic methods of infusing language with sound, synaesthetic-aural imagery turns on adjective, uneasy metaphor, and simile. Pushing at the edges of this limited literary-sonic toolbox Lomax attempts to describe that affective quality of Jelly Roll's voice:

> . . . a gravel voice melting at the edges, not talking, but spinning out a life in something close to song . . . each sentence almost like a stanza of a slow blues . . each stanza flowing out of the last like the eddies of a big sleepy Southern river where the power hides below a quiet brown surface . . (xx)[116]

Although in most places, Lomax uses three-dot ellipses, here he experiments with just two-dot ellipsis, as though to indicate a different length of pause, or to insert space without implying absence.[117] It may be surprising that the appellation "gravel voice" was not widely recognized

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[115] Although Morton tends to stress his French-Creole heritage, in the intermediary chapters Lomax attempts to provide some context for the shifting socio-political status of the Creole people living in New Orleans at the turn of the twentieth century. Under French and Spanish rule, mixed race children were educated and given professional jobs and trades. However, creoles became professional musicians in part out of necessity and the changing times in the post-reconstruction era and "by the 1890's the Creoles of New Orleans were being pushed out of their old trades and down on the social scale. . . . On his way down the class scale the light-skinned Creole met the black-skinned American musician fighting his way out of the black ghetto" (Lomax 98).

[116] In a letter, he writes an earlier version of this description: "A gravel voice melting at the edges, not talking, each sentence bowling along like a line from the blues, like an eddy of a big sleepy southern river, weaving a legend, and as the legend grew, the back seat of the hall filled with [ghosts of] ladies in crinolines, listening . . ." (Szwed *Biography* 123). The reiteration of the description evidences Lomax's struggle with how to capture the essential feeling of Morton's voice.

[117] Later in this dissertation, we will see that William S. Burroughs also uses this strange two dot ellipsis.

until the early 1940s.[118] It was a slang term meant to evoke the granular quality of gravel, so to say that a voice is gravelly is to simply say that it has a *grain* (as Roland Barthes might say). The term is also used synonymously with *husky*, which refers to the sounds produced by dry cornhusks (here, the outer layer of a grain) rattled by wind. In both instances, the comparisons rely on recognizable references to the natural world. If you pull your hand through gravel, for instance, the friction of the individual stones or grains as they rub against each other create a distinctive sound; a recognizable whispery sonic quality.[119] It seems particularly poignant that a term like gravel-voiced entered parlance in the 1940s—the period coinciding with the height of radio and popular jazz recordings, which made the materiality of sound more present on a mass-scale.[120] The emergence of the term acknowledges a struggle with new ways to characterize the sounds that became such a part of everyday life through sound technology.

Given the roots of such terms in the natural world, the transition Lomax makes between Morton's "gravel voice" and the eddy of a river seems less jarring as we think about the gravelly riverbed. In this sense, Lomax is attempting to describe the *literal* grain of the voice, that is, the way that a voice is shaped by its geography and sense of place. What begins as an attempt to characterize Morton's voice quickly slips into a reference to the music (blues, which is also a color) and then quite suddenly transitions to a highly visual portrayal of the geography. The ever-morphing metaphor makes Morton into the mouthpiece of New Orleans and the Mississippi

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[118] It first appeared in the *American Thesaurus of Slang* as "gravel-throat" meaning "a granular enunciation" or "one with a husky granular voice." 1947 *Time* 29 Dec. 15 Gravel-voiced Joe Curran, president of the National Maritime Union. 1959 'F. Newton' *Jazz Scene* vii. 135 The gravelly and expressive voice of the great Louis Armstrong. (OED)

[119] Inevitably, such descriptions end up turning back on one another: gravel sounds like voices, and voices sound like gravel.

[120] Evan Eisenberg points out the strange symbiosis between the phonograph and sonic identification: "Music would now imitate records, especially Armstrong's. Anyone could imitate his ballooning cheeks and gravelly voice, and any critic could recognize in him the voice of the phonograph, the voice of the invisible man" (121).

Delta, and the compressed description conflates his sound with a mythic geography that simultaneously allows Lomax to make a legend *of* the recording experience itself, as Morton spins the legend of New Orleans onto the disc. Lomax even strangely collapses the image of the phonograph with southern African Americans: "Something came along where the Mississippi Delta washes its muddy foot in the blue Gulf, something that bullies us, enchants us, pursues us out of the black throats of a thousand music boxes. This something was jazz" (xxi). Thus, Lomax's description of Jelly Roll Morton's voice as *gravel* is on the one hand an attempt to give his voice a geographic and technological marking, but it may also be an indirect way of marking his voice as black.[121]

These alliterative descriptions and parallel constructions produce their own sonic qualities, but it would be difficult to say that such descriptive prose offers any kind of approximation of the sound of Morton's voice. The descriptions are evocative in their way and help to contextualize Jelly Roll's world, but it would be more accurate to say that they only help us to understand how Lomax *hears* Morton. The compressed image of the phonograph's black throat illustrates how the sound of Morton's voice and the sound of the recording have become inseparable for Lomax—he can only represent the experience of *recording* Morton.[122] While the book continues to point to the recordings as a way to compensate for the loss of sound on the page, there are also elements that text (through metaphor or figurative imagery) is better

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[121] While the term gravel voice is applied to people of all races, it quite frequently is employed to describe African American blues singers who emerge from the Mississippi delta. I might go so far as to say that describing someone as having a gravelly voice often implies a *black* (or *blackened*) voice. Whether one can actually distinguish between black and white voices without seeing the body that produces them remains a touchy subject of debate. While there are undoubtedly certain identifiable timbres and tones common among African American speech, it is easier to discuss such differences in speech as culturally determined by class, income, education, etc. It is for this reason that when voices are transcribed onto the page, Sterling Brown stressed idiom rather than a phonetic approximation of sound. Idioms can be geographically and culturally located with a certain degree of specificity. A racial grain cannot.

[122] "Like a Proust of the folk, he [Lomax] wanted to get all that into the transcription so that it would evoke the experience of recording it" (Szwed 110).

equipped to represent than the recordings alone. Although the ghostly listeners serve to situate the readers in a listening position, their presence references something that is *not there* on the recordings themselves. It is the condition of the "altogether recorded book" as it hovers in an intermedia-zone.[123]

Elliptical Listening

The strangeness of Lomax's depiction of the "ghostly listeners" raises larger questions about what constitutes listening. As I have shown, listening does not always neatly adhere to the rules we associate with other modes of sensory perception, and recordings can have the peculiar tendency to act like a phantom limb. In a literary context the concept of listening can prove especially vexing since the text itself is silent. However, to the extent that close listening is always aspirational, Jean-Luc Nancy's configuration of listening as always "on the edge of meaning" and sound as "nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin" may be useful (*Listening* 7). For what are ghosts but specters caught in the in-between, neither living nor dead. What is a text, or even a record, but the potential for sound—or better yet, the potential for listening. According to Nancy, the meaning that listening produces is thus a "resonant meaning" (7). Sound re-emits itself, and likewise our own ears re-emit the sounds to which we are listening through sympathetic vibrations (16). This notion of listening as having a particular resonance is one way that we might begin to think about the "ghostly listeners" that Lomax invents as a way to frame the recorded book. In order for readers to *listen* to Jelly Roll's story, the text must produce its own "acoustic otoemissions" (in Nancy's words) to simulate resonance of sounds

[123] I am using the term intermedia to delineate the status of *Mister Jelly Roll* as neither a record nor a book. The term has been used variously, but it has been used most frequently to describe interdisciplinary genres of art, and especially1960s neo-dadist new-media performance art by groups such as Fluxus and Hans Breder. *See* Hans Breder, Klaus-Peter Busse, *Intermedia: Enacting the Liminal* (2005).

within our ears. Since the text itself can only be on the verge of sound, listening becomes a space into which we can project literary-sonic resonance. Interestingly, Nancy posits that "listening is musical when it is music that listens to itself" (68). The circularity of this Steinian phrase becomes actual when Morton's music produces its own listeners. Thus, ghostly listeners are required in order to achieve a musical listening toward a book, that is, in order to achieve a literature that listens to itself. Listening in Nancy's sense is therefore uniquely suited to a book that hovers in the inter-media space of recording and book.

In adopting sound reproduction technology as a writing tool, *Mister Jelly Roll* actively struggles with the notion that sound in its reproducibility had new capacities for meaning-making. Listening to Morton on a recording and attempting to bring this phenomenon to print, Lomax works in the edgy position between a sonorous object and its meaning, and thus what he must bring to the page is not exactly sound itself but the *listening*. In Bechet's *Treat it Gentle*, listening also comes to perform a central role. But unlike Lomax's listening, which is always contingent upon the Library of Congress recordings, Bechet's approach to listening is much broader, and less referential.

Lomax did not hide his wish that that *Mister Jelly Roll* would serve as a new model for prose writing, influencing not just biography but novels as well. In interviews and his foreword, he refers to Morton as a Creole Benvenuto Cellini, and alludes to Homeric myth, seeking to cast Morton (and himself) as participating in a longer literary tradition.[124] Yet, we find that *Mister Jelly Roll's* most lasting influence has been on jazz autobiography and historiography, even though it arguably participates in both modernist and social-realist literary traditions.[125] That so

[124] "My notion," says Lomax in the Preface, "was that the great talkers of America could, if lovingly transcribed, contribute enormous riches of prose style and varied points of view to literature" (xv-xvi).

many of the jazz autobiographies that followed are highly literary in nature I think ought to be attributed, at least in part, both to the kinds of aspirations alive in *Mister Jelly Roll* and to jazz's inherently rhetorical qualities.

Recordings allowed editors of jazz auto/biographies to get closer to the musicians' sonic identities; however, jazz musicians were not just musical innovators but technological innovators. Alexander Weheliye notes in *Phonographies* that African American musicians played a key role in the development of sound reproduction technologies and that technology is central to the concept of Afro-sonic modernity (3-4). Sidney Bechet, a musician whose distinctive saxophone sound and wide vibrato helped to define the jazz solo, was also an innovator when it came to utilizing recordings to create performances that could not have existed without sound reproduction technology. His own autobiography, *Treat it Gentle*, was directly influenced by *Mister Jelly Roll* and serves as an important link between the first "altogether recorded book" and the various kinds of recorded jazz autobiographies that materialized thereafter. As Bechet's book demonstrates, the kind of listening *Mister Jelly Roll* was beginning to define with its elliptical transcription provides an expansive frame in which a wide range of possible sounds can emerge from a text, and the recorded medium is Bechet's experimental playground. Whereas ellipses characterized the Lomax-Morton text, Bechet casts his own unique sonic identity.

Sidney Bechet and the Tape Recorder

If Sidney Bechet had not already been thinking about the need to tell his own story of where the music came from, the popularity of *Mister Jelly Roll* and Bechet's cameo appearance

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[125] However, as we will see in the next chapter, Jack Kerouac was also an admirer of *Mister Jelly Roll* and Lomax's use of recording technology.

in that book together served as an important impetus; Morton's text was not merely a predecessor but in some ways the starting point for what would become *Treat it Gentle*. In the process of interviewing the elder statesmen of New Orleans for *Mister Jelly Roll*, Lomax realized it was impossible to tell Jelly's story without including Sidney Bechet's.[126] Less abrasive and self-promoting than Morton, Bechet was considered the golden boy of New Orleans; although not nearly as famous as his younger contemporary, Louis Armstrong, Bechet is credited as one of the pioneers who brought the hot sound to jazz solos, first on clarinet and later on soprano saxophone. Like Morton, Bechet did not stay long in New Orleans, setting out on the road in 1916 and spending extended amounts of time in Chicago, London, New York, and Paris (which he would make his permanent home after 1950). His brother Leonard Bechet, a dentist by trade and erstwhile trombone player, made nearly two hours of recorded interviews with Lomax in 1949, and through these stories, Sidney Bechet makes a cameo appearance in *Mister Jelly Roll*. Sidney Bechet had also met Alan Lomax on several occasions while playing on his various radio shows in the 1940s, and he was no doubt aware of his appearance in Lomax's book.[127] In this way, Bechet's story began to emerge within Morton's, even before Bechet would begin the process of taping interviews for his own autobiography. The links between the two books are numerous, from Rudi Blesh's involvement in promoting both projects to the fact that both books were illustrated by the jazz album-cover artist David Stone Martin. The use of recordings in the writing process and the desire to infuse the text with Bechet's sound are a direct nod to *Mister*

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[126] Lomax eplained, "Sidney Bechet's Story, as Doctor Bechet, his brother, told it, bears upon Jelly's *history* because it shows a further blending of Uptown and Downtown and the unabashed emotional flowering of jazz in Sidney's playing" (115). Sidney exemplified the complex negotiation between playing, as Leonard Bechet put it, the "nice music" of the respectable Creoles and the "lowdown music" of "Louis [Armstrong] and them," that is, black musicians (118).

[127] Sidney Bechet appeared on several of Lomax's radio programs over the years. This includes the "Hootenany" radio program on CBS from March 10, 1947: *http://www.culturalequity.org/alanlomax/ce_alanlomax_profile_sidney_bechet.php*. John Szwed has also suggested that Lomax spoke directly with Bechet in the course of his research about Morton.

Jelly Roll, and *Treat it Gentle* serves as a key link between the first "altogether recorded book" and the various kinds of recorded jazz autobiography that materialized thereafter, including Count Basie's *Good Morning Blues* and Miles Davis's *Miles: The Autobiography*.

Despite the many similarities, there are important differences between Morton and Bechet's books, most significantly that *Treat it Gentle* calls itself an "autobiography" (*Mister Jelly Roll* was officially biography) and lacks the interludes and other mediating texts that we find in *Mister Jelly Roll*. Even though it was transcribed and pieced together by editors, it is told entirely in Bechet's first-person voice. *Mister Jelly Roll* was the first book of its kind, and because Lomax did not begin to write the text until after Morton's death, it demanded a unique form. Since Lomax did not have the luxury of checking the transcriptions with Morton, it would have been somewhat misleading to call the book Morton's *auto*biography. After all, the Library of Congress interviews were not recorded with the book in mind. And herein lies one of the most important differences between the books: the recorded interviews of Bechet were always made with the express purpose of writing a book, and Bechet thought of himself as not only a musician but a writer as well.

These differences on the institutional level (commercial publishing vs. Library of Congress) greatly shaped the interview and transcription process, making for a complicated editorial history; *Treat it Gentle* went through three editors and two publishers before reaching print, and most of the recordings used in writing the book have gone missing or were recorded over. When I began this project, I felt certain that I would be able to locate the taped interviews used to write *Treat it Gentle* to give them the hearing they deserve; mostly, I met with silence. [128]

[128] In consulting with Bechet experts who have searched for these tapes over the years, I was met with a general sense of despair; in an email from Dr. Gabriel Solis, August 18, 2011, Solis speculated that perhaps the tapes are

Sifting through the catalogues of disparate archives, the only tapes I located amount to little over two hours of interviews made in Paris in 1957 by the book's final editor, Desmond Flower of Cassell & Company Ltd., which are held at Tulane's Hogan Jazz Archive. These interviews, which offer a rare sample of Bechet's unique voice, were taken after a substantial amount of the manuscript had been drafted and served primarily to fill in gaps and bring the story up to date from where it left off around 1936. The Foreword to *Treat it Gentle* by Flower offers a few clues about the multiple hands at work and the use of recordings, crediting Joan Reid, Bechet's secretary, for "getting a very considerable amount of material on to tape" (v).[129] However, Reid played a conflicting role, transcribing the first draft but also waging legal battles for authorial credit that halted initial attempts to publish the book. We now know that *Treat it Gentle* may never have come to print without the guiding hand of Bechet's manager and champion in Paris, Charles Delaunay (founder of *Le Jazz Hot* magazine), a fact made evident by the extensive collection of letters and other Bechet materials recently located within Delaunay's collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.

As the letters between Delaunay, Bechet, and his publishers indicate, the bulk of the tapes were made by Joan Reid with additional tapes made by the poet and editor John Ciardi, and there were most likely tapes made by Bechet himself.[130] Yet, the unknown location of these tapes, if

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themselves a myth. And yet, new evidence from the Charles Delaunay archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France confirms that the tapes indeed exist (or existed), though their present whereabouts remain unknown. It is worth noting, however, that after searching the catalogues, I have determined that these interviews are *not* located at the following archives: The John D. Reid Collection at the Arkansas Art Center, The John Ciardi collection at the Library of Congress, The John Ciardi Papers at Syracuse University, and the Charles Delaunay Papers at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

[129] Joan Reid neé Williams was married for a time to Bechet's RCA contact and friend, John Reid.

[130] *See* letters between Ciardi, Bechet, and Delaunay 1951-1952 located in the Charles Delaunay Collection, Département de l'audiovisuel, Bibliothèque nationale de France, boîte n° 26-27. *See also* John Chilton's *Sidney Bechet: Wizard of Jazz* (290-292); and Edward M. Cifelli's *John Ciardi: A Biography* (153-155). Additionally, Rod Jellema, who has done extensive research on the early New Orleans jazz scene and Bechet, has noted that John Ciardi's correspondence with Twayne indicates that he taped Bechet in Boston in 1951 or 1952 (personal communication, September 29, 2011).

they still exist, presents something of a problem for those who wish to understand how Bechet's so-called "recorded" book came to be. If the poor quality of the existing tapes made by Flower is any indication, those who worked on Bechet's book treated the tape recordings like scratch paper—just another way of making disposable notes—and for this reason the attitude toward tape and transcription is much like that of the early ethnographers who treated the text as primary. Indeed, had the Hogan Archive not digitally remastered their tapes a few years ago, listening to Bechet would have been nearly impossible, for the original tapes have such poor, muddled sound quality as to almost be unlistenable.

But even with Flower's additional interviews and chapters the story was never quite finished. Sidney had more to say but illness left him without a voice for the last months of his life; Charles Delaunay, founder of *Le Jazz Hot* and Bechet's manager in Paris, had tried to coax him into writing more of his story, but Bechet insisted upon using his tape recorder. In a letter from April 8, 1959, Delaunay lamented, "I have tried in vain several times to get from Sidney the few things he wanted to change in the manuscript […]. The thing is that Sidney wanted to answer himself and record it. But since September he never recovered his voice. And now I am getting convinced that Sidney will never recover not only his voice but his health."[131] When I interviewed Sidney's son Daniel in Paris on October 2, 2012, I asked him about his father's tape recorder, to which Daniel remarked, "He had two! A big one and a little one." In fact, Bechet not only used the tape recorder for the dictation of his stories, but he also used it compose music. Since Bechet never learned to read music, in his later years he composed at the piano with the tape recorder at his side, playing and sometimes singing too. "He had so many melodies and concepts inside him," Daniel remarked, and "if he had the opportunity to translate a different

[131] From a letter from Charles Delaunay to Mark Patterson of Twayne Publishers Inc. dated April 8, 1959. Located in the Charles Delaunay Collection, Département de l'audiovisuel, Bibliothèque nationale de France, boîte n° 26

way, he might have." While Daniel still has a few of these tapes of his father's composing, the interviews for *Treat it Gentle* are not among them. Were these tapes locatable, they might comprise a rather extensive collection—one that could rival the interviews of Morton made at the Library of Congress.[132] Even without the recordings, the impulse to hear the poetry of Bechet's playing (Lomax called Bechet the "poet of jazz") in the pages of his book by his devoted fans says something of the need to always be listening for Bechet.

The mystery of the tapes may be a casualty of the medium itself. More disposable than disc, tapes (as I will discuss at length in the next chapter) made it easier for relative amateurs such as Joan Reid to make recordings outside the auspices of a large institution like the Library of Congress or a commercial recording studio, and to do so with less pressure due to time or expense.[133] Additionally, Bechet's interviews were recorded with the express purpose of writing a book, and at various times the recordings were made by editors designated by a publisher. Lomax, by contrast, recorded Morton without the initial intention of making a book, and the recordings were released commercially before the book was published. This difference on the level of intention as well as institution necessarily shaped and limited the kind of book that could be produced, and the attitude toward the recordings reflects this distinction.

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[132] In Paris, where Bechet spent the latter part of his life in the 1950s, Bechet was a huge star—even bigger than Elvis, Parisians will say. As a result, a number of interviews were conducted for French radio with Bechet, and many of these recordings still exist, including a two-disc set re-released by Sony Music in France titled *L'Histoire De Sidney Bechet* (2009). This collection includes interviews with Yves Salques, Frank Ténot, and Daniel Filipacchi (of radio Europe No. 1) from 1957 in which Bechet talks about his early life, covering much of the same material found in *Treat it Gentle*, interspersed with some of his most famous recordings for the Vogue record label. Transcripts of these interviews are located in the BnF's Charles Delaunay Archive, boîte n° 26. It is expected that in 2013 another CD will be released that will include recordings of Bechet talking about his ballet "The Night is a Witch" in an interview with Mr. Coffran while he plays piano and speaks.

[133] When Lomax was recording Morton, tape recorders were not yet available, and the acetate-plated discs that he used were relatively expensive and could not be reused; personal disc recording devices tended to be limited to professionals and serious audiophiles. Also, tapes could hold significantly more material (two-to-three hours or more, depending upon the speed of recording) and could be reused.

Whereas Morton's interviews with Lomax were highly performative, Bechet's demeanor on the recordings with Desmond Flower reflects a writerly bent, and these recordings do not include accompanying or interceding music. Instead, Bechet self-consciously refers to his "book" throughout his interviews with Flower. Time and again, Bechet tells Flower, "as I've said in my book . . ." as a way to curtail the interview and limit his responses, but in doing so, he reveals his disposition toward the recording-as-writing, as well as his knowledge of the existing transcript (which he is said to have read and approved before his death). In such instances, Bechet often stops and starts the tape, and it is clear from the conversation between Flower and Bechet on the beginning of the tape that Bechet is the one in charge of the recording (Flower asks if the machine is working and if he is speaking loud enough). But despite Bechet's assertive presence during the recording sessions and investment in text, his words were held captive for several years as his various publishers and editors sorted out legal disputes over authorship.[134] And yet, Bechet's hyperawareness of the "text"—versus the recorded narrative—hints at his acute sense of the media and their differences.

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[134] There is a slight discrepancy between Flower's account of Reid's role, and that described by Bechet's biographer John Chilton. Flower says of Reid: "Sidney Bechet was first persuaded to tell his story some years ago by Miss Joan Reid, who succeeded in getting a very considerable amount of material on to tape" (v). Chilton says: "With the help of Joan Williams . . . Bechet began transferring his memoirs to paper, usually from recollections he had recorded on tape" (290). From Chilton's description, it is somewhat ambiguous whether Bechet may have made some of the recordings himself, without the aid of an interviewer. By 1951, it is presumed that a significant portion of the manuscript was complete (including the chapter about Bechet's grandfather Omar), and Bechet began talking to the poet John Ciardi about the possibility of publishing the book. Upon hearing of Bechet's project, Ciardi brought the book to the publishing house, Twayne, who subsequently hired him as editor (Cifelli 153). According to Ciardi's biography, the manuscript by Joan Reid was colored by her purple prose and intervening remarks. Ciardi felt that Reid's writing distracted from Bechet's unique voice, and he undertook the task of reworking Reid's transcripts by erasing her voice and conducting further interviews with Bechet. As Ciardi stated in a letter to his biographer about the manuscript he edited, "It's all Sidney's talk and talk I have put into his mouth" (154). (Ciardi may have been somewhat bitter about his work on Bechet's book, given that Reid attempted to claim authorship and for a while halted the progress of the publication with a lawsuit, and this may account for what at times seems like an exaggerated degree of influence over Bechet's text.) When Reid threatened to sue, Twayne shelved the project and it was not until Cassell & Company Ltd. (Hill & Wang in the U.S.) picked up the manuscript and assigned Desmond Flower as editor that the book was finished.

That Bechet thought of himself as a writer has been made more evident by my recent archival research at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, which revealed that Bechet's writerly pursuits extended to short fictional works meant for either stage or screen. In the papers belonging to Bechet within the Charles Delaunay collection, there are two short unpublished manuscripts; the first, a play or screenplay titled "Wildflower (or, The Story of Frankie and Johnny)" was written around 1952 and is a retelling of the popular song "Frankie and Johnny." In a letter to from Bechet to John Ciardi (who was then editing *Treat it Gentle)* dated April 14, 1952, Bechet writes, "I started to do it as a film or a stage-play. And since I wrote to you I discovered a few things: one is it would make a hell of a play, maybe even better than Porgy and Bess. I have the music all in mind. . . ." Bechet did not seem to know what form Wildflower ought to take and thus sent the manuscript to Ciardi asking, "Should I make this a ballet, or a picture, or a stageplay and ballet combined, or maybe a book?" The eleven-page manuscript is more like a sketch than a full-fledged play, focusing more on the colorful story of Nelly Blay, a blues singer who leads Johnny astray, but it hints at the colorful shape of Bechet's style as he improvises and dramatizes the popular standard. A few years later, around 1955, Bechet put together a second treatment for a film or a novel—an untitled four-page story about a jazz musician King Joe, a singer named Lilli Tiger, and King Joe's long-lost son.[135] As the story of an older musician living in Paris reminiscing about a love affair from twenty years prior, the story

[135] The story was written most likely between 1955 and 1957. Referring to a flashback twenty years earlier in 1935 would suggest a 1955 composition date, but the manuscript was included in a letter to the literary agent Mark Patterson from Charles Delaunay in 1957. In a letter dated May 9, 1957, Delaunay writes: "Sidney has a title for the synopsis we handed over to you. It was written with no specific aim in mind and can be considered as basis for either a novel, a film etc. Sidney gave it to you merely to see whether you could do anything with it." On May 16, 1957, A. B. Edwards of Mark Paterson replied, "Please tell Sidney I would be interested in hearing any of his ideas. I am afraid however that I cannot do very much for the synopsis as it stands, I see it more as a piece of music."

reads as vaguely autobiographical.[136] Bechet, it would seem, treated the stories and scenes within his life like standards over which to improvise.

Treat it Gentle as published is told in Bechet's first-person voice, but this was not always the case. In helping Sidney Bechet write *Treat it Gentle*, Joan Reid's initial manuscript included her own editorial commentary, whereas John Ciardi and Twayne found her "purple prose" distracting and eliminated it to form the first-person narrative we now know. This rather harried publication history raises questions about the "voice" of the text and the relationship of Bechet to his interviewers and editors. The question of what Bechet *really* sounds like may not have a single answer, and it is complicated by the fact that interviewees like Bechet and Morton tend to adjust their manner of speaking both as a result of the presence of the recording machine and in accordance with the identity of the interviewer. For example, there are moments on the tapes when Bechet adopts Desmond Flower's posh British accent or performs Fats Waller's Harlem drawl. The different "voices" assumed by Bechet destabilize the notion that Bechet has one "authentic" voice and make the possibility of conveying this aspect of his speech even more problematic.[137] As alluded to in the discussion of Morton and Lomax, the relationship between interviewer and subject influences how and what stories are told, but in the tradition of ethnographic recordings and transcription, texts derived from recordings tend to erase and obscure the presence of the interviewer. The decision of whether to include the interviewer or

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[136] There are several indications that Bechet was drawing on his own life when writing about King Joe, such as a detail during a flashback to 1935 when King Joe opens a tailor shop to make ends meet (Bechet had a tailoring and pressing business in Harlem around this time). The reconciliation and hope that King Joe finds in a long lost son that Lilli bore him after their split may also reflect a changing state of mind about his own legacy—his son Daniel Bechet was born just a year earlier in 1954.

[137] The tendency of jazz musicians to acknowledge their multiple identities is not unique to Bechet. Charles Mingus would famously assert "I am three" in his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog* (1971), and Duke Ellington's autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress* (1973) includes dozens of mini biographical portraits of his band members and collaborators.

not—that is, to establish a listening frame—illustrates the ongoing tension between the renewed sense of aurality in these recorded books and the traditions of print. Even in recording slave narratives and other oral histories for the Federal Writers Project, there had been debate as to whether transcriptions ought to include the questions or editorializing of the interviewer; for the most part, it was decided that getting as close to speech as possible and relating the words of the people without interruption was the highest priority.[138] However, this is not to say that all writers or publishers consistently advocated this 'unmediated' transcriptive writing. Alan Lomax had initially proposed that *Mister Jelly Roll* only consist of transcriptions, but the publisher urged him to add additional contextualizing material in the manner of John Dos Passos. *Treat it Gentle* represents a shift in editorial attitudes toward transcription, and it finds new ways to reinvigorate the role of the listener presumed by the use of the recording technology without relying on either the age-old interlocutor device or the insertion of a listening frame.

A closer analysis of Desmond Flower's transcription style reveals the heavy influence of Lomax and the challenges of wrangling a chronological narrative from a multitude of vignettes. Since Flower interviewed Bechet after a significant portion of the manuscript for the book had been completed, his additions to the book are interspersed throughout the text. Going through the existing manuscript, seemingly chapter by chapter, Flower's interviews with Bechet largely consist of questions related to stories Bechet had already told but which Flower felt needed more detail, or to stories whose chronology was in question. Like Lomax, Flower preserves idiomatic expressions and sentence-level syntactical choices while eliminating redundancies. Whereas Lomax did a good deal of editing to coax Morton's stories into cohesive paragraphs, Desmond Flower stays more faithful to Bechet's meandering patterns of speech, and his transcriptions

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[138] *See* Sterling Brown in *Slave's Narrative* 38; also, David Taylor, *Soul of a People: The WPA Writers' Project Uncovers Depression America* (2010).

frequently run for several paragraphs with scarcely any embellishments or additions. However, moments that in the interview have a certain element of drama or emotional pull sometimes fall flat in the transcription, which seems unable to capture the tone or the important role of the interviewer in extracting a story. For example, the scene in which Bechet speaks of his brother Leonard's death:

In* Treat it Gentle*:

. . . But I came back to Paris, and it was around this time that my brother Leonard died. I said how he used to come up from New Orleans to see me, and after I came to Europe we kept corresponding together. I wanted him to come to Europe, and I was always on to him about it but he never made up his mind. Then about two or three o'clock one morning, I received a telephone call to tell me my brother Leonard, he was dead; and that was the end of him, poor fellow.

Leonard, he never made up his mind. He never just wanted to play trombone, and it was a sort of hobby for him, you see. But in later years we had a feeling that he really wanted to leave the dentistry alone and just play Jazz music. That was his intention, but I guess, time caught up with him, and he had to leave us. He died right there in the hospital in New Orleans. He was around twelve or fifteen years older than me, and he was the member of my family who had always been nearest to me—right from the days when he started the Silver Bells Band—and whom I loved best. (196-197)

On Tape 071 (10:27-12:38):

SB: . . . I was fixin to have him come and live with me, but he got ill, and I went to Chicago to work, and my brother he got alright. And that was around '48, so he made two visits to Chicago and in '49 as I came to Europe, you know, and we kept corresponding together, you know, and I wanted him to come to Europe. And a few years later I received a telephone call bout two, three 'clock in the morning to tell me my brother Leonard had died. [*long pause*] That was the end of him, poor fellow. [*slowly, belabored*]

DF: He died in New Orleans?

SB: Yes, he died in the hospital.

DF: Was he was still practicing as a dentist?

SB: Oh yes he was still practicing and playing too. He never made up his mind. He never wanted to just play trombone like that, it was a sort of hobby for him, you see, but later years he had a feeling that he really wanted to just leave the dentistry alone and play jazz music. That was his intention. But I guess time caught up with him. He had to leave us.

DF: He was a year or two older?

SB: No, he was much more . . . between fifteen and twelve round . . . oh yes

DF: And he was the member of the family you were fondest of?

SB: Oh yes. Yes.

[*mumbles – unintelligible*]

> I think we better wind it up [*tape cuts out*][139]

(*Note: I have added different colors to better demarcate the differences between the book version of this story, and the one we find on the tapes made with Desmond Flower.*)

Whereas Lomax might have preserved a few of the "you see's" in order to evoke the listening presence, Flower eliminates them. Even my transcription does not quite capture the sighs and slowing pace of Bechet's story as he approaches the phone call. We lose the belabored way in which Flower carefully attempts to draw out details and the seeming insufficiency of questions like "He died in New Orleans?" The emotion seems to overwhelm Bechet at Flower's last question, and quickly thereafter Bechet half mumbles, "I think we better wind it up," signifying the end of a place where speech is possible. The tape cuts out; the book simply moves on to the next paragraph and the narrative chronology continues.

Flower's transcription can at times feel stiff and err on the side of literary cohesion; like Lomax, Bechet and his editors recognize the limits of translatability between media as the book moves between recorded sound and written word. The self-consciousness of the media infiltrates the tone in other parts of Bechet's story that were written prior to Flower's intervention as well. Talking about learning the blues in prison, Bechet begins to quote a few of the lyrics he heard, but then recognizes how poor a rendering this will be when his interview is transcribed:

> The man prays to the Lord to hear his cry
>
> And the Lord says, 'Go down Angel, that man's got
>
> no right to die.'
>
> Well, it would be easy for me to tell you some lyrics, make up other ones, just fill it in and fake it for you. But that won't do—that's not the way I'd want. You got

[139] My transcript draws from tape 071 in the Sidney Bechet collection at the Hogan Jazz Archives at Tulane University.

> to hear it for yourself, you got to *feel* that singing, and I got no way to make that possible for you in a book way. But what you've got to realize is this blues, it had a memory to it; it was like I was talking to one of these people come to hear us play. (107)

This moment of meta-discourse encapsulates several of the conundrums one faces in moving between sound and text—and particularly music and text. By including a few lyrics and simultaneously acknowledging the impossibility of representing the blues on the page, Bechet creates a paradox that calls out for an imaginative close listening. The use of the second-person imperative "You" indicates the residual presence of the interviewer to whom Bechet told the story, and reaches out toward the reader holding the book. For Bechet, the experience requires more than simply hearing the blues, and he insists that the reader must *feel* the memories within the blues. Pointing to the void in order to fill it may seem a similar strategy to the ellipses Lomax uses in *Mister Jelly Roll*, but whereas Lomax points to the absence of music in order to reference the recordings, *Treat it Gentle* accounts for the absence by suggesting a more ambiguous idea of listening. The sense that one must *feel* the memory of the blues extends the idea of what sound can mean, and implies that even a recording would be insufficient to convey the depth of sound that Bechet experienced in prison. This same impulse also allows him to bring the memory of his grandfather, a slave, into the story as an audible memory.

For Bechet, listening (or hearing "for yourself") is always at the heart of the critical practice he is imagining, even as he is quite consciously "writing" a book. That Bechet claims that there is no way for him to put the blues "in a book way," rather than simply saying there is no way to *write* the blues seems deliberate here, for it focuses the attention on the medium rather than the method. On the one hand, he is referring to the way that the lyrics capture only a part of

the blues, but he is also talking about the ever-evolving, shape-shifting nature of the blues as a living thing. Any attempt to write the blues down is to "fake it" because a book, as a physical object whose text once printed cannot be altered, defies the blues tradition, for the blues are felt and always changing. A book makes a text objective, rather than subjective—not heard for oneself, but recorded for posterity. Thus, Bechet's idea of listening is always expansive, rather than purely referential, as it works along the "edge" of meaning.

Of course, this edgy quality is also one of the hallmarks of Bechet's sound with its wide vibrato, and these moments of self-reflexivity and hesitation, which cause him to stop himself short and unsettle the narrative, could be said to parallel certain aspects of Bechet's playing. The distinctive quality of Bechet's fast, warbling vibrato, can be a bit unsettling. After all, one of the ways to think of vibrato is as a refusal to settle on a single note in favor of a pulsation between pitches. John Chilton has gone so far as to say that the intensity and width of Bechet's vibrato, which nods to the stylings of the great operatic tenors, was the "biggest obstacle to his achieving universal acclaim," "touching a nerve" with certain listeners and creating an "aural hardship" (291, 46).[140] Paradoxically, the vibrato is also what makes Bechet's sound recognizable and palpable on recordings and brings it closer to a vocal grain; the unsettling quality and the underlying desire to unseat inflects the writing. Not unlike the ellipsis with its dual foci, the feeling of vibrato within the text in these moments of hesitation opens up spaces for listening and expresses that phantom feeling of playing between two spaces.

The instances when Bechet adopts an evasive posture toward the music or his role as writer are not a moments of inarticulacy but rather acknowledgments of the text's lack of an audible dimension. Part of Bechet's ambiguity about the capacity of language to relate his

[140] I think there is also a way in which this kind of hesitation could be thought of as a literary and musical stutter, which Mackey calls "an articulation that would appear to be blocked in advance" (616).

autobiography is the sense that the music already contains the narrative: "I wouldn't tell all this in a story about the music, except all I been telling, it's part of the music" (201). For Bechet, the line between musician and author is forever blurred, but at times he checks himself and expresses insecurity about his role as a writer. In another self-conscious turn, he cuts himself short and says: "But I don't want to get away from my story. There's so much books and speeches made about it, there's not much use talking about it all. I just play my music" (40). This evasion erupts in a moment when Bechet begins to talk more directly about racial tensions and the subjugation of black people during slavery. The dismissal, "I just play music," may hint at a feeling of unease, not just with the literary role Bechet has assumed in telling this story, but the political role it inevitably implies. Bechet is far more comfortable *playing* the sounds of his enslaved grandfather, Omar, than he is trying to explain the institution of slavery. But rather than undermine Bechet's authorial voice, the appeals to music strategically allow Bechet to reassert sound's capacity for meaning: "The music, it's my whole story," he says (218). Of course, the book tacitly refutes this assertion. If the music was the whole story, or if the recordings could serve as their own history, writing a book would be unnecessary. As Bechet's approach to writing seems to suggest, he can hear the story and its sound, but he struggles to find the right medium in which to express his ideas, and music alone is often not enough.

The question of how Bechet *really* sounded may not have a single answer—Bechet had many voices. Jazz musicians who traveled in mixed circles and who were accustomed to performing for white audiences as well as black and Creole audiences were necessarily savvy code-switchers, and Bechet was no exception.[141] Transcriptions that erase the presence of the

[141] Code-switching is a term that came out of linguistics to describe when bilingual speakers shift between more than one language or dialect; however, the term has also come to represent, according to Gene Demby of npr.com, the "hop-scotching between different cultural and linguistic spaces and different parts of our own identities—sometimes

interviewer (as both Bechet and Morton's narratives do) obscure the verbal interplay that shapes the speaking voice. The absence of Desmond Flower's voice from Bechet's book, for instance, seems all the more striking to one listening to the recorded interviews. In the book, we hear nothing of Flower's extremely cultivated, aristocratic British accent, with its nasalities and drawn-out vowels, nor do we hear the strange contrast this makes to Bechet's Creole tinged speech. When Bechet imitates Flower's British accent, adopting the accent could be interpreted more than one way. It could be understood as a sympathetic gesture of adapting his manner of speech to his audience, but it can simultaneously be read as mockery or even one-upsmanship. In another instance Bechet corrects Flower's French pronunciation of Buddy Petit with an exaggeration of the francophone *puh-TEE*, emphasis on the second syllable (Tape 071, 12:00; and *Treat* 77). When contrasted with another recording of Bechet made by Mary Karoly and John Reid in 1942 at Camp Unity, New York, in which Bechet sends a "message" to Bunk Johnson, the adaptability of Bechet's speech depending on his audience is even more apparent. In speaking to Bunk, Bechet's tone and manner is much more colloquial: "What d'ya say there Bunk, old pal . . ." he begins ("Message to Bunk"). Here again, Bechet reveals the multiple registers of his speech.

The notion of Bechet's sound is further complicated by the term "musicianer," which appears in the book 39 times.[142] In the text, the term, which stands in for the simpler word "musician," is a way of characterizing Bechet's creole *sound* through an alternate spelling. However, on the two hours of interviews made with Desmond Flower, Bechet never once says "musicianer." Even so, Desmond Flower added "musicianer" on page 181 in a story Bechet tells

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within a single interaction." For more *see*, Penelope Gardner-Chloros, *Code-switching* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[142] Scholars such as Robert G. O'Meally have speculated how Bechet might have pronounced this—whether it was meant to indicate the creolized quality of his speech, tinged by the francophone.

about playing an award ceremony at *Esquire* for Louis Armstrong with "a lot of the old musicianers;" on the tape Bechet simply says, "It was a lot of the old musicians" (Tape 071, 3:04). It is not impossible to conceive of Bechet using the term, which was a common New Orleans idiom that referred to trained musicians, but Flower's editorial decision misleadingly exaggerates his dialect in an attempt to authenticate his voice.[143] While the unique quality of the word helps mark Bechet's *sound* as Creole, such moments also reveal the editors' unfamiliarity or misunderstanding of the New Orleans idiom. Given the instability of Bechet's voice within the text, we must listen for its different resonances and shifts in dialects.

Bechet's insistence that readers must hear, listen, and feel sounds pervades his story. Nowhere is this clearer than in the story Bechet tells about his grandfather Omar—an ill-fated escaped slave, who was also one of the most famous drummers of Congo Square. Omar loses an arm before suffering an untimely death at the hand of his beloved's jealous master, but even during his exile in the bayou with a lynchmob at his heels, he was able to communicate with his people through rhythm and song. Many, including Bryan Wagner and Bechet's biographer John Chilton, have disputed the historical facts of Bechet's account of Omar, which closely echoes the famous tale of Bras Coupé made legendary by George Washington Cable (Bechet did not have a slave grandfather named Omar). Wagner has argued that the figure of Bras-Coupé, with his

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[143] Within the New Orleans context, "musicianer" is not, in fact, interchangeable with "musician." Musicianer was meant as a way to designate trained musicians who could read notes, as opposed to self-taught amateurs—a strange word choice for Bechet given that he himself did not read music. Terry Teachout makes this distinction in *Pops: a life of Louis Armstrong* (42). However, from an etymological standpoint, "musicianer" has a somewhat varied history. It has been used as colloquially interchangeable with "musician" among the Irish and Scottish (according to the OED and the English Dialect Dictionary of 1903). It is also noted in the *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery* that "slaves also recognized their instrumentalist by verbally acknowledging their position with the title of 'musicianer.'" *The Journal of American Folklore* 24 (July-September 1911). *See* "Folk-song and Folk-lore as found in the secular songs of southern Negroes," in R. M. Miller and J. D. Smith, *Dictionary of Afro-American Slavery* (Praeger, 1997), 259.

amputated arm and limited history, created a space in which writers have been able to intervene, fictionalize, and reify legend into autobiography and history.[144] Bechet's fictionalizing thus does not lessen the story's fundamental truth. I find that the story of Omar is more about Bechet's musical genealogy than his actual blood lineage. In a story about the music's origins (Bechet's original title for the book was: *Where Did It Come From?*), this kind of genealogy is perhaps more important, and the Omar or Bras-Coupé figure's actual amputated limb makes space for the kind of phantom limb of musical history that Bechet is trying to conjure. That the story is fictionalized matters less because it allows Bechet to perform the way the memory resides within the music, and the way Africa permeates his own sound.

For Americans who are the descendents of African slaves, the issue of genealogy has always been exceedingly complex: laws preventing slaves from attaining literacy also prevented them from keeping written records; as captives wrested from their homeland, slaves were forced to give up their native languages, and to take the names of their masters. In more recent years, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s PBS series *African American Lives* and *Faces of America*, as well as websites such as AfricanAncestry.com, have allowed African Americans to explore their African lineage in ways previously unimagined. However, prior to advances in DNA testing and genealogy research, claims to African ancestry were more difficult to trace. In light of these historical difficulties, we might look to Bechet's approach to the Omar story as an alternative approach to genealogy that is less concerned with blood lines and more concerned with cultural influence. When he talks about the memory within the music, this is what he means.

As a drummer in Congo Square, Omar is "like a piece of rhythm," says Bechet, and thus Omar reappears throughout Bechet's music as well as throughout his book (44). Bechet and the

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[144] *See* Bryan Wagner, "Disarmed and Dangerous: The Strange Career of Bras-Coupé."

editors treat Omar like a refrain that ties various vignettes together, for as Bechet goes on to say, "As an idea, the way he [Omar] played his horns, the way he beat on his drums, he was still a background music" (44). The impulse to treat Omar as a "rhythm" or "background music" emphasizes Omar's position within the musical genealogy and frames him as a sonic character. Despite the controversy surrounding Omar's story, Bechet's hyperbolic characterization of his grandfather is done consciously, and Bechet even acknowledges that sometimes when he is telling the story, "it's almost like I'm him" (45). This fictionalizing or improvising impulse is in line with Bechet's interest in writing plays and movies based on songs and various aspects of his own life. For if Omar is a piece of rhythm, it would follow that he can be *played*, and even improvised. In one such flight of fancy, Bechet uses the Omar story to explain the relationship between the music, memory, and Africa. Talking about the drum, he says:

> That was how the Negro communicated when he was back in Africa. He had no house, he had no telegraph, no newspaper. But he had a drum, and he had a rhythm he could speak into the drum, and he could send it out through all the air to the rest of his people, and he could bring them to him. And when he got to the South, when he was a slave, just before he was waking, before the sun rode out in the sky, when there was just that morning silence over the fields with maybe a few birds in it—then, at that time, he was back there again, in Africa. Part of him was always there, standing still with his head turned to hear it, listening to someone from a distance, hearing something that was kind of a promise, even then. . . .
>
> And when he awoke and remembered where he was—that chant, that memory, got mixed up in a kind of melody that had a crying inside itself […]" (7; ellipsis Bechet's)

The idea that a slave in America could *hear* back to Africa, even in a moment of silence, emphasizes Bechet's assertion that a blues has "a memory to it." In this way, listening is both an internalized and externalized activity and requires one to enter a meditative, dreamlike state. One might call this a kind of *ghost listening*, for it requires listening across time and space in unconventional ways. Like the "ghostly listeners" in *Mister Jelly Roll*, the image of the listening

slave is a product of the music, standing in tension with the sounds of the drums and participating in a complex doubling—resonating at once in Africa and America. To make these sounds more present, Bechet infuses the writing with the kinds of rhythms he is talking about. The repetitive, rhythmic structure of this passage, with its short phrases, carries the markers of oral speech, which, in the words of Walter Ong, is "additive rather than subordinative," and helps us feel that Bechet is speaking to us (36). On the page, this overflowing feeling of *and* also creates a rhythmic pulse meant to resonate with the drums, drawing us closer to the sounds of the music. In this way, inflections of a poetic orality in the text create a sound that is closer to singing, a sound that buds into the aural realm. The Omar story, perhaps more than other chapters in *Treat it Gentle,* uses strings of short sentences that build upon one another with a mounting sense of rhythmic addition. Describing how Omar could hear the music of Congo Square, even while in exile, he says:

> And then he'd hear the drums from the square. First one drum, then another one answering it. Then a lot of drums. Then a voice, one voice. And then a refrain, a lot of voices joining and coming into each other. And all of it having to be heard.The music being born right inside itself . . . (8)

The sentences, in succinct parallel structure, contain the rhythms of *call and response* within them, as drum answers drum and voice answers voice. And so, although Bechet cannot make his readers literally hear the music of the drums, he can point toward those rhythms and try to get us to "turn to hear it" and listen in the distance for a *memory* of sound (indeed the resonance), if not the sound itself. The figure of slave standing in the field at dawn, like a ghostly listener, does not actually hear drums from Africa but attempts to hear them and even imagines them. The gesture of turning seems crucial here and echoes Nancy's *renvoi* or return, for the move is less about

sound as an object than about adopting a particular attitude to, toward, and in the direction of listening. In these scenes, Bechet does not reify sound but allows it to come into being. This reformulation of sound and radical representation of listening offers a model for readers, who could not possibly be expected to reproduce particular sounds and cannot reference the recordings of Bechet's speech. But here Bechet does not want us to hear him because he wants us to *listen* for Omar and his African ancestors.

It is also worth noting that in the first example, Bechet compares the African's drum to the technologies of mass communication such as the telegraph and the newspaper, as though to suggest that the drum was already a broadcast technology that allowed one to traverse time and space. Of course, pointing to the drum as the center of mass-communication is, in a way, a literal description of the technology, for early sound reproduction technologies did contain a drum: the tympanum, or eardrum. Such moves counter any residual notions that Africans were primitive or lacking a rich historical past.[145] This scene of re-writing technology into a *pre*-technologized past resonates with Lomax's mapping of the phonograph and player piano onto Morton. By recasting the drum as high technology, Bechet infuses Omar with technical aptitude and reconfigures the slave ancestors as highly tuned radio receivers. Further connecting the idea of Omar with rhythm, at the beginning of the next chapter he says:

> . . . I got to thinking that story inside me, about my grandfather Omar, and I got to talking it almost like I was playing the music, going back into it as it came. […] I got to talking and there was some friends there. I was just talking like I was inside the music, just letting it come of itself, and remembering like that, all about my grandfather . . . you know, it's almost like I'm him. (45)

[145] Of course, critics like Alexander Weheliye counter this idea as well, instead insisting upon African Americans' centrality to the development of sound technology. See *Phonographies*, pgs. 2-3.

The line between the music, talking, and writing is never so neatly drawn for Bechet, a point that is reinforced by the rhythmic repetition of "I got to talking." Playing his music is a performance of Omar that also listens for Omar, and thus writing is a similar kind of performance and listening. As a result, Bechet does not find it necessary to distinguish between his own identity and Omar's. "It's all true, all that I said about my grandfather. And it's all so mixed up with the music" (45).[146] The affirmation that "it's all true," should be unnecessary, and yet Bechet's insistence tacitly acknowledges that many will read the story as hyperbole or as an outright lie. The identification of both the music and himself as his own grandfather reveals just how complex the autobiography of a musician must be, and it emphasizes the crucial aspect of sonic identity. The traditional notions of lineage and dates simply do not apply here. The story is truthful in the same way that his playing is truthful (Bechet's account is true *to* history rather than true *of* history), but the idea is difficult to explain when the genre of autobiography demands something else of him. Here, too, ethnography and autobiography become muddled. Regardless of Bechet's blood relation to Omar (or Bras Coupé, for that matter), his identification with the story (to the point of becoming Omar) and with Omar's African musical lineage is truth*ful*, if not wholly factual. In light of the imperfect record of Bechet's ancestry, literacy and text alone cannot provide the reader access to Bechet's history, and thus listening between the aurality and orality (the heard and the spoken), as Charles Bernstein might instruct us to do, becomes the important critical tool by which we must approach his story. This is, after all, a kind of truth that cannot be made textual, but must be heard.

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[146] The kind of mythologizing implied by the Omar story, and the rejection of the idea that memory need be factual is similar to what Michael Ondaatje has called the "truth of fiction." In writing his fictionalized account of Buddy Bolden, *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), Ondaatje noted that "some of the facts were expanded or polished *to suit the truth of fiction*" (162; italics mine).This phrase seems to be a contradiction of terms, but the contradiction reaches toward a definition of truth that is not simply a synonym for fact, but something much greater. Ondaatje never pretended that his book was biography, but then again, Bechet's own reckoning with Omar hints at his complexity.

According to Bechet: "The music gives you its own understanding of itself. But first, you have to like it; you have to be wanting to hear it" (204). Like Stein and Dos Passos, Bechet would seem intent upon tutoring the readers' ears to hear, for time and again, in the absence of recordings, Bechet suggests to us that sound and music are in the ears of the beholders. Hearing is more than simply the ear's ability to transduce vibrations into sound; hearing and listening represent a spectrum of empathy, understanding, and even access to an unrecorded history. The notion of listening as a kind of radically democratic tool has been suggested not only by Alan Lomax but also by Roland Barthes (as noted earlier). Therefore, as a result of Bechet's expansive interpretation of sound and listening, listening to recordings of Bechet being interviewed might actually limit the kinds of sounds that he and his editors wanted readers to hear. They wanted us to hear unrecordable sounds—sounds that never existed.

Recording unimaginable sounds

Bechet's contributions to the sound of jazz are remarkable enough that we tend to forget that he was also experimental in the recording studio. One of the more illuminating aspects of *Treat it Gentle* is that in addition to offering new approaches to listening, Bechet spends time reflecting upon the recorded medium, its limitations and its possibilities. Given the undeniably important role that recordings played in the spread of jazz from a regional music to a popular national (and international) form, it is hard for us to imagine a time when musicians actually turned down the chance to record. But Bechet, like Morton and many of their contemporaries, had initially approached recording with a degree of skepticism. Bechet struggles to explain, for instance, why Freddie Keppard turned down the chance to record with Victor in New York in

1915, which would have made Keppard's band the first to make a jazz record.[147] "Freddie just didn't care to, that was all," said Bechet (112).[148] Players like Keppard worried that recording would encourage imitators who would "steal" the music, but Bechet's analysis of the recorded medium takes a more nuanced approach:

> You hear a record, you know—you don't see all that stamping and face-making; you just hear the music. And that's the same of today; you take someone that's grinning and stomping and moving around the stand where the *music* should be going—for the moment you're lost from the music, you're so busy watching him fool around. But you get his same record and try to listen to the music then, and there's no music there. (83-84)

This reflection on the acousmatic nature of recordings—a concept Pierre Schaeffer uses to describe the way we hear sounds separated from their source—comes after Bechet's attempt to discuss the differences between the legendary cornet player Buddy Bolden, whom Bechet calls a great showman, and Manuel Perez, who Bechet felt was a superior player. Of course, the irony of this example is that Buddy Bolden never recorded—a fact that is still considered one of the great tragedies in jazz history. The implication of Bechet's assessment, however, is that Bolden could never have really made a record, even if he had had the chance; as a showman, Bolden's music would not have shown up. While one might view this as a deficiency of the recorded medium, Bechet's preference for Perez's "sincere" playing and his belief that "you've got to be the music

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[147] Instead, the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (an all-white ensemble) is credited with making the first jazz recording in 1917.

[148] Freddie worried that the music would be stolen or taken away if recorded, a point with which Bechet concurred, arguing that "pretty soon every fellow who ever heard a piece of music in his life was showing up with a recording" (113). Rumors surfaced that Keppard even hid his hands under a handkerchief while playing to keep his music a secret, but Bechet dismissed such reports, for "any musicianer knows you don't learn from seeing someone's fingers. You learn by hearing; there's no other way—not if you're a real musicianer" (112).

first" suggest that recordings might also help to separate real musicians from mere entertainers (84).[149]

This is not to say that Bechet idealized the recorded medium because he too was critical of the tendency of the record companies to exploit musicians and put profit before quality.[150] He criticized the proliferation of imitators and denigrated the idea that recordings could be equated with ownership: "You can't own a thing like that unless you understand a lot more about it than just repeating what's written down" (114). As someone who played by ear, Bechet remained skeptical of written scores as well. However, in spite of these protests, Bechet was a savvy and successful recording artist and was one of the early experimenters with the medium, and his aptitude for the technology influenced his commercial recordings as well as his personal and amateur recordings.

Indeed, both Morton and Bechet shared a technological acumen with the recorded medium. According to Danny Barker, "Morton did what no other musician dared to do at the time: enter the sanctity of the control room of the recording studios and give advice to the engineers. And for that reason, he said, his RCA records were clearer and better defined than others in his time" (Szwed, "Doctor Jazz" 18). Evan Eisenberg has compared the importance of Morton's recording innovations to those of Eisenstein in film, arguing that Morton's influence can be felt in recordings by "master builders" from Ellington to Zappa and the Beatles (122). "What is even more remarkable is his construction of dazzling phonographic montages in whole

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[149] Mark Katz points out that listening to a recording has certain benefits and that "even musicians who frequented jazz clubs sometimes preferred listening at home" (74). Bud Freeman attested to the distractions of some live performances and noted, "'I was learning more about jazz through listening to records than I was occasioned to learn by going to the clubs, because in the nightclub atmosphere, your attention was not always on the music [but on] a lot of interesting things we had never seen before" (74).

[150] African Americans were frequently denied their lawful rights, and musical ownership was a legitimately contentious issue. Sheet music had only come under copyright in 1897, and the protection of recordings did not become codified into law until shockingly late in 1972.What is more, unknown artists were frequently paid a flat fee of as little as $25 to make a recording and received no residuals.

takes, without the aid of tape. . . . Morton's records rely less on the power of his personality than on the power of his constructions: the dazzling succession of riffs, breaks, and bittersweet harmonies is what carries the listener along" (121-122). While Eisenberg's assessment verges on hyperbole, it points to incredible influence of the kind of sound Morton developed in the recorded medium.

Traces of this aptitude can be heard in the recorded interviews as well: Morton occasionally asks Lomax if there is enough time on the disc to continue with a particular story; Bechet decides when to start and stop the tape and answers Flower's questions about whether he is using the machine properly. For these reasons, we must look at the recorded interviews as true collaborations between interviewer and subject, for both Morton and Bechet approached the task with a sense of purpose and a high degree of what we might call *recording literacy*. These were not merely oral storytellers passively recorded; these were men who knew how to *write* in sound.

Bechet's philosophical-acoustic aspirations in *Treat it Gentle* should be read, therefore, as an extension of his musical recordings, as evidenced by his infamous one-man-band recording of "Sheik of Araby" (1941). His approach to sound within his book is less referential than it is aspirational, evoking sounds that never existed or that must be felt. In "Sheik of Araby," Bechet experiments with a primitive kind of over-dubbing and achieves what would otherwise be an impossible performance by playing every instrument on the recording. Since tape and multi-tracked recordings had not yet been invented, he played all six instruments one after the other, over-dubbing each instrument by playing along to the previous recording.[151]

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[151] Note that "multitracking" as we currently think of it was not technically feasible until the use of tape recording in the studios in the late 1940s. Even then, it was not until 1956 when Les Paul helped develop the Ampex tape recorder (which was capable of recording eight parallel tracks) that multi-tracking became truly possible. (*See* David L. Morton Jr.'s *Sound Recording*, 141-151.) What Bechet talks about as making a "trick" record requires recording alongside the other record playing (a rather primitive effect).

> I started first with the piano, and then I got the drums and my soprano. I meant to play all the rhythm instruments first, you know, but I got all mixed up and I grabbed hold of the bass and then I got the tenor, and I had these earphones on as the company did for this oboe player, and finally I recorded with the six instruments. (180)

"Sheik of Araby" was so controversial that the American Federation of Musicians forced the studio to pay Bechet seven times over for playing all the instruments as well as the role of band leader, and then they outlawed the practice for many years thereafter, citing it as unethical.[152] Today we think very little about whether a recording represents an authentic performance because multi-tracking, auto-tune, and a number of other technologies make it possible to create recordings that could never exist in performance. Almost every recorded sound we hear now has been filtered, processed, chopped-up, looped, spliced, amplified, and rebalanced in every imaginable way. In making sounds more "perfect" than they could ever be in performance, our contemporary concerns are less about the absence of an "original" performance than whether live performances can measure up to the "original" recording.

There is something uncanny, even unsettling about listening to "Sheik of Araby," which Bechet seemed to be aware of when reflecting upon the recording in later years. Bechet chalked this up to difficulties with the engineer, but as a conversation with Fats Waller revealed, there was a level of absurdity to the performance from the start:

> The funny part was right after that I met Fats Waller going into the theatre; he was playing at the Polo. So he said to me, "Bechet, I'm telling you, boy, you certainly did make that one man band record!" And I said, "It would have been all right if

[152] During the same recording session, Sidney also recorded a one-man-band version of "Blues of Bechet" but only recorded four instruments. For whatever reason, this recording seemed less controversial than the six-track "Sheik."

> we would have had a rehearsal before," meaning the engineer and myself, you know. But Fats, he laughed and said, "Man, how the hell you going to have a rehearsal with yourself?" (180)[153]

Not only does the interchange highlight Sidney's technical understanding of how recordings are made, but it reflects one of the fundamental differences between recordings and live performances. Waller was right: rehearsing with oneself was not an option. A one-man-band recording is nothing like playing with a band.[154] But without the tools to engineer the recording to sound more *natural*, it just sounds wrong. It is not just that the drums are muffled as a result of being dubbed over repeatedly; the music does not swing very hard, in part because it is locked to the tempo Bechet sets up at the beginning. What is most unsettling about the "Sheik of Araby" is that the multiplication of Bechet's distinctive vibrato across so many instruments makes the song feel off kilter; it vibrates unnaturally. Bechet's vibrato is so consistent that when he plays harmonies with himself, or even when he is playing all the different instruments during the collective improvisation, the vibratos bump up against one another. The recording is impressive in theory, but feels like novelty rather than artistry. As a revolutionary feat in recording, the record received a good deal of press, but reviewers had very little to say about the music itself.

Experimental uses of recordings were, in fact, central to Bechet's musical output. Daniel Bechet pointed out that his father composed by recording himself playing piano and singing. Furthermore, Bechet experimented with overdubbing on at least one other occasion in 1942 with the help of John Reid, making an overdubbed "duet" of "Weary Blues" with New Orleans

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[153] In the interview with Flower, Sidney does an amusing impression of Fats' signature voice that does not quite register on the page.

[154] Moreover, since Bechet could not read or write music, he was improvising the arrangement as he went along. In an interview about the recording for *Afro-American,* he joked: "Man! that ends three months of torture, Thinking about this session was giving me nightmares; I dreamed I was playing the whole Duke Ellington band" (13).

trumpeter Bunk Johnson. The amateur recording was made at the same time Bechet recorded his "Message to Bunk," pleading with Bunk to come up to New York to play and record because at that point Bunk had never made a record. John Reid and Mary Karoly had made a short recording of Bunk Johnson on a portable disc recorder while down in New Orleans earlier that year, and then they recorded Bechet improvising along to the recording. At the time, Bechet was acutely aware that he might never have the chance to actually record with Bunk and that he needed to make some kind of *record* of their playing together. Bechet enters tentatively at first, but soon is matching the phantom presence of Bunk's phrasing and one-upping him in the breaks. In the space of the recording, Bechet is able to bridge the geographic divide between New Orleans and New York, and bridge the many years since they had last played together. Like the "Sheik of Araby," the performance could not have existed without recording technology.

It is tempting to draw an analogy between the one-man-band studio recording and the editorial methods employed to write recorded autobiography: both, in their way, reproduce sonic performances that cannot be linked to a single, originary performance and push acousmatic listening to new limits. Like the one-man-band recording, the narrative voice of the recorded autobiography is a composite; different iterations of the same story are layered and filtered together in order to create the effect of a single narrative. The voice of "Morton" in *Mister Jelly Roll* sounds convincingly like Jelly Roll Morton, even though the book is the result of a complex orchestration of many disparate pieces by Lomax (and likewise for Bechet in *Treat it Gentle*). To the extent that these texts insist upon their sonic qualities and root themselves in recordings of the biographical subject's *real* voice, we might begin to think of Lomax, Flower, et al. as *audio engineers* rather than merely editors. To be sure, there are important differences between editing a book and engineering a record. For one, on a recording we can still hear each individual

instrument clearly articulated while all the tracks are playing at once. The same cannot be said of a book in which the various tales woven together can no longer be seen as component parts; the stitches can only be seen with great effort as one listens to the recordings alongside the text. Books have long been subject to editors who manipulate and rearrange text to create a whole; however, I think the comparison between editors and engineers is useful for thinking about the ways that these two texts are pushing against the boundaries of their media and incorporating the lessons of commercial recording into the writing process. Likewise, it may be helpful to think of the ways that audio engineers have taken on roles that have more in common with literary editors while forward-thinking musicians such as Bechet (and later Les Paul and others) push the possibilities of the technology forward and work to naturalize sounds that are otherwise unnatural.

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Though there has been a tendency to talk about recorded jazz auto/biographies as "oral histories," this term ultimately limits the breadth of sounds that these texts contain. Unlike oral history, the recorded book does not merely collect recordings and transcriptions to include in archives for further research, nor does the recorded book simply transcribe words spoken on a recording. Orality is not enough; aurality is required. For when it comes to writing about musicians, sonic identity cannot be inscribed within the voice alone.

In unraveling the question of what it means to be an altogether recorded book, we find that the form is ultimately one predicated on instability. Situated on the cusp of two different media, these books and the recordings on which they rely exist in tension with one another, ever pointing in the direction of the other and asking readers to hear across the mediated divide.

Ghostly listeners and other kinds of phantom sonic presence manifest themselves within the books as ways for readers to approach textual sounds that require an imaginative listening. For Lomax, this requires writing an account of his own listening; for Bechet, this listening is as wide and expansive as his vibrato. As a result, *Mister Jelly Roll* often points readers back in the direction of the recordings, whereas *Treat it Gentle* wants to open the possible sounds to improvisation. In privileging listening and aurality, and allowing space for the kinds of sounds that might otherwise go unheard, both *Mister Jelly Roll* and *Treat it Gentle* aestheticize the kind of spaces, gaps, ruptures, and disjunctures that occur in the process of moving between the media. In *Mister Jelly Roll*, Lomax accounts for the loss of sound with the ellipsis, which is a formal gesture that reflects his approach to transcription. Likewise in *Treat it Gentle*, Bechet acknowledges the limits of what kinds of sounds he can make in "a book way" and instead reaches toward the phantom presence of a music that can only be felt. Of course, these textual reflections of loss characterize much Afro-Diasporic literature and music, thus situating these books firmly within that tradition.

Because text is a silent medium, it allows us to consider sound in ways that sound recordings alone cannot. Listening to text that so overtly claims to be audible makes plain the relationship between the subject and the sonorous object: we already understand that on a certain level sounds desire to be heard by us, but we also have to be extending our ears toward sound. Listening by its nature re-sounds. As texts whose silence challenges the very notion of listening, *Mister Jelly Roll* and *Treat it Gentle* show us the degree to which all sounds are constructed. Our listening is no more transparent than the act of transcription that makes recording into text. It requires attention. As Bechet says, "The music gives you its own understanding of itself. But first, you have to like it; you have to be wanting to hear it" (204).

Chapter Three

Press Play: Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and the Tape Recorder

On September 7, 1951, just a few months after completing the scroll of *On the Road* (1957) and a month before beginning work on *Visions of Cody* (1972), Jack Kerouac reported in his journal, "Am reading Lomax's "Mister Jelly Roll"—great material by an important writer about an American artist who will live... Jelly Roll Morton (without whom maybe Mamie's Blues wouldn't have survived). In the afternoon, in my fields, I discovered once + for all that I need my wire recorder..."[155] That Kerouac made note of his reading was not unusual—he was an avid reader and a noted jazz fan—but what is more startling is the connection between his growing desire to experiment with magnetic recording and reading Lomax's "recorded book." In the sketches he would write over the following month while revising *On the Road*, Kerouac frequently interrupted his own prose mid-sentence: "—but wait till *tape recorder!*" as though his pen could not keep up with his memory (*Cody* 108). By mid-fall Kerouac was on his way back to San Francisco to see Neal Cassady (his peripatetic best friend and muse) to make recordings of their conversations. As Neal's wife Carolyn Cassady recalled, the tape recorder was "always rolling" during this time, but due to the expensiveness of the new technology they were constantly recording over their tapes.[156] The tape sessions became immortalized in the book we

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[155] Special thanks to Jean-Christophe Cloutier who located this entry in Kerouac's collection at the New York Public Library (Box 55, Folder 6. Holograph notebook "1951 / Journals / More Notes." August 28, 1951 - November 25, 1951. Berg, NYPL). *Note also* that a wire recorder, as mentioned here, was an early form of magnetic recording and the precursor to tape, and was introduced commercially in the U.S. in 1948.

[156] *See* "On the Road: Present at the Creation," September 9, 2002. http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/ontheroad/

now know as *Visions of Cody* in the two longest sections titled "Frisco: The Tape" (a direct transcription of Kerouac's conversations with Cassady) and "Imitation of the Tape" (a section that contains fictionalized tape transcripts). But what was it about the tape recorder that captured Kerouac's imagination? What did the tape recorder promise literature that other technologies did not?

Tape recording occupies a unique place in the history of literary engagement with recording technology in that, unlike the phonograph, it was seen as a sound technology that writers could actually use. Edison had very early imagined that phonographic technology might be used for dictation purposes and recording writers reading their works, but the medium of the wax cylinder and later the gramophone disc were better suited to brief musical recordings. Although magnetic recording was invented in 1898, it was not widely available to consumers until 1953; however, the timing of this was well met—at least for its literary users. As Michael Davidson points out in his essay on tape and poetry, "With the rise of poetry readings in jazz clubs, coffeehouses, and college auditoriums in the late 1950s, the tape recorder returned a kind of oral aura to poetry at a point where it had been, as [Charles] Olson phrased it, removed from 'producers and reproducer'" (99). The portability of tape technology made it possible to record outside the studio, and led to the rise of bootleg culture in both music and poetry. Recording poetry readings (or a jazz concert, for that matter) was about preserving an *event*—a specific voice in a particular moment in time. This was a prospect that was intriguing to Kerouac, of course, as he began to imagine capturing and preserving Neal Cassady's unique speech. However, one of the defining qualities of tape, as we shall see, is its mutability.[157] In this chapter, I turn to the writings of Jack Kerouac and his friend William Burroughs to explore how

[157] N. Katherine Hayles points to the paradox of tape as "a mode of voice inscription at once permanent and mutable" (77).

two innovative prose writers redefined literary uses for the tape recorder, but also to show how their experiments with tape informed their avant-garde literary methods: spontaneous prose for Kerouac, and the cut-up method for Burroughs. In particular, I turn to Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* (written 1951-52, published 1972) and Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded* (1967) as works in which tapes and tape recorders are an integral part of the narrative, as well as tools for the construction of text.

It is not uncommon to think of Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs together given that the two were central figures of Beat movement. In 1944, long before Kerouac or Burroughs had written the works that would bring them notoriety, they collaborated on hard-boiled novel detailing Lucien Carr's murder of David Kammerer: *And The Hippos Were Boiled In Their Tanks* (2008). Unpublished until 2008, few would call the piece of juvenilia great literature, but it hints at the important innovations that Kerouac and Burroughs would in different ways pioneer. The chapters, which alternate between Kerouac and Burroughs telling different and overlapping pieces of the story, perform a kind of interlocution and intercutting between voices that both writers would take to new levels in their later experimental tape-recorder novels.

Kerouac and Burroughs would never again collaborate as directly as they did on *Hippos*, but their friendship was often a catalyzing aspect of their individual literary projects. Burroughs hosted Kerouac in Mexico City in 1952 while he wrote *Doctor Sax* (1959); Kerouac typed much of Burroughs' manuscript for *Naked Lunch* (1959), even giving the work its title, while living with Burroughs in Tangier in 1957. The two remained friends throughout their lives, but their literary projects would diverge significantly. *Visions of Cody* and *The Ticket that Exploded* are markedly different kinds of works. The former is autobiographical-fiction that reworks Kerouac's materials from *On the Road*; the latter is science-fiction that imagines a viral invasion

of Earth by the Nova Mob. *Cody* is a deeply personal account of the friendship between Kerouac and Neal Cassady, while *Ticket* is generally impersonal and characterized by disembodied voices. But both writers were invested in the writing *process* and the relationship between technologies of writing such as text and tape in relation to memory. While Kerouac was an early adopter of tape and foreshadowed future uses of the technology, Burroughs's experimental tape practices would link the practices of modernism to the digital multimedia aesthetic practices of the early 21st century. And yet, both Kerouac and Burroughs's tape recorder experiments are usually treated as "failed" projects, both by critics and the authors themselves.[158] This chapter seeks to correct this narrative through a reconsideration of the role of the tape recorder in the innovative prose of Kerouac and Burroughs.

Fast Forward, Rewind, Loop: A brief history of the tape recorder

The proliferation of the gramophone and mass produced disc recordings during the first half of the twentieth century had meant that listeners lost the power to make their own recordings; the tape recorder, however, gave this capability back and made good on the promise of the phonograph to record any sound, in any place, at any time. For Jack Kerouac, the ability to capture his conversations with Neal Cassady in a natural environment into the late hours of the night made the tape recorder especially alluring. But when Cassady and Kerouac began experimenting with the tape recorder in 1951, it was still such a new technology that it would be nearly two years before Philips introduced a tape recorder for general consumers.[159] As the

[158] *See* Belletto, 200; Charters 145.

[159] Karin Bijisterveld and Annelies Jacobs have written, "prior to the 1950s, tape recorders were almost exclusively made for professional and semi-professional markets" and Philips didn't introduce its consumer tape recorder until 1953. The consumer tape recorder was the Philips *EL 3530*, which operated on a fixed energy supply. *See* Bijisterveld, 28.

reference to a wire recorder in Kerouac's journal entry indicates, he was writing at a time when magnetic recording technology was on the cusp of innovation, and thus he and Cassady were what we might call "early adopters."[160]

Of course, to say that tape was "new" in 1951 when Kerouac made his recordings is not entirely accurate. Magnetic recording technology that initially used steel wire had been in existence since 1898, and tape was first introduced in the 1930s, but the genealogy of tape recording technology does not follow a linear path—rather one of loops, forward spurts, and parallel tracks.[161] Those who have written the histories of recorded music have a difficult time placing tape technology within the chronology, and often mistakenly treat tapes as merely a stop on the train of technological progress from long-play records to CDs and digital recordings. In reality, magnetic recording technology has served as a kind of parallel recording development that fulfilled other needs and drove other kinds of recording developments, from long-play to multi-tracking. Whereas disc devices like the gramophone were branded as a musical medium for individual consumers, the same was not true for magnetic recording, which was developed with commercial and military uses in mind, and became a kind of supplementary technology for musical recording purposes. As a recording technology given to multiple uses, tape does not sit easily within narratives about the recording industry, and as a result histories have treated tape alternately as a revolutionary development and as a commercial failure.[162]

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[160] A.C. Shaney notes in *Elements of Single and Dual Track Tape Recording* (1950), it was long thought that long lengths of steel wire run at very high speeds was necessary to achieve reasonable fidelity, but this necessarily restricted recording to speech range. Although German engineers had started using tape as early as 1935, "for some inexplicable reason, these significant developments were overlooked by American engineers" (6). With the pressure of the Armed Forces during the war to develop compact recording technology, Bell Telephone Laboratories focused its research on steel tape machines (6-7).

[161] Magnetic recording was first developed by Valdemar Poulsen of Denmark in 1898.

[162] According to Karin Bjisterveld, "Compared to the big commercial success of the compact cassette recorder, the tape recorder was a failure in terms of sales. It was also a marketing failure, since its actual use significantly diverged from the use promoted by manufacturers. It simply did not become the sound souvenir device its makers

Due to the success of phonographic discs, the development of magnetic recording lay dormant until the 1920s and 1930s.[163] Although a few labs in the United States had experimented with the wire recorder, it was German engineers who would develop the Magnetophon, which used lightweight paper or plastic tape coated with microscopically fine iron powder (Morton 114). Hitler and the Nazis used tape to pre-record propagandistic radio speeches, and tape was also used as a surveillance technology for recording phone calls and other messages. When the U.S. military intercepted and captured the German tape technology during World War II, they quickly undertook efforts to reverse engineer tape for their own purposes but did not do so successfully until after the war (Shaney 6). That tape was born out of a military-surveillance culture would not be lost on William Burroughs, who saw tape as another method of control.

As a medium for recording, tape had a number of distinct advantages over discs. Unlike a disc, whose finite size limits the length of a recording, tape could be made as long as needed and could hold varying amounts of content and fidelity depending on the speed of recording.[164] Tape also did not have the same problems of diminished fidelity after multiple playbacks and did not scratch or warp. But perhaps the most notable difference between magnetic tape and phonographic recording was that tape could be erased and recorded over a number of times, and because you could cut, splice, and loop tape, you could edit tape in similar ways to film.[165]

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originally had in mind. Only one of the uses of the tape recorder—to record and replay music—fostered the later rise and success of the compact cassette recorder" (40).

[163] In the course of developing tape, a number of different media for making magnetic recordings were tested, including steel drums and steel wire (Morton 114).

[164] Tape recording speeds work in multiples or submultiples of 7½ inches per second (ips), thus $^{15}/_{16}$ ips was an economical tape speed appropriate for speech, $1^{7}/_{8}$ for music, 7½ for professional use, or up to 30 for master recordings (Staab 20).

[165] In his 1950 tape manual, A.C. Shaney made a number of arguments in favor of tape, even asserting that magnetic tape recorders were better for editing sound than film because the splices were silent and did not have to be specially treated and edited out (10).

Early magnetic recording was still technically an analog process, but rather than engrave a solid medium with the sound vibration, it records sound as a fluctuation of field strength on tape that has been covered with charged iron particles. Magnetic recording operates on a similar principal to the ways magnets have been used to turn iron fillings into interesting patterns (as with the popular Wooly Willy toy or the Magna Doodle), but on the microscopic level. As Joachim Staab describes in his manual *Fun with Tape* (1967), "When continuous electrical signals are used in this way to create a magnetic pattern on a moving stream of minute iron particles, the resultant magnetic picture represents a lasting translation of those signals" (Staab 14). To reproduce these signals as sounds, the process is reversed. By passing the wire or tape over a similar magnet head, "the varying magnetic patterns generate a corresponding current in the coil of the electro-magnet, thus giving us once again an electrical signal which we can convert into sound, by passing it through an amplifier unit and into a loudspeaker" (16). In some ways, magnetic recording is not so different from other kinds of recording in the electric era—tape still involves converting sound into an electronic signal, and then translating it back into sound again. However, it is not a mistake that Staab uses the word "picture" to describe the magnetic pattern that occurs, and one could even say that tape turned sound into a picture. The similarities between tape and film, both in their physical appearance and editing possibilities, made it easy to conflate the two media—a fact that becomes apparent in the works of both Kerouac and Burroughs, who both draw together images of reeling tape with reeling film. In these ways, tape recording was more *cinematic*. However, this conflation of the audio and the visual was more than its appearance or the mechanics of its use. As researchers discovered as early as the 1930s, magnetic recording technology could record more than just sound.

Magnetic recording was developed to capture sound, but became synonymous with *memory* more generally. During WWII while the military was experimenting with the magnetic recording devices for surveillance purposes, it was discovered that magnetic recording could also be adapted to electromagnetic pulses other than voice or music, including radar and oscilloscope images (Morton 108). In other words, magnetic wire or tape could record any electronic data broadly speaking. It is well known that magnetic recording was fundamentally important to the development of computers, and as early as 1951, IBM was using magnetic tape for computer data storage.[166] Magnetic recording powered VHS video tapes and floppy disks, and a number of other memory devices.

Yet, when it came to transforming the tape recorder into a commercial device, it was initially a failure. As a medium for disseminating music, reel-to-reel tapes never gained the kind of wide-spread popularity afforded to LPs and later compact cassette tapes, CDs, and mp3s. Tapes were bulky and difficult to store, and unlike disc records, which one could easily navigate by lifting the needle and placing it on the next track, tape was more difficult to navigate, using fast-forward and rewind. As Karin Bijisterveld and Annelies Jacobs point out in "Storing Sound Souvenirs: The Multi-Sited Domestication of the Tape Recorder," tape recorders never quite lived up to the expectations by tape-recorder manufacturers that tape would become an important way of making and storing family memories. The 1964 Philips handbook "emphasized that sounds carried more meaning than photos" (Bijisterveld 29). Tape-recorder companies hoped that the technology would find a place in the domestic space just as stereo and hi-fi systems had. But there was tension between the imagined and actual uses. Although the tape recorder was marketed as a way for making "family albums," people still tended to use the device for music

[166] "IBM 701" *Columbia University Computing History* (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/computinghistory/701-tape.html)

playback, and particularly recording music off the radio (Bjisterveld 26). Evidence of this can be seen in *Visions of Cody*, which ends the tape recorder section not with a conversation between Jack and Cody, but with a recording of a black revivalist preacher giving a sermon on the radio. Such uses were not promoted in the many manuals and how-to books on tape. Family albums and recorded letters may have topped the list, but tape-recorder manuals also stressed the creativity of the user and invited tinkering.[167] Tape-recorder books such as *Fun With Tape* proliferated and explained everything from microphone positioning, to editing styles, tape speeds, and other technical specifications. In *Fun with Tape*, recording a letter is the base-level activity, but it also discusses how to add signature lead-in music, splice the tape, and add additional layers of sound.

On the one hand, the tape recorder made promises similar to those of Edison that the tape recorder would preserve memories, but on the other hand, the suggestion that users ought to approach tape *creatively* suggested that it could be used to imagine new sounds—or make new memories. The tension between the desire to "record" or to preserve sounds and the desire to *make* new sounds is one of the central problems for Kerouac. Magnetic tape was simultaneously a revolutionary medium for memory (it literally became known as "memory" for computers), but it also enabled a completely new approach to *making* rather than simply recording new sounds. Kerouac initially wanted to use the tape recorder in order to better record his and Neal's memories of their travels and of Neal's early life, but instead they find that remembering is more difficult than they realized and that in the process of remembering that they change it. The tape recorder's so-called "perfect" memory reveals to them the artificiality of their own.

[167] Bijisterveld and Jacobs attribute the different ways the tape recorder was marketed to the gendered dynamics of these different uses—women recording the voices of their children, men tinkering and with mastering sound (31).

In music, the creative possibilities of tape took hold rather early. After all, musicians had been thinking about the innovative possibilities for recordings at least as early as 1941 when Sidney Bechet made his one-man-band recording (pre-tape). In 1948, guitarist Les Paul began experimenting with multitrack recordings using an Ampex tape recording, and Pierre Schaeffer, the experimental composer coined the term *musique concrète* to describe music composed entirely from a collage of prerecorded sounds.[168] Among the foremost thinkers and experimenters with tape was the composer John Cage, who remarked in his 1957 lecture on "Experimental Music" that people were using tape "not simply to record performances of music but to make a new music that was possible only because of it" (*Silence* 8). By Cage's measure, the tape recorder was becoming an instrument. Thus, with tape, the notion of what it meant to *play* a recording completely changed because it was no longer a simply matter of *playback*, but what we might call "play" in the broader sense.[169] Playing a tape implied the ability to manipulate a plastic medium. With the tape recorder, the boundary between listener and maker of sound was diminished significantly.

The distinction between sound and music during this period provoked a substantial amount of debate, and composers like Cage began rethinking the parameters of sound, music, and silence—especially in relation to technologies like tape. Cage was at first skeptical of the "experimental" moniker but used it as an opportunity to redefine the status of the composer,

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[168] The *Electric Acoustic Resources Site (EARS)* of the De Montfort University defines Music Concrète thus: "When in 1948 Pierre Schaeffer gave the name Concrète to the music which he invented, he wanted to demonstrate that this new music started from the concrete sound material, from heard sound, and then sought to abstract musical values from it. This is the opposite of classical music, which starts from an abstract conception and notation leading to a concrete performance. Schaeffer wanted to react against the "excess of abstraction" of the period but he did not shy away from "reconquering" this musical abstract. A reconquering which for him had necessarily to go through a return to the concrete. (Source - Michel Chion (1983). Guide des Objets Sonores. Eds. Buchet/Chastel, Paris. 1995 translation by John Dack/Christine North.)" http://www.ears.dmu.ac.uk/spip.php?rubrique143

[169] For more about play, see Pierre Schaeffer's concept of *jouer* in *In Search of Concrete Music* transl. Christine North and John Dack (2012).

stating that "What has happened is that I have become a listener and the music has become something to hear" (*Silence* 7). Emphasis on the listener as an active participant in sonic creation was later echoed by pianist and recording artist Glenn Gould who predicted a "new kind of listener—a listener more participant in the musical experience" ("Prospects of Recording"121). For Cage, the tape recorder revolutionized approaches to composition, for "whether one uses tapes or writes for conventional instruments, the present musical situation has changed from what it was before tape came into being" (11). Tape allowed Cage and others to extend traditional modes of composition and notation, and "Since so many inches of tape equal so many seconds of time, it has become more and more usual that notation is in space rather than in symbols of quarter, half, and sixteenth notes and so on" (11). Whereas the phonograph had in many ways forced a chasm between music consumers and music makers by creating a class of professional musicians—making the home piano obsolete, and making listening into a commodified activity—the tape recorder promised a reversal of this trend by putting the music-making tools back into the hands of listeners. In this regard, the tape recorder democratized sound in ways that were fundamentally subversive.

The implications of tape for music were clear to a composer like Cage, who had begun to think of music more broadly in terms of the "organization of sound," but the implications for writers and literature were a little less clear. Could literature also be considered an organization of sound?[170] Alan Lomax had felt that recordings would rejuvenate literary forms and made bold claims for its uses after publishing *Mister Jelly Roll*; however, the tape recorder did not immediately revolutionize writing. Part of the reason for this was that writers were not

[170] *See* Cage "Future of Music," 3. Cage borrowed the concept of "organization of sound" from Edgard Varèse, who later came to experiment with musique concrete, had been inspired by Ferruccio Busoni's writings on music. Busoni wrote, " 'Every notation is, in itself, the transcription of an abstract idea. The instant the pen seizes it, the idea loses its original form'" (qtd. in Eisenberg 107).

accustomed to using recording technology in the same way that musicians were (for instance, Sidney Bechet). Lomax had framed the relationship between recordings and literature as perfect transcription, but as we saw in Chapter Two, his book revealed the creative editing required in translating sound and speech to the page. Even a forward-thinking writer like Jack Kerouac could at first only imagine the use of the tape recorder as a means of recording, memorializing, and transcribing speech. But as *Visions of Cody* shows, the tape recorder became a catalyst for thinking about the organization of sound in literature in the radical Cagian sense.

Jack Kerouac's Auditions of Cody

In 1951 Neal Cassady purchased a Webster Electric Ekotape Tape Recorder with the hope that he and Kerouac would exchange tape-letters while he was in San Francisco and Kerouac in New York.[171] Although Kerouac never made good on his promise to get his own recorder, the lure of Cassady's Ekotape drew him to San Francisco later that year while he was in the midst of revising *On the Road* and beginning to write the manuscript for what eventually became *Visions of Cody*. The Ekotape, which used coated paper tape, was designed for semi-professional dictation and recording purposes. As a pamphlet advertising the machine states, the Ekotape was geared toward "educators, professional men and women, and business men who used recorders in their work" and advertisements for the machine featured men in suits recording their meetings—a scene in which Kerouac and Cassady would have been noticeably out of place.[172] But as audiophiles who "understood the power of voices" Kerouac and Cassady could

[171] As Neal told his wife Carolyn Cassady, he "bought a tape recorder because … both he and Jack 'understood the power of voices'" (C. Cassady125).

[172] You can view a Webster Electric Ekotape pamphlet here: http://www.tapeheads.net/showthread.php?p=261059. The pamphlet also recommends uses for the Ekotape, including: "Rehearsing and recording speeches, radio shows, auditions, broadcasts. Teaching languages, speech correction, music appreciation, voice training. Sales training and sales presentations; meetings and conferences."

easily imagine creative uses for tape (C. Cassady 125). In reality, the tapes were quite expensive, necessitating constant re-use. Remembering those early years with the tape recorder, Neal's wife Carolyn Cassady lamented, "since we had so little cash and tapes were expensive, we used the same two or three over and over. (I'd rather not think of that loss.)" (193). A number of those recordings became the section of *Visions of Cody* titled "Frisco: The Tape," which indicates how Kerouac was forced to type his transcripts along the way. As a result, we can no longer listen to those original tapes that Kerouac used to write the middle section of *Cody*.[173,174]

Kerouac had hoped the tape recorder would be better than memory for capturing their wild speech, and what appears in "Frisco: The Tape" is a virtually unedited transcript of the 1951 recordings Kerouac and Cassady made over five evenings at Cassady's San Francisco apartment.[175] The tape sections are written like the dialogue of a play, but constantly transcribing the tape so that it could be used again had the unintentional effect of causing the tape sessions and the writing to double-up on one another such that one evening they are recording reflections of a 1947 trip to visit William S. Burroughs in Texas, and the next evening they are reviewing the transcription of that very story while taping, creating a moment of metafictional reflection. In the process of narrating the first time they met William Burroughs, "Cody" (Neal's alias) reflects on the difficulty of remembering:

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[173] *See* O'Hagen, "Kerouac Crosses the Line," *New York Review of Books*, March 21, 2013 (pg. 17); Shapcott, 232.

[174] The only recordings that survived this period amount to little more than 15 minutes of tape fragments made at the Cassady's San Jose, CA house in 1952. A cassette tape copy of this tape made by Carolyn Cassady is located at the British Museum in their "Beats and Friends" Audio-Visual Collection. According to the archive records, the original paper tape recorded on the Ekotape machine disappeared long ago. As Carolyn Cassady recalls in her memoir of the time, "When the girls were not with us sometimes Jack read us passages from *Dr Sax* in a great booming voice, accented by W.C. Fields or Major Hoople imitations, while Neal, eyes sparkling above his grin, breathed 'Yeah! Yeah!' after nearly every sentence" (193). Excerpts from these recordings were played on NPR in 2002 as part of a special segment about *On the Road* and are available on their website: http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/ontheroad/

[175] The original typed transcripts are located in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library and, with very few exceptions, are included verbatim in *Visions of Cody*. Exceptions include explicitly sexualized stories about public figures including Billie Holiday and the Editor of the New York Times's daughter.

> **CODY.** […] I was hung up on something else, you know, so I can't remember, say, like for example, I can remember NOW for example, but now that I CAN remember it doesn't do any good, because … man … I can't get it down. You know … I just remember it, I can remember it well, what happened' cause I'm not doing nothing, see?
> **JACK.** You don't have to get it down
> **CODY.** (*demurely downward look*) But I can't remember what happened there, man, except I remember certain things …. (123)

In other areas of the transcript, Kerouac inserts parentheticals to indicate nonverbal sounds such as *laughing* or *baby cries*. However, the "*demurely downward look*" is not transcription of a sound; rather, it is a notation of Kerouac's memory that is invited by the content of the conversation on the problems of memory and the difficulty of recording it or "getting it down." The description is what critic Steven Beletto calls a "metonym for the act of narration" (201).

Were this the only instance of the phrase it might not be especially notable, but it later serves a more important position in the text, one that invites a moment of self-reflexivity about the relationship between writing, recording, and memory. In the very next tape session Jack and Cody read over the transcription of the previous night's recording session and discuss Kerouac's addition of the phrase.

> **JACK.** Then I remembered this, "demurely downward look"
> **CODY.** I seem to remember that myself
> **JACK.** Although it wasn't really
> **CODY.** No
> **JACK.** It was *my* idea
> **CODY.** Yeah
> **JACK.** About the look you had
> **CODY.** Well yeah … it was kind of a –
> **JACK.** But it apparently wasn't … what you were really doing …
> **CODY.** That's what it really amounts to, though
> **JACK.** Why, because lookit … the talk is far way from demure …
> **CODY.** Well, the reason for the *demure* is … any approach to the words like, as I remember like what I said .. here, ah, "I can't get it down," for example, you know, "I can't get it down"—Well, I approached that very terribly, I was talking you know about something you know, that—it's going on—You know what I'm trying to say? (133)

Cody is forgiving of Jack's narrativizing, but Jack recognizes the extent to which he invented and interpreted the moment. The decision to include this metadiscussion in the text itself shows how quite early in the tape recorder sessions Kerouac realized, not unlike Bechet, that there was always more than the tape or its transcription could capture. By re-recording over the previous tape and incorporating the previous night's recording, Jack and Cody are not only in dialogue with one another, but with their earlier selves. It is the textual equivalent of overdubbing and echoes the practice that Sidney Bechet initiated in recording "Sheik of Araby" in 1941. Unlike actual overdubbing, however, the two tracks Kerouac negotiates between cannot be heard simultaneously because recording over a single-track tape necessitates erasure; textually they intersplice one another. The re-remembering erases/replaces the earlier memory, both building upon it and displacing it. Cody struggles with the idea that he "can't get it down," but the fact is—as this moment reveals—getting it *down,* whether on tape or in text, is to shape it again. What, then, are we to make of the role of the tape recorder in *Cody*? Does it record memory, or displace it?

Even before Kerouac was able to record, he both fantasized about the tape's abilities and worried that it would cause him to be self-conscious. In one of the sketches from an earlier section in Part 2, he interrupts his own thought to make a note about getting a tape recorder, but the parenthetical overtakes his narration:

> Last night in the West End Bar was mad, (I can't think fast enough) (*do* need a recorder, *will* buy one at once when the *Adams* hits New York next March then I could keep the most complete record in the world which in itself could be divided into twenty massive and pretty interesting volumes of tapes describing activities everywhere and excitements and thoughts of mad valuable me and it would really

> have a shape but a crazy big shape yet just as logical as a novel by Proust because I *do* keep harkening back though I might be nervous on the mike and even tell too much). (99)

As the *demurely downward look* would reveal, Kerouac was right to worry about being self-conscious. Yet, that very self-consciousness of the tape and the recursive action of listening and transcribing (and listening and transcribing again) helped him to unlock the spontaneous, yet multilayered aspects of tape that infuse the structure of *Cody*. Kerouac could not imagine writing from bed as Proust did, so he imagines taping his experiences as they happen—amassing an enormous tape archive. But tape, he fears, might be too unbounded or too limitless, causing him to tell too much.

Kerouac indicated on a number of occasions that he felt that *Visions of Cody* was his masterpiece ("O my best prose there" [*Selected Letters II* 189]), but it is also arguably his most difficult book.[176] Because Kerouac wrote *Cody* simultaneously with *On the Road*, he did not initially consider it a separate text, it is both a re-working of the story of his 1947-1950 adventures with Neal Cassady/Dean Moriarty, and a reflection on the present state of their friendship.[177] But unlike the 1957 version of *On the Road*, *Cody* lacks a traditional narrative structure and moves between sketching, transcripts of taped dialogues, and an amalgam of the two.[178] Allen Ginsberg deemed the new text unpublishable, and in a frustrated letter to Carolyn

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[176] In *Action Writing: Jack Kerouac's Wild Form* (2006), Michael Hrebeniak wrote that *Cody* was "the consummation of [Kerouac's] search" for his own form (61).

[177] More precisely, Kerouac wrote *Cody* in between the Scroll and the published version of *On the Road*.

[178] Michael Hrebeniak says of *Cody's* form*:* "What emerges is a work that cannot be subsumed into a single interpretative position or philosophy. Rather than assert an authoritative realist reading of the past, Kerouac reflects the jazz musician's use of cross-references traced in memory to generate ever-new effects as measures of fervor or point signs, offering a variety of directions beyond causality" (62).

Cassady in June 1952, he complained about the form and organization of what Kerouac was then still calling *On the Road*, and in particular the tape-recorder section:

> Your tape conversations were good reading, so I could hear what was happening out there—but he put it in entire and seemingly un-unified, so it just skips back and forth and touches on things momentarily and refers to events nowhere else in the book; and finally it appears to the objective eye so diffuse and disorganized—which is, on purpose—that it just *don't make.*" (qtd. in C. Cassady 184)[179]

Years later, however, once Kerouac had untangled the text of *Cody* from what became *On the Road*, Ginsberg changed his mind about the book, and scholars have since cited *Cody* as the work in which Kerouac developed his characteristic style and method of writing—the method Kerouac called "spontaneous prose."[180]

When we talk about Kerouac's brief 1953 manifesto "Essentials of Spontaneous Prose," most tend to point to Kerouac's conflation between his writing methods and jazz. Sometimes referring to his style as bop-prosody, Kerouac felt jazz to be central to his writing (he was even a frequent audience member at Minton's in the early years of Bebop), and he had idealized notions of improvisation. However, jazz readings of spontaneous prose sometimes obscure the way he is talking about sound and speech more generally. Describing the writing procedure he says, "Time being of the essence in the purity of speech, sketching language is undisturbed flow from the mind of the personal secret idea-words, *blowing* (as per jazz musician) on subject of image"

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[179] In Ginsberg's letter to Kerouac, he softens the tone considerably, but still tells Jack that the new *On the Road* was unpublishable. See *Selected Letters, Volume I,* pg. 179.

[180] *See* Hrebeniak, 61.

("Essentials of Spontaneous Prose" *Reader* 484).[181] Extending the metaphor of blowing, Kerouac suggests that one should never revise and should ignore conventions of punctuation in favor of "rhetorical breathing" (485). Instead of laboring over editing, he favors speed and "No pause to think of proper word but the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words till satisfaction is gained, which will turn out to be a great appending rhythm to a thought and be in accordance with Great Law of timing" (484). As the intermediary text between the scroll version of *On the Road* Kerouac composed in 1951 and the published version from 1957, *Visions of Cody* embodies the kind of scatological buildup that Kerouac describes, and the tape recorder enables Kerouac to hear the ways that speech already contains a buildup of words and repetitions, not unlike Gertrude Stein's own discovery half a century earlier.

While there has been scholarly agreement that *Cody* was the work that catalyzed Kerouac's style, critics such as Joyce Johnson have attributed this discovery to the practice of sketching, dismissing the tape transcriptions as a failed experiment, or merely a slice-of-life.[182] Johnson says "'sketching' immediately gave Jack what he needed—the freedom to write his 'interior music' just as it came to him, removing the inhibiting presence in his mind of the editor or reader" (419).[183] But the fact is that in sketching "like a painter in the street" (as his friend Ed White suggested), Kerouac was bound to recording the exterior world, rather than the interior,

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[181] Kerouac is drawing on a number of poetic lineages, from Ezra Pound's imagism to Charles Olson's projective verse.

[182] Justin Thomas Trudeau, who writes on performativity in *Cody,* says of the Tape section: "Kerouac's transcription of his and Cassady's conversations is one in a series of competing approaches to memory, a competing vision that generally fails to capture the immediacy of the relationship as it is transferred to the written page" (339).

[183] Sketching, Joyce Johnson describes, allowed Kerouac "abandonment to a 'tranced fixation' of the object" (419). In a letter to Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac described the process, saying, "You just have to purify your mind and let it pour the words (which effortless angels of the vision fly when you stand in front of reality) and write with 100% personal honesty both psychic and social, etc. and slap it all down shameless, willy-nilly, rapidly until sometimes I got so inspired I lost consciousness I was writing" (qtd. in Johnson 419). This desire to lose consciousness, to enter a trancelike state, to escape writing, is also in line with what Ann Charters says about how Kerouac's drug use was a way to get at "the center of the universe and reduce it to vibrations" (Charters 144).

and could not write and engage in conversation at the same time. Steven Belletto, who writes about the politics of historiography in *Visions of Cody*, argues that the experiment with the tapes "ultimately fails" because Kerouac and Cassady "find themselves conscious of the tape" (200)[184]—a sentiment shared by Ann Charters.[185] Kerouac himself felt that tape recording was problematic and in an interview with Ted Berrigan in 1968 for the *Paris Review*, said:

> I didn't dictate sections of *Visions of Cody*. I typed up a segment of taped conversation with Neal Cassady, or Cody, talking about his early adventures in LA. It's four chapters. I haven't used this method since; it really doesn't come out right, well, with Neal and with myself, when all written down and with all the *ahs* and the *ohs* and the *ahums* and the fearful fact that the damn thing is turning and you're *forced* not to waste electricity or tape . . . Then again, I don't know, I might have to resort to that eventually; I'm getting tired and going blind. This question stumps me. At any rate, everybody's doing it, I hear, but I'm still scribbling. McLuhan says we're getting more oral so I guess we'll all learn to talk into the machine better and better. (theparisreview.org)[186]

Kerouac acknowledges the uncomfortable gap between written and spoken language, the non-verbal sounds that the tape records, as well as the limitations of the machine itself in an era when tape and electricity were still quite expensive. Charters and Belletto have both pointed to this interview as evidence of the tape's failure, but then omit Kerouac's reconsideration ("Then again") that there may be something to be gained from using the tape. But talking into the machine, of course, had very little to do with it. Kerouac's tone of resignation implies a grain of skepticism of McLuhan's claims about a revitalized orality.[187] Kerouac acknowledges the awkwardness of the *ohs* and the *ahums*, and yet the original transcripts in Kerouac's archive show that rather than omit these nonverbal utterances, he actually went back over the manuscript

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[184] Belletto views the hybrid text as a negotiation between historical objectivity and radical subjectivity and asserts, Kerouac "thought tapes would allow him to be a better historian" (196).

[185] *See* Charters, 145.

[187] Marshall McLuhan's 1962 *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographical Man* argues, similarly to Walter Ong, that mass media technology from the printing press onward have changed our consciousness, and claimed that electronic media would make us more oral.

and meticulously penciled them in and moved them to their proper places during his revisions. In fact, these ahs and uhms anticipate a writing voice that embraces "the infantile pileup of scatological buildup words" and their "great appending rhythm to a thought" (485).

In the course of listening and transcribing "Frisco: The Tape," rhythm comes to occupy Jack and Cody's attention, and music and other sounds become more central to the text. Scenes of listening—especially to jazz records—become moments for meditation on rhythm and sound and what it means to *play* a record. When Cody puts on Coleman Hawkins's 1937 recording of "Crazy Rhythm," it is not merely as background or soundtrack (as music sometimes is in Kerouac's works), but is a teachable moment wherein Cody aims to narrate a listening that will help Jack "hear" the well-worn record anew.[188] Whereas we tend to think of listening as a one-directional activity between the listening subject (who is silent) and the sonic object (which makes sound), the scene here represents a dialogue between Cody and Jack and the record.

> **CODY**. No kidding (*stops music at phonograph*). Now. Pardon me son, I don't want to – you see I've different things that I've got on MY mind you know what I'm trying to say to you is, I'm gonna tell you something, although there might be other things that I'm hungup on, ah – the only reason that I'm playing this record is 'cause now you're high and you're gonna hear see . . . so now I'm gonna relax it and listen to it, you're gonna hear the *different* things they play. (MUSIC: *Coleman Hawkins' "Crazy Rhythm") (and demonstrates ideas with hands)* I don't choose this record for any reason except that we played it three or four times see, so, that's why you know – even though it's not really – but listen to the man play the horn, that's all (*they listen to ensemble beginning work*). Ah man I'm gonna try to change that needle (*after stopping music and Jack riffs on*). Did you hear that riff? (*puts music back, on alto solo*) when they begin – listen to here (*off, on again*)
> […]
> **JACK**. Who's playing now, is it the Hawk on tenor?
> **CODY**. No, that's the guy who blows so sweet I told you

[188] "Crazy Rhythm" (1937, Victor) with Coleman Hawkins (tenor), Benny Carter (alto), Django Reinhardt, Stephane Grappelli (piano!), and saxophonists Andre Ekyan (alto) and Alix Combelle (tenor), Tommy Benford (drums), Eugène d'Hellemes (bass).

> **JACK**. That's Benny-what's-his-name
> **CODY**. Yeah
> **JACK**. That's Benny Carter!
> **CODY**. Let's see in a minute
> **JACK**. Playing alto!
> **CODY**. Yeah
> **JACK**. Benny Carter
> **CODY**. Now Coleman comes in . . . listen to Coleman. (*Coleman comes in low toned, fast*) Hee hee hee way down there (*gesturing low at waist*)
> **JACK**. Yeah
> **CODY**. Hear it? (*they laugh and gloat*) See? he keeps blowin. Now here comes Benny, Benny plays like he did first only he backs off more, listening . . . hear it? Hear? He's going up, and – he's not rockin, listen. (*they listen*) Hear him coming down on a riff?
> **JACK**. Yap
> **CODY**. He really got that riff didn't he? (*laughing hungrily)* Staying up there, see, and here comes Coleman (*low again*)
> **JACK**. Ooo-*hoo*! Hey, yes
> **CODY**. He keeps drivin see?
> **JACK**. Yeah, drivin
> **CODY**. (*laughing ecstatically*) Blows that sonumbitch does. Of course (*changing his tone*) near the ending he falls apart here. Poor man. (*Jack laughing*) He doesn't – it's just, you know, record . . . the ending (*Bass-player on record calls to Hawk:* "Go on, go on.") (*Hawk blows a side complex what's this? riff*) What do you mean falling apart? (142-143)

When Cody decides to play "Crazy Rhythm," the repeated act of listening is key. Cody knows the song well enough that he can anticipate certain moments in the music, and he suggests that no two listenings are alike. There are a number of parallels between this scene and the Prologue to *Invisible Man* as the two attempt to descend the depths of the music. High on marijuana, Cody wants to narrate a particular kind of listening to Jack and help him to *hear*. For Cody, a person who can never seem to complete a thought and who relies constantly on the good will of his listeners to fill in his thoughts ("you know what I mean?"), the recording promises to convey that which he cannot express in words, and which is inevitably represented by the trailing off of an ellipses or long dash. Paradoxically, at every moment he asks Jack to *hear* it, he also wants him to *see.*

In Kerouac's transcription of Cody's narration, the point of reference is forever shifting. Cody keeps saying that he just wants Jack to *hear it*, but it is never clear what "it" is; he cannot help but speak excitedly over the recording, an act that both obscures and illuminates the music. There is a subtle punning between *hear* and here, as Cody tries to anticipate and stay in the moment of the *here* and to simultaneously *hear.* But the *here* is always passing. ("Hear it? (*they laugh and gloat*) See? he keeps blowin. Now here comes Benny, Benny plays like he did first only he backs off more, listening . . . hear it? Hear? He's going up, and—he's not rockin, listen. (*they listen*) Hear him coming down on a riff?"). There is an audible contrast between the solo playing of Carter and Hawkins and the fast foxtrot of their Paris counterparts on the recording, and their solos sound shockingly modern in contrast to the quick-stepping arrangement.[189] Carter in particular plays a number of notes that in jazz are referred to as "outside"—that is, he plays notes outside the specified chords such as 9ths, sharp-11ths (or flatted-fifths), and 13ths. This "outside" sound is one of the defining features of bebop, but the line between outside and inside is always fluctuating and fleeting. For attentive listeners who are non-musicians, like Jack and Cody, it is easy enough to hear that there is something *off* or *out* about this kind of playing, but it is difficult to pinpoint why.[190] In moments such as these, Cody's narration trails off and fails to

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[189] Although Cody implies that the choice to play "Crazy Rhythm" is only to demonstrate the way one can hear something new, even from a record they know well, the choice is not quite so arbitrary. The recording is notable for the way it anticipates the distinctive sounds of bebop, and one could argue that part of what Jack and Cody are listening for is bop's origin moment. Coleman Hawkins recorded "Crazy Rhythm" in 1937 in Paris with Benny Carter and an all-star line up that included Django Reinhardt on guitar and, strangely enough, violinist Stephane Grappelli plays piano.[189] It was still two years before the official beginning of bebop—which was, incidentally, the year Kerouac arrived in New York and began frequenting Minton's and other Harlem jazz clubs. It was a time when big-bands were still the most popular configuration, but the stripped-down band is more akin to the smaller ensembles that would drive the new sound. Incidentally, Benny Carter and Coleman Hawkins re-recorded these same numbers from the 1937 Paris recording session in 1961 on the album *Further Definitions* with Quincy Jones's band with similar instrumentation, but without a guitar. With the improved recording technology, and a slightly more relaxed, smoother playing of the horn sections, the sound with more traditional ideas about bebop. However, if anything, the solos are not quite as daring as the original.

[190] According to the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, "To play "outside" or "out" is to depart, in improvisation, from the harmonic structure of the theme. The term came into use in the early 1960s, in conjunction with its antonym,

account for what is actually happening in the music, but it illuminates the similarities between these *outside* musical conversations and his own dialogues with Jack.

The moment of listening to "Crazy Rhythm" is thus concerned with constantly being in the *here* of the present moment that Kerouac was initially so intent to capture with the help of the tape recorder, but it also opens the possibility of listening as a multilayered act that ascends different temporal planes. With each successive tape recording and transcription or re-listening session, Kerouac's approach to the tape recorder shifts. If at first he thought the tape recorder would help him to capture the energy and liveness of the present moment, in transcribing the tape as nearly as possible, he is confronted with including those moments when a past recording momentarily resurfaces and interpenetrates the text. Such is the nature of the early expensive tapes and the necessity of constant reuse.

The functioning of the Ekotape recorder was such that if you did not fully erase the tape prior to re-recording, remnants of the previous recording might remain in the places where one punches in and out—like a palimpsest. Rather than edit out these 'left-overs' or 'ghosts' of recordings past, Kerouac leaves them in. These are, in one respect, the manifestation of technological detritus that remind us that 'this is a tape recording,' and reinforce the commitment to the scatological buildup. In another respect, the presence of tape-ghosts allow an exploration the multilayered temporality of tape and memory. In one scene, Jack and Cody have decided to go out for another bottle of wine, and in the stop-start moment of running the errand, the tape is interspliced with an earlier recording made on the same tape:

"inside," to describe the playing of musicians who brought into performances of hard bop and modal jazz some of the harmonic license of free jazz; the outstanding exponent of playing outside was Eric Dolphy. The term is cleverly used in the title of Yusef Lateef's album *The Doctor is In . . . and Out* (1976, Atl. 1685)." *See* "Outside." *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Ed. Barry Kernfeld. *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 14 May. 2013

> **CODY**. Yeah, I'll put on my shoes, it's the end of the reel anyhow, see, give the matcheen, machine a chance to rest – (*machine stops discussion)*
> **EVELYN**. (*speaking from New Year's Eve tape of "Hamlet"*): "…which is the night…"
> (*click*)
> **CODY**. (*resuming tape, he's shut it off while Jack pissed again on porch*) … whole cabinet so crazy, that I thought it was, ah, the beginning of that, ah, German picture I told you about one time … very frantic –
> **JACK**. (*way back*) … man, very cool …
> **CODY**. See the whole screen vibrated and shook (203)[191]

The ghostly tape remainders are identified temporally, for instance, New Year's Eve, or "*speaking from last month on unerased tape"* (204). The gesture toward temporality accentuates the way in which the tape is never fully in the present—i.e. the way all present moments are interpenetrated by past ones, and even our own voices are in dialogue with our past voices. That the moment happens to be an unidentifiable excerpt from a reading of *Hamlet* seems prescient as well, as a play very much concerned with the ghostly presence of disembodied sounds and voices.[192] These moments of inadvertent splicing also anticipate William Burroughs's experiments with tape cut-ups.

Kerouac's transcripts of his tape recorder sessions reveal that his attitude toward the tape recorder and its function was in a state of flux; one can get a better sense of Kerouac's attitude toward the technology when he moves away from it and instead emulates the form of the tape in the final section "Imitation of the Tape"—a section which Justin Thomas Trudeau calls the "countermemory of what came before" (339). Some have read this final section of *Cody* as Kerouac's rejection of the tape recorder and embrace of his own voice and spontaneous prose. However, it would be a mistake to say that Kerouac rejected tape given his continued

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[191] Note that "Evelyn" was the alias for Carolyn Cassady.

[192] Derrida would later write about Hamlet's ghost as the *revenant* in *Spectres* (1989).

engagement with the tape-dialogue form and the importance of the *medium* of composition for Kerouac, whether the scroll on which he first composed *On the Road*, or the small notebooks in which he wrote so many of his blues and other works. The tape, which was not just a tool for recording memory, was a medium of experimentation. If we think of the magnetic tape as coming to represent not just a sound recording device, but as "memory" broadly speaking—as an external device for holding consciousness or thought—then this might help us to understand what Kerouac means by imitation of the "tape." Sound and listening become synonymous with memory technology and cognitive practice, and thus the slippery edge between listening and understanding (i.e. processing). The tape helped Kerouac to negotiate between a desire for the authenticity of the voice/breath, with the struggles of memory, and the desire for his own narrative style.

The nature of the spontaneous prose style that Kerouac develops while working on *Cody* is such that it allows us to witness the process or the mechanical aspects of recording and writing. He is able to fold in the kinds of sounds that he listens to so attentively on the tape recorders while freeing himself from the burden of the tape's supposed objectivity. As we saw early in the book, even tape recordings shape memory, even transcription is an interpretive act, and the *real* Neal is not the same as the character called Cody. In this section, we find Kerouac negotiating between the sketching style that he develops prior to his San Francisco trip, and the conversational rhythms that he captures in his tape transcripts. But more importantly, we hear Kerouac attempting to find his own sound. As an *imitation*, one might expect that Kerouac would try to recreate dialogues between Jack and Cody that sound authentically like the tape transcriptions; that is, an imitation of the voices and manner of speaking. While Jack-Cody dialogues do appear in this section, imitation of the tape means something greater—an imitation

of the music of their friendship. When divorced from the constrictions of transcribing actual speech, Kerouac plays upon the musical rhythms of their exchanges. Similar to the rhythmic "certainly's" in Gertrude Stein's "Melanctha," there are elements of exchange that are better experienced in the harmonies of repetition, rhyme, and syncopated rhythm.

Ginsberg called the tape dialogues "ritual"—and here, the dialogues between Jack and Cody assume increasingly incantatory, ritual-like qualities, and seem less invested in the content of the conversation than in the poetry of their sounds.

> **JACK**. Made to wring the meaning, made to roam the void
> Made to sing demeanors to the meters of the
> **CODY**. You mean this is the pit of night, the moonsaw?
> **JACK**. The moonsaw's come, the rainy night is milk, red eyes sea,
> **CODY**. Can't decide? Have no bones? Pick up stone? Or stick an own?
> **JACK**. Crick alone, turtle dove alone, moan alone, pose alone.
> **CODY.** Nonsense be, as nonsense was; or nonsense is a trapeze
> **JACK**. Nay a hole beneath it; with a balloon upon the void afloat.
> **CODY**. Van Doren, excellent; New Yorker, extrasmash; Walt Winchell, band start
> **JACK**. Tell me Nones; throw a Flying Scone
> […]
> **CODY**. […] Shee-it, I could tell you stories make you wish you was daid. I could lay you down a hype make you wish you was dead *and* gone, dead *and* gone.
> **JACK**. I could ripple you a houndspack make you wish I was dead and void
> **CODY**. Dead and voiced; (310-311)

Whereas many of the conversations between Jack and Cody while high in "Frisco: The Tape" rely on Jack to play the listening interlocutor, in the imagined conversations they can jam more equally, "trading bars" so to speak and playing on language sounds, rhymes, and associations the way that improvising jazz musicians play upon the melodic lines of one another during improvisation. The sense of the dialogue is, as Cody points out, nonsense, but they keep coming back to certain motifs and sounds (e.g. "void" and "moan").[193] Without the pressures of the real

[193] Earlier in Imitation section, he has that other 'moan' – the one that ends up on the Kerouac recording of his reading; the one where it seems like God gives him marching orders to write: "Go thou across the ground; go moan for man; go moan, go groan, go groan alone go roll your bones, alone; go thou and be little beneath my sight; go

conversation, Kerouac can artfully represent the degree to which their conversations are all wordplay, and he can make them feel closer to the jazz that drives the rhythms of their speech but which didn't come across in the transcription translations. In later dialogues, Jack and Cody merely "think" and communicate silently as they jointly narrate their experience as their minds finally become one in Kerouac's more holistic "visions" of Cody.

Beyond the dialogues, to imitate the tape also means incorporating the layered-ness of the tape by recording over, rather than simply recording for posterity, and incorporating the remnants of those past recordings that intersplice the live moment of recording. Like the starts, stops, and incomplete thoughts of real-time speech, Kerouac interrupts himself, even mid-word, and starts over, retelling a certain scene without erasing the previous iteration, "But no, wait in here, don't you know I'm serious? you think I'm?—damn you, you made, you make, the most, m – I guess – but now wait a minute, till I l--- but no I'll jump on in, I meant to say, w – about whatever – well, I swear, I swow…" (250). Writing in this way is a kind of overdubbing and preserves the present moment even as it is interrupted by memory. Whereas Cody dominated the narration of the Tape section, here "Jackie" asserts his narrative voice and attempts to stall the interruptions, calling us to *listen* as he enters a stream of consciousness monologue that takes on the rhythms of Cody's speech but blends them into Jack's voice. As he tells the story of traveling through Canada and the West, we get the sense that there's an interlocutor that we do not hear, except in occasional parentheticals. The narrative voice keeps being cut off mid-word—he keeps being interrupted by something, but he is determined to tell the story this time: "now you're to listen to *me* now, and let *me* tell the story—see?—right…" (251).

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thou, and be minute and as seed in the pod, but the pod the pit, world a Pod, universe a Pit; go thou, go thou, die hence; and of Cody report you well and truly" (295).

Joyce Johnson has suggested that in fact Kerouac needed to hear the tape recorded conversations with Neal to better understand their relationship; "To separate his self-image from the Neal in his mind he would have to go to California and listen to tapes of the two of them having the real conversations he intended to transcribe and use in his book. Between them for now was a year of separation in the netherworld of fiction" (Johnson 434). Listening to the tapes, it would seem, helped Kerouac to realize that the "Neal" of his visions both was and was not interchangeable with himself, and importantly that the Cody/Dean of his visions was in fact fictionalized.

Like a tape on fast-forward, the "Imitation of the Tape," includes a compressed re-writing of the *On the Road* scroll in which Kerouac finally begins to reconcile the tension that the tape revealed between Neal and Cody, who is eventually written as Dean. "I first met Cody…" (*Cody* 338) echoes the "I first met Neal" of the scroll, and foreshadows "I first met Dean" in the published version of *On the Road.* The section then proceeds to describe the first scenes of meeting Cody, if not in the same order as the scroll, in much the same language. If we take these three works together (as Kerouac would have us do, as part of what he referred to as the 'Duluoz Legend'), we can begin to untangle the layers, which, like the tape, he recorded over and over again.

On the Road – Scroll 1951	*Visions of Cody - 1951*	*On the Road – published 1957*
"**My first impression of Neal was of a young Gene Autry—trim, thin hipped, blue eyes, with a real Oklahoma accent**." (112)	"…a Nietzschean *hero of the pure snowy wild West*; a champion. In the door he stood with a perfect build, large **blue eyes** full of questions but already thinning in edges, at edges, into sly, or shy, or coy disbelief, not that he's coy, or even demure; **like Gene**	"You saw that in the way he stood *bobbing his head, always looking down, nodding, like a young boxer to instructions, to make you think he was listening to every word, throwing in a thousand "Yeses" and "That's rights*." **My first**

	Autry (exact appearance) with a hardjawed bigboned—but he also at that time *bobbed his head, prided himself on always looking down, bobbing, nodding, like a young boxer, instructions, to make you think he's really listening to every word, throwing in even as early as 1947 a thousand manifold yeses and that's rights* […] (338)	**impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autry—trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent**—a sideburned *hero of the snowy West*" (2)

(emphasis mine)

This well-known description of Dean/Cody reveals how listening to the tape helped Kerouac to refine his portraits of Neal Cassady. The first description from the scroll is brief and casts Neal as a type (Gene Autry), but in *Cody* he adds the description of how Cody bobbed his head like a boxer "to make you think he's really listening to every word" throwing in "yesses and that's rights" (*Cody* 338; *On the Road* 2). The punctuating rhythms of his speech and nods of his head that simultaneously make Cody a good listener help to bring Cody into three dimensions. Even the "demure" of the demurely downward look gets replayed and reworked here as a negation of that paradoxical quality of Neal's character, and an emblem of the difficulty of description and memory. In the published version of *On the Road*, we can see how Kerouac blends together the scroll with some of the revised descriptions from *Visions of Cody* to create a compact, hybridized version that cuts across the texts.

Kerouac would later call *Cody* a "vertical metaphysical study of Cody's character" in contrast to the "horizontal account of travels on the road" (i), wherein the scrolling prose moves from the paper scroll to the spooling tape recorder. In search of a medium that would solve the problems of what Kerouac felt to be an incomplete record of his memory, the tape recorder

instead presented him with a malleable medium that offered a new proximity and sound, but also opened the possibilities for how he could imagine Neal/Cody as a character. Listening became a transformative process for Kerouac, and his return to sketching and narrativizing in the final section of *Cody* is not a rejection of the tape (indeed, he would use it again while starting to work on *Doctor Sax* and also the short story *October in the Railroad Earth* in 1952). Instead, "Imitation of the Tape" reflects a new way of thinking about the relationship between memory, recording, and writing in which the sounds of language assumes a more 'playful' role. In making the recordings and listening to them again and again, Jack was able to leave behind transcription. According to Ann Charters, "The speedwriting of *October in the Railroad Earth* came after more tape recorder experiments with Cassady. They'd both done a lot of fast talking the month before when Jack arrived in San Jose, listening to the playbacks instead of trying to transcribe them. Then Jack felt they 'both got the secret of LINGO in telling a tale and figured that was the only way to express the speed and tension and ecstatic tomfoolery of the age …" (Charters 164). While working on the railroad "Kerouac's grunts and silences were signs of his intent listening" which he would later record in his notebooks (165).

When Kerouac first wrote *Visions of Cody* in 1951-52, Allen Ginsberg and others who read it felt that it was unpublishable, and the book was not printed in its entirety until 1972, after Kerouac's death. That Kerouac felt the tape recorder experiments were a failure was probably in no small part due to the rejection he felt from his peers and publishers, who found the text unintelligible. In some ways, one might say that readers of *Cody* needed a tape recorder hand book in order to understand it; or perhaps, readers needed Burroughs to explain the new methodologies the tape recorder made possible and how they related to memory and thought.

William S. Burroughs Plays the Tape

> *"Sound can act as a painkiller. To date we do not have music sufficiently powerful to act as a practical weapon."* –William S. Burroughs, *The Western Lands* (1987)
>
> *"What we see is determined to a large extent by what we hear"*—William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket that Exploded*

Shortly after Kerouac finished his tape sessions with Neal Cassady in San Francisco in 1952 he drove to Mexico City, where he wrapped up work on *Visions of Cody* and wrote *Doctor Sax* while living with William Burroughs.[194] It is unclear what Burroughs thought of *Cody* and Kerouac's use of the tape recorder, but not long thereafter Burroughs also took up the tape recorder and used it off and on throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Similar to Kerouac, Burroughs initially used tapes to help capture voices, and as he admitted in an interview with the *Paris Review* years later, "Many of my characters first come through strongly to me as voices. That's why I use a tape recorder" (theparisreview.org). More so than Kerouac, Burroughs became known for his experimental uses of the tape and the cut-up method—especially in *The Ticket That Exploded*, the second book of the Nova trilogy. Burroughs's renegade tape methods are usually attributed to his collaborations in the 1960s with the artist Brion Gysin and sound engineer Ian Sommerville, but one may also detect subtle inflections of Kerouac's tape-methods in Burroughs's writing—inflections that include both attention to the sound of voices and the spliced-in elements of past recordings. The leftover sounds of past recordings were initially accidental, but these kinds of random splices became an important property of Burroughs's approach to experimental recording. Allen Ginsberg, reflecting on a passage from the final

[194] During his stay, Kerouac wrote *Doctor Sax*, an early version of which he is said to have composed entirely in taped monologue. According to Ann Charters, while Kerouac was living with the Cassadys, "Into the machine he delivered a two-hour taped monologue about being thirteen years old in Lowell. One hour of the tape was the entire tale of *Doctor Sax*" (148).

section of *Visions of Cody*, pointed out that "Jack's naked original mind's surreal cut-ups, [were] prophetic of later Burroughs conscious efforts the same" (*Cody* 419). The difference, as Ginsberg aptly notes, regards the level of consciousness in these efforts. Kerouac's approach began as a transcription project, but in the course of transcribing the tapes, with their mechanical glitches and remnants, Kerouac began to discover a potentially more playful use—one that transformed the listener's role from mere consumer to producer of sound. Whereas this discovery pushed Kerouac back toward his own voice and his deeply personal explorations, Burroughs took this tape function to its opposite extreme. In *The Ticket That Exploded*, Burroughs is more interested in the depersonalized voice and in performing fictionalized voices than in recording his own, and the tape recorder assumes a more insidious role.[195] Tapes, tape-recorders, and tape cut-ups come to infuse the text both thematically and formally, and ultimately, *The Ticket That Exploded* becomes a kind of experimental how-to manual for using a tape recorder.

The Nova trilogy is loosely organized around the struggle between an alien Nova Mob, who enact a violent, highly erotic brand of viral mind-control, and the Nova Police who, along with the likes of Inspector Lee, are tasked with breaking up the Mob. For Burroughs, language was the ultimate form of mind control—or as he called it, a *virus*—and thus subverting the Nova Mob required the subversion of language. In *The Ticket that Exploded*, the tape recorder is the most prominent vehicle of brain washing, but paradoxically the tape recorder is also the means of subverting that very method of control by making one's own recordings and splicing them with other recordings. Of course, to give any kind of plot summary of the Nova books is a bit misleading. *The Ticket that Exploded* is a book without a traditional plot; it eschews narrative in

[195] Robin Lydenberg asserts, "Individual identity is not destroyed in the cut-up text but expanded; depersonalization of the text is viewed as a necessary step toward a liberation from the isolation and immobility of individual ownership" (427).

favor of the cut-up. As such, the text is always on the move, and the characters are impossible to follow as they come to the reader through the ear, which is to say through the sound of their voices.

The Ticket That Exploded may be read as a tale told by the tape recorder. From the outset, the voices are displaced and the characters are unknown:

> It is a long trip. We are the only riders. So that is how we have come to know each other so well that the sound of his voice and his image flickering over the tape recorder are as familiar to me as the movement of my intestines the sound of my breathing the beating of my heart. (1)

But who is this "we"? The unnamed narrator has lost a sense of individual identity and conflates and confuses the sounds of his own body with that of another. Ihab Hassan has suggested that the book's "*aim is to make man bodiless and language silent*"—a kind of new twist on the Word made flesh (65). However, more often than not, the relation between the sound of the voice and the body is ambiguously dependent. "In fact his voice has been spliced in 24 times per second with the sound of my breathing and the beating of my heart so that my body is convinced that my breathing and heart will stop if his voice stops," the narrator continues (3). The scene is meant to familiarize the reader with a concept of mind control that is dependent upon sound. While the common trope about sound recording has been that it produces disembodied or invisible voices, in *The Ticket That Exploded* the sounds of the bodies and the tape-recorder voices have become, if not interchangeable, much more closely related. Burroughs's tape recorder restructures the relationship between embodiment and sound, and inter-spliced voices produce a sound-image at roughly the same rate that films do. One could call these voices *disembodied*, but to do so would diminish the forceful presence of bodily-sounds within the text: "the beating of his heart, the

gurgle of shifting secretions and food, the rattle of breath and scratches of throat gristle—crystal bubbles in the sinus chambers magnified from the recorders" (72). The book does not reject the body; rather, it is full of the grotesque, the pornographic, and the scatological. Characters suffer morbid addictions to "Sex Skins" that involve "being slobbered down and shit out by an alien mollusk" (4).[196] In the topsy-turvy world of *Ticket*, bodies overcome by addiction and mechanically repetitive behaviors are the result of the mind-control of the Nova mob who are, in fact, bodiless.

The Nova mob are a band of parasites who infect their human hosts with language and can only be detected by transferable personality traits, or in many cases by their *sound*. One of the central stories in *Ticket* is the investigation of a particular parasite known as "Genial" in relation to an unsolved death by hanging. The difficulty of the case is that no one seems to know who Genial really is. The protagonist, Inspector Lee, whose sole purpose is to fight the Nova mob, searches for tape recordings that might shed light on the case. It turns out that Genial has a recognizable laugh and is only detectable in the tape-recorded interactions with those he infects. In Lee's own tape-recorded field notes, he remarks:

> The sound track *illuminates* the image . . 'Genial's' image in this case . . almost tactile . . Well there it is . . biologists talk about creating life in a test tube . . all they need is a few tape recorders: 'Genial 23' at your service sir . . a virus of course . . The soundtrack is the only existence it has no one hears him he is not there except as a potential like the spheres and crystals that show up under an electron microscope. (19)

[196] Whereas Kerouac's scatology echoed jazz, Burroughs's implies actual excrement.

The tape does not simply keep a record or a copy of the virus; it holds the *potential* for new viral life forms in mutation. The tape recorder is the central metaphor for the pre-recorded aspects of viral control; tapes contain all the information to infect or inoculate.

Those who have managed to escape the mind control of the Nova Mob are attributed with voices that have a mechanical, tape-like quality, namely the D.S. (District Supervisor) that Inspector Lee encounters in his hopes of being inoculated against the Nova Mob's main means of control: "a computerized Garden of Delights" and the word virus (10). The D.S. is a member of a group of assassins called the White Hunters, and he is described as "talking in a voice without accent or inflection, a voice that no one could connect to the speaker or recognize on hearing it again. The man who used that voice had no native language. He had learned the use of an alien tool. The words floated in the air behind him as he walked" (9).[197] In other words, the D.S. speaks with the voice of the tape recorder itself, a voice that is disembodied and not spoken by any one particular person.

Burroughs also inserts descriptions of how actual tape recorders perform the effects into the narrative. In his investigation into the death of John Harrison and the possible involvement of Genial, Inspector Lee listens to tapes made by Harrison and Genial. Mr. Taylor, who initially investigated the death, plays the tapes and narrates how they work:

> "Now listen to this." The words were smudged together. They snarled and whined and barked. It was as if the words themselves were called in question and forced to give up their hidden meanings. "Inched tape . . the same recording you just heard pulled back and forth across the head .. You can get the same effect by

[197] As the narrator Lee points out, the White Hunters are an "equivocal" group: "Were they white supremicists or an anti-white movement . . . ? The extreme right or the far left . . . ?" They were, by their own definition, a *non-organization* (9).

> switching a recording on and off at very short intervals. Listen carefully and you will hear words that were not in the original text: 'do it-do it-do it . . yes I will will will do it do it do it . . really really really do it do it do it . . neck neck neck . . oh yes oh yes oh yes . .'" (18)

The primal qualities of these sounds reduce words into a primordial state where new words are born from sound and erotic meanings revealed. Inching the tape—that is, pulling the tape back and forth over the tape head—leads to repetitions whose rhythmic qualities are themselves erotic, by Burroughs's measure. When reading *Ticket,* it can sometimes be difficult to imagine what this sounds like; the effect of pre-recorded speech being used to create new speech is clearer when one listens to the actual recordings Burroughs made with Gysin and Sommerville. On the track called "Sound Piece" from the album *Break Through in Grey Room* (1986), one can hear these inching effects at work. The effect sounds similar to a DJ scratching a record, and when words emerge from the scratches, they sound as though they are being sucked through a vacuum. As Mr. Taylor explains, "the content of the tape doesn't seem to effect the result" (18). Throughout *Ticket*, one of the ways the Nova Mob exerts power is through erotic images and sounds, but Burroughs always includes clues for the inner workings of the mob's control strategies. Only in the course of listening to the recordings does Inspector Lee realizes that Genial is a tape virus.

The cut-up method is generally considered the most important aspect of Burroughs' contribution to late twentieth-century writing, and as its name implies, the process usually involves taking scissors to a page of text and rearranging the pieces in order to create new texts. However, a cut-up can also be performed by cross-referencing folded pages of texts (as he frequently did while writing *Ticket*) and can be applied to tape recordings by cutting and

rearranging pre-recorded elements. Burroughs used scissors, folds, and splices on his own materials, but also introduced 'found' elements such as newspapers, novels, and radio shows into the mix. By adding a randomizing element to writing, Burroughs hoped to better reflect our everyday experiences of sensory input and to undermine the pre-determined aspects of language. The cut-up, rather than being an artificial activity, is "a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of."[198] *The Third Mind* (1978), Burroughs's collaboration with Gysin that offers several definitions as well as demonstrations of the cut-up, suggests that by reading texts written in this way "you will hear the disembodied voice which speaks through any newspaper on lines of association and juxtaposition. The mechanism has no voice of its own and can only talk indirectly through the words of others" (178). Of course, even Burroughs recognized that the cut-up was not essentially new, citing precursors such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Tristan Tzara's Dadaist experiments—even "Dos Passos used the same idea in "The Camera Eye" sequences in U.S.A. and I felt I had been working toward the same goal," Burroughs admitted (theparisreview.org). Similar to Glenn Gould, who hoped for a "participant listener," Burroughs felt the cut-ups would "involve much more of the total capacity of the observer" (theparisreview.org). Listening to recorded sounds with a tape recorder was not just another form of consumption. Rather, the listener regained the possibility for agency and became a producer of new sounds.

There are a number of parallels between Burroughs's approach to the listener/reader's role and that of the classical pianist and recording pioneer, Glenn Gould. Gould, who at the height of his career gave up performing in favor of the recording studio, presented quite a

[198] "Of course, . . . cut-ups make explicit a psychosensory process that is going on all the time anyway. Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. . . . That's a cut-up—a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of" (*The Job* 8).

challenge to the world of classical music, which privileged live performance. But as Evan Eisenberg pointed out, Gould imagined a "situation in which the artist disappears and the listener, shaping the music to his environment and his 'project at hand', becomes the artist" (83). In Gould's 1966 essay "The Prospects of Recording," he predicts a "new kind of listener—a listener more participant in the musical experience" (*Audio Culture Reader* 121). This new "participant listener," Gould continues, "is no longer passively analytical; he is an associate whose tastes, preferences, and inclinations even now alter peripherally the experiences to which he gives his attention, and upon whose fuller participation the future art of music waits" (122). Gould even went as far as to suggest granting the listener "tape-edit options which he could exercise at his discretion" (122). At the time, this provocation seemed little more than fantasy, but in 2012 Sony Music released *Glenn Gould: The Acoustic Orchestrations*, which includes not only a new spatial rendering of the score, but a CD-rom with a "Gouldian 'sound mixing kit'" that includes the unmixed tracks so that anyone with a computer or mobile device with multitrack applications (e.g. Apple's Garage Band) can create her own mix. Such listener-oriented remix applications have also become popular for the iPad with applications such as RJDJ Voyager, which allows listeners to remix recordings by well-known bands and DJs. In 1966 Gould predicted that the hierarchies between composer, performer, and listener would break down, as would the hierarchies between music and the environment. Without such hierarchies, "the audience would be the artist and their life would be art" (126). This dissolution of order reflected a larger shift during this period in aesthetic practices in music, but also in theater and writing. As mentioned earlier, John Cage imagined his role as composer becoming that of listener; in the book *In Search of a Concrete Music* (1952; trans. 2012), Pierre Schaeffer was especially interested in the way "the listener evolves into the composer" (120). The pioneer

of performance art, Allan Kaprow, and others began to explore breaking down of the fourth wall in theater and organized what they called "Happenings." The performance of poetry in cafes and clubs became more central to the poetry scene. Tom Wolfe described how the "Acid Tests" of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, for instance, were meant to be a "form of expression in which there would be no separation between himself and the audience" (Wolfe 8). In each of these scenarios, tape recorders were often present on the scene, and the notion of *play* was central to the collaborative modes of artistic exploration.

Burroughs's collaboration with Gysin and Sommerville to make recordings that applied the techniques of the cut-up to magnetic tape began in the early 1960s while he was working on the Nova trilogy. The experimental recordings, a few of which were broadcast on the BBC, inspired the incorporation of the tape recorder in *The Ticket That Exploded*. The first tape cut-ups involved "dropping-in," recording fragments *over* previous recordings at random. Dropping-in replicates deliberately what Kerouac experienced inadvertently while making recordings with Cassady. As Burroughs, Gysin, and Sommerville became more aware of all the potential facilities of the tape, they incorporated them into their experiments: techniques such as slowing-down, speeding-up, running backwards, inching the tape (also known as rubbing), playing several tracks at once, and cutting back and forth between two recorders. On "Silver Smoke of Dreams," made by Burroughs and Sommerville in the early 1960s, the recognizability of language diminishes significantly as new words and voices are *dropped in* the middle of others. Cutting between extremely short stretches of tape, perhaps no more than a couple of seconds, the voices of Burroughs and Sommerville (and sometimes Burroughs and Burroughs) intersect and interrupt one another as they read from the last page of *Ticket*. If the process does not exactly produce new words, it creates new word-like sounds. Especially prominent are the cut-ins of the

non-verbal utterances ("uhm" "ah" "st") and short inhales of breath between words.[199] At times, the repetitions give the sounds a rhythmic musical quality. Certain recognizable words and phrases bleed through, hinting at their origin—"the still," "Billy," "smell of late morning," "how to do it," "of dreams"—but more frequently, the listener is faced with isolated vocables and half-words.[200] Any attempt to transcribe these sounds, of course, would involve an act of interpretation and would crystallize a word whose sound and interpretation is meant to be open. As Gysin observed, the words produced by the drop-ins and splices "had never been said, by me or by anybody necessarily, onto tape" (Wilson 44). These were new words without any pre-determined meaning, spoken by a new voice—a voice only the tape recorder could produce.

Initial responses to *The Ticket That Exploded* when it was published in the U.S. in 1967 were mixed; Burroughs's cut-up style was no longer new, but the reading no less harrowing. Eliot Fremont-Smith of the *New York Times* praised *Ticket* for its humor and described it as comprising "a painting, perhaps a jukebox, of lethal, writing images and wails." However, Samuel Bellman of the *Los Angeles Times* criticized that *Ticket* "really isn't a novel after all but a mere idea for relating deviant behavior" and a "misuse of the machine for recording sounds." Bellman's critique only adds to the sense that *Ticket* is a kind of *Anarchist Cookbook* of tape technology and highlights the strange relationship between the tape recorder and the text. Accusing *Ticket* of *misusing* tape technology implies not simply objectionable writing, but an objectionable methodology. Responses like those of Bellman, however, are not surprising given

[199] Timothy Murphy compares "Silver Smoke of Dreams" to the works of Babbit and Stockhausen, and especially the children's voices in Stockhausen's "Gesang" (Murphy 217).

[200] Here is the passage as it appears in *Ticket*: "toneless voice in San Francisco? . . belong to the wind . . silver morning smoke in the desolate markets . . sure you dream up Bily who bound word for it . . in the beginning there was no Iam . . stale smoke of dreams it was Iam . . haunted your morning and will you other stale morning smell of other Iam . . no Iam there . . no one silences . . There was no morning . . sure late Billy . . Iam the stale Billy . . I lived your life a long time ago . . sad shadow whistles" (202).

the difficulty of Burroughs's weedy prose. Indeed, *Ticket* is not a novel in the traditional sense, and reading his cut-ups can be uncomfortable. One might even call it *revolting* in the broad sense of the word—disgusting in subject matter, but revolutionary in form.

Assessing Burroughs's radical formal methodologies in relation to his subject matter continues to be one of the most divisive aspects of critical responses. Our critical understanding of Burroughs is steeped in the mythology of his association with the Beats, his drug use, sexuality, and the ambivalent morality of his texts, not to mention the overtly misogynistic portrayals of women. Burroughs' first book *Junkie* (1953) chronicled his experiences as a drug addict, and the explicit portrayal of sexuality, violence, and drugs in *Naked Lunch* (1959) led to his trial on charges of obscenity.[201] Burroughs participation in the 1962 Edinburgh conference, where he presented on censorship and the future of the novel, was controversial, and though he was championed by other writers like Mary McCarthy and Norman Mailer, who praised the cut-up method and compared his satirical wit to Jonathan Swift, many were still skeptical and called his work "disgusting."[202] But as Robin Lydenberg and Jennie Skerl have suggested, the post-structuralism of the late 1960s and 70s made it easier to read Burroughs's book as "texts rather than messages," which led to his reconsideration among scholars who have argued that his techniques were justified (8).[203] N. Katherine H ayles points out that although Burroughs would

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[201] Regarding the Naked Lunch Massachusetts obscenity trial 1965, Skerl and Lydenberg have noted: "Norman Mailer, John Ciardi (then editor of the *Saturday Review*), and Allen Ginsberg, as well as professors from Harvard, Wellesley, and MIT, defended the novel as an important moral and social document, and all defended the structure of the book as artistically justified and having an underlying unity" (5).

[202] Lydenberg and Skerl write in their introduction: "Burroughs participated in the Edinburgh conference in 1962 as pat of the American delegation that also included Mary McCarthy, Norman Mailer, and Henry Miller. But he also became a subject of the conference in what became a battle between the ancients and the moderns, and between a conservative British literary establishment and the Americans. McCarthy stunned everyone by declaring that Burroughs was one of the most interesting and important new writers she had read recently, and Mailer referred to his 'vast talent'" (4-5)

[203] Robin Lydenberg compares Burroughs's attitudes toward language toward hose of Roland Barthes (in *Mythologies* and *S/Z*), suggesting that they are equivalent. According to Lydenberg, Barthes and Burroughs portray "a linguistic menace which threatens to destroy reality and human will by a process of parasitic absorption" (415);

not have read Derrida when working on *Ticket* (*Of Grammatology* was published the same year), he came to a similar conclusion about language. In a 1964 review in *The Nation*, Marshall McLuhan said that Burroughs's work in *Naked Lunch* and in the Nova trilogy was emblematic of the way the new media forms were shaping consciousness: "It is the medium that is the message because the medium creates an environment that is as indelible as it is lethal" (72).[204] At times it feels like McLuhan will apply his famous catch phrase to anything he can, but in Burroughs's treatment of the tape recorder, the medium and the message sometimes do appear interchangeable.

In the strange world Burroughs constructs, tape recorder viruses and tape recorder voices are layered into tape recorder landscapes. Thus, the tape recorder is a metaphor for mind control, but magnetic recording is also a way for Burroughs to imagine a kind of writing that is multilayered and constantly rewriting itself. In the following description of a phantasmagoric journey through "The Exhibition," the reader might not immediately recognize that she is inside a tape recorder:

> In a room with metal walls magnetic mobiles under flickering blue light and smell of ozone—jointed metal youths danced in a shower of blue sparks, erections twisted together shivering metal orgasms—Sheets of magnetized calligraphs drew colored iron filings that fell in clouds of color from patterns pulsing to metal music, off on, on off—(The spectators clicked through a maze of turnstiles)—

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both were "concerned with distorted communication, particularly with the transformation of the dialogue of discourse into the one-way "sending" of mass media propaganda" (419).

[204] Marshall McLuhan's theory also helps to explain reading the *text* vs. reading the *message:* "The message, it seemed, was about the 'content,' as people used to ask what a painting was *about*. Yet they never thought to ask what a melody was about, nor what a house or dress was about. In such matters, people retained some sense of the whole pattern, of form and function as unity" (McLuhan *Understanding Media* 13).

> Great sheets of magnetized print held color and disintegrated in cold mineral silence as word dust falls from demagnetized patterns […] The magnetic pencil caught in calligraphs of Brion Gysin wrote back into the brain metal patterns of silence and space. (62-63)

The scene is steeped in psychedelic images of swirling color, and a reader less familiar with the mechanics of magnetic tape recording could easily miss the fact that Burroughs has taken the reader down to the microscopic level of the tape where "metal music" pulses the long sheet into magnetized patterns. Whereas these recorded patterns are impossible to see with the naked eye, Burroughs zooms in on the technology to the point where sound becomes an image—amplified to the point of silence. Even the turnstiles evoke the rotating spindles around which the tape turns. Located within a routine titled "*writing machine*," the tape recorder shape-shifts and the spooling tapes become "conveyor belts" that, instead of spilling "talk and metal music fountains," take Shakespeare and Rimbaud and "shifts one half one text and half the other through a page frame" that in turn spits out new literary works. The scene is emblematic of the strange, associative relationship between tape and text throughout *The Ticket that Exploded*, where it is not always clear that Burroughs distinguishes between recording and writing, nor between medium and message. Although Burroughs is deeply invested in sound and recording experiments, their role in the text continually fluctuates between contingent metaphor and formal model.

The image of conveyor belt-tape is also useful for understanding the ever shifting and contingent relationship that Burroughs imagines his reader will have to the text as a result of the cut-ups and fold-ins—a relationship that I would argue is more like that of a listener than a reader. In interviews, Burroughs asserts that everything he writes is in the service of the

"juxtaposition of word and image" and their "very complex association lines," which he calls "coordinates" (theparisreview.org).[205] Not only does Burroughs encourage readers to cut-in and start reading at any point in the text, but through the cut-up method of assembling text, the writing performs the juxtaposition of unmatched text.[206] Thus, the writing does not always comply to expected rules of grammar, and the meaning of sentences can prove elusive. Instead, meaning depends upon the associations that percolate in the mind of the reader. Rather than operating on the basis of a cohesive narrative—which, when it appears, lasts no more than a few pages—cohesion in *The Ticket that Exploded* arises from "coordinates" and refrain-like words and phrases that recur throughout the book and the trilogy as a whole.[207] For example, phrases that appear in the passage above such as "cold mineral silence" repeat verbatim, but there is also a repetition of similar images (such as metallic dust) in various contexts, including "magnetic silver flakes" (66) "iron from pale word dust" (79) "silver morning smoke" (202), each of which evokes a sense of resonance and association.

As discussed elsewhere, listening depends upon hearing resonances and echoes. In the case of Burroughs's tape-recorder experiments with "inching" the tape, the reader is invited to partake in the role of "participant listener" in order to hear the words *between* words. These "coordinates" of association allow the text to cohere as a kind of constellation of moments, without being tied to a particular narrative time. Whereas these kinds of associations require listening in a more metaphoric sense, there are moments in *The Ticket That Exploded* that

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[205] Burroughs's interest in unsettling *word locks* has been connected to his interest in the work of Alfred Korzybski, the semanticist. In 1939, Burroughs heard Korzybski's lectures on semantics in Chicago, where he warned of the psychological problems that could arise from the misuse of language and language's mediating role in our experience of reality. *See* Russell 66-67.

[206] "You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point. . . . I have written many prefaces" (*Naked Lunch* 203).

[207] Timothy Murphy makes a similar observation about the trilogy, noting that "Many passages, both of cut-ups and of linear narrative, are repeated throughout all three novels and act like refrains or choruses to unify, to some small extent, the fractured story" (107).

explicitly play upon musical memory to demonstrate the degree to which recordings have programmed contemporary readers' minds. In "*do you love me?*" the young monk Bradly is tortured into painfully contorted ecstasies through tape recorded sounds of love making and popular songs:

> All the tunes and sound effects of '*Love*' spit from the recorder permuting sex whine of a sick picture planet: Do you love me?—But i exploded in cosmic laughter—Old acquaintance be forgot?—Oh darling, just a photograph—Mary I love you I do do you know i love you through—I would run till i feel the thrill of long ago—Now my inspiration but it won't last and we'll be just a photograph [...] Tell Laura i love my blue heaven—Get up woman off your big fat earth out into cosmic space with all your diamond rings—Do you do you do you love me? (44)[208]

Burroughs might have imagined this section as emulating the sound created by turning the radio dial at random, but for today's reader, the "do you love me" section is immediately recognizable as an elaborate mashup—a form which Burroughs arguably pioneered. A mashup is the combination of two or more songs to create a new song, and it is a form that has become a staple of early twenty-first-century cultural production (the practice is also sometimes applied to text and video). In sections like these, it is easy to see why so many musicians, bands, and DJs have been drawn to Burroughs's work. Through lyrical reference, Burroughs is deliberately drawing on the Newsreel strategies of John Dos Passos and playing on the way that recordings (through repetition) have been able to ingrain particular culturally-inscribed sounds into the minds of the

[208] Some of the songs that are immediately recognizable in the passage are: "Do you love me?" (1962, recorded by The Contours for Motown), "Auld Lang Syne" (traditional, poem by Robert Burns 1788), "Stardust" (1927, a Hoagy Carmichael standard considered to be one of the most popular songs of the 20th century), "Tell Laura I love her" (1960, a pop-ballad made popular by Ray Peterson), "My Blue Heaven" (1924, a standard by Walter Donaldson, popularized by Fats Domino in 1956), "St. Louis Blues" (1914, a traditional blues by W.C. Handy).

masses. On the one hand, the reader's familiarity with popular songs like "Stardust" enables Burroughs to create a pleasurable, even erotic, effect that draws upon the emotional associations the individual reader has with the music. But on the other hand, there is an inherent critique of the way that popular songs have affected a kind of mind control by ingraining themselves in the memories of unwitting listeners, which illustrates the problem with a passive kind of listening. Whereas a writer like Dos Passos seemed to want to evoke songs in their entirety (even specific recordings) through strategic reference, Burroughs's intersplicing of the song lyrics with one another to create new lyrical lines offers a way for obliterating the "association blocks" and creating new relationships to the words. This is Burroughs's innovation. Rather than treating popular song recordings as something static, he treats sound and lyrics like the materials for making art. In a 1972 *Rolling Stone* interview with Robert Palmer, Burroughs explained how his relationship with Gysin gave him a new attitude toward the materiality of making text: "The cut-up method treats words as the painter treats his paint, raw material with rules and reasons of its own" (67). When Burroughs turns this strategy to tapes of recorded music, it not only creates new sentences with new meanings, but the juxtaposition creates new melodic lines. For the reader who is familiar with these songs, reading the lyrics causes the melodies to sound in the mind. And as the fragments connect to one another, new and original melodies emerge.

Through the processes of reworking songs, texts, and other materials, Burroughs hopes to break open and rewrite the memory. "We think of the past as being there unchangeable," he suggested. "Actually the past is ours to shape and change as we will" (*The Job* 20). To illustrate this point, Burroughs uses the example of two men having a conversation. If the conversation is not recorded, it just exists in memory. But play back an altered tape recording over the

conversation and "the two actors will *remember* the altered recording" (*The Job* 20). This scenario, of course, could describe the tape recorder sessions between Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady, who struggle with the relationship between recording, memory, and writing. In *Ticket*, this scenario is represented by "engrams" and "engram clearing," which is a process by which memory can be written and re-written via tape and repetition. Engrams are part of a strategy devised by the Logos group to control people with word combos. In a therapy called *clearing* "you 'run' traumatic material which they call 'engrams' until it loses emotional connotation through repetition and is then refiled as neutral memory" (21). However, the system is open to abuses and "these 'engram' tapes are living organisms viruses in fact" (21). In other words, engram clearing is a kind of inoculation. The section that follows may be taken as the formal enactment of the engram clearing (starting on p. 21). Characterized by a lack of punctuation and text strung together in an endless line of em-dashes, this section consists of an endless montage of disturbing erotic images, samples of text from books, and disembodied voices.

In the manipulation of word and image, Burroughs was drawing on principles of advertising, and in resisting the mind-control aspects of language, he ends up adopting the strategies of the enemy.[209] But doing so places Burroughs in a double bind. The problem with writing a book that tries to resist language (through the random reordering of text via the cut-up method) is that text inevitably freezes language. The risk to the reader is that rather than being freed from the so-called mind-control, one simply becomes reprogrammed. In other words, by writing a book, Burroughs is also exerting a kind of mind control over the reader via text, which undermines his aims of subverting language. However, Burroughs has tried to account for this

[209] "I spent a year as a copywriter in this small advertising agency ….. I've recently thought a great deal about advertising. After all, they're doing the same sort of thing. They are concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image" (n.p. *theparisreview.org*).

possibility. Throughout *The Ticket That Exploded*, Burroughs includes implicit instructions for using the tape recorder by describing how the various process of Nova mind control is performed; and at the very end of the book, he includes overt instructions (written with Brion Gysin) for experimenting with tape recorders, and even suggests to the reader which brand to purchase: "a Philips compact cassette recorder" (208). Reading alone is not enough—Burroughs instructs the reader to actively engage the gadgetry and *perform* the cut-up process.[210] To read *The Ticket That Exploded* as a novel would therefore seem to be a mistake; it is not a novel, but a revolutionary How-To manual.[211]

"It's all done with tape recorders," Burroughs and Gysin assert in the final pages (205). Adopting the tone and language of tape recorder manuals and advertisements, the section titled "*the invisible generation*" provides detailed instructions for innovative ways to use the tape recorder. Some of the instructions seem innocuous, if a bit silly, such as saying a sentence backwards to unlearn it:

> a tape recorder can play back fast slow or backwards you can learn to do these things record a sentence and speed it up now try imitating your accelerated voice play a sentence backwards and learn to unsay what you just said… such exercises bring you a liberation from old association locks (206)

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[210] Burroughs acknowledged, "Of course, you can do all sorts of things on tape-recorders which can't be done anywhere else—effects of simultaneity, echoes, speed-ups, slow-downs, playing three tracks at once, and so forth. There are all sorts of things you can do on a tape-recorder that cannot possibly be indicated on a printed page. The concept of simultaneity cannot be indicated on a printed page except very crudely through the use of columns, and even then the reader must follow one column at a time. We're used to reading from left to right and then back, and this conditioning is not easy to break down" (*The Job* 13).

[211] Burroughs had different views about the relationship between traditional literary forms like the novel and new media forms. In a 1969 interview, *The Job*, he said, "I think that the novelistic form is probably outmoded and that we may look forward perhaps to a future in which people do not read at all or read only illustrated books and magazines or some abbreviated form of reading matter" (*The Job* 11). However, in a 1972 interview in *Rolling Stone*, he disagrees with Marshall McLuhan that print is on the way out and going to be replaced by other electronic media (60).

The tone of the instructions fluctuates wildly, from humorous and jovial, to absurd, to morbidly serious. One moment the narrator encourages, "go to the zoo and record the bellowings of Guy the gorilla" (207), the next, "why not give tape recorder parties?" (209). But in a more serious turn, the tape recorder becomes a tool for political resistance:

> go see some interesting results when several hundred tape recorders turn up at a political rally or a freedom march suppose you record the ugliest snarling southern law men several hundred tape recorders spitting it back and forth and chewing it around like a cow with the aftosa you now have a sound that could make any neighborhood unattractive (210)

The reference here to the civil rights movement is clear, and implies that to fight hate speech, one must take that hate speech and reinvent it until the sound itself becomes a weapon.[212] It is an instruction that might be said to foreshadow the recordings of Amiri Baraka on *It's Nation Time*, even if he was not using the tape recorder specifically. The only way to move past the fighting and arguing is to let the tape recorder do it for you and, according to Burroughs, "everybody splice himself in with everybody else" (212). Borrowing the language of the pioneering performance artist Allan Kaprow, Burroughs and Gysin claim that "tape recorders can create a happening anywhere" (214). Ultimately, "*the invisible generation*" manifesto asks "you" to take control of your own message by turning tape recorder listening into an active mode of sound production.

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[212] Burroughs was also interested in a phenomenon called "Infrasound," which was explored by the military as a possible weapon, but Burroughs though had implications for music as well. Infrasound, he offered in his 1972 *Rolling Stone* interview could be used "to produce very definite psycho-physiological effects in the audience, reader, viewer, as the case may be" (Palmer 52).

In a parallel development, the elaborate system of programmed, looped tape recorders that Burroughs and Gysin describe was made a reality by the ultimate purveyors of the "Happening," Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. In a scene where Neal Cassady was once again both literally and figuratively at the wheel, the Kesey compound was a kind of vast experimental recording studio where even the trees were wired for sound. Like Burroughs, Kesey felt that tape recorders represented a way not simply to record and reproduce sounds, but to solve larger philosophical problems of sensory experience. As Tom Wolfe describes it in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968):

> [Kesey] starts talking about the lag systems he is trying to work out with tape recorders. Out in the backhouse he has variable lag systems in which a microphone broadcasts over a speaker, and in front of the speaker is a second microphone. This microphone picks up what you just broadcast, but an instant later… A person has all sorts of lags built into him, Kesey is saying. One, the most basic, is the sensory lag, the lag between the time your senses receive something and you are able to react. One thirtieth of a second is the time it takes, if you're the most alert person alive… [Neal Cassady] is going as fast as a human can go, but even he can't overcome it…. (144-145)

The result of Kesey's variable lag system is that one is constantly speaking over echoes of echoes. Whether the system leads to harmonious sounds or merely cacophonous noise is left unaddressed. Having left his writing career behind, the Happenings, the Rolling Stones concerts, the acid tests, and the tape recordings became Kesey's main mode of artistic production. It was a mode in which one's life becomes one's art—a mode that Neal Cassady arguably pioneered and which inspired Jack Kerouac to write about him in the first place.

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During the last two decades of the twentieth-century, Burroughs achieved a level of pop notoriety not usually afforded writers, recording with rock musicians and even appearing on

Saturday Night Live.[213] As is well documented, his writings have inspired numerous songs and band names (from Steely Dan and Soft Machine to DJ Spooky, That Subliminal Kid), and in more recent years there have been several attempts to set parts of the Nova trilogy to music, including John Zorn's 2011 album *Nova Express* and James Ilgenfritz's 2011 opera *The Ticket That Exploded*. In speaking with Ilgenfritz on March 1, 2013, it became clear to me that *Ticket* had become both a work to set to music as well as a how-to manual for his method of composition. Ilgenfritz's modular score does not adhere to traditional modes of notation and instead attempts to visually express timbre, dynamics, and velocity and allow for the improvisation of the individual performer. The aesthetic of the tape recorder is built into the score through fugal soundings of the words between words and "looped duets" in which singers are encouraged to duet with prerecordings of themselves. In Ilgenfritz's opera, one can hear Cage and Burroughs come together along with the rock sounds of electric guitar and bass.

As Mr. Ilgenfritz reminded me, there is a good reason that William Burroughs appears on the cover of the Beatles's 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—and it is not simply because the publication of *Naked Lunch* had made him a cult figure. Burroughs, through his tape recorder experiments in the early 1960s with Ian Sommerville and Brion Gysin, had become one of the influences on how the Beatles were beginning to use the recording studio. In 1966 shortly after Burroughs returned to London, Paul McCartney invited Burroughs to listen to an early cut of *Rubber Soul* at the studio they had set up for Ian Sommerville (Morgan 8875). *Rubber Soul* was not nearly as experimental as *Revolver* (1966) or *Sgt. Pepper's* (1967) would be, but it did include some early experiments with the tape, such as playing a recorded piano

[213] Burroughs read excerpts from *Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express* on Saturday Night Live on November 7, 1981 http://www.openculture.com/2012/02/william_s_burroughs_on_saturday_night_live_1981.html.

back at double speed for the harpsichord effect on "In My Life."[214] As Burroughs recalled, he had several conversations with McCartney and Sommerville around this time about the possibilities of the tape recorder, such as overlaying and running backwards,[215] and McCartney considered Burroughs something of a mentor.[216] McCartney had even planned to launch a spoken-word label with Sommerville, Burroughs, and Barry Miles that would incorporate poetry, interviews, and experimental music (T. Morton 8890). But it is easy to forget the connection between these experimental pop albums and the avant-garde literary and tape-recorder experiments of a fringe figure like Burroughs.

Burroughs himself was not a huge fan of Rock and Roll music, but his approach to sound would anticipate and give forward momentum to hard rock and punk rock to come. Figures from Mick Jagger to Kurt Cobain revered Burroughs, and in their screams, the squeals of their guitars, and their obscured vocals, one can hear the resonance of the kinds of sound Burroughs brings forth in his work and encourages through nontraditional uses of the recorded medium: the sounds in between the words, the feedback, the peals of sped-up-speech, the rubbing of the tape. When Burroughs applied his cut-up method—a process that involves juxtaposing cut or folded pages of text at random to create new texts—to the realm of tape, he not only shifted how we think about

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[214] As Evan Eisenberg rightly points out George Martin, the producer an arranger credited with crafting the Beatles' recorded sound, helped give "dramatic continuity" to albums like *Sgt. Pepper's*—albums that elevated "kitsch into Dada" (104).

[215] *See* Victor Bockris, *With William Burroughs: A Report From the Bunker*: "Burroughs: … This was when the Beatles were just getting into the possibilities of overlaying, running backwards, the full technical possibilities of the tape recorder. And Ian was a brilliant technician along those lines.

"Ian met Paul McCartney and Paul put up the money for this flat which was at 34 Montagu Square… I saw Paul several times. The three of us talked about the possibilities of the tape recorder. He'd just come in and work on his 'Eleanor Rigby.' Ian recorded his rehearsals. I saw the song taking shape. Once again, not knowing much about music, I could see that he knew what he was doing. He was very pleasant and very prepossessing. Nice-looking young man, hardworking" (72).

[216] In a recorded interview, Barry Miles also remembered Burroughs' presence while Paul McCartney was writing "Eleanor Rigby" and Paul's feelings that Burroughs was a "mentor" figure. http://www.lawrence.com/audioclips/4831/; *See also* Barry Miles, *El Hombre Invisible*, 148.

the malleability of recorded sound, but he created a link between modernist collage and the aesthetic gestures that have come to define much of late twentieth and early twentieth century aesthetics, including the remix and the mashup.

Chapter Four

The Stereophonic Poetics of Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka

> *If you play James Brown (say, "Money Won't Change You . . . but time will take you out") in a bank, the total environment is changed. Not only the sardonic comment of the lyrics, but the total emotional placement of the rhythm, instrumentation and sound. An energy is released in the bank, a summoning of images that take the bank, and everybody in it, on a trip. That is, they visit another place. A place where Black People live.*
>
> –Amiri Baraka, *Black Music*

When James Brown released *Live at the Apollo* in 1963, no one but Brown could have predicted the phenomenon it would become. King Records, Brown's label, initially declined to make the record because Brown did not plan to feature any new songs, but Brown could feel that the timing was right and that his band was primed, so he made the record at his own expense.[217] The album, which was recorded in stereo, captures not only the energy of Brown's singing and signature falsetto scream but also the supercharged waves of the audience's shouts and wails as they resound in the large Harlem theater. But what does it mean to be "live" and "at the Apollo"? When listening to the album in one's living room, the sounds of one's own environment are interpenetrated by and reverberate with those of the Apollo theater, such that when Brown calls out "I want to hear you scream!" he could be speaking to you. In critical circles and among record collectors, *Live at the Apollo* is frequently cited as one of the greatest "live" albums of all time. Yet, at times, the excitement of the album seems to have less to do with the music than the vicarious crowd experience, which Phillip Auslander has argued is the only real difference between a live album and a studio recording.[218] One might argue that the audience performs a kind of useful listening frame, and yet on this album, something else is going on. As Amiri Baraka has said of James Brown's records, his music "makes an image," and, as the passage

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[217] James Brown recorded the October 24, 1962, *Live at the Apollo* album at his own expense when his label refused.

[218] *See* Auslander, 60.

above suggests, if you are listening to James Brown in some ordinary place like a bank, "an energy is released in the bank, a summoning of images that take the bank, and every body in it, on a trip. That is, they visit another place. A place where Black People live" (*Black Music* 186). But where is this place, and *where* are we when we listen to such an album? When listening to *Live at the Apollo*, the answer is not simply that we are simultaneously in our own home and at the Apollo theater; there is an implied third, more complicated audio space—one that is also strangely visual: a stereophonic dimension. Listening is always a complicated act, and the ways we listen to records are as varied as there are listeners, but while music has always had transportative qualities, the stereo LP with its long form and two channels of sound created a new and underexplored frame for understanding sonic space. In this chapter, I turn to works by two authors whose poetry directly engages with the stereo LP—Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka—as a way to explore how stereo enabled the possibility of new black sonic spaces at a contentious moment in history.

In turning to poetry at this moment in a dissertation that primarily deals with works of prose, I must admit to making something of a generic leap. After all, allusions to the phonograph and recorded sounds can be found in the works of just about every major modernist poet from T.S. Eliot to William Carlos Williams and beyond; iconic recordings such as Eliot's reading of the "The Wasteland" have come to inflect many readers' hearing of the poems.[219] Langston Hughes himself was among the early poets to engage with the recorded medium in the 1920s. As such, there are a number of strong works of criticism that have treated the relationship between

[219] As Steve McCafferty points out, with the Russian Futurists and the Dadists the "phonemic aspect of language finally became isolated and explored for its own sake" (149).

avant-garde poetry and sound reproduction technology.[220] However, while critics have done a good job of addressing the impact of the phonograph and the advent of recording broadly (and to a lesser degree the later popularity of the tape recorder at poetry readings), most have tended to gloss over rather significant developments in sound reproduction technology after WWII that shaped music as well as writing, namely high-fidelity, long-play, and stereo.[221] This oversight is evident in the continued dominance of thinkers like Walter Benjamin in the discourse. Writing before the era of LP and stereo, Benjamin stressed the absence of "the here and now" of recorded works (21). Technologies that abstract sounds and images from a particular place and time purportedly free them from *aura,* Benjamin argued (24). But do his claims still hold true when stereo sound reproduction technology can arguably reproduce the spatial qualities of sound?[222]

If there has been something of a lag in the field of sound studies to address how the LP and stereo shifted our listening, Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka offer potential approaches to these new sonic spaces. As two of the most canonical American poets, Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka are usually considered in light of the African American poetic tradition and their engagement with jazz; however, despite their generational differences, their experimentation

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[220] Some of the best critical works on this subject include: *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (1998); *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adelaide Morris (1998); and *Wireless Imagination: Sound Radio and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (1994).

[221] This oversight may be due in part to the kinds of recordings made by poets: early in the recorded era, records of poets reading their works were driven by a desire to preserve the poet's voice for posterity, and recordings were thus made of their most famous poems. Now as then, the majority of poetry that is recorded is not written with recorded medium in mind, and recorded readings have varying degrees of performativity. Eliot's reading of *The Wasteland*, for example, is famously dry. There have been notable exceptions, however, including the works of Dadaists such as Guillaume Apollinaire, F.T. Marinetti, and Jean Cocteau. But if only a few treated the record as an object of the poetry in and of itself, it is likely because records were treated primarily as popular commodities rather than art objects. However, this attitude would shift later in the century when advances in recording technology made longer, better quality recordings a reality, and "album" or "LP" gained the status of cultural artifact in addition to being a disposable popular artform.

[222] Michael Davidson argues that "with the rise of poetry readings in jazz clubs, coffee houses, and college auditoriums in the late 1950s, the tape recorder returned a kind of oral aura to poetry at a point where it had been, as Olson phrased it, removed from the 'producer and reproducer'" (99).

with the recorded medium makes their mid-century works crucial sites for investigation as we continue to explore the ongoing engagement between literature and recording. For this reason I turn to Langston Hughes's "LP" book, *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961), and Amiri Baraka's LP recording for Motown's Black Forum Label, *It's Nation Time* (1972). Just as their works are not the first works of poetry to interact with recordings, neither are Baraka and Hughes the only poets to record LPs. What distinguishes these works is the ongoing dialogue with the specificities of stereo sound, the LP, and their theoretical models of sound in its spatial dimensions. In this chapter, I am purposefully extending the idea of what "stereophonic" can mean and thus use the term broadly to refer to sound in its technological-spatial dimension. What makes this *stereophonic dimension* different from ordinary audition, however, is the way it opens a space within a space: one that is neither outside nor in-between, but central and simultaneous. Whether sitting in your living room with an LP on the stereo or listening to your headphones plugged into your smart phone, suddenly you are participating in two (or more) spaces.[223] It is, on some level, a fundamental modeling of the modern multimedia environment. With just two channels of sound, stereo promises to project a total sound image before you.

Generationally speaking, we tend to consider Hughes and Baraka separately—Hughes as part of the Harlem Renaissance, and Baraka as part of Black Arts—but in the poetry they wrote during the1960s, we can track both the overlapping themes as well as the transitions of a historical moment marked in the United States by the civil rights movement. Stereophonic sound ushered in a wave of experimentation by musicians, audiophiles, and sound engineers; but the stakes of sonic space are heightened when considered in light of historical circumstances. In the United States, the 1960s were marked by the Civil Rights movement and the struggle to end

[223] Caroline Bassett writes about this phenomenon as it relates to mobile phone technology in "How Many Movements?" in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (New York: Berg, 2003), 343-55.

segregation and systematized discrimination against African Americans, but globally the 1960s was also an incredibly tumultuous time for African and Afro-Diasporic people. There was civil war in the Congo, protests against apartheid in South Africa, and a renewed sense among black intellectuals in America, like Hughes and later Baraka, that the struggles of African Americans were linked to those of African people everywhere.[224] As Brent Edwards documents in *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism,* the sense of a black internationalism had existed since the early twentieth century and was an underlying force behind the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.[225] Langston Hughes, though thought of as the quintessential Harlem Renaissance poet, had traveled to West Africa, Paris, Mexico, the Caribbean, Russia, and elsewhere, and such travels informed his writing. But what was the relationship between these disparate people of African descent? Did such a people so geographically dispersed comprise a nation? What of the relationship between the United States and its black citizens? Could they inhabit the same spaces in peace? What would happen to black culture in an integrated America? After all, as Amiri Baraka has said, the issue of segregation (and later Black Nationalism) was always a "space question" (qtd. Szwed, *Space is the Place* 311). What role could listening play in the constitution of a community?

The tension between sound and space becomes audible in Langston Hughes's book-length poem *Ask Your Mama*, which uses the LP as a model for poetic form and features twelve "tracks," two channels of poetry and musical description, and liner notes. Hughes had been writing blues poems since the 1920s, but now they included "Blues in Stereo." Arguably a precursor of the Black Arts Movement that would develop in the 1960s, Hughes's LP book,

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[224] *See* Lowney, 562-4.

[225] As Edwards notes, W.E.B. Du Bois attended at the Pan-African Conference in 1900; see *The Practice of Diaspora*, 1-3.

which critiqued segregation and began imagining a black transnationalism, laid the groundwork for the numerous recordings by black poets in the late 1960s. When Amiri Baraka released *It's Nation Time* on Motown's Black Forum label in 1972, it represented a kind of book-end to the Black Arts movement.[226] While *Ask Your Mama* alludes to an emerging global black consciousness, *It's Nation Time* attempts to use sound to establish a new Black Nation with a poetry that screamed and raged in dynamic engagement with free jazz, R&B, and African drumming. In moving from book to LP in this chapter, we are necessarily confronted with questions of textuality and of what constitutes a poetic text. In their poetic performances of the stereo LP, Hughes and Baraka call upon the listening ear to pry open new spaces and call into question the mediated divide. While both Hughes and Baraka are drawing upon the high-modernist epics (of the likes of Eliot, Pound, Olson, and Williams) in these long-form poems, adopting the "mass" form of the LP allows them to remain firmly situated within a vernacular tradition and turn their ears to the plight of African Americans and their history as the Civil Rights movement got underway. Although one work is a book and the other is an LP, in both instances we find Hughes and Baraka invoking the new technology's ability to create previously unimagined auditory spaces that help negotiate the difficulties African Americans (and other Afro-diasporic peoples) faced in being unable either to return to Africa or to disappear into white America.[227]

A number of critics have alluded to the sonic spatial dimension of these works in passing, but in this chapter I will show how stereophonic sound came to play a central role in the poetics

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[226] It should be noted that the poetry on *It's Nation Time* draws upon poems printed in pamphlets, such as the similarly titled *It's Nation Time* (1970) and *Spirit Reach* (1971), in addition to original lyrics written for the album.

[227] Fred Moten claims that Amiri Baraka's poem, "Black Dada Nihilismus" is "about the absence, the irrecoverability of an originary and constitutive event; the impossibility of a return to Africa, the impossibility of an arrival at an American home" (*In the Break* 94).

of negotiating the issues of racial segregation, integration, and later Black Nationalism that Hughes and Baraka touch upon in their works. My own intervention draws upon the work of Alexander Weheliye, who has noted that despite cultural historians' interest in space as it relates to the postmodern moment, few have thought about the sonic dimensions of space. In his readings of Ralph Ellison's "Living with Music" (1955) and Darnell Martin's film *I Like It Like That* (1994), Weheliye maintains that music influences and shapes the spaces in which we dwell, arguing that "*consuming* sonic technologies and *being consumed* by them suggest specifically modern ways of be(com)ing in the world" (*Phonographies* 107). However, while Weheliye makes an important point about how sonic technologies shape the places we already inhabit, he fails to consider either the projective aspects of sonic space or the connection between spatialized uses of sound and the development of stereo technology. Writings about both Hughes and Baraka have pointed out the importance of the spatial dimensions in their poetry that offers useful connections between space and a radical intervention. Larry Scanlon's "News from Heaven: Vernacular Time in Langston Hughes's 'Ask Your Mama'," which is perhaps the best critical essay on the work to date, briefly alludes to the interesting tension between the spatial and temporal dimensions of the text, citing the repeating figure of the shadow or shade in the poem, which, "paradoxically, because it is spatial, . . . is also an image of simultaneity" (55). And yet simultaneity draws the spatial and the temporal into dialogue. Fred Moten takes us a step closer to the issue regarding Baraka's work, noting that "syncopation, performance, and the anarchic organization of phonic substance delineate an ontological field wherein black radicalism is set to work" (*In the Break* 85). In addressing Baraka's radical poetic turn in the mid-1960s, Moten argues that "Baraka plays: from question to assertion, from line to line (spatial reorientations) from sight to sound," adding that "we might look at that temporal-spatial

discontinuity as a generative break, one wherein action becomes possible" (95, 99). But why did *space* become such a recognizable feature of works that frame the Black Arts movement? Why did so many poets start making poetry and protest albums? Why does the issue of *space* feature in poems that so directly engage with sound recording technology? Although Sun Ra declared in 1973 that "*Space is the Place*," most listeners have struggled to follow what he meant. In order to unpack these questions and understand how these works are engaging with stereo and the LP, it is important first to think a little bit about the history of the technological developments.

Now in Stereo: Mid-Century Developments in Sound Reproduction Technology

When the LP (or long-play disc) was first introduced commercially in 1948 followed by stereo recording in 1958, little distinguished the new technology from the records that came before: LPs were still big flat discs, and historical accounts of the period frame the LP as a marketing ploy on behalf of the recording industry to increase the sale of records in the face of competition from radio and television.[228] As a result, in the field of sound studies, many works cover the advent of the phonograph and recorded sound, but few address further developments. To a generation of serious listeners and audiophiles, however, the LP (and the technological advances it represented) was something of a technological revelation; even Ralph Ellison was, as he says, "obsessed with the idea of reproducing sound with such fidelity that even when using music as a defense behind which I could write, it would reach the unconscious levels of the mind with the least distortion" ("Living with Music"11). Part of the difficulty of talking about this period in the technology's development is that when we say "LP" or "album" we are often unknowingly talking about a complex of technological advances that also included high-fidelity,

[228] *See* Millard 202-208; Morton 130-138.

tape, and stereo.[229] It was not just that long-play vinyl albums could hold twelve times the amount of music; high fidelity and stereo promised to bring the sound of the concert hall and the jazz nightclub into your home. However, I would argue that the shift was even greater than that: stereo sound exploded the divide between the audio and the visual by pushing sound into the spatial realm, fundamentally shifting the paradigm by which we had considered recorded sound and drawing attention to the way sounds already influenced our experience of the spatial environment.

In addressing this change, let us consider not only the impact of long-play on the cultural status of recordings but also the more technical aspects of stereo sound. The long-play record, which could hold about 20-25 minutes per side, was made possible by the introduction of vinyl, a material that, unlike the shellac of the old 78 rpm records, reduced the size of the groove as well as the surface noise and also improved the recorded signal, making it possible to record more music in the same amount of disc space with slower revolutions (or fewer rpms). In 1948 Columbia records released the 33⅓ rpm long-playing disc, and in 1949 RCA Victor released its 45 rpm seven-inch disc; both claimed to be "high-fidelity." The push for ever greater fidelity had been a concern since Edison's era, and the motivations for long-play came from the desire to put an entire symphony on a single disc. Yet, the implications of long-play had a broader reach; for jazz in particular, the LP meant that records could finally capture the longer-form improvisations so common in performances, and across jazz and pop the album encouraged thinking of

[229] Despite the interchangeability of the terms "LP" and "album," the term "album" actually precedes the advent of the LP and refers to a small collection of 78s that were released as a set in a book (or album) with sleeves for multiple records. In the introduction to *Setting the Tempo: Fifty Years of Great Jazz Liner Notes* (1996), Tom Piazza notes that the album was the result of record companies reissuing material by popular artists. The earliest instance appears to be an album of Bix Beiderbecke recordings on Victor released in 1936. In repackaging the music, there was a tendency to historicize and mythologize, according to Piazza, thus necessitating booklets with linernotes. It was not until 1940, with Decca's *Chicago Jazz*, that sets of multiple new recordings were released as albums. As collections, albums themselves became a subject of interest, and so liner notes sometimes explained the process of recording.

individual songs as part of a larger work. Thus, long-play made it possible for records to attain higher status as works of art, and high-fidelity stereo sound put recorded sounds back into a three-dimensional space. By the early 1960s, the album had reached a point where its cultural currency rivaled the book, and hi-fi stereos and record libraries were prominent features in the average living room. For an audiophile like Langston Hughes, who had an extensive record collection and even wrote a children's book about rhythm that included technical explanations of sound waves, an appeal to the LP was not simply an attempt to be hip to the changing times but demonstrated an attentiveness to technological form and the cultural role of LPs and stereo sound.[230]

Long-play readjusted the temporal frame of the record and helped to confirm its status as an art object, but stereo gave recorded sound a spatial dimension it previously lacked, a development that deserves more critical attention. Stereo was in some ways an outgrowth of the high-fidelity movement. Using two (or more) microphones, stereo recordings inscribe both sides of the record's groove with two channels of sound that, when replayed, produce the illusion of hearing sound in a real space. David Morton points out in his history of recorded sound that "a scientific mindset among technicians and engineers contributed to the notion that the music heard in the home on the radio or on disc should ideally sound exactly like the original performance," and thus the obsession with high-fidelity not only drove research into new

[230] Even in his illustrated children's book *Rhythm* (1954), Hughes demonstrates his familiarity with the scientific definitions of sound and rhythm, and the various technological devices used to measure and produce them. Writing about sound waves and electronics, he describes how radio makes use of electro-magnetic waves to transport sounds, and discusses the phonodeik, a device for transcribing sound waves, including different graphs of sound waves for voice, violin, and bell tones. Hughes intrinsically translates between the visual and sonic rhythms, which makes his visual translation of stereo on the page all the more alluring.Though stereo was still a relatively new phenomena when Hughes was writing (it had just become commercially available in 1957), *Ask Your Mama* demonstrates an intuitive understanding of how stereo sound works.

materials but also into better ways to replicate our own binaural hearing (131).[231] As cognitive psychologists tell us, our ability to locate sounds in space is the result of a complex array of auditory information, but the two main ways that we are able to locate sounds in space are due to (1) the interaural time difference, and (2) the interaural level difference—in other words, the difference in time as sound hits one ear and then the other, and also the difference in volume as it encounters the ear that is closer to the sound source.[232] By recording sounds with two (or more) microphones and then replaying the sound through two speakers, the technology mimics these functions of the ear, and listening to stereo recordings creates an effect similar to listening to sound "live." However, this desire was not simply about replicating the original performance but rather about presenting the sound of that performance within a culturally inscribed setting, such as the concert hall; stereo recordings reproduce not just the sound of the instruments but the sound of the space in which they are produced. It gives the listener the sense that she could locate the sources of the sound in space and creates what audio engineers refer to as a "sound image."[233] In this way, stereo became a theatre of sound: both a performance space and a performance *of* space.

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[231] As Eric D. Barry points out in "High-Fidelity Sound as Spectacle and Sublime, 1950-1961," the desire for high-fidelity also represented something of a paradox, on the one hand claiming a greater degree of realism, and on the other hand promising the magical and the sublime. In the early 1950s, audiophiles like Emory Cook were experimenting with hi-fidelity recordings, aspiring not just to "concert hall realism" but "entering a spectacular world of sound and reveling in the power of technology to deliver a sublime experience" (116). High-fidelity wanted to be "more sensational than the real thing" (118).

[232] According to cognitive psychologists, part of the reason we are able to discern space has to do with the fact that sound, depending on its location, will reach one ear before the other. This very small time difference (as small as 10 microseconds) allows us to process our spatial orientation along a lateral plane. This is the interaural time difference. This difference is accentuated by the small difference in sound level between the two ears—that is, how loud it is on one side versus the other. However, scientists still know relatively little about the exact factors by which we determine distance, which is impacted by a number of factors including volume, the sound's frequency, and reflection off other surfaces. (see Goldstein 378)

[233] For further reading on the sound image and sound localization, *see* Peter Damaske, *Acoustics and Hearing* (2008); E. Bruce Goldstein, *Sensation and Perception* (2002), 376-390; and William A. Yost, *Fundamentals of Hearing* (2007), 173-184.

This projective, three-dimensional quality of sound has interesting roots in the term itself. Stereo, rather than referring to binaurality or two channels of sound, comes from the Greek *stereo-* meaning solid or three-dimensional. As Evan Eisenberg describes it in *The Recording Angel* (1987),

> Stereo . . . arrays the musicians before you in empty space. You can almost pinpoint them, but they're not there. Instead of projecting, they are projected—but invisible, "a ghastly band". The introduction of stereo did not simply double the listener's pleasure; it changed the phenomenology of the phonograph by adding a spatial, and hence a visual, aspect that at once clarified and confused. (53)

The image here may recall the ghostly listeners that Alan Lomax evokes to frame Jelly Roll Morton's narrative, but now in stereo, these projections are locatable. Since stereo's two channels attempt to replicate that aspect of our binaural hearing that allows us to spatially locate sounds, recordings seem ever more palpable, even visual. Audiophile publications such as *Gramophone* were quick to marvel at the promise of stereo and its visual sound. As Joseph Enock put it in a 1956 issue of *Gramophone*, there was a sense of "anticipatory gilt" in the coming synaesthetic technology "which together would make up the complete moving sound picture that was being presented for the enjoyment of the listener. Or should I say 'viewer'" (101). Some listeners found the new pleasure of listening to stereo hard to pinpoint, and Reid A. Railton remarked in 1958 that "of course it is true that stereo very definitely 'has something,'" but because the attractive quality of that "something" was so difficult to name, "the attraction may well lie chiefly in the novelty of the sensation, and may prove to wear off rather quickly" (69). Of course, the visuality of stereo sound is not accidental.

One of the ironies of stereo is that although it was popularized by LP records, the initial push for stereophonic sound technology came not from the record industry but from the film industry starting in the early thirties.[234] Remarkably enough, the first film released with stereo sound was Disney's *Fantasia* in 1940, an animated film accompanied by classical orchestral pieces; in other words, sound was being used to enhance the dimensionality of a visual medium, and in the case of animation, a determinedly flat medium.[235] These connections between the audio and the visual would not be lost on Hughes or Baraka, and Hughes in particular uses the visual space of the page in unusual ways that have stereophonic effects.

When combined with longer recording time, stereo also made it possible to make convincing "live" recordings, which became increasingly popular during the period. The desire for a more "live" or true-to-life sound was propelled by classical music's attempts to reproduce the concert hall sound, but it also translated into jazz and pop recordings; for example, before stereo, Sam Phillips (who recorded Elvis at Sun Studios in Memphis) used heavy echo effects

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[234] Rick Altman points out in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (1992), that J.P. Maxfield of Western Electric asserted that "sound scale must always match image scale" (Altman 49). Maxfield argued for placing the microphone near the line of sight of the camera because that way "characters approaching the camera automatically approach the microphone as well" (50). However, even Maxfield understood that "volume alone is an insufficient marker of distance . . . [and] earlier revealed the importance of reverberation" (50). He further showed that "the focusing capabilities of the listening binaural human subject permitting humans to selectively cut out a certain percentage of reflected sound, have no parallel in the monaural sound collection system of cinema" (50).

Ironically, during the thirties (when stereo sound was still just an aspiration), studios began adopting a strategy of mic'ing everything close to the source, in effect flattening the sound in a way that more closely resembled radio, and privileged the dialogue intelligibility above all (borrowing from theater) (55). It was a rejection of the "real" in some ways. As Altman himself argues, "The real can never be represented; representation alone can be represented" (55).

[235] Though film of the 1930s and 1940s tended to favor a flattened sound in which everything was close mic'd, studios continued to invest in the development in stereo sound and worked with Bell Labs in the process. Disney's *Fantasia* in 1940 (at the time, Disney called it "Fantasound") was a unique case. *See* Andrew R. Boone, "Mickey Mouse Goes Classical," *Popular Science* [Jan. 1941], 65. As Boone tells us, the development of the sound for *Fantasia* was in many ways the brainchild of the conductor Leopold Stokowski, who had earlier worked with Bell Labs to do a demonstration of stereo recordings of the Philadelphia Academy of Music at Carnegie Hall.

and strategic microphone placement to get a more "live" quality (Chanan 103).[236] Studios also began using magnetic tape in the process of recording around this time, which enabled multiple takes and splicing, in addition to much longer takes.[237] Tape also made the recording process more portable, which made it easier to record in "live" performance venues. The emergence of commercially available stereo recordings in 1958, therefore, represented an attempt to accommodate this desire for even greater fidelity to a "live" sound. Albums like James Brown's *Live at the Apollo* thus allow the listener to enjoy not just the extended nature of live recording but also to experience the sound of the theater itself. Whereas stereo had been invented with the idea of reproducing the sounds of real places, recording artists and others soon discovered that it could also produce spaces that never existed before.

In this chapter, I turn to the works of Hughes and Baraka in order to explore how they employ the LP to develop a stereophonic poetic, characterized by sound in its spatial dimension. Although Hughes and Baraka were working in different media, the stereophonic poetic allowed both poets to pry open new sonic spaces for poetic protest at two quite different moments in the Civil Rights movement. Hughes was primarily concerned with the geography of *place* as integration got underway—i.e. what happens to the "quarter of the Negroes"—but Baraka was more interested in opening a new *space* in which a new Black Nation could be born. Thus, the album *It's Nation Time* taps into a stereo imagination of infinite new spaces, including previously unimagined black sonic spaces.

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[236] Even the length of the long-play album is largely determined by the desire to fit an entire symphony on a single disc.

[237] During WWII, the discovery of Germany's high-fidelity tape recording devices led to the development of that technology by the United States military for spying purposes. Commercially, tape was first used to pre-record radio programs promoted by Bing Crosby, who invested in Ampex, and the technology was soon adapted for use in recording studio.The combination of high-quality vinyl with lighter pickups greatly increased the fidelity of records. *See* Andre Millard, *America on Record*, 189-211.

Langston Hughes and the LP Book

Langston Hughes began writing *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* on July 4, 1960, just two days after a riot at the Newport Jazz Festival brought the festival to a premature end. Hughes, who was on the board of the festival and was engaged to give a demonstration lecture on the history of the blues with John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Sammy Price, and others, saw the riot as a significant event.[238] Though the rioters were primarily white college-aged men, Hughes recognized that it was black jazz that had ignited them.[239] Just a few months earlier, Hughes had also witnessed youth protests beginning to flare in the south while giving a reading in Atlanta, where he saw the black students of Atlanta University engaged in tension with the police, and this along with the Newport riots raised a new awareness in Hughes (Rampersad 309). Hughes had a premonition that the struggles of the Negro people in America would soon erupt, and, so emboldened by the young black protestors and the fiery power that black music held over young white people, Hughes put down on *record* a more caustic poetic protest of his own. Hughes furiously began scribbling the first lines of *Ask Your Mama* in pencil on scraps of pocket notebook paper and hotel stationary, returning again and again to the line: *In the quarter of the Negroes . . .*[240]

As Hughes's longest and arguably most ambitious poem, the wide-ranging scope of *Ask Your Mama* lends itself to a variety of different readings. Nearly all studies point to Hughes's

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[238] You can listen to a recording of the concert and lecture on Wolfgang's Vault here: http://www.wolfgangsvault.com/goodbye-newport-blues/concerts/newport-jazz-festival-july-03-1960-afternoon-show.html

[239] When large crowds (est. 3000) were turned away from the festival on July 2, 1960, with a lineup featuring Oscar Peterson, Lambert Hendricks and Ross, Ray Charles, and others, they began to tear down the fences and oust patrons from their seats. The police began blasting the crowd with fire hoses and called in the National Guard to try to quiet the rioters. *See* Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes, Vol. II*, 315-316.

[240] These and other early drafts of *Ask Your Mama* are part of the Langston Hughes Collection at Yale's Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, JWJ MSS 26, Boxes 271-272.

protest against racism in the face of the civil rights movement (what Hughes termed a "polite protest"). Larry Scanlon has a studied the poem as a meditation on the "dozens"—an African American form of ritual insult that most of us recognize as "yo' mama" jokes. Arnold Rampersad has drawn parallels between *Ask Your Mama* and modernist epics such as T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos.* Others have studied both Hughes's critique of the white-dominated music industry and the relationship between music and the text. Meta DuEwa Jones has revisited the performative voice of Hughes, and Josh Kun writes about the exchange of African American and Afro-Cuban music. More recently, scholars have turned to the international consciousness of the poem, and John Lowney argues that "the jazz form of *Ask Your Mama* enacts the challenge of developing a progressive black transnationalist public" (564). That the poem has elicited such rich and varied readings is a testament to its multifaceted depth; thus, it is not my aim to dismiss these approaches. Rather, I want to focus on how Hughes's disc-tortions of the poetic and recorded form exploited the new technologies of the stereo LP, as well as how the stereophonic dimension created new avenues for Hughes to rethink the geopolitical spaces inhabited by Afro-diasporic peoples.

By the time Hughes began writing *Ask Your Mama*, he had already established himself as one of the most famous poets in America, known primarily for his short lyric works, his characteristic invocation of black vernacular speech, and especially his blues. Having read his poetry with Harlem jazz musicians since the mid-1920s, his revival in the late 1950s with the downtown poetry-to-jazz scene was no surprise. At the suggestion of the producer Leonard Feather, he even released an album with Feather and Charles Mingus, *Weary Blues* (1958). However, Hughes's collaboration with Mingus and Feather did not quite live up to his ideas about an album of poetry. Longer and much grander in scope than his earlier blues and short

works, *Ask Your Mama* consists of twelve poems or "tracks," coyly explanatory "liner notes" for the "unhep," and a prefatory note stating that the "Hesitation Blues" is the *leitmotif* of the poem. But what is perhaps more notable is the unique form the poems assume on the page. The book itself is squarish in shape, much like an album, and the poems run in two columns: on the left, poetry written in all capital letters (Hughes sometimes called this column the "voice"), and on the right, evocative musical descriptions meant to accompany the poetry. The nearest precursor to *Ask Your Mama* in scope is Hughes's *Montage of Dream Deferred* (1951), but rather than model the jagged lines of be-bop and Harlem, Hughes opens the range of musical examples and references. As we can see in Hughes's papers at Yale's Beineke Library, *Ask Your Mama* went through more than thirteen drafts before the poet settled upon the form we now know. In its earlier stages, the poem grew amorphously, riffing lightly on the oft-repeated line "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES," but in Hughes's later drafts the concept of the LP—with its twelve tracks, cohesive artistic vision, sonic dimension, and cultural status—gave form, structure, and dimension to *Ask Your Mama*.

The disc had long been on Hughes's mind. An avid record collector, Hughes had dragged a portable phonograph across Russia in the 1930s and used jazz and blues records to make friends in new places.[241] In the preface to *Montage of Dream Deferred*, Hughes remarked that "Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes," and thus *Montage*, with its many variations and re-versions (of the blues and of its own poems), reflects what Hughes called the

[241] In Arnold Rampersad's introduction to *I Wonder as I Wander*, he notes that Hughes traveled to Russia with "a record player, and a collection of Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, and Ethel Waters recordings" (12); in Madrid he listened to "Jimmie Lunceford's 'Organ Grinder's Swing' . . . to drown out the intense shelling on one particular night" (21).; Louis Armstrong records allowed him to make friends with a young captain in Ashkhabad who was "crazy about my Ooo-wee Harm-Strung record" (131). Playing records while writing in his room initiates a meeting with Arthur Koestler from Berlin. "Perhaps it was because of music that my room became a kind of social center. Everywhere, around the world, folks are attracted by American jazz. A good old Dixieland stomp can break down almost any language barriers, and there is something about Louis Armstrong's horn that creates spontaneous friendships" (133).

"disc-tortions of a community in transition" (*The Poems* 21). *Ask Your Mama* takes these disc-tortions to new levels in his LP book; it not merely distorts the disc by recording multiple versions, like so many be-bop musicians did, but by playing upon the new developments in long-play and stereophonics to open up a new relationship to space as the first rumbles of integration after *Brown v. Board of Education* were shifting the kinds of spaces Black Americans could inhabit. Thus, adopting the LP form enabled a radical revolution of form in which there could be a recursive relationship between text and music, poetry and album, audio and visual. As I show, *Ask Your Mama* uses the possibilities of sonic spaces opened through the stereo LP and of close listening as a way to explore the politics of *place* and race in a shifting American landscape.

The turn to the LP as a formal inspiration for writing is usually overlooked or treated as incidental, but the media border-crossing functionally shapes the way we read and hear *Ask Your Mama*. Critical readings have attempted to reclaim the vernacularity of the book in the face of modernist difficulty by focusing on Hughes's use of the dozens. But what if we rethink the LP *as a vernacular form*? Hughes's approach to the LP manifested itself in a number of ways. As Hughes's publisher, Judith Jones at Knopf, recalls, "He saw the book as different, and he wanted it to look different," and so its square-ish shape gestures toward an album sleeve (qtd. Rampersad 329).[242] In the press materials that accompany his archival drafts, Hughes suggested that these were more than visual allusions:

[242] In the press materials, the use of color is described more explicitly: "Langston Hughes, the author of Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, says that his poetry is influenced by both traditional and contemporary jazz. He has certainly been a partisan of Duke Ellington, whose Black, Brown and Beige he admires. Since the moods of his poetry are in those three Ellington colors, and also incorporate the blues, the format of the new Hughes book published this month by Knopf is one of alternating brown and blue ink on beige paper, with a kaleidoscopic dustjacket and a cubistic six-color binding. Visually it is one of the most striking books of the fall season. Its design is by Vincent Torre." (Press Material *from* The Langston Hughes Collection at Yale's Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, JWJ MSS 26, Boxes 271-272, folder 4472.)

> In his new book of poetry, Ask Your Mama, Langston Hughes employs liner notes as commentary at the back of the volume. The book, subtitled 12 Moods for Jazz, Hughes feels is like a recording with six tracks to a side. Since current LP records all have liner notes, why not a poem? The notes by Hughes comment not only upon the moods and meanings of the poetry, but go beyond them into the realm of free association—which the poet claims jazz itself does—so when you have finished the liner notes, you return to the poems to find out what the notes mean.[243]

Of course, it would be impossible to make a one-to-one comparison between Hughes's book and an actual LP, but in encouraging a recursive relationship between reading and listening, Hughes constructs a multimedia experience on the page that challenges the distinctions and makes use of the visual aspects of text to illuminate the visual-spatial elements of sound.

The most recognizable aspect of a desire to unsettle our reading practice is poem's layout in dual channels. In the multi-sensorial opening poem, "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," Hughes establishes the dialogic relationship between poetry and music with lines that stutter like a needle dropped in the groove:

IN THE	*The*
IN THE QUARTER	*rhythmically*
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES	*rough*
WHERE THE DOORS ARE DOORS OF PAPER	*scraping*
DUST OF DINGY ATOMS	*of a guira*
BLOWS A SCRATCHY SOUND.	*continues*
AMORPHOUS JACK-O'-LANTERNS CAPER	*monotonously*
AND THE WIND WON'T WAIT FOR MIDNIGHT	*until a lonely*
FOR FUN TO BLOW DOORS DOWN.	*flute call,*
	high and

[243] Press Material *from* The Langston Hughes Collection at Yale's Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, JWJ MSS 26, Boxes 271-272, folder 4472.

BY THE RIVER AND THE RAILROAD	*far away,*
WITH FLUID FAR-OFF GOING	*merges*
BOUNDARIES BIND UNBINDING	*into piano*
A WHIRL OF WHISTLES BLOWING	*variations*
NO TRAINS OR STEAMBOATS GOING—	*on German*
YET LEONTYNE'S UNPACKING.	*lieder*
	gradually
IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES	*changing*
WHERE THE DOORKNOB LETS IN LIEDER	*into*
MORE THAN GERMAN EVER BORE,	*old-time*
HER YESTERDAY PAST GRANDPA—	*traditional*
NOT OF HER OWN DOING—	*12-bar*
IN A POT OF COLLARD GREENS	*blues*
IS GENTLY STEWING.	*up strong*
	between verses
THERE, FORBID US TO REMEMBER,	*until*
COMES AN AFRICAN IN MID-DECEMBER	*African*
SENT BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT	*drums*
AMONG THE SHACKS TO MEET THE BLACKS:	*throb*
LEONTYNE SAMMY HARRY POITIER	*against*
LOVELY LENA MARIAN LOUIS PEARLIE MAE	*blues*
(3-4)	

Before one even begins to think about content, the reader is faced with the question: *how do I read this*? Ought one read each column separately and try to imagine them together? Should one read the musical description at right first, and then the poetic verse, or the other way around? When we read "lonely flute call" do we hear it, or must we play it? Perhaps we are meant to read all the way across, each column intersecting the sense of the other. While reading from left to right across the line is standard reading practice, doing so in this case would seem to interrupt the poetic flow and lead to a cacophonous nonsense; Hughes's use of two different font styles (all-caps and italics) seems to resist this kind of reading. Although there is no prescribed reading practice and no consensus as to the best approach to the text, the tendency among readers is to read each channel separately (treating the right channel descriptions as the musical accompaniment to the poem, thus secondary), and most critical treatments of the poem tend to

analyze the left channel and may or may not mention the right. Reading in this manner, however, would suggest that the music and the poetry are two completely separate entities, when, in fact, both columns contain music that is in constant dialogue with one another.

Difficult and jarring though it may be, some degree of reading across the lines is necessary to hear the full extent of the rhythms at play in *Ask Your Mama*. Meta DuEwa Jones has argued in favor of an "oppositional reading practice" that moves vertically as well as horizontally, "even though, admittedly, it goes against the grain of how listeners would hear Hughes's recital of *Ask Your Mama*" on the recording of the poem that he made for Buddah Records in 1961 in which he only read the overtly poetic left column (*Muse is Music* 68). Extending Jones' claim, I would even say that reading across is a practice invited by the strong rhythms of his opening lines. In "CULTURAL EXCHANGE," Hughes sets the tempo of the poem in the rhythms of the musical descriptions, reinforced by the rhythmic poetic line, "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES." Mimicking the "*rhythmically rough scraping of a guira*" (a cylindrical metal percussion instrument played with a brush, typically with a short-short-long rhythm), the oft-repeated line takes on a three-dimensional sonic quality as its rhythms are echoed both across the horizontal plane of the page and vertically. Although the free verse poem has no set meter, in this line we can hear both an anapestic quality (˘ ˘ ¯) as well as the more standard trochaic tetrameter (¯ ˘), a poetic echo of a "three-over-two" polyrhythm that is the hallmark of jazz's sense of swing and most African-based music.[244] The reader is placed in the position of overhearing through paper-thin doors a "scratchy sound," which from the outset evokes both the guira and the scratch of the record as the needle is set in the groove. As the wind

[244] Written in free verse, the moments of meter in this poem are always somewhat unsettled. At times the line echoes the trochaic tetrameter of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "Hiawatha" poem: "By the shore of Gitchie Gumee, / By the shining Big-Sea-Water, / At the doorway of his wigwam, / In the pleasant Summer morning, / Hiawatha stood and waited." However, I would argue that Hughes invites us to read "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES" as having an anapestic quality, which resonates more closely with the short-short-long rhythms of the guira.

blows in breathy alliteration in the left column, so blows the flute "*high and faraway*" in the right column. These sonic reflections and resonances work their way throughout *Ask Your Mama* and call into question the notion of the musical accompaniment as simply supplementary or secondary.[245]

As we read *Ask Your Mama*, the parallel right and left channels have the effect of the dual-sided groove of the stereo record. Although a stereo recording produces two separate streams of sound, our ear is inclined to unite them. But slight differences in each channel (volume, orientation of the instruments, and an imperceptible delay) lend the illusion of space. Depending on the placement of microphones in the recording space, and depending on how the engineer mixed the final cut, when we listen to a stereo recording, we hear certain instruments as coming from one side more than from the other. For example, we might hear more drum or bass on the right side, the flute on the left, and the piano as centered. But even if we isolate each channel, we will usually still hear all instruments in both channels, only at different levels. In attracting the ear to musical elements across both channels, Hughes draws a kind of imperfect diagram of the sound image—one in which the poetic lyrics are always in the left channel and music primarily on the right, but each always interpenetrating the other.

The musical descriptions are score-like, but their impulse is frequently more poetic than musical, and a blues gets described as "like a neon swamp-fire cooled by dry ice . . ." (77). Thus

[245] Hughes has at times described the music as a description of what he heard while writing the poem, and so even though the descriptions themselves were added much later in the process, the music itself was always integral to his writing process. However, as early drafts show, the musical descriptions were only conceived as a second column at the point when Hughes was attempting to put together a first reading of the poem with musicians at The Market Place in New York, February 1961. Initially, what Hughes called "Musical Themes" were listed at the very end of the text after the liner notes and were far less descriptive. The "Music Cues" were added to the right hand margin, it would seem, for the purposes of the musicians following the "score" at The Market Place reading. Interestingly, a copy of this early iteration of the poem with the music cues was sent to LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) along with the musicians involved in the performance. (More than twelve drafts of *Ask Your Mama*, from its earliest sketches to polished publication proofs, are available at Yale's Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The musical themes first appear in Draft 11, January 18-20, 1961. *See* JWJ MSS 26 Box 271-272.)

reading the poem requires that we enlist our eyes to struggle at the task our ears perform so naturally when listening to a stereophonic record: perceiving the two channels as an aggregated, single sound. These audio-visual acrobatics are fascinating in their own right, but for Hughes, the aesthetic cannot be untangled from the political. By interpolating Western trochaic patterns that echo Longfellow (see note 244) with the Caribbean guira and African 3:2 polyrhythms, this innovative form allows Hughes to hold these geographically-disparate sounds in tension with one another even as they blend and interpenetrate.[246] In this way Hughes sonically performs the difficult patterns of cultural exchange that mirror the more official, institutional forms that he references, such as when "COMES AN AFRICAN IN MID-DECEMBER / SENT BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT / AMONG THE SHACKS TO MEET THE BLACKS." Cultural exchange is always multi-directional for Hughes—often paradoxically so; the poem evokes the trips organized by the U.S. State Department during the Cold War that sent jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, and Dave Brubeck around the globe to promote American culture and freedom, but Hughes also references trips by African leaders to the United States, such as Guinean President Ahmed Sékou Touré's visit in 1959, which was interrupted by racial violence in the South.[247] Juxtaposing these multidirectional forms of cultural exchange, Hughes also brings forward an irony that he offers more explicitly in the "liner notes" to the poem where he calls America "an IBM land that pays more attention to Moscow than to Mississippi" (86). For what good is cultural exchange among nations when America understands "even so little about itself" (86).

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[246] Hughes's echoing of white canonical poets extends beyond Longfellow. In 1925 he wrote, "I, too, sing America," an echo of Walt Whitman. Josh Kun writes about this re-hearing of Whitman; see *Audiotopia*, 143-147.

[247] In 1962, Dave Brubeck worked with Louis Armstrong and created a musical about the state department tours and the civil rights movement called *The Real Ambassadors*, which included a song called "Cultural Exchange."

In light of this lack of understanding, *Ask Your Mama* is, at its core, about the negotiation of black spaces within America, and particularly the black sonic space. With its insistent repetition of "IN THE QUARTER OF THE NEGROES," the poem is partly about the quarter or *place* where black people live, but it is also about the place they occupy in America and in the world as part of the broader African Diaspora.[248] It is the story of black neighborhoods from Harlem to Haiti, and the opening lines hesitate on the preposition "IN" as a way of opening the door, so to speak, to the question of *where* Negroes stand in America. Evoking the smells of a pot of collard greens stewing, and the sounds of trains and steamboats, Hughes takes the reader across the tracks, so to speak, into a segregated universe where "THE ENTRANCE TO THE MOVIE'S / UP AN ALLEY UP THE SIDE" (5). The repeated imagery of doors and the frequent use of prepositions (especially "in") at the beginning of lines help to position and situate the reader within the three-dimensional space of the poem, and specifically, within the quarter of the Negroes.

Visually, one could read the two columns on the page as a reflection of this preoccupation with segregated space as the columns literally command a dis-unified and separate reading; sonically, they enact a different kind of spatial orientation, one that requires the ear to take in their rhythms at once. But as we read, a delay is always perceptible, and this enforced visualization of the delays and disjuncture already at work—the visualization of the duality of sound—hints toward a stereophonic effect. It emphasizes the strangely spatial and separated

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[248] As John Lowney has noted, Hughes was increasingly involved in promoting cultural production from the African diaspora during this period. "Hughes's role in promoting African writers became increasingly pronounced by the 1960s, as he edited two pan-Africanist anthologies, *An African Treasury: Articles, Essays, Stories, Poems by Black Africans* (1960) and *Poems from Black Africa, Ethiopia, and Other Countries* (1963). This work coincided with Hughes's growing involvement with African diasporic cultural productions that combined music with the literary arts, from his participation in the 1959 Carnegie Hall African Freedom Day celebration and the 1961 American Society of African Culture Festival in Lagos to his collaboration with Randy Weston on his groundbreaking recording, *Uhuru Afrika* (1961)" (Lowney 565).

aspects of binaural hearing and stereo sound that are, in fact, visual. Though early audiophiles were attuned to this unique quality of stereo, Hughes is offering a more creative theory of the stereophonic, and *Ask Your Mama* uses this audio-visual confusion to its advantage. In the field of cognition, this relation and interplay between the senses is still not fully understood. However, Hughes's use of the textual medium to explore this audio-visual spectrum points toward the ways sound and sight are strangely intertwined, especially in our understanding of three-dimensional space. By adding the column of musical descriptions, Hughes was able to enact on the page much of the preoccupation with space (and spatialized sound) already taking place within the poetry.

The dual columns of the poetry are perhaps the most recognizable stereophonic effect, as they physically divide the space on the page; however, the poem also incorporates stereo techniques in more nuanced ways through manipulation of the interaural time difference, the "Hesitation Blues," and the use of echoes. An echo might be thought of as a temporal delay that registers as a marker of space. On the level of cognition the interaural time difference is usually too insignificant to register as two separate sounds, but at a certain point, depending on the acoustical architecture of a space, our ears begin to hear this time difference as an *echo*, or repetition of sound.[249] Usually the resonances that occur as sound reflects off objects within a space reinforce some of the sound's frequencies, but after a threshold of five milliseconds we start hearing these resonances as two sounds, or an echo (see Goldstein 383, 392-393). Echoes therefore represent a fundamental disjuncture of time, as a sound with one source becomes two or more. Given the tendency to frame sound and music as temporally bounded, it is interesting to

[249] Our understanding of auditory space is also a function of the acoustical architecture and the way our ears process the resonances of sounds as they reflect off different surfaces (including our ear canal and the pinna). *See* Goldstein, 392-393.

think about our perception of space as dependent on time in this way. The "Hesitation Blues" thematizes this delay and echoes Hughes's "dream deferred," and thus the song, along with the echo, is one of the ways Hughes deals with this sonic-spatial disjuncture.

Echoes and doubling in *Ask Your Mama* are often indicative of a collapse of historical time, musical time, or general delay, and open the tension between time and space. What is more, these kinds of echoes seem to have been partly a product of Hughes's own use of recording technology in the process of writing. When Hughes simply repeats a phrase or word to even-out the line (metrically), this kind of echo visually amplifies the amount of space that his writing inhabits on the page, in addition to reinforcing the word and placing pressure on the meaning:

	[*"Battle Hymn of the Republic"*]…
WHOSE HAYMOW WAS A *MANGER MANGER*	*repeated*
WHERE THE CHRIST CHILD ONCE HAD LAIN	*ever*
SO THE WHITENESS AND THE *WATER*	*softer*
MELT TO *WATER* ONCE AGAIN	*to*
AND THE ROAR OF NIAGARA	*fade*
DROWNS THE RUMBLE OF THAT TRAIN	*out*
DISTANT ALMOST NOW AS *DISTANT*	*slowly*
AS FORGOTTEN PAIN IN THE *QUARTER*	*here*
QUARTER OF THE NEGROES	*TACIT*
("ODE TO DINAH" 27 emphasis mine)	

Thematically, this is another instance in which Hughes is drawing together large swaths of history and here quilts together a Biblical journey with those made along the Underground Railroad, all the while referencing the present-day quarter of the Negroes. The effect is like a new verse for the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." They are historical resonances that echo, and the repetitive doubling reinforces the ways that cyclical historical moments fade into the noise created by their echoes. Across time and across great distances, we forget the pains of slavery

and the Underground Railroad. On the one hand, the echo amplifies a sound by repeating it, but the noise it creates also threatens to drown out the original message or sound—repetition degrades the fidelity of reproduction. Here, Hughes reinforces the image of sound's degradation across distance with a fade out effect in the music. Interestingly, many of these echoes are the direct result of Hughes's own use of a tape recorder in the process of drafting his poem, including the addition of a second "MANGER." This was among a number of edits that Hughes listed in a note on an early draft from January 8, 1961, titled "Changes made after verbal taping."[250] By taping himself reading the poem aloud and listening back to it, we can see how recording infused the poetry at every level of its composition, and there is something about hearing his own voice displaced and echoed back at him that enables Hughes in turn to incorporate that element of recording's phenomenology.

Musically and thematically, this interaural time difference is embodied by the "Hesitation Blues," a song that resonates with the theme of deferral present in so many of Hughes's poems. In "Ode to Dinah," Hughes's paean to Dinah Washington, the "Hesitation Blues" express themselves across both channels as Hughes explores the way that black artists have been exploited by the recording industry and jukebox culture.[251]

AS EACH QUARTER CLINKS	*"Hesitation*
INTO A MILLION POOLS OF QUARTERS	*Blues"*
TO BE CARTED OFF BY BRINK'S	*softly*
THE SHADES OF DINAH'S SINGING	*asking*
MAKE A SPANGLE OUT OF QUARTERS RINGING	*over*
TO KEEP FAR-OFF CANARIES	*and*

[250] Hughes was not the only writer known for using the tape recorder. Ralph Ellison, for example, frequently did so.

[251] Although Hughes never explicitly identifies Dinah as Dinah Washington in the poem's text, in the files for the book's publicity, he includes a list of "Persons Named" as a glossary of who each name "could be," including "Dinah---could be Dinah Washington" (Box 272, Folder 4473). Of course, the insistence on "could be" implies a desire to leave the reference open to other possibilities as well—for instance, "Dinah" in the Louis Armstrong song, or "someone's in the kitchen with Dinah" from the folk tune "I've Been Working on the Railroad." After all, *Dinah* was not Dinah Washington's real name—it was Ruth Jones. Dinah was most likely chosen for her by producer Joe Glaser.

IN SILVER CAGES SINGING.
***TELL ME**, PRETTY PAPA,*
WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?
PRETTY PAPA, PRETTY PAPA,
WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?
DON'T CARE WHAT TIME IT IS—
GONNA LOVE YOU ANYHOW
WHILE NIAGARA FALLS IS FROZEN.

over
its old
question.
"Tell
me
how
long?"
until
music
dies . . . .
(28; emphasis mine)

The voice singing "TELL ME, PRETTY PAPA, / WHAT TIME IS IT NOW?" is echoed by another question in the right channel: "*Tell me how long?*" These resonances of the Hesitation Blues are also the musical manifestations of the dozens in which questions are answered with questions, resulting in a reverberation effect.[252] As the questions redouble back upon themselves and the "Hesitation Blues" is re-versioned across the columns, Hughes draws out the irony of the continued delay of justice for black Americans, and gives the irony space to resonate.

Ask Your Mama treats not only the technical aspects of recording but also the socio-economic aspects of the recording industry. While a number of Black entertainers and athletes managed to achieve success and moved into the white suburbs, they were still largely exploited by the white-owned industries, and their individual wealth did not trickle down to black communities as a whole. As the "liner notes" to "Ode to Dinah" state, "Most of the money spent goes downtown. Only a little comes back in the form of relief checks" (88). Dinah Washington is a particularly fraught figure in the poem and offers insight into the paradox of the successful African American artist: she was the epitome of "crossover" and one of the most popular singers

[252] Greg Johnson, Blues Curator and Associate Professor at the Archives and Special Collections of the J. D. Williams Library at Ole Miss, believes these may be an unpublished version of the Hesitation Blues. However, Hughes may have simply been riffing on the theme of the Hesitation Blues in an attempt at a new lyric, drawing from the "pretty papa" trope in Dinah Washington's music. The "tell me, pretty papa" lyric, for instance, seems to come from "What's the Matter Now" (originally a Bessie Smith blues song).

of the 1950s and 60s, but in retrospect, her records have sometimes been criticized for having a whitewashed sound that compromises her roots.[253] A singer in the blues tradition who grew up singing in the church, her distinctive voice and phrasing style was indicative of the recorded era's dependence upon recognizable voices and distinct audio identities; Dinah and her microphone are seldom far apart.[254] In 1956, she even released an album called, *In the Land of Hi-Fi,* as though hi-fi were not merely an aspect of the technology, but a place one might go.[255] Dinah Washington was indicative of the conflation of the recording artist with the technology itself. Hughes alludes to the sense in which "Dinah" is manufactured; she does not make her songs, the jukebox does:

> DARK SHADOWS BECOME DARKER BY A SHADE
> SUCKED IN BY FAT JUKEBOXES
> WHERE DINAH'S SONGS ARE MADE
> FROM SLABS OF SILVER SHADOWS
> AS EACH QUARTER CLINKS
> INTO A MILLION POOLS OF QUARTERS
> TO BE CARTED OFF BY BRINKS (28)

Though her records were top sellers, that money was "CARTED OFF" in armored trucks with the implication that it never made it to the quarter of the Negroes, where the arrival of prosperity is always deferred. In "Horn of Plenty" this faulty accounting manifests on the page where incoming dollars "$$$$" become only cents "¢¢¢¢" (another "quarter" of the Negroes) in a poetic accounting that recalls Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and his endless obsession with debt. There

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[253] Hughes's fears of the *whitewashing* of black culture were first expressed in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," which he wrote for *The Nation* in 1926. Remarking upon his encounter with a young man who told him "I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet," Hughes answers that African Americans should embrace their identity and find value in black vernacular forms.

[254] Everything about Dinah Washington was made for recording, and her identity was polished by famed producer Joe Glaser.

[255] It is worth noting that on the album cover, her eyes are closed, suggesting not sleep but rather attentive listening as the way of entering the land of hi-fi. On *Dinah Jams*, a live album recorded in 1954, she is paradoxically pictured with a microphone hanging from above, which would seem to indicate that she is in the recording studio (rather than onstage).

are great costs to success and integration, and Dinah Washington's voice was the sonic manifestation of both costs and gains.

Despite the inherent contradictions contained within a figure like Dinah Washington, the poem reclaims the African American roots of her sound through an elaborate mashup. Hughes calls upon readers to hear the resonances across the time and space of musical references by calling up records in the jukebox of the mind, allowing sounds to accumulate and infiltrate one another.[256] In the space of the poem, Dinah is all at once Southern, tinged by a Caribbean past, and born of both the gospel music of Mahalia Jackson and the gutbucket blues of Blind Lemon Jefferson. This history is exemplified by the image of a fruitcake from Georgia crumbling into Caribbean rum in "TO A DISC BY DINAH," as Hughes asks us to hear between two distant Negro neighborhoods. However, this kind of listening *across* is not without difficulty or hesitation, and the disc by Dinah hiccups as the record skips and repeats; Blind Lemon is not a real father but a step-father, and he literally steps over the lines ("STEP-FATHERED BY BLIND LEMON / STEP-FATHERED BY / BLIND LEMON" [26]). The melding of both blues and gospel roots is reinforced across the channel with a blues played *à la* Ray Charles, the artist who is usually charged with secularizing gospel music.

In moments like these, Hughes plays disc-jockey, matching beat for beat as he switches between records, long before beatmatching was the purview of the DJ (starting in the late 1960s).[257] This mode of collage is common to modernist epic poetry, but the specific references

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[256] Austin Graham, in *The Great American Songbooks: Modernism, Musical Texts, and the Value of Popular Culture* (2013), argues that the prevalence of popular song meant that writers could expect that readers would actually be able to hear this music in their heads as they read; he suggests that Hughes's use of the popular AAB form of the blues invited his readers to sing.

[257] Contemporary performances of *Ask Your Mama* have incorporated actual remix into the piece. Laura Karpman's 2009 composition in collaboration with Jesse Norman and The Roots, for example, incorporates the Buddah Records recording of Hughes reading *Ask Your Mama*, as well as samples of recordings Hughes references in the poem. According to Karpman, *Ask Your Mama* was a multimedia work before the technology made it possible.

to recordings give the practice a closer affinity to that of DJs today. Hughes is *timestretching* and *pitchshifting* to bring these records closer together; he deploys the recorded form's ability to transcend temporal boundaries in a poetic move that Larry Scanlon calls "diachronic."[258] These kinds of mashups pepper the book and play upon echoes and resonances across historical time and space. In "Ride, Red, Ride," for example, Hughes works across the channels to create the ultimate protest-song mashup, bringing together the "Hesitation Blues" with "When the Saints Go Marching In" and an obscure reference to the French Revolutionary song, "Ah, Ça Ira!" (13).[259] A casual reader of French might see *ÇA IRA!* and translate the phrase as "it will go." However, colloquially, *ÇA IRA!* means "it'll be fine" or by some accounts "we will win!" The phrase became the refrain of an important song during the French Revolution as early as 1790, and was revived by Edith Piaf in the 1953 film *Si Versailles m'était conté*. Even more surprising is that Benjamin Franklin is said to have originated the phrase; when asked about the Revolution in America, he would reply, "Ah, ça ira!" Taken together, these songs express the complex emotions around civil rights issues: the exasperation of the "how long do I have to wait?" with the promise of the glory at the end of days ("when the saints go marching in") and the self-assured conviction that it will all turn out alright. Writing about jazz recordings more generally, Peter Eldson has suggested that this kind of "intertextuality works against semantic stability and the concept of the closed work" (Elsdon 159). In Hughes's writing, the density of audible reference pushes on the capacity of the recorded medium and calls into question the

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[258] *See* Scanlon 48, 62. Scanlon sees Hughes's use of the dozens as an aesthetic that is at its core diachronic. It is also a highly musical impulse: "Music defines its formal elements precisely by their movement through time. To highlight the affinities between music and poetry is to highlight the diachronic aspect of poetic form. Using music as a model enables Hughes to imagine the relation between poetry and politics as a specifically temporal one (48).

[259] There is a helpful history of the phrase and the song on Fordham University's Internet Modern History Source Book: http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/caira.asp

ability of the record to contain such a vast black space. The critical listening ear must make sense of these multilayered schemes of reference; listening is therefore a strategy for hearing the blend of references without sacrificing their distinct sounds.

It is thus not without irony does the poem titled "Blues in Stereo" contain the most instances in which the new media technologies fail. Dominated by images of broken down media and the failure to get a signal, "Blues in Stereo" announces that the "TV KEEPS ON SNOWING," and repetition in the poem creates self-reflexive echoes that challenge the LP's musical status (37). The record itself does not *play* the horn—an image that implies both phonograph and trumpet—but echoes it; the music is in effect "BORROWED" and the LP has no memory of itself: music is played "ON LPs THAT WONDER / HOW THEY EVER GOT THAT WAY" (36). Hughes may be a master of the media in its various forms, but his mastery does not dilute his contentious relationship with the media. Part of what Hughes is doing is not simply mimicking the LP or trying to induce stereo effects but rather questioning and reimagining how the media function. It is something of an antidote to the Marshall McLuhan reading of media technologies as simply determining the art itself.

Although *Ask Your Mama* continues to be understudied, it is arguably Hughes's most exciting and innovative work; a rising tide of attention to the piece on behalf of critics, musicians, and composers suggests attitudes may be changing. As John Lowney has suggested, "One reason that it has appealed more to twenty-first century readers is that it resembles a DJ's mix of converging sounds rather than a more conventional jazz poem" (566). In recent years there have been a number of attempts to stage the poem using multimedia including Ron McCurdy's Langston Hughes Project (since 2009), Laura Karpman's multimedia composition

and collaboration with The Roots and Jesse Norman (premiered in 2009 at Carnegie Hall), and Dr. John S. Wright's reading with Jon Faddis and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band in 2000. Of course, these stagings reflect the paradox of *Ask Your Mama*: it is a book that models itself on a recording and in doing so becomes a score for performance.[260] Laura Karpman has argued vehemently for the need to reconsider the importance of the *Ask Your Mama,* and in a phone conversation in June 2012 called Hughes a "multimedia visionary" whose ideas could not be realized in his time.[261] For Karpman—a composer for film and television who has worked with Steven Spielberg, among others—part of the attraction to *Ask Your Mama* lies in the slippages between the sonic and visual elements and the exhaustive references to recordings, which she incorporates into her work. In considering *Ask Your Mama* anew, we find that while Hughes takes inspiration from the LP as a way to give form to his poem, he just as actively theorizes and critiques that form by illuminating the already spatial-visual nature of sound. This is made vivid on the page, where Hughes visualizes the stereophonic dimension of recorded sound and confounds our typical understanding of the aural and the visual as distinct. In working across that space on the page and challenging readers to listen for the echoes and resonances (as well as for moments of disjuncture), Hughes's work clarifies an attitude toward listening that was just beginning to take shape while foreshadowing the possibility of a recording that did not just *re*produce but actually produced new kinds of spaces. Through his experimental poetics, Hughes illustrated a new possibility for the LP—both as a tool for opening new spaces and as a protest space—and laid the foundation for a recorded poetic that would influence poets of the Black Arts Movement, so many of whom made recordings. Writing at the cusp of the integration of the

[260] In addition to the book, Hughes prepared other treatments of the piece for dance and dialogue, and Hughes himself would read the poem with musicians a number of times in New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

[261] Karpman talks in detail about the piece in a feature by PBS about the Carnegie Hall debut: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2009/08/jessye-norman-the-roots-team-up-for-langston-hughes-ask-your-mama.html

quarters of the Negroes, Hughes's stereophonic poetic forces open the issue of the continual deferral of justice for African Americans and begins to conceive of a revolutionary black sonic space.

Creating a Black Forum: The Emergence of the Poetry Album

By most measures, Langston Hughes's *Ask Your Mama* was ahead of its time, both in scope and in its appeal to the LP form as a site of poetic protest, but the time for "polite" protest had passed and soon gave way to the louder, more aggressive sounds and demands of Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement.[262] Hughes's LP book reflects a transitional moment in which the notion of what the "publication" of poetry meant was only beginning to shift. Public readings were becoming *de rigueur*, and one could argue that *Ask Your Mama*'s explicit use of the LP form helped to open the possibility for spoken word recordings as a form of publication. The transition was not immediate, nor did it necessarily eliminate the book. As Pat Thomas points out in *Listen Whitey: The Sights and Sounds of Black Power*, when Gil Scott-Heron's first album, *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox* (1970), exemplified "a new era of poets making the crossover from books to albums," and the album cover itself depicts Scott-Heron with a book of poetry in his hands (19). The eroding distinction between recording and text was even more evident in jazz circles where recordings had already gained status as texts, especially for the purposes of learning music.[263] Ingrid Monson clarifies this relationship, arguing that "jazz performances are not musical texts in and of themselves . . . but when such performances are recorded and disseminated through LPs, CDs, and cassettes, they become texts. Musicians may

[262] The founding of the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School by Amiri Baraka in 1965 is considered by most to be the catalyzing moment for the Black Arts movement. This same year, Baraka wrote "Black Art," which he also recorded with Sonny Murray on *Sonny's Time Now* (Jihad Records 1967).

[263] *See* Amanda Bayley, *Recorded Music*, 4.

use them as resources for learning tunes, solos, harmonic substitutions, timbral sensibility, or rhythm section styles" (*Saying Something* 126). Yet, as this dissertation shows, the relationship between text and recording has been fraught; sound recordings did not mean the death of print, and even so-called "recorded books" require a printed text. However, with the LP's rise to cultural prominence in the 1960s, this line continued to blur. Poetry and spoken word albums became recognized as texts, and albums became an important means of the mass dissemination of black radical messages.

The Black Arts Movement emerged around 1965 as the cultural wing of Black Power and Black Nationalism in response to the growing unrest among black Americans and to the assassination of Malcolm X. As the poet and dramatist Larry Neal described it in 1968:

> The Black Arts and the Black Power concepts both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics. Recently, these two movements have begun to merge: the political values inherent in the Black Power concept are now finding concrete expression in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists. A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for black people to define the world in their own terms. The black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics. The two movements postulate that there are in fact and in spirit two Americas—one black, one white. (qtd. Collins and Crawford, *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement* 7)

Although Hughes had been wary of the integration while writing at the beginning of the 1960s, peaceful non-violent advocacy for rights, "polite" protest, and irony still seemed to be a viable means of expression, but after the assassination of Malcolm X and later Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., polite words no longer seemed possible. Having rejected the liberals' push for non-violence and integration during the late 1950s and early 1960s, activists like Larry Neal along with Amiri Baraka advocated that African Americans make art addressing black audiences rather than protesting against white ones, art expressing visions for the future. It was in essence a separatist

movement. Blaming the mass media for programming black Americans with negative images and racial self-hatred, Black Arts proponents supported efforts to re-program the black psyche.[264] In *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Crawford write of the importance of visual culture to the Black Arts Movement in making these new images, but in some ways the visual could prove more difficult to reprogram. Sonic space was less explored, and with LPs arguably taking the dominant cultural form, spoken word albums became a crucial means of getting the message heard. Amiri Barka and others began establishing small independent presses and record labels to disseminate their works to black audiences.

Hughes's poetry continued to resonate with poets of the Black Arts Movement, and the influence of *Ask Your Mama* can be heard on many of the poetry records of the era, several of which included musical accompaniment.[265] In 1970, The Last Poets, usually credited as the "godfathers of rap," released their eponymous debut, as did poet Gil Scott-Heron on the independent label Douglas Records; both records feature poetry accompanied by conga drums and a flowing style of delivery that would heavily influence rap (Thomas 15). Poetry was moving outward from publication toward recording and performance. Poets like Scott-Heron frequently mentioned the influence of Hughes, and on *Boss Soul: 12 Poems by Sarah Webster Fabio set to Drum Talk, Rhythms and Images* (Folkways 1972), Sarah Webster Fabio incorporates folk songs, African rhythms, and R&B—and on "Soul Through a Lickin Stick" acknowledges Hughes and *Ask Your Mama* by name. The poetry album became a prominent form for female poets associated with Black Arts, including Jayne Cortez, Maya Angelou, and

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[264] *See* Collins and Crawford, 9-11.

[265] According to Lorenzo Thomas, "Among the factors that influenced the developmental direction of Black Arts poetry were (1) the model of African American music—particularly jazz; (2) an interest in finding and legitimizing an 'authentic' African American vernacular speech; and (3) the material or physical context of Black Arts poetry readings" ("Neon Griot" 310).

Nikki Giovani.[266] On Jayne Cortez's *Celebrations and Solitude* (1974), a collaboration with bassist Richard Davis, she echoes the "Hesitation Blues" in her ode to John Coltrane, "How Long Has Trane Been Gone." Echoing the refrain, she asks "How long, how long has that Trane been gone. John palpitating love notes in a lost found nation within a nation, his music resounding discovery." The poem laments that black communities may be forgetting their history and forgetting that Black Music should be a source of pride. Although integration was ostensibly a civil-rights-win for African Americans, it also threatened to erase or ignore cultural differences and mask continuing forms of racism. Cortez's poetry illustrates the challenge for black poets and musicians working in the wake of both slowing civil rights advances and the 1965 and 1968 assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., respectively. There was a clear need to redefine the *place* of Black Americans in America, and there was a need for a new *space*, but where?

One such space was "Black Forum"—a sub-label of Motown Records. Between 1970 and 1973 the short-lived Black Forum label released a limited selection of spoken-word recordings, including Amiri Baraka's *It's Nation Time*. Black Forum was formed by a small group of producers at Motown who were empowered by the efforts of mainstream Black artists on Motown and other labels to take more vocal political stances in their music.[267] Songs like James Brown's 1968 anthem "Say it Loud, (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" became a huge force in the movement and opened the door for other mainstream Black recording artists to write political music. Such music included The Temptations' "Message from a Black Man" and Sly Stone's

[266] Some of the albums included: Maya Angelou's *The Poetry of Maya Angelou* (1969); Jayne Cortez's *Celebrations and Solitude* (1974) with bassist Richard Davis; Nikki Giovanni's *Truth is on its Way* (1971) and *Like a Ripple on the Pond* (1973); and Fabio's *Boss Soul*.

[267] There were, of course, early iterations of this, including Max Roach's 1960 *We Insist! Freedom Now* suite, which he recorded with Abbey Lincoln and included lyrics by Oscar Brown, Jr.

"Don't Call me Nigger, Whitey," both released in 1969, and Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" in 1971.[268]

These gradual shifts provided the impetus for Black Forum. Although Berry Gordy, Jr. had been reluctant to release albums by radical artists, Black Forum created a venue for them on a mainstream record label; the label released albums by Martin Luther King, Jr., Langston Hughes and Margaret Danner, Elaine Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and others.[269] The albums were part of a small but growing trend; in the era before video, the spoken word and commemorative albums played an important role in preserving historical events and speeches. Those associated with Black Arts, Baraka included, advocated for independent modes of dissemination, and Amiri Baraka himself created his own record label and publishing company, Jihad, to this end. Black Forum, however, created an important space within the mainstream for artists and activists with non-mainstream messages.

Amiri Baraka and the Audio Nation

Recording on the heels of the 1970 Congress of African People (CAP), Baraka considered *It's Nation Time* to be a kind of founding document of Black Nationalism, stating assertively on the liner notes: "This recording is an institution."[270] But how can a recording be an

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[268] Pat Thomas's *Listen, Whitey! The Sights and Sounds of the Black Power Movement* (2012) recounts this period in some detail and notes that Gaye's "What's Going On" was initially blocked by Motown's Berry Gordy as too controversial, and was released only at Gaye's insistence (12).

[269] The Black Forum logo states its mission thus: "Black Forum is a medium for the presentation of ideas and voices of the worldwide struggle of Black people to create a new era. Black Forum also serves to provide authentic materials for use in schools and colleges and for the home study of Black history and culture. Black Forum is a permanent record of the sound of struggle and the sound of a new era" (qtd. Thomas 33).

[270] The liner notes to *It's Nation Time* describe the Congress of African People thus: "Represents African Nationalists of diverse description but all of the members of its Executive, Legislative, Coordinating and work councils agree that what the Congress must provide is a functioning methodology for reducing the contradictions and artificial diversity of Pan-African Nationalist theory. Back to the concept that animates the Congress is the idea that ultimately all valid concepts of Pan-African Nationalism will one day come together as a practical, achievable body of elective human accomplishment throughout the Black World" (Liner Notes, *It's Nation Time*).

institution? What does a nation sound like? The Congress of African People in some ways marked the high point of Black Nationalism, but it was also the beginning of Black Power's demise.[271] Nationalism was a fraught subject that divided black radical thought, and even Baraka would eventually separate himself from the nationalists in 1974. On *It's Nation Time*, one can hear the struggle of bringing a black nation into being while rethinking the idea of what a nation might look and sound like; the album also registers the imaginative, hyperbolic, and ultimately never-realized creation of a Pan-African nation.

Although Amiri Baraka had gained his poetic footing among the likes of Allen Ginsberg, by the late 1960s he had broken with the integrated Beat crowd and had become increasingly political.[272] He changed his name from LeRoi Jones to Imamu Amiri Baraka, joined the Black Nationalists, and wrote and performed poetry with a more radical edge, including "Against Bourgeois Art," "Black Art," and "Black Dada Nihilismus"—poems which he frequently performed and also recorded with the likes of Sun Ra, Sonny Murray, the New York Art Quartet, Albert Ayler, and others.[273]

It's Nation Time, which received a limited release, mixes poetry with Free Jazz, African drumming, and R&B—melding together the popular with avant-garde and traditional forms of black music. The album addresses issues across the spectrum of black life in America and looks to reinflect black life with a proud African ancestry and spirituality. Baraka's readings on the

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[271] Komozi Woodard speaks of CAP and this decline at length in *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, 219-54. As Komozi points out, both self-determination and Pan-Africanism were important themes at the Congress, which aspired to create a governing body that could put the ideas of Black Power into action (162-164). In *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, James Smethurst points to the decline of Black Power that was caused by the internal battles within CAP between the Marxists and the cultural nationalists (87-88).

[272] Though Hughes had been critical of Baraka's affiliation with the Beats, he saw him as the most promising Black writer of the younger generation and even sent him copies of *Ask Your Mama* while it was still in drafts.

[273] Recordings on which Baraka performs include: *Sonny's Time Now* (Jihad Productions, 1965); *New York Art Quartet* (ESP Disk, 1965); and *A Black Mass* with Sun Ra (Jihad Productions, 1968).

album are dramatic and musical, and the rhythms of his speech are at every step integrated into the music. This is not an instance of poetry accompanied by music but rather a dynamic performance in which speech rhythms, screams, non-verbal utterances, and music propel one another. In addition to the lyrics written specifically for the LP, the album draws upon a number of poems that Baraka had also published in pamphlets including the similarly titled *It's Nation Time* (1970) and *Spirit Reach* (1972). Because the text of the poems is not included with the album, the listener's approach is entirely auditory and thus invites both repeated listening and non-linear listening by lifting the needle and skipping around between tracks. Baraka's vocal performance, which hovers somewhere between speech and song, invites a readerly approach to the material; but how do we read *It's Nation Time*? What are we listening for? If we argue that stereo opens up new sonic spaces, how do we read these spaces?

Compared to *Ask Your Mama, It's Nation Time* takes the stereophonic poetic in a somewhat different direction. Hughes was intimately concerned with issues of *place*—that is, the sounds and scenes of the black neighborhood—but for Baraka the audible *space* was a realm that could be harnessed in the service of a new black nation. Whereas *place* usually denotes a specific geographic or historical location, *space* is unbounded, expansive, and can have a temporal as well as physical dimension. Therefore, the acoustic spaces Baraka inhabits are projective, hyperbolic, and imagined. They are attempts to push beyond the constrictions of place and history in order to produce a new, contingent sonic space. Such a move also reflects a turn in the studio stereo recording that would take place around this time as engineers discovered that sonic spaces could not only be reproduced but manipulated and *pro*duced.[274] *It's Nation Time* strives

[274] Perhaps the most famous example of this is illustrated by the ongoing debate about the Beatles' release of both stereo and mono versions of their early records. While there are many who prefer the mono recordings, there were instances in which it is clear that stereo was essential to the recording. The Beatles' recording of "Revolution 9" on The White Album (1968) is notable for its experimental use of stereo panning, looping, samples, and other studio

toward a theory of sonic space that might redefine the parameters of a national space and create a new conception of blackness.

Baraka's conception of the projective stereophonic space resonates with Charles Olson's concept of projective verse and transformed Olson's manifesto in service of a black sonic space. Both Nathaniel Mackey and Lorenzo Thomas have pointed to the impact of Charles Olson's 1950 essay "Projective Verse" on Baraka's work. Olson's manifesto aimed to bring the breath of the poet (and the poet's listening) back into poetry, calling for poetry that was "(projectile (percussive (prospective."[275] As Thomas points out, when redefined by African Americans, the return to speech and the breath has political implications.[276] But when poetry becomes a record, certain aspects of "Projective Verse" become literalized, and the direct contact with Baraka's voice and breath is not just projected but amplified. The views espoused in Olson's manifesto played an important role in the initial movement toward the performance of poetry and laid the foundation for Lorenzo Thomas's assertion that "all poetry is incomplete until it is read aloud" (319).[277] In taking the process to the ear itself via the LP, we can hear what Olson means when he exclaims, "Get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, . . . keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen"—Baraka performs the speed and makes his poem the "high-energy construct" necessary to move into a stereophonic dimension (Olson "Projective Verse").

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techniques as a way of sonically representing revolution. This and other recordings of the Beatles' "psychedelic" period utilize stereo to disorienting effect and mark a sharp departure from their other music. *See* Ian MacDonald's *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties* (2007). Today the audio space of recordings rarely attempts to reproduce music played in actual spaces, being built rather for clubs, headphones, and car stereos.

[275] From Olson, "Projective Verse," http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237880

[276] *See* Mackey 366, and Thomas 308.

[277] For Lorenzo Thomas, the ability to read and perform the poetry is paramount. Recitation is key. "What this suggests, to use a technological metaphor, is that we should be concerned equally with the technical quality of both *recording* and *playback*," by which he means, skills required from both performer and audience, and also the written and performed versions (319). "All poetry is incomplete until it is read aloud" and "the poem printed on the page is effective when it functions as a memorandum to excite the reader's recall of a previous performance, or serves as a score for future vocal reproduction" (319).

For Baraka, the music was already a technology of sonic space with the capacity for the stereophonic dimension, as expressed in the collection of essays *Black Music* and its culminating essay, "The Changing Same." In addition to James Brown, Baraka's trifecta of black sonic space philosophers included Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra. In "The Changing Same," Baraka's theory of new Black music and innovation utilizes a spatial vocabulary to describe social expression at work in both R&B and Free Jazz. This marked shift from the typical musical discourse gives sound a multidimensional, even visual orientation. Similar to the way James Brown can transport even passive listeners standing in line at the bank, Ornette Coleman is a musician who reorients space: "Ornette Coleman is the elemental land change, the migratory earth man" (197); and "Ornette was a cool breath of open space. Space, to move. So freedom already exists. The change is spiritual" (198). When on a later track, Baraka and his chorus chant, "The land's gonna change hands" (on "Wha's Gonna Happen"), they are doing so in the sense of Ornette Coleman. The descriptions chart a new definition of space, one that better lends itself to a philosophical and spiritual account of geography and nationhood. As a central text and "institution" of the black nation, *It's Nation Time* attempts to locate *where* such a new nation would exist by redefining space.

Perhaps the most instrumental figure in Baraka's development of a theory of black sonic space was Sun Ra. While some activists were more literal-minded about the need for a black space, in the music of Baraka and of Sun Ra we can hear a philosophical re-thinking of what space means.[278] Sun Ra's 1973 album *Space is the Place* helped to catalyze this more celestial

[278] The question of where Black Americans, the descendants of slaves, ought to *go* was been a topic of debate even before to the Civil War; some felt that freed slaves would never consent to living in America. Thomas Jefferson even argued that the only solution would be emigration to Africa. Indeed, the founding of Liberia as a U.S. colony in 1821 was the brainchild of abolitionists. However, even post-slavery the *space* issue continued. In the 1920s Marcus

and philosophical thinking, and as Baraka noted early on, "Sun-Ra is spiritually oriented. He understands 'the future' as an ever widening comprehension of what space is, even to the 'physical' travel between the planets as we do anyway in the long human chain of progress . . ." (199). Sun Ra never fully adopted the orthodoxy of the black nationalists, argues biographer John Szwed, but "he agreed that black people should have their own culture, and he favored cultural centers for blacks at one point, and later even urged emigration to space, thus solving the nationalists' 'land question' (what Baraka called the 'space question') on an intergalactic level" (Szwed, *Space is the Place* 311). There were a number of proposed answers to the demand for nationhood—Rev. Jesse Jackson advocated a black political party, for instance—but the issue of where to locate that space, whether physically or philosophically, was an ongoing point of contention. After Baraka's collaboration with Sun Ra in 1968 on the play and recording *The Black Mass*, Sun Ra's influence would continue to inflect his work.[279] Sun Ra's approach to sound and space was instrumental in opening up the musical time of the piece and also enabled Baraka to rethink the sonic space of the album as infinitely more flexible than physical space and "sticks and stones" institutions (*Nation Time* liner notes). For Baraka, sound, particularly recorded sound, has the potential to open up *space* for living; space for freedom.[280] Whereas the poetic page exists within defined constraints of space, the creation of an album opened up some of these formal constraints, allowing for an unbounded poetic less contingent upon time and

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Garvey was one of the advocates of the Back-to-Africa movement. The Pan-Africanism movement that emerged in the 1960s, however, was more resistant to the idea of a nation-state and advocated for new kinds of nationhood.

For more about Sun Ra and issues of space, see Gayle Wald, "Soul Vibrations: Black Music and Black Freedom in Sound and Space," *American Quarterly* 63.3 (2011): 673–696, 862.

[279] *The Black Mass* a play explores the Jacoub myth in which Jacoub creates a Frankenstein-esque white monster whose greatest flaw is an awareness of time. *See* Baraka, *Four Black Revolutionary Plays*. *See also* Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation* (209).

[280] There is even a way in which the rhetoric mirrors the longer tradition in American culture to equate open space with freedom and the aspirations of democracy, a tradition that goes back to Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis.

place. As Paul Youngquist has noted, Baraka's experimentation with recording "eschews the apparent fixity and finality of a poem printed in a book" (341).[281] When emancipated from the page, the poetry begins to take on lives in different kinds of spaces, as is the case with the title track of the album. "It's Nation Time" is not simply a poem or an album; it is an important act of ritualized speech that echoed throughout the Black Nationalist movement. In this way, the recording has the potential to become an "institution."

Part of the effort to open a new black sonic space takes place at the level of the music and its relation to the poet's voice. Baraka resists the typical genre classifications, such as jazz and R&B, assigned to music by the record labels and has argued instead for the term *black music*—a point which he makes at length in his book of the same title.[282] Nathaniel Mackey has suggested that it is precisely the "liminality" of black music, "which situates it somewhere between the reality away from which it recoils and the ideal toward which it aspires," that allows Baraka's poetry to aspire to the "conditionlessness" of the music (Mackey, "Changing Same" 380). However, the *conditionlessness* Mackey alludes to is, in fact, a feature of the music that is cultivated by Baraka, rather than one that the music inherently possessed. The record companies had divided black music into genres, but *It's Nation Time* weaves together disparate genres to emphasize their unity as black music. In a 2003 interview with Kalamu ya Salaam for the *African American Review*, Baraka agreed that the album was artistically the most realized of his

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[281] In "The Space Machine: Baraka and Science Fiction," Youngquist asserts that Baraka is a "prophet in three dimensions, and his science fiction is a space machine. It projects and produces other spaces, not in some distant future, but right here, right now" (336). Interestingly, writing about Baraka's 1967 short story "Answers in Progress," in which aliens come to earth in search of Art Blakey records, Youngquist does not point out that a poem within the short story is actually recorded on *It's Nation Time* as the track "Answers."

[282] In his essay "The Changing Same" from *Black Music* (1966), Baraka explains that "the differences between rhythm and blues and the so-called new music or art jazz, the different places, are artificial, or they are merely indicative of the different placements of spirit" (189). As Jayne Cortez puts it in her critique of radio DJs and club owners on "How Long Has Trane Been Gone," "They divided black music, doubled the money, and left us split again."

recordings to date, if only because of the amount of time he had to prepare and work in the studio. "I wanted to go from rhythm and blues, to new music, to Africa at will," Baraka stated (231).[283] *It's Nation Time* is arguably the realization of Baraka's unified theory of black music.

One of the ironies of producing a Black Arts record on a Motown label is that Motown is historically considered to have played a key role in integration by cultivating a "crossover" sound—that is, a sound that appealed to both blacks and whites. Black Arts, as the extension of Black Power, sought to do the opposite by promoting black sound for black people that would resist homogenization. The "Motown Sound" (as it is often called) refers to the sonic signature of the recordings produced by the label with its recognizable blend of pop and soul, characterized by the tambourine, electric bass, and call-and-response vocals; it is a prime example of how *sound,* rather than simply music or a musician, came to dominate commercially successful recordings. Motown's history would seem at odds with Baraka's interest in advocating an assertively Black or Pan-African sound, raising questions as to how we read the co-opting of the Motown *sound* on tracks such as "Come See About Me," which is essentially a cover of The Supremes 1964 track by the same title with poetry layered over the original lyrics. Given Baraka's resistance to the mainstream record industry and the founding of his own label, Jihad Productions, it is difficult to tell whether the tone is ironic in light of the exuberance of the music.[284] Directly following a track whose melodic bassline sounds very similar to the

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[283] In the interview, Baraka stated: "Because of the formal kind of preparation and the fact that the people we were working with we had worked with organizationally, ideologically, and artistically, so there was a kind of ensemble strength. I like the stuff we did on some other records . . . but *Nationtime* I like for the whole ensemble, plus we had some hip people like Reggie Workman and Gary Bartz. And we had the money to put it together and do it. I guess it was like some Earth, Wind and Fire stuff; we had a chance to get the shit, plan it, go over it, and then go in the studio and get down with it. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to go from rhythm and blues, to new music, to Africa at will" (231).

[284] Critiques of Motown and the extent to which the label white-washed sound are not unlike the one Hughes implicitly acknowledges in his "Ode to Dinah." Even today, the history of Motown, as a prominent black-owned record label, is fraught—on the one hand, it was an important development in African Americans' attempts to gain a foothold in an industry known for exploiting them, but on the other hand, some have criticized Motown and its

recognizable drone of John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" (1964), "Come See About Me," with its soul-funk groove, electric bass, guitar, trumpet, and tambourine, sonically strikes an abrupt shift in mood.[285] Lyrically, however, the tone of the piece is consistent with the spirituality of "All in the Street" and John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme," and Baraka juxtaposes poetic lyrics calling to the deity over The Supremes' original song lyrics about getting over lost love. Although it is not entirely possible to transcribe the interplay between the two sets of lyrics, whose rhythmic relation to one another is elastic, I will attempt to do so here to show how the spiritual and secular intersect one another. In doing so I am effectively reversing the process of reading the dual columns of *Ask Your Mama.* On the left I have transcribed Baraka's voice, and on the right the backing vocals with a few references to instrumentation:

OAllah, all deity, jinn, spirit creation on the earth, where we live, cut off from righteousness by devil in corporated (*repeat*) come see about we us black people your first creations	*(African drums and electric bass*)
All deity Hey God Hey God Hey God Spirit Interior animation of existence we here cut off in a devil land we need something to be strong god	*(Music shifts to Motown Sound*) I've been Praying (for you) 'Cause I'm lonely (so blue) Smiles have all turned to tears But tears won't wash away my fears That you're never ever gonna return To ease the fire that within me burns

founder, Berry Gordy, Jr., for compromising black artists in favor of a mainstream "crossover" sound that would appeal to whites as well as blacks.

[285] Bassist Reggie Workman had recorded several albums with Coltrane in the 1960s.

all spirit flesh us with strength to allah give us will to get up and split […]	It keeps me crying baby for you Keeps me sighin' baby for you So won't you hurry? Come on boy, see about me (Come see about me) […] ("Come See About Me," *Side A* 11:13-12:30)

In terms of the stereo arrangement, the Supremes-esque backing vocals play in the right channel, while Baraka's vocals play in both—an arrangement which spatially orients his lyrics as central and yet interpenetrated. While on the page I can, like Hughes, easily separate the streams of music, such separation is more difficult in the moment of listening because the lyrical lines overlap and overtake one another, smudging to the point of interference so that the listener must strain to make out either line. In this instance, the stereophonic works on two levels: that of the album's engineering and the aesthetic decision to mashup (as it were) two separate lyrical trajectories. Doing so allows the track to perform the task of bringing the secularized (and saccharine) R&B closer to its spiritual roots—trading "me" for "we" and making the individual or personal plural.

Reclaiming R&B under the mantle of *black music* is one of Baraka's larger aesthetic projects, for as he says in "The Changing Same" from *Black Music* (1966), "Rhythm and Blues is part of 'the national genius,' of the Black man, of the Black nation," and, "Even The Miracles are spiritual" (185, 188). Baraka explains that "the differences between rhythm and blues and the so-called new music or art jazz, the different places, are artificial, or they are merely indicative of the different placements of spirit" (189). By claiming ownership of this so-called "cross-over" music as a black music, Baraka performs an unsettling of the power implied by mainstream repetitive music.

As a stereo LP that is neither just a spoken word album, nor a jazz album, nor a pop record, *It's Nation Time* challenges listeners to think not simply about the musical or poetic content but about its broader audio qualities. While we have a defined critical language for assessing music, we still lack an adequate vocabulary to describe the spatial, non-musical qualities of sound. When it comes to recordings of music, it becomes even more difficult to separate the musical and the acoustic. There is a small but growing body of literature about what R. Murray Schafer has called the "soundscape"—defined as "any acoustic field of study" ranging from musical works to acoustic environments—but such studies are generally less concerned with the spatial acoustics of recordings and deal more with urban environmental noise (*Soundscape* 7).[286] In *Spaces Speak: Are you Listening?* (2009), Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter draw a comparison between the ability to create virtual auditory space (as created by stereophonic sound reproduction and other electroacoustic tools) and the ability of Renaissance painters to represent perspective in their paintings. With technologies for recording and manipulating sound such as stereo, "Musical space is unconstrained by the requirements for normal living, and musical artists are inclined to conceive of surreal spatial concepts" (Blesser 164). However, when we talk about real or virtual soundscapes, we tend to rely on visual language and metaphors. Sound engineers and acousticians talk about the "sound image," but as Peter Damaske points out in his book *Acoustics and Hearing* (2008), "acoustical quality is basically defined by *subjective sound impressions*," and even technical data gathered by machines only gives partial information (vi). In other words, listeners always play an important role in constructing a sound image of an acoustical environment—often through descriptive

[286] For example, *see* Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (2010).

language. The subjective aspect of sound quality, both in its direct transmission as well as its stereophonic reproduction, is not only influenced by the space in which the sound is made, but the space in which the sound is heard, the position of the listener, and the shape of her head and pinnae (the external portions of the ears).[287] Even scientists of sound and hearing tend to rely upon metaphor and simile to describe sound; for example, in one of his studies, Damaske describes a recording with a particularly flat sound as "'dry', like a voice under the bedclothes" (61). Describing the acoustic space of a recording is further complicated by virtue of the listener's remove from the sound source and the visual nature of spatial description. To talk about the spatial environment of *It's Nation Time* therefore requires us as listeners to negotiate between the poetry's metaphorology of space, as well as its aspirations toward creating an actual audio space via the stereo LP.

If I had wanted to write simply about experimental stereophonic techniques, there are perhaps better albums to feature—the Beatles' self-titled White Album (1968), for instance, or Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973). But the stereophonics of *It's Nation Time* are particularly interesting because the stereophonic soundscape of the album reinforces the thematic aspects of space in Baraka's poetry in a combination of electroacoustic effects and speech acts. Admittedly, the stereo effects of *It's Nation Time* are not revolutionary, and their deployment likely reflects necessities imposed by the recording studio, the size of the ensemble, and other constraints as much as it reflects express intent. However, at a rudimentary level, the album attempts to construct a sonic environment that expresses a relationship between the different genres of music and their geographic-temporal relations to one another: African drums, as an

[287] *See* Damaske, vii. This phenomenon is known as acoustic diffraction, which results from "sound waves passing the human head and its funny-shaped pinnae." Acoustic diffraction also impacts the amplitudes and phases of the waves, which is important to directional perception.

ancestral music, feel "farther" away, while the R&B tracks, with electric amplified instruments like electric guitar, bass, and keyboards, feel "closer" and more direct. This relationship is established on the two opening tracks, "Chant" and "Answers," as the album opens with the hollow-sounding roll of African hand drums and the slow Swahili chant of a chorus of women. The unison of the voices and the drums and shakers sound far away, especially when contrasted to Baraka's voice, which is not just significantly louder but lacks the ambient acoustic quality, feeling instead flat and close to the ear as a result of close mic'ing; his voice is clearly separate from the chorus. He comes in over the top, as we might say, speaking, "All praises due to the black man. All praises due to the creator . . ." ("Chant"). The track hearkens to the sounds of ritual at a moment in which it establishes the stereophonic landscape. As the music shifts from African drumming to free jazz, the two sounds combine as the lyrics emphasize the sonic-visual space: "Can you Imagine something other / than what you / see" (*Sprit Reach* 10). In the overlapping of an African sound with an African American jazz sound, the drumming gives way to Lonnie Smith on piano, who plays a series of ascending and descending arpeggiated tone clusters to a dream-like effect, finally leading into the track "All in the Street." The lyrics here encourage the listener to transpose sound into the visual dimension:

> Can you Imagine something other
> than what you
> see Something
> Big Big & Black
> Purple yellow
> Red & green (but Big, Big & Black)
> Something look like a city
> like a Sun Island gold-noon
> Flame emptied out of heaven
> grown swollen in the center
> of the earth
> Can you imagine who would live

there (as printed in *Spirit Reach* 10)[288]

The music transitions at a deliberately slow pace.[289] Asking his listeners to "imagine" this new world that seems to exist simultaneously at the center of the earth and out in the "Big & Black" (i.e. *outer space*), Baraka induces the audio-eye of listener. Whereas Hughes was able to perform the synaesthesia of stereo in the textual space of the page, Baraka enhances this possibility through lyrics and sonic effects. As the liner notes suggest, the will to listen in order to see is part of the album's philosophy: "These are projections of (image/sound) which represent the new life-sense of African men and women here in the west, it is the African man's vision/version of music."

The space that *It's Nation Time* seems to describe is an inherently Afro-Diasporic space—one that seeks to transcend not just geographic boundaries but temporal boundaries as well. Space is "way out waaaay out way way out" he tells us, stretching the elastic "ay" with each repetition ("All in the Street" 11). But in order to reach this place, he appeals to the ear:

> Hear each other miles apart (without no telephones)
> "Love I hear you from way cross the
> sea . . . in East Africa . . . Arabia . . .
> Reconstructing the grace of our
> long past—I hear you love
> whisper at the soft air as it bathes
> you—I hear and see you" (11)[290]

Like Bechet and like Hughes, Baraka invokes the listening ear to access an African past but without the technology of the telegraph or telephone. As Ingrid Monson reminds us, "In many

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[288] This poem, along with a few others, also appeared in the 1972 (the same year as the album) pamphlet *Spirit Reach*, published by Baraka's own Jihad Productions. On the album, the track is located on Side A at minute 3:05.

[289] Only three minutes into the track does the saxophone (Gary Bartz) enter, followed by the rest of the rhythm section.

[290] *It's Nation Time*, Side A 5:59.

West African musics, for example, the boundaries between language and music are much blurrier, since speech may literally be spoken through instruments, most usually drums" (211). The performance of the lyrics themselves emulates spatial effects such as echoes. The chorus of men and women repeat Baraka's words in a fugal pattern: lovelovelove I I I hearhearhear youyouyou . . . etc. Each word decrescendos in its repetition, and in doing so the words issue ripples and echoes as they reverberate against each other. The effect resonates like a voice speaking in a vast and vaulted space. The repetitions are orchestrated as part of the performance, but it is a self-contained stereo effect. Literally re-sounding reinforces the resonance of listening—love, I hear you.

The efforts to double and perform the resonant technology only become more clear when Baraka himself becomes the medium as "All in the Street" continues, and he claims that that ancestors in Africa will speak through him if only we listen:

> I am in touch
> w/ them. They speak and
> beckon to me
> Listen they speak thru
> my mouth
> "Come on—
> "Come on—
> "Come on— (12)[291]

In a moment of frenzied improvisation, Baraka becomes the "medium"—the body through which the message speaks—speaking both in his voice and in the voice of the ancestors across space and time. Sound's spatial qualities are largely a result of the fact that sound requires a medium through which to travel—sound must resonate in other things. Shouting "come on" in quick succession, the words take on a percussive quality; the exclamation is also a call to the band to catch up with him as together they drive the tempo ever faster. There are moments in which the

[291] *It's Nation Time,* Side A, 8:10

words fall away completely and Baraka becomes one of the "oobeedah scatters," wailing and singing and scatting and raising the general noise level of the piece to its fulcrum. By increasing the noise level of the album, Baraka also increases the potential for the album to resonate within the space where it is played. But these resonant spaces can only exist for a time. At the end of the poem as the band fades out, he says, "Here the contact is broken," for as the music ends and the poetry ends, the auditory space closes and so does the communion of African peoples across time and space.[292] The space itself that was open for a time by noisy ruptures no longer exists when sound is replaced by silence. Sonic spaces thus only exist in time.

Through time, speed of delivery, and noise, Baraka tries to explode the audio space into the projective realm. As Charles Olson puts it, "process" is of the first importance, and as perception moves to next perception, "get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed."[293] On "Peace in Place" Baraka begins reading in a slow, measured fashion over a rumbling double-time rhythm on the ride cymbal played by Idris Muhammad and the new music group, but by increments Baraka's reading accelerates in speed and intensity until the combination of his voice with the music seems to fill up all of the audio space available. As he reads "TIME AFTER TIME," his mutation of the musical time transposes time and space, and the order of the words seems to shift, as is apparent in the printed version of the poem in *Spirit Reach*:

> TIME AFTER TIME AFTER TIME AFTER TIME
> AFTER TIME
> AFTER TIME
> AFTER TIME AFTER TIME AFTER TIME A LIE
> TIME A LIE
> AFTER A LIE TIME
> AFTER A TIME, A LIE

[292] *It's Nation Time,* Side A, 10:59

[293] "Projective Verse" on http://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237880

> . . .
> WORKING IN TIME
> WORKING ALL THE TIME
> WORKING THROUGH TIME, PAST IT, DEAL WITH THE GREAT
> ENSIDERGEE
> (5)[294]

On the recording, this subtle shift in emphasis is the effect of Baraka's rhythmic reading that slowly moves the word "time" closer to the end of "after," but on the page, it is registered by enjambment, the placement of the words on the space of the page breaking over the line. The use of all capitals in the print version (which is unique to this poem) echoes *Ask Your Mama*, but the capital lettering also helps to visualize Baraka's endeavor to use all of the space—even to the point of excess and overflow. But as Gary Bartz on alto saxophone plays with ever increasing speed and with almost baroque melodic detail, the energy of the piece and the words themselves begin to increase and to assume explosive, sensual qualities:

> FIREFINGERS . . . GOLDSPARKS . . . ELECTRIC HAIR . . . EYEBURSTS
> . . . CRACKLE
> SPACKLE EYEBURSTS . . . FIREFINGERS" (5) [Side A 15:50][295]

His voice rips and fries on the "*CR*" and explodes on the plosive p in "HOTPUNCTURES," rupturing with uneven repetitions and words that suggest fissures, breaks, and burns. But can the words perform the assault and open a space into which a black spirituality and a black nation can exist? Connecting this aspect of Baraka's poetry to Dadaism, Nathaniel Mackey calls it a

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[294] *It's Nation Time*, Side A, 14:28.

[295] In an interview with Kalamu ya Salaam for the *African American Review* in 2003, Baraka describes his "onomatopoetic" approach to writing: "That's what bebop is. You take the rhythm and make it into a vocal sound." This strategy involves hearing what the voices "sound like" before knowing what they are saying: "When I hear them, they are saying words. I've just got to try to figure out what those words are. The thing is to transfer them to the page. The translation of rhythms." The strategy applies to his plays as well as to his poetry (225).

"dreamish arational quality."[296] Pushing upon the onomatopoetic capacity of words to articulate the sounds they describe, the poetry approaches the musical and sensual, leaving less and less space for silence and instead filling every space with sound:

> I AM USING ALL OF THE SPACE ALL OF THE SPACE FILL THE
> SPACE ALL THE
> SPACE MY VOICE IS NOT HEARD MY FLESH IS NOT SEEN IT IS
> ALL THE SAME
> FLESHVOICEHEATRAY ALL THE SAME HOTCHOICE ALL THE
> FIRELIFE COMING (6)[297]

The enjambment of the lines and clustering of words that seem to overflow emphasize the use of "all of the space" on the page, while on the recording these lines seem to run into each other, breaking only so briefly for Baraka to take a breath (similar to those of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, and following Charles Olson's "projective verse," the poetic lines follow the length of the breath, even to the point of breathlessness). Having been spoken right up against the microphone, Baraka's tone is aggressive and powerful as it fills the ears.[298] One gets the sense that the space of the present listening moment might actually be stretched and expanded, like a balloon filling with air. In this flexible expansion of the audio space, Baraka and the instrumentalists push and pull against one another, but it is never exactly clear who is driving the rhythm forward. Through the accumulation of undifferentiated sounds, nonsense words, screams, and shouts, language itself seems to break down in the flaming primordial heat of a new space erupting.[299]

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[296] This flirtation with the a-rational occurs elsewhere in Baraka's work, and Nathaniel Mackey has described the move this way: "The West's exclusionary practices against nonwhite peoples are seen as one with its attempted suppression of the nonrational. The dreamish, arational quality of Baraka's poems is thus of a piece with his contempt for the confusion of rationality with rationalization ('Bankrupt utopia sez tell me/ no utopias'). Hence his espousal of 'insanity,' the ultimate irrationality, in the form of a black dadaistic uprising in the poem 'BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS' and in the essay 'Philistinism and the Negro Writer'" (Mackey, "Changing Same" 375).

[297] *It's Nation Time*, Side A, 17:04

[298] It is worth noting that in the printed version of the poem, the text shifts to lower case (from all capitals) at the moment the music on the recording briefly releases itself from its fevered pitch and slows down (*Spirit Reach* 6).

[299] Of course, some aspects of Baraka's method for opening black sonic space still prove problematic for listeners, such as the promise of violence added to the activism. In an apocalyptic vision, Baraka and his band chant: "Who

The title track of the album was originally published in a 1970 pamphlet of the same name distributed by Third World Press, and the phrase "It's Nation Time" became an important chant at gatherings of the Black Nationalist movement. On the album, the track produces a radical rupturing of the aural/visual and spatial/temporal divide through its noisy screams and through the insertion of an "eye" into "time," but the phrase has a broader life span. Strongly influenced by Baraka's poetry, Rev. Jesse Jackson adopted the phrase during his speeches at rallies. When he asked his audiences, "What time is it?" they would respond: "It's Nation Time!"[300] The call and response form is central to a number of black art forms and religious practices, and thus the phrase as well as the poem engages in the rhetoric of ritual in order to foster a sense of collectivity and unity. The poem itself calls out to listeners to come together in the service of the black nation:

> Time to get
> together
> time to be one strong fast black enrgy space
> one pulsating positive magnetism, rising
> time to get up and
> be
> come
> be
> come, time to . . . (*It's Nation Time* 21)[301]

The division of the word "become" that is visible in the line breaks of the printed version used here is also audible on the album as the percussive breaking-up of "be-come" inverts the stress of the syllables (BE-come) and reinforces the word's own coming into being. The stylized vocal

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will survive America? Very few Negroes, no crackers at all" [Side B 7:45]. This is the point at which the expansion of the stereophonic dimension dreams of encroaching on actual territories.

[300] Rev. Jesse Jackson recalled: "I had drawn much of the strength of Nationtime from a poem written by LeRoi Jones, Amiri Baraka at that time. The sense of people saying, 'What's Happening?' . . . Say, . . . 'It's Nationtime, it's time to come together. It's time to organize politically." *See* Komazi Woodard's *Nation within a Nation*, 209.

[301] *It's Nation Time,* Side B, 12:35.

performance is reminiscent of a Pentecostal preacher, and Baraka moves seamlessly between the sacred voice, the vernacular voice of James Brown's falsetto (whom he evokes repeatedly), and the voice of ritualized violence. In his readings and performances, Baraka was sometimes known to bring a gun on stage and point it at the audience, and on the album, he uses his voice to mimic the fire of bombs and machine guns ("Boom BOOOM Boom Dadadadadadadadadadadada" 22). The performance of a ritual of violence opens into an assertion that "Christ was black / Krishna was black […] Shango budda black," etc. (23). By blackening the world religions and the sonic space, the recording opens a possibility that this new nation can be accessed through ritual as Baraka stereophonically melds sight with sound.

The *eye*'s intersection of *time* in the course of this chant could be thought of in terms of Baraka's work at the interstitial break, but there is something more projective here: he is no longer working between but beyond—simultaneously inside and outside. Shouting "it's nation time" in repetition, Baraka aspirates the "i" in "time" repeatedly, so that we hear all the homophonic associations: time, eye, I. The synaesthetic meaning is also made explicit in the printed version of the poem:

> It's nation time eye ime
> it's nation ti eye ime
> chant with bells and drum
> it's nation time (*It's Nation Time* 24)[302]

As he bursts open time, Baraka's voice is rough and hoarse with use, and it breaks and squeaks like the saxophones of James Wheeler (alto) and Philip Eley (tenor) as they play at the limit of their own upper registers. Fred Moten addresses this in terms of the break, and in discussing this mode in Baraka's work, he states, "This location, at once internal and interstitial, determines the

[302] *It's Nation Time*, Side B, 14:58.

character of Baraka's political and aesthetic intervention. Syncopation, performance, and the anarchic organization of phonic substance delineate an ontological field wherein black radicalism is set to work" (*In the Break* 85). It is a break that refuses to close and that resists a single, settled meaning. Time is not just time, but the eye through which to look outward toward a new space and inward toward the "I." This kind of opening was evident in the broken space of the page in *Ask Your Mama*, but here, listening to these words on the album, the rupture opens a space that is both internal (that is, literally within the ears) and external (inscribed on the album). Although the album is called *It's Nation* ***Time*****,** this issue of time and space are intricately linked; as Moten asserts, "We might look at that temporal-spatial discontinuity as a generative break, one wherein action becomes possible" (99). In making this claim, Moten was thinking mostly about Baraka's printed poetry and some of his performances, but when we listen to the album in stereo and in light of Baraka's thematic interest in space, we must consider the impact of the stereophonic dimension. This is not simply an imagined space, but a real, audible one.

Because of the phrase's popular use by the Black Nationalists, its presence and reiteration here on the record directly participate both in the ritual of nation building and in the institutionalizing of the LP itself. To say "It's Nation Time" is thus a speech act in the declarative order: the phrase does not simply describe reality but ushers a new one into being.[303] Saying the phrase creates the nation. This idea is central to understanding the way in which Baraka and the Black Nationalists were negotiating the desire for a unified Pan-Africanism. The assertion of the ritual here is predicated in part on the habitual, repetitive nature of ritual and its significance within a cultural group. The LP, as an object of repeated listening and important

[303] Much has been written about speech acts and performative speech, especially by J.L. Austin and John Searle. For a helpful summary *see*: Mitchell Green, "Speech Acts," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/speech-acts/>.

cultural value, is uniquely situated to perform this task.[304] Baraka's ritual sense of nation ti-eye-ime and the assertion of a black sonic space challenges Benjamin's argument that technologically reproduced art necessarily lacks a "unique existence in a particular place" (21). Here the audio space itself is its own unique existence. And when sound takes on spatial dimensions, as it does in stereo, the experience of listening to a record more closely approaches the experience of listening to a performance.

For Baraka, there is no one who embodies this new use of black space better than James Brown, and allusions to Brown percolate throughout the album. Scatting as though firing a machine gun, Baraka squeals and lets his voice break in imitation of Brown as he goads the screaming saxophone:

> listen to son burn through you burn you up burn you up burn you up
> yaaaaaaaaa dir dir rummmmmmm rummmmm doo eee doooo eee
> doooo eeee goooo (6)[305]

In the printed text, it is not as easy to hear the highly punctuated articulation, but it is not difficult to hear the echo of James Brown, whom he calls "jb" in the poem. In *Black Music*, Baraka remarks that "the hard, driving shouting of James Brown identifies a place and image in America. A people and an energy, harnessed and not harnessed by America" (185). This simultaneous "harnessed and not harnessed" aspect of the sound is crucial for understanding how the black audio space of the LP can be the site of a nation within (and outside) a nation. Whether we are listening to an album on a stereo system in a living room or on headphones, stereophonic

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[304] Even today, the artifactual value of the album makes it sought after by collectors. The album itself has never been re-released on CD or mp3.

[305] *It's Nation Time*, Side A, 18:12.

listening requires that we inhabit two spaces simultaneously.[306] In echoing Brown, Baraka captures some of the live frenetic energy of Brown's legendary *Live at the Apollo* (1963) album, which exemplifies the way that an album can transport listeners into a particular audio space. In order to translate Brown's use of the recorded performance space, Baraka and his band create as much noise as possible to overtake the audio space—but instead of white noise (which has a similar function), this is black noise:

> benny heatin up magic to reuse space better. Ima do my space using
> thing now, watch out cold stuff, heatin up heatin up look at him
> can you diiiiiiiiiig it?? can you diiiiiiiggggit can you
> use space this way cracker, naw you cant, where's jb come out do yo
> dance clean up space, watch out for that motherfuckin flag dude, can
> you diiiiiiiiiivweusi appollo thales inventin sidespace . . . beepadeep […]
> (*Spirit Reach* 6)[307]

In this instance, Baraka is referring to James Brown's signature dance moves, which involved fancy footwork and slides. These moves allowed him to traverse space in completely new ways, and they even predated Michael Jackson's popularization of the moonwalk. Brown's movement and his sound encapsulated a particularly African American way of using space, and by tapping into his sound, Baraka offers a model to "reuse space better."

* * *

Can the LP—asserted as a performance space and even as an institutional space—function the way a poetry reading or rally can? *It's Nation Time* proves that the album can be a performance space even more accessible than the Apollo Theater, or a march on Washington, or a congress in Atlanta. Put the record on in your living room, and you are part of the Black Nation

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[306] Caroline Bassett writes about this projective phenomenon of virtual spaces in her essay about the impact of mobile phone use on our perception of space. *See* Caroline Bassett's "How Many Movements?" in *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003).

[307] On the recording, Baraka omits the obscenity and simply says, "watch out for that flag dude"; *It's Nation Time*, Side A, 19:05.

coming into being. Through the music and the medium of the record, the listener can *be* there. This implicit assertion places pressure one what it means to listen *live*. *It's Nation Time* does this by invoking aspects of the live album (like James Brown's screams), and reasserting the sonic space as a space for ritual, or as Baraka calls it, the spirit. In using the album this way, and placing pressure on the album's ability to open up new spaces for being, Baraka is rewriting and revising the framework with which we have historically understood sound reproduction.

In the course of this chapter, I have been considering what it might mean to extend the term stereophonic to think about sound in its spatial dimensions more broadly, and in particular, to think about how these poetic works are engaging with the technological developments of the LP, hi-fi, and stereo. As I have shown, one of most important implications of the stereophonic is that sound impacts how we experience the three-dimensional visual world, even to the point of geographic orientation. However, what stereo revealed to attuned listeners was that sound recordings did not just have the capacity to *reproduce* space, but to *produce* entirely new sonic spaces. Writing over the course of a decade in which the negotiation of racialized spaces in the forms of segregation/integration and the advocacy of a Pan-Africanist Nation, Langston Hughes and Amiri Baraka contested traditional ideas of how we define space, neighborhood, and nation in the aural dimension.

However, there is something else at play when we start calling sound a *space*; in treading the line between poetry and recording, *Ask Your Mama* and *It's Nation Time* complicate the relationship between recording, performance, and text, as well as that ever pressing dichotomy of *live* vs. recorded. Baraka was attentive to the paradoxical tension embedded within the stereo LP and used that tension to drive forward his pursuit of a projective black sonic space. If a record is a performance space and can *perform* space, who is to say that a recorded performance is not

live? The issue of liveness will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter on August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*; however, it is worth briefly mentioning it here in order to understand the ways in which Baraka is troubling the usual distinction made between recording and ritual by the likes of Walter Benjamin and even Jacques Attali.[308] Part of the difficulty is that the definition of liveness is often predicated on an antiquated interpretation of recording technology itself that overlooks the important development of the stereo LP. In his book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Philip Auslander argues that the concept of liveness must always be defined *against* recording (59). However, as Baraka contends in the liner notes he wrote for John Coltrane's 1964 *Coltrane Live at Birdland*, acknowledging that half the tracks were recorded in the studio, "All the music on this album is *live*, whether it was recorded above the drunks and clowns at Birdland, or in the studio. There is a daringly human quality to John Coltrane's music that makes itself felt, wherever he records. If you can hear, this music will make you think of a lot of weird and wonderful things. You might even become one of them" (*Black Music* 67).[309] The implication is that the only way to truly access liveness is to *listen.* Though Baraka dances around the idea of giving a visual-sensory description of the nightclub (and then evades it), ultimately, liveness has nothing to do with the recorded vs. the performed, or the nightclub vs. the studio, but with the *a*-liveness of the music and the individual

[308] Benjamin is famous for saying that technological reproducibility "emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual" (*The Work of Art* 24). Attali, on the other hand, was anxious about the effects of recording on music because "reproduction, in a certain sense, is the death of the original, the triumph of the copy, and the forgetting of the represented foundation" (*Noise* 89).

[309] Paul Gonsalves' solo on "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" from Duke Ellington's 1956 *Ellington at Newport* is a particularly notable example of how a live album could capture aspects of performance that shorter tracks precluded. Running for 27-choruses, the Gonsalves' solo brought the crowd to a frenzy and you can hear not only the band shouting at Gonsalves to keep blowing ("come on!") but the whoops, whistles, and cheers of the crowd that had been moved to its feet. The album is said to have revived Ellington's career. Incidentally, Ellington also re-recorded some of these tracks in the studio (i.e. not all of them were live).

who produces it.[310] By loosening these distinctions between live and recorded, both in these liner notes and in the approach to sound on *It's Nation Time*, Baraka was able to offer a new vision of stereophonic space that reflected the shifting attitude toward sound recording technology, a shift from an emphasis on mere sound reproduction to actual sound *pro*duction.

Sound engineers have continued to develop and advance different kinds of recording and reproduction techniques to enhance sound's spaciousness. The development of quadraphonic sound in the early 1970s, though less successful than stereo, was one of the first attempts at surround sound, and not long thereafter Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound became standard in movie theaters and home cinema systems. However, quadraphonic and surround sound, though popular for cinematic entertainment, never quite caught on in the recorded music industry, and dual channel stereo has continued to dominate. In more recent years, experimental musicians have shown increasing interest in the creation of soundscapes, but experimentation with immersive sonic environments has been around since the early 1970s and was an outgrowth of the experimental music of John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, and others. But given that the term *soundscape* did not enter the lexicon until 1968, it is arguable whether the idea of a soundscape existed prior to stereo. What Langston Hughes hinted at and Amiri Baraka made explosively clear was that stereophonic reproduction had the capacity not just to reproduce the sound of spaces but to create entirely new ones. Opening other dimensions was not simply the domain of science fiction but was made real via stereo sound. Today, we think very little about the produced environments from which our popular music emanates; the idea that they would replicate some *real* acoustic space is hardly a consideration, and recordings are mixed for

[310] Writing about this same Coltrane recording in "Jazz Recordings and the Capturing of Performance," Peter Eldson points out that the distinction between the live and recorded was complicated even further by the fact that Coltrane taped and listened back to many of his performances (152). "Recording does not merely allow access to performances; it intrudes right into the development of the very musical tradition to which it provides access," says Eldson, and thus the line between composition, recording, and text is forever muddled (157).

headphones and car stereos. Listening in one's living room situated perfectly between two speakers seems almost quaint now. And yet, the stereophonic dimension continues to be an important space for cultural exploration. Increasingly, museums such as The Whitney, MOMA, and the New Museum in New York City have included immersive soundscapes and other kinds of sound art among their collections.[311] That such sound installations have become the purview of museums usually devoted to the visual arts is perhaps the greatest evidence that attitudes toward sound in its spatial dimension have shifted.

[311] For example: the entire fourth floor of the Whitney's 2012 Biennial was given over to performance and sound pieces; Sharon Hayes "There's So Much I Want to Say to You," The Whitney, June 21-September 9, 2012; MOMA's Carlito Carvalhosa, "Sum of Days" with Phillip Glass, August 24–November 14, 2011; Pauline Oliveros with Doug Van Nort and FILTER, The New Museum, September 2012.

Coda

The Recording Studio on Stage: Liveness in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*[312]

> *"They don't care nothing about me. All they want is my voice. Well, I done learned that, and they gonna treat me like I want to be treated no matter how much it hurt them. . . . As soon as they get my voice down on them recording machines, then it's just like if I'd be some whore and they roll over and put their pants on."*
> —Ma Rainey, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

August Wilson has noted in several interviews that when he first set out to write a play about the blues singer Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, he was interested in writing about the economic exploitation of black musicians.[313] With the sounds of blues singers emanating from his record player, he began to find the voices of his characters. The explosive themes alongside the musical language of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (1984) became the vehicle that launched Wilson's career. As the play went from a staged reading at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center's National Playwright Conference in 1982 to the Cort Theatre on Broadway in 1984, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* proved the catalyst for Wilson's ten-play "Pittsburgh Cycle" on the history of African Americans in the twentieth century. Critical discourse about the play has centered on the themes of racial exploitation, especially the struggle between the black musicians and the white producer, white manager, and white police officer.[314] However, the importance of Wilson's message has overshadowed his nuanced treatment of the problematic tension between *live* and *recorded* sound in the twentieth century.

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[312] Note: This chapter is a slightly revised version of an article by the same title, Copyright © 2011 The American Studies Association. This article first appeared in *American Quarterly*, Volume 63, Issue 3, September, 2011, pages 555-572.

[313] *See* Samuel G. Freedman, "What Black Writers Owe to Music." *New York Times*. October 14, 1984. A1.

[314] *See* Sandra G. Shannon, "The Blues on Broadway: Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," in *The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson*, 65–88 (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1995).

Turning to a play from 1984 takes us significantly forward in the chronology of this dissertation, but in reflecting back upon a moment relatively early in sound recording's history, Wilson is able to extrapolate a number of the key issues about the technology's impact on our understanding of the relationship between sound, space, and identity. Borrowing its title from one of Ma Rainey's most famous songs, the play dramatizes the 1927 Chicago recording session that produced several of her most well-known recordings, including "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," "Hear Me Talking to You," "Moonshine Blues," and "Prove It On Me." But although Ma Rainey carries the title role of Wilson's play, much of the action takes place in the dialogue between the musicians in her band as they await her arrival at the studio. The discussion among the band members leading up to and following the recording session foreground the many tensions at play between the black musicians and the white recording company, as well as between the changing desires of jazz in the face of older blues traditions. As recordings became more popular and began to play a more prominent role in the musical economy, the priorities of musicians necessarily shifted. Thus the play raises important questions about the relationships between black musicians within an exploitative economic system, but it also stages questions about the relationship among media: between recordings and live performance, and specifically theater. What does it mean to *stage* a recording session, we might ask?

This question helps to crystallize a number of the issues that I have addressed in this dissertation in regard to the triangulation between writing, sound recording, and performance. I argue that it is precisely by locating a recording session within a play—by exploring the intermediality of theater as live and recording as not live—that Wilson is able to perform the fraught tension in blues and jazz history between live improvised performance and recordings. I begin this investigation by situating the play within the ongoing conversation among jazz

scholars about the status of recordings as historical evidence and the aesthetic of "the break." I then explore how the text and action of the play might be said to *evade* the recording and translate the break to theater. And finally, I look at how various productions have addressed the embedded issue of how to deal with recordings in light of the "musicians" onstage. Despite the persistent sense that recordings somehow freeze sounds, taking them out of the spatial and temporal realm, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* demonstrates the way that sound recordings, rather paradoxically, opened new possibilities for improvisation and revision. Taking us into the recording studio, Wilson re-opens the idea of what it means to produce (and not just re-produce) sound.

Liveness and "the Break"

Of the many theoretical debates surrounding jazz and blues music, it is an endemic irony that although improvisation is one of the defining qualities of jazz, so much of what we think of as jazz stems from "definitive" recordings—that is, frozen versions of a music that *moves*. A record may capture a particular performance of an improvised solo, but the act of recording transforms the nature of the performance from one that was temporally bound—or *live*—to one that can be repeated. As Jed Rasula puts it, "Recording tends to reify improvisation, converting the extemporaneous into scripture" leading to the cult of the recording (144). Official jazz history often reads like a discography, and the fetishization of the record by musicians and fans alike has led to a strange conflation of jazz with its recordings. Even the practice of improvisation paradoxically relies on recordings as one of its primary pedagogical strategies, and generations of aspiring musicians have learned to play and to improvise by listening repeatedly to certain recordings and imitating the solos. Famous examples of this practice include young

musicians learning Coleman Hawkins's improvisation on "Body and Soul" or John Coltrane's "Giant Steps."

While Rasula writes specifically about jazz, his arguments echo broader discussions about the relationship between recording technologies and performance. For the field of sound studies, the common wisdom has suggested that sound-reproduction technologies separate sound from the source that produces it, allowing us to hear the voices of the dead.[315] But as I discussed in the Introduction, this dualistic relationship between recorded sounds and dead sounds has created what Philip Auslander refers to as *liveness*. Defining liveness as what recording is not, Auslander asserts that "the meaning of liveness be understood as historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences" (8). In other words, we cannot have the concept of liveness without the advent of radio, recordings, etc. Auslander's definition of liveness responds to those, who, like Rasula, have tended to treat live events as "real" and recorded or broadcast events as secondary or unreal (3). However, when considered in the context of jazz and blues practices, this dichotomy does not always withstand. As I alluded to in my last chapter, Amiri Baraka rightfully points to the difficulty of calling one kind of performance live and a recording not live. In his liner notes for *Coltrane Live at Birdland* (1964), Baraka asserts, "All the music on this album is *live*, whether it was recorded above the drunks and clowns at Birdland, or in the studio" because of the human quality Coltrane brings to his music (*Black Music* 67). Perhaps nowhere are these tensions more evident than in Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.

Discourse about the status of the recording within jazz studies has always been fraught.[316] In his essay "The Media of Memory: The Seductive Menace of Records in Jazz History," Rasula

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[315] *See* "Introduction," *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead; and Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*.

[316] *See* Peter Elsdon, "Jazz Recordings and the Capturing of Performance."

has noted that jazz historiography tends to submerge its reliance on records and "obscure the fact that recordings are the actual subject, not the music as such" (140). As Rasula attempts to untangle the recordings from the *music* in these histories, he argues that the records themselves are their own history. However, this difference is not so much between recordings and the music as it is between recordings of the music and live performances of the music. By Rasula's logic, the truth of the music is somehow located in the live performance, but that the live performance is always *lost* amid the recorded archive.[317]

"Jazz has been a constant testimony to things that will never be known, people that will forever go unheard," says Rasula (152). This sense that the recordings are somehow always in relation to absence and loss—or what is *not* recorded and *not* said—draws from a larger thematic interest within jazz and African American studies that has been addressed by the likes of Nathaniel Mackey, Albert Murray, Fred Moten, and Brent Edwards. Though there are a number of ways critics talk about the aesthetic move that mirrors this loss, most simply refer to it as *the break*. Within jazz, the break is usually defined as the moment within the music when the ensemble stops playing momentarily while the soloist improvises. This suspension of time and disruption to the rhythmic flow of the music enables moments of musical freedom. Murray has noted the centrality of the break to improvisation, for "it is precisely in this disjuncture which is the moment of truth . . . . It is when you establish your identity; it is when you write your signature on the epidermis of actuality . . . that is how you come to terms with the void" (112). In my own experience as a singer, I have compared it to being thrown into freefall where you are the only one to catch yourself—you and your imagination of the chords that might be there.

[317] There are a number of ways that writers have attempted to explore this sense of loss. In the space of a recording's absence, Michael Ondaatje's 1976 novel *Coming through Slaughter* fictionalizes the life of the legendary Buddy Bolden. As Ondaatje has noted, the lack of records by Bolden allowed him to *improvise* to "suit the truth of fiction." Michael Ondaatje, *Coming through Slaughter* (New York: Random House, 1996), 157.

Within music, the metaphor of the break almost always carries a temporal valence and is sometimes called *stop-time*, for it creates the effect of time stopping even as the music moves forward. Although the break does not literally *stop* the time of the song, it conveys this effect by rupturing the flow of the tempo as the rhythm section drops out. But the break can also refer to a more general loosening of the music to allow for greater improvisation. In his book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Moten extends this idea beyond its temporal dimensions to describe a broader Afro-Diasporic aesthetic practice of disjuncture across the arts, including performance, literature, and photography. Moten points specifically to Amiri Baraka, whose work operates in a space that is at once "internal and interstitial" as it creates openings in which to perform black radical resistance (85). In this context, the break offers a "liberatory possibility," and Moten points to the "generative forces there are in the asymptotic, syncopated nonconvergence of event, text, and tradition" (87). In other words, the break is the creation of an opening or space for creative exploration where none existed before and, like an asymptote, is an opening that cannot be closed. Moten's use of the term reveals the flexibility of *the break* as a metaphor that reaches beyond the music and characterizes a range of aesthetic practices. As we see in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, establishing a break in the convergence between the recording and the live theatrical event becomes one of the driving challenges for Wilson.

If Auslander's assertion is true, and liveness is to be defined in a negative relationship to recording, is there a way to reanimate the recording and make its sounds live again in the context of theater? Does the existence of the recording mean that the music is dead or hermetically sealed? The answer proves problematic. By fictionalizing the life of a real person and staging a famous recording session, Wilson is faced with competing evidence: records, film, and photographs of Ma Rainey. As a result of these competing media, Wilson has less freedom to

fictionalize her sound, but also cannot simply re-create the 1927 recording—to truly participate in the jazz tradition he must find a place in the break where he can improvise. Part of his strategy to create a break is to privilege fiction over biography. As Wilson noted in a 1984 *New York Times* interview, he deliberately chose not to base his play on extensive research, arguing that "too much research puts a straitjacket on—you feel compelled to address specific points" ("A Playwright" C3).[318] To combat the straitjacket effect, he assigns most of the dialogue to fictionalized band members whose identities would have been obscured by the celebrity of Ma Rainey and instead makes Ma Rainey a more peripheral character whose presence is *felt*, even in her absence.[319] Importantly, the play's action is built on an *evasion* of the recording, or we might say, a break.

An Evasion Plot: The Recording We Never Hear

During the play, Ma Rainey expresses no eagerness to record. To her, making a recording is to take her "voice and trap it in them fancy boxes with all them buttons and dials" (79). Yet the "Mother of the Blues" (as she was frequently called) was one of the first female blues singers to record and have a record deal with a major label, Paramount Records. During the 1920s she recorded more than a hundred songs and mentored other young blues singers, including Bessie Smith. Although she acknowledges the monetary value of making recordings, ultimately recording is a form of entrapment and exploitation, which she likens to captivity and prostitution. Unconcerned with record sales, Ma Rainey's allegiance is to her fans, and her skepticism of recordings implies that they are merely a way to advertise for her tour. As her moniker suggests,

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[318] *See also* August Wilson, "Preface to Three Plays," in *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture*, ed. Robert G. O'Meally, 563–68 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[319] The 1927 Chicago recording session would have likely featured Johnny Dodds and Kid Ory—both of whom hold a place in jazz history—however, the Paramount recording merely lists Ma Rainey and her Georgia Jazz Band.

Rainey's life and her music are firmly situated among the origin stories of blues and jazz, but as one who grew up in vaudeville and only later made the transition to a recording career, Rainey's conception of the music privileges live performance. To represent this resistance on stage, the plot revolves around the ancillary activity that takes place while *not* recording: the arrival of the band, rehearsals, and mostly waiting. Waiting for Ma to arrive and waiting for technical issues to be resolved.

In this way, the play operates in an aesthetic of interruption and false starts, which affects the sense of time and its progression. Wilson's are a hesitating blues. During the first act, much of the dramatic tension arises from the question of whether Ma Rainey will actually show up for the recording session. As the white manager, Irvin, and the producer, Sturdyvant, set up the recording equipment and test the microphones, Sturdyvant complains about Ma's "shenanigans." Ma is conspicuously absent, but Irvin tries to assure Sturdyvant that he will take care of everything. Throughout the musicians' rehearsal, Irvin repeatedly interrupts to ask the band if they know anything about when Ma will arrive. "Irvin: Say . . . Uh . . . look . . . one o'clock, right? She said one o'clock?" (47). Time passes in the play, but the characters are caught in a state of suspended action as they await Ma's arrival. The temporal disjuncture built into the plot is one of the central methods by which Wilson creates the break. Although the rehearsal was set to begin at one o'clock, there is the sense in which one o'clock is whenever Ma arrives. This manifests itself in Irvin's pauses and tentative tone, and creates anxiety not only among the white producers but among the band members, who have received conflicting information about the set list.

Levee, the young upstart trumpeter, insists that they will be recording his arrangement of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," but Cutler, the band's leader, argues that Ma will stand for no

such thing. Ma's authority is needed to resolve the discrepancy. In the meantime, the band attempts to rehearse, but Levee's diversionary tactics prevent them from starting:

> Slow Drag: Come on, let's rehearse the music.
>
> Levee: You ain't gotta rehearse that . . . ain't nothing but old jug band music. They need one of them jug bands for this.
>
> Slow Drag: Don't make me no difference. Long as we get paid.
>
> Levee: That ain't what I'm talking about, nigger. I'm talking about art! (25)

The conversation leads to a longer debate about the difference between "just playing the music" the way Ma wants it and making "art," and meanwhile the rehearsal is delayed yet again. The interchange is indicative of the action in the play's first act: a series of digressions as the band members kill time waiting for Ma. Even though she is not present onstage, Ma Rainey's phantom presence is *felt* precisely because she is absent. She is even strangely evoked through impersonation, as Slow Drag flamboyantly performs Ma's part during a rehearsal of "Hear Me Talking to You." Slow Drag's caricatured imitation of Ma prior to her arrival helps establish the authenticity of the Ma Rainey who will soon arrive onstage, but again serves to increase the dramatic tension of her absence.

Most audience members, we can assume, will be familiar with the original Ma Rainey recordings, alerting them to the fact that the recording session will eventually happen (because history demands it), but Wilson introduces the tensions of a history that *might* have been. As Alan Nadel has commented,

> The fact that history might have been very different informs all of Wilson's works, which manifest an acute awareness of the plasticity of the official record. .

> . . The problem of history, in other words, is how the record is produced, whose voices it includes, what arrangements it uses, and who has the rights to control its distribution and accrue its revenues. (Nadel 104)

Nadel, of course, is speaking to the issues related to African American history being excluded from the official record, but his comment also suggests that Wilson treats the sound recordings and the historical record as interchangeable metaphors that share temporal characteristics. Prior to the invention of sound-reproduction technologies, sounds tended to be characterized as bound to the particular moment in which they were produced and died off not long after they sounded. Friedrich Kittler has remarked on the seeming immortality of speech and sound made possible by sound-reproduction technologies—a theme that we have seen repeatedly questioned and reconsidered throughout this dissertation—stating that "what phonographs . . . were able to store was time: time as a mixture of audio frequencies in the acoustic realm" (3). If we think of recordings as devices for storing time, phonograph recordings are inherently engaged in a historical project. Thus Wilson maps these theoretical principles of sound reproduction and their effect on our sense of temporality to the theater.

By delaying Ma's arrival and effectively suspending the sense of time in the play, Wilson has created a break in which he can fictionalize the events surrounding the recording. As the band members wait for Ma's arrival, they *riff* and improvise on themes ranging from shoes and women to art, black exploitation, and African history. The conversations that seem like digressions or interruptions of the rehearsal in fact become the primary action of the play. Through jokes and storytelling, Wilson is able to create a complex dynamic between the band members and Levee the trumpeter as they attempt to negotiate between the music's traditions and its future. The effect of this suspension of time is that the conversations sound and feel like

improvised solos—and of course, it is the improvisational nature of jazz performance that primarily distinguishes the live from the recorded.

While the band continues to wait, they attempt to rehearse Levee's version of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." Since the band members do not read music, they must learn by ear. Rather than play the music so the band can repeat it, Levee attempts to describe it: "Me and Cutler play on the breaks. (*Becoming animated*) Now we gonna dance it . . . but we ain't gonna countrify it" (38). The description expresses Levee's enthusiasm, but does little to elucidate what the music should sound like. When the band fails to play the piece as Levee imagines it, he lashes out at them, saying, "You all got to keep up now. You playing in the wrong time. Ma come in over the top. She got to find her own way in" (38). Here, the wrong time carries a double meaning. Not only is the band in the wrong tempo, they are also old-fashioned—or one might say, behind the times. From Levee's perspective, the rest of the band members are stuck in the past. On a certain level, their playing is no different than a phonograph record; they play the music the way they have always played it. The central conflict of the debate between Levee and the band mirrors the conflict between the record's repeatability and improvisation. The music demands that it be repeatable, but also that it retain the flexibility to change. In exploring this tension, Wilson weaves together the multiple senses of time and its mutability.

Once Ma Rainey does arrive, other factors emerge to disrupt the recording session. As she enters the studio, Ma is accompanied by a policeman, along with her nephew Sylvester and her "girl" Dussie Mae.[320] We learn that her delayed arrival was caused by a car accident and that the officer wants to arrest her for assault and battery against a cab driver who refused to give her a ride. Although Irvin is able to pay off the officer, other factors that delay the recording session

[320] Although never made explicit, it is clear that Dussie Mae is Ma Rainey's lover. Throughout the play, the characters refer to her as "Ma's girl."

begin to accumulate. The studio is too cold, so she won't sing. They didn't bring her a Coca-Cola, so she won't sing. Then, Ma's insistence that her nephew Sylvester perform the introduction on the recording nearly derails the project because Sylvester suffers from a severe stutter. Debate about this stutter and whether Sylvester should be allowed on the recording bears witness to the kinds of voices that are deemed *un*recordable and are thus written out of the recorded history. Nathaniel Mackey has referred to the stutter as "the most appropriate, self-reflexive feature of an articulation that would appear to be blocked in advance" ("Sound and Sentiment" 616).[321] Although the stutter is an impediment that disrupts the flow of speech, for Mackey, this stammering state of unresolve can be productive. The performance of this stutter within the play allows Wilson to introduce an alternate history as the recording is delayed yet again. In this light, we might view Sylvester's stutter as the aesthetic manifestation of the blockage threatening the recording before it even begins.

After several ruined takes, Sylvester finally overcomes his stutter long enough to say the introduction: "All right, boys, you done seen the rest . . . now, I'm gonna show you the best. Ma Rainey's gonna show you her black bottom" (Wilson 85). The band plays and Ma sings, but Sturdyvant discovers that there was a malfunction with the cable and nothing was recorded. While the producers take fifteen minutes to reset the microphones, the band retreats to the rehearsal room where Cutler proceeds to recount a tragic tale about the mistreatment of a black reverend by white men. The story causes the explosive Levee to start raging at God while stabbing his pocket knife into the air, but the scene ends abruptly, fades to black, and shifts quickly to a point in the near future as the band is wrapping up the recording session in the

[321] In Mackey's essay, the stutter is discussed in the context of William Carlos Williams's *Man Orchid*, whose stuttering protagonist is half black, half white, and represents "America's yet-to-be-resolved identity." The stutter is the manifestation of a productive unresolved state.

studio. It is as though Levee literally *cuts* the scene with his knife—catapulting the audience ahead in time. Therefore, when the recording of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" is made at last, the audience never sees or hears it. Instead, it ostensibly occurs outside the time of the play, and as the stage directions indicate, "*Lights come up in the studio. The last bars of the last song of the session are dying out*" (100). In this way, Wilson translates the blues *break* into a theatrical *break* by employing a method specific to the medium of theater: the blackout.

As I have shown, Wilson translates the jazz aesthetic practice of the break to the theater on several levels, including plot and character, by delaying the recording session and Ma's arrival onstage. However, the blackout, as a theatrical technology, has a particular power to create a feeling of absence as it severs the recording from the drama of the play and makes the recording itself a kind of *phantom limb*. Borrowing the term from Wilson Harris, Mackey has described the phantom limb as "a feeling for what is not there that reaches beyond as it calls into question what is" ("Sound and Sentiment" 606).[322] In other parts of this dissertation, we have seen the way that the phantom limb has manifested itself in texts in the form of the ellipsis. It is as though the negative spaces not only imply what is absent but how what we take to be whole may reflect only a fragment of a larger reality. Thus the 1927 recording of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" haunts the play and asserts a ghostly presence as it simultaneously highlights the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the theatrical performance and recordings.

On a more practical level, Wilson's decision to leave out the recording that gives its title to the play illustrates the fundamental impossibility of staging a recording. By their nature recordings are infinitely repeatable and exact. Even the most skilled musicians cannot give the

[322] Wilson Harris positions the phantom limb as an Afro-Diasporic practice akin to limbo, as it stages the African dislocation. *See* Wilson Harris, "History Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guianas," *Explorations: A Selection of Talks and Articles*, ed. Hena Maes-Jelinek (Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1981), 26–28.

exact same performance twice, and it is this infinite repeatability of phonographic technologies that marks the primary difference between recorded and live performances. Not only would staging the "real" recording be redundant, no performance could ever perfectly replicate the phonographic duplicate. Therefore Wilson sets up the scenario for intermediality between theater and the recording, but ultimately avoids it—creating a break where none existed before. What we are left with instead are a number of different versions of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," none of which attempt to approximate the recording. In addition to the "alternate take" that was not recorded, the play contains fragmented versions in the form of rehearsals, as well as the hypothetical arrangement Levee had written.

The practice of "versioning," like the "break," is a key tenet of jazz improvisation that stresses how music is always coming into being and never settles. The term *versioning* emerged from dub practices in reggae music, but is now commonly used to describe the jazz and blues tradition of playing standards, whereby the music's originality is judged on creative modification of the song, rather than a new composition.[323] Versioning can be as simple as changing and shifting a few notes of the melody, or creating a radically inventive arrangement of a piece. It is a move that stresses variation, avoids reification, and thus works against recording. By giving these versions performance in the space of the play, Wilson imagines and improvises on the tune "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." The play makes these versions primary—thus seemingly privileging the *live* over the recording. But then again, there is also the sense in which the practice of versioning is in fact made possible by the existence of recordings. Wilson never allows the recordings to be one thing or the other. In one brief interchange between Cutler and Ma, Cutler points out that "Moonshine Blues," a song that appears on the set list, is "one of them

[323] Mackey has also referred to this idea as "othering" and the practice in black vernacular culture of privileging the verb. *See* Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," *Representations* 39 (Summer 1992): 53.

songs Bessie Smith sang." To which Ma responds, "Bessie what? Ain't nobody thinking about Bessie. I taught Bessie. She ain't doing nothing but imitating me" (78). What Cutler means, of course, is that "Moonshine Blues" is a song that Bessie Smith recorded. While the practice in performance encourages versioning, this interchange illustrates how the recording industry was beginning to shape how people thought about ownership in music. Ma might have sung the song first, but Bessie recorded it first with Columbia Records in 1924. And while the blues actively call out for versioning, recordings simultaneously resist and enable repetition and variation. In staging a phantom *version* of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," Wilson seems to be arguing, as Ma does, that there is room, even amid the most definitive and famous recordings, to improvise and elaborate.

Who Plays the Blues: Difficulties of Staging

While the text of the play reveals Wilson's use of the break to evade the recording at the level of plot, staging *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* raises additional tensions between *liveness* and recordings. As directors and producers have confronted the conflicting demands of a jazz aesthetic in a theatrical medium, one finds that Wilson has created a play that is deliberately difficult to stage. Although Wilson makes explicit that his play is *not* a musical, it is a play that calls for music. When confronted with staging music for which the "source" recordings exist, how ought one deal with these recordings? Should they be a part of the production? What kinds of casting considerations must be made for a play that calls on its actors to "play" instruments? In addressing these questions, a director has essentially three options. The first is to cast actors who do not necessarily play instruments, but who mime to the original 1927 Ma Rainey recordings. The second is to cast actors who do not play instruments but who mime to

prerecorded music. The third is to cast actor-musicians who can also perform the music. In a survey of reviews of major productions of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, most directors opt for one of the latter two possibilities—I have not found one that has attempted to synchronize the performance with the 1927 recording. That no productions have done so is telling and demonstrates the strength of Wilson's resistance to the mechanical repetitions built into theatrical performance. As I show, there are benefits and drawbacks to each staging possibility. When executed by smaller theater companies with fewer resources, the results of bad dubbing can be, as one Ohio reviewer put it, "deadly."[324] When done well, it can create fruitful relationships between the characters and their instruments.

In the original production that moved from the Yale Repertory to Broadway in 1984, there was some discussion as to whether to cast musicians or actors in the roles of the band members, but ultimately it was deemed more important to cast the right actors and work on the musical aspects later. According to a 1984 *New York Times* review, when the actors were initially brought together for a staged reading at the 1982 National Playwrights Conference, they were not asked to play or even mime instruments. The play was performed "a cappella" (i.e., without accompaniment), and the actors approached the reading as "vocalizing together like a jazz group."[325] The following year, the same actors were brought together again at the Yale Repertory Company for a full staging, and it was decided that the production would incorporate tape recordings and train the actors to mime appropriately. For a play that directly addresses the problems of sound recording, there is something inherently problematic about seeing the bodies of the musicians onstage and seeing the instruments in their hands, but hearing the music come from elsewhere. If done purposefully, one could argue that displacing the sound from the band

[324] Fran Heller, "'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom' at Beck Falls Short," *Cleveland Jewish News*, February 6, 2009, 22.
[325] Enid Nemy, "A Ma Rainey Quartet Plays Its Own Special Music," *New York Times*, October 28, 1984, A1.

members highlights the exploitative nature of recordings that "trap" sound (as Ma says) out of reach of the musicians. It stresses how the recorded music does not belong to them. However, staging directions to this effect are absent from Wilson's script and are more likely the accidental result of casting priorities. This much is evidenced by later productions that have attempted to incorporate more live playing.

When the production moved to Broadway, significant pressure was placed on the actors, especially the two horn players, to learn to play their instruments. Joe Senneca, who played Cutler, the trombonist, was submitted to a series of what he called "painful" lessons so that he would be able to play during the show (Enid A1). The result was a combination of some live playing by Cutler (trombone) and Levee (trumpet), and tape recordings. Frank Rich referred to the playing as "nearly convincing," and indeed, archival video of the performance held by the New York Public Library reveals it to be just that (C1).[326] As the musicians prepare to rehearse, they play a few tentative notes on their instruments, just to get the sound going. The rustling of air moving through the trumpet and the vibrating pluck of the bass establish a sense of authenticity to their playing, regardless of their skill. However, in this way, their playing is more decorative than musical. It announces to the audience that the instruments are real, but does little more than that. In particular, Cutler's trombone playing during the rehearsal scenes verges on distracting as he fumbles for the notes. On the whole, the production does a reputable job of masking the miming of Toledo (piano) and Slow Drag (bass) by placing them just outside the stage lights, with the instruments turned away from the audience.[327]

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[326] An archival video of the original 1984 Broadway Production of Ma Rainey's Black Bottom at the Cort Theater is available at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts—Theater on Film and Tape Archive (viewed May 2010).

[327] One problem with viewing an archival video rather than seeing the performance in the theater is that it necessarily flattens the sound, making it difficult to discern whether there would have been acoustical

But what kind of jazz band is it when the players are not responsive to one another, but instead are responsive to a recording? It is a band that *sounds* convincingly live, even if it is not—and perhaps that is the point. To ask the actor-musicians to play along to a static, repeatable recording unfortunately limits the improvisatory possibilities. The difficulties embedded in the staging of Wilson's play point to important differences between a scripted theatrical performance and a jazz performance. Wilson may desire the improvisatory feeling of live jazz—and he is able to stage this feeling in the conversational interaction between the band members—but the fact of the matter is that theatrical performances strive to be repeatable in the way that recordings are. This again challenges the duality set up by Auslander that defines the theater as live and recordings as not live. The play's action may attempt to evade the recording, but ultimately the medium of the theater is inextricably caught in the necessity of repeatability. By juxtaposing live players with recordings, it simultaneously evokes the presence of the live musicians and their absence, and retangles the music's live and recorded manifestations.

More recent productions of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* have attempted to break away from the constraints of taped music altogether and bring more of the jazz aesthetic into the theater by hiring actor-musicians. One such example was a production by the Seattle Repertory Theater, which I saw in 2005. Although the decision was made to cast "actors," the Seattle Rep found actors who could also play the instruments ascribed to them. But in any production where actors are required to play instruments, decisions must be made about which skill to prioritize, and acting is usually the winner. If at times the playing in the Seattle Rep production sounded a bit rough, the fact that the music is part of a rehearsal helped carry it through. The band's playing

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inconsistencies in the hall. For instance, depending on the placement of the speakers, the sound may or may not have seemed to come from the piano.

was credible, and without the distraction of apprehensive miming, the director could explore the relationship between the actors and their instruments. As Joe Adcock of the *Seattle Post* notes:

> Don Mayo, as the pianist, is as versatile and complex as his instrument. He offers big chords of philosophy, history, detachment and passion. As Cutler, the trombonist and the band's leader, Wendell W. Wright provides emphatic depth. Chic Street Man, as the bassist, adds staccato rhythms. (E1)

Indeed, Wilson's stage directions suggest that the characters are extensions of their instruments. For example, Toledo "is the piano player. In control of his instrument, he understands and recognizes that its limitations are an extension of himself," and Levee "plays trumpet. His voice is strident and totally dependent on his manipulation of breath. He plays wrong notes frequently (Wilson 20, 23). The directions not only indicate how the instrument extends to the character but also the style of the character's playing. To demonstrate the fluidity between the instruments and the characters' personalities, however, requires that the actors both play and act. In the Seattle Rep production, the audience could begin to associate the sounds of the instruments with the actors who played them, not only reading the instruments into the bodies but hearing what Roland Barthes calls the "grain" of the player in the instrument.[328] The "grain" is that distinct quality of the individual body that one can hear in the music (or writing). It is linked to uniqueness of sound beyond the quality of the music or text itself. Writing specifically about listening to recordings of singers and not live performances, Barthes's grain is a quality that can be heard regardless of whether the body is present.

We tend to think of recordings as something that abstracts the voice from the body, but for Barthes, this is not necessarily the case. The importance of the embodied and lived aspects of

[328] See Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *The Responsibility of Forms*.

the blues are also important to Wilson, and to how the character of Ma Rainey understands her music. "White folks don't understand about the blues," she says. "They hear it come out, but they don't know how it got there. They don't understand that's life's way of talking. You don't sing to feel better. You sing 'cause that's a way of understanding life" (92). The problem with "white folks"—and here we may presume she means the record producers Sturdyvant and Irvin—is that they divorce the voice from its source. They do not hear the blues as the expression of an individual life. All they hear is the resulting sound with no understanding of its context. If the blues were merely an emotionally bound music that makes one feel better, it would be easier to separate the music from the person who produces it. By making the blues a process for understanding, Wilson links the blues to rationality and the articulation of lived experience. If a stutter blocks articulation, the blues is the method out. Wilson recognizes that the blues and the sound associated with it are always intertwined with the individual life, whether they are performed in a juke joint or on a phonograph record. Although recording technology has the power to separate the voice from the body, it cannot erase the presence of the embodied life in the voice.

It is precisely this dynamic that makes Wilson's staging of the tensions between liveness and recordings, presence and absence so interesting: with a blues figure like Ma Rainey, it is difficult to extract her life from her music. Her *liveness* is neither contingent on the recording nor her physical presence onstage, for she exudes a magnetic pull even when absent. The best singers of the blues, from Ma Rainey to Billie Holiday, have voices that sound like they have been *through* something. They represent voices that have *lived*. It is this aspect of liveness that Auslander and scholars of performance studies do not address, for it does not fall neatly into the dichotomy between the so-called live and the recorded. When sound is recorded and taken out of

its temporal dimension, the sound is no less live even long after the performer's death. The theater, as venue with its own fraught relationship to *liveness*, is a particularly apt space in which to explore the aspect of the *lived* in the blues.

As a medium, the theater enables Wilson to develop a critical relationship to the recording, and its place in the jazz and blues tradition. For what I find that Wilson is doing particularly well is using the theater to rearticulate jazz practices and stage the tensions between the recording and the notion of liveness in jazz and blues. Wilson's play demonstrates the importance of the presence of the human body—and in his case, the black body. It is only with the presence of live bodies in juxtaposition with phantom presence of the records that Wilson can express what it means to have lived the blues and reclaim the music from an exploitative white recording industry. It is important for Wilson that the audience both feels Ma Rainey's absence, as well as her presence.

As I have shown, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* engages the aesthetic practice of the "break" as a way to approach the staging of a recording session. Wilson achieves this in several ways: first, by delaying Ma Rainey's arrival and thus suspending the play's time line; second, by creating disruptions that prevent the recording session from starting; and third, by purposefully *not* staging the "take" that gave us the 1927 version of "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." It is in this third method that Wilson finds an analogue to the musical break in the theatrical vernacular by employing a blackout in the place of recording session. The feeling of *absence* that this blackout creates illustrates how Wilson inverts the trope of the "phantom limb" by playing in all the places where the limb—the 1927 "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom"—is *not*. Therefore much of the action derives from improvising around the recording itself, but never actually replicating it or

playing it. Of course, it was the absence that surrounded the 1927 recording that initially called out to Wilson to improvise. Wilson therefore is able to both resist the constraints of the definitive recording and invert the argument that the recording was something to be resisted in the first place.[329] By avoiding the staging of the recording, he acknowledges the dichotomy between the live and the recorded within the contemporary discourse, and is able to move the conversation forward by worrying the line between the recorded and the live, illustrating an interplay between the media that does not necessitate subordination of one to the other.

Wilson's play is indicative of what Rasula alludes to and other scholars have begun to notice, which is that although we tend to treat the recording as definitive, artists themselves have long been working against this. For example, in 1957 Louis Armstrong recorded a four-LP box set titled *Satchmo: A Musical Autobiography* in which he rerecords many of his most famous recordings, informing the listener about the history behind the recordings in the interceding tracks. Many of the songs are in a similar spirit to the original recordings, or re-create the improvised solos he would have played, but he also takes many liberties in creating new versions of the tunes. Which is to say, of course, that even in the most definitive of recordings, one can make room to play in the margins and to version again.

It is fitting, perhaps, to end this dissertation with Ma Rainey—a blues singer whose sound helped to popularize recordings. Although the Ma Rainey in Wilson's play denigrates the recorded medium, recordings were an important part of the real Ma Rainey's identity as a stage performer. As Rainey's trombone player Al Wynn recalled, "She would prove herself to be the real star of the whole evening. Her entrance was—she would come out of a large victrola—it was made just like an old-style phonograph and she would walk out of that singing the

[329] It is a move that Ralph Ellison would call to change the joke and slip the yoke.

'Moonshine Blues' which was her big hit at that time" (qtd. Lieb 31). The gag, of course, is that Rainey inverted Edison's "tone-tests," which attempted to prove to audiences that the phonograph sounded just like the original performer. Instead, it was the phonograph that would prove to sound like Ma Rainey. Perhaps even more than Louis Armstrong's, Rainey's voice was interchangeable with the phonograph. Wilson's play, in reflecting back upon this moment in the technology's history, brings together a number of the themes we have encountered throughout this dissertation, including the performative qualities of speech-sounds, the tension between race and the recording industry, the complicated spatial dynamics of sound in its reproduction, and the recording studio as a space in which new unimagined sounds are produced. Ultimately, our study of recording technology and literature is made up of a complex set of returns. The literary texts examined here require us as readers to inhabit not just one, or two places, but a third more complicated space as we follow an elliptical pattern linked by the dual foci of reading and listening. In this third space of an imagined auditory performance, we too must improvise and take up our rights as listeners.

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