BLACK AND BLUE: JAZZ, TECHNOLOGY, AND AFRO-DIASPORIC IDENTITY

By

Andrew Joseph Hines

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

English

August, 2011

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Prof. Houston A. Baker Jr.

Prof. Dana D. Nelson

Thelonious Monk's *Underground* (1968) does not have your typical jazz album cover (Figure 1). Instead of portraying the modernist musician sitting contemplatively at the keyboard, his hands glimpsed through a filter of blue coolness, the cover of *Underground* builds a troubling tableau. Monk is caricatured as a World War II French Resistance fighter. "VIVE LA FRANCE" is painted prominently on the back wall of his digs. Beneath the scrawl sits a piece of battlefield memorabilia: an unconscious Nazi officer. Yet, despite this spatio-temporal deflection, Monk stolidly remains a stereotypical jazz musician; cigarette dangling from his mouth and surrounded by bottle after bottle of open wine. In the background is a gun-toting white woman for whom the liner notes instructs: "no explanation was forthcoming." This graphic characterization is especially troubling when one discovers that Monk had no hand in its design and like virtually all other album covers of his era, *Underground* was designed and photographed by white designers. Black musicians like Monk often had no say in the images that covered their art. The prevailing thought seemed to be that jazzmen were not "educated" like their white counterparts in the psychology of package design, which allowed those package designers to dictate and control these photographic representations of Black musicians.

Perhaps because of its explicit stereotypography, *Underground*'s Grammy award winning cover reveals a system of white, institutional control over Modern Jazz (Monk's preferred term for bebop) hiding behind it. Modern jazz is music that affords free black expression inside and outside of rhythm and tonality that, soon enough, finds itself as a cultural form that was (and is) uniquely *American*. Not only does *Underground* expose a potential rearticulation and reassertion of Black stereotype, it also parodies the very

emancipatory space of black articulation that Ralph Ellison builds in *Invisible Man*. As with Ellison's underground or with Monk's in walks a contradiction. It comes in the form of a question that can never be asked enough: How does jazz, a music of African-American origin, become the music of America when for so long those who played it and developed it, were scarcely defined as full citizens?

Figure 1: Thelonious Monk, *Underground*

Jazz is a machine, a technology, a *technê* that through its structure and use opens up a space of expression and cultural articulation for Black subjects. Like blues, its "survival technology" cousin, jazz has the ability to weave in and out of structures of control while still reshaping them by creating a space where white visual stereotypes fail to operate; a space akin to Ellison's underground.[i] In creating this space, jazz itself is a structure that keeps other structures of expression running, even when those other structures are controlled by whites; just as Lucius Brockway says of himself, "They got all this machinery but that ain't everything; *we the machines inside the machine*."[ii]

Fifty years after *Underground,* jazz, I think, has become less about race, and all about cool. The images of Miles, of Bird, of Diz, and of Coltrane tinted blue are ubiquitous. One can say "jazz" now and not just an aural aesthetic comes to mind, but also a visual one,

inflected by album covers designed in the late 1940s and 1950s that are memorialized now on posters that hang on the walls of dorm rooms, bars, and man caves across the world. Jazz has become inescapably *American* in part because of its packaging, the technologies of reproduction built around it to control what jazz is attempting to articulate. But the force of jazz refuses a singular nationality. Rather the *technê* of jazz, its artistic crafting, is more global. Jazz is perhaps more Afro-Diasporic than African-American. By connecting two disparate physical locations, technology creates an imaginary space—the Internet immediately comes to mind, but so does more "low-tech" escapist technology, like the novel)—which for jazz is a ground for the articulation of a cosmopolitan black voice outside the strictures of stereotype.

Until recently, most of my intellectual labor has been devoted to trying to sort out what precisely is going on in Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965), a narrativized collection of interviews that Warren conducted with major African American literary and Civil Rights figures including James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. One of my major concerns with Warren's work is the way he sets up and excerpts quotations in the text. For example, Warren forces Whitney Young, executive director of the Urban League to make "A Joke about Historical Context" when Young tells the following anecdote:

> A group of Negroes was trying to get a mayor of a certain Southern city to employ Negro nurses, and after a great deal of effort, he finally said: "Well, I can get these nurses in here if you will promise me you don't care how I do it." And they all said all right. And he said, "Now don't get angry with me—when you hear how I do it." And they said, "No, we just want nurses in there." Then he publicly went to the hospitable people and went to the legislature, and he said: "I think it's a doggone dirty shame that our fine white girls from nice homes and nice backgrounds have to rub and scrub and ash the private parts of those black Negroes."[iii]

Warren's heading directs the reader's interpretation away from the complicated racial realities of African American experience in the 1960s and diffuses it as a "joke." Warren's framing discounts the potentially serious claims Young makes with his anecdote. Intentionally or not, Warren redirects the words of Young—and all of his interview subjects—to speak for *Warren's* assertions; to answer his own question, Robert Penn Warren elects himself to "speak for the negro."

Part of my interest in Warren and in jazz is because the phenomenon of appropriating or inventing black commentary hasn't yet been escaped. It is so prevalent that even as I write there is a minor controversy brewing that to me, at least, obliquely parallels the systems of control that Warren and jazz marketers both deploy. On May 11, 2011 Jon Stewart lambasted Fox News for their escalation (and generation) of controversy over an invitation extended to Common, an African American rapper, to visit the White House from First Lady Michelle Obama. After his segment aired Bill O'Reilly invited Stewart for an interview on his show, the *O'Reilly Factor,* the following Monday. Their ensuing debate rests on two points of contention: first, does Common "celebrate" (O'Reilly's word) the alleged "cop-killer," Assata Shakur? And, second, even if he does "celebrate" her, why is Fox not consistent in their disparagement of other performers who also have written, performed, and defended songs about "cop-killers" and been invited to the White House? O'Reilly persistently asks Stewart why Common would go down to Cuba to visit Shakur if he didn't "support her," to which Stewart consistently replies "I don't know Common, but I suspect…" Herein lies the problem: why are Stewart and O'Reilly generating explanations for this visit? Why can't Common speak for himself? Both views, even if Stewart's view seems more palatable to liberals, attempt to frame Common's voice with their own commentary. The exploration of

the second point of contention reveals the problem with the discourse about race in the United States: it virtually doesn't exist. When Stewart mentions that Bono, Bob Dylan, and Bruce Springsteen all support convicted killers and asks why Fox doesn't question their White House appearances, no one dares point out that Common is black and that all of the other musicians mentioned are white. There is something disturbing that Stewart points out in his paralipsis, which, in fact, is the elision of race, an elision that Warren partially participated in with the 1930 Southern Agrarian manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand,* and that packagers of jazz did with their images and distribution that somehow turns black music into *American* music. Sadly, I think it still needs to be emphasized that Common, the men and women that Warren interviewed, and jazz all make their own articulations through a *technê* that is disrupted when mediated by white systems of representation and reproduction.

What, then, is jazz *technê*? *Technê* indicates craftsmanship, art, and the entanglement of these phenomena. The practice of music often gets shoved into a narrow gap between art and craft—practicing an instrument is called "woodshedding," something associated with craft, but many modernists had seen music as embodying a pure form of artistic expression. In the term *technê* I align crafting with the development of technology. I am invoking a cultural craft and invention in its own right, one that melds technology and art in a single term.[iv]

But still: why technology? Part of my impetus to "make" jazz technology is to resurrect an otherwise buried discourse about the relationship of Blacks to technology. In his short, biting essay "Technology & Ethos" Amiri Baraka points out the glaring power dynamic held by those who invent and maintain society's technologies: "Machines, the entire technology of the West, is just that, the technology of the West."[v] Baraka's almost too

obvious statement draws to mind Aimé Césaire's comments at *Le Congrés des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs* held at the Sorbonne in 1956, and reported on by James Baldwin in his essay "Princes and Powers." Baldwin sums up how Césaire describes the center of their cultural crisis, "that culture which is strongest from the material and technological point of view threatens to crush all weaker cultures, particularly in a world in which, distance counting for nothing, the technologically weaker cultures have no means of protecting themselves."[vi] These insights on technology and technology's relationship to those that the West "Others" highlights the tenuous, power inflected relationship that technology has with Black subjects.

Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) took this philosophy of technological power to its heart, recognizing that to "up-build" and "develop[]…the Negro Race" was to become well-organized and economically independent. Being economically independent in the 1910s meant controlling forms of industry, technology, and commerce, which Garvey attempted to do, most prominently, with his Black owned and operated shipping and passenger company, the Black Star Line.[vii] Africans and African Americans fought (and still must fight) to escape a stereotype of being Luddites, an attribution that is a symptom for the association that anything that is from Africa must be *the primitive*. What is lost in this blindness is the recognition that jazz is innovative technology constructed out of musical traditions from the West *and* from Diasporic locales that can weave through the structural means to control it.[viii]

Jazz embodies both assimilation and distinctiveness, because the music education that African Americans underwent in the United States in the early twentieth century highlights the push and pull between classical tradition and that of the "folk." Part of this entanglement reveals itself in the way jazz musicians were taught to approach their instruments during the

first half of the twentieth century. Most classroom or private instruction was classical in focus. Black students would learn to read musical notation and play accordingly. Such performance differed wildly from the musical presentation known to the parents of those student. The narrator of James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* articulates the tension of the black generation gap in musical performance.

For the uninitiated, Johnson's 1912 *Autobiography* tells the story of an African American man able to pass and live as white, a passing that is partially aided by his masterful ragtime playing. His playing is proficient not simply because he possesses a technical mastery of the piano, but also because his interpretive abilities acquired by listening to his mother's playing give him an edge. At an early age, he is able to distinguish when his mother is playing hymns "from the book" or "by ear." Johnson's narrator recognizes a distinctive tone and tempo to the different kinds of playing: "I can recall now that whenever she played hymns from the book her *tempo* was always decidedly *largo*. Sometimes…she would play simple accompaniments to some old Southern songs which she sang. In these songs she was freer because she played them by ear."[ix]

Later in the backroom of a bar in New York City, Johnson's narrator encounters a musician whose playing would have been corrupted had he been "properly" trained. The pianist, he writes, "was just a natural musician, never having taken a lesson in his life…I began to wonder what this man with such a lavish natural endowment would have done had he been trained…he might have become, at best, a mediocre imitator of the great masters" (74). There is something peculiarly seductive about music that is untouched by the system of musical notation to the narrator. In the *fin de siècle* (when Johnson's narrator is growing up), however, playing by and from notation was the most accessible technology for producing

music. To distinguish between music being reproduced by and from notation and music being expressed "by ear" is essential for technical development. This is the expressed view of Johnson's narrator as pianist. Memories of his mother's Southern songs mature into his interpretive flourishes. His skill does not depend solely on mastery, but more particularly on what might be called "invested expression": "I always tried to interpret a piece of music; I always played with feeling…this was due not entirely to natural artistic temperament, but largely to the fact that I did not begin to learn the piano by counting out exercises, but trying to reproduce the quaint songs which my mother used to sing, with all their pathetic turns and cadences" (18).

A bifurcation between classical, notated music and folk, aural expression goes beyond the realm of the fictional. Ralph Ellison, whose early aspirations included writing a classical symphony on the level of Duke Ellington's jazz influenced *Black, Brown, and Beige*, outlines a similar strain between the harmonies that strike his ear and the music he is taught to perform.[x] In "Living with Music" Ellison reflects on the division between "slave song and jazz, and that of Western music," a music that he had to play "strictly according to the book and express that which I was *supposed* to feel."[xi] This discord arose for Ellison, at least in part, from his admiration of jazzmen in his native Oklahoma City, musicians whose "driving motivation was neither money nor fame, but the will to achieve the most eloquent expression of idea-emotions through the technical mastery of their instruments…and the give and take, the subtle rhythmical shaping and blending of idea, tone, and imagination demanded of group improvisation" (189).

Expression for Ellison is found outside the written notes, outside Western education. It is tied particularly to the folk, the culture surrounding his youth. Thelonious Monk has a

famous answer to this apparent discord and distance between classical music and jazz: "Two is one."[xii] His phrase suggests that jazz, very literally, has the ability to collapse the distance between two places and play within the tension of two discourses, or styles, and create one new place and one new voice. Jazz is the negative space, that place in between the genres and the categories that in total are meant to contain everything. Jazz takes them on, turns them: inside out, from without.

When the narrator's mother in Johnson's *Autobiography* is playing those Southern songs, he enjoys the freedom of "chiming in with strange harmonies" and "a particular fondness for the black keys" (5). These spaces of expression, unbounded by the strictures of musical notation and reproduction are where jazz/blues harmony can emerge. In certain keys (though, it is impossible to tell the particular keys of the songs that he was chiming in on) "strange" harmonies can be generated by playing the black keys on the piano. These accidentals are the basis for "blue notes," the signature of jazz/blues harmony. The keys on the piano that would make these notes (in a major key, ♭3, ♭5, and ♭7) vary, but in many popular tonal keys black keys are more often those that must be pressed to play these altered scale degrees. The narrator's passion for the black keys reveals his interest in how traditional hymns and Southern songs can be altered, and potentially reinvigorated, with jazz harmony.

Beyond shifting the harmonies of extant compositions, the narrator's childhood reading method indicates a penchant for jazz improvisation and composition. He builds new narratives based on the static structure of words on the page. His reading instructor finds "that, in reading whenever I came to words that were difficult or unfamiliar, I was prone to bring my imagination to the rescue and read from the picture" (6). This method of reading uses the standardized text (sheet music, perhaps) as a space to launch expression that creates

something new from his imagination (improvisation). His teacher tells him that “not only was [she] sometimes amused at the fresh treatment I would give an author’s subject, but, when I gave some new and sudden turn to the plot of the story, often grew interested and even excited in listening to hear what kind of denouement I would bring about” (6). Linking the narrator’s interest in the “black keys” on the piano with his method of reading suggests that education in classical music notation leaves or provides a condition of possibility thus enabling a space for creative variations on the inscribed music and for a more personal and folkloric expression, one that mirrors the moves of jazz composition and improvisation. The process constitutes the “inventing” of a technology of black expression.

Translating this process to musical terms, Johnson’s narrator is writing a new melody over existing chord changes. In a 1975 article James Patrick designated such compositions as “contrafacts.” Mark Osteen has recently written an important article, which argues that the initially lax relationship between contrafacts and copyright law enabled the flourishing of bebop.[xiii] Starting in 1952 copyright law as it applied to music underwent dramatic changes, arguably as a tactic of record companies seeking to profit from contrafacted compositions. *Northern Music Corp. v. King Record Distributing Co.* (1952) states: “it is in the melody that originality must be found.” Melody is thus established as protectable. Harmony remains in the public domain because it is constructed by a set of known rules. The effect of the ruling is that contrafacts are *not* in violation of any copyright law and are, in fact, protected. Further decisions in 1953 (*Funkhouse v. Loew’s Inc.*) and 1955 (*Alexander v. Irving Trust Co.*) allow for harmony to stay in the public domain as “ideas,” and ensures a freedom to deploy harmonic structures for original “expression.” This expression *was* (and is) protectable under copyright law. For example, if a composer tweaks a traditional harmonic system in a ‘unique’

way then that composition falls under copyright law. These decisions clear the ground for the proliferation and profitability of contrafacts. Furthermore, these decisions are essential to bebop becoming an economically viable machine. Legal structure allows jazz to retain its citational nature and still turn a profit, because music publishers and record companies could legally sell a song like Monk's "Rhythm-a-ning" even though its chord changes are clearly derived from Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm." Jazz is able to take a structural element from a jazz composition, a harmonic derivation from a classical piece, and even a melodic twist from a popular song and fuse it into a musical machine of sorts. A machine made as much for profit as for pleasure.

The way jazz musicians initially approach their instruments and the music itself is a balancing act. They negotiate an intertwined system of binaries: classical music and folk hymns, notated music and music performed, and what one is dictated to play on a page and allowable deviation from that notation. Their careful crafting collapses categories and very concretely creates something new.

Jazz, then, emerges as a particular system of navigation, one that comes out of a system designed to control and put a check on its expressive power. Jazz's negotiation between tradition and newness is part of what makes it such a valuable *technê* to articulate broader Afro-Diasporic identity. American poets, black and white, and Caribbean poets take up jazz as an aesthetic.[xiv] The formal characteristics that make up the *technê* allow for not only an expression of a particularity, but also a larger communal identity. Much like the educational and intracultural boundaries that jazz collapses, jazz poetry collapses space and even time. Modern jazz is just as much about the space between notes and beat, as it is playful with those notes and rhythms played in time.

The poetry of Kamau Brathwaite can serve as a paradigm for jazz poetry's use of *technê* to manipulate language in a way that collapses time and space, infusing a potentially African-American art with Afro-Diasporic rhythm. Brathwaite's poems are incredibly attentive to jazz *technê* in both their fundamental structure and their conceits. His poem "Trane" (1976) comes out of a tradition of poems about John Coltrane and his performances that were virtually ubiquitous in the poetry of the 1960s and 1970s. Some important examples include poems by Sonia Sanchez ("a/ coltrane/ poem"), Elizabeth Alexander ("John Col"), A.B. Spellman ("Did John's Music Kill Him?"), Michael Harper ("Dear John, Dear Coltrane"), Haki Madhubuti ("Don't Cry, Scream"), and Amiri Baraka ("*AM/TRAK*"). Brathwaite enters this veritable chorus to participate in traditions of jazz and its poetry. He also asserts his own distinctive rhetorical turns. His "Trane" is a jazz composition in miniature with the melody blown by the full band in the first two stanzas, and then rhythmically improvised upon for the final two stanzas:

Propped against the crowded bar
he pours into the curved and silver horn
his old unhappy longing for a home

the dancers twist and turn
he leans and wishes he could burn
his memories to ashes like some old notorious emperor

of rome. but no stars blazed across the sky when he
was born
no wise men found his hovel. this crowded bar
where dancers twist and turn

holds all the fame and recognition he will ever earn
on earth or heaven. he leans against the bar
and pours his old unhappy longing in the saxophone[xv]

"Trane" begins by introducing its own motifs (and motives!), its own head and its melody that it will vary throughout the rest of the poem. The first two stanzas mark the language (bar, pour, horn) and themes (a "notorious emperor" morphs into "no wise men") that will be improvised on in its second chorus. When these words or themes reappear in the second half of the poem they are jumbled, appearing in a different position on the line, reframing the language content. Brathwaite varies his opening melodies by quoting them. When repeated he puts them in different rhythmic *locations* that surround them with new melodic inflections. The *context* of each performance of each word (or note) is different. The poem's invocation of clave rhythm makes the variation that occurs in the final two stanzas of "Trane" stunning. By dividing the poem into two halves, a head and an improvisational chorus, the poet leaves his audience with two stanzas on each side of the dividing line.

The musical analogue for this structure would be two bars (a very short chorus, I concede) for each section. Clave in its simplest definition is a two bar syncopated rhythmic pattern, often marked by a triplet feel over a duple meter. The stanzas in the first section, with three lines apiece, nod to a two bar pattern inflected by triplets. indicated by the shift of accents in the syllabification when two hard syllables occur to "reverse" the strong beats ("he pours," for example). When looking at the first two stanzas against the second, the first two are played relatively "straight," on the beat, not syncopated. The lines break with relatively neat division and implicit line stops until the end of line 6 where Brathwaite enjambs the line to break into his 'solo' section.

The third stanza of "Trane" has an extra line, indicating a rhythmic disrespect for bar lines, a hallmark of syncopated playing. Also, the second half of the poem has an extra bar within it, created not by the formal characteristics of rhythmic and metrical music notation,

but from Brathwaite's poetic variation. The final two stanzas are also marked by caesuras in lines 7, 9, and 12, previously unseen (or unheard) in the poem. "Playing" with the meter, playing with the beat, and creating new groups of three over these two bars suggest that Brathwaite infuses his improvisation with Afro-Cuban rhythm, *the clave*. Brathwaite's rhythmic fusion takes a "standard," a traditional jazz (poem) theme, and makes it his own. He makes the theme less African-American and more Afro-Caribbean, entangling the two to create a more encompassing and more precise Afro-Diasporic voice. The conversation between the two is occurring before our very eyes, asserting the particularity of one identity that is very much in conversation with a community of identities. Brathwaite's temporal manipulation—rhythm playing with time—shrinks space and allows a conversation across multiple continents in one space created by jazz *technê*.

Another hallmark of Coltrane poetry is the channeling of the jazzman's multiphonics, moments where he would make his saxophone play multiple pitches at once. Literary critic Meta Du Ewa Jones has called this phenomenon in Coltrane poems and more generally in jazz poetry, "multiphonemics," which describes multiple significations of language performing at the same time.[xvi] When jazz appears in other Brathwaite poems they invoke multiphonic jazz *technê* as a means to collapse spatiality across Afro-Diasporic locales. In "Jah," a tribute to the Rastafarian god of the same name, Brathwaite opens the poem by drawing together Nairobi, Havana, and Harlem through elephant "trumpets" and "saxophone stops:"

Nairobi's male elephants uncurl
their trumpets to heaven
Toot-Toot takes it up
in Havana
in Harlem

bridges of sound curve
through the pale rigging
of saxophone stops
the ship sails, slips on banana
peel water, eating the dark men. [xvii]

The jazz instrumentation draws parallels to ship rigging, signaling Atlantic crossings to those three poles of diaspora. Sounds that come out of the narrator's trumpet eventually provide a figurative, through very concrete, infrastructure for travel, "my bridge stops in the New York air/ elevator speeds me to angels" (23-4). Reading "an elevator to angels" in the context of Atlantic crossing to African Diasporic locales points to an escape in the form of an emancipatory suicide from Atlantic slave ships. Though slightly uneven Brathwaite draws an analogy that suggests forms of expression like jazz allow for Afro-Diasporic peoples to escape oppression in contexts outside the horror of the Middle Passage in ways that are not death.[xviii]

The connections to the dis-locative Middle Passage, in "Jah" complicate and confuse the "here" of the poem, "God looks out over the river/ yellow mix of the neon lights/ high up over the crouching cotton-wool green/ and we float, high up over the sighs of the city" (40-3). The landscape of the "here" is simultaneously a river flowing through a brightly lit city and the verdant appearance of cotton fields. In "Duke Playing at 70," Brathwaite continues to play on geographic collapse when he lists the locations of Civil Rights era race riots, "Watts/ St. Louis/ Selma, Alabama/ Chicago/ Montgomery Bus Boycott/ Cairo/ where they most nearly kill you."[xix] All of these are American cities, but Brathwaite plays on the multiphonic and chordal nature of Cairo where the "Sphinx/ Pharaoh" of the poem's next lines reside (48-9). The multiphonics of Cairo (Illinois/Egypt) entwine Diasporic and American locations. This language is so resonant that Brathwaite must come back to it to control it. To express

the specificity of the next item listed, “Memphis,” he adds “Tennessee,” and the lines that point to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., so that it doesn’t indicate another Egyptian city (50-1).

Later in “Duke Playing at 70,” Brathwaite makes a similar list, but, now, instead of riots he lists Duke Ellington songs, the mere titles of which evoke the similar geographic multiphonics of Creole-ness (“The creo,” “Creole Love Call,” and “Creole Dawn”), translation (“Perdido”), and Harlem (and its air shaft) seemingly “leading us out of the silence” of the violence of those riots listed above (80-90). Brathwaite utilizes jazz technology to speak across geographical borders, while still allowing singular identities in those geographies to speak, to ultimately be led out of a greater silence and to sing through syncopation, variation, and improvisation.

Part of what I find so interesting about jazz *technê* in Brathwaite’s poetry is how it resists stasis, particularly how it is able to travel uninhibited from one place to the next disregarding borders of distance, time, and politics. I find it even more striking because of the way certain commentators and enthusiasts put such emphasis on the emplaced legendary spaces of jazz’s gestation.

In an essay for *Esquire* in 1959 (now collected in *Shadow and Act*) Ralph Ellison discusses the legend behind Minton’s, the room at the bottom of Hotel Cecil on 118th Street in New York City where Monk, Diz, and Bird (among many others) built bebop. As much as Ellison in “The Golden Age, Time Past” tries to debunk that legend, he ultimately gets entirely caught up in it, idealizing a room where “a homogenous community” with a “collectivity of common experience” brought on modern jazz, “a meaningful expression.”[xx] I’m struck by the particularity that is weighted by the juxtaposition of the place of jazz’s

invention and the more or less amorphous space that it is able to travel and transcend with such locative weight when jazz is performed there. This contradistinction, I think, highlights the effect of sound reproduction technologies on the very experience and power of the music itself. When I say sound reproduction technologies, I am talking particularly about the phonograph, which allows sound to travel across the world, transforming miles and borders leagues and continents removed from the original performance. For many, the first encounter with bop would not be inside Minton's or on 52nd Street, but a record listened to anywhere a record player was met by a plug and a live current.

In *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* Alexander Weheliye thinks deeply about the differences between listening to a record and attending a live performance.[xxi] One of the places he situates his argument is in the "underground" of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a legendary space of its own where Ellison's narrator will be listening for the "lower frequencies," maybe on one of the five phonographs he eventually hopes to have so that he can "*feel*" the vibration of the music they produce. Part of Weheliye's argument is that phonographic technologies allow black performers to articulate their expression in a protective cloak of invisibility by allowing the black body to speak without being scene, generating the same sort of strength and subversion that Ellison builds for his narrator in the underground of his classic novel.[xxii]

The space of the underground is the space that jazz creates. The underground can be an imaginary; as an underworld, a place where Ellison says "human instincts conflict with social institutions."[xxiii] The underground can be mythic. Jazz critic Otis Ferguson wrote of Benny Goodman that his music felt and sounded "as if it came from the American ground under these buildings, roads, and motorcars (which it did)."[xxiv] The underground can be very

real; Monk used to work on his playing and composition in the basement under Minton's. Ellison's underground(s)—plural because, I get the sense that these spaces of homogenous (comm)unity recur throughout his *oeuvre*—are loaded with technology that is manipulated to raise one voice and exclude another. This may just be Ellison's all-too-occasional elitism showing, but I think there is something particularly interesting that occurs when jazz links up with technologies of reproduction in the underground the way they do in Ellison. This intersection doesn't make jazz conflict with social institutions, but rather with those who are trying to channel jazz *technê* for their personal, and not necessarily professional, expression.

I should be more explicit: reading Ellison's engagement with technology in creating the underground back into Weheliye's argument triggers the obvious realization that performed music functions much differently than recorded music. Recorded music has its benefits, of course. Brathwaite and so many other poets are able to write about Coltrane because of the global distribution of records. But does the system that the music industry creates with sound reproduction technology interfere with the function of jazz *technê*?

I want here to avoid the limitation of Benjamin's *auras* and the compulsion to rewrite Adorno's "On Jazz," an essay that takes Benjamin's arguments about the film industry and tweaks them to talk about the music industry. I have no fear of jazz losing its potency, which seems to be Benjamin's concern with the art object losing its aura. Instead I am concerned about the effects of the ubiquity of records and how they influence the voice of expression. How does such ubiquity create categories of what is marketable and what is not? What is good or bad? What is black or white?

The record, at least when explicitly attached to the music industry, has the ability to create taste, and part of what concerns me is that the taste-makers are those that modern jazz

was trying to escape in the first place. Ellison, to explore a single eloquent voice, puts it well: "bop sprang partially from the desire to create a jazz which could not be so easily imitated and exploited by white musicians to whom the market was more open."[xxv] It isn't just white musicians doing the exploiting, though. Read a jazz biography. They are littered with tales of compositional theft and unauthorized recording and distribution, like the sessions of Monk recorded by Jerry Newman that he later released without Monk's permission on the Vox label. Instances like this point to the broader machine of the white-run music industry that very literally repackages jazz in a way that restricts it from articulation.

Ellison's essay "Living With Music" is an excellent example to observe the effects of recorded music on the black voice attempting to express itself freely. In some ways the environment that Ellison creates in his described apartment is similar to the one his narrator creates in *Invisible Man*. In *that* underground, Ellison blasts Armstrong's "Black and Blue" not to make himself or Armstrong invisible, but to make the world above him invisible. He builds a wall of sound to silence the gaze from above and basks in his own sensation, smoking reefer, eating ice cream with sloe gin poured atop it, all beneath 1,369 light bulbs. The narrator allows the recorded Armstrong to drown out the heightened visibility of black bodies above ground, to create a safe location of invisibility, essentially a space of homogeneity where Ellison thinks expression can be articulated purely. Instead of suppressing a militant and violent voice, like that of Ras the Exhorter or exploitative white capital, in his apartment Ellison is trying to silence a black female neighbor's vocals, rehearsals of a tyro constantly practicing while Ellison is tries to write. If we suspend our belief that Ellison may just be a touch obnoxious in creating an environment conducive to writing (though, doesn't every writer understand that? I'm having my own stereo battle with

Nashville's cicada invasion of 2011 as I write) we can decode his allegorical anecdote about the interaction of jazz *technê* and technologies built to reproduce it.[xxvi]

Ellison's exchange with his upstairs neighbor is one that is musically intertexual and increasingly technological as the writer builds up his stereo system as a "weapon" to drown out his neighbor's voice. His essay points both to the underground—he is downstairs—and to tensions between records and performance, especially private performance meant for self-expression. The writer's dilemma with his neighbor is formulated in a precise question that suggests the complicated position and responsibility of the reproducer: "Could I, an aspiring artist, complain against the hard work and devotion to craft of another aspiring artist?" (190) "Living with Music," though, does not just refer to jazz but to all types of music. The writer bombards his neighbor with music from many traditions, though I assert that her absorption of them is similar to that of a jazz musician, one who cobbles together multiple genres in an attempt to create her own voice. This structuring enters Ellison and his neighbor into a battle of jazz *technê* despite being outside the bounds of genre.

Ellison's upstairs neighbor, then, is an embodied African American jazz voice, the expression of the *technê* in her interpretation of all that weaves below, above and in between the din produced by Ellison's "fine speaker system" (194). The 'noise' of the technologies of reproduction pushes against the voice of black expression and attempts to reshape its sound and style so that it can enter the circuit of the culture industries, rendering his neighbor invisible. To build his weapon, Ellison describes the "piece-by-piece" construction of a speaker system, even crafting his own preamplifiers when he cannot afford expensive pre-crafted models. His "obsess[ion] with the idea of reproducing sound" litters his apartment

with wires and pieces of equipment that are sometimes packed on shelves so tightly that he and his wife "were almost crushed in our sleep by the [falling] tape machine" (195).

Yet, Ellison's handcrafted sound system eventually is replaced by "a commercial one that satisfied [his] ear" (194). The system of sound reproduction later gets placed behind a large closet door where "the only wire visible is that leading from the closet to the corner speaker system" (196-7). Closeting the sound system hides the system of reproduction, making it veritably invisible and scarcely traceable. In other words, the sound system speaks to a system mechanical reproduction or a culture industry for music making that operates relatively unquestioned behind a closed door.

Ellison deploys this system of reproduction to intimidate his neighbor into silence by barraging her with examples of better performances of the same pieces she rehearses:

> If, let us say, she were singing "Depuis le Jour" from Louise, I'd put on a tape of Bidu Sayão performing the same aria, and let the rafters ring…I'd forget completely that I was supposed to be a gentleman and blast her with Strauss' Zarathustra, Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, Ellington's "Flaming Sword," the famous crescendo from the Pines of Rome, or Satchmo scatting, "I'll be Glad When You're Dead" (you rascal you!). (195-6)

The sound system attempts to mold the aspiring upstairs artist into what Theodor Adorno calls an "amateur." In "On Jazz"—though, it should probably be titled "On the Music Industry" because it is much more interested in industry practice than the particular type of popular music (swing) that it primarily packaged in the 1930s—Adorno's amateur is a mime built to increase profits for the music industry, mimicking "the clichés of current jazz music [of 1930s] and guarantee[ing] the commercial opportunity to underbid it wherever possible."[xxvii] Ellison's hope is that his sound system creates an artist that will reproduce the qualities in musical performance that he values. His sound system does not, though, force her to fits of screaming or even of silence. Instead she becomes deeply interested in the music

Ellison plays, sometimes asking Ellison for the name of the artist he had been broadcasting when she encounters him outside his apartment. Most important to Ellison, "she persevered, she marked the phrasing of the great singers I sent her way, she improved her style" (196). Ellison's nameless upstairs neighbor becomes inculcated in a system of reproduction that controls her disembodied voice from below—stereo technology remolds her voice so that it becomes another copy of a record. Her previous voice has been submerged; it is drowned out in a silencing din, because the sound technologies essentially remove her voice from her embodied expression. In some sense, though, Ellison falls greatest victim to the culture industry because he imposes its taste on the voice above. If anything, his neighbor's continued performance insists that recorded music with its potentially fading auras is an impetus to make those songs perform again with her *unique* expression of jazz *technê*. Her failure to desist is a tribute to the resonance of jazz through layers and layers of technology sounding for its silence.

We find ourselves back where we started, looking at a vision of the underground that is interrupted and exploded through the technological systems built around jazz *technê*. The cover of Monk's *Underground* foregrounds questions about what packaging does to jazz, how through its visual representation and its liner notes it instructs listeners how to hear the album. It controls the listening experience of the music contained within its fold. The album cover, in other words, can be seen as the blaring sound system that aims to quiet and reshape the voice expressing itself above.[xxviii]

The photograph on *Underground*'s cover (Figure 1), designed and shot by John Berg, Richard Mantel, and Horn/Grier Studio, shows Monk sitting at his piano in the center of an

apartment littered with dynamite, grenades, and barbed wire. Monk has an assault rifle strapped over his shoulder, a cigarette in his mouth, and many open bottles of wine. He looks askance at the camera, as if the viewer has just walked in to this tableau and is most definitely not welcome. In the background there are two human figures; one, a Nazi soldier seemingly passed out and tied up; the other, a woman carrying an assault rifle, though her position in the background of the image makes her seem manniquenesque. The image on its own can certainly draw its own ire, but it could certainly be argued that *Underground's* designers are tapping in on heroic and fearsome liberation energies of World War II—a deflection of space and message, but not necessarily a bad one. But when the image is paired with Gil McKean's liner notes it caricaturizes the Black underground as a ridiculous vignette of both militant nationalist organizations and jazz musicians. The notes redirect the image to shove Monk further into the stereotype of a drinking, drug-using, and philandering jazz musician. McKean writes, "he has been committing thelonious assaults on certain hidebound enclaves of jazz since the mid-Forties, and the attacks are beginning to tell. Oh yes, about the girl with the firearm in the background. No explanation was asked nor was one forthcoming."[xxix] Even some of the battle relics have become objects that draw Monk into this stereotype, "The field telephone on the wall, a memento of Normandy, now serves as a direct line to *Le Pavillion* in the event he wishes to order a delivery of French soul food."

I read these as pernicious attempts to turn this underground from a subversive space into a parodic one, inheriting its power from a long history of stereotypical imagery and apocryphal behavior. The album cover enframes the listening of this record, potentially redirecting jazz *technê* to discourse not with itself, but with the image and words that explain how it should be listened to. The packaging of *Underground* threatens to change the timbre

and message of the music itself, though; because of its extremism it actually just draws attention to its own malevolent motives. The materiality of *Underground* may be able to physically cross borders of city and country, but the music it contains within is able to create a potent, even if it is in some sense an “imaginary,” space allowing for improvisations on a broader theme of Afro-Diasporic identity. Like Ellison’s upstairs neighbor the jazz on *Underground* refuses to be silenced even if it is slightly redirected by the culture industries surrounding it. Like it or not, jazz is very much a machine within a machine and like Lucius Brockway the factory could not run without it.

Notes:

[i] Albert Murray originally used the term "survival technology" to describe the blues, though a full definition was never fully constructed. Joel Dinerstein takes up Murray's term and defines it as "consist[ing] of public rituals of music, dance, storytelling, and sermonizing that create a forum for existential affirmation, through physicality, spirituality, joy and sexuality…against the dominant society's attempts to eviscerate one's individuality and social function." I mention Dinerstein's definition not to adopt it as my own—though, his idea that survival technologies open up a forum, or, in my description, a space is something that my argument interrogates specifically—but to display that critics before me have considered culture along the lines of jazz as technology. (*Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars*. Amherst: U. of Massachusetts Press, 2003. 22).

[ii] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, 1980. 217, emphasis original. From herein citations will be included in the text.

[iii] Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* New York: Random House, 1965. 168.

[iv] For an excellent, thorough discussion of the history of *technê* in theoretical discourse see: R. John Williams, "The Chinese Parrot: *Technê*-Pop Culture and the Oriental Detective Film," in *Modernism/Modernity*. 18:1 (January 2011), 95-124. esp., 99-100.

[v] Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "Technology & Ethos" in *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays Since 1965*. 155.

[vi] James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers" in *The Price of the Ticket*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 52.

[vii] Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. Ed. Amy Jacques-Garvey. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

[viii] Though, Martin Kevorkian makes an argument for the opposite. From the 1980s to the present African-Americans often are depicted in films as computer technicians to deflect the perceived potency of black bodies. "Fears about the dehumanizing, disembodying effects of information technology and fears of the black male body work as mutually reinforcing impulses behind popular depictions of black males as computer experts…the displayed [black] body is safely occupied, both contained by and containing the threat of the computer." (*Color Monitors: The Black Face of Technology in America*, Cornell UP, 2006. 2.)

[ix] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 4-5, emphasis original. From herein citations will be included in the text.

[x] For an analysis of *Black, Brown, and Beige* and Ellington's accompanying poems see: Harvey G. Cohen, "Duke Ellington and *Black, Brown, and Beige*: The Composer as Historian at Carnegie Hall." *American Quarterly*. 56:4 (December 2004). 1003-1034.

[xi] Ralph Ellison, "Living with Music," in *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 190, emphasis original. From herein citations will be included in the text.

[xii] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original*. New York: Free Press, 2009. xix.

[xiii] Mark Osteen, "Rhythm Changes: Contrafacts, Copyright, and Jazz Modernism" in *Modernism & Copyright*. Ed. Paul Saint-Amour. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

[xiv] Jazz poetry is a diverse form pursued by a diverse range of poets including Amiri Baraka and Jack Kerouac. While certainly a treatment of this wide swath of poets and their

respective poets being read amongst each other is warranted, it is not my expressed goal here. Meta Du Ewa Jones has started some of this work in "Jazz Prosodies: Orality and Textuality," also Brent Edwards and John F. Szwed published an excellent bibliography to encourage work on the subject in *Callaloo* 25:1 (Winter 2002, "A Bibliography of Jazz Poetry Criticism").

[xv] Kamau Brathwaite, "Trane." *Black + Blues*. TriQuarterly Books, 1995.

[xvi] Meta Du Ewa Jones, "Jazz Prosodies: Orality and Textuality." *Callaloo*. 25:1 (Winter 2002). 66-91. 73.

[xvii] Brathwaite, "Jah." *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy: Rights of Passage: Islands: Masks*. Oxford UP, 1973. 1-10.

[xviii] For more on the Middle Passage, suicide and emancipation see: Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Harvard UP, 2008); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard UP, 2007); and Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (Penguin, 2008).

[xix] Brathwaite, "Duke Playing Piano at 70." *Middle Passages*. New Directions, 1993. 41-7.

[xx] Ralph Ellison, "The Golden Age, Time Past," in *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 199-212. 209.

[xxi] Alexander G. Weheliye. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.

[xxii] My exploration is one that is more literary critical and theoretical, but Dinerstein's historical exploration finds that this particular point about the phonograph hiding the black body is very much in play as early as 1924 when Ma Rainey started her performance at Chicago's Grand Theater from inside an oversized victrola. After the first verse she emerged to boisterous applause. Dinerstein argues that this spectacle "communicate[d] the message that technology was simply a tool that collapses distance" (129).

[xxiii] Ralph Ellison, "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz," in *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 221-232. 227.

[xxiv] Otis Ferguson quoted in Dinerstein, 18.

[xxv] Ellison, "The Golden Age," 212.

[xxvi] Though, Ellison has a tendency to pass over potential experts because of a tendency to be deflected by socio-economic, or even racial, appearance and position. See: "The Little Man at Cheehaw Station."

[xxvii] Theodor Adorno, "On Jazz" in *Essays on Music*. Ed. Richard Leppert and Trans. Susan H. Gillespie. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2002. 482.

[xxviii] Not much has been written on the history of album covers, nor has there been considerable analysis of their images. Though the work that has been done is important and informative, see: Robert G. O'Meally's "Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections" in *International Review of African American Art* (14:3, 1997, 38-47) and Carissa Kowalski Dougherty's "The Coloring of Jazz: Race and Record Cover Design in American Jazz, 1950-1970" in *Design Issues* (23:1, Winter 2007, 47-60). Also, my concentration and focus on the image and its importance for constructing stereotypes of black identity is heavily inflected by Maurice O. Wallace's *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Finally, to consider Monk's *Underground* within the context of Ellison's *Invisible Man* is not

unprecedented. James Brixton Peterson, in an unpublished dissertation, argues that the image of Monk attributes to a "cipher," or the genealogical past of a trope, of the African American underground. (*Roots, Rhymes and Rhizomes: An Introduction to the Concepts of the Underground in Black Culture*. PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2003.) I am indebted to Prof. Peterson for personally sending me a copy of his dissertation with many insightful words of encouragement.

[xxix] Gil Mckean, "Liner Notes," *Underground*. Columbia Records, 1968. (CS-9632)

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor. "On Jazz." *Essays on Music*. Ed. Richard Leppert and Trans. Susan H. Gillespie. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2002. 470-495.

Baldwin, James. "Princes and Powers." *The Price of the Ticket*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985. 41-64.

Baraka, Amiri. "Technology & Ethos." *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays Since 1965*. New York: Random House, 1972. 155-158.

Brathwaite, Kamau. "Duke Playing Piano at 70." *Middle Passages*. New York: New Directions, 1993.

---. "Jah." *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy: Rights of Passage: Islands: Masks.* New York: Oxford UP, 1973.

---. "Trane." *Black +Blues*. Evanston: TriQuarterly Books, 1995.

Dinerstein, Joel. *Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture between the World Wars*. Amherst: U. of Massachusetts Press, 2003.

Ellison, Ralph. "The Golden Age, Time Past." *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 199-212.

---. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage, 1980.

---. "Living with Music." *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 187-198.

---. "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz." *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 221-232.

Garvey, Marcus. *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*. Ed. Amy Jacques-Garvey. New York: Atheneum, 1971.

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

Jones, Meta Du Ewa. "Jazz Prosodies: Orality and Textuality." *Callaloo*. 25:1 (Winter 2002), 66-91.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Original*. New York: Free Press, 2009.

Mckean, Gil. "Liner Notes." *Underground*. Columbia Records, 1968. (CS-9632)

Monk, Thelonious. *Underground*. Audiorecording. Columbia Records, 1968. (CS-9632)

The O'Reilly Factor. 16 May 2011. Videorecording. <http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/oreilly/transcript/bill-oreilly-and-jon-stewart-debate-common-controversy>.

Osteen, Mark. "Rhythm Changes: Contrafacts, Copyrights, and Jazz Modernism." *Modernism & Copyright*. Ed. Paul Saint-Amour. New York: Oxford UP, 2010.

Warren, Robert Penn. *Who Speaks for the Negro?* New York: Random House, 1965.

Weheliye, Alexander G. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005.