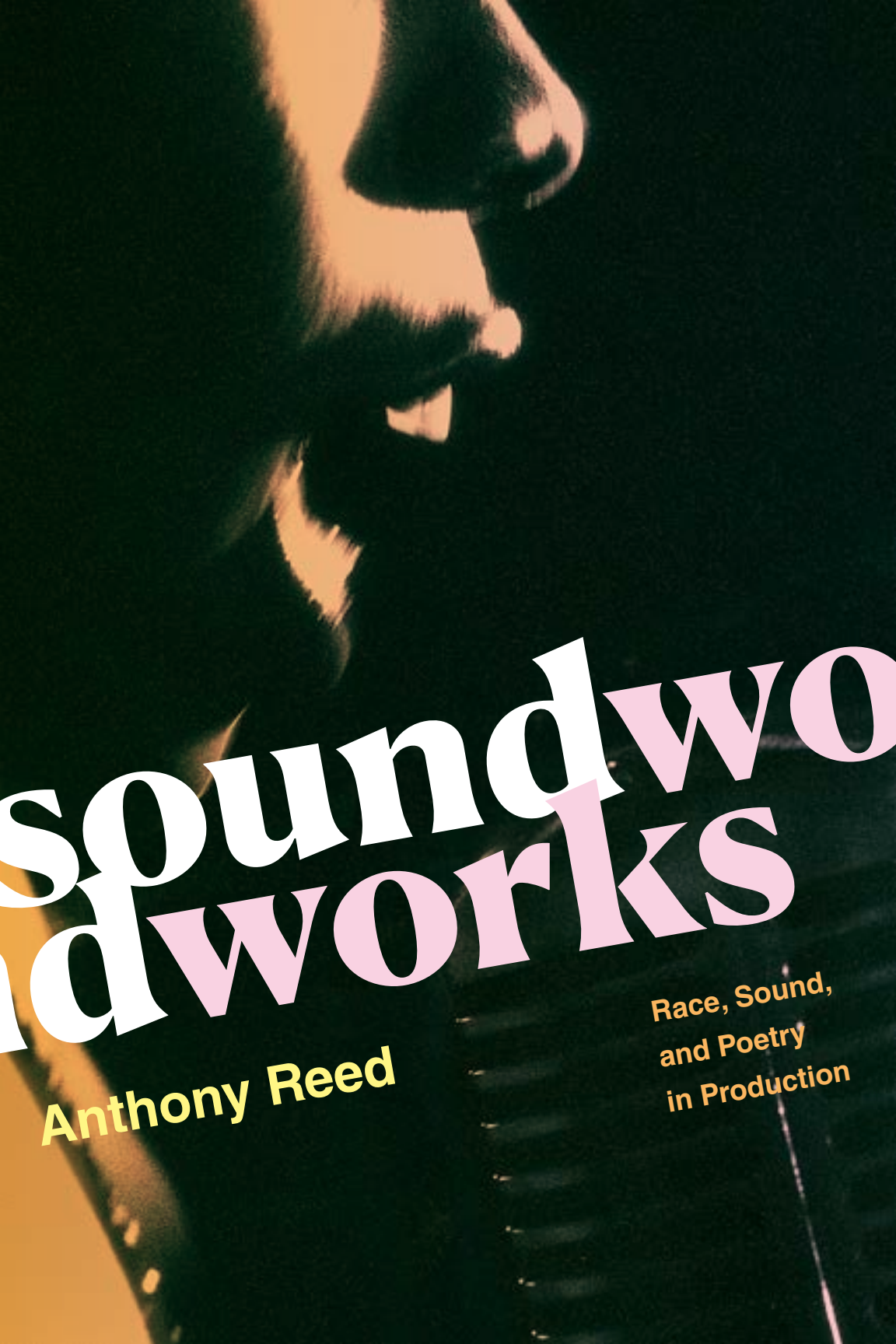
soundwo
dworks
Anthony Reed
Race, Sound,
and Poetry
in Production

BUY

REFIGURING AMERICAN MUSIC *A series edited by Ronald Radano, Josh Kun, and Nina Sun Eidsheim Charles McGovern, contributing editor*

sound

Anthony Reed

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

works

Race, Sound, and Poetry in Production

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Durham and London 2021

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson and typeset in Portrait, Helvetica, and Canela by Westchester Publishing Services, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Reed, Anthony, [date] author.
Title: Soundworks : race, sound, and poetry in production / Anthony Reed.
Other titles: Refiguring American music.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2021. | Series: Refiguring American music | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020027632 (print) | LCCN 2020027633 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478010210 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478011279 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478012795 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Music and literature—United States—History—20th century. | American poetry—United States—African American authors—History—20th century. | African Americans—United States—Music—History—20th century. | Jazz—20th century—History and criticism.
Classification: LCC PN56.M87 R443 2020 (print) | LCC PN56.M87 (ebook) | DDC 811.009/896073—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020027632
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020027633

Cover art: Singer, courtesy Digital Vision/Getty Images.

For Stokely and Nelson For Emily

1

2

3

4

Contents

Acknowledgments

This book about recorded collaborations itself records many near- and long-term collaborations. The many years it has taken me to write it have been a period of intense personal and professional growth. These acknowledgments offer a partial account of all those who in one way or another have been pivotal to its fruition, with the usual caveat that it will necessarily be a partial list.

I would first like to acknowledge some of the women who taught me along the way, starting with three of my Harold Washington College colleagues—Raymonda Johnson, Della Burt-Bradley, and Rosie Banks—without whom my path would have a very different shape. Dr. Johnson hired me to join her department, and the experience of teaching there opened my eyes to the impact teaching and mentorship could have in the world. During what proved to be a pivotal moment in my life trajectory, Dr. Burt-Bradley offered profound advice. Dr. Banks gave me the nudge I needed to pursue a PhD. If you've paid attention to me, I hope all three of you feel validated by the steps I've taken and the work I've done thanks to your initial encouragement.

I've been fortunate to cross paths with many astounding peers and mentors. I would like to acknowledge Sharon P. Holland, from whom I've learned so much about intellectual and professional life. Likewise, Grant Farred has been a model of negotiating the demands of the job and the work, and not confusing the two. Joseph Roach, Hazel V. Carby, and Hortense J. Spillers, on the page and as colleagues, have been important models of intellectual generosity. There are many ways to inhabit this world and many ways to stay faithful to, or stray from, intellectual demands. Thank you for the gift of your work, your teaching, your example, and your friendship.

Many people have either invited me to present from this work as it developed or presented on panels with me and offered generous feedback. Thank you to

my colleagues in Post45, who have been supportive throughout the process. I would especially like to acknowledge Tim Murray and the Society for the Humanities and Cornell University, where I was able to present to an audience including Tim, Lauren Berlant, Tsitsi Jaji, Suvir Kaul, and others. Your belief in the potential of this project sustained me through the inevitable twists, turns, and periods of doubt. Many years ago, Jacques Coursil answered my naïve questions about his collaborations with Frank Wright, and that conversation changed the course of my thinking. Colleagues at Duke University also were receptive to an initial version of these arguments, and I would single out Nancy Armstrong, Thomas DeFranz, Karla Holloway, Richard Powell, and Leonard Tennenhouse; your challenging questions and insights proved clarifying as I was beginning this project. Early on, I reached out to Steven Evans to compare notes when I discovered his project on the "phonotextual braid." Thank you for responding generously to a stranger. Thank you to Brent Hayes Edwards, Robert G. O'Meally, Farah Jasmine Griffin, George Edwards, Michael Veal, and others at the Jazz Study Group at Columbia University for your enthusiastic reception of these ideas. I'm grateful to have shared parts of this work with colleagues at Boston University (special thanks to Anita Patterson, Gene Andrew Jarrett, and Askia M. Touré), Concordia University (thanks to Nathan Brown and the Center for Expanded Poetics), Princeton University (thanks especially to Kimberly Bain and Jennifer Soong), New York University (especially Lytle Shaw and the Organism for Poetic Research), Northwestern University (special thanks to Harris Feinsod, John Alba Cutler, and the participants of our Radical Poetics Symposium—Chadwick Allen, Adrienne Brown, Kinohi Nishikawa, Urayoán Noel, Samantha Pinto, and Sonya Posmentier), the University of Michigan (special thanks to Hayley O'Malley and Kyle Fresina), and the University of Wisconsin (thanks to Adam Schuster, Timothy Yu, and others). Thanks to Sangeeta Ray, Mary Helen Washington, Hazel Carby, Caryl Phillips, and Eddie Chambers for engaging my work on dub poetry, which will ultimately belong to the next book. Thanks to Margo Crawford, Jeremy Matthew Glick, William J. Harris, Jean-Phillipe Marcoux, Carter Mathes, Fred Moten, Aldon Nielsen, and Tyrone Williams, who have been enthusiastic and challenging in their response to this work as it has evolved. Ron Radano invited me to participate in a Mellon Workshop at the American Academy in Berlin, where I was fortunate enough to be in the company of Nomi Dave, Eric Lott, Louise Meintjes, Phillip Miller, Rosalind Morris, Tejumola Olaniyan, Ciraaj Rasool, Michael P. Steinberg, Gavin Steingo, Jonathan Sterne, and Thuthuka Sibisi. At pivotal stages in the process, former Yale colleagues spoke to me about the manuscript, and I would single out Jacqueline Goldsby, Michael

Warner, and Ardis Butterfield for their care and attention. Nathaniel Mackey's invitation and provocation to dwell on the meaning of play proved decisive to the final shape of these arguments. Thank you all.

I could not have done this work without the generous and patient support of archivists, especially Kevin Young (then at Emory University), Julie Herrada, Curator of the Joseph A. Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan, and Nancy Kuhl and Melissa Barton at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Research Library. Special acknowledgement goes to Mark Bailey, Nick Forster, and Andrew Jones at Yale University's Historical Sound Recording archive. Thank you all for your patience and enthusiastic support.

As important has been the support of the musicians who have helped me develop the analytical method I use throughout the book. I was fortunate enough to have several conversations with Henry Threadgill about his poetry that proved formative when this project was nascent. Special thanks to Jason Moran, Tarus Mateen, and Nasheet Waits for their encouragement when this project was still germinal. Bob Stewart gave me a whole education on improvisation in one brief conversation. David Boykin invited me to participate in a celebration of Sun Ra and to be among such great scholars and musicians (including Marshall Allen, Dany Thompson, Greg Tate, Thomas Stanley, and Marvin X). That event helped me better conceive my audience and the stakes of this work. I was grateful to meet and learn from Gayle Wald, Nina Sun Eidsheim, Vijay Iyer, Jennifer Stoever, Alex Vasquez, and Wadada Leo Smith at an event Daphne Brooks and Brian Kane—themselves valuable interlocutors—co-organized. From the time we were in grade school bands together, Raphael Crawford has been a source of inspiration and knowledge about the music. His encouragement (and reassurance, when needed) has meant the world to me. Finally, to enter the music and write about it respectfully and knowledgeably I undertook to study saxophone with Frank Newton. From our first lessons I knew I was in the presence of a man whose involvement with the music is as profound as his gifts as a teacher. Being able to discuss music has proven a gift I will never be able to repay, but I want to acknowledge my debt and my appreciation for your instruction and your friendship, which sustained me and helped me stay grounded in the essential.

I cannot thank everyone who has helped or encouraged me along the way, but I want to acknowledge a few friends and colleagues who make this work sweeter. Thanks especially to Vanessa Agard-Jones, Elizabeth Alexander, Jafari Allen, Herman Beavers, Caetlin Benson-Allott, Rizvana Bradley, Nick Bromell, Joe Cleary, Soyica Diggs Colbert, David Coombs, Ian Cornelius, Aimee Meredith Cox, Ashon Crawley, Nijah Cunningham, Michael Denning, Laura

Doyle, John Drabinski, Erica Edwards, Daylanne English, Crystal Feimster, Rachel Galvin, Michael Gillespie, Glenda Gilmore, Ben Glaser, Langdon Hammer, Erica Hunt, Ulas Ince, Gerald Jaynes, Virginia Jackson, Meta DuEwa Jones, David Kastan, Vera Kutzinski, Wendy Anne Lee, Keguro Macharia, Lawrence Manley, Barry Maxwell, Kobena Mercer, Angela Naimou, Mark Anthony Neal, Steph Newell, Marisa Parham, Seth Perlow, John Durham Peters, Yopie Prins, Dixa Ramirez, Shana Redmond, Ed Rugemer, Evie Shockley, James Smethurst, Courtney Thorsson, and too many more to name. And special thanks to Dana Nelson.

Thanks to Ken Wissoker and everyone at Duke University Press, who have been models of professionalism and care through every step of the process. Thanks to Ron, Nina, and Josh for including the book in their series. And thanks to the anonymous readers whose encouragement and insights greatly improved this work.

My mother, Deborah, my brother Edward, my sister-in-law Tameka, and my nieces Nia and Soleil have been immensely supportive and inspiring throughout this journey. Please know that so much of what I do comes from the desire to make you all proud. My in-laws, Larry, Lorraine, Joe, Jeff, and Catherine, and my niece and nephews, Annalise, Sam, Alex, and Michael, have widened my sense of family, and I appreciate all of you more than these words will seem to say. Just know you're never far from my thoughts. While writing this book, we welcomed two sons, Stokely and Nelson. This book is dedicated to you, and to the worlds you will dream and build. May it contain something of the joy of word, music, and sound you have taught me. This book is also dedicated to Emily, my partner in all things. You inspire me, and I'm grateful to have you as my interlocutor, my friend, and so much more. This book is for the world we're making together.

Black: Sonic: Textuality

I'm trying to find the concept according to which sound is renewed every time it's expressed.
—ORNETTE COLEMAN, "The Other's Language"

"We Are on the Edge." The first sounds: a trumpet (Hugh Ragin), a sound that recalls another you may have heard before. Roy Campbell? No, it sounds a little like Lester Bowie. Ragin plays an obbligato, answered by a unison line, played by an enlarged version of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which his trumpet joins. Their union temporarily puts soloist/ensemble and improvisation/composition binaries in abeyance. After about three and a half minutes, the ensemble transitions to a vamp announcing some other event. Poet-performer Moor Mother (Camae Ayewa) soon provides and defers that event, announcing "we are on the edge / we are on the edge of victory." At first seeming to offer a familiar, gendered chastisement of "dope, and dancing, and drunkenness," she ends up underscoring the hollowness of victory that leaves many "dripping in blood from the rat race."[1] Stressing that the coming victory will be for

"all of us," she reminds those who listen of prior victories' partiality. Refusing harmonic or conceptual resolution, audible within but not wholly enveloped by the traditions it invokes, I hear in "We Are on the Edge" a commitment to the dissolution and reconstitution of the "we" ("we are on the edge of existing"), which aligns it with the black experimental sound practice this book engages. Moor Mother's delivery, mode of address, and investment in the vernacular recalls Amiri Baraka, an influence on multi-reedist and co-founder of the Art Ensemble of Chicago Shaku Joseph Jarman, whose poetry is integral to the group's celebrated experiments with sound and theatricality. As on their former recordings, and in many other instances of the phonographic poetry studied here, "We Are on the Edge" joins poetry and music in a unity more complex and supple than a words/music dichotomy that prioritizes soundful words or meaningful sounds. Analyzing that greater complexity in conceptual, aesthetic, and historical terms is this book's abiding ambition. Its aim, in other words, is to learn to listen to phonographic poetry as a practice of black sound.

Knowing the fifty-year history of the Art Ensemble of Chicago does not fully prepare listeners for this recording, just as knowing Amiri Baraka's printed or recorded works does not substitute for listening to Moor Mother (or Joseph Jarman). One reason for this is that the prior works correspond to historical and social conjunctures whose conflicts, as the poem demonstrates, are at once extinct and still alive as urgent intellectual and political conflicts. Her refusal to convert historical sequence into unambiguous progress, her rejection of teleological certainty in favor of a reflexive disposition sounds a welcome reharmonization of the present's struggle with history. "We Are on the Edge" creates a musical and conceptual caesura, an aporetic pause between familiar paradigms, the history it sketches, and the particularity of its sound. In so doing, it invites and is *play*, a non-teleological commitment to what may happen in the course of an event's unpredictable unfolding. If, as we're accustomed to thinking, black sound offers itself as evidence of "some other kind of thought" or another way of knowing, we must remember that that thought does not exist independently of its material expression and that ways of knowing index conceptual apparatuses, that is, the sign complexes, theories, and texts through which we encounter and understand the world.[2] Sound is always (also) a re-sounding; it resounds in the presence of prior hearing and ways of hearing; it resonates within history's mutable chambers. It risks being, to borrow a term from Nathaniel Mackey, "hearded": "*Hear*'s past tense's past tense . . . multiply removed from the present, someone else's having heard presumed to be one's own."[3] What Mackey describes, I take it, is the process whereby music's putatively "internal" categories—pitch, timbre, intensity, duration, rhythm, mel-

ody, etc.—have to be in effect bracketed in order to define the experience as genre, as in the tradition. The part-whole relationship reverses itself, and the discursive map of the sonic overwrites its territory rather than describing the terrain.

Listening to black sound beyond the herding effects that discipline any experience of sound—starting with those epistemological and ideological mechanisms by which we separate music from random noise—requires reconceiving it as an evolving, open set of aesthetic practices that develop alongside the ideological and material forces that give those practices dimension and meaning. Black sound is the result of work, play, and contestation. This book listens to the insurgent sonic practices that have circulated between poetry and music and that have shaped a vital strand of black aesthetic production since the long Black Arts era (the late 1950s through the mid-1970s).[4] To listen requires reflexively engaging the time that frames the experience. Each present—each *now*—produces its own version of the past as part of its self-legitimation. Designating the present—post–Civil Rights, post-Ferguson—is political insofar as, drawing on Lauren Berlant, it requires a narrative accounting of those "forces [that] should be considered responsible and what crises urgent in our adjudication of survival strategies and conceptions of a better life."[5] The "historical present," what we collectively and individually live, is multiple rather than unitary; it often appears as what is intuitively true, what *feels* right; it is the starting point for knowledge projects, including the study of history. Every saying "now" is a tacit demand, assertion, and revisionary claim to collectivity and on the past (e.g., of the Civil Rights Era) that smooths out rough edges and contingencies according to narrative and generic conventions. Soundwork is a way of inhabiting and making claims to a collective present, both concrete and speculative. My analyses throughout attend to the rhythms of attachment, of community de- and re-formation, and the corresponding de- and re-formation of political aesthetics, dis- and re-enchantment with engaging the political.

To say that black sound in or across time resists social and political orders does not require listening to any note or analyzing any composition. Those narratives of resistance teach us about the nature of the crisis black life engenders within the deep economic, political, social, and epistemological structures of the West. They teach us that even as structures define themselves in opposition to blackness, blackness inhabits them as a destabilizing capacity. Ultimately, such resistance is tropological, a way of reading and thinking beyond the lived experience and positivistic accounts of black vulnerability. The first chapter tracks some of the figurative tendencies, which tend to be analogical (this aesthetic gesture is like a similar gesture in the physical world), metaphorical (the aesthetic gesture is symbolic action), allegorical (the ensemble models ideal

sociality), metonymical (the aesthetic is juxtaposed with supposedly determining context), or some combination of these. Black sound, in these accounts, becomes an indicator of the radically emergent, a harbinger or emblem of utopian possibilities or at least the establishment of separate spaces for being and deliberating together. While I'm sympathetic to those ways of arguing (and inevitably argue that way myself at times), I practice listening as a historically grounded orientation toward the event with the understanding that no "pure" listening to music's "interior" aspects is possible because each—pitch, tonality, harmony, rhythm, duration, melody—already participates in a symbolic economy. Listening must contend with sound neither as pure presence nor as pure symbolic transcendence but as *text*, a structured weave of the phono- and typographic, the grammatical, and the semantic. As far as possible, I offer nonfigurative, theoretical descriptions of black sound's circulation and resonance in the world, with the assumption that reordered aesthetic experience intends new forms of community. I listen for what may have been possible to hear and desire in particular historical conjunctures without assuming the context to which the sound responds. Black soundwork does not simply express an evolving consciousness and orientation toward freedom; it does not reflect the world in which it resonates, but meaningfully changes it.

Soundworks' primary object of analysis is phonographic poetry, the recorded collaborations between poets and musicians, and the larger media history it refracts. Phonographic poetry allows me to track the changing practical and theoretical relationships among sound, text, and speech; among sound, song, and meaning; and among the sensuous, technical, and ideological forces that comprise the black sound object. It also foregrounds media—including paratexts such as interviews, liner notes, and titles—that coordinate artists' own (literal and figurative) voices, newly resonant vocal metaphors for instrumental sound (growl, scream, cry), and constitute and shape struggles within and against language.[6] Media are primary ideological and conceptual condensation points for the epistemological and ontological order that depends on maintaining a distinction between subjects and objects, between humans and things. These sound texts participate in contests over meaning and value and play out on a terrain structured by the culture industries and state cultural apparatuses. My interest is in the ways black sound, as sensual, sonic, and semantic, engenders the sense of ongoingness around which communities coalesce, fragment, and reconstitute themselves. Periods of political and aesthetic flux—for example, the late 1960s, the early 1990s following the Rodney King–inspired uprisings in Los Angeles, or the current era of protest against the nexus of policies, norms, and laws that reproduce black immiseration for which the extralegal murder of

black people has been a focal point since 2014—tend to see an upsurge of phonographic poetry. Artists reach back to a prior generation's aesthetic and discursive modes. In the contemporary, this means returning to a Black Arts era aesthetic and political ethos, including its implicit assumption that communities must be built, and that black sound—poetry, music, and theatricality—is a means of building it. While recent recordings are not this book's primary object, I hope to contribute to an understanding of the politics and populism of the gesture.

Here, however, we hit a minor impasse. Aesthetic impulses tend to exceed even the most capaciously conceived historical schemas, even and perhaps especially in adversarial contexts. The relationship between black sound and history appears here as problem rather than solution. Especially since the 1950s, black poets and musicians have come to understand themselves, within their respective domains, to be experimental sound artists whose primary medium was verbal or nonverbal sound. If the poetry-jazz nexus was initially a site of interracial collaboration (usually organized around male homosocial bonds), the white avant-garde came to reject the so-called "tyranny of jazz" that informed abstract expressionism and the Beats.[7] Club owners, meanwhile, were wary of the new music even before critics associated it with black militancy because the kinds of listening it demanded were antithetical to a nightclub's economic mission. The alienation of black artists from putatively "white" spaces along with the development of a newly revalued blackness that included both the historical and then-decolonizing Africa accelerated the development of alternative spaces and institutions that inform the broader Black Arts era. As Aldon Nielsen observes, "black musicians, poets, and political activists all saw their work as part of a growing internationalist development" and, moreover, "recognized that there was little point in addressing themselves to the *New Yorker* and [instead] set about the construction of their own national and international networks of publications and readings."[8] To those institutions I would add the development of new performance venues, independent record labels, artist and composers' guilds, and outlets for criticism. In short, they set about creating an insurgent media infrastructure.

Starting from the presumption that aesthetic experience always has an aleatory, anarchic, and refigurative potential, I attend to the ways these poets and musicians play the changes of their moments within and against the contours of agency, understood in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's sense to refer to those forms of action institutionally and communally valid, even as they attempt to recreate institutions.[9] This framing encourages different perspectives on Charles Mingus's embrace of black vernacular forms, Langston Hughes's

shifting sense of community, Matana Roberts's inheritance and transformation of an avant-garde legacy traceable to Archie Shepp, Amiri Baraka's poetics before and after his nationalist period, Cecil Taylor's embodied forms, and Jeanne Lee's aesthetic excess. Multi-genre, multimedia "live" performance plays a key role in the development of vernacular avant-gardes, and sound media play a similarly important practical and theoretical role, creating the conditions of spatial and temporal simultaneity in the service of reconfiguring the possibilities of tradition and community.

The material and ideological limits of calls for "black power" and its cognate demands for self-determination and local control of civic and economic institutions—including a missed opportunity to rethink politics on bases other than individual or collective rights and sovereignty—are well known. We might nonetheless see implicit qualm and qualification of institutions in the call itself. Rather than assume that everyone who rallied around "black power" naïvely sought black control or representation within liberal institutions and then-dissolving forms of direct domination, we might catch the outline of an anarchist- or communist-inflected imagination.[10] Driving this were new conceptions of the national and the nation-state, new faith in revolution and community, fascination with emergent forms of African and Caribbean socialism. If we take seriously the skepticism many black people had toward the ability of the state and capitalist social organization to answer their demands for freedom, we might better understand the suspicion many poets, musicians, intellectuals, and ordinary people felt *in the moment* about the relatively narrow interpretations of freedom available in the mainstream. For example, musician, poet, and activist Sun Ra said black people "were on the right road, but going in the wrong direction."[11] In this light, pragmatic forms of mutual aid and alternative institution-building resonate with black poets and musicians' evocations of both outer- and inner-space alternatives to then-extant cartographies of power and black life, alternative ways of being together. Although many of the figures I am concerned with here did identify as socialist, communist, or otherwise aligned with the radical left, I use the designation "communist-inflected" primarily to keep in focus the varieties of black political and social life that fall outside or exceed bourgeois norms of the acceptable or desirable.

I situate my analyses in what Richard Iton terms the "thickly dissonant space" between "the confidence of the teleological and the bittersweet . . . entanglements of the agonistic," between the certainties that attend some "liberationist narratives and the uncertainties and qualifications characteristic of an instinctively reflexive category of perspectives."[12] The liberationist impulse of cultural productions or the communist-inflected imagination is only one

part of the story. Throughout this book, I focus on moments of ambivalence, where the "bittersweet entanglements of the agonistic" or quotidian struggle more perfectly overlap or undermine "confidence of the teleological." Any articulated telos—the good life, the liberated future—requires a calculation of what is possible, which is simultaneously an epistemological, historical, and political question: what do I know about the present, what can be hoped in the present, what can I convince others to want in the present?

When I started this project, I undertook intense study of music theory and performance (saxophone), intending to explain in technical detail how experimental music created fissures in the edifice of the so-called Western tradition. As my study advanced, however, I found it important to register the ways that black soundwork disturbs the intelligibility of the Western tradition, itself a mode of social reproduction whose models of the well-ordered function to exclude those non-European forms that cannot be appropriated or "refined." This is not to suggest that one cannot analyze the music according to the terms of Western musicology, but that doing so obscures more than it reveals. Black soundwork in all its varieties noisily calls into question the Western tradition's predicates and aesthetics from an outside that is always also at the very heart of that tradition's self-declared interiority. Rather than catalogue "call-and-response devices; additive rhythms and polyrhythms; heterophony, pendular thirds, blue notes, bent notes, and elisions; hums, moans, grunts, vocables, and other rhythmic-oral declamations, interjections, and punctuations; off-beat melodic phrasings and parallel intervals and chords; constant repetition of rhythmic and melodic figures and phrases . . . timbral distortions of various kinds; musical individuality within collectivity; game rivalry, hand clapping, foot patting, and approximations thereof; apart-playing; and the metronomic pulse that" Samuel Floyd argues "underlies all African American music" (in part because Floyd has already done that work), I have opted to underscore the unsuitability of certain musicological concepts for understanding—really listening to—the sounds of this music and its poetic symbiont.[13]

Foregrounding media enables sustained analytical attention to the interaction of the commodity form and class formations in a complexly postcolonial context that encompasses, as Stuart Hall argues, not only the end of direct European rule over the globe but the world-making projects that emerge from newly configured power/knowledge relations in which aesthetics had a role to play.[14] Drawing on Walter Benjamin's Marxian aesthetics, I understand sensory experience is historically situated rather than transcendent, and trace the ways technical apparatuses act in unevenly reciprocal relationships with that sensorium.[15] Accounts of voice that develop around and inform the idea of the

New Black Music and poetry, for example, reward the development of sound technologies that feature the voice in accord with those broader ideologies, which are in turn reinforced by those technologies. The voice becomes the central medium of the human soul or mind, technologies and material practices emphasize (or fetishize) the voice, voice and the metonymic chain it figures take on a phantom objectivity: it looks as though technology drives the centrality of the voice rather than collective desires, and it becomes difficult to see the ways ideas of voice drive the development of certain technologies and recording techniques, as well as the promotion of some performance styles over others. New aesthetics, metaphors, technologies, and material practices develop along those lines. Insofar as it is linked to aspirational collectivity (and aspirations to collectivity), black sound indexes a host of social changes and orientations toward alternative forms of social organization.

Soundwork in this sense also refers to the conceptual labor involved in producing black sound as a theoretical object that comprises practical, ideological, and epistemological structures.[16] Black sound gathers and encodes—sign-ifies—a set of rational, iterative practices that produce racial meanings (and race itself) through the circulation of sounds, texts, and attending discourses. Given the historical connection between black performance and compulsion—first by the dominant classes and then by the whims of the culture industries—we might say its mode is affirmation, a refusal to choose between containment and liberation, a noisy change of the question. I follow thinkers such as Alexander Weheliye in insisting that black soundwork, as aesthetic and political activity, is not merely reactive but constitutive of modernity and modern media. In Weheliye's account, which admirably maintains a reflexive stance toward the history it charts, black sound is not "merely a byproduct of an already existing modernity, ancillary to and/or belated in its workings, but a chain of singular formations integrally linked to this sphere, particularly as it collides with information technologies."[17] Conceiving black sound as a "series of relational singularities that refuse to signify any ontological consistency before and beyond" and of tradition as "activating difference" outside an original/copy binary allows more highly attuned listening to specific sonic events.[18] However, in order for them to signify as "afro-modernity" they have to relinquish some of their singularity in order to become exemplary, in the manner of synecdoche, of a larger formation that still needs to be historicized. For that, I remix Weheliye with Stuart Hall, understanding black sound as the ground of constitutive differences upon and through which cultural meanings are inscribed, contested, worked out, and reactivated. There is no "as such" or ontological ground upon which to rest; the question of black sound only has meaning in relation to the specificity of spe-

cific moments.[19] Soundwork, then, is necessarily theoretical work, requiring an account of sound's effects that corresponds to particular historical conditions. Such framing avoids the sense of black sound (or culture) existing as either timeless or as the autonomous unfolding of a unitary tradition or consciousness, while having the benefit of allowing a further question of the relationship between historically specific articulations of blackness and its texts.

A Vernacular Avant-Garde

Sound recording and reproduction technologies further aided in the transforming relationship between sound and source, making available, plausible, and desirable new cultural spheres and aesthetic forms. New forms of social organization made it possible to value and promote sound recording and reproduction technologies in concert with transformed relations to time, space, community, and aesthetics. The new and transformed often appears first in the guise of the old, and the process of transformation reveals an often explosive potentiality latent within the familiar—the unorganizable within social and aesthetic organization. Structurally unorganizable particularity is also a futurity beyond the conceptual limits into which sound is he(a)rded. To substantiate my claims that the sounds change contexts rather than metonymically, metaphorically, or otherwise reflecting them, I propose the term *vernacular avant-garde*. This framing allows us to acknowledge participation in the culture industry as important but not determinant, to acknowledge cynical marketing of black rebellion as an attempt to short-circuit the real thing, and to acknowledge the ways new performance styles required shifts in the ways engineers recorded.[20] The term *vernacular avant-garde* also captures relays between popular forms and their aesthetic elaboration and imagines them as simultaneous, rather than reinscribing modernism/mass culture binaries. I use it to hold space open for listening for the ecstatic and riotous within black aesthetics. "Riotous" refers to those apparently spontaneous acts that reveal the fictive and arbitrary nature of existing social relations and in so doing introduce the possibility of different desires and arrangements. These range from avant-garde performance, which targets the line between art and non-art, to the spontaneous urban uprisings that revealed the degree to which black leadership neither directed nor straightforwardly reflected people's quotidian "upworking" of new political desires, or revolutionary ideals.[21] The rhetoric of spontaneity tends to discredit those ideals and political means, while tacitly reinforcing and legitimating the hegemonic order. The structurally unorganizable, the structurally uncountable, is riotous potentiality.

Even when the riot does not manifest as punctual event or conflagration, the riotous imprints itself in the fabric of everyday life. What happens to aesthetic forms that seem linked to moments whose questions and solutions seem misfit in subsequent moments? What becomes of yesterday's riots? Learning to listen means resisting the urge to hastily declare failure or supersession (soul or R&B or rap music supersede jazz as "people's music") where there is instead rearticulation of common elements. Thus, if the persistence of free jazz, certain modes of political poetry, and other vernacular avant-garde practices appears atavistic or revenant, the fault lies in our conceptual and critical frameworks.[22] No matter how often we are told that vernacular avant-garde modes have been superseded, they persist, and continuing investment in those modes is perhaps symptomatic of a too narrowly conceived concept of the beautiful and "the popular," themselves tethered to forms of social organization that are ultimately too narrow.

Drawing on Miriam Bratu Hansen, Ralph Ellison, and Christopher Small, my understanding of vernacular "combines the dimension of everyday usage and cultural practices with its connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability,"[23] outlines a historically particular "process" embedded in the (re)production of racial logics rather than a preexisting set of practices and styles,[24] and tracks the "anarchistic resistance to classification" that informs suspicion toward and rejection of genre distinctions (e.g., jazz) for the artists in this study.[25] Hansen's account, in particular, helps to keep the recording apparatus visible as a constitutive component of vernacular art rather than imagining a black sound essentially prior to recording. "Vernacular" specifies one way of considering in aggregate processes of reappropriating and redirecting of the riotous, insurrectionary capacities of outmoded forms, of inventing in the style of the past with an eye toward new historical conjunctures and horizons not previously imagined beyond the dissolution of black communities into their constitutive, antagonistic class fragments, and more broadly the domestic and international class-shuffle that characterizes the sixties. I also draw on James Smethurst's notion of a "popular avant-garde": "a paradoxical . . . avant-garde that had roots in actually existing and close-to-home popular culture and that was itself in some senses genuinely popular while retaining a countercultural alternative stance."[26] "Popular" here is a rough synonym for "mass" rather than "high" culture (forms of culture enabled by emergent culture industries) and counts a large number of people ("genuinely popular"). It also signals attachment to the "synthesi[s] and revis[ion of] a cultural inheritance derived significantly from the Popular Front, using the 'new thing' jazz or 'free jazz' of the late 1950s and the 1960s as a model."[27] The semantic drift

and malleability makes "popular" a tricky word to describe the phenomenon I describe, which tends to involve recontextualizing—re-signifying—the sources of "the people." I prefer the term *vernacular* because of its insistence on the shifting ground of relation in contrast to *popular*'s ambiguous position between the descriptive and the valorized, its insistence on forms of social mobility not guaranteed to the musicians and writers that I analyze. Smethurst's insistence on the continuities between the black left in the Popular Front era and the period that follows is salutary, and his notion of an avant-garde reframes the emphasis on direct emotional expressivity and the New Black Music's embrace of "uglier modes."[28] *Avant-garde* as I use it here signals the effort to continually recreate the ground of aesthetic practice, to create practical and conceptual openings for new systems of value or thought; it is a way of occupying the interludes between emergence and appropriation. *Vernacular avant-garde* is ultimately my way of conceiving both the reappropriation (in all senses of the term) of mass cultural elements and the modes of address and resonance within and across shifting national and communal boundaries where the status of "the people" is uncertain. The term refers to a mode of collective politics and poetics in deep conversation with the apparatuses of the culture industry in a period defined by hostility to collective imaginings of freedom (and collectivity itself).

Though not always acknowledged, racial logics have important media components, and vice-versa: media emerge in and contribute to specific racialized contexts whether engaged practically or theoretically. Early ethnographic recording helped legitimate phonography's medium. Ideas of black sound, circulating under the sign of Negro or "world" music, helped to popularize it.[29] Recent scholarship reveals the centrality of African American vaudeville performers and public figures, early ethnographic records, and vernacular music to the legitimization and popularization of phonography.[30] One way of narrating the history of the medium is the gradual becoming-autonomous of the phonographic sound object, its evolution from storage medium or index of prior performance to an aesthetic medium in its own right. The rise of commodity culture and concomitant transition from the Victorian parlor to the modern living room (hence the invention of the private domestic space) is one precondition for sound reproduction technology finding recorded music as a primary function. It overlaps population shifts from rural to urban centers and from agricultural to industrial labor, and expansions of imperialism and domestic rights, among other shifts. There was, as Jonathan Sterne argues, "a new level of plasticity in the social organization, formation and movement of sound," which informed the emergence of new media, or the designation of new functions for existing technology.[31]

One of sound recording's first functions was to communicate the dominant values of bourgeois society through important speeches, poems, and symphonies. As Michael Denning and others have shown, the communication and dissemination of alternative, anticolonial, or counter-hegemonic values coexists with its other functions, such as producing and aestheticizing the exotic in the interest of normalizing imperial relations.[32] The latter function became a dominant way of hearing by reducing aesthetic excess to appropriable surplus, making "world music" the sign of either an exotic or a recently departed elsewhere. Records helped create and disseminate a sense of shared social experience across geographically and temporally diverse terrains, contributing to shifting racial attitudes and geographies, and ultimately helping shape the racialization of sounds themselves. The modern, including black sound, depends on hidden or obscured colonial relations, and the transition from racial abjection to liberal freedom, historically paired with the waning of sovereignty as political virtue, has continually meant the spatial and conceptual displacement of dispossession of unfreedom along lines of gender, race, and geographic difference. To conceive of black soundwork as liberatory requires thinking beyond the boundaries and histories of individual nation-states, and reconceiving the alternative maps and geographies implied and traced by the circulation of black sound. If early sound recording's traffic in vaudeville suggests an effort to create shared social experience for the white bourgeoisie, the traffic of "race records" and other vernacular music remade modernity's collective ear, enabling new collectivities organized around and through the sonic.[33]

Phonographic poetry is one element in that development. Its emergence provides insights into the evolving techniques of poetic, sonic, and racial production. It emerges in the context of a general social reorganization of the ways we listen, what we listen for, what we hear, and who counts as "we." One well-developed axis of analysis emphasizes white hipster engagements with African American and global black culture, which follows the trajectory of love and theft Eric Lott analyzes through his study of blackface minstrelsy. Having been, however ambivalently, the soundtrack of youthful rebellion and anti-bourgeois self-fashioning for white hipsters, jazz's meanings have become increasingly diffuse and contested, especially along the color line, which I would argue made it vulnerable to the emergence of rock and roll (which also had roots in the black "folk") to become the soundtrack of white youth culture. Simultaneous with that, one sees the rise of poetry as a counterculture, with recordings of Dylan Thomas, Allen Ginsberg, and the Beats playing a key role.[34] Less emphasized, however, is the new self-assertion of black poets and musicians who, through "soul jazz," capaciously conceived avant-garde and other

forms that used sound to hail new black publics and counter-publics into being in the context of the culture industries' consolidation. Musicians and poets positioned audiences to receive new sounds and definitions of blackness—corresponding with new notions of "the people" and the community.

Such transmission is never straightforward, and the positions of sender and receiver are dynamic and reversible. Although the outcome Theodor W. Adorno seems to have at once predicted and feared—that music would "become" writing—has not happened, listening to sound as text, as material always already worked on, requires attention to what is and remains troubling. Medium, and with it the possibility of animating re-hearing, plays a central role. Rather than "relinquish[ing] its being as mere signs," phonographic sound emerged from and participated in overlapping ethnographic and commercial processes that enabled new grammars of listening, and new modes of signification in excess of those grammars.[35] Each citation of a sonic "truth" of race also plays in the interstitial zone between reinscription and potential resignification or transformation. Phonographic poetry is among the new forms electric sound recording made available, transforming and extending music's productive force rather than extinguishing it. Nonetheless, its producers mobilized it in the interest of transformation of "the most recent sound of old feelings" into simultaneously archaic and avant-garde texts that bear without being reducible to knowledge to come.[36] Phonography, even with the most carefully planned recording session or reading, unavoidably creates the conditions for hearding—hearing that more or less willfully confuses text and subtext. Phonography never entails the simple transmission of a message, the translation of sound from one medium (air, built environments) to another (durable storage media): textuality's inevitable surplus always also bears along what is not yet communicable.

New Words, New Worlds

Through mixed-media, vernacular avant-garde textual practice, black poets and musicians sought to reconceive community and the common that subtends it. Keeping attention on the sound-specific practices and texts through which people shape and contest meaning, I avoid reference to "blackness" in the abstract. While I've learned from Moten's understanding of blackness as "an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line," my question involves the ways black *texts* produce, contest, and disseminate the meanings of blackness, a social relation, which then obtains a "phantom objectivity" as "para-ontological" (ante-/anti-) presence.[37] *Text* does not refer to recording or writing but to something closer to medium and the surplus generated by what grammar and intertextuality

produce in the interstitial play between different kinds of utterances. Attention to text allows simultaneous attention to the constitution of black sound as a set of relations among economic, political, professional, and affective interests (rather than a narrower understanding of the music industry). From this vantage point, I attend to the aesthetic possibilities afforded by new performance, recording, transmission, and playback techniques and technologies to take on dimension. *Text* thus refers to open-ended material practices/processes and objects as well as the interaction among temporal, grammatical, material, and figural processes of signification that allows blackness to appear as both an open set of incongruous and contested meanings and a transcendental signified or objective thing rather than the social relation it is. My framing allows a richer picture of the theoretical, physical, and political investments black sound practice encodes. Moreover, this framing requires attention to the media concepts or historically contingent desires that make black sound work.

Black soundwork, rather than assuming a stable audience as recipient, often does the work of calling to a prospective audience, of drawing together a "we." Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, and others, I'm interested in the ways aesthetic projects imagine collectivity and ongoingness, and in the ways they participate, modifying Rancière, not in the production but in the *improvisation of the common*, the improvisation of communism.[38] Rather than institutional forms (e.g., the Party) or debates (e.g., reform or revolution), *communism* refers primarily to conceptions of social organization that are not organized around property relations or capital. "Improvisation of the common" holds space open within which to conceive and take seriously alternative social structures where production is not necessarily the production of value. Black community, never a defensive exclusivity or formation grounded in origin or originary rupture, might best name the socio-spatial forms produced by—and that condition the production of—marginal social life, where "margin" indicates the continued production of an outside to a putative mainstream. At its most radical, black soundwork is a practice of black collective thinking that opens onto new configurations of the social. Analysis of phonographic poetry through medium requires a different line of thinking about the ways sound practice draws on the past (itself mediated by previous texts), not simply to affirm belonging to a group or historical formation but to attempt to imagine and call into being new ways of being collective.

In Rancière's account, "the political (*la politique*) arises from a count of community 'parts,' which is always a false count, a double count, or a miscount."[39] Relatedly, the "distribution of the sensible," referring to "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence

of something in common [*le commun*] and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it," serves as the point of articulation between politics and aesthetics.[40] At bottom, for Rancière, is a question of *logos*, and those identified with it via a familiar logocentricism that equates intelligible speech with being human and unintelligibility with the condition of the subhuman. Nonetheless, the notion of the common usefully recalls other shapes of the social than those corresponding with logocentric cartographies. As Michael Hardt puts it, the common "is the scene of encounter of social and political differences, at times characterized by agreement and at others antagonism, at times composing political bodies and at others decomposing them."[41] The boundary separating sensible/insensible and *demos*/non-*demos* is the police order (*le politique*). The count of democracy's *demos* always produces a surplus—the part that has no part. Politics, for Rancière, exists when domination is interrupted or resisted by the dominated, and that resistance constitutes the dominated as a political entity. Freedom is a "pure invention," an act of claiming equality carried out by the "part that has no part," the dominated who are structurally excluded from the *demos* and therefore visible only within the police order as an element to suppress. A long history of black sound reveals that crossing the line into intelligibility does not eliminate the operation of the police order. As often as not, emerging intelligibility—legitimacy—can intensify policing, allowing cover for the continued murderous segregation that produces the "part that has no part," reframed as the spectacularly or sacrificially excluded upon whom the security of the *demos* depends.

This is not to answer a theoretical question empirically. Rancière's arguments for the ways societies respond to il/legitimate claims to freedom from those whose systematic and strategic exclusion shapes the political give me pause. Rancière cites Herodotus writing about a Scythian slave revolt (it is easy to imagine more contemporary slave revolts) where the enslaved "decided that, until proved wrong, they were the equal of the warriors" and engaged in armed revolt.[42] The enslavers eventually put aside their spears—signifying their intention to engage the rebels on their terms—and took up whips: "struck by the spectacle, the slaves took to their heels without a fight." His point is to strategically position such uprising as the "disorder of revolt" beyond the sphere of the legitimately political—beyond the realm of the intelligible—and thus discredit it. The enslaved spoke themselves into the social order, and the police order reasserted itself and, moreover, revealed the degree to which it had imprinted itself in the self-understanding of the enslaved. Putting to one side disagreement over the potential of popular uprising, it remains unclear how or whether the police order might be not simply disrupted but dismantled, or whether there are ways of resolving the theoretical and structural problem posed by the "part that has

no part" that fundamentally alter the terrain of the political. That, I take it, has tended to be the aim of "slave rebellions" and similar uprisings.

But what if we read those revolts through Saidiya Hartman's analysis of the "longstanding and intimate affiliation of liberty and bondage," and her injunction to consider "freedom independent of constraint or personhood and autonomy separate from the sanctity of property and proprietorial notions of the self"?[43] If the most radical claims for the new music and new poetry stem from their respective reimagining of experience itself, grasping the full impact of black soundwork and the forms of community it discloses requires reconsidering the claims to subjectivity and subjective experience that tend to inform the discourses and cultures surrounding the music and poetry, each understood as the other's spur and limit. Producing the common ought to be a name for the pre- and re-figurative work of overturning the very ground of the political in light of the structural miscount. For this reason, and because the outcomes are not guaranteed, I prefer to think in terms of what Spivak might call the concept-metaphor of improvisation. The uncounted are structurally excluded; the part that has no part is neither inside nor outside; as riotous supplement, it might turn this mother out.

In its ideal forms, improvisation requires both play and reciprocal attunement—commitment to sympathetic vibration, social disposition, and embodied practice. This does not simply mean commitment to rule breaking or violating norms but a collective commitment to yet unrealized alternatives, to revolutions that yet have no name. In its commitment to that "yet" it opens onto the unthought, to experiments with freedom reflexively aware of their complicity and insufficiency but nonetheless oriented toward something else to be completed by and through the future engagement phonography provides. Reciprocal attunement requires play, a commitment to what may happen in the course of the event's unfolding, as well as an openness to conceptual revisioning to make room for the forms of transformation of self and others that may come. Play, in ensemble, likewise requires reciprocal attunement. Improvising the common, then, is the search, through play, for a freedom that does not necessarily recapitulate the structure. I'm interested in black soundwork's speculative capacities, its capacity to invoke aspects of lived experience of renewal in Ornette Coleman's sense in the epigraph above. The sanctity of property and the norms of propriety and autonomy that issue therefrom have as their avatars bourgeois white men, and are defined in opposition to the slave and the feminine. What we need is not the universalization of patriarchal, capitalist freedom but its abolition, along with its conceptual dependencies—personhood, autonomy, individual sovereignty—understood to mark the boundaries of legible and de-

sirable selfhood. Abolition in this sense is at stake in the black soundwork this book studies. What we need is a set of collective capacities for which we do not have names, and which black soundwork gives one way of conceiving.

In his discussion of Amiri Baraka, Fred Moten refers to "a massive intervention in and contribution to the prophetic description—a kind of anticipatory rewriting or phonography—of communism that is, as Cedric Robinson has written, the essence of black radicalism."[44] In light of his subsequent work, we can understand that remark in terms of his ongoing engagement with a long phenomenological tradition that separates subjects and objects, which subtends his powerful critique of the proper and property. If, following Moten and Robinson, we understand blackness as the historically specific and enduring form of a more general racialization and production of the social's excess or "outside," we might understand the long, discontinuous history of black struggle as a series of contests staged in the name of a freedom more profound than those oriented around self-possession. Taken together, Hartman, Moten, and Robinson offer exemplary critiques of the social forms predicated upon freedom to enter into contracts, formal equality, property, and the "invisible hand"—in a word, critiques of the forms of life thinkable from within capitalism—that substantively engage slavery and its afterlives. Substantive freedom requires social forms and transformation beyond what we usually mean by diversity, inclusion, and similar terms. But it will also mean that the "we" that becomes free will differ from the "we" that fights for freedom. The fight for freedom is a fully transfigurative fight to reshape the discursive and political terrain upon which people struggle, a fight for new ways of imagining collective action and collectivity itself without guarantees of their future shape. Here we might again recall that the name musicians and critics give to musical activity is *play*, and consider the full range of things played on and with. We might, as I attempt, consider the relationship between improvisation and surprise as a way of registering the unexpected, the riotous, what was immanent but unrecognized, what was still possible in what was thought outmoded.

To ask about black sound's media is to ask about the history of the past, the relationship of culture to the present, and ultimately the improvisation of the common whose range of effective circulation we term community, but whose most radically conceived form is communism. Focus on collaboration, meanwhile, creates conceptual space through which to consider the mutual constitution of poetry and music. Rather than understand these collaborations in terms of the available histories of poetry and music, this book listens for artists' negotiation of aesthetic fields that shaped and were shaped by their institutionally legible and illegible actions. Using experimental modes, they

engaged textual practices that expanded the possibilities of art, and those texts refract—recode and engage through field-specific logic—broader social conflicts and contradictions while retaining a relative autonomy and a specific discursive, economic, and political field. This orientation encourages consideration of the aesthetic field's relative autonomy, seeing aesthetic conflicts as having an actuality beyond simply reflecting or expressing broader social and historical processes.[45]

What *Is* This Thing Called *Jazz*?

Insofar as I am invested in the potentialities and latencies as born by black sound, especially music, I grapple with what is regressive or inadequate in the music's history and historiography, which discourses surrounding the music can tend to replicate. Throughout, I grapple with the predominant maleness of the archives of free jazz and phonographic poetry. The persistent conceptual and practical exclusion of women from jazz should remind us that no aesthetic form or practice is inherently liberatory or progressive.[46] The word *jazz* names multiple vectors of desire, power (including the power to define what is and is not jazz), relations to music, and sites of conflict, and that multiplicity defines its being. Perhaps above all, it designates a discursive field, that is, an evolving set of questions and answers, claims and explanations, within which evolve narrative and tropological tendencies and ideal ways of linking aesthetics and historical context. It sets the conditions for hear(d)ing the music, for converting non-meaning sound into predetermined symbolic relations (e.g., syncopation as indicative of a basic savagery in one moment, recoded as a freedom drive in another). The line between meaning and non-meaning is a historical question regarding the specific contexts in which black sound comes to be read as an independent phenomenon. Rather than recite familiar lists of performers, composers, debates, tendencies, legacies, and landmark recording sessions, it seems more productive to consider the processes by which critics, musicians, and listeners alike have produced ideas of jazz as the name for a singular impulse. What are the semantemes (base units of meaning) and how do they control its morphology, the torque of its tropes? Sherrie Tucker argues that what we study is "the desires mapped onto representations of and narratives about jazz and the connections and disconnections between them and jazz practice."[47] Those representations and narratives are constitutive of jazz, and those representations, which encode and fuel collective desires, suffuse the experience of jazz practice, even as that practice necessarily exceeds them. Tucker calls for critics to consider those practices, players, and audiences jazz

studies excludes in order to define its object—"to narrate with an awareness" of narrative's limits and produce more adequate representations. The more radical implication of the deconstruction she calls for (riffing on Scott Deveaux's influential essay "Constructing the Jazz Tradition") would be to track the ways those bodies, desires, and practices strategically excluded from the jazz tradition as discourse turn out to be conditions of possibility for thinking or narrating jazz. Insofar as the anarchic, unorganizable, or unruly name jazz's ideal promise, our analysis should probe the serial exclusions upon which its symbolic unity relies. I am ultimately interested in the kinds of listening and analysis that become possible, and necessary, when we treat "jazz" as a process rather than an entity, and examine the vectors of power that shape its being. As with poetry and other genres, the whole to which jazz belongs is an effect of the discursive operations that make singular performances or styles effective. Poetry is no more stable as referent or archive than jazz is, and while I do not study spoken word directly, its performative mode bears a family resemblance to those I do study. One could trace the emergence of phonographic poetry through the archives of poets reciting and performing their own poetry in the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, whose function gradually shifted from demonstrations of elocution, to instill virtue and discipline speech and to encourage self-expression, to a means toward an additional plane of analysis where the author's own inflections became most vitally important.[48] The public reading, parallel with the use of early sound recording to transmit great oratory, eventually gave way to broader practices of literary entrepreneurialism, where charismatic lectors developed rhetorical and performance practices to promote their work and supplement their income. In that relay between print and performance modern poetry constitutes itself. The spaces, practices, and functions of poetry proliferate through the twentieth century, with poets adapting new technology as it emerges. Along the way they effect crossings among (invoking in Don Ihde's terms of "the word as soundful" or "songful") "sounds as meaningful" and "the [technical] transformation of [sound] experience itself."[49] Poetry mediates soundful words and meaningful sound; phonographic poetry remediates poetry, music, and the community theater projects specifically for intended black audiences. Media analysis is key to reconstructing this cartography of desires, narratives, and competing claims to legitimacy within and beyond the bourgeois sphere of culture. Framed by economic and cultural relations and antagonism, medium is a name for a "recurring set of contingent social relations and social practices."[50] One name for that contingency, of course, is history, analyzed in terms of the shifting economic and political terrains, the processes of emergence and incorporation, and the vectors

of power and social positionality that shape and animate mutually informing class, race, and gender relations. This project investigates the media of poetry and the work of poetry as mediation in a specific context where black sound takes on new political meanings.

Collection: Time

A project concerned with sound recordings is also concerned with collection—re-constellating commodity objects in into new networks of desire and value. Obsession, which marks a perversion or diversion of libidinal energies toward potentially perverse, even liberatory (mis)use, is its intellectual mode. And, as will be clear from its analysis of the shifting meanings and functions of black sound, the analysis of phonographic poetry probes the boundaries between art and non-art as (related to) the boundary between socio-ethical and economic value, understanding that with each binary one pole contaminates the other. A simple opposition of "idealist" (black sound reflects or expresses an underlying black consciousness) and "materialist" (black aesthetic practice responds to concrete historical antagonisms) theories of black soundwork is unhelpful, even symptomatic, if it simply proposes sound as materiality or pure use-value. Use-value, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued, is "both outside and inside the system of value-determination," neither simply host to parasitic exchange-value (inside) nor calculable within the definition of value.[51] Spivak's reminder, via Marx, that "a thing can be a use-value without being a value" reminds us of the theoretical difficulties entailed in framing black sound as wholly resistant and extrinsic to capital or capitalist modernity. (It also tells us something about those whose lives and labor are at once central to and external to bourgeois conceptions of the good life.) One way, then, of conceiving black soundwork is by thinking about those similarly inside and outside capitalist modernity, those whose desires to "consume the (affect of the) work itself" always point to a strategically excluded possibility of, and riotous supplement to, that modernity. In its claims to and mobilization of common content, this aesthetic and theoretical practice I study here is most generally concerned with the improvisation of alternative forms of value. As obsessive pursuit (thinking here of the sheer duration of the labor entailed in being able adequately to develop one's own sound concept), it allows collaborators to imbue with value the objects, questions, concerns, and positions drawn from within stratified social structures, and outline at least a fantasy of autonomous, auto-telic production. Yet, though durable, obsessions are also mutable, ultimately deferring and differing the compulsion to circulation and value.

If, as Jacques Attali argues, records store "use-time" (on the model of use-value), the record collection is also an archive of intimacies and desires, uses beyond utility and surplus.[52] Yet, "use-time," like use-value, is heterogeneous, only ambiguously related to larger determinations of value. While workers disposing of their time as they will registers as theft from the perspective of the capitalist, it is also clear that the record collection potentially represents something more subversive than people "stockpil[ing] what they want to find the time to hear."[53] Attali's unfortunate analogy of "exchange-time" to money ("a supposedly stable sign of equivalence") is beyond the scope of my present argument. Suffice it to say that as with traditional Marxist accounts of use-/exchange-value, the two change sides, and eventually use-value has to be strategically excluded in order for his temporal schema to work. What I want to suggest is that we might be able to read his terms differently in order to rethink the record collection in light of the concerns with which I began this introduction.

One might agree that sound recording reifies labor (use-time) into a commodity. One could also note that legitimating early sound recording required understanding it to belong to a broader social hygiene project, ensuring the transmission of bourgeois cultural values to the proletariat. Neither of these "materialist" accounts, however, account for the perversity of collection as a site of conflicting desires and uses, not all of which correspond with market values in any straightforward way. Collection indexes affects at once intrinsic and extrinsic to social reproduction; it points to affectively necessary surpluses that have no correlate within the production of commodity value. But, returning to Nathaniel Mackey and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, I wonder about other forms of "exchange-time," which is to say I wonder about the normative situation Attali and others imagine of the solitary listener with his (usually a man) records, waiting for the time to listen. Could we conceive of such time as the imagined time of an encounter, the prospective, future-perfect time of listening in a world that differs from the world of the initial sounding? Exchange-time becomes a way of describing a moment when things fall into place—the right moment, the right sound, the right company, the right occasion to share listening. Mackey's character N. decries "someone else's having heard presumed to be one's own." But Mackey's work—in prose, in verse, and as a longtime host of a radio show called *Tanganyika Strut*—reminds us of the pleasure and possibility of making one's listening available to others. Listening is reflexive, but its autonomy heightens the desire for another to listen to my listening and through that imagine a community of listeners "that each wants to make itself heard hearing."[54] This doubled scene of listening—being affected

by sound and imagining others hearing my hearing—marks the resonant body of the community of listeners.

One's personal collection of sound objects—I can no longer say "record collection"—is advance preparation for an encounter with someone who shares in the project of counter-knowledge at the heart of black (sound) studies. Collection touches on alternative temporalities and intimacies, alternative relations to the objects one concerns oneself with that are not about consumption, absorption, integration but instead about reoriented relations to the world. This attention is necessary as this book considers the circulation of texts, the different meanings sound takes on or is refused at different moments across time and space, in the interstices of communal formation between the here/now and the potential. As much as a sound recording, like any document or archive produced under capitalism, is also a document of dispossession, alienation, and exploitation, it also indexes "some other kind of thought," points that will have been locatable on a map of counter-formation. This is a formation written on the B-side of the archival records of black negation, the fetishistic ac/counting of black vulnerability, the mathematics and ledgers of black undoing. Listening is a proto-political, critical practice aimed at what in the past is not yet exhausted, at forms of life still on the horizon. Those riotous forms of life are immanent; they beckon still—if we make time to listen.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 "We Are on the Edge," Art Ensemble of Chicago, *We Are on the Edge* (Pi Recordings, 2019).

2 Amiri Baraka, *Black Music* (1967. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 64.

3 Nathaniel Mackey, *Late Arcade* (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 2017), 182.

4 Robin Kelley argues for this periodization: "If we can agree that the Black Arts Movement is not defined by race riots and dashikis but by a self-conscious collective effort to promote black art for black communities, art about liberation and freedom, then we should push our chronology back to the mid-1950s. For instance, radical black musicians formed collectives for both economic security and artistic collaboration in the 1950s and early 1960s, developing structures for cooperative work that anticipated the Black Arts Movement's efforts of the late 1960s" (Robin D. G. Kelley, "Dig They Freedom: Meditations on History and the Black Avant-Garde," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 3 [1997]: 18).

5 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

6 Gérard Genette defines *paratext* as a "threshold" or "vestibule," an "'undefined zone' between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)" (Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], 2).

7 Quoted in Ronald Sukenick, *Down and In: Life in the Underground* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 221. George Lewis's treatment of this moment in the formation of experimental jazz is indispensable. See George Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 29–54.

8 Aldon Nielsen, "Now Is the Time: Voicing Against the Grain of Orality," in *People Get Ready: The Future of Jazz Is Now!*, eds. Ajay Heble and Rob Wallace (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 34. Richard Iton in a similar vein urges attention to "the conjunctions made possible by the artist-activist, and efforts to sustain infrastructures that might support more extended and intensive forms of creative expression such as

the band, the collective, workshops, and live performances," which he analogizes to "the struggle for room within language itself" (Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post–Civil Rights Era* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 287).

9 I refer especially to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular," *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 475–86.

10 Iton, *Black Fantastic*, 200. Iton's later gloss is helpful: "It is this ethical lack of commitment—this anarchist-inflected imagination—that enables subaltern subjects to push for inclusion among those protected by the prophylactic state while at the same time recognizing the limitations of this recognition" (202).

11 Quoted in John Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 365.

12 Richard Iton, "Still Life," *Small Axe* 40 (March 2013): 27.

13 Samuel Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6.

14 Stuart Hall, "When Was 'the Post-colonial'?" 254. "It does not mean," Hall cautions, "that what we have called the 'after-effects' of colonial rule have somehow been suspended. It certainly does *not* mean that we have passed from a regime of power-knowledge into some powerless and conflict-free time zone. Nevertheless, it does also stake its claim in terms of the fact that some other, related but as yet 'emergent' new configurations of power-knowledge relations are beginning to exert their distinctive and specific effects. This way of conceptualizing the shift between these paradigms—not as an epistemological 'break' in the Althusserian/structuralist sense but more on the analogy of what Gramsci called a movement of deconstruction-reconstruction or what Derrida, in a more deconstructive sense, calls a 'double inscription'—is characteristic of all the 'posts.'"

15 For an excellent summary account of Benjamin's understandings of medium and apparatus, I recommend Antonio Somaini, "Walter Benjamin's Media Theory: The *Medium* and the *Apparat*," *Grey Room* 62 (Winter 2016): 6–41.

16 I develop this distinction between the "real" or empirical object and the theoretical one from Hortense Spillers, by way of Louis Althusser. Spillers argues that "the 'purest' object that the black creative intellectual always imagined as the unmediated 'thereness' is situated in his/her concept of natal community," which she urges us to reconsider for reasons practical, political, and theoretical (Hortense Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003], 458). Most germane to my argument here is that the black creative intellectual's "raw material" does not conform to an empiricist conception of knowledge but refers instead to a "structure of intuition or 'representation' which combines in a peculiar '*Verbindung*' [complex structure] the mode of production, sensuous, technical and ideological elements." In other words, the real object, as raw material, is not a given but already *produced* within a "historically constituted system of an *apparatus of thought*, founded on and articulated to natural and social reality" (Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading* Capital, trans. Ben Brewster [London: Verso 1997], 44). A black sound studies adequate to its concept must consider "the imposition of the complex (sensuous-technical-ideological) structure

which constitutes it [black sound and blackness] as an *object of knowledge*" (*Reading Capital,* 46).

17 Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: The Grooves of Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 22.

18 Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 205, 32.

19 Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 21.

20 George Lewis offers a telling account of the difficulties journeyman recording engineers faced when his colleagues in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians first began recording (*Power*, 141–43).

21 I draw the "upworking of revolutionary ideals" from Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 93.

22 I find persuasive Cynthia Young's argument in *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) that black artists, intellectuals, and activists found inspiration in international struggles, effectively imagining new internationals between African Americans and other black and brown intellectuals throughout what was called the Third World. For that reason I am wary about overemphasizing the CPUSA in particular. In his essay "A Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left" (in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, eds. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig [London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006], 277–302), Van Gosse helpfully recovers the complexity and transnational character of the social movements for socialism and radical democracy of the post–World War II era, recovering those voices subsequently grouped and dismissed under the sign of "identity politics."

23 Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. (1999): 59.

24 Ralph Ellison defined *vernacular* "as a dynamic *process* in which the most refined styles from the past are continually merged with the play-it-by-eye-and-ear improvisations which we invent in our efforts to control our environment and entertain ourselves." Ralph Ellison, *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 612. While I reject the notion of refinement, Ellison usefully outlines the ways individual artists might act with indifference toward, and thus redefine, the racializing logics associated with particular styles. Grant Farred extends this line of thinking, using "vernacular" to modify intellectual practice "[d]eeply grounded in the ways in which the cultural shapes and reshapes the political impact" of black intellectual labor in a postcolonial and anti-colonial context. Grant Farred, *What's My Name?: Black Vernacular Intellectuals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 2.

25 Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1987), 8–9.

26 James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 59. Smethurst's conception of a "popular avant-garde" tracks with Martha Biondi's discussion of the Black Popular Front in *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

27 Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 59.

28 Amiri Baraka, *The Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 174. For more on this era and the one immediately following, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*; Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*; and Michael Dawson, *Blacks In and Out of the Left*. Smethurst's *New Red Negro* details African American literary engagements with the left during the Depression and World War II, while Mary Helen Washington's *The Other Black List* joins scholarship by William Maxwell and Bill V. Mullen in excavating the many complex interactions between African Americans and the communist left.

29 Jerrold Hirsch's influential "Modernity, Nostalgia and Southern Folklore Studies: The Case of John Lomax," *Journal of American Folklore* 105.416 (Spring 1992): 183–207, notes the relationships between romantic nationalism, genocidal colonial policies, and the processes of legitimating imperialism and segregation (by reifying violent social transformations under the sign of "disappearing culture"). Jonathan Sterne, drawing on Hirsch and Erika Brady, underscores the coincidence between the rise of sound media cultures in the late nineteenth century, romantic nationalism, the rise of ethnography, modernity's territorial expanse, and the genocidal effects of the policies that supported that expansion in the United States. The more Native Americans (and other cultures) "disappeared" through death or assimilation, the more sound technologies fit and promoted new social constructs of sound's reproducibility and preservation. Moreover, as a somewhat unitary popular culture diffused through records spread, the homogenization of American culture as a truly national culture accelerated the conditions of the disappearance of local folk cultures—the disappearance of the "folk" illuminated and selected for the use of sound media to preserve the languages and songs of colonial others almost as a fetish. The fetishization of "folk spirit"—a term for original community—is a key component of romantic nationalism, promoting a view of all those cultures and peoples on modernity's periphery as living reliquaries whose cultures can be adopted as an alternative to an increasingly mechanized, overdeveloped modern world. Arguments on the analogous function of "primitivism" in literature, often figured through music, are too numerous to cite. As one example, Jean Toomer calls *Cane* the "swan song" of a Negro folk spirit "walking in to die on the modern desert" in the context of the Great Migration (Jean Toomer, *The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer*, ed. Darwin M. Turner [Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1980], 123).

30 For African American participation in what will become the music industries, see Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890–1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Andre Millard discusses the relationship of sound recording to the rise of ethnography as a separate branch of anthropology, and, at least initially, as a consumer object recorded by Emile Berliner, Victor, and Gennett in *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

31 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 182.

32 Michael Denning, *Noise Uprising: The Audio Politics of a World Musical Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015).

33 I am drawing on Weheliye, *Phonographies* and Denning, *Noise Uprising*.

34 Aldon Nielsen discusses recordings by Duke Ellington, Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Kenneth Rexroth, and Kenneth Patchen in *Black Chant: The Languages of Black Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 173–233. Jacob Smith writes about the ways the circulation of poetry on record extended the "verse-recitation movement" in Victorian England and record companies' attempts to appeal to middle-class and middle-class-aspirant listeners, foregrounding Caedmon Records' poetry recordings in *Spoken Word: Postwar American Phonograph Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). And Peter D. Goldsmith offers a comprehensive account of Folkways Records, famous in the postwar era for recording black and other poets, musicians, and public figures in *Making People's Music: Moe Asch and Folkways Records* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

35 Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 280.

36 Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 280.

37 Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 1. "Paraontological" is Nahum Chandler's way of describing the conceptual disturbances blackness enacts within and against positivism on one hand and phenomenology on the other, insofar as the former's things-as-they-are neglects the social forces that shape existence (naturalizing racist outcomes as "facts" about race) and the latter's intending subject always at least implies a European subject.

38 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.

39 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6. Translation modified.

40 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Rockhill explains that "*le commun*," variously translated, "is strictly speaking what makes or produces a community and not simply an attribute shared by all of its members" (102n5).

41 Michael Hardt, "Production and Distribution of the Common: A Few Questions for the Artist," *open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain*. February 6, 2006. http://www.onlineopen.org/production-and-distribution-of-the-common. Accessed May 9, 2018.

42 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 12.

43 Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 115.

44 Moten, *In the Break*, 86.

45 I derive the notion of "relative autonomy" from Louis Althusser, who deployed it as an alternative conceptual framework through which to conceive the relationship between economic, political, ideological, and theoretical "levels" articulated into a "complex unity" for which the economic, notoriously, proves "determinant in the last instance." The economic, in other words, is a kind of theoretical vanishing point, a necessary but not sufficient reference for conceiving unity between otherwise discrete social formations. The argument is related to Lukacs's notion of "phantom objectivity," but attempts to conceive the relationship between these

"levels" as imperfect correspondence rather than Hegelian expression. See Althusser and Balibar, *Reading* Capital, 91–101. For an account of the mutual inflection of class and race—notably absent from Althusser's account—see Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds. Houston Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara, and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16–60.

46 Sherrie Tucker's work, especially her essay "Bordering on Community: Improvising Women Improvising Women-in-Jazz" (*The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*, eds. Daniel Fischlin and Ajay Heble [Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004]: 244–67), is especially helpful. Her insistence on considering "improvising women" as "a working condition of 'improvising women'" underscores that, while the power gender norms exercise may produce resistance, the exercise of resistance threatens to erode the very footholds the women worked to make for themselves.

47 Sherrie Tucker, "Deconstructing the Jazz Tradition," in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries*, eds. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, and Daniel Goldmark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 279.

48 Here I draw on and synthesize several sources. Though largely silent on African American practices, Joan Shelley Rubin, *Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), and Mike Chasar, *Everyday Reading: Poetry and Popular Culture in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), offer compelling arguments about the place of verse in the formation of quotidian US life, from advertising jingles and scrapbooking to church bulletins, family gatherings, and beyond. Lesley Wheeler's attention to the practicalities of voice, poetry, and performance is a welcome focus in *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). Tyler Hoffman, *American Poetry in Performance: From Walt Whitman to Hip Hop* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), offers an expansive view of the "civics of American performance poetry and the nexus of its oral and print modalities in the light of shifting political and cultural formations in the nation over the last century and a half" (4). His attention to a broad range of performance practices and cultural identities is in line with such studies as Julia Novak, *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), and Susan B. A. Somers-Willett's indispensable *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

49 Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 4. I adapt the term "songful" from Lawrence Kramer's discussion of "songfulness," an excess materiality of words in performance that can extend or contradict semantic meanings, in "Beyond Words and Music: An Essay on Songfulness," in *Word and Music Studies Defining the Field: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Word and Music Studies at Graz, 1997*, eds. Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher, and Werner Wolf (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).

50 Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 182.

51 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 162.