

# Experimental Music in Black and White: The AACM in New York, 1970–1985\*

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## Introduction

Since its founding on the virtually all-black South Side of Chicago in 1965, the African American musicians' collective known as the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) has played an unusually prominent role in the development of American experimental music. The composite output of AACM members explores a wide range of methodologies, processes, and media. AACM musicians have developed new ideas about timbre, sound, collectivity, extended technique and instrumentation, performance practice, intermedia, the relationship of improvisation to composition, form, scores, computer music technologies, invented acoustic instruments, installations, and kinetic sculptures.<sup>1</sup>

In a 1973 article, two early AACM members, trumpeter John Shenoy Jackson and co-founder and pianist/composer Muhal Richard Abrams, asserted that, "The AACM intends to show how the disadvantaged and the disenfranchised can come together and determine their own strategies for political and economic freedom, thereby determining their own destinies" (Abrams and Jackson 1973:72). This optimistic declaration, based on notions of self-help as fundamental to racial uplift, cultural preservation, and spiritual rebirth, was in accord with many other challenges to traditional notions of order and authority that emerged in the wake of the Black Power Movement.

The AACM's goals of individual and collective self-production and promotion challenged racialized limitations on venues and infrastructure, serving as an example to other artists in rethinking the artist/business relationship. A number of organizations in which African American musicians took leadership roles, including the early-twentieth-century Clef Club, the short-lived Jazz Composers Guild, the Collective Black Artists, and the Los Angeles-based Union of God's Musicians and Artists Ascension, or Underground Musicians Association (UGMAA/UGMA), preceded the AACM in attempting to pursue these self-help strategies. The AACM, however, has become the most well-known and influential of the post-1960 organizations, and is still active almost forty years later.<sup>2</sup>

The Art Ensemble of Chicago (AEC), which emerged from the AACM and has been active in one form or another from 1969 to the present, is one of the groups that most radically exemplifies AACM-style collectivity, or in the words of Samuel Floyd, "individuality within the aggregate" (Floyd

1995:228). The five members of the classic Art Ensemble—saxophonists Joseph Jarman and Roscoe Mitchell, trumpeter Lester Bowie, bassist Malachi Favors Maghostous, and drummer Famoudou Don Moye—represent a multi-voiced, internationalist vision, exemplifying theorist Kobena Mercer's notion of "plural and heterogeneous black identities" (Mercer 1994:53–66).

Moye explains the necessity of acting in concert in order to move beyond simpler strategies of resistance: "Along with defiance you have organization. There have been moments of defiance throughout the history of the music, but the strength of the effort and the strength of the cooperation between the musicians and their unity of effort is what enables us to survive. Anytime the musicians are not strong in their unity, the control factor goes over to the *other* side" (Beauchamp 1998:56).

The first activities of AACM artists in New York City, occurring roughly between 1970 and 1985, played a crucial and very public role in the emergence during this period of now-standard musical and critical discourses of genre mobility and musical hybridity. As AACM trumpeter Lester Bowie asserted, not long after the dawn of postmodernism, "We're free to express ourselves in any so-called idiom, to draw from any source, to deny any limitation. We weren't restricted to bebop, free jazz, Dixieland, theater or poetry. We could put it all together. We could sequence it any way we felt like it. It was entirely up to us" (ibid.:46). Having emerged from the jazz tradition, which had already problematized the border between popular and high culture, AACM musicians, by actively seeking dialogue with a variety of traditions, had placed themselves in an excellent position to recursively intensify and extend the blurring and possible erasure of this and other boundaries—or as Charlie Parker is reputed to have said, "Man, there's no boundary line to art."

To the extent that AACM musicians challenged racialized hierarchies of aesthetics, method, place, infrastructure, and economics, the organization's work epitomizes the early questioning of borders by artists of color that is only beginning to be explored in serious scholarship on music. Indeed, it may fairly be said that the AACM has received far less credit for this role in challenging borders of genre, practice, and cultural reference than members of subsequently emerging experimental music art worlds. In particular, the so-called "downtown" improvisors and the "totalist" composers, two loosely-structured musical communities largely framed and coded as white by press reception, articulated similar discourses of mobility, extending them to an alliance with rock that undoubtedly furthered their respective causes (cf. Gann 1997:320–23, 355–56).

The corporate-approved celluloid description of the AACM in the recent Ken Burns blockbuster film contrasts markedly with the situation in

the real world, where the AACM's international impact has gone far beyond "white college students—in France" (see Ken Burns's *Jazz*, episode 10). While most studies that extensively reference the AACM appear to be confined to an examination of the group's influence within an entity culturally identified as the "world of jazz," the musical influence of the AACM has extended across borders of race, geography, genre, and musical practice and must be confronted in any nonracialized account of experimental music. To the extent that "world of jazz" discourses cordon off musicians from interpenetration with other musical art worlds, they cannot account for either the breakdown of genre definitions or the mobility of practice and method that informs the present-day musical landscape.

In New York, the example of the AACM expanded the range of thinkable and actualizable positions for a generation of black experimental artists, such as Anthony Davis and James Newton, and the various artists who emerged from the M-BASE collective, such as Steve Coleman, Graham Haynes, Geri Allen, Robin Eubanks, Cassandra Wilson, and Greg Osby. Finally, the AACM's work challenged the white-coded American experimental music movement to move beyond ethnic particularism toward the recognition of a multicultural, multi-ethnic base, with a variety of perspectives, histories, traditions and methods.

This study of the AACM in New York is intended to illustrate some of the strategies black musicians used in negotiating the complex, diverse, and unstable environment of contemporary musical experimentalism. Presenting a brief summary of the group's origins, initial goals, and activities in Chicago, the essay contextualizes the period by referencing a set of core AACM ideologies, including notions of collectivity; the management of difference and innovation via individualism; the importance of composition; the promulgation of a nurturing atmosphere; and border-crossing. Given this preparatory context, we then follow the consequences of the attempts by AACM members to hew to these ideologies and practices in the stressful musical environment of New York City in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, critical reception and the members' own views of their activities coalesce to provide some understanding of the effects of AACM activities on the musical world as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay I draw in part on my own experiences and history as an AACM member who was active in that environment. But rather than advancing a straightforward version of my own oral narrative—a slave narrative, if you will—I try to create a critical history as well, placing my perspectives in intersection with published reports and interviews from the period. In that spirit, I also would inform the reader that rather than speaking for the AACM, I present my own perspective, in the hope that others will consider their own understandings alongside it.

### The Crucible of Chicago

In the spring of 1965, a number of Chicago musicians received a postcard from four of their mid-career colleagues—pianists Jodie Christian and Richard Abrams, drummer Steve McCall, and trumpeter Philip Cohran—calling for a general meeting, and specifying fourteen issues to be discussed in relation to forming a new organization for musicians. The meeting was held on May 8, 1965, at Cohran's home on East 75th Street, near Cottage Grove Avenue on Chicago's South Side. The proceedings were conducted using more or less standard parliamentary procedure, and were recorded on audiotape. Each participant stated his or her name for identification purposes before speaking. The participants were diverse in age, gender, and musical direction.<sup>4</sup> Some of the meeting's participants had taken part in the rehearsals of Abrams's Experimental Band from 1961–64 (Radano 1993:77–80). Cohran in particular had found sustenance in the work of Sun Ra (Shapiro 2001), with whom he had performed until Ra's departure for New York in 1961. Others were more traditional-minded; in fact, the individual work of many of these musicians was too diverse to make sense of an experimental/traditional binary.

The wide-ranging discussions in these early meetings, in which musicians spoke frankly among themselves, rather than to any outside media, evince nothing so much as an awakening of subalterns to the power of speech. Already on display was the radical collective democracy that later became a central aspect of AACM ideology. What the taped evidence does *not* support, however, is the understandable but erroneous notion, advanced by most critical reception, that the AACM was formed in order to promote or revise “new jazz,” “the avant-garde,” or “free music.” Rather, with the very first order of business, the focus of the meeting was on finding ways to foster the creation and performance of a generalized notion of what the musicians called “original music.” I include here some excerpts from the discussion:

**Richard Abrams:** First of all, number one, there's original music, *only*. This will have to be voted and decided upon. I think it was agreed with Steve and Phil that what we meant is original music proceeding from the members in the organization.

**Philip Cohran:** I think the reason original music was put there first was because of all of our purposes of being here, this is the primary one. Because why else would we form an association? By us forming an association and promoting and taking over playing our own music, or playing music period, it's going to involve a great deal of sacrifice on each and every one of us. And I personally don't want to sacrifice, make any sacrifice for any standard music.

**Steve McCall:** We've all been talking about it among ourselves for a long time in general terms. We'll embellish as much as we can, but get to what you really feel because we're laying a foundation for something that will be permanent.

**Melvin Jackson:** Original music, I feel, is really based on the individual. It doesn't necessarily mean that I care to play all original music, which would be all my music.

**Roscoe Mitchell:** I think, you know, it's time for musicians to, you know, let go of other people and try to start, you know, finding themselves. Because everybody in this room here is creative. I mean, I think we should all try to go into ourselves and stretch out as far as we can, and do what we really want to do.

**Gene Easton:** The [post]cards originally said "creative music" and what picture I hold is that creative music can only be original anyway, in a true creative sense. "Original," in one sense, means something you write in the particular system that we're locked up with now in this society. We express ourselves in this system because it's what we learned, and if you don't express in the system that is known, you're ostracized. But as we learn more of other systems of music around the world we're getting closer to the music that our ancestors played—sound-conscious musicians, finding a complete new system that expresses *us*. Because there are far better systems, and I feel that we will be locked up for the rest of our days in this system unless we can get out of it through some means such as this.

**Fred Berry:** Now before we vote on whether or not we're going to play original music there has to be a clear-cut definition in everyone's mind of what original music is.

**Richard Abrams:** We're not going to agree on what exactly original music means to us. We'll have to limit—now—the word "original" to promotion of ourselves and our own material to benefit ourselves. (AACM 1965)

At the next meeting on May 15, the discussion evolved toward an exploration of how "original music" might interface with the venues and infrastructure system that these musicians were about to challenge and eventually outgrow:

**Julian Priester:** Taking into consideration economic factors involved, as musicians we're going to be working in front of the public, and different people, club owners or promoters . . .

**Richard Abrams:** No, no, we're not working for club owners, no clubs. Not from this organization. This is strictly concerts. See, there's another thing about us functioning as full artistic musicians. We're not afforded that liberty in taverns. Everybody here knows that. (AACM 1965a)

The new organization moved quickly to fashion a formal organization, with by-laws, offices such as president, vice-president, treasurer, recording secretary, and business manager, and a board of directors. During meetings, a philosophy of collective, one person/one vote governance included debating procedures in which members were addressed as "Mrs.," "Mister," and "Miss." The first board of directors—Floradine Geemes, Philip Cohran, Jodie Christian, Jerol Donavon, Peggy Abrams, Richard Abrams, and Sandra Lashley—was charged with creating a name for the new group.

Jacques Attali has asserted that the emergence of "free jazz" was provoked by "the organized and often consensual theft of black American music" (Attali 1989:138). Certainly this understanding of the political, economic, and aesthetic situation for black music extended right into the naming of the new organization. At a May 27 meeting, the board settled on two choices. Ultimately, the name "Association of Dedicated Creative Artists" did not receive as much support as the second and eventual choice, but a question arose as to whether the name should refer to "creative music" or "creative musicians." Cohran's exposition settled the matter: "If the association is to advance the creative musicians, they are the ones who need advancing. . . We can all create music and somebody else can take it and use it, and the music is still . . . [general laughter]. . . The musicians are the ones who need the help" (AACM 1965b).

The name "Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians" and the acronym "AACM" were adopted unanimously at the next general meeting on May 29, and by August of that year the organization was chartered by the state of Illinois as a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation. The documents submitted as part of the charter request included a set of nine purposes, to which the membership continues to subscribe in 2002:

- To cultivate young musicians and to create music of a high artistic level for the general public through the presentation of programs designed to magnify the importance of creative music.
- To create an atmosphere conducive to artistic endeavors for the artistically inclined by maintaining a workshop for the express purpose of bringing talented musicians together.
- To conduct a free training program for young aspirant musicians.

- To contribute financially to the programs of the Abraham Lincoln Centre, 700 E. Oakwood Blvd., Chicago, Ill., and other charitable organizations.
- To provide a source of employment for worthy creative musicians.
- To set an example of high moral standards for musicians and to uplift the public image of creative musicians.
- To increase mutual respect between creative artists and musical tradesmen (booking agents, managers, promoters and instrument manufacturers, etc.).
- To uphold the tradition of cultured musicians handed down from the past.
- To stimulate spiritual growth in creative artists through recitals, concerts, etc., through participation in programs. (AACM 1965c)

In early August of 1965, an "open letter to the public" introducing the new organization and announcing its first concerts appeared in the *Chicago Defender*, the important African American newspaper. Written by Richard Abrams and Ken Chaney, the letter declared that, "The ultimate goal is to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to serious music and performing new unrecorded compositions. . . . The aim is universal in appeal and is necessary for the advancement, development and understanding of new music" ("Creative Musicians Sponsor," 1965; Abrams and Chaney 1965). The language of the announcement, which uses terms that recall high-culture, pan-European "classical music" culture—"new music," "serious music"—already distances the organization from jazz-oriented signifiers.

At first, AACM-sponsored concerts took place weekly in the black community. The first two concerts were held at the now-defunct South Shore Ballroom on 79th Street near Stony Island Avenue on the South Side of Chicago. The first AACM concert, featuring the Joseph Jarman Quintet with bassist Charles Clark, drummer Thurman Barker, saxophonist Fred Anderson, and trumpeter Bill Brimfield, took place on August 16, 1965. The second event on August 23 featured Philip Cohran's Artistic Heritage Ensemble, including Claudine Myers and Eugene Easton ("Creative Musicians Present," 1965). The concerts took place at 8 p.m., the standard time for concert music events. Production values for the early events were guided by the goal of creating "an atmosphere conducive to serious music," including concert-style seating, the printing and distribution of advertising, attempts to obtain appearances on radio, advance ticket sales, and overall stage and venue management. All of these activities were handled by the musicians themselves.<sup>5</sup>

The Abraham Lincoln Centre, a local community assistance institution, was host to a regular series of AACM concerts, as well as the Saturday gen-

eral body meeting. Other AACM events, as well as non-AACM events featuring AACM members, took place in galleries, churches, and, indeed, in lounges and taverns, whose atmosphere the music tended to transform toward a concert orientation. AACM musicians performed on both the South Side and the then mainly white North Side of Chicago. Later, students and faculty members at the University of Chicago in the Hyde Park area, a bastion of relative whiteness within the otherwise black South Side, began organizing events with AACM musicians in university concert halls and other spaces, a development that cannot be overestimated in its impact on winning new and larger audiences, including a broadening in terms of race, class, and other demographic factors.

By 1966, attendance at meetings had declined considerably, as the optimistic financial projections of the early months were now being tempered by the difficulties of presenting and promoting events with extremely limited means (AACM 1965d, 1966). Soon afterwards, however, an influx of new members transformed the organization into what is known as the AACM today. The new members, some of whom have come to be viewed as the organization's "first wave," included trumpeters John Shenoy Jackson, Lester Bowie, and Leo Smith; drummer Alvin Fielder; pianist Christopher Gaddy; saxophonists John Stubblefield, John Powell, Abshalom Ben Shlomo, and Anthony Braxton; bassists Mchaka Uba and Leonard Jones; violinist Leroy Jenkins; poet David Moore (later Amus Mor); singers Fontella Bass (of "Rescue Me" fame) and Sherri Scott; trombonist Lester Lashley; and vibraphonist Gordon Emanuel, who was later ousted in a contentious meeting that resulted in the organization's membership becoming completely African American (Radano 1993:90 n. 45).

The first articles on the AACM in the United States began to appear as early as 1966 (Welding 1966a; "Jazz Musicians Group," 1966). International attention was not long in coming: between October of 1966 and December of 1968, a series of ten detailed and highly enthusiastic reports on "The New Music" by the young Chicago-based producer-critics Chuck Nessa, John Litweiler, and University of Chicago microbiologist Terry Martin, appeared in the Canadian journal *Coda*.<sup>6</sup> In 1968, Martin published the first major European article on the AACM in the English journal *Jazz Monthly* (Martin 1968). In 1966, the first commercial recording by an AACM composer, Roscoe Mitchell's *Sound*, was released by an independent Chicago-based firm, Delmark Records, and in May of 1967, Philip Cohran released two seven-inch recordings of his music on his own Zulu Records label (Cohran 1967). As early as 1968, the now-landmark series of Delmark and Nessa recordings of AACM music by Abrams, Jarman, Mitchell, and Bowie were becoming known in Europe (James 1968; Cooke 1968, 1968a; Harrison 1969; "Press Release," 1969).



AACM members manifested a strong belief in the importance and the inevitable success of the collective mission, even in the face of the tragic deaths of two of its youngest members, Christopher Gaddy in 1968 ("Final Bar," 1968) and Charles Clark in 1969 ("Final Bar," 1969). Serious financial problems, both for the organization and for most individual members, had not forestalled the fulfillment of one of the organization's stated purposes, the founding of the AACM School of Music. The collective gathered on Saturdays at 9:00 a.m., first to conduct the AACM School's free classes in theory, composition, and various instruments (still conducted each Saturday, as of 2002), and then for rehearsals and meetings.

An unpublished, fictional journal/narrative by pianist Claudine Myers, written around this time, depicts some of the dreams and aspirations of an organization in harmony. The narrative's dramatic setting is a Saturday afternoon at the Abraham Lincoln Centre, where AACM members are going about their creative business in an optimistic, hopeful spirit. Musicians such as Maurice McIntyre, Leo Smith, and Anthony Braxton appear among the playfully drawn "characters," and nicknames are used for others, such as John Stubblefield ("Stub"), Fontella Bass ("Fonnie"), and Roscoe Mitchell ("The Rock"). Since the narrative carried the eponymous byline of one "Ariae," a certain "Claudine" herself appears as a character:

I. Walked in the auditorium. Stub was playing the piano; Anthony Braxton sweeping. Leo was cleaning the office. Claudine proceeded to The Rock's desk. She told Leo that she was going to study with Anthony to learn his theories on notation, sounds . . . Leo said, "Get your own thing. You don't need someone else's. No one can say I'm playing someone else's thing."

II. While Maurice's group is rehearsing, Rock, Braxton and Leo enter. "We're stealing your song, Rock. You've got a hit!" (They were speaking of Rock's composition, "Rock Suite"). Rock replied, "When we get our own record company, we'll put it on a 45."

III. Anthony came down with his contrabass clarinet, "The Rock" had his bass sax. Later Fonnie and Claudine sang and played the piano. Fonnie and Claudine threw in a little 500 Rummy to make the day complete (smile). (Myers 1968)

### **Individualism, Self-realization, and Atmosphere**

AACM members have been connected with a vast range of musical styles, including jazz, blues, gospel, R&B, rock, funk, computer music, and pan-European classical and contemporary forms. Attempts by critics to identify a unitary "AACM style," however, appear to have been largely gen-

eralized from the methods of a few of the more prominent early members. For Muhal Richard Abrams, “there is no uniform musical style of the AACM . . . the style of the AACM consists above all in encouraging people to be self-assured. That is our style” (Jost 1982:189).<sup>7</sup> In 1977, the jazz critic Whitney Balliett quoted an unnamed AACM musician’s answer to a query about “the” AACM sound: “If you take all the sounds of all the A.A.C.M. musicians and put them together, that’s the A.A.C.M. sound, but I don’t think anyone’s heard that yet” (Balliett 1977:92).

There was, in fact, strong resistance within the AACM to overarching dogmas. As Anthony Braxton observed, “the diversity of its composite investigation has been the strength of the organization” (Braxton 1985:420). The management of difference was indeed a critical element in maintaining the life of the organization, since not only musical directions, but also social and political philosophies held by individual members, varied widely. As a result, AACM meetings could be very contentious, and extremely heated debate was common.

Informing AACM practice to a much deeper extent than one sympathetic scholar’s notion of “aesthetic spiritualism” (Radano 1993:100–5) were the AACM ideologies of “individualism,” “self-realization,” and “atmosphere.” In AACM parlance, the term “individualism” generally connoted a conflation of personality and innovation. As expressed by Muhal Richard Abrams at a 1990 symposium on the AACM, “The AACM inspires individuals to be individuals” (De Lerma 1990:17). This focus on the individual is consistent with African American musical practice generally. The notion of “sound” becomes “one’s own sound,” connected not with deracinated, autonomous analytic morphologies, but with notions of individual expression, agency, personal responsibility, uniqueness, and the avoidance of imitation. After all, the thinking goes, one’s own sound—by definition—constitutes something as new to the world as one’s very own birth, and therefore cannot have been heard before. As Max Roach maintained, “Our music isn’t one that demands, ‘Okay, we’re going to turn out a group of Charlie Parkers . . .’ We allow each other the luxury of being an individual . . . he receives the highest praise if he does break through, but in the sense that he’s an individual like Parker, not that he *sounds* like him” (Parks 1973:64).

While celebrating the individual, members of the AACM, practically without exception, tended to see their membership in the collective as equally important to their creative lives. “The organization,” as it was commonly called, constituted the foundation of an “atmosphere” that was crucial to the nurturing of creative difference within collectivity. Original member Fred Anderson felt that “It’s about everybody getting a possibility to express themselves . . . Because when you create that kind of atmosphere,

then you know that something will come out of it" (Jost 1982:208). Saxophonist Chico Freeman, who would become a part of the AACM's "second wave," felt that "The purpose of the AACM remains to try to create an atmosphere where we can try to reach our own individual potentials" (Gans 1980:47).

The investigations of individual musicians were viewed as being unbound by constructions of genre, method, tradition, or race. As Joseph Jarman put it, "If you're a writer, it's your responsibility to find out everything you possibly can so that you can find out what words are about. If you're going to be a musician, it's your responsibility to find out everything you possibly can about every form of music in the whole universe." Issuing an oblique, yet pointedly universal challenge to the policing and channeling of black musical artists, Jarman goes on to advocate an artistic and intellectual mobility that freely crossed musical borders: "Now that may be a new concept because up until the late '60s, we were always categorized, and it was only possible for you to self-realize certain situations. But then we began to realize that if you began to self-realize, you became a universal property, and then you must use the whole spectrum of conscious reality" (Kostakis 1977:4). In a very real sense, this intellectual diversity and methodological catholicity is a question of sheer survival. If the subaltern cannot speak, then he or she is certainly obliged to listen.

### **The Three Waves and the Move to Paris**

The evolution of the AACM's membership has been described by many writers as a succession of waves, or groups of individuals who came together at a particular point in time in the geographic space of Chicago. Many of these musicians, from the first two waves in particular, became crucial actors in the mid-1970s AACM "invasion" of New York City, and it is to these musicians that I want to pay particular attention.

The first wave consisted of two parts. First, there were the founding and original members who attended the initial organizational meetings and organized the first concerts. Those first-wave members who were later active in New York included co-founders Steve McCall and Richard Abrams, as well as original members Fred Anderson, Roscoe Mitchell, Amina Claudine Myers, Malachi Favors, Thurman Barker, Joseph Jarman, and Maurice McIntyre. Within two years of its founding, the AACM began to attract a second part of this first wave, including Leo Smith, Lester Bowie, Henry Threadgill, Anthony Braxton, John Stubblefield, Leroy Jenkins, and bassist Fred Hopkins.

The organization's artistically successful example of how black musicians could assert control over their destinies had already inspired saxophonists Oliver Lake and Julius Hemphill to take leading roles in the

founding of the other important Midwestern collective, the Black Artists Group (BAG) of St. Louis, in 1968. BAG adopted the even more radically ambitious mandate of organizing not only musicians, but visual and performance artists, writers, and choreographers as well. BAG established schools that featured instruction in visual art, movement, theater, and music. Its membership included visual and performance artists Patricia and Emilio Cruz; trombonist Joseph Bowie (the younger brother of AACM trumpeter Lester Bowie); trumpeters Baikida E. J. Carroll and Floyd LeFlore; theater artists Portia Hunt and Malinke Robert Elliott; dance artist Georgia Collins; cellist Abdul Wadud; painter Oliver Jackson; drummer Charles Bobo Shaw; poets K. Curtis Lyle and Ajule Rutlin; and saxophonists James Jabbo Ware, J. D. Parran, and Hamiet Bluiett. Between 1969 and 1971, BAG and AACM members developed a series of exchange concerts in which each collective presented its members' work in the other's home city (cf. Litweiler 1969; Lipsitz 2000; Looker 2001).<sup>8</sup>

By 1969, the minds of many members were on widening the audience for their music still further. John Stubblefield had already decided to try to establish himself in New York—the only AACM member to do so before 1970. For several other members, moving to this traditional mecca for jazz musicians—as so many Chicago musicians had done before them—proved less attractive than exploring international opportunities. These members decided to take the AACM message to Paris.

Since the early 1960s, the French capital had become perhaps the most accommodating of any city in the world to the new black American music.<sup>9</sup> For AACM musicians, working in Paris presented a clear statement that becoming known in the wider world beyond the United States could be just as effective as being accepted in the largest American city. By presenting their music in Paris first, the AACM members helped to expand the range of conceivable options for their fellow Chicago musicians beyond the fascination with New York that tended to define their career trajectories.<sup>10</sup>

Within days of their arrival in Paris in June of 1969, four AACM members, Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman, Malachi Favors, and Lester Bowie, billing themselves as the “Art Ensemble of Chicago,” caused an immediate sensation with the first of their regular performances at the Theatre du Lucernaire in the Montparnasse district. The group's unusual hybrid of energy, multi-instrumentalism, humor, silence, found sounds, and homemade instruments—and most crucially, extended collective improvisation instead of heroic individual solos—proved revelatory to European audiences (“Press Release,” 1969a). Following closely on the heels of the Art Ensemble were Leroy Jenkins, Leo Smith, and Anthony Braxton, who arrived in Paris that same month and quickly garnered important notice for

their work as well. By 1972, BAG artists Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill, Floyd LeFlore, and Joseph Bowie had joined the expatriate music community in Paris, receiving similar acclaim for their work.

Press reception in France was voluminous and overwhelmingly positive; between 1969 and 1974, citations of the work of the Paris-based AACM and BAG musicians abound in the pages of the two major French jazz magazines, *Jazz* and *Jazz Hot*. Already in October of 1969, a photo of Joseph Jarman on the cover of *Jazz Hot* announced a feature story on the AACM. On Christmas Eve 1969, Jarman's full-page poem (Jarman 1969) was published in *Le Monde*, the major French newspaper, on the occasion of the release of the Art Ensemble's Paris-recorded album, *People in Sorrow* (Art Ensemble of Chicago 1969).

Despite the group's slogan, "Great Black Music," the variegated visual and sonic iconography of the Art Ensemble came from around the world. Writer Daniel Caux describes the complexity of the scene facing concertgoers at the first AEC performance at the Lucernaire:

the stage of this curious, 140-seat theater is nearly entirely overrun by a multitude of instruments: xylophones, bassoon, sarrusophone, various saxophones, clarinets, banjo, cymbals, gongs, bells, bass drum, balafon, rattles etc. . . . The first night, listeners were surprised to see Joseph Jarman, with naked torso and painted face, passing slowly through the aisles murmuring a poem while the bassist Malachi Favors, wearing a mask of terror, screamed curses at Lester Bowie, and Roscoe Mitchell operated various car horns. (Caux 1969:8)

Jarman explains:

We were representing history, from the Ancient to the Future . . . Malachi always represents the oldest entity . . . he would look like an African/Egyptian shaman . . . Moye was really in the midst of the African tradition . . . not a single African tradition, but a total African tradition . . . I was Eastern oriented. These three were the pantheistic element of Africa and Asia. Roscoe represented the main-stream sort of shaman, the Urban Delivery Man . . . Lester was always the investigator, wearing cook clothes, which is healing, creating energy and food. (Beauchamp 1998:74–75)

Creating relationships with more established experimentalists proved far easier in Paris than in New York. Jarman observed in an October 1969 interview in *Jazz Hot*, "We really tried to meet these people in New York, but apparently, there are some difficulties" (Caux 1969a).<sup>11</sup> Steve McCall,

the very first AACM member to visit Europe, provided entrée for the newcomers into the expatriate and itinerant musicians' community in Paris (Beauchamp 1998:74). McCall also provided a link to the first wave of European free jazz musicians, such as German vibraphonist Gunter Hampel and Dutch saxophonist Willem Breuker.<sup>12</sup>

AACM members living in Europe vigorously promoted the AACM name and philosophy as they presented performances throughout the continent. Interviews with European-based AACM members in French journals brought other, still relatively unknown Chicago-based members to the attention of European promoters and journalists, preparing the ground for future generations of AACM members to receive a hearing. These interviews invariably mentioned the AACM itself as an important source of strength and nurturance. By the late 1970s, both the promotional and musical efforts bore fruit; the entire December/January 1978–79 issue of *Jazz Hot* was devoted to the AACM.

Nonetheless, by 1971 most of the AACM expatriates had left Europe. While it is impossible to generalize about the reasons for their departure, in 1998 Lester Bowie remembered that “We wanted to go back to the States because we wanted to be home . . . To me it ain’t no gas to be French. I like being an American Negro” (Beauchamp 1998:43). Those who came back to Chicago found their AACM colleagues, such as Claudine Myers, Henry Threadgill, Muhal Richard Abrams, Maurice McIntyre, and Thurman Barker, continuing to hold meetings and present AACM concerts.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a number of new members had appeared, including saxophonists Chico Freeman, Douglas Ewart, Edward Wilkerson, and Mwata Bowden; percussionist Kahil El-Zabar; trumpeters Malachi Thompson and Rasul Siddik; vocalist Iqua Colson; pianist Adegoke Steve Colson; and myself as a trombonist. This so-called “second wave” of AACM musicians had been enculturated into the set of values developed in the AACM’s self-realized atmospheric hothouse: economic and musical collectivity, a composer-centered ideology, methodological diversity, and freedom of cultural reference.

But not all of the sojourners returned to Chicago. In fact, a kind of AACM diaspora began to form, with some musicians trying to become established on the East Coast, in California, and in the South, while others moved to midwestern rural environments distant from major cities. Some musicians attempted to replicate the AACM experience in their local communities. Leo Smith helped found the Creative Musicians Improvisors Forum in Connecticut. Roscoe Mitchell moved to a farmhouse near a small Michigan town and founded the Detroit-based Creative Arts Collective, along with guitarist A. Spencer Barefield, saxophonist Anthony Holland, drummer Tani Tabbal, and bassist Jaribu Shahid.

Back in France, Lester Bowie had waxed enthusiastic, stating his intention to “establish the AACM everywhere, in every corner of the universe” (Caux 1969a:17). Now, both the tremendous publicity cachet and the depth of new professional associations gained from the Paris experience provided a springboard for a small coterie of AACM members to try to seek performance opportunities in another particularly vital corner of the universe—New York City.

### **Scouting the Territory: New York, Spring 1970**

John Stubblefield and drummer Phillip Wilson (who, while not an AACM member himself, was a frequent and highly valued collaborator) were already on hand when Anthony Braxton and Leroy Jenkins returned from Europe in 1970 to pursue an encounter with New York City. Although performance opportunities and press coverage were relatively sparse, these AACM musicians performed with many of the more established experimentalists of the period, such as Marion Brown, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Sam Rivers, Chick Corea, Ornette Coleman, and Archie Shepp. In many cases, these encounters simply extended the relationships AACM members had initiated in Paris.

The first wave of New York-based AACM musicians presented their own work in concert programs of both contemporary notated music and improvised music. In May of 1970, promoter Kunle Mwanga organized perhaps the first AACM concert in New York, at the Washington Square Methodist Church (Peace Church) in the West Village. Featured was the “Creative Construction Company,” consisting of Leroy Jenkins, Anthony Braxton, Muhal Richard Abrams, Steve McCall, Leo Smith, and Chicago-born bassist Richard Davis (Palmer 1975; Primack 1976).<sup>14</sup> By 1973, Anthony Braxton had managed to garner notice in the *New York Times* for an Alice Tully Hall performance of his chamber work, “L-J-637/C”; the year before, he had followed in the footsteps of Ornette Coleman by renting Town Hall for a performance of his work.

Between 1972 and 1974, the fortunes of AACM members in New York began to change, with so-called “major label” recording contracts for the Art Ensemble of Chicago in 1972 (Atlantic), and for Anthony Braxton in 1974 (Arista). In July of 1973, the first New York concert of the Art Ensemble of Chicago took place at Columbia University’s Wollman Auditorium, as part of promoter George Wein’s Newport Jazz Festival. *The New York Times’s* advance article for the Festival was written by Robert Palmer, a member of an emerging critical advance guard that was promulgating new ways of writing about improvised music in the New York press.

Palmer describes some of the Art Ensemble’s musical methods as reminiscent of various elements of black jazz and R&B traditions, but avoids traditional jazz journalism’s tendency to deploy historical jazz icons as a

means of quickly, yet all too neatly, contextualizing a particular performer's work within a constructed jazz tradition. Rather, evoking a post-modernist contextualization, the article descriptively expands the frame of reference, comparing the Art Ensemble's work to "developments in the visual arts; themes, variations, solos and ensemble passages alternate in a continuous flow that is comparable to a collage of apparently disparate objects and images" (Palmer 1973).

### **Black Music of Two Worlds**

Samuel Gilmore's sociological analysis of the New York "concert music world" of the early 1980s (i.e., ostensibly excluding jazz, pop, or other "vernacular" genres) draws upon the methods of symbolic interactionism in identifying three major art world divisions—uptown, midtown, and downtown—that by the early 1970s, had become fairly well-defined, if "imagined," communities. While as of this writing, the terms "uptown," "midtown," and "downtown" are still used in New York, it must be emphasized that in the 1970s, as now, the art worlds to which they refer interpenetrated one another to a considerable extent to form an overall "art music" scene in New York.

Gilmore sees the term "midtown" as denoting major symphony orchestras, touring soloists, and chamber groups active in large, well-funded, commercially-oriented performing spaces, such as Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. "Uptown" refers to academically situated composers "of whom the public has rarely heard . . . but who win the Pulitzer Prize every year" (Gilmore 1987:213). For Gilmore, these representative "uptown" composers included Milton Babbitt, Charles Wuorinen, and Elliott Carter; representative performance ensembles included the Group for Contemporary Music, then directed by composers Harvey Sollberger and Charles Wuorinen; and *Speculum Musicae*, which then featured the very diverse and insightful pianist, Ursula Oppens.

Gilmore identifies the term "downtown" as referring to "the composer/performer, living in small performance lofts in Soho, Tribeca, and near alternative performance spaces in Greenwich Village." Representative venues included the Kitchen, the multidisciplinary performance space founded in 1971 by the video artists Steina and Woody Vasulka, which by 1975 had become a central part of New York's new music scene; intermedia artist Phill Niblock's Experimental Intermedia Foundation; and later Roulette, founded by trombonist Jim Staley and sound artist David Weinstein.

Representative artists active in this downtown art world included John Cage, Philip Glass, Philip Corner, Robert Ashley, and LaMonte Young. These artists, and others in their circle, might be brought under the heading of "Downtown I," to distinguish their putative post-Cage commonality



from the post-1980 construction of "downtown," or "Downtown II," most prominently represented by saxophonist John Zorn, vocalist Shelley Hirsch, sound artist David Moss, and guitarists Fred Frith, Eugene Chadbourne, and Elliott Sharp, among many others.<sup>15</sup> Both Downtown I and Downtown II are generally coded in press accounts as white, and by the late 1980s, such accounts routinely portrayed Downtown II as the logical successor to Downtown I's connection with pan-European high culture.

Between 1973 and 1977 a sudden and dramatic shift was occurring in experimental music in New York, in which the AACM was to play a crucial role. Part of this shift was occurring in the critical domain. The younger *Times* music writers, including Robert Palmer, John Rockwell, and Jon Pareles, were acquainted with a wide range of musical aesthetics and practices, and thus less invested in maintaining traditional taxonomies. In a review of Lincoln Center's 1974 "New and Newer Music" Festival, Rockwell announced (some might say "warned of") changes in the relationship of jazz with "serious contemporary music." Rockwell contrasts the standard bebop-era image of "somber-looking black men wearing berets," playing in "dim, smoky clubs," with that of "short-haired white people peering industriously through their spectacles at densely notated pages of . . . genteelly complex music in genteelly academic environments." The writer goes on to note that the border between "experimental jazz" and contemporary music was routinely being crossed in the "downtown" environment. "For several years in downtown lofts, the same faces have been turning up among the performers at avant-garde jazz concerts and avant-garde 'serious' new-music concerts" (Rockwell 1974).

Rockwell went on to present an optimistically color-blind analysis of the situation: "The National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts [and] the Guggenheim Foundation are just as likely to give their grants to Ornette Coleman as to Charles Wuorinen" (*ibid.*). Of course, the real situation was far less sanguine. In 1971, the "Jazz and People's Movement," organized by Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Roswell Rudd, and Archie Shepp, had staged a "play-in" at the offices of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation in New York, "demanding an end to the obvious and blatant racist policies . . . in the allocation of awards" ("Guggenheim to Mingus," 1971). Indeed, NEA funding for music was hypersegregated according to racialized categories of "jazz/folk/ethnic" and "music," with the latter category apparently intended to denote, to recall Rockwell's phrase, "short-haired white people" creating "genteelly complex music in genteelly academic environments."

In 1973, the NEA disbursed over \$225,000 to 165 individuals and organizations applying to its "jazz-folk-ethnic" category. Composition grants for commissioning new works were provided; no grant exceeded \$2,000, including those given to such important artists as pianist Cedar Walton,

saxophonist Clifford Jordan, and composer Duke Jordan. Several AACM members received grants, including Lester Bowie (\$750), Malachi Favors (\$1,000), trumpeter Frank Gordon (\$1,500), Joseph Jarman (\$1,000), Leroy Jenkins (\$2,000), Roscoe Mitchell (\$1,000), Don Moye (\$1,000), and Leo Smith (\$1,000) ("Jazz Grants," 1973). The next year, the new "composer-librettist" category—as it happens, one of the less well-funded of several categories under which pan-European music could be supported—was allocated nearly twice the amount allotted to the jazz-folk-ethnic category, with grants of \$10,000 to George Rochberg and John Harbison. Other grants were received by Vladimir Ussachevsky (\$7,500), Charles Wuorinen (\$3,500), Morton Subotnick (\$7,000), Charles Dodge (\$4,500), Steve Reich (\$2,000), Otto Luening (\$6,000), and Barbara Kolb (\$2,000) ("\$407,276 in Grants," 1974).<sup>16</sup>

Despite the obvious presence of the border in terms of financial support, in other respects many of the changes Rockwell had announced were indeed in the air. The "New and Newer Music" taking place at Ornette Coleman's Prince Street performance loft, Artists House, which he had been renting since 1970, featured works by Coleman, Carla Bley, and Frederic Rzewski—"successive evenings of jazz and classical avant-garde, and works that fuse the two" (Rockwell 1974). By 1975, black experimental music was starting to be featured at such midtown venues as Carnegie Recital Hall.

Gary Giddins and Peter Occhiogrosso, and later Stanley Crouch, writing for both the *Village Voice* and the now-defunct *Soho Weekly News*, were becoming instrumental in covering this newest black experimental music, which they discursively folded into the previous decade's conception of "avant-garde jazz." Their articles came sporadically, perhaps every other month or so; certainly there was no concentrated, dedicated press coverage of these black experimentalists that could be considered analogous to composer Tom Johnson's weekly *Voice* columns on Downtown I, which were instrumental in furthering the careers of Robert Ashley, Steve Reich, Meredith Monk, Philip Glass, Pauline Oliveros, Glenn Branca, and others.<sup>17</sup>

Even a small amount of publicity for a musician, however, is like an infusion of life-giving oxygen in outer space—or as Art Blakey is said to have observed, "If you don't appear, you disappear." Partially as a result of this press coverage, word was getting back to AACM members in Chicago through the musician's grapevine that New York was beckoning, with potential opportunities far beyond what was available in Chicago at the time.

### **The Final Invasion**

Between 1975 and 1977, it seemed to a Chicago-based musician like myself that one was hearing something exciting about New York every week. Glowing, if often apocryphal, reports came back from New York about

playing with famous musicians, enthusiastic audiences, opportunities for foreign travel, and so on. At the same time, it was becoming clear to many who tried that it was not very realistic to organize events in New York from afar using the same techniques one used for finding work in other American cities. As one person asked me over the phone: "Are you in New York? No? Well, we'll talk when you get here."

In a sense, the pressure was becoming unbearable, and perhaps these hopeful signs served to "set people flowin'," to borrow Farah Griffin's phrase about African American migration narratives (Griffin 1995). In the fashion of a river overflowing its banks, members of the AACM's second wave, along with the Chicago-based remnants of the first wave—including, most importantly, founder Muhal Richard Abrams—moved to New York, seemingly en masse. Joining those already on the East Coast, this grand wave, including Kalaparusha, Lester Bowie, Amina Claudine Myers, Henry Threadgill, Steve McCall, Fred Hopkins, Chico Freeman, Malachi Thompson, Iqua Colson, Adegoke Colson, and myself, all moved to Manhattan or the New York area during this time. Members of BAG, including Charles Bobo Shaw, Baikida E. J. Carroll, Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill, Hamiet Bluiett, J. D. Parran, Joseph Bowie, Patricia Cruz, Emilio Cruz, and James Jabbo Ware, had all arrived in New York before this mass migration, forming a powerful group of Midwestern colleagues.

In addition to this contingent, there was a group of new and exciting Californians, in large part the products of pianist Horace Tapscott's UGMAA, such as saxophonists Arthur Blythe and David Murray; flutist James Newton; and trumpeter Lawrence "Butch" Morris. Also a product of the UGMAA was the writer Stanley Crouch (Tapscott 2001), who presented many of the new experimentalists in his role as music director at the loft/club on the Bowery, the "Tin Palace" (Dubin 1982:5), as well as in his own upstairs loft at the same Bowery location, dubbed "Studio Infinity."

The new music of the AACM, BAG, and the Californians was in the process of becoming widely influential. Robert Palmer wrote of the AACM and BAG that "their originality becomes more and more evident. Their improvisation ranges from solo saxophone recitals to little-tried combinations of horns, rhythm instruments and electronics. They have rendered the clamorous playing characteristic of much of New York's jazz avant-garde all but obsolete with their more thoughtful approaches to improvisational structure and content" (Palmer 1976).

The arrival in New York of AACM co-founder Muhal Richard Abrams provided an occasion for perhaps the most extensive *Village Voice* article on the AACM's growing influence on black experimentalism. In a May 1977 article, Giddins declared that "[Abrams's] presence here is a crest on the wave of immigrant musicians recently arrived from St. Louis, Los

Angeles, and especially Chicago.” The article’s focus on the history of the AACM sought “to get to the bottom of why an inner-city organization from the Midwest founded in 1965 should revitalize New York’s music scene a decade later.” Giddins observed that “a distinguishing characteristic of the new movement is that it isn’t a movement at all, at least not one with closed stylistic parameters” (Giddins 1977:46). The writer’s quote from Leo Smith summarizes well the intentions of this non-movement: “[The AACM] represents the control of destiny for the music and the artist” (ibid.:48).

Some AACM members were ambivalent about being based in New York. Those New York-based members who did comment on their experiences in the city valued above all their access to colleagues of the highest quality, and proximity to business opportunities. In a French-language interview in 1977, Abrams said that “It’s good for work. In the United States, New York is an important market; if you want to be known beyond your local area, sooner or later you have to have business in New York” (Bourget 1977:22). Kalaparusha was of the same opinion: “New York is a business center, the capital of the music business, that’s all. That’s why most musicians who want to live from their work are in New York” (Marmande 1977:33).

On the other hand, in an interview with Valerie Wilmer, Amina Claudine Myers noted that many of the promotional strategies and collegialities that had worked in the Chicago days of the AACM were far less effective in the very different and unfamiliar environment of New York: “In Chicago when I wanted to do a concert, I’d just set it up. I’d go out and put up my flyers. Now you can do this in New York but it’s definitely not that easy. Chicago has a large black population but New York is altogether a different thing. The pressures are much different” (Wilmer 1979:6). Some of these pressures were gender-related: “I was always encouraged, except for one time. That was in New York about two years ago when I ran across a male ego . . . I ran across some real games that some of the men musicians played in New York” (ibid.:5).

Furthermore, even as they acknowledged the central role that New York has traditionally played in musicians’ aspirations, AACM members tended to challenge that role where it conflicted with their ideals of methodological mobility. As in Chicago, some AACM artists in New York saw the jazz community as it was then constructed as only a part of their overall reference base. Pursuing membership to varying degrees in a panoply of sociomusical and career networks, including those traditionally centering on high-culture “art music,” AACM musicians in New York articulated a definitional shift away from rigidly defined and racialized notions of lineage and tradition, toward a more fluid, dialogic relationship with a

variety of musical practices that problematized the putative “jazz” label as it was applied to them. For these musicians, pan-European contemporary music was not a distant, disembodied influence, nor was it something to be feared, avoided, or worshipped. Rather, musicians articulated participation across genres, as well as exchanges of musical methods. Advancing a notion of hybridity and mobility across and through media, traditions, and materials meant not only the freedom to draw from a potentially infinite number of musical sources, but also the freedom to explore a diverse array of infrastructures and modes of presentation.

In May of 1977, the AACM, seeking to do in New York what some of its members had done in Paris—that is, bring to the fore AACM musicians who were not as well known—collaborated with Taylor Storer, then a student worker at Columbia University’s radio station WKCR, to produce an ambitious four-day concert series at Wollman Auditorium. WKCR was already one of New York’s most adventurous radio stations, programming a wide variety of musics that rarely received a hearing through commercial outlets. As a preview of the festival, billed as “Chicago Comes to New York,” the station broadcast ninety consecutive hours of music, interviews, and unpublished recordings of AACM members (Palmer 1977).

Thus, one sunny Chicago afternoon, a contingent of AACM members and associates loaded their instruments and suitcases onto a rented Greyhound-style bus bound for New York. On board were a large number of musicians who had seldom performed in New York up to that time, or who were just then trying to become established there.<sup>18</sup> On the final evening of the series, the AACM Orchestra, conducted by Muhal Richard Abrams, gave a performance of a single untitled work lasting one and one-half hours. The work, which included all of the members who had been present, featured an instrumental complement of eight reeds, two trumpets, two trombones, four percussionists, three pianists, and three singers (Balliett 1977:96).

This work, as well as the festival as a whole, was the subject of a long, searching article in the *New Yorker*, written by veteran jazz writer Whitney Balliett, that presented a context and history of the AACM as he saw it. The article, which reports on each of the concerts in great detail, provides what is perhaps one of the most meticulous and richly contextualized accounts of AACM musical performances to appear in any American publication. Describing some of the music heard in the ninety-hour radio broadcast as “beautiful, infuriating, savage, surrealistic, boring, and often highly original,” the writer described his conception of the AACM’s composite vision: “The broadcast revealed a ferocious determination to bring into being a new and durable music—a hard-nosed utopian music, without racial stigmata, without clichés, and without commercialism” (ibid.:92).

### The Loft Period

In New York, much of the most radical experimental work was taking place in small performance lofts and other alternative spaces. The loft network developed for most of the same reasons as the “downtown new music” loft movement; it was part of the general move among experimental musicians of various genres to develop alternative spaces that avoided the codes and genre-policing of conventional jazz and classical performance. Thus, Ornette Coleman’s Artists House was started for many of the same reasons as the Kitchen—namely (recalling the AACM press release of 1965), “to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to serious music.” Both art worlds needed alternative spaces in order to get their experimental work before the public, expanding the set of positions available for the music.

The venues and social networks to which these new spaces constituted “alternatives,” however, were vastly different according to genre, and most frequently, race as well. Until the mid-1960s, “serious” (i.e., pan-European) new music, including the early work of John Cage and the New York School, was conceived largely for traditional concert halls, a legacy bequeathed by the previous generations of midtown and uptown within this overall art world. Countering the dominant upper-class ideology which maintained that such halls were the venue of choice for “serious” music—and, incidentally, almost exclusively for that music and no other—younger white artists of the 1960s began experimenting with gallery spaces, specially designed site-specific spaces, outdoor spaces, and the like.<sup>19</sup>

For the black musicians, on the other hand, the “club,” rather than the concert hall, had been heavily ideologized as the ideal, even the genetically best-suited space for their music. Early on, however, black experimentalists realized that serious engagement with theater and performance, painting, poetry, electronics, and other interdisciplinary expressions that require extensive infrastructure, would be generally rendered ineffective or even impossible by the jazz club model. In this light, the supposed obligation to perform in clubs began to appear as a kind of unwanted surveillance of the black creative body.

By 1976 the loft was being touted in the New York alternative press as the new jazz club, inheriting from its predecessor the minimal infrastructure and the related discourse of “intimacy.” Indeed, some of the early lofts sought to emulate traditional jazz club environments, with tables, drink minimums, and smoking, but many lofts provided some version of the concert environment, with concert seating and, at times, light refreshments (Giddins 1976). Other musician-organized or directed lofts included the La Mama Children’s Workshop Theater, where La Mama founder Ellen Stewart worked with BAG drummer Charles Bobo Shaw;

pianist John Fischer's "Environ"; drummer Rashied Ali's Studio 77 ("Ali's Alley"); and perhaps the most adventurous and long-lived of the improvisors' lofts, Sam and Bea Rivers's Studio Rivbea.

Loft proprietors would often band together to present "alternative" festivals featuring musical approaches that were either excluded or poorly represented by the ordinarily "mainstream" jazz policy of standard New York clubs and festivals, such as the Newport Jazz Festival. The five-LP collection *Wildflowers: The New York Loft Jazz Sessions*, recorded at Studio Rivbea's 1976 Spring Music Festival and originally released in 1977 (Wildflowers 1977, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1977d) constitutes a handy summary of some of the ideas and practices about improvisation that were being explored during this period by the loosely-associated group of musicians dubbed "the loft generation"—a term whose ephemerality the musicians are no doubt quite grateful for today.

On these recordings, the newcomers from the Midwest and the West, who were now being represented in the New York, European, and Asian press as part of an emerging "loft jazz" movement, were heavily represented. Among the AACM newcomers presented were Roscoe Mitchell, Anthony Braxton, Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre, Don Moye, Leo Smith, and myself as trombonist, as well as the collective Air, with Henry Threadgill, Fred Hopkins, and Steve McCall. From the BAG diaspora (the group itself had disbanded in 1972), there was Abdul Wadud, Charles Bobo Shaw, Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill, and Hamiet Bluiett.<sup>20</sup>

In his regular monthly column in the now-defunct men's magazine *Players* (a kind of African American *Playboy*), Stanley Crouch, who performed on drums in several of the performances on "Wildflowers," reviewed the live performances that the recordings later documented. Crouch hailed the new music on these recordings as "significant for its variety, its craftsmanship, and finally, its often breathtaking beauty and clarity of its artistry." For Crouch, Hemphill was "masterful," while Mitchell's performance was "almost as exciting and great as anything I've heard from Coltrane, Rollins and Ornette Coleman" (Crouch 1977:6).

It can fairly be said that the loft period provided entry-level support for an emerging multiracial network of musicians; key players in this network included not only the Californians, BAG and the AACM, but many others, both black and white.<sup>21</sup> Many of these musicians deeply resented the reduction of the diversity of their approaches to the term "loft jazz." Chico Freeman's reaction was typical: "Then, and I don't know where it came from, somebody came up with this term, 'loft jazz.' Not just me, but every musician who was involved in it vehemently opposed that" (Tesser 1980:28). Not only was there little or no agreement as to what methods or sounds were being described by the term, but as bassist Fred Hopkins related in a 1984 interview, "The funniest thing was, the musicians never

considered it a *movement*" (Whitehead 1984:24). Musicians pointed out that this label, by framing their music as demanding minimal infrastructural investment, was used to disconnect them from more lucrative economic possibilities. A 1977 *Voice* article reported the concerns of musicians that "constant press association with lofts has undermined their commercial viability with European promoters, since lofts have come to be synonymous with percentage-of-the door payments" (Giddins 1977a).

Nonetheless, critics defended the label, and felt confident in assigning musicians to this amorphous category, while at the same time admitting its descriptive inadequacies. For instance, in countering what he viewed as "misconceptions," Giddins asserted the tautology that "there is neither a loft nor an AACM style of jazz. Loft jazz is any jazz played in a loft." With this, the taxonomic policing mechanism that at once connected the signifiers "AACM," "loft," and "jazz" created a tightly bound, multiply-mediated corset that the AACM's mobility and border-crossing strategies were already shredding.

At any rate, by the early 1980s the loft jazz phenomenon was all but dead in New York, the victim of competition for the attention of the new musicians from better-funded, higher-infrastructure New York spaces, such as Broadway producer Joseph Papp's Public Theatre; midtown spaces such as Carnegie Recital Hall; and downtown lofts such as the Kitchen, all of which had engagement policies that mirrored to some extent those of the lofts (Keepnews 1979). Even rock spaces such as CBGB briefly featured loft-jazz veterans alongside the "art-rock" of groups like the Theoretical Girls. Moreover, the more established artists could obtain work at traditional club spaces, such as Sweet Basil and the Village Gate, to say nothing of the expanded opportunities then becoming available in Europe. Also important were issues of individual support; it is not difficult to imagine that it could have proved daunting for individual musicians such as Sam Rivers to compose and perform new work while directing an ongoing concert series.

### **Beyond a Binary**

As early as 1975, it was becoming increasingly unclear as to exactly whose purview it was to critique the new hybrid music. *Voice* writer Gary Giddins mused openly on how the blurring of boundaries that was taking place across ethnic and genre divides was affecting critical commentary. He begins with an admission: "I know something of John Cage's theories, but virtually nothing of his music as a living thing. This is pretty strange when you consider how many of the people I write about acknowledge Cage as an influence" (Giddins 1975:106). Giddins goes on to acknowledge the asymmetrical power dynamic symbolized by the separation of genres in his own newspaper, with its twin headings of "Music" (i.e., reviews



of work from the high culture West) and "Riffs," the low-culture, diminutively-imagined Rest.

Noticing that "much avant-garde music, whether jazz or classicist, is moving in similar directions," the article suggested that Tom Johnson, then the *Voice's* "downtown" critic, might move outside of his normative "Music" purview to investigate Anthony Braxton, while he, as a "Riffs" columnist, would discover Philip Glass. Giddins even invokes a version of the one-drop rule to speculate (perhaps with a naive humor) about what would happen if Glass and Braxton made a recording together: "Since black blood is more powerful than white, as any mulatto will attest, Braxton would presumably render Glass non-Music and both would be filed as a Riff" (*ibid.*).

Eventually, Giddins and Johnson, among many others, would be obliged to actually encounter music that incorporated references outside of their usual spheres of study. In particular, it was becoming obvious that AACM events were presented in a great diversity of spaces—jazz and new music lofts, clubs, concert halls, and parks. Inevitably, just as the black community of Chicago broke out of the South Side Bantustan to which restrictive covenants and discriminatory laws and customs had confined its members, the AACM was destined to run roughshod over many conventional assumptions about infrastructure, reference, and place.

At first, these determined efforts to produce new music that blurred boundaries and exhibited multiplicity of reference were lauded, particularly in the jazz press. An important bellwether of jazz fashion and commercial impact are the two annual *Down Beat* magazine popularity polls—one a compilation of the opinions of "recognized" critics, published in the summer, the other a mail-in poll for readers and subscribers appearing just before the December holidays. In 1971, perhaps the first AACM musicians to be recognized in these polls were Lester Bowie, Joseph Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell, and Malachi Favors. The Art Ensemble of Chicago was also recognized, and Anthony Braxton and Leroy Jenkins, who were then based in New York, were also listed. Over the next couple of years, Jarman took first place in one of these polls, Muhal Richard Abrams was mentioned for the first time, and the Art Ensemble, Braxton, Kalaparusha, and Jenkins were all winners.

In 1976, the number of AACM and BAG musicians listed in these polls rose markedly. Often listed in multiple categories, new names, such as those of the trio Air, Fred Hopkins, Henry Threadgill, Julius Hemphill, Leo Smith, Oliver Lake, Hamiet Bluiett, Don Moye, Joseph Bowie, and my own, all appeared. In 1977, Braxton's *Creative Orchestra Music 1976* (Braxton 1976) was the Critics' Poll "Record of the Year," and over the next few years, Amina Claudine Myers, Steve McCall, Abdul Wadud, Douglas Ewart, and Chico Freeman found places on the poll listings. In

1980, Air's "Air Lore" (Air 1979) was also selected as the critics' "Record of the Year"; other new names, such as the World Saxophone Quartet of Lake, Hemphill, Bluiett, and David Murray, were appearing as well.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, it would appear that at least at first, the business gamble of so many Midwestern musicians had paid off. In time, however, some aspects of the evolution of their music met with considerable resistance from a variety of entrenched sectors of New York's jazz and new music communities. Bogged down in binary systems—black/white, jazz/classical, high culture/low culture—critical reception in particular eventually became quite often frankly dismissive of the extensive engagement with extended notated form, electronics and computers, graphic scores, and traditionally-notated works (with or without improvisation) realized by AACM musicians in particular. Moreover, the cultural and methodological issues that informed the work of AACM composers were often obscured by discussions of whether or not the music was truly "jazz." A *Voice* review of a 1978 Leroy Jenkins concert at Carnegie Recital Hall became the occasion for critic Giddins to confront some of the same questions that had dogged Ellington forty years earlier: "How does this music relate to the jazz tradition? At what point can jazz be wrenched from its idiomatic integrity?" (Giddins 1978a).

A related trope informing critical reception on the jazz side articulated concerns about the "authenticity" of hybrid musics—particularly those that incorporate sources from jazz's great competitor, pan-European classical music. Reviewing a Muhal Richard Abrams recording, Giddins expresses "some sympathy for the complaint that extra-jazz influences water down the idiom" (Giddins 1978b:63). In 1979, Rafi Zabor wrote that "one of the hazards this music may be facing now is the ingestion of a fatal dose of root-devouring Western intellectual hunger" (Zabor 1979:73). Peter Occhiogrosso, reviewing a Roscoe Mitchell concert in 1978, declared that Mitchell's work was "uninspired, boring music, music that belongs in the conservatory, music that will hopefully soon go the way of third stream, electronic music and conceptual art . . . [it] should be left to academics and people like Philip Glass" (Occhiogrosso 1978:111).

### **Engaging the Third Stream: The Creolization of Composition**

Attali notes that the emergence of so-called "free jazz" represented "a profound attempt to win creative autonomy" (1989:138). In challenging the policing of the creative black body and asserting freedom of reference, Ornette Coleman was acknowledged by a number of early AACM members as one of the critical forerunners in asserting this autonomy. In Abrams's view, "Ornette is the only one that really had been an inspiration for the whole field . . . Ornette was the first to take the risk" (Vuisje 1978:196). Coleman, then as now, sought to involve himself not so much

in “extending the boundaries of jazz,” but in erasing the barriers placed around African American creativity generally, and around his work in particular. Seeing himself very early on as in international dialogue with musicians from every field, Coleman’s string trios and quartets, as well as his orchestral work *Skies of America* (1972), challenged notions of black non-entitlement to the infrastructural means of experimental music production, and to the impulse of experimentalism itself.

At first, Coleman’s compositions became associated with the Third Stream practices of composer and conductor Gunther Schuller; some AACM practices would later be described as congruent with this tradition. While Third Stream infrastructure may well have been attractive in the undercapitalized field of jazz, its ideology was much less so, with its reification of racialized notions of classical and jazz methodology that, as John Coltrane observed, was “an attempt to create something, I think, more with labels, you see, than true evolution” (Kofsky 1970:240). By 1974, John Rockwell could quote conductor Dennis Russell Davies to the effect that the new jazz-classical mixes were not like “the old so-called ‘Third Stream.’” For Carla Bley, quoted in the same article, Third Stream practice meant that “the old forms of jazz were put together with the old forms of the other” (Rockwell 1974). As Bley clearly implies, by this time Third Stream concepts of musical form had already been overtaken by more radical experiments in indeterminacy and other forms of real-time music-making, notably in the work of Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, John Cage, and Pauline Oliveros. For many black artists, as “a metaphor for jazz reaching outside itself and incorporating other elements, to broaden and diversify” (Ratliff 2001), Third Stream could be viewed as a form of liberal racial uplift. To white artists and audiences, Third Stream could propose a sublimated image of “miscegenation” with jazz as a source of renewal of the European tradition, proposing a way out of the dilemma of the alienated listener, for which European high modernist composition was being blamed.<sup>23</sup>

Post-1960s African American artists like Coltrane, however, were understandably reluctant to commit to a musical movement in which their culture was considered a junior partner. Most crucially, the Third Stream movement failed to realize or support the complexity of black musical culture’s independent development of a black experimentalism that, while in dialogue with white high culture, was, like the New Negroes of the Harlem Renaissance, strongly insistent upon the inclusion of the black vernacular, including the imperative of improvisation. Moreover, unlike the Third Stream movement, this independent black experimentalism challenged the centrality of pan-Europeanism to the notion of the experimental itself, instead advancing the notion that experimentalism was becoming “creolized.”

In this light, the focus in most histories on the role of the improviser, a trope that has become standard in the historiography and criticism of black American music, cannot account for the diversity of black musical subjectivity exemplified by the AACM. As we can see from the following meeting excerpt, the dominant focus of the AACM as strongly *composer*-centered was fostered right from the start, eventually leading to the extensive engagement with notation in so many AACM members' works.

**Richard Abrams:** Now, for the benefit of those who were not here last week, we decided that we in this organization will play only our own music—original compositions or material originating from the members within the group.

**Julian Priestler:** It would seem to be that if you put too many restrictions on the activities at this point, you're going to put a lot of obstacles in your way. For instance, to me, everyone in here is not a composer, so right there you exclude them.

**Richard Abrams:** No, no one's excluded, you see. You may not be Duke Ellington, but you got some kind of ideas, and now is the time to put 'em in. Wake yourself up. This is an awakening we're trying to bring about. (AACM 1965a)

In the context of the 1970s, Abrams's reference to bringing about "an awakening" through composition recognizes that this simple assertion by Afro-Americans—defining oneself as a composer—was a challenge to the social and indeed the economic order of both the music business and the aesthetics business. Moreover, the reference to Ellington is understandable on a number of levels, given the fact that throughout his career, Ellington's image of himself as a composer working with and through African American forms was constantly challenged, stigmatized, and stereotyped.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, even African American composers who had grown up with so-called "classical" training were similarly burdened with ethnic stereotyping and channeling. Thus, Ellington could be viewed as a symbol, not only of excellence and innovation, but of optimistic perseverance. Moreover, as some AACM composers explored the more restricted, Dahlhausian notion of composition as a dialectic with notation (Dahlhaus 1972:9), modernist black classical composers, such as Ulysses Kay, Olly Wilson, Talib Rasul Hakim, and Hale Smith, provided models for emulation and vindication.<sup>25</sup>

Like the modernist black composers, AACM composers often sought to place their work in dialogue with diasporic traditions and histories from both Africa and Europe. At the same time, the ongoing binary opposition between composition and improvisation, present as an important trope in

both modernist and postmodernist pan-European practice, lacked any real force among AACM composers, who were often drawn to collage and interpenetration strategies that blended, opposed, or ironically juxtaposed the two disciplines. Thus, as with Ellington, as well as later white American experimentalism, the definition of “composition” could be a fluid one, appropriating and simultaneously challenging and revising various pan-European models, dialoguing with African, Asian, and Pacific music traditions, and employing compositional methods that did not necessarily privilege either conventionally notated scores, or the single, heroic creator figure so beloved by jazz historiography.

Roscoe Mitchell’s *The Maze* (1978) was a meditative composition for eight percussionists—or rather, eight musicians who introduced the AACM-based version of “little instruments,” found objects, and homemade instruments to contemporary percussion practice. Muhal Richard Abrams’s *IQOA+19* (1978) juxtaposed complex written passages with propulsive rhythms, while *Lifea Blinac* (Abrams 1978a) presented multi-instrumental, text-sound, and electronic textures. Leo Smith recorded a long-form notated work for trumpet and three harps, “The Burning of Stones” (Smith 1979); Chico Freeman (1977) was working with conventional jazz quartet forms, while the trio Air was recasting older, pre-New Orleans African American forms; and my own work, including *Chicago Slow Dance* (Lewis 1977), combined minimalism, open improvisation, and computer electronics.

This kind of engagement with composition, following theorist Kobena Mercer, “critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and *creolizes* them, disarticulating given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning otherwise” (Mercer 1994:62). This kind of “critical dialogism,” according to Mercer, “has the potential to overturn the binaristic relations of hegemonic boundary maintenance by multiplying critical dialogues *within* particular communities and *between* the various constituencies which make up the ‘imagined community’ of the nation . . . such dialogism shows that our ‘other’ is already inside each of us, that black identities are plural and heterogeneous” (ibid.:65).

Indeed, both the overturning of “hegemonic boundary maintenance” and the affirmation of heterogeneous black identity were critical elements of the projects of both Ellington and the AACM. The frequent disclaimers by black musicians of the classification “jazz” can be seen as an expression of this desire for genre and methodological mobility. As Ellington remarked in 1962, after a lifetime of evading labels, “Let’s not worry about whether the result is jazz or this or that type of performance. Let’s just say that what we’re all trying to create, in one way or another, is music” (Tucker 1993:326).

### **Black Classical Composers (and Black Cultural Critics)**

Experimental musicians who were familiar with the important earlier work of the influential critic and activist Amiri Baraka might have been particularly surprised at the vehemence with which he denounced the hybrid new music of the AACM in his 1987 book, *The Music*. Baraka denounces an unnamed violinist (probably Leroy Jenkins) as a member of what he calls the “Tail Europe” school, whose members were presumably unduly influenced by European modernism. According to Baraka, the project of “Tail Europe” was to “take music on a tired old trip, deliberately trying to *declass* the music, transforming it into a secondary appendage of European concert music, rather than the heroic expression of the folk and classical music of the African American majority as well as the spirit of a progressive and populist high art.” Baraka holds up the work of saxophonist David Murray as an example of “redefining the spiritual aesthetic of a whole people,” while another unnamed saxophonist—almost certainly Anthony Braxton—“wants to show us that he’s heard Berg and Webern and Stockhausen . . . showing white folks how intelligent he (they) is” (Baraka and Baraka 1987:260).

Even at the time that it was written, this updated Dionysian/Apollonian binary, along with its evocation of the “heroic” and “the majority,” is difficult to understand as anything other than a certain nostalgia for a bygone moment. Jazz had by this time long since ceased to be a music of the black majority, but here the music is re-enlisted in the quest for what Andrew Ross calls the “Golden Fleece of the intellectuals’ century-long search for a democratic people’s art that was both organic and post-agrarian” (Ross 1989:93). Moreover, this discussion points to the fact that, despite the best efforts of black scholars such as Eileen Southern (1983) and long-time New York *Amsterdam News* music critic Raoul Abdul (1977), the black classical composer has been almost entirely ignored by black cultural critics. The reasons for this disavowal are complex, even as Southern warned in 1973, “If we black folk are serious about our commitment to the rediscovery and the redefining of our heritage in the fine arts, our scholars must take upon themselves the responsibility for developing an appropriate and exemplary literature” (Southern 1973:6).

This responsibility has not, for the most part, been taken up by the field of academic popular culture studies, which, by downplaying or even actively disparaging the utility, purpose, and influence of those indigenously black musics that are not obviously or predominantly based in or represented as mass culture, has effectively ignored the diversity of black musical engagement. Thus, in the age of globalized megamedia, to the extent that certain oppositional black musical forms have been generally ignored or dismissed by academic theorists, the idea is thereby perpetuated that

black culture, as academically defined and studied, is in fact corporate-approved culture, and that there is no necessary non-commercial space for black musical production.

The implication here is that academics accept the notion that the set of positions for studies of black music, as well as for black musicians themselves, is properly defined by the economic and demographic imperatives of media corporations. In contextualizing the development of African American music, this intellectual climate supports Andrew Ross's commercial/social Darwinist framing of soul music as having forged "a more successful cultural union" (1989:97). In fact, Ross's critique of "avant-garde jazz" as having "gone beyond the realm of popular taste" (*ibid.*) moves well past Baraka's in advancing the notion that marginalized, oppositional, subaltern, corporate-disapproved, or otherwise non-mainstream forms of black cultural production should be ignored, if not altogether erased.

In this context, the entry into classical music by black composers becomes, rather than bourgeois accommodation, an oppositional stance. In fact, the very existence of the black classical composer not only problematizes dominant conceptions of black music, but challenges fixed notions of high and low, black and white. For the most part, black classical composers active since 1930, coming out of the tradition of William Grant Still, have never been as dismissive of popular music as their white colleagues. Black classical music-making, from Still's "Afro-American" Symphony (1930) to Hale Smith's symphonic poem *Ritual and Incantations* (1975), continued to reference elements of vernacular black life, both as a form of advocacy for the continued relevance of the European tradition to a composite notion of black culture, and as a recognition of their own connection to an African diasporic sonic culture whose worldwide influence throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first can hardly be overstated.

Baraka's definition of the directions in African American music as overdetermined by "wherever the masses of the African American people have gone" (Baraka and Baraka 1987:177) recapitulates the thrust of his 1966 essay, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)," an anthem for the more prescriptive aspects of the then-emerging Black Aesthetic (Jones 1968:180–211). In such an atmosphere, the African American composer trained in the Western European "art" tradition is troped as a tragic mulatto figure—shunned by white-dominated systems of cultural support, and supposedly a non-factor in black culture as well.

It seemed plain enough to Muhal Richard Abrams, however, that "there are different types of black life, and therefore we know that there are different kinds of black music. Because black music comes forth from black life" (Vuisje 1978:199). What the Baraka of the mid-1980s did not

notice was a certain reversed dynamic relative to the 1960s, when resistance to dominant narratives included a strategy of refusal of the “bourgeois” values of classical music in favor of the advocacy of vernacular musics such as jazz, blues, and R&B. Attali’s notion of the economy of repetition, however, identifies the deployment of an amorphous construction of “the masses” as useful for precisely the same dominant economic interests that have, according to need, alternately exploited and erased black musical expression. Far from articulating resistance or class struggle, those who import the bourgeois-versus-vernacular binary dialectic unblinkingly into the complex world of black musical expression risk serving as the ventriloquist’s dummy for corporate megamedia.

A conception of black cultural history that is forced to deny engagement with or influence from pan-European traditions would look absurd if it were applied to black writers or visual artists. Such a perspective cannot account for the complexity of experience that characterizes multiple, contemporary black lives. Thus, this particular formulation of resistance, in advancing (strategically) essentialist notions of black music practice and reference, enforced an aesthetic rigidity that minimized the complexity and catholicity of a composite black musical tradition that includes Nathaniel Dett, James Reese Europe, Will Marion Cook, Florence Price, Ulysses Kay, Olly Wilson, Dorothy Rudd Moore, Hale Smith, Primous Fountain III, Wendell Logan, and Jeffrey Mumford.

A trope that uses overly broad strokes to posit a classical-jazz binary cannot account for those who, like Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, and many others, were extremely respectful of and eager to learn from the achievements in pan-European music—and all other musics—while rejecting Western aesthetic hegemony. On this view, the AACM’s engagement with Europe was simply the next step in a long history of exchange that, as with such AACM composers as Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman, Henry Threadgill, Malachi Favors, Anthony Braxton, and others, included formal academic study. Describing the scene at an early, pre-AACM rehearsal of Muhal Richard Abrams’s Experimental Band, a group widely seen as a direct predecessor of the AACM, Jarman remembered that his early compositions, influenced by his training with Dr. Richard Wang at Wilson Junior College in Chicago, were “real deep into Anton Webern and the concentrated elements of compositional form” (Jarman 1998). Jarman’s story was hardly atypical; of course, white experimentalism was widely discussed, along with other world musics, particularly among the members of the AACM’s first wave, a fact that should be unsurprising.

AACM musicians pursued not only practices of exchange and creolization, but also strategies of de-authorization, as expressed in Lester Bowie’s signifying:



I mean most Europeans' background is one of wars and colonization of Africa. I mean really, they've dogged a lot of people. And they have this kind of presumed intelligence, they presume that they're really cultured. And they are in a certain sense, but in other ways they're really barbaric, crude. Most western nations are like that. They didn't get to be big western nations walking on roses or no shit like that. I mean they became France by cutting off motherfuckers' heads. (Beauchamp 1998:43)

Thus, I would advance the notion that what is particularly striking about some AACM music is not how much it sounded like European and American experimentalism, but how little. Reading many of the "Tail Europe"-style critiques, it became clear to musicians that many jazz critics were simply not prepared for the full impact of the postmodern multi-instrumentalism of the AACM, with its tremendous range of references from around the world. Moreover, if we can take Giddins's and even Baraka's remarks as symptomatic, the high modernist and postmodernist music being performed in New York in the 1970s and 1980s—from Sollberger to Ashley to Reich to Oliveros to Rzewski—was unfamiliar to many jazz writers, even those who were living in New York. In the final analysis, those who thought that Anthony Braxton sounded like Karlheinz Stockhausen or Anton Webern could not be said to have truly heard much of any of them.

The AACM's radical individualism allowed multiple notions of the future of music to co-exist. AACM musicians had been inculcated into a set of values that saw constructed distinctions between musicians, such as those advanced by Baraka between Murray and Braxton, as a form of divide-and-conquer, regardless of the race of the person articulating them. Thus, Steve McCall, one of Baraka's frequent 1980s collaborators, nonetheless said this about New York jazz writers: "Something that irritates me about many people who write about jazz here is the fact that they think that when they praise one music, then they have to downgrade another. I don't like that at all! Because that is completely unnecessary" (Jost 1982:122).

Accordingly, those who were looking for divisions between AACM members based on the "Tail Europe" issue were undoubtedly disappointed in Lester Bowie's response to an interviewer's claim that Anthony Braxton, Douglas Ewart, and myself "ignore a whole lot of the cultural background of jazz": "There's a whole branch of that, I call it neo-classical. They're in touch with this kind of thing and I feel it's very valid and very cool . . . they are developing other areas that are just as valid and just as culturally expressive of our time and age. The music is spreading to encompass all of these areas" (Coppens 1979:14).

Where Baraka sees overt class struggle in the composition, performance, appreciation, analysis, and critical writing about the music (Baraka and Baraka 1987:260), I would maintain that on this very view the AACM represents an indigenous working-class attempt to open up the space of popular culture to new forms of expression, blurring the boundaries between popular and high culture. As African American musicians sought the same mobility across the breadth of their field that (for example) African American writers and visual artists were striving for, engagement with contemporary pan-European music became a form of resistance to efforts to restrict the mobility of black musicians, rather than a capitulation to bourgeois values. AACM musicians felt that experimentalism in music need not be bound to particular ideologies, methods, or slogans. Rather, it could take many forms, draw from many histories (including the blues), confront different methodological challenges, and manifest a self-awareness as being in dialogue with the music of the whole earth. Thus, Lester Bowie could affirm the excellence of his colleagues while locating himself solidly in a different area within this vast field of musical riches: "I am from a different kind of thing. I deal purely with ass-kicking. Period. Just good old country ass-kicking" (Coppens 1979:14).

### **New Music and Hybridity**

John Cage's "History of Experimental Music in the United States," part of his early, widely influential 1961 manifesto *Silence* (Cage 1961:67), continues to serve as a "readymade" touchstone for later histories and reference works, including Nyman (1999), Johnson (1989), Kostelanetz (1993), Rubin (1994), and Cameron (1996). These and other historical accounts, reviews, and retrospectives tended to define "experimental music" in terms of a set of acceptable methodologies, people, sites, and venues available to pan-European high-culture music. Musics by people of color (in particular, the high-culture musics of Asia) were most often framed as "sources."

However, the development of a notion of "experimental" and "American" that excludes the so-called bebop and free jazz movements, among the most influential American experimentalist musics of the latter part of the twentieth century, is highly problematic. This discursive phenomenon can be partly accounted for by the general absence of discourses on issues of race and ethnicity in criticism on American experimentalism. In later years, this aspect of denial in new music's intellectual environment tended to separate it from both post-1960s jazz and from other contemporary work in visual art, literature, and dance. More directly, it could be said that part of white-coded experimentalism's ongoing identity formation project depended in large measure upon an Othering of its great and arguably equally influential competitor, the jazz tradition,

which is also widely viewed (and views itself) as explicitly experimental. The transcribed orature of musicians endorsing the importance of exploration, discovery, and experiment is quite vast and easy to access; it spans virtually every era of jazz music, and includes nearly every improviser of canonical stature before the rise of Wynton Marsalis in the mid-1980s.<sup>26</sup> Even as both uptown and downtown musics of the 1980s sought to challenge prevailing wisdom in so many areas, the dominant response of white American experimentalism to the hybridity represented by the AACM displayed an ongoing fealty to the erasure of African American cultural production from the very definition of “experimental.”<sup>27</sup>

This stance was radically challenged by the diversity movement in experimental music. For Attali, free jazz “eliminated the distinctions between popular music and learned music, broke down the repetitive hierarchy” (1989:140). As we have noted, the AACM’s revision of the relationship between composition and improvisation lies on an unstable fault line between the new black music and the new white music, a border that was brought to light as the work of AACM, BAG, and other black experimentalist composers began to receive limited exposure in some of the same venues, and support from some of the same sources, as white experimental composers. Thus, for a short period between 1976–78, trombonist Garrett List, as music director of the Kitchen, was particularly active in moving toward a nonracialized, barrier-breaking conception of new music. Members of the new generation of black experimentalists, such as Anthony Braxton, Leo Smith, Oliver Lake, and the Art Ensemble of Chicago, were presented in Kitchen concerts during List’s tenure, though few of these events were ever reviewed. By 1980, my own two-year tenure as music director of the Kitchen could be viewed as shifting the debate around border-crossing to a stage where whiteness-based constructions of American experimentalism were being fundamentally problematized.

Both the *Voice* and the *Times* announced the new Kitchen regime in bold letters. The *Times* presented a large picture of the new director in the Sunday “Arts and Leisure” section, accompanied by the Kitchen’s Welsh-born director, Mary MacArthur (Rockwell 1980). *Voice* writer Tom Johnson’s review of my first curated event described a double bill of a collaboration between synthesist Tom Hamilton and Black Artist Group woodwind improviser J. D. Parran, followed by a John Zorn “opera” for improvisors, *Jai Alai*. For Johnson, the salient feature of this event was expressed in the headline: “The Kitchen Improvises” (Johnson 1980). Johnson admitted that while the previous Kitchen concert policy had been a valuable forum for “many fine minimalist works requiring long spans of time and complete composer control,” it had nonetheless “tended to shut out new music involving improvising groups” (ibid.). Thus, the writer predicted that the direction of the Kitchen’s programming, “assuming that

these opening concerts are symptomatic, is to open the door to new forms of improvising." Nonetheless, the jazz side of the *Voice* took little, if any, notice of events at the Kitchen. A full five years after the earlier musings of Gary Giddins (1975) about border crossing, the venue was still not considered part of the jazz "turf."

My presence at the Kitchen was an artifact of an era in which African American musical histories and practices came into dialogue with white-coded American experimentalism's methods, practices, and not incidentally, its sources of support, right in the center of one of the most publicly charged arenas in the world. The Kitchen, with its relatively extensive infrastructure, its large presentation and commissioning budgets, and its commitment to experimental work, had a long history of supporting complex projects that other spaces would not or could not bring to fruition. The new curatorial direction promised to make that infrastructure welcoming to African American artists who sought to present that kind of demanding hybrid work. Perhaps realizing this, Johnson goes on to warn his readers that the apparent broadening of scope and altering of focus was going to require some adjustments, particularly in dialogue with a cultural institution whose overall budget at the time was over half a million dollars: "when it is decided that previously neglected formats will open the season at a place like the Kitchen, that means a lot. It's not just someone's opinions but an actual fact, and everyone concerned must adjust to it" (Johnson 1980).<sup>28</sup>

The new hybridity reflected in the Kitchen's programming challenged journalistic, critical, social, and historical discourses that presented as entirely natural the musical separation of black and white, low and high, up-town and downtown, popular and serious. Lacking a language adequate to the task of describing and contextualizing the new diversity, critical reception eventually settled on the notion that the Kitchen was now "concentrating" on jazz, which seemed putatively defined as "new music by black people, and/or which featured improvisation"—a framing that updated, but ultimately preserved the old racializations. While the number of Kitchen events featuring African Americans or improvised music had indeed increased sharply from prior years, concentration was far too strong a term; the complement of artists presented could not be subsumed under any generalizations about ethnicity, race, gender, or musical method.<sup>29</sup>

Eventually, the *Voice*, which had faithfully covered Kitchen events for years, virtually ceased covering them. The *Soho Weekly News* followed suit until its demise in 1981, preferring (mostly negative) articles about its "up-town" relatives to boundary-crossing engagement with black forms that had started to come under attack on the jazz side of the paper. *Voice* jazz critics practically never ventured to the Kitchen. Gregory Sandow, the eventual replacement for Tom Johnson, bravely stepped into the breach

to review a 1981 Julius Hemphill/Anthony Davis double bill, where he found that "the new music crowd found at the Kitchen on other nights stayed away" (Sandow 1981).

There are several reasons for the asymmetrical dynamic regarding critical support for experimental forms in New York. First, critical commentary on the work of the Downtown I avant-garde was most often written by composers who were regarded as members of that community. As a result, most *Voice* articles were not simply non-adversarial, but were, in a sense, insider reports, where the voices of the artists themselves were always centered. With the support of a sympathetic publisher, the clear purpose was to build a community, even as the articles tended to implicitly define Downtown I's methodological, ethnic, and class boundaries. In contrast, writing on black experimental music came not from among the musicians themselves, but from more or less professional writers. Few black musicians had the kind of relatively unmediated access to publication that the white experimentalists enjoyed; for a brief period, guitarist Vernon Reid, later a founding member of the Black Rock Coalition and the important heavy metal band Living Colour, wrote *Voice* reviews.

However, resistance to diversity, while dominant, was hardly monolithic. The central role of leadership exercised by musicians themselves was vital in envisioning the end of "hegemonic boundary maintenance." The Creative Music Studio (CMS), located in Woodstock, New York, was a grass-roots initiative of vocalist Ingrid Berger and her partner, Karl Berger, a vibraphonist and academically-trained philosopher who had performed with Eric Dolphy (Sweet 1996). Inspired by a combination of Black Mountain College and trumpeter Don Cherry's cross-cultural vision of new music, the Bergers' creolizing conception brought together members of various experimentalisms. This hybrid conception from the 1970s constituted one obvious model for John Zorn's 1986 declaration that "we should take advantage of all the great music and musicians in the world without fear of musical barriers" (McClary 2000:148).

A typical visitor to CMS might encounter a conversation or performance among a diverse array of musicians, including members of the AACM, such as Roscoe Mitchell and Woodstock resident Anthony Braxton; Indian flutist G. S. Sachdev; Japanese Zen shakuhachi artist Watazumi-doso; Senegalese drummer Aiyb Dieng; Brazilian multi-instrumentalist Nana Vasconcelos; and composer and improviser Pauline Oliveros, a CMS neighbor and frequent participant who collaborated there with the African American choreographer Ione in creating an opera about Angolan Queen Nzinga's resistance to Portuguese colonial domination. Other area residents, such as bassist Dave Holland and drummer Jack DeJohnette, were regular visitors and instructors, as were the members of the best-known of the live electronic music ensembles, *Musica Elettronica Viva*. These politi-

cally engaged artists—Alvin Curran, Frederic Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum, and trombonist Garrett List—had for many years actively sought alliances with improvisors from different traditions, recognizing early on that musicians of all backgrounds and ethnicities were exchanging sounds, styles, materials and methodologies (cf. Teitelbaum 1972).

The high point of the early diversity movement produced the New Music America Festival (NMA), perhaps the first attempt to codify, in a performance network, an avant-garde that drew from a wide variety of sources. The festival's immediate predecessor was 1979's "New Music, New York," a week-long series of concerts and symposia sponsored by the Kitchen during composer Rhys Chatham's tenure as music curator. Beginning in 1980, the New Music America Festival sought to expand on the success of "New Music, New York," aiming at the creation of nothing less than an annual national showcase for experimental music. Over the fourteen-year lifespan of the festival, large-scale festivals were held in such major cities as Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, and Montreal, among others.

While a 1992 volume summarizing New Music America's history is suitably multicultural in tone and presentation (Brooks 1992:10), the rhetoric of inclusion never quite caught up to the reality. The fifty-four composers listed in advertisements for the original "New Music, New York" constituted a veritable catalog of Downtown I artists; just three, however, were African American: Don Cherry, Leo Smith, and myself ("Advertisement for New Music New York Festival," 1979). Thus, at several of the panel discussions accompanying the New York festival, criticisms were made concerning the overwhelming whiteness of the version of experimental music being presented as "diverse." The few non-white composers featured, however, exercised influence far out of proportion to their numbers, not least because for perhaps the very first time, their presence obliged the "downtown" art world to touch upon, however gingerly, the complex relationship between race, culture, music, method, and art world rewards. Anticipating the furor, *Voice* reviewer Tom Johnson, while admitting that "the festival was clearly weighted toward white musicians," felt nonetheless that this had "more to do with recent history than with overt racism" (1979:89). Johnson's acknowledgement that "the black-dominated loft jazz scene has evolved right alongside the white-dominated experimental scene throughout this decade" was perhaps the first such admission to appear in any New York paper.

For Johnson, however, an attempt by the Kitchen to engage with this black experimental music "would be far more patronizing than constructive . . . a truly ecumenical festival of new music in New York would have to include some of the klezmer musicians . . . along with shakuhachi players, kamancheh players, Irish groups, Balkan groups, and so on" (ibid.). This strategy of unfurling the banners of pluralism and color-blindness to mask

this astonishing conflation of diverse musics under the heading of “Other” begs questions of affinity, collaboration, and competition between black and white experimentalism that were already being articulated all over New York, right under the noses of media commentators supposedly “representing” both camps.

In any event, AACM and BAG artists constituted a clear majority of the very few African American composers featured in New Music America events over the succeeding years. For NMA 1980 in Minneapolis, the only African Americans invited were the Art Ensemble of Chicago, a duo of Oliver Lake and Leroy Jenkins, and former SUNY Buffalo Creative Associate Julius Eastman, out of forty-seven events listed. Despite the presence of two AACM members (Douglas Ewart and myself) on the advisory board of the 1982 NMA festival in Chicago, just four performances by African Americans were featured, of the approximately sixty-five presented. These included an orchestral work by Muhal Richard Abrams, and chamber works by Douglas Ewart and Roscoe Mitchell (“Advertisement for New Music America Festival,” 1981). Particularly telling, in the founding city of the AACM itself, with an African American population of over 40%, was a panel discussion, titled “New Music and Our Changing Culture,” in which all of the participants—David Behrman, John Cage, Dan Graham, Ben Johnston, Marjorie Perloff, and Christian Wolff—were white.

### **In the Tradition?**

The mid-1980s saw the rise of the neoclassical movement in jazz, which placed musicians, critics, and audiences on the horns of at least two dilemmas: between tradition and innovation, and between classical music and jazz. Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, who possessed expertise in both jazz and classical traditions, soon emerged as the leading spokesperson for this movement. Marsalis, who had already won Grammy awards in both classical and jazz categories—in the same year—began working with New York’s Lincoln Center, home to the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic, to produce a series called “Classical Jazz,” a title that seemed tailored to Marsalis’s rapidly growing public image. In fact, Alina Bloomgarden, a Lincoln Center employee, had been promoting the idea as far back as 1983; for the post of “artistic advisor” she recruited Marsalis, who in turn recruited writer Stanley Crouch (Porter 2002:311–12).<sup>30</sup>

Up to this point, the most unusual aspect of the debate over borders between classical music and jazz was that its most publicly prominent conceptual leadership came largely from the black experimental music community. A 1987 *New York Times* article by Jon Pareles, viewing Marsalis’s double releases of classical concertos and jazz recordings as “superficial” and “a gimmick,” framed AACM composers Roscoe Mitchell and Anthony

Braxton, along with Ornette Coleman, James Newton, Anthony Davis, and Butch Morris, as “experimental hybrids [who] have to battle on both the jazz and classical fronts,” but who were nonetheless key to the emergence of a new synthesis of classical music and jazz (Pareles 1987).

The alacrity with which this interpretation of a classical-jazz fusion was simply swept from the chessboard is fascinating to review. The promulgation of a revisionist canon that emphasized a unitary, “classic” tradition of jazz eventually took on an institutionalized cast with the 1991 creation of Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC), arguably the most heavily-funded jazz institution to ever exist. The JALC approach to the classicization of jazz had its antecedents in many earlier classicizing projects, but this new version sought not to problematize or transgress barriers between jazz and classical music, as the AACM and others had tried to do, but to uphold and nurture them. In a critical discursive shift, the term “classical” became less a description of a musical tradition than of an attitude—one of reverence and preservation. Stanley Crouch, formerly one of the most vocal supporters of the 1970s black experimentalists, had shifted ground by the early 1980s. Influenced by the heroic modernism of writer Albert Murray, Crouch became heavily critical of the new music (Crouch 1979), and declared in the liner notes to a Marsalis recording of “jazz standards” that the new challenge for black musicians would be “to learn how to redefine the fundamentals while maintaining the essences that give the art its scope and grandeur” (quoted in Porter 2002:304).

Ironically, JALC’s articulation of membership in the “canon” (at least up to 1960) would be fully congruent with that of the first-wave AACM members, who had all grown up revering the same artists—Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Art Tatum, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and others—that the neoclassicists held dear. For years, prior to coming to New York, Henry Threadgill had been combing the Joplin repertoire, Muhal Richard Abrams was mining and recasting stride, and Roscoe Mitchell was making ironic references to R&B. Moreover, the issue of “standard music” versus “original music” had also been a central aspect of the discussions in the initial meeting of the AACM on May 8, 1965. Steve McCall’s thoughtful, ecumenical reasoning about the need for a new organization is especially valuable.

The standard music, we’ve all played it, and not taking nothing away from no form of music at all. But for *this* organization, you know, for the promoting of having cats to write, you know, like the original charts, original compositions, and getting together and presenting, in concert; and as a means of a livelihood, you dig, like making some money, getting out of your things, the things that we all create



among ourselves. Being at a concert just for standard music, you know, there doesn't have to be this kind of a group for that kind of thing. (AACM 1965)

As McCall noted, "The standard music, we've all played it." Thus, one can imagine the puzzlement of AACM experimentalists when a new breed of New York-based journalists, critics, and musicians advanced the claim that those who had been creating the new music had "no respect for tradition." The fact that the new musicians chose definition over redefinition, by presenting their own music as they had done since their Chicago days, now became an issue for much critical reception; in fact, the presentation of "original music" was now used as *prima facie* confirmation of this "lack of respect." For some, this "evidence" made the "no respect" claim easier to substantiate than the simultaneous recycling of the older canard that the "free" musicians "couldn't play," since many AACM musicians had worked with some of the most traditionally respected musicians—Mercer Ellington performing Muhal Richard Abrams's Duke Ellington arrangements, Lester Bowie with Albert King, Leo Smith with Little Milton, Pete Cosey with Miles Davis, Steve McCall with Dexter Gordon, Amina Claudine Myers with Gene Ammons and Sonny Stitt, my work with Count Basie and Gil Evans, and so on.

A signal difference between the pre- and post-Marsalis framings of African American musical tradition, however, was that the AACM musicians were taking what was up to that time an unchallenged view: that the jazz music now regarded as "classical" was originally the product of innovation—i.e., "finding one's own sound." On this view, the musician's attitude of experiment and self-realization was one of the crucial reasons for the importance of the work itself. A 1995 article on Marsalis in the *New York Times Magazine* challenges this view, accusing those who valorized innovation as appealing to outdated notions of "progress" in the arts:

Have we had progress in poetry, in the novel, in painting or in dance? I don't think so . . . The way to strengthen one's ability to tell the difference between progress and evolution is to study the canon—that music which has had the longest and deepest influence—because the canon contains the evolutionary signposts and implies how jazz can spiral outward without losing its identity . . . One of the most important missions of Jazz at Lincoln Center is to lay down a foundation for the future of jazz by presenting important works from the canon with all the passion and intelligence that can be brought to bear. (Conroy 1995)<sup>31</sup>

While the new canon seemed lacking in a number of important respects, such as the apparent exclusion of the work of people like Ornette

Coleman, Cecil Taylor, and other black experimental musicians, Farah Griffin points out that “Had Marsalis not struck such a conservative stance, whereby some of the most innovative practitioners are left out of the jazz canon, it is highly unlikely he would have been able to acquire the resources necessary to do the kind of work on behalf of the music that he has done” (Griffin 2001:143–44). Certainly, in the severely undercapitalized field of jazz, the advent of JALC, with the massive resources to which Griffin refers, had much the same effect as the introduction of a Wal-Mart into a community of Mom-and-Pop businesses.<sup>32</sup> Taking advantage of a regularly supportive media presence, as well as backing from major corporations for his music and his JALC events, Marsalis eventually took on a role as authoritative spokesperson for the future of music itself, making his primary mission the creation of an atmosphere in which jazz was finally due to be treated with “the same respect” as classical music. Prominent black intellectuals who had generally been associated with progressive political stances signed on. Some, like Cornel West, did so enthusiastically,<sup>33</sup> while others, like Amiri Baraka, acknowledged a certain ambivalence. In a 1995 German-language interview, Baraka avows that “I want to be completely honest there—I would rather hear Wynton Marsalis in an Ellington concert than what [Lester] Bowie or [Henry] Threadgill do. Even when I value them for certain things that they have brought into being.” In the very next breath, Baraka emphasizes the issue of self-determination, which the AACM had also sought to bring forth—an idea with which Baraka himself, with his long history of political activism, had inspired many.

Yes, they [Bowie and Threadgill] should have regular stages too, and I wish that Sonny Rollins had one. But the problem will present itself as long as we do not have our own independent institutions. Until then I can only say: It is to be welcomed that the Afro-American tradition is being preserved by Wynton Marsalis. I would even describe his work in these times as progressive. (Broecking 1995:111)

Despite Baraka’s assertion that “there is no point on which we agree” (*ibid.*), on the issue of black experimental music aesthetics he and Stanley Crouch find common ground in their disapprobation of black music that exhibits too much “European influence”—a criticism that, given their own—and Marsalis’s—use of European tropes, appears particularly curious, even contradictory. Thus, it became evident that this “progressive” motif of preservation and protection did not extend to the products of the black experimentalists. As early as 1982, discussions of black new music were beginning to disappear from the New York “alternative” press. AACM-oriented ideas of diversity, mobility, and innovation came under withering attack, not only from an emerging politically and culturally neoconservative aesthetic movement, but from the black political left wing as well.

Criticism of Marsalis's approach to the canon was generally dismissed by a supremely supportive New York press, and naysayers were admonished to (as the title of a 1995 *New York Times Magazine* piece had it) "Stop Nitpicking a Genius" (Conroy 1995). Nonetheless, many musicians were resistant to the new regime. Even as he was being widely touted as an up-and-coming "Young Lion in the Tradition," composer Anthony Davis, who collaborated extensively with a number of AACM artists, expressed the views of many when he was widely quoted as saying that the notion of "tradition" was being used "essentially as a vehicle for conservatism," and "as a means of maintaining the status quo, of limiting your own personal connection" (Van Trikt 1985:5). A number of AACM musicians, moreover, detected (correctly) the hand of corporate megamedia stirring the new traditionalism's soup kettle. Roscoe Mitchell warned that "What we've seen happen between the 60s and now is the commercial machine expanding and dominating the scene . . . we've seen the institutionalizing of so-called 'jazz.' We've seen a general turning away of new ideas and sounds . . . [Young musicians] are getting these messages from the media that they should do such-and-such to re-create the tradition. But the tradition will never be re-created as strongly as it was by the people who invented it" (Baker 1989:19). Indeed, the marketing strategy around the heavily advertised and corporate-supported Ken Burns film *Jazz* exhibited a remarkable synergy, with videos, DVDs, and CDs bearing the "Ken Burns Jazz" logo available immediately following the airing of the first episode.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Mitchell was certainly expressing a common view, neatly encapsulated in a 1994 *New York Times* headline announcing a "Classical Jazz" event": "Jazz, Classical, Art, Business: A Series Wraps All Into One" (Watrous 1994).

It is worth noting that up to this point in time, Lincoln Center had never been a significant long-term supporter of musical experimentalism; why so many people in the jazz community thought that a Lincoln Center jazz program would be any different might be explained with reference to a certain lack of experience with the histories and practices of this and other high-culture institutions. Moreover, despite Marsalis's reputation as an interpreter in both jazz and classical idioms, his public pronouncements regarding method and canon have somehow been essentially limited to the jazz side of his work. Further, within that sphere, black musicians, for the most part, have been the exclusive targets of his critiques.

In contrast to the ideologically charged atmosphere on Lincoln Center's jazz side, its classical side has never engaged in extensive public critiques of experimental music in its chosen European-based tradition. In fact, composers seen as "fringe" elements were quietly supported, even as it was acknowledged that the public was not necessarily excited about their

music; to keep donations flowing, patrons were discouraged from attending new-music events (Hersh 1980).

Thus, by the mid-1980s, when one of the new black experimentalists presented an event deemed as falling outside the social or methodological frame of jazz, neither the jazz writers nor the new music writers would cover it. In the jazz press, those among the black experimentalists who “refused to swing” or were “too European” were routinely savaged, with little hope of succor from the “new music” press, which simply ignored them as it had done earlier. Black composers framed as “jazz” who dared to present transgressive new work at spaces like the Kitchen would be covered only when they chose to return to their “natural” home in a local club. As Attali says of free jazz, the work of these musicians was “contained, repressed, limited, censored, expelled” (1989:140).

However, the increasingly interdisciplinary and multicultural landscape in which present-day artists find themselves wreaks havoc with the logic of those who would confine African American musicians to nativist (re)presentations of a narrowly constructed “blues idiom” while arrogating to themselves the right to consider Picasso, Rothko, de Kooning, Proust, Joyce, Eliot, Melville, Kerouac, Burroughs, Wagner, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky salient to their deliberations. Throughout the past century, African American musical artists have pursued an ongoing engagement not only with Eurological forms, but with the world of art and music as a whole, in full awareness of their position in a world of art-making traditions. As with the work of earlier generations of African American artists, the current generation is free to assimilate sounds from all over the world, even as they situate their work in a complexly articulated African American intellectual, social, and sonic matrix. In this regard, Julius Hemphill’s challenge to the tradition bandwagon is particularly apt: “Well, you often hear people nowadays talking about the tradition, tradition, tradition. But they have tunnel vision in this tradition. Because tradition in African American music is as wide as all outdoors . . . Music is much bigger than bebop changes. I don’t feel like being trapped in those halls of harmony” (McElfresh 1994).

### **Epilogue**

Before the 1950s, European high culture was the primary model for an emerging high culture in America. Contemporary classical musicians were under particular pressure because of the very frequent assertions by important European musicians, including Bartók, Milhaud, Ravel, Dvořák, and Stravinsky, that jazz, rather than European-based American classical music, represented “the core of American music,” as well as the most likely source of new musical ideas for a truly native American music.<sup>35</sup> As Ravel

asserted in 1928, "I am waiting to see more Americans appear with the honesty and vision to realize the significance of their popular product, and the technic and imagination to base an original and creative art upon it" (Oja 2000:296).

Today, we find Ravel still waiting for that bus, as American experimental music from Cowell to Cage has advanced a whiteness-based musical nativism that situates itself historically, ethnically, and methodologically in dialogue with an overall pan-European tradition, and tries to erase any connection with black American culture (Lewis 1996:98–99; Oja 2000:297–360). Even as the various forms of black experimentalism—bebop, free improvisation, free jazz, and the hybrid work of the AACM—have emerged as serious competitors for the mantle of high art, the assertion that "jazz is America's classical music" continues to be discouraged. As we glimpse the new century, white-coded American experimentalism's gradual willingness to consider some aspects of a multicultural, multi-ethnic revision of its definition is at variance with its continued disavowal of specifically African American perspectives, histories, traditions, methods, and people.

One might want to question, however, the desirability or utility of a "classical" music to a postmodern, post-Cold War, postcolonial America. Given such a focus, strategies of classicization become disclosed as aspects of competition over capital, both symbolic and actual. Positively put, however, a larger and perhaps more fruitful question might concern what an American classical music might look like in a postcolonial world. Certainly such a new music would need to draw upon the widest range of traditions, while not being tied to any one. Perhaps, as Attali would have it, such a music would exist "in a multifaceted time in which rhythms, styles, and codes diverge, interdependencies become more burdensome, and rules dissolve"—a "new noise" (1989:138–40). Thus, as the new century approached, AACM musicians continued to present their radical approaches to diversity, even in the face of the loss of several of its members, including co-founder Steve McCall in 1982 and trumpeter Lester Bowie in 1999, as well as second-wave members, saxophonists Charles "Wes" Cochran and Light Henry Huff. Since the late 1980s, a newer generation of AACM musicians has come to prominence from the Chicago chapter, including flutist Nicole Mitchell, saxophonists Ernest Dawkins, Mwata Bowden, and David Boykin, drummer Avreeayl Ra, sitarist Shanta Nurullah, and trumpeter Ameen Muhammad. The AACM collective established a New York chapter in 1982 to complement its original base in Chicago, and continued to organize and present its own events in both cities.

Muhal Richard Abrams's 1977 prediction regarding the AACM's influence proved prescient, as New York experimental music movements emerging in the late 1980s, such as the movements of Downtown II and

“totalism,”<sup>36</sup> adopted the rhetoric of diversity, if not hybridity: “A lot of people will pick up on the example and do very well with it. A lot of people that are not AACM people. Now who those people will be a couple of years from now, who knows?” (Giddins 1977:48).

Composer John Zorn, arguably the most well-known artist to emerge from Downtown II, connects this notion of diversity directly with the AACM, an important influence on his work. In discovering Braxton and the Art Ensemble, Zorn notices that “the guy’s [Braxton] got a great head, he’s listening to all this different music. It all connected up” (Gagne 1993:511). Echoing longstanding AACM premises, Zorn declared that “I want to break all these hierarchies: the idea that classical music is better than jazz, that jazz is better than rock. I don’t think that way” (Watrous 1989).

Downtown II artists, who were never subjected to the discourses of transgression and “roots” that were being used to police the work of black experimental musicians, were able to take full advantage of their relative freedom from cultural arbitration. Thus, contemporaneous commentary on Zorn and other Downtown II artists celebrated this diversity of sonic reference in their work, even as comparable efforts by black experimentalists were being routinely condemned. In 1988, John Rockwell found no particular difficulty in declaring that Zorn not only “transcends categories; better, he’s made a notable career crashing them together and grinding them to dust” (Rockwell 1988). In contrast, a 1982 Rockwell piece could insist of Anthony Braxton that “However much he may resist categories, Mr. Braxton’s background is in jazz, which means an improvisatory tradition” (Rockwell 1982), an evocation in a single sentence of the eugenicist power of the one-drop rule which revokes, rather than celebrates Braxton’s mobility.

Moreover, unlike the black artists who preceded and influenced them, Downtown II artists are routinely framed as transcending race as well as genre. By 1989, a *Times* reviewer could declare that the repertory of Zorn’s “Naked City” project

mirrors a typically modern sensibility, in which the culture of our grandparents—whether it’s defined by race, religion or nationality—is abandoned, or at least tempered, in favor of the possibilities of endless information. Eclecticism isn’t simply a position for some composers: it’s the only position. It’s the only culture that makes sense to them, that they can depend on—a culture of musical literacy. (Watrous 1989)

Downtown II’s press coding as white, however, is not only at variance with this image of transcendence, but seems to have little basis in either New York City’s geography or musical affinities. African American saxophonist

Greg Osby's acerbic observation neatly encapsulates the issue: "I played with all the downtown cats but nobody called *me* a downtown cat" (Nai 2001:16)—a statement that some AACM members could have made twenty years before.

To the extent that both Downtown I and II failed to challenge either the dominant culture's generally high levels of investment in white positional diversity, or its complementary disinvestment in black subjectivity, they cannot form the basis for a cosmopolitan, globalized, hybrid, transgressive American experimentalism that confronts the challenges to musical form, transmission, and reception represented by the permeability of borders, the dynamics of post-colonialism, and the decline of the nation-state. In that regard, as Attali notes, the work of John Cage, while certainly announcing "the end of music as autonomous activity," nonetheless presents "not the new mode of musical production, but the liquidation of the old" (1989:138–40).

A recent article by jazz critic Bill Shoemaker (2000) described an already emerging post-jazz, post-new music economic network for improvised music that moves beyond gatekeeping authorities, aiming toward the creation of an environment where canonizing pronouncements are both powerless and meaningless. This network can be described in the same terms as those used by theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri to discuss the anti-globalization movement, which for them constitutes a new form of challenge to centralized authority. For Hardt and Negri, the movement "is not defined by any single identity, but can discover commonality in its multiplicity" (Hardt and Negri 2001). Similarly, Muhal Richard Abrams declared more than twenty years ago: "First we make for ourselves an atmosphere, in which we can survive, in spite of this environment—simply through that which we have in common. We have something in common! For example, we are in agreement that we should further develop our music. Whatever else we do outside of our central development, we will not let this central development be destroyed" (Jost 1982:194).

Ultimately, the AACM's gamble on New York can be viewed as pointing the way toward a mobile, boundary-crossing experimentalism that exemplifies these notions of commonality in multiplicity and individuality within the aggregate. The example of the AACM has been central to the coming canonization, not of a new musical aesthetic with defined borders, but of a new kind of musician who works across genres with fluidity, grace, discernment, and trenchancy. After nearly forty years of a living AACM presence, the significance of what these new musicians have done up to now, as well as what they might create in the future, is only now beginning to be understood.

*Notes*

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1. A first-person account of the AACM is found in Braxton (1985:410–39). Other accounts of the AACM's early activity, philosophies, and musical approaches are to be found in Jost (1975), Wilmer ([1977] 1992), Litweiler (1984), and Radano (1993).

2. For a useful starter bibliography on musicians' collectives, see Gray (1991:41–57). For an account of the Clef Club's goals and activities, see Badger (1995). Contemporaneous accounts of the work of the Jazz Composers' Guild include Levin (1965) and Heckman (1965); for a brief personal account of the Guild's practice of collective governance, see Bley and Lee (1999:91–97). Briefer references to the Guild are found in Wilmer ([1977] 1992:213–15), Litweiler (1984:138–39), and Jost (1991:213–14). For an extended look at the UGMAA, see Tapscott and Isoardi (2001).

3. From time to time, I cite the theorist and economist Jacques Attali (1989), whose brief section on free music in his chapter on "Composing" offers a number of insights that dramatically reflect the contemporary situation (133–58). Attali's influential exposition on the musical implications of the "political economy of repetition," or the mass reproduction and centralization of music, explicitly includes the AACM as emblematic of the project of using music to build a new culture. I am sure that I am not the first to observe that Attali's notion of "composition," proposed in the hope of finding an exit from the Adornonian nightmare of repetition, resembles, in fact, not composition as it is known in the West, but improvisation: "Music is no longer made to be represented or stockpiled, but for participation in collective play, in an ongoing quest for new, immediate communication, without ritual and always unstable. It becomes nonreproducible, irreversible" (141).

4. Present at this first meeting were, among others, bassists Charles Clark, Betty Dupree, Melvin Jackson, Malachi Favors (later Maghostous), and Reggie Willis; drummers Jerol Donavon (later Ajaramu) and Steve McCall; singers Floradine Geemes, Sandra Lashley, and Conchita Brooks; trumpeter Fred Berry; saxophonists Troy Robinson, Eugene Easton, Jimmy Ellis, Maurice McIntyre (later Kalaparusha), Joseph Jarman (later Shaku), Roscoe Mitchell, and Gene Dinwiddie; trombonists Julian Priestster and Lester Lashley; and pianists Jodie Christian, Willie Pickens, Claudine Myers (later Amina), Bob Dogan, Ken Chaney, and Richard Abrams (later Muhal).



5. Other concert spaces included the Abraham Lincoln Centre (a community service organization in the "Bronzeville" district on the South Side), St. John's Grand Lodge on South Ingleside, and later the Parkway Community House on East 67th Street.

6. See Nessa (1966), T. Martin (1966–67, 1968), and Litweiler (1967, 1967a, 1967b, 1968, 1968a, 1968b).

7. Translations of Jost (1982) and Broecking (1995) from the original German; Vuisje (1978) from the original Dutch; and Caux (1969, 1969a), Bourget (1977), and Marmande (1977) from the original French, are by the author.

8. This information was also compiled in part from a Black Artists Group program brochure (St. Louis, Mo., ca. 1970) with the organization's operating budget.

9. The classic French treatise on the "new thing," clearly influenced by LeRoi Jones (1963), is Carles and Comolli ([1971] 2000). At this writing, this important text, already available in German and Italian, still lacks an English translation.

10. Despite the fact that black experimental musicians had an enormous and lasting impact on Parisian cultural life, their activities are hardly mentioned in American historical accounts of the period (e.g., Stovall 1996), an omission that seems particularly curious given the congruence of these musicians' histories with Paris's traditional relationship with black expatriate artists and intellectuals. For an overview of the activities of black Americans in Paris that includes these musicians, one might try the difficult-to-locate Fabre and Williams (1996).

11. In Europe, AACM members developed collaborative and personal relationships with many residents and frequent visitors to the continent, including trombonist Grachan Moncur III; pianists Bobby Few, Mal Waldron, Dave Burrell, Burton Greene, and Cecil Taylor; trumpeters Clifford Thornton and Jacques Coursil; saxophonists Archie Shepp, Jimmy Lyons, Ornette Coleman, Dewey Redman, Kenneth Terroade, Arthur Jones, Steve Lacy, Robin Kenyatta, Byard Lancaster, Noah Howard, and "The Rev" Frank Wright; drummers Muhammad Ali, Philly Joe Jones, Arthur Taylor, Ed Blackwell, Andrew Cyrille, and Sunny Murray; and bassists Alan Silva and Earl Freeman. See Beauchamp (1998) for first-person reminiscences by Art Ensemble members about the Paris period.

12. Other musicians active in the French-based wing of the emerging European free jazz movement included drummers Francois Tusques, Aldo Romano, and Claude Delcloo (who originally invited the Art Ensemble to Paris); trumpeter Bernard Vitet; German pianist Joachim Kühn, then resident in France; saxophonist Michel Portal; and bassists Beb Guerin, Barre Phillips, and Jean-Francois Jenny-Clark. Perhaps the most thorough historical account of European free jazz activity can be found in Jost (1987). Again, the German-language text has not been translated into English.

13. This fact casts some doubt on Radano's assertion (1993:142) that the Paris trip occasioned the collapse of AACM unity.

14. A recording of the concert was released in two volumes (Creative Construction Company 1975, 1976).

15. The terms "Downtown I" and "Downtown II" were coined by my graduate student at the University of California at San Diego, Michael Dessen, and myself. For a recent collection of the writings of artists associated with Downtown II, see Zorn (2000).

16. According to Gary Giddins (1978), the NEA disbursed \$6,650,000 for symphony orchestras; \$3,400,000 for opera; \$310,000 for “contemporary performance of new music”; \$475,000 for “composers and librettists” (excluding “jazz” composers); and \$640,000 for all forms classified as jazz, of which \$80,000 went for “jazz composition” and \$100,000 for “jazz performance.” According to Pasler (1987), NEA music composition grants (and not surprisingly, the music panel assignments) tended to rotate among a small coterie of white academics. Gilmore (1993) notes that in 1987, “minorities”—African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans combined—received 6.3% of all grants for music. As Diane Weathers (1973) shows, many black musicians in New York, such as Reggie Workman of the Collective Black Artists, saw these discrepancies as a form of discrimination.

17. For a nearly complete collection of over five hundred pages of reprinted *Voice* articles on Downtown I, see Johnson (1989).

18. These included percussionists Ajaramu, Thurman Barker, and Kahil El-Zabar; saxophonists Douglas Ewart, Edward Wilkerson, Mwata Bowden, and Wallace McMillan; pianist Adegoke Steve Colson; bassists Felix Blackmon, Leonard Jones, and Brian Smith; singers Iqua Colson and Bernard Mixon; bassoonist James Johnson; trumpeters Frank Gordon and John Shenoy Jackson; and myself and Martin “Sparx” Alexander as trombonists. Among the members who had become established in New York were the trio Air (Henry Threadgill, Fred Hopkins, and Steve McCall) as well as the trio of Anthony Braxton, Leo Smith, and Leroy Jenkins.

19. See Goldberg (1988) for a standard account of this interdisciplinary movement away from traditional spaces.

20. Other new performers included pianist Anthony Davis, guitarist Michael Gregory Jackson, drummer Paul Maddox (now Pheeroan ak Laff), and saxophonist David Murray. Those newcomers were augmented by members of the existing New York experimental improvisation scene, such as pianist Dave Burrell; trombonists Grachan Moncur III and Roswell Rudd; drummers Jerome Cooper, Andrew Cyrille, Barry Altschul, and Sunny Murray; saxophonists Sam Rivers, Byard Lancaster, Ken McIntyre, Marion Brown, Frank Lowe, Jimmy Lyons, and David S. Ware; trumpeters Olu Dara, Ahmed Abdullah, and Ted Daniel; guitarist Bern Nix; bassoonist Karen Borca; and vibraphonist Khan Jamal.

21. These included pianists Michelle Rosewoman and Marilyn Crispell; saxophonists Jemeel Moondoc, Daniel Carter, Marty Ehrlich, and Charles Tyler; trombonists Craig Harris and Ray Anderson; drummers John Betsch and Ronald Shannon Jackson; guitarists James “Blood” Ulmer, Jean-Paul Bourelly, and James Emery; bassists Mark Dresser, Jerome Harris, John Lindberg, Wilber Morris, William Parker, and Mark Helias; clarinetist John Carter; cellist Diedre Murray; violinists Jason Hwang and Billy Bang; vibraphonist Khan Jamal; and singer Ellen Christi.

22. Poll information was obtained from *Down Beat* critics’ and readers’ polls between 1971 and 1980.

23. For an account of the “crisis of the listener” and proposed solutions relating to jazz, see Henry Pleasants (1955, 1962). As it happens, Pleasants, whose books championed jazz as the American music of the future, had served as the CIA station chief in Bonn in the 1950s (D. Martin 2000).

24. For example, while John Hammond recognized that Ellington, with his extended work, "Black, Brown and Beige" was "trying to achieve something of greater significance," the producer clearly felt that something more was needed from the composer: "No one can justly criticize him for this if he keeps up the quality of his music for dancing" (Tucker 1993:173).

25. A number of AACM members, including Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman, Wadada Leo Smith, Muhal Richard Abrams, Amina Claudine Myers, Anthony Braxton, and later Henry Threadgill and the present author, have engaged extensively with this mode of composition. An early public inkling of AACM engagement with pan-European experimentalism occurred with the 1966 Joseph Jarman/John Cage midnight concerts at the Harper Theater in Chicago's Hyde Park, which received a highly unfavorable review in *Down Beat* (Welding 1966).

26. See, for instance, the important interviews with African American improvisors published by drummer Arthur Taylor ([1977] 1993).

27. For instance, see Chatham (1992) and Nyman (1999). In the second edition of his canonical history of experimental music, Nyman is particularly defensive, even defiant, about the fact that the second edition made no effort whatsoever to redress the lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in the first edition. While admitting that a sequel to his book "would have to be less ethnocentric," Nyman maintains that were he writing the first edition today he "would *not* do it any differently" (1999:xviii).

28. For estimates of the Kitchen's 1980 budget, see Rockwell (1980).

29. Information compiled from Kitchen concert announcement mailers printed during my term as music curator (between September 1980 and June 1982) shows that the Kitchen's music program presented, among others, Tom Hamilton, John Zorn, Bertram Turetzky, Rae Imamura, Carles Santos, Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, Takehisa Kosugi, Stuart Dempster, William Hellermann, Eliane Radigue, Julius Hemphill, Anthony Davis, Julius Eastman, Michael Byron, William Hawley, Amina Claudine Myers, Arnold Dreyblatt, Gerry Hemingway, Robert Moran, Glenn Branca, Dick Higgins, Jackson MacLow, Ned Sublette, John Morton, Arlene Dunlap/Daniel Lentz, the Jamaican Music Festival, John Morton, Carl Stone, Trans Museq (Davey Williams and LaDonna Smith), Roscoe Mitchell, Peg Ahrens, Defunkt, Tona Scherchen-Hsiao, the Ethnic Heritage Ensemble (Kahil El-Zabar, Edward Wilkerson, and Joseph Bowie), Frederic Rzewski, Rhys Chatham, Ingram Marshall, Douglas Ewart, Muhal Richard Abrams, Robert Ashley, Diamanda Galas, Anthony Braxton, Gerald Oshita, and Joan LaBarbara.

30. For a thoughtful history of Marsalis and neoclassicism, see Porter (2002). For a forthright, first-person declaration of the purposes and strategies envisioned at the time regarding the promulgation of a revised canon for jazz, see Marsalis (1988). Herman Gray (1997) has advanced the notion that Marsalis's advocacy of a highly selective version of a jazz canon recapitulates a neoconservative version of the strategies of both prescription and resistance promulgated by the Black Aesthetic movement of the 1970s.

31. For further elaboration on these issues from a similar viewpoint, see also Piazza (1997).

32. As the saxophonist Jimmy Heath remarked, on the eve of a "Classical Jazz" concert featuring his music, "There were grants before, from the government, but

nothing like this. The budget, which, I might add, is probably minuscule compared to the classical budget, is still bigger than anything I'm used to, and Lincoln Center itself has an aura of prestige. It's all very helpful to musicians and to the music" (Watrous 1994).

33. For West, Marsalis, like Louis Armstrong, Ella Baker, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King, Jr., among others, is one of a new breed of "intellectual freedom fighters, that is, cultural workers who simultaneously position themselves within (or alongside) the mainstream while clearly aligned with groups who vow to keep alive potent traditions of critique and resistance." Going further, West exhorts such cultural workers to "take clues from the great musicians or preachers of color who are open to the best of what other traditions offer yet are rooted in nourishing subcultures that build on the grand achievements of a vital heritage" (1993:27).

34. Film and music scholar Krin Gabbard (2000) acidly comments that "Some of my more cynical friends in jazz circles have pointed out that the only musicians we see in Burns's finale are the ones with major-label recording contracts." However, the extensive sponsorship for jazz events at Lincoln Center has by no means been limited to media corporations.

35. For a contemporary view, see Small (1987).

36. For a description of "totalism," see Gann (1997).

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