

BETWEEN HISTORY AND HEARSAY

IMAGINING JAZZ AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY

PhD Dissertation

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PREFACE

I am not a musicologist. Although for some time I intended to major in music (even spending a year at the Department of Musicology at University of Copenhagen), literature and cultural studies became my chosen field in the end. From that scholarly background, I come to this study.

I am, however, a fan. Jazz has always been present at the margins of my listening, but only truly entered my life in my early 20s. It became for me an aesthetic framework wide enough to accommodate the same eclecticism I practiced in my readings – happily moving from Shakespeare to Dick Francis to Gogol, and from Armstrong to Pat Metheny to Don Cherry (I always did favor the trumpet). It was jazz that first led me to American studies and literature, following my natural curiosity into investigations of the culture that produced this wonderful music. So, I carry with me in my work the privilege and predicament of fandom: the privilege to be passionate about your work. And the predicament of becoming so invested in your field, your passion, that it can be difficult to take that mental step back, to remain coolly analytical in the midst of excitement - it is a constant balancing act.

Looking through some boxes in my basement a few months back, I came across an essay I had written in high school (while I was still a music major). It was on Miles Davis' musical development from 1947-54 with meticulous analysis of the tunes, musical examples both in the form of transcripts as well as on tape (before you just burned a CD). I remember my fascination with Davis' persona and my immediate disorientation upon the first hearing of the bebop material. I also remember how the logic of the music slowly unfolded as I listened over and over again, counting bars, sounding out chords on the piano. Remembering this, I suddenly caught a

glimpse of a pattern; those rare moments when you sense that there is some direction to the choices made in life. I am a great believer in the beauty of coincidence and relish in the general improbability of life. Nevertheless, the narrative desire is a strong impulse – and the sense of coming full circle immensely satisfying.

However, those of us who chose to dedicate disproportionately large chunks of our time to the study of jazz - or literature or culture - do so out of love and fascination, and the desire to make a case for one's particular musical or literary love affair is strong. But the subject matter is not necessarily served well by hagiographies and sermons. We owe it to ourselves and our chosen field of studies to strive towards a debate that critically engages the discourses that have become cemented; to attempt to dislodge them from time to time in order to open up possibilities of dialogue. As tempting as romanticizing may be, a certain element of pragmatism might serve us better – both in love and scholarship.

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...
And I sometimes feel
foolish
staying up late,
trying to squeeze some life
out of books and records,
filling the gaps
between words and notes

...

Lawson Fusao Inada

INTRODUCTION: JAZZ IS – AND JAZZ AIN’T

Jazz – even the word itself is a contested signifier, the etymological beginnings and definitions lost in apocrypha. A quick survey of various definitions and ideas of origin produces the following results: “Jazz” derives from 1) an African, or Arabic, or Creole word meaning to speed things up – or from the French word “jasér.” 2) a man called Jasbo, Jasper, or Razz, or Chaz who had a band. 3) a lewd term for various sexual activities - possibly deriving from jasm with allusions to “gism” (Europe; Kingsley; Merriam and Garner). Often, the choice of which version to ascribe to, comes down to politics of ownership and authenticity. The French-creole origin of the term can be used to advocate for a higher European stake and vice versa for a purely African same. Both positions, aside from being in their extremes profoundly essentialist, demonstrate a desire for narratives that produce authenticity in the form of origin.

Narrative is one of the primary devices through which we as human beings organize and explain experience and thought. It is also one of the most enduring and flexible strategies, producing material so rich and so varied that it can provide us with infinite texts through which we can try to

understand ourselves and the world we inhabit, by way of exegesis or catharsis. Narratives inform not only personal stories but communal histories on all levels, from the grand universal narratives to narratives that define and position smaller national, ethnic or cultural groups. Narratives allow for the construction of in-group coherence and make positioning and repositioning within a greater cultural, ethnic or national framework possible. But narrative also “describes an aporia between the inexplicable and the meaningful, a place from which to think about the representation of experience” (Shuman 10-11).

The recent proliferation of narratives on the jazz tradition is intimately connected with these kinds of strategies. It is safe to say that jazz since the early 1980s has experienced a significant shift of cultural position in the US, becoming a signifier of sophistication and innovation: it has become cultural capital. “Jazz is America’s classical music” became a rallying call for the US jazz community in the mid 1980s. In 1987 Congress passed Resolution 57 deeming jazz a “valuable national treasure” and what followed was a debate very much focused on the definitions of jazz – with both major and minor skirmishes along the borders of these definitions. As Scott DeVaux points out in “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” claiming the right to the history and definitions of the tradition is also a claim to power and legitimacy. However, in the process of defining the tradition, narrating its history, the jazz community is faced with the fact that so little of jazz history has been documented in the conventional sense. Most of the (his)stories in jazz have the character of anecdote and oral history. The major source of documentation in jazz is the recorded material, the sound of jazz, which is not only immensely varied and diverse, but also, for the most part, wordless. Thus, in order to create narratives that produce a sense of community and history, a discourse is built around the assumption that “some central

essence named *jazz* remains constant throughout all the dramatic transformations that have resulted in modern day jazz” (DeVeaux 528) and that this essence can be transposed into narratives, that “music alone, independent of the cultural matrices around it, can *mean*” (Tomlinson 247).

The present dissertation attempts to uncover a corner of that discourse: to investigate how various representations of jazz negotiate the field between the known and the assumed. I am not aiming to pass judgment – which representations are more accurate than others – but to uncover the how’s and the possible why’s and so’s. How is jazz represented? What are the reasons or strategies of the different representations? What are the consequences? I wish to argue that the last 20 years have seen a conscious effort to “imagine” a jazz tradition at the center of American culture by employing a discourse of canon, metaphor and myth and in the process lay down delimiters that invariably preclude dialogue as well as simplify the complexities and heterogeneity of the music. Finally, I also want to suggest that there are ways in which these closed definitions can be and are being engaged dialogically.

Theoretical Perspectives and Paradigms

The present work is situated in the interdisciplinary field between American studies and jazz studies. It grows out of the rising number of works in jazz studies in which the cultural formations both in jazz and surrounding jazz takes center stage. There has in recent years been a “new jazz studies” underway (as the title of one of the recent volumes in the field, *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies* indicates (O’Meally, Edwards, and Griffin 2004)) in which jazz has not only been approached through musicology or ethnomusicology, but through multiple disciplines reflecting the basic assumption that “jazz is not only a music to define, it is a *culture*” (2). Among

the titles and scholars that have provided inspiration and important insights are the aforementioned *Uptown Conversations*, the “prequel” to this volume, *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (O’Meally 1998), Krin Gabbard’s work in both his monograph, *Jamming at the Margins* (1996), as well as the two edited volumes, *Jazz Among the Discourses* (1995) and *Representing Jazz* (1995). Also Sherrie Tucker’s *Swing Shift* (2000) and John Gennari’s *Blowin’ Hot and Cool* (2006) have been strong models for a theoretical paradigm that not only situates jazz as a discursive space for alterity, but also investigates how alterity figures *within* the various discourses in and of jazz.¹

But the emergence of a jazz studies that went beyond the formalism of musicology towards a jazz studies embedded in the larger field of American studies can be traced back to especially the post World War II scholars and writers such as Marshal Stearns and Ralph Ellison. Also African-Americanists such as Melville Herskovits and Harold Courlander, whose focus on the transference and survival of African cultural elements in black American culture, assisted in the construction of an evolutionary theory of jazz. One that emphasized not only the African elements, but also the unique American circumstances that produced the art form².

Marshal Stearns was a primary force in the founding of The Institute for Jazz Studies and his work in *The Story of Jazz* (1957) helped build a methodology that widened the theoretical field to include sociology, anthropology, linguistics and American studies (Gennari 1993, 201). Ralph Ellison constantly insisted on reminding mainstream America of its entanglement with African American culture, placing jazz at the center of American mythology, making jazz the signifier of American democracy as

¹ I owe this insight to German jazz scholar Alexander Beissenhirtz and the excellent conference paper he presented at the 7th International Conference of the Collegium of African American Research in Madrid, 18-21 April 2007.

² See John Gennari, *The Politics of Culture and Identity in American Jazz Criticism*, ch. IV for an excellent discussion of this as well as the importance of Marshal Stearns.

“an art of individual assertion within and against the group” (Charlie Christian, 267). Likewise, Stearns “saw jazz studies as essential to an understanding of America civilization writ large” (206). As Gennari points out, much of this discourse entrenching jazz in the greater American narrative was deeply influenced by Cold War politics. Not only did jazz provide a trope for American democracy and an American “liberal consensus,” but it did so via a hybrid origin that encompassed geographical and cultural signifiers beyond US territory, thus positing jazz as “the universal cultural consensus” (1993, 208).

Lawrence Levine points out the interesting paradox behind making jazz part and parcel of American universalism when stating that “one of the results of creating a truly international culture is that you lose control over the criteria of judgment and categorization” (Levine 1989, 17). Thus, the recent proliferation in writings on jazz can be perceived as part of the motion to regain control over definitions and recontextualize jazz within an American setting. As such, one can roughly and very generally speak of two positions within jazz studies: 1) that which falls into the rhetorics of cultural hierarchies and American metaphors and 2) that which tries to engage these in a critical manner. Eric Nisenson’s *Blue, the Murder of Jazz* is an interesting example of how a critique of the canonizing of jazz becomes inflected with the pathos and emotion that the combination of metaphors of purity and jazz music evokes. For example stating on one hand, that using such terms as “the greatest” and “the most American” is problematic and then on the other insisting that “Ellington’s music is so deeply saturated with the true jazz spirit [that] it is virtually impossible for any band to play authentic Ellington” (Nisenson 1997, 90-91). Thus, Nisenson realigns himself with the exact same discourses of authenticity and purity that he intends to deconstruct. In the more universalistic end of the spectrum is Alfred Appel’s

Jazz Modernism (2002). Despite the sympathetic move to place jazz and modernism in the mainstream of American culture rather than within a “high art” position (Appel 8), Appel uses jazz in such a generic way that meaning is practically emptied out of it as signifier³.

I aim in the following to engage these types of discourse, the tendency to conflate terms of music with terms of myth, authenticity and purity, in a critical debate. Letting the dialogue and my perspective be informed by theoretical and critical tools from a variety of sources. Recent jazz studies provide a starting point, but from there I reach out to more general American studies, such as Lawrence Levine’s work, African American studies (Gates, Gilmore, Lott), Postcolonial (Bhabha), cultural geography (Cresswell, Massey), cultural theory (Anderson, Bourdieu, Bhabha, Eagleton), literary theory (Bakhtin, Gates), myth (Barthes), and canon (Herrnstein Smith). The central tenet that I pull from them all is the various ways in which we narrate and imagine ourselves, each other and our communities. Throughout, I consider the text the primary object that determines the theoretical perspective. There was no grand overarching theory to start with (and thus no schematic “theory chapter”), although I did have a starting hypothesis which, as it entered into a dialogue with the texts, evolved and grew.

When I first started out on this journey, I carried with me as a central idea or critical paradigm, something which I referred to as the *perfect metaphor*. This had originally evolved from my readings of jazz fiction and it signifies an understanding of the process of mythologizing and the erasure of dialectics as jazz is used in various discourses as a metaphor. Whether for a

³ Not to mention the interesting tendency to constantly emphasize (defend) the authenticity of white jazz musicians as if feeling a need to legitimize a claim to the music on equal terms with that of African Americans – and possibly taking it a little far when advocating for a “Jack Teagarden Robinson Day” without thinking to suggest a Louis ‘Satchmo’ Armstrong Day as well (182).

particular emotional pathology, a romanticist notion of the suffering artist, or those (American) doctrines of “democracy,” “freedom,” and “e pluribus unum,” jazz as such *is* the perfect metaphor. The hybridity of jazz, its contradictions and paradoxes provides a useful matrix that can be shaped into powerful tropes, often by simply focusing on whichever element of jazz that fits a given agenda or narrative. Thus emptying jazz of its contradictions and filling in whatever content that is appropriate or useful. But even when, or perhaps especially when, the paradoxes of jazz are the central point, when jazz as metaphor is used to signify diversity, or even better, diversity within unity, I would argue that the metaphor does not allow space for the contradictions and dialectics of history or jazz. Jazz seizes to possess its contradictions and dialectics and becomes simply another element in the grand narrative of – for example – the American mythology.

This function of jazz as a metaphor became particularly important in connection with my second paradigm of critical thought, one that evolved out of the first – the *imagining of communities*. Perhaps it was my position as a non-American reader, but I was at first struck by the persistency in the use of jazz as a trope in the construction of national identity, asserting an American universalism. Benedict Anderson provides the greater theoretical framework with his *Imagined Communities* (1991), pointing to the strong narratives that form the basis of national identities. It is only by narrating our common past that we come to perceive ourselves as nations. The metaphor is particularly apt in the imagining of a national community: Homi Bhabha points out in his essay “DissemiNation” that the language of the nation is metaphoric, transferring the meaning of belonging “across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people” (Bhabha 291-92). Closely connected to the metaphorical language of imagining, the nation or community is also the language of

memory. The past is a key protagonist in narratives of nationhood and community, producing both coherence and validation – the further back a community can establish ties to an “immemorial past” (Anderson 1991, 11), the stronger its *raison d’être*, it becomes the natural state of affairs. Thus, remembering the past, commemorating and celebrating as well as “forgetting to remember” (Bhabha 1990, 310) – that is the will to only remember what fits the imagined narrative of the Nation or community – is part of what propels these narratives forward. But as Nicola King also points out in her book, *Memory, Narrative, Identity* (2000), “is it impossible to recover the past ‘as it really was’” (8), making *re*-membering a continuous act of reconstruction.

Furthermore, the jazz community uses strategies of imagining and remembering in which jazz as a trope is brought into play, negotiating terms of authenticity and tradition. Paul Allen Anderson’s study of the Harlem Renaissance investigates the “intersection of music and social memory” (Anderson 2001, 4) and his conclusion on the connections between African American music – including jazz – and memory as “contrasting visions of possible and desirable futures fuelled divergent strategies for memorializing the musical past” (214) highlights the same contesting of definitions that this study seeks to uncover. In the jazz community, this is played out in a dialogue between the narratives of the universal and the local, the collective and the personal. Here, the third and last paradigm comes into play by considering *orality* as the privileged mode of representation within the jazz community. A number of factors come together to situate jazz within orality. There is the immediate connection back to an African American vernacular tradition carried forward through oral history and rhetorical strategies produced by orality. Anecdotes are ubiquitous throughout the discourses surrounding jazz, often shaped by these rhetorical strategies into exemplary

tall tales or outrageous “lies” as modes for exegesis and signifying. The lack of traditional “documentation” in jazz history, or rather the *nature* of documentation in jazz – the recordings, as well as the privileging of improvisation over notation – strengthens the connection between sound, voice and authenticity. The tendency to use terms of voice as an indicator of the musician’s individuality, the idea of jazz and particularly the solo as “telling a story,” all these aspects combine in constructing orality as a frame through which the jazz community can be seen imaging and narrating itself – remembering itself.

Texts, Contexts and Counter Texts

The texts that the present dissertation deals with cover a 20 year period between 1985 and 2005. This timeframe not only ties in with the rise of “America’s classical music”-discourse in the mid 1980s, as well as providing a sufficiently tight focus, but it also situated my research in a period starting in the midst of Reagan’s years as president and ending after September 11th 2001 (and for the jazz community perhaps more significantly after the devastating effects on New Orleans of hurricane Katrina in August 2005). If the post World War II discourses on jazz were influenced by cold war sentiments and the idea of Pax Americana, the last 20 years have seen a jazz discourse affected by the change from conservatism on the rise to an America faced with the effects of globalism, in terms of economy, foreign policy and climate change, possibly sensing the end of the American Century. The investigation of national and cultural identities must in this case also entail an investigation of “canons” because, as already pointed out, the struggle over definitions, the right (or the power) to claim the tradition, is one that reaches beyond the immediate and supposedly ephemeral sphere of art and far into the politics of identity.

Let me again point out, that the present project comes out of a cross-disciplinary background, situated in the interstices between jazz studies, American studies, and literary and cultural studies. This is reflected in the eclectic theoretical approach outlined above, but also in the choice of material. The three main chapters each deals with a different type of material, as I aimed to widen the scope and investigate trends of discourse in various settings. Still, I deliberately chose “texts” from within what could be called “the mainstream jazz community” – that is, texts that even by a broad American audience would be identified as related to or speaking for and about jazz. I made these choices because the discourses of nation, tradition and identity seemed particularly strong in this segment of the jazz community, and I was interested in investigating how it would situate itself in relations to these terms, both in-group and within a wider national context.

Of course, I am aware that the so-called “jazz community” is as heterogeneous, polyglot and paradoxical as the music itself and that there are a number of groupings within this sphere that offer alternative ways of imagining jazz – ways that to varying degrees go against or modify the grand narratives of nation and tradition. There is a growing transatlantic community whose visions for jazz carry strong connotations of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism and despite rumors of the contrary, free jazz has been growing since its inception, generating a vibrant community (mainly based in New York) that has found an audience with alternative rock listeners. But these communities also imagine themselves, occasionally employing some of the same discourses as those under investigation in this work. For example, when Phil Freeman in his book on the New York free jazz scene, *New York is Now!*, insists that John Zorn is not a jazz musician as he “follows no tradition” and his aesthetic is more

European rather than “anything American or truly jazz based” (Freeman 31-32).

Ken Burns’ documentary series, *JAZZ*, was chosen for the immediate impact it had, both within the jazz community and further afield. The controversy it sparked was the result of sharp divisions in reception, with an overall positive reception from the “mass audience” and an almost unanimously negative reception from within the jazz community.⁴ The critique centered on the omissions of both artists and genres, and it essentially demonstrated the conflict between the telling of national narratives and the narratives of a distinctive cultural group. In order to create a strong national narrative, the diversity of the jazz narrative had to be cut back.

The jazz magazine *DownBeat*, in contrast, presented material from *within* that same community that had criticized Ken Burns so severely. What these texts demonstrate most clearly is that even though *Down Beat* is a trade magazine, aimed at a mainstream jazz audience, division and differences abound and the magazine becomes a site where contesting definitions can be played out. Not only in the ways that the various meanings of jazz are constructed, but also how the national narratives are made to fit into these jazz narratives.

Finally, in the choice of jazz biography and autobiography lies the possibility to uncover the interplay between the personal and the collective. The last two decades has seen proliferation of jazz biographies and

⁴ The PBS audience is perhaps not what Bourdieu or Marshall McLuhan would deem a “mass audience” – it will certainly never reach the viewer numbers of commercial channels. However, *JAZZ* “debuted to an audience of 13 million viewers Jan. 8. [2001]” (Morris 82), a figure far beyond what jazz related events usually attract.

particularly autobiographies (Harlos 1995, 132).⁵ This is part of the same move towards defining jazz as for example the Ken Burns' series and Resolution 57 *as well* as the "New Jazz Studies" – albeit in different ends of the discursive field. But biography and autobiography also holds in interesting position in a larger cultural and literary American context. From Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin; over the slave narratives of Equiano, Frederic Douglas and Harriet Ann Jacobs; all the way to Malcolm X, Frank McCourt and Miles Davis – the American tradition of biography and autobiography has shaped what Justin Kaplan calls "a culture of biography" (Kaplan 1). Biography has provided a medium through which American individuals could name, define, and come to terms with the national character (Casper 2). Thus, in this study it functions as a reversal of the optics: starting with the individual and looking out towards both national and cultural connotations.

Exciting alternative texts and possibilities for even wider comparative work have presented themselves several times during my research and my computer has become a veritable graveyard of darlings killed – subjects and objects that simply did not make it into the final text. Of the many topics that fell by the wayside, I was particularly loath to let go of an investigation of the various education and outreach programs emanating from different institutions such as J@LC, JazzMobile, The Monk Institute, AACM, and the National Endowment of the Arts. However, just listing these make it clear that the scope would warrant a separate investigation. Another possible body of texts that presented itself was a reading of general jazz history books, such as Giddins *Visions of Jazz* and Gioia's *The History of Jazz*. And finally there is the continued use of jazz in the Jazz Ambassadors program in

⁵ Harlos notes this development in the period 1983-1993. But as quick search on Library of Congress' online catalogue for "Jazz musicians – United States – Biography" published between 1995 and 2005, provides well over 100 search results.

the U.S. Department of State, certainly a research subject with an increased relevance over the last 5-6 years of US foreign policy.

There are also certain matters that are not the object of separate investigations as they remain continually present throughout the analysis. One is naturally race – central to almost any reading of American culture and inevitable in readings on jazz. The strong black nationalist rhetorics of the 1960s and 70s and the Black Arts movement is perhaps no longer dominant; however, the move to position jazz at the center of American culture (high or vernacular) is on one hand tied in with Ellison’s advocacy for an understanding of American culture as inextricably linked with African American culture and the need for a recognition of this. On the other side of this is the fact that notions of authenticity in jazz are still connected to race, sometimes causing heated debates and defenses – on either side of the color line – of a particular musician’s eminence and whether the value judgment is (or should be) based on issues of color. As Berndt Ostendorf points out in his essay, “Is American Culture Jazz Shaped? African American Rules of Performance,” these issues often come down to the questions of origin and who “owns what part of American culture” and “the Manichean push and pull of the color line which tends to amplify the depth of the enigmas and the noise of the battles” (Ostendorf 268).

Another reoccurring subtext is gender. Jazz is traditionally perceived in terms of male musicianship (and female singers) and the surrounding discourses continue to be affected by this. For example, bands whose members are all women are still referred to as “all girl” or, marginally less condescending, “all women” whereas no-one would ever think of referring to Miles Davis’ second quintet as an “all male” group. Notions of femininity and masculinity in music are still informed by patriarchal constructs and the focus on women in jazz has been almost exclusively on singers (often with

the implicit understanding that singers aren't musicians). Although such books as Sherrie Tucker's *Swing Shift* actively seeks to redress this imbalance, there is still a strong male bias in place. In the case of both gender and race they are part and parcel of the issues of narrating community, tradition and nation that are the central theme of this study.

The main body of the dissertation is divided in to three chapters each dealing with the three different types of material selected. The first chapter looks at Ken Burns' documentary series, *JAZZ* from 2001. The series represents a very strong "master narrative" built around many of the topics that I investigate. Of course, doing a close reading of all 19 hours of film was beyond the immediate scope of the study (and very possibly beyond the patience of any reader). The chapter opens with a general introduction to the context and central issues of my analysis and then moves to a close reading of 3 different episodes: 1 – "Gumbo," 7 – "Dedicated to Chaos" and 10 – "A Masterpiece by Midnight." Episodes 1 and 10 have, as the first and last episode, the character of respectively introduction and summary. They provide the frame and the main themes for the entire series. Episode 7 sits at the center of the years covered by the series, staging two of the central climaxes of the series: the role of jazz in World War II and the emergence of bebop – almost as "point of no return." The last part of the chapter turns to the well over 20 transcripts of the interviews conducted for the series and made available on the PBS website. As a resource, these transcripts are invaluable, offering insights into the experiences and thoughts of musicians, critics and industry people. However, it is in relation to the series that the transcripts become particularly interesting, providing us with a glimpse of

the unedited version of what became the narrative in *JAZZ*⁶. Thus, the transcripts as a body can be seen as a counter-text that can be used to open up the series.

The second chapter deals with the jazz magazine *Down Beat* covering the general period under scrutiny: the years of 1985 and 2005. In order to create a stringent reading, I collected material both in terms of constants and variables. The constants are the monthly editorial (in the beginning of the period titled “On the Beat” and from 2002 “First Take”), the two yearly polls as well as minor reoccurring items as for example “The Question Is”⁷. The variables consist of various features providing a representative selection of articles and interviews on mainstream, fusion, and avant-garde. For the sake of focus I have organized my readings along three main themes that all correspond in one way or another with the issues of canon, community, and identity that this dissertation seeks to investigate. The first thing that struck me in my readings was the almost overwhelming tendency to create lists. Not just in the form of the two yearly polls, the Readers Poll and the Critics Poll, but at any given opportunity such as the end of year or at some anniversary are lists constructed, such as “the best albums of the year” or “the 50 all-time best blues recordings”. The lists serve a function, or several functions, of establishing a canon, building internal hierarchies, and determining authenticity – all relating to the imagining of a community. So does the matter of geography, which forms the second focal point in my readings of *Down Beat*. Again, hierarchies and authenticity are central – here in the connection with Nation and with place as a basic component in

⁶ Of course, “unedited” is a term that should be read with some reservations as there is always an element of editing going on. For example in the choice of transcripts that was included on the website, those where the interviewee perhaps did not agree to publicize the transcript, as well as elements of (implicit) editing in the questions asked and the answers given. Some of these matters will be dealt with in the chapter.

⁷ I did not use the reviews in my readings as the brief format lends itself very poorly to close readings.

establishing a sense of community. Third and last in the chapter is an investigation of the way that musicians and the community in *Down Beat* negotiate the discourse of tradition as a site of contested definitions – particularly using orality as means of framing tradition and community.

The final chapter of the dissertation starts off in the sphere of orality, with the autobiography of Miles Davis strongly staging this as central to the narrative. The genre of autobiography and biography concerns itself with the same quest for truth and facts as documentary and reportage, but shifts the attention from the community to the individual, thus providing a clearer focus for the interplay between those personal acts of memory and the collective past. So as not to render any comparisons completely inconsequential I have chosen works that all center on the same individual. The choice of Miles Davis came down to several factors: One was that Davis' autobiography was undoubtedly the most interesting of those published within the period of the study. In recent years a growing number of jazz autobiographies demonstrate a renewed interest in the genre. As Christopher Harlos points out in his essay, "Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics," this can be seen as connected to the general change taking place in jazz writing, particularly representing a desire from the musicians to "seize narrative authority" (134). Second, Davis' status in the jazz community has periodically been very controversial – he has become a symbolic "site" for fighting out some of the contesting definitions of what is and is not jazz. Third, once I started looking into the various biographies, the material on Davis presented texts that employed biographical conventions in alternative ways. The chapter is constructed around my readings of three recent texts: Miles Davis's *Miles: The Autobiography*, John Szwed's *So What: The Life of Miles Davis*, and *Miles Davis and American Culture*, a collection of essays, interviews and poetry edited by Gerald Early. This last

book stands somewhat outside a strict definition of biography, but it still engages with the genre and offers an interesting alternative to the classic biographical narrative⁸. Throughout my readings of all three texts, issues of voice/orality, community and imagining jazz in terms of metaphor and memory remain constant concerns. These issues function to broaden my readings. Thus, working my way towards an understanding of how jazz is imagined in a space of contested definitions, in terms of nation and in terms culture, in terms of the past and in terms of the future, and in terms of a discourse of aurality as well as orality in the space between the sound as document and inimitable moment – between history and hearsay.

⁸ I am of course aware of the two very substantial biographies by Ian Carr and Jack Chambers. Both fall outside the period and/or the geographical/cultural parameters of this study (American culture, 1985-2005); however, they are both present as contextual readings to the chapter.

THE PERFECT METAPHOR: KEN BURNS' *JAZZ*

The broadcast of Ken Burns' documentary series *JAZZ* in 2001 is a prime example and perhaps culmination of some of the positions and discourses I have been discussing in the introduction. Six years in the making and with almost 19 hours of film,⁹ it is an extremely ambitious production that took its beginning when the debate over the definitions of jazz was in full motion. According to Ken Burns himself, he knew next to nothing about jazz when he started working on the film (Burns 2001) and the fact that he felt compelled to embark on such a large scale production is proof of the prominence the debate on jazz as an American art form had reached. The series begin in New Orleans at the end of the 19th century, and a large part of the production focuses on jazz as an historic art form, devoting the better part of four episodes to the era of the Big Bands and Swing and just one (the last) episode to jazz after 1960.

Throughout the film, the origins of jazz are attributed to a cross-current of white, black and Creole cultures. However, one of the main points of criticism that various jazz writers aimed at the series was the detection of an underlying current of thought that defines jazz as an essentially (and almost exclusively) African American art form.¹⁰ Thus, “forgetting to remember” a number of white contributors to the tradition, or by portraying white musicians as either great business men, as masters of popular culture,¹¹ as alienated from white mainstream culture and not really “white.” Or finally, simply opportunists like Nick LaRocca, the man who made the first jazz recording with his Original Dixieland Jazz Band, who is

⁹ With Wynton Marsalis as the Senior Creative Consultant.

¹⁰ See Brown (2002), Hadju (2001), Ratliff (2001), and Francis Davis (2001).

¹¹ Benny Goodman is placed as a man of popular culture across from Duke Ellington as the man of high art.

clearly portrayed as a thief in his insistence that jazz was an exclusively white music. Lee B. Brown also points to this pattern in his article “Jazz: America’s Classical Music?” when he states that “there is a muted pattern to the exclusions. It was impossible for the series to avoid Benny Goodman given his central role in the swing era. But white figures are too often either ignored or treated as alienated outsiders.” (Brown 2002, 158) As for Benny Goodman, the final ruling on him falls in the section on the “battle of bands” between Benny Goodman and Chick Webb’s (black bandleader) Swing bands: Webb is judged to have “outswung” Goodman and authenticity remains with the African American artists.

Ken Burns clearly states the intent to use jazz as a way of looking at social issues in the history of America, and thus jazz is said to be “about race, always race”. To call for a history of jazz that omits the issue of color seems a naïve refusal to look the realities of American culture in the face, and in dealing with these issues Ken Burns pursues a noble cause. LaRocca’s claim remains a highly unsympathetic one, but rather than narrating the story with LaRocca as the neatly stereotyped villain, a speculation on the forces in play, the complex back and forth across the color line between attraction and repulsion would have served the film better. Steven F. Pond lists in his article, “Jamming the Reception: Ken Burns, *JAZZ*, and the problem of ‘America’s Music,’” several responses in the ensuing and often heated debate on *JAZZ* to this element of the film. Critique focuses on the film as social history at the cost of style history and a representation of jazz “*in its own terms*.” But as he rightly points out, all music has been created in one form of social context or another, and to “chronicle jazz music “in its own terms” *is* to chronicle it in its cultural and social context.” (Pond 2003, 40-42)

What is at stake here is not only the issue of race, but the general issues always at stake when attempting to establish a canon. Its exclusions become as important as its inclusions. Canons are thought of as definitive (the series, with the simple title “JAZZ” and the overwhelming 19 hours of television certainly do implicitly claim to be a “definitive and complete version”) and any work or artist left out of it implicitly becomes “less worthy.” The works and artists included are consecrated and imbued with cultural capital. However, especially 20th century scholarship has shown that canons are social and cultural constructs that tend to privilege those dominant in a society and silence those already marginalized. Furthermore, as Barbara Herrnstein Smith has pointed out so clearly in *Contingencies of Value*, the main function of canons – attributing value to works of art – rests on the false assumption that such value is constant and non-contingent. However, the value of a work of art (whether in literature or music) “is not the property of an object *or* of a subject but, rather, *the product of a dynamics of a system*” (Smith 1988, 15). These dynamics arise out of several sets of variables, thus making for the contingency of artistic value – and canons.

Creating a “counter canon” where the culturally and socially marginalized African American culture is given privilege will not eliminate the fundamental contingency of the model. The possession of the power to evaluate also provides possession of history; thus, it is continually recycled. Canon formation is an intrinsic element in the narration of history – in this case the narration of the history of jazz, or rather, the history of *American jazz*. The series is actively taking part in the “writing” of national history and identity and the biases, the inclusions *and* exclusions, are part and parcel of that process. As Homi Bhabha says, “National memory is always the site of the hybridity of histories and the displacement of narratives” (DissemiNation 319).

One type of bias is apparent in the overwhelming focus on the individual talents of “great men” and their pivotal performances and/or recordings. These talents are to a large extent portrayed along the lines of various myths on the Artist as Victim/Genius/Mad/Miserable.¹² To be middle class and happy, or even just content, immediately disqualifies you from the hall of Jazz Greats. As David Hajdu in his review of *JAZZ* in *New York Review of Books* points out, the model of ‘Great Men’ is at all times invested with cultural value:

As if to leave no doubt that jazz masters deserve the same reverence long accorded Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and other composers in the European tradition, Burns presents his subjects in the terms he would have found in a music textbook three or four decades ago. There is an artistic hierarchy, headed up in descending order by Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker; in fact, Armstrong is directly compared to Bach repeatedly, and Ellington to Mozart at least once. [...] The ranking being chronological as well as qualitative, a paternalistic narrative is implicit; each master left his innovations—swing time, tone color, abstraction—for the next to pick up and advance. (Hajdu 2001, 48)

We are presented with a line of artists and artistic products (recordings) that are deemed important, either as examples of the typical or (more often) as seminal: where “jazz was changed forever.” As pointed out in the Hajdu quote above, a linear development of style is constructed. Floating above all this, two figures are present through the entire film as the two greatest of the Great Men: Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. The importance of neither Ellington nor Armstrong should in any way be contested. But both Armstrong and Ellington continuously re-appear throughout the series, at times when the immediate relevance seems unclear, and Ellington gets the very last word in the last episode. The use of Ellington and Armstrong in this way serves to gloss over the multi-linear existence of jazz. Ellington and

¹² Also Hayden White’s ‘emplotments’ of historical narratives comes to mind. In the case of *JAZZ, Tragedy and Romance* seems to be the preferred *modus operandi*.

Armstrong does not stay valid because all music stays valid, but simply because they are above and beyond time. They belong in the realm of mythology and canons. Smith points to the tendency to make works timeless by focusing on other aspects of a work than those rooted in a specific time or period. In turn the canonical work starts creating the very criteria for aesthetic value that it and others will be evaluated by. “Nothing endures like endurance” (50).

The above bias towards a canonical model of “great men” and their masterpieces implies both inclusions and exclusions as the series makes a clear attempt to counter a white hegemony. However, it is replaced by a masculine one. The few women artists that are portrayed in detail in the film are described with almost masculine characteristics: tough, hard drinking and hard living. Billie Holiday and Bessie Smith, but also Ella Fitzgerald is described as not pretty and lacking in femininity and especially the description of Billie Holiday (in Episode 7) produces ambivalence by on one hand alluding to her toughness and on the other describing her drug addiction in terms of weakness and dependency on men. Of the women that appear as talking heads only three are musicians: Joya Sherrill, Abbey Lincoln and Cassandra Wilson.

On the PBS website for *JAZZ* in the “Jazz in Time” section, a separate last chapter written by Sherrie Tucker has been granted to women. With this marginal position it is understandable that the chapter focuses to a large degree on feminist theories and why women should be included in the history of jazz in the first place.¹³ As Tucker notes in *Swing Shift*, her monograph on all-women Big Bands in the 1940s, jazz history has

¹³ Sherrie Tucker was initially asked to provide research on women in jazz for the series itself, but was subsequently told that “this is not the story we are looking to tell”. She was in doubt whether to pull out of the production entirely, but decided that if she didn’t provide *some* material for the website, chances were no one else would (Conversation with author, 13. Oct. 2005).

traditionally been written by white males. No doubt this has had an effect on the inclusions and exclusions of narratives, both in terms of race and gender (Tucker 2000, 14). Her text on the PBS *JAZZ* website constitutes a counter narrative. The paradox lies in the fact, that as enlivening and enlightening as the more theoretical approach may be, it is not how all the previous chapters approach history and the tradition of jazz within history, and it serves to set women apart from the rest of the community and culture. Thus, female jazz artists are placed outside of history and the rest of the jazz tradition.¹⁴ Finally, although the text focuses on instrumentalists, of the 22 audio samples that PBS provides, 18 are with or about vocalists. All these factors combine in rendering any effort to profile female instrumentalists a somewhat quixotic venture and underlining Tucker's statement in *Swing Shift* that in "the gender division of jazz and swing labor, the normal configuration is for men to skillfully operate instruments and for women to perform privatized popular versions of femininity with their voices and bodies" (6).

The high degree of cultural capital that jazz has been associated with over the last 20 years, and of which *JAZZ* is both a product and advocate of, also establishes a dichotomy between art and commerce. Throughout the film, this is emphasized as one of the key tensions in the world of jazz. The first example is of the black musician Freddie Keppard who turned down what was probably the first opportunity to record jazz, fearing that others might "steal" his ideas. He is positioned in opposition to the (white) Original Dixieland Jazz Band and Nick LaRocca who instead became the first to record jazz and reach a mass audience. The binary oppositions continue

¹⁴ For example, Lil Hardin-Armstrong receives just a passing mention in this chapter and is left out completely on the bio of Louis Armstrong, although she was a strong performer, arranger and composer and wrote and arranged several of the pieces that are used in the film to illustrate Louis Armstrong's career and talent.

along double lines of race and commerciality: Paul Whiteman v. Fletcher Henderson, Benny Goodman (or even more commercial, Glenn Miller) v. Duke Ellington. There is even a brief discussion in Episode 5 on whether it is not a little dubious to call the music of the Swing Bands jazz as much of it was “pretty commercial,” thereby indicating that the minute the music becomes commercial, it ceases being jazz – ceases being art.

The double lines of opposition, art/commerce equalling black/white, are correctly based on the fact that the structure of American society until very late in the 20th century did not allow the same level of commercial success for African Americans as for white Americans. As the film moves up through the decades this starts to dissolve; but the dichotomy between art and commerce remains. With the advent of bebop we are told that jazz musicians wanted to be perceived as artists rather than entertainers, indicating not only the now familiar idea of art v. entertainment/commerce, but also that previous jazz musicians, by virtue of being entertainers, were not artists. In order to fit for example Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington in to this type of discourse unscathed, various qualifiers are set in place: First of all both Armstrong and Ellington’s high level of artistry is stressed again and again and second, they become proponents of a type of entertainment that *transcends* the mere commercial interest by linking it to metaphors of freedom and sophistication.

The dichotomy briefly reverses itself when the free jazz movement and parts of John Coltrane’s work is discussed as being (too) avant-garde and alienating the audience. But it returns when the film turns to Miles Davis’ fusion years and the bands that followed in his wake. The fusion bands are described as being more concerned with getting a slice of the commercial cake than creating art. In the film’s final analysis, jazz is cemented as an art form in opposition to commercial popular culture –

where jazz differs by requiring “real courage and aesthetic belief.” Again, the shift that jazz has made within the cultural field over the last two decades is reflected in the evaluation of previous traditions. As jazz is increasingly associated with the “classical” and as it gains cultural capital, a shift also occurs in the position from which the previous traditions are viewed. From this new position, entertaining or even just making a (good) living from your art becomes incompatible with art itself. The film creates binary oppositions between popular culture and “art for arts sake,” placing jazz in the second of these categories. However, it is clear that the form of jazz that Ken Burns’ film promotes does not hold the position of what, for instance, Bourdieu would call “restricted production” – a position autonomous of market place and institutionalized consecration (Bourdieu 1993, 15-16). One of the obvious examples is the previously mentioned evaluation of free jazz as alienating the audience. Here the art form seems to become too autonomous and moves outside the desired range of *JAZZ*. But since the film has already set up the dichotomy between art and commerce, the criticism of free jazz centers not on its autonomy from the marketplace, but rather on its clear break with accepted and recognized form. We are left with what we, in Bourdieu’s terms, could call “Bourgeois art.”

The whole idea of art as being irreconcilable with commerce rests of course on the same western/patriarchal ideas of high art and cultural capital that David Hajdu points to in his objection to the Great Men approach of *JAZZ*. The series can also be seen as adopting a double stance, as it on one hand refutes commercialism and on the other is a large scale production designed to reach a mass audience. The end product of *JAZZ* is not just the series itself when it was aired, but also the CD’s, the books, the DVD’s, and the website (it almost comes as a surprise that there are no t-shirts). An article in *Billboard* lists CD titles coming out of the series as occupying “18 of

the 25 positions on the current Top Jazz Album chart” (Morris 82). It is clear that the series was not just educational, but seen as a marketing opportunity. Mike Haney of CDnow¹⁵ is quoted in the same article for expecting sales to continue to reach a broader mass audience as “Ken Burns always puts a very accessible, American feel to all his pieces and this helps to elevate the category overall” (83). Thus, connections are made between accessibility, “American,” and elevation, implying not just the “all American way,” but also the desire to invest cultural signification in the greater national narratives.

This is not a new strategy. John Gennari describes very similar strategies in the marketing of *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* in the 1970s, using “a discourse clearly calculated to convey the idea that jazz consumption, at least in this form, can increase one’s stock of cultural capital” (Gennari 1993, 46). Also Catherine Gunther Kodat points in her paper “Conversing with Ourselves: Canon, Freedom, Jazz” to what she calls a “canonization of culture industry itself,” where the emphasis, both in productions like *JAZZ* and in educational programs like the ones Lincoln Center travels with, is on appreciation rather than music education or analysis (Kodat 2003, 15-17). These ideas again point toward art for arts sake and the charismatic producer/artist. According to Smith there is a traditional tendency “to isolate or protect certain aspects of life and culture, among them works of art and literature, from consideration in economic terms [having] the effect of mystifying the nature – or, more accurately, the dynamics – of their value” (33).

The strategy of *JAZZ* in stating authenticity, aesthetic unity, and coherence is historically a prominent one in the canon-building process and so is the idea of autonomy – of art for arts sake – that is reflected in the

¹⁵ One of the first internet music retailers – it is now owned by Amazon.com.

dichotomies of art/commerce or art/entertainment. But this is also a profoundly bourgeois strategy. Peter Bürger points out that the emergence of a philosophy of aesthetics coincided with the emergence of a bourgeois society in the mid 18th century, where the “solitary absorption in the work is the adequate mode of appropriation of creations removed from the life praxis of the bourgeois” (Bürger 1984, 48). This is the basis for the idea of the autonomy of art and what is significant is that the concept, although it is a historically developed concept, implies an ahistoric position. If art is truly autonomous it is also not bound by society and its historical development, it becomes the “nature” of art to be in and for itself. This position creates an interesting paradox within *JAZZ*. The film claims historicity and it continuously uses jazz to explain or interpret social history in the US. But when, for instance, Ellington and Armstrong appear throughout almost the entire series, they are cut loose from any immediate historical context as the two great mythological fathers of jazz. Thus, the film underscores the autonomy and timelessness of jazz. The different categories of consecration at play in the film also sustain an ahistoric position. “Classical” implies in today’s usage something that remains relevant and valuable regardless of time and place, and the “canon” implies a number of works whose significance is a constant. But as Smith states, “to define aesthetic value by contradistinction to all forms of utility [...] is, in effect, to define it out of existence” (33).

Faced with this, it is perhaps not surprising that the series turns to the use of jazz as a starting point for a social history. The timeless aesthetic value of jazz somehow becomes analogous with a national historic value, creating one of those instances of ambivalence in nationalistic discourse that Bhabha discusses. The main character of *JAZZ* is not a jazz musician – it might not even be jazz music. The main character of the series is “history”

or “the past,” and more importantly, the American past. In the culture and discourse of jazz lie an expectation, and sometimes a demand, for constant innovation. The form that foregrounds the soloist and his/her improvisational inventiveness has produced a culture that only reluctantly acknowledges music with a high degree of notation. If an orchestra takes it one step further and tries to play earlier arrangements note by note, occasionally even down to the solos, criticism tends to focus on the lack of improvisatory elements as abandoning the central element of jazz.¹⁶ This same criticism has been directed towards *JAZZ*: in focusing on the earlier years of jazz, there is a loss of contemporality, a central quality of the improvisatory character of jazz. The film is saturated with nostalgic and romantic nationalist discourse, and jazz is the vehicle through which we approach the past. But historicity looms in the neatly evolutionary and homogenous grand narrative. In fact, it is exactly by using jazz as the interpretive locomotive, the metaphor that illuminates the history and development of America, that *JAZZ* makes mythology out of history.

Roland Barthes explains how myth never suppresses the original meaning of the original object, but rather empties it or distances it. It “transforms history into nature” (Barthes 1972, 129). Not only does the thought of “art for arts sake” that runs more or less implicitly through *JAZZ* rely on this same mechanism. By making a metaphor of jazz – even one that signifies diversity, or even better, unity within diversity – the history that is to explain jazz and that jazz is to illuminate becomes myth. The metaphor does not allow space for the contradictions and dialectics of both history

¹⁶ Interestingly, in vocalese, where lyrics are added to jazz orchestral instrumentals, there are no connotations of un-inventiveness or lack of originality. First of all the change of “instrument” implies a shift in form and the adding of the lyrics a shift in content. There is an elements of “Signifying” (as in Henry Louis Gates’ definition of the concept), especially as the lyrics often take shape as loving pastiche and tribute to the original composer/instrumentalist.

and jazz. Again, Barthes' definition of myth provides us with an accurate description:

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (143)

JAZZ does exactly this: it fails to foreground the complexity and the contradictions as nothing more than the metaphor of America's "diversity within unity." By using myth, the American past is at the same time placed in mythical time – "an immemorial past" (Anderson 1991, 11) – that provides:

a charter for the present day social order; it supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better, more supernatural reality of initial events. (Malinowski 1982, 146)

Perhaps this is also why the film devotes so little time to jazz from 1960 to the present. It is seen as a Babel of styles, not corresponding with the series' neatly evolutionary model or the simplicity of myth. It cannot contain a scenario where every form of jazz that ever has "evolved" (with only a couple of exceptions) continues to co-exist alongside any new development of the form, all continuously in dialogue with one another.

MYTHOLOGICAL BEGINNINGS: EPISODE ONE

The first episode of Ken Burns' *JAZZ* serves to not just narrate the beginnings of jazz, but provides the paradigm for the series as a whole. The

first 10 minutes of the episode function as a classic filmic “exposition” introducing the key issues to the viewer as well as establishing a common “now” from where the actual story can start: It opens with the camera panning across a B/W still of New York City by night (a birds eye view of the Times Square area), and we hear Louis Armstrong playing “Stardust.” The picture then shifts to another B/W still, this time of Louis Armstrong and as the camera zooms out on the still, a voiceover (Wynton Marsalis) enters: “Jazz objectifies America ... It is an art form that can give us a painless way of understanding ourselves.” The camera then cuts to an interview situation with Wynton Marsalis. The shot is a classic head shot (from upper chest) usually referred to as a “talking head”¹⁷. As the music fade, Marsalis goes on to talk of jazz as a place where musicians come “together to improvise art” and to “negotiate their agendas.” He emphasizes dialogue and “conversation in the language of music.”

The camera cuts to a sequence of B/W film clips. The sequence starts with the blurry image of a train moving, and then comes a whole series of clips of mainly audiences and people dancing/doing the lindy. On the soundtrack we hear a piano intro. The train is a signifier of speed and modernity, but the jazz savvy will know that the image corresponds to the music: the intro to Billy Strayhorn’s “Take the A-Train,” played by the Duke Ellington Orchestra. A few seconds into the music and film clip we hear a new voice (which we will come to recognize as the narrator of the film): “It is America’s music ... Born out of a million American negotiations.” The narrator begins a series of binary oppositions along the lines of race, class, religion and politics and concludes: “It is an improvisational art, making itself up as it goes along – just like the country that gave it birth ... It

¹⁷ The film makes frequent use of the “talking heads” and I will come back to the function of these later in my analysis.

rewards individual expression, but demands selfless collaboration.” The narrator emphasizes the ever changing character of jazz while it stays rooted in the blues, its tradition and innovation – at this point the rhythm section (drums and bass) joins the piano. The narrator goes on: “It has always reflected Americans ... All Americans ... At their best ... Above all, it swings.” Here the entire horn section comes in, underlining the last sentence.

Next we are presented with three consecutive talking heads: Wynton Marsalis, Gary Giddins and Albert Murray. Marsalis opens with comments on jazz as celebrating life in its full range, including sexuality. Giddins speaks of jazz as “the ultimate in rugged individualism,” and Albert Murray calls jazz “the creative process incarnate.” At this statement a single horn from the orchestra breaks out into a piercing finale and the camera cuts to the graphics of the title of the film: *JAZZ*.

Again the camera cuts back to B/W footage, this time a sequence of stills of “jazz greats.” On the sound track we hear “Body & Soul” (played by Benny Goodman) and the narrator tells us of the “remarkable men and women who created jazz,” coming from “every walk of life,” but who could all “create art on the spot.” The narrator launches into a list of jazz musicians, naming them as their pictures appear on the screen, giving one-line-characteristics of them. Duke Ellington for instance was the middle class boy who grew up to be “America’s greatest composer,” Billie Holiday (the only woman on the list) the “troubled daughter of a Baltimore housemaid [who] routinely transformed mediocre music into great art,” Charlie Parker “the son of a Pullman chef from Kansas City, Missouri, who came to New York to launch a musical revolution, proudly lead it for a time and then destroyed himself at 34,” and Louis Armstrong the “fatherless waif” whose “unrivaled genius helped turn jazz into a soloist’s art, who

influenced every singer, every instrumentalist, every artist who came after him.” The sequence of stills comes to rest at a still showing a birds-eye view of the inside of a club, with band and audience. As the camera zooms out on the still, we hear the voice of Samuel L. Jackson reading a quote from Ralph Ellison: “And yet, who knows very much of what jazz really is, and how will we ever know until we are willing to consider everything which it sweeps across in its path.”

The camera cuts to a new series of still, sepia toned daguerreotypes of New Orleans and the narrator speaks of New Orleans as a melting pot as the sound track changes and the music becomes more folkloristic with a heavy African influence. The narrator states: “Jazz grew up in a hundred places, but it was born in New Orleans.” The sequence of stills continues to change as the narrator talks of New Orleans as cosmopolitan with the mix of African and European influences, and of the slaves as the “creators of jazz.” The camera then cuts to the title graphics of the episode, signifying the end of the introduction: “Episode One: Gumbo.”

Thus through the “exposition” of Episode One, *JAZZ* introduces us to the central issues as well as central characters and narrators of the story. The introduction establishes the paradigm of the film, its discourse. The B/W film clips and stills not only carry an indexical or metonymic function, as for instance the initial still of New York, but also a metaphoric function. Christian Metz points out in *The Imaginary Signifier* how “the symbolic is to be found at the intersection of the metaphorical and the metonymic” as “the play of metonymy helps metaphors emerge” (Metz 200-201). When the metonymic image of New York fades into the image of Louis Armstrong, he ceases to be simply Louis Armstrong and becomes, on the one hand, an index for jazz musicians in general and, on the other, the embodiment, the metaphor of “a painless way of understanding ourselves.” The clip of the

train comes to signify movement, speed and modernity, while the music (“Take the A-Train”) holds it fast in a metonymic position.

The music very much serves to comment or underline both the images and the words spoken. It gives emphasis to the word “swing” as the horn section fires up under Strayhorn’s tune, and “Body & Soul” (a love song) suddenly receives connotation of the romantic ideal of the artist as it accompanies images and words on “jazz greats.” Homi Bhabha explains how the language of the nation is that of metaphor, transferring the meaning of belonging “across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people.” But at the same time it is “the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy [...] that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories” (DissemiNation 291-2). In addition, there is the actual narration and comments. If jazz is to “objectify” anything, it must necessarily become an object. And if jazz is an object, then it can no longer be a fluid and dialogic art form under constant change. Although categories of dialogue, negotiations and conversations are brought into play, the discourse of the film makes every effort to make jazz fit the part of the perfect metaphor for America. The usual American mythologies of individualism, innovation, democracy and freedom are evoked, and the romanticist notion of the artist/genius is combined with connotations of the American Dream and “self made man”¹⁸. The constant oscillation between metaphoric and metonymic language signifies the ambivalence of national discourse, as Bhabha points to; an ambivalence that in this case is rooted in the insistence on (contingent) aesthetic values as historic and national meanings.

¹⁸ In the aforementioned list of “the men and women who created jazz,” only one woman is actually present, Billie Holiday.

The structure of Episode One progresses in a forward linear motion and apart from the first few subchapters it centers on individuals¹⁹. Beginning with Buddy Bolden it moves on to Jelly Roll Morton, then to Sidney Bechet etc., each standing on the shoulders of the ones that went before. Wynton Marsalis talks of Jelly Roll Morton using the sound of Buddy Bolden, “putting it in his music.” Likewise, Freddie Keppard is defined in terms of a “trumpet lineage.” This of course supports an evolutionary model, but also provides us with main and supporting characters. The structure of the narrative follows a traditional model:²⁰

- The *exposition*.
- A *presentation* of the main protagonists and their environment. In this case early New Orleans and its African/African American population. Especially the African connection serves to create ties to that “immemorial past” that Anderson lists as one of the key elements in the imagining of a nation (11). Jazz (and America) is suddenly not simply an entirely new form, but a redefinition and repositioning of traditions that loom out of ancient cultures.
- An *elaboration* where themes and conflicts become crystallized. On the historical side we are told of the civil war, abolition, and reconstruction and musically this is accompanied by minstrelsy, ragtime, and the blues – with emphasis given to the blues.
- A *point of no return* from where the story must be followed to the end. It is often difficult to establish, but usually it is at a point where the ending is pre-empted: we are told of Buddy Bolden, “the man who

¹⁹ The first subchapters deal with times and historical circumstances where no records of individuals were kept - especially not if they were black individuals.

²⁰ Not surprisingly, as Anderson points to the development of nationalism as concurrent with that of the form of the novel.

started the big noise in jazz” and the “first to have his own sound”²¹. His entrance into the narrative very much pre-empts Louis Armstrong’s at the end of the episode.

- An *escalation* where possible conflicts are intensified with moves and countermoves, attacks and counterattacks: first the bourgeois condemnation of “America falling prey to the collective soul of the negro” and what writer Gerald Early refers to as “Africanizing American culture,” upsetting both white and black middle class. This is countered by the Castles, the clean cut white couple that made ragtime and the popular dances acceptable to the bourgeois whilst promoting James Reese Europe’s orchestra and music.
- A *climax* that presents the crucial test of our protagonists, usually leaving one or the other victorious. In this case, the first jazz recording. Not by black trumpeter, composer and bandleader Freddie Keppard, whose due it really was, but by the white Original Dixieland Band led by Nick LaRocca who “until the day he died [...] would insist that his music and all jazz music had been an exclusively white creation.”
- And finally the *denouement* where we come to rest at the happiness or despair of the protagonist or the moral conclusion of our narrative: this would be Wynton Marsalis’ closing comments on race, mythology

²¹ What of course makes this interesting is that only very little documentation of Buddy Bolden exists. There are no recordings and only a single faded photography. All other “facts” are based on oral narratives. In this respect Bolden actually becomes the perfect canonical figure. Smith argues that a canonical object remains so as long as it performs a desirable function (47). The interesting thing of course is that no one knows exactly the nature of Bolden’s work and/or its function. Thus it can be ‘read’ whichever way is desirable. Anderson points to this as an element in the creation of national communities when for example “more and more ‘second-generation’ nationalists, in the Americas and elsewhere, learned to speak ‘for’ the dead people with whom it was impossible or undesirable to establish a linguistic connection” (198).

and America: “Race is like the thing in the old mythology you have to do for the kingdom to be well [...] it is always the thing you don’t want to do [...] where you must confront yourself [...] Jazz music is at the centre of American mythology and it naturally deals with race [...] in this nation it [the monster] *is* race.”

As this is a series, we are in addition left with what could be called a “cliffhanger,” the hook that will get us to watch again next week. In *JAZZ* this is consistently referred to as the “Coda,” staying with the music terminology. The sound of Louis Armstrong’s trumpet emerges, we see a still of a street all lit up, and we hear the narrator telling the story of a little 11 year old boy getting arrested on New Year’s Eve 1917 for firing a gun into the air to celebrate the New Year. He is put in the colored waifs’ home. We now see a photo of a group of young black boys and as the camera zooms in on one of them, the identity of the boy is revealed: it is Louis Armstrong, called “Little Louie” who “one day would transform American music.” Cut to end credits...

The documentary form is increasingly influenced and inspired by other genres in the media, and *JAZZ* uses the traditional model of the narrative with great success. Of course, *JAZZ* is not a movie made for the cinema or even a fiction drama series made for television. The traditional narrative structure is less clear cut than what you will see in those types of media products. Other modes also inform the structure of the episode. One such mode clearly takes its inspiration from the subject matter: the constant interchange between the B/W footage and the talking heads create an antiphonal movement, a sort of call & response structure. However, rather than creating a dialogic or heterogeneous effect, a closer look at the two elements show the aesthetic and functional homogeneous character of the way the call & response form is utilized here.

The stills and film clips are combined into a montage, but a montage of tradition rather than modernism, as the film seeks to create coherence and continuity instead of fragmentation and discrepancy. The images are governed by the aesthetics of the black and white photography. Even when the film uses images from a time before the photographic age, as in the watercolors of New Orleans, the coloring stays pale and sepia-toned. To create a narrative flow, the footage is arranged in thematic sequences, such as people dancing, city- and townscapes, workers loading and unloading in the docks.

The stills in particular are used in ways that evoke an approach of traditional narrative filmmaking rather than techniques grounded in modernistic montage. We are not simply *shown* the stills, they are *filmed*: the camera pans and zooms across the images, focusing the viewer's attention and in the process making small narratives of each image. The function of the stills changes from being documentation to being mimetic and/or diegetic tools. One clear example is seen in the two different uses of the almost identical stills. Both stills depict a parade (possibly Mardi Gras). The first one is shown in the subchapter on Buddy Bolden "The Big Noise," during Wynton Marsalis' demonstration of the effect of the beat called "the big four" (where the second and fourth beats of a march are accented). Here the camera zooms out from a smaller group of musicians to show us the whole picture. We are shown the second still a little later in the same chapter, as the narrator tells the story of how Buddy Bolden in a fit of paranoia walks out of a parade. But this time we are not simply shown the image in a full shot. Instead the camera zooms in on the lonely figure of a musician (possibly holding a horn) walking away from the camera. Although we have already been told that only a single blurry photo of Bolden exists (which we are shown), it is clear that we are to perceive of the musician in

the still as the tragic figure of Buddy Bolden. Thus, the first use functions as an indexical or metonymic image, pointing to parades and marching bands; exchanging Marsalis words and playing with the photographic image, but not adding meaning. However, the second use of this type of image takes on a metaphoric and diegetic function/meaning, illustrating not just the words of the narrator, but an implied set of paradigmatic notions.

Juxtaposed with these B/W images, both stills and film clips, is the talking heads footage. This is not archive material, but interviews filmed (in color) for *JAZZ*, and they comment or expand on what we are shown in the archive footage. As mentioned earlier, the constant interchange between the B/W footage and the talking heads leads the thought on to an antiphonal or call & response pattern. Mostly, sequences of up to 10 minutes of stills or film clips (B/W) with either music or the narrator's voiceover will be interspersed by clips of the interviews, never more than a few minutes long. In connection with jazz, the call & response structure is particularly evocative as it implies the connection with the vernacular and oral tradition of work songs. The potential of this form lies in both its social and dialogic aspect. Call & response, or antiphony, is in its origin a community driven form in which the individual and the group work out and through the task at hand – be it physical or spiritual. Paul Gilroy argues that it has the potential for “a democratic, communicarian moment” and “symbolizes and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships” (Gilroy 79). This very accurately points to the possibilities (and lack of absolutes) of the dialogic relationships in antiphony. But he also suggests that the true potential lies in the “performer dissolving into the crowd” (200), thus erasing the significance of the individual voices as both distinct and in continuous conversation of cultural difference. It is, however, exactly what happens with the call & response form in *JAZZ* as the

aesthetics of the interviews ties them together not only with each other, but also with the B/W footage and the greater narrative in a homogenous unity.

All the interviewees are shot on a fairly neutral background or occasionally a background that is somehow indexical to their functions (the historian/scholar in front of bookcases, the musician in a studio) and all are shot with a classic head & shoulders shot.²² What is more important is that all are filmed with the same sepia filter that not only gives all the interviews the same tone, but also softens the shift to the B/W footage, creating coherence. In addition, the shift is rarely abrupt: the voices from the interviews often start as voiceovers over the B/W footage after which the camera cuts to the interviews, creating continuity. The comparatively shorter duration of the talking heads clips strengthens the sense of them only being short bursts of “scat” or riffs, embellishing on the greater narrative of jazz²³, but without the signifying prerogative of riffing. They are, in a sense, the performative element, the individual voices. Juxtaposed with these is the pedagogical of the national narrative, the stills and narrator in combination that document the chronological passing of time. Bhabha speaks of this alignment of the performative and the pedagogical as an ambivalence in the narration of the nation where the “scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects” (DissemiNation 297).

The main narrative force of the episode resides with the speak or what I have referred to as “the narrator.” The clear hetero-diegetic narrative voice

²² All except Stanley Crouch, who is mostly in a full body shot. This is probably for practical reasons as he moves and gestures a great deal as he talks, but it also (along with the fact that he is filmed by a table in “Small’s Paradise,” a jazz club in NYC – that is away from a more neutral or even scholarly setting) reinforces any connotations we might have of Crouch as the riotous critic.

²³ The same can be said of the occasional quotes from for instance Ralph Ellison or Rev. Adam Clayton Powell.

guides us through the events, not just giving us their chronology, but interpreting them. Rather than entering into a contrapuntal relationship with the “text”, the images are more often used to illustrate the word, be it a quote, talking heads or the narrator. Like the previous example on Buddy Bolden, meaning is added to or superimposed on the stills and film clips. Anderson talks of the photograph of the (unrecognizable) infant self as exemplifying the process of recording apparent continuity while simultaneously emphasizing its loss from memory (204). In order to make the pictures make sense, it is necessary to frame them in a (biographical) narrative. In the same sense, the stills of an unremembered past in *JAZZ* are made points of reference in a historical (biographical) narrative of the music – and, as previously pointed out, the nation. Sound is also used to reinforce the sense of a traditional narrative, particularly the “real” or “effect” sound. As the stills themselves have no sound, the film occasionally shows them with sounds that are related to scene of the still. For instance, with the still of an auditorium, we hear the murmur of an expectant audience; with the stills of loading docks, we hear the sounds of wagons and carts, chains and pulleys; and when we hear of the end of the Civil War it is accompanied by the sound of canons firing. Thus, the mimetic effect is strengthened.

As for the music, in *JAZZ* it would be natural if jazz was the focal point that everything else leans toward, but in fact the *music* very rarely is given space or time on its own. The music functions as either paraphrasing or specifying the events of the narrative. For those familiar with the greater jazz song book, the recognition of a specific tune will often add another dimension to images and word. For instance, in the earlier example of “Take the A-Train” or when “Body and Soul” accompany the list of “remarkable men and women who created jazz,” leaving connotations of giving your self to the music/art *body and soul* – in a traditional romantic fashion – in its

wake. At other times, the music serves as (audio) illustrative examples of whatever genre the narrative is dealing with; be it blues, ragtime, operatic arias or minstrel. It all serves to create a rather cluttered soundscape. Indeed, the music becomes most prominent when it is no longer there. When a particularly good “nugget” from either a quote or an interview needs to be underlined, the music and other sounds stop and the words stand alone.

The music as well as the images and the talking heads are all tied together in a grand narrative. The ambivalences that arise between metaphor and metonymy, between the performative and the pedagogical, and the documentation of an unremembered past are all glossed over. The title of this first episode is “Gumbo” – implying the mix and spiciness of the dish where each individual ingredient retains its distinctive flavor and texture. But here, it is possible to imagine that someone has been a little too generous with the okra: From the exposition, over the traditional narrative structure, the passing up on the possibility to create dialogue with the call and response pattern, and to the hetero-diegetic use of music; Episode One presents not an idiosyncratic, polyphonic, modernistic bricolage, but an epic: The myth of “The Birth of Jazz as America’s Music.”

REMEMBERING CHAOS: EPISODE SEVEN

The title of Episode Seven “Dedicated to Chaos” seems to simultaneously contradict and underline the final conclusions of the core story of the episode, or rather stories. Dealing with the years 1939-1945 there are 3 central narratives: the advent of bebop, denoted by the ascent of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, the function of swing and the swing orchestras

during WWII, and the matter of segregation both in the armed forces as well as in the public sphere.

Generally, many of the structural and formulaic elements encountered in Episode One are recurring throughout Episode Seven. The call and response pattern between B/W footage and talking heads is maintained, so is the use of effect sound accompanying stills and also the way that stills are panned across or zoomed out (or in) on, in order to create movement and narrative. But there is one significant difference in structure between Episode One and Seven. Where Episode One followed the single line narrative of the birth of jazz, using a traditional model of narrative and plot, Episode Seven breaks up the structure and produces several parallel plotlines. These stories are each other's "meanwhile," a concept Benedict Anderson develops in order to explain how the print media, the novel and the newspaper, affected conceptions of time (1991, 24). Instead of the "simultaneity" of religious world-order time comes the idea of "homogenous, empty time" where the protagonist of the novel or ones fellow citizens all of a sudden can be *imagined* doing other things, living their lives, while ones own self moves through time in chronological forward motion. Structurally, the first plot or narrative of Episode Seven is the story of "the birth of bebop," framing its meanwhile, the story of "jazz going to war" and as those two narratives shift back and forth, the issues of race relations during the war years appear in both, often functioning as the narrative cohesive.

Even in the exposition, the Bebop narrative frames the WWII and the focus is on the lonely genius of Charlie Parker, the madcap brilliance of Dizzy Gillespie and the rebellion and anger of the bebop generation. Parker is introduced, much like Louis Armstrong was at the end of Episode One, as an unknown and anonymous young boy from lowly beginnings "playing

whenever he got the chance.” True to the model of the romantic creator/artist we are told of the defining moment, the artistic breakthrough, and even given a precise description of the setting. The camera cuts to a still of Charlie Parker, panning from a close-up of his hands on the saxophone up to his face.²⁴ On the soundtrack, Parker enters with a fast-paced solo and the narrator describes how “Parker discovered a new way to create a solo... based not on the melody, but on the cords underlying it.” The narrator then quotes Parker saying “I came alive [...] I could fly,” and the camera cuts to a birds-eye view of NY by night. Next we hear the voice-over of Gary Giddins: “I think genius ultimately is unknowable. We are never gonna really understand what makes a Mozart or a Schubert any more than we are gonna understand where an Armstrong or a Parker come from.” The allusions to flying and the birds-eye view of New York tie in with Parker’s nickname, “Bird.” But by moving from Parker’s hands, over his face and finally out over the lights of New York, we also move away from the man, hovering over a multitude of shimmering light that will only turn into fragments if you move in on them again.

That same “unknowability” is stated in the portrait of Dizzy Gillespie. After a brief introduction on the youth of Gillespie, the camera cuts to talking head Wynton Marsalis: “There’s no sense in even listening to him [Gillespie], ‘cuz nobody will ever play like him.” Marsalis proceeds to play an example of how a phrase might sound with “regular” jazz phrasing and how then Gillespie would phrase it. He follows with the comment, “I mean, what *is* that!?” Again it seems we are faced with the inexplicable, regardless of the fact that Wynton Marsalis obviously *has* listened, intently, to Dizzy Gillespie’s playing and understood enough to be able to emulate it.

²⁴ The image of Charlie Parker’s hands returns with variations again and again throughout the episode. They are naturally the hands of the creator, the hands that was capable of such virtuosity, but they also seem cut off from the man, autonomous.

To further underscore the inexplicable in especially Charlie Parker, who in this episode becomes the central figure of the “bebop revolution,” a quote from Ralph Ellison is used. The quote is culled from Ellison’s review of *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker* (Reisner):²⁵

Many of the bare facts of Parker’s life are presented in the useful chronology, but it is the individual commentator’s embellishments on the facts which create the mythic dimension. Bird was a most gifted innovator and evidently a most ingratiating and difficult man – one whose friends had no need for an enemy, and whose enemies had no difficulty in justifying their hate. According to his witnesses, [*he stretched the limits of human contradiction beyond belief. He was lovable and hateful, considerate and callous; he stole from friends and benefactors and borrowed without conscience, often without repaying, and yet was generous to absurdity. He would be most kind to younger musicians or utterly crushing in his contempt for their ineptitude. He was passive and yet quick to pull a knife and pick a fight. He knew the difficulties which are often the lot of jazz musicians, but as a leader he tried to con his sidemen out of their wages. He evidently loved the idea of having a family and being a good father and provider, but found it as difficult as being a good son to his devoted mother. He was given to extremes of sadism and masochism, capable of the most staggering excesses and the most exacting physical discipline and assertion of will.*] Indeed, one gets the image of such a character as Stavrogin in Dostoevsky’s *The Possessed*, who while many things to many people seemed essentially devoid of a human center – except, and an important exception indeed, Parker was an artist who found his moments of sustained meaning and meaningful integration through the reed and keys of the alto saxophone. It is the recordings of his flights of music which remain, and it is these which form the true substance of his myth.” (Ellison 1995, On Bird 263-264)

Using only the part quoted in *JAZZ*, the emphasis lies on the contradictions and incomprehensible actions of Parker, strengthening the myth of the “unknowable genius.” The full quote, on the other hand, emphasizes how that myth is formed, although one could argue that Ellison exchanges one myth with another – that of the unifying principle of art. The quote receives additional impact from its juxtaposition to the comment on Louis Armstrong immediately preceding it. Arwell Shaw, bass player in Louis

²⁵ I am quoting the whole paragraph, indicating the part used in *JAZZ* with italics in square brackets.

Armstrong's All Stars band, in voice over explains how Armstrong projected "such great artistic emotion. He didn't have a great voice, but in his heart and soul he was a giant." Armstrong's unsophisticated, but soulful approach is positioned opposite Parker's technical brilliance and de-centeredness.²⁶

The quote also lists all the occasions when Parker would be aggressive, emphasizing the antagonism that is part of the mythology surrounding the bebop generation. They are portrayed as iconoclasts, "a group of defiant young men, [...] questioning some of the most basic assumptions of jazz." The chapter on Minton's Playhouse in New York highlights the elements of underground and rebellion, talking of the "cramped and dingy club" that would "attract the most adventurous and dissatisfied musicians in jazz." There, the narrator tells, musicians could be "free of the regimentations of the swing bands" and quotes a musician referring to the (commercial) swing bands as "phony music" and expressing the wish to "play for yourself," reestablishing the dichotomy of commercialism v. art for arts sake. Later on, Gary Giddins refers to Parker's way of improvising over the cords as "wiping the slate clean of all the clichés of the swing era." Finally, great emphasis is also given to the battling and antagonism between musicians and different generations of musicians with for instance Jackie McLean speculating that Parker, Gillespie and their peers "wanted to play something the older musicians couldn't play."²⁷

Thus, the internal war in jazz is not just juxtaposed with the external WWII, but also reflected in the structure of the episode where the story of

²⁶ Yet another myth. Armstrong's technique as a trumpet player *and* a singer was highly sophisticated – as testified by several people in Episode Two.

²⁷ This is an allusion to the "cutting contests" in jazz, where musicians take turns soloing. In the process they try to outdo and "Signify" on each other, often by repeating but slightly changing a phrase played by the musician that came before. It is however a misunderstanding that these 'battles' rests on antagonism. As Gates point to in his definition of Signifying: "'Making fun of' is a long way from 'making fun,' and it is the latter that defines Signifyin(g)" (Gates 1989, 68).

“the birth of bebop” is juxtaposed to the story of “how swing won the war.” And through both these runs the theme of the racial war in America. The film strikes here a nuanced tone. Demonstrating the paradox of, on one hand, jazz as representing democracy in the war against fascism and, on the other, the fact of all-pervading segregation, in the armed forces as well as in the general American public sphere. A. Philip Randolph is quoted on the “fighting on two fronts” and the closing of the Savoy Ballroom in 1943 is placed in clear racial terms with a quote from Adam Clayton Powell as “Hitler has scored a Jim Crow victory in New York.” Even the rise of 52nd Street as the center for jazz is connected with race issues, although the contention, that jazz moved out of Harlem because even jazz musicians found it too dangerous to play there, grossly simplifies the complex economic, social *and* racial factors at play. 52nd Street – or “The Street” – was both a free market²⁸ appropriation of a music and entertainment that had proved a viable (if moderate) economic success, as well as a remarkably defined geographical and socio-geographical space for a gathering of musics, cultures and ethnicities.

Across all of these plots, the music seems to step further into the foreground than in Episode One. As mentioned, in the first episode the music functioned more as a backdrop or mood-setter to the narrative speak or interviews, and occasionally as examples, its absence more marked than its presence. This explains why the foregrounding of the music – music playing uninterrupted – seems so strong in Episode Seven.

Underlining (and taking its title from) the subchapter on race relations is the sound of Josh White singing his protest blues “Uncle Sam Says.” The first chorus forms the introduction and second chorus as well as an

²⁸ Which in the US at the time would be synonymous with white (bourgeois) capitalist.

extended bridge continues while the narrative voice tells the story of the segregated army. As this ends Josh White's words and almost a full minute of music for the last two choruses make the final statement:

Got my long government letter, my time to go,
When I got to the Army found the same old Jim Crow
Uncle Sam says, "Two camps for black and white,"
But when trouble starts, we'll all be in that same big fight.

If you ask me, I think democracy is fine,
I mean democracy without the color line.
Uncle Sam says, "We'll live the American way,"
Let's get together and kill Jim Crow today. (Quoted in Wald 2001)

Another instance occurs in the sequence on Roy Eldridge. As he launches into a solo, talking head Gary Giddins explicate how Eldridge's sound was "an extremely personal sound," how it had a "human quality," a "cry," a "roughness of edge" to it²⁹. You could "hear all the effort that goes into it." This last comment is voiced over a B/W still of Eldridge and it is followed by almost twenty seconds of uninterrupted music. Twenty seconds may not seem much on the written page, but when considering that the average TV commercial spot rarely runs for longer than thirty seconds, twenty seconds is a fairly substantial amount of time in modern media. It is clear that the bebop movement's insistence on the music *in and for itself* as primary to any entertainment value, its foregrounding of jazz as an art form, establish a corresponding shift in the paradigm of the film. This shift also emphasizes the connection between orality and jazz. Eldridge's sound is consistently referred to in terms of the personal and in terms of voice. The individual musician's sound is central in jazz as part and parcel of the

²⁹ Here again Armstrong is set as the measuring stick to which Eldridge's sound is antithetical. Armstrong's sound is described as "brilliant" and "golden" with the "fullness of life" in it.

demand of improvisation and distinctive style, and in the mythology of jazz this became even more so with Bebop³⁰.

In the “jazz goes to war” plotline, however, the music is given considerably more time. There are two examples of both more than one minute of uninterrupted music. The first one appears in the chapter called “Soldiers of Music.” The effect sounds of airplanes and the radio broadcast declaring the US’ involvement in WWII from December 1941 initially accompanies images of bomber-planes and Pearl Harbor. As the sound change to Glenn Miller’s signature tune, “In the Mood,” the narrator pronounces how “jazz would go to war too and swing helped remind the men and women of the armed forces of home.” The music then runs uninterrupted for *one minute and twenty-one seconds*, accompanied by stills and film clips depicting swing bands playing for dancing and lindy-hopping armed forces. When the narrator resumes he quotes Down Beat Magazine for calling the musicians in the swing bands for “soldiers of music.” This is followed by the voice over of Gary Giddins (still accompanied by the footage of entertaining bands): “I think the swing era and all those great band leaders of that period reminded Americans at a time when they were willing to be reminded of this, of what was unique about the country, of what a democracy was.” Giddins then go on to how many of the leaders of the big bands were either Jewish or black. The camera cuts to the interview situation and Giddins continues:

And it, it, it reminded everybody that there was something special about this country and when the war started it became even more underscored because the war, in a sense, was about, you know, ethnic cleansing. And, and jazz became identified, it epitomized the American spirit. The spirit of freedom and swing and, you know, we are a young vibrant nation. The

³⁰ Of course, it is possible to argue that this shift does *not* signify a departure from the bourgeois strategies previously discussed as its focus on Eldridge’s deeply personal sound stays within a romanticist discourse of the gifted artist/individual.

way we dance represents us. The way we listen to music represents us. The whole, the whole fact that you could have a serious art music that was also a showmanship music, an entertainment music. This was purely and uniquely American. This was not going to a concert hall and sitting there in your dress suit listening to virtuoso musicians. This was going out there and being part of the music through dance and even the way you listened. Your bodily movements, your, your finger snapping, you pat, the patting of your feet.

The discourses of nationalism are here conflated with those of art. “Democracy,” “Freedom,” and “Swing” and the youth of the nation are juxtaposed with the war in Europe – the old world – and its themes of ethnic cleansing (and implicitly, lack of freedom, democracy and swing). Interestingly, Giddins does not seem to adhere to the dichotomy of art v. commerce/entertainment that otherwise is maintained in the series. Instead, he focuses again on a dichotomy between old and new world music appreciation. The old world signified by the stuffy atmosphere of the concert hall and the new world by the participating appreciation that the swing bands called for³¹. But the focus in the film remains on the “serious art music,” evident by the context of the next case of uninterrupted music.

The chapter called “Finding Eachother” in Episode Seven opens with an image of Duke Ellington at his piano, progressing into film clips and stills of people dancing. The sound of Duke Ellington and his Orchestra playing continue uninterrupted for one minute and seven seconds. The music and the space it is given emphasizes the connective and emotional force of the music. Stanley Crouch (initially as voice over, then talking head) uses the unorthodox but effective simile of the making of lemon meringue pie to explain the intangible elements in Duke Ellington’s music: How Ellington

³¹ Of course, one could argue that much music of the old world and the “stuffy concert hall” at the time of its birth also was entertainment. If we for example consider Mozart, certainly a great deal of showmanship was involved. Furthermore, the recent showcasing of, for instance, Duke Ellington’s music in the concert hall constitutes that very same development: from active to passive appreciation.

created the best in music and how “nobody else will be able to do as well, even if told how and knowing the ingredients” and “so the best thing to do is just to appreciate it.”

Although using a simile of the commonplace and vernacular, Crouch is still indicating that the creative act lies outside the realm of rational understanding. This is further underscored by the chapter’s focus on the collaboration and friendship between Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn over a period of almost 3 decades. Strayhorn and Ellington met in 1939 and in *JAZZ* the emphasis lies with the musical, creative and personal connection between the two. Talking head Mercedes Ellington speaks of a mutual love and how “the joy of them finding each other was the core of their mutual creativity. They brought out the best in each other.” Joya Sherril talks of a “musical marriage,” Gary Giddins calls Strayhorn Ellington’s “alter ego” and talks of “collaborative pieces where you can’t tell whose hand is leading who,” and finally Mercedes Ellington closes the chapter:

[...] I think that only the two of them knew what their relationship was like. People now are trying to interpret it. I don’t think they can. I don’t really think [they] honestly can, because up to the point of meeting Billy Strayhorn I think that my grandfather was a very lonely person. On the musical level. There was no one he could communicate to on that level. And if you can imagine, what if Mozart had somebody like that? It was, it would be such an opening. It would be such a joy to be able to not necessarily say something but just write a note and have somebody else write a note and you write a note and then it’s all the same thing, you know, it’s like communicating with just feelings, with just music, with just music. They communicated through music.

The discourse of “art for art’s sake” becomes invested with a romantic discourse of love and “Wahlverwandshaft,” and the creative act takes on mystic proportions. Again it is Barthes’ definition of mythologizing that seems the most apt: as the mystic experience lies beyond explanation, it contains the “simplicity of essences.” It holds no contradictions or dialectics,

and the collaboration between Ellington and Strayhorn, and the music that came of it, becomes legend as it is incorporated into the grand narrative of *JAZZ*.

However, Ellington remains the towering figure, who performs the impossible task of both keeping a big band on the road as well as composing “masterpiece after masterpiece; music that would rank among the greatest of all American compositions.” The by now familiar American universalistic discourse is once again conflated with bourgeois connotations of art. Ellington’s improbable ease at composing (doing it whenever and wherever), combined with his reserved nature and simultaneous “uncanny understanding” of human nature, constructs a man of mythic proportions. The a-historicity of it all is underlined as the episode departs from the various storylines and spends considerable time detailing Ellington’s leadership and the psycho-dynamics of his orchestra. The narrative is only brought back on track as Ellington’s suite *Black, Brown and Beige* comes to represent the ongoing move in jazz and America towards freedom: both in terms of breaking the restraint of the 3-minute recordings and as chronicling the African American history, from slavery, through emancipation and towards the New Negro.

This propels the narrative back to the central plotlines and the back-and-forth of meanwhile time and space. *JAZZ* returns to the war in Europe and the music’s function as metaphorical freedom when it becomes a sign of resistance in France,³² by virtue of being a form from a black culture – carrying with it not just connotations of anti-racism, but probably also a host

³² Not without another example of American chauvinism, though, when the narrator states about the French jazz scene that “because they could not see American musicians in person, they looked to their own home grown performers instead” (meaning Django Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli), overlooking the hybridity of the form that not just allows, but privileges such creolized forms as “gypsy jazz”. It is up to French film director, Bertrand Tavernier to point this out some minutes later.

of more or less stereotypical notions of black culture. And as jazz wins the war of symbolic action in Europe the narrative winds to a close by returning to the US and the war still being fought there along the color line. Dave Brubeck remembers, with obvious still-fresh pain, the sorrow of returning with his de-segregated wartime band to a segregated US and his personal abhorrence of all that this system stood for. There is a sense of futility and sadness as well as quiet dignity in this moment, and the shift to the final scenes of the episode seems all the more abrupt as mushroom clouds unfold and Charlie Parker enters with “Bird Gets the Worm.”

The sign of the times is the acceleration in technology and as well as music – a loss of innocence as the Bomb is dropped. Parker’s recording of “Ko Ko” is put in direct connection with what is rather euphemistically called “the surrender of Japan.” In the episode’s final analysis, Bebop becomes the metaphor for the dedication to chaos that a lengthy quote from Ralph Ellison’s essay “The Golden Age, Time Past” implies. In the passage quoted, we are left with a sense of an absolute break from tradition and a move towards a more less ordered sense of the world. As the quote continues, it touches on an understanding of the place for the tradition in the new, but the sense of loss remains – if not of tradition then of memory. But the entire essay is also about the impossibility of memory. About how a shift in paradigm is never neat and linear when you are in the midst of it and how “the enduring meaning of the great moment at Minton’s took place off to the side, beyond the range of attention” (Ellison 240). As time passes, only fragments remain and “the dry facts are too easily lost in legend and glamour” (242).

The dedication to chaos that the quote and the title of the episode pins on such men as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie seems only a true reflection in that glamour of the iconoclasts, because surely, Parker and

Gillespie was still looking for order although a different kind of order than the one that they came out of. But the “chaos” becomes in a paradoxical way the order that creates coherence throughout the episode. Not just the perceived iconoclasm of bebop, but the confusion of WWII and the contradictions of America. The question remains whether “chaos” as a metaphor is at all chaotic. As Ellison’s definitions on the contradictions of memory, history and legend reminds us:

Afterward the very effort to put the fragments together transformed them so that in place of true memory they now summon to mind pieces of legend. They retell the stories as they have been told and written, glamorized, inflated, made neat and smooth, with all incomprehensible details vanished along with most of the wonder – not how it was as they themselves knew it. (239)

THINGS FALL APART: EPISODE TEN

As the narrative time closes in on the time of the narrative moment, the act of remembering becomes entangled in the present, with all the “incomprehensible detail” fully intact. Although the tenth and last episode returns to the more traditional format of a single line narrative, this episode, more than any other in the series, is filled with cracks and fissures along the neat lines of narrative. As Bhabha points out, “the historical necessity of the idea of the nation conflicts with the contingent and arbitrary signs and symbols that signify the affective life of the national culture” (DissemiNation 293).

Again the major themes are struck upon in the exposition. The romantic idea of the artist is again present, along with its canonic implications. So is the idea of jazz as representative of democracy and the

nation. But this time juxtaposed with what the exposition refers to as a “tower of Babel:” the warring fractions and styles in jazz. As the episode opens, the narrator talks of America in the 1960s as “entering an era unlike any it had seen before.”³³ The times are described as turbulent and full of conflicting trends, and jazz “would include it all, but in the process it would become a tower of Babel, bitterly divided into schools.” It is clear that from the standpoint of *JAZZ* the explosion of styles – or rather, the co-existence of previous styles with every new one that jazz gave birth to in the second half of the 20th century – is seen as problematic.³⁴ It raises and complicates the question of what jazz is and is not, and this in turn threatens the existence of jazz: “[...] for many people, the most important question was whether jazz – the most American of art forms – would survive at all.”

What follows must be seen as the films counterweight to this threat to jazz. Footage of the Timex All-Star Jazz Show³⁵ with such “jazz greats” as Ben Webster, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, Gene Krupa and Duke Ellington playing serves as a reminder of “what jazz is.” Talking head Wynton Marsalis makes the by now familiar connection between jazz, America and democracy, talking of how in “American life you have all these different agendas” and jazz is an attempt “to achieve harmony through conflict.” The camera cuts back to the footage of the all star band and Marsalis in voiceover continues to explain how jazz is like an “argument

³³ Throughout the series such discursive markers as “unlike any before,” “the most ... ever,” “never again” and “the best... ever” occur again and again, creating a sense of history’s inevitability.

³⁴ Above and beyond these skirmishes stand Armstrong and Ellington as the pantheon of jazz – constant and ever relevant. Especially their passing (respectively in 1971 and 1974) is given an interesting significance, which I shall return to a little further on in this chapter.

³⁵ Timex hosted a series of jazz shows during the 1950s. On this show, the last from 1959, Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie did a wonderful version of “Umbrella Man” together (to my knowledge the only piece they ever recorded together). A great example of trans-generation and trans-genre collaboration.

with the intent to work something out” a way of negotiating “your individual expression in the context of [a] group, and how this is “exactly like democracy.” Scott DeVeaux points out of the tendency to gloss over the differences of styles in jazz history in his essay “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” connecting them all in an organic model (530). Here, Marsalis’ use of the simile “democracy” achieves the same goal. It presents jazz as a community that incorporates any differences or disagreements into the larger organic whole.

What is then striking is how the multiplicity of styles in the 1960s and 1970s are seen as a threat to jazz’ continued existence, rather than an expression of the just celebrated diversity of American culture. How the arguments of what jazz is or is not between different “schools” in jazz is referred to as bitter, rather than as an attempt to work out the different agendas, to “achieve harmony through conflict.”³⁶ Again, the ambivalences of writing the narrative of the “natio”³⁷ materialize and perhaps can be explained by what Barbara Herrnstein Smith refers to as the *asymmetrical* explanation for diversity in value judgments:

...specifically, to explain the constancies of value and convergences of taste by the inherent qualities of certain objects and/or some set of presumed human universals, and to explain the variabilities of value and divergences of taste by historical accident, cultural distortion, and the defects and deficiencies of individual subjects. (36)

The constants and non-contingents of *JAZZ* lies with the type of music represented in the footage of the Timex All-Star Jazz Show, whilst the “turbulent times” account for the disruption of the organic whole.

³⁶ These arguments seems to arise with some regularity in the jazz world, and the debate in the latter half of the 20th century is/was no more heated than for example the debate between modernists and “moldy figs” in the 1940s.

³⁷ “... a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging” (Brennan 1990, 45).

The trope of the tower of Babel is mirrored in the title of the chapter on fusion: “Tennis without a net” – a quote from Gerald Early’s comments on Miles Davis’ fusion bands. Early states that “Miles had decided he was gonna be the ultimate Walt Whitman. He was going to absorb everything.” He then goes on to talk of how Miles Davis with his acoustic quintet (Carter, Williams, Hancock & Shorter) was able to create a situation where individuals could stretch out but still remain “within the framework of his vision.” With the fusion bands this fell apart, “no-one was listening” and it “became like playing tennis without a net.”

JAZZ makes an attempt at a neutral stance by letting Hancock open the sequence on fusion, talking of Davis’ un-dogmatic approach and by letting the narrator stick to the seemingly neutral facts. But even here the choice of words is significant. Miles Davis “*discarded* the jazz standards that had made him famous” (in this and the following the emphasis are mine). His experiments “reached a new audience [...] and *spawned* a host of fusion groups that would continue to explore the *hybrid* for decades.” And finally Davis’ fusion album “Bitches Brew” from 1970 is referred to as “the best known fusion album,” a clear departure from the otherwise abundant use of celebratory discourse surrounding significant jazz recordings. The album is highlighted for its commercial success (it sold more than 400.000 copies in the first year), not on any would-be artistic or revolutionary merits. Of course commercial success is, as already pointed out in the analysis of Episode One, deemed deeply suspect, and this alone disqualifies fusion from the realm of art.

Interestingly, earlier in the episode Louis Armstrong’s success with the tune “Hello Dolly” (1963) is referred to in entirely different terms. Although Gary Giddins talks of it as “the last gasp of another age,” it is still referred to as the recording that bridged the gap between jazz music and an audience

that had turned to pop and rock: it was the song that pushed the Beatles of the charts at the height of their success. Louis Armstrong performed it in front of huge audiences, and according to the narrator “no jazz musician ever experienced that kind of popularity again.” For some reason, Miles Davis’ undisputable success and popularity with fusion is not deemed equally valid. Perhaps because the film does not consider fusion to be “jazz”, but (as earlier quoted) a “hybrid.”³⁸ Perhaps because Louis Armstrong’s success represents a sense of sweet nostalgia juxtaposed with Davis’ aggressive and futuristic sound universe in his fusion bands. The nostalgia is a strong undercurrent throughout *JAZZ*. Within a possible bourgeois strategy nostalgia offers no resistance, but enters seamlessly into the mythologizing grand narrative of the film.

Due to those same bourgeois strategies, Miles Davis’ acoustic quintet from the 1960s (the group previous to the fusion years) is highlighted. Not because of the group’s nostalgia – that is one thing Miles Davis never has and never will be accused of – but paradoxically because of its association with the avant-garde. As previously mentioned a bourgeois approach to art will rarely embrace the avant-garde as it is too autonomous of both market place and institutions of consecration. As Smith points out, some canonical works may seem subversive, questioning such things as wealth and power. But since those with the cultural power to establish canons usually are also those with wealth and power, those works would not be inscribed into the canon “if they were seen *radically* to undercut establishment interest or *effectively* to subvert the ideologies that support them” (51). Significantly, *JAZZ* embraces Davis’ quintet for its *association* with the avant-garde. The narrator states: “Miles had always been skeptic of the avant-garde, but now he edged toward it.” It is “edged” that is the operative term here. Davis’

³⁸ Here, the film conveniently overlooks the “hybrid” origins of jazz.

proximity to, but not embrace of, the avant-garde allows him to create “great art.” Davis is in this context referred to as “the great perpetually restless trumpet player” and the rhythm section (Hancock, Williams and Carter) the “best rhythm section in jazz history.”

Episode Ten deals at length with the avant-garde. But it manages to sidestep the *musical* significance of avant-garde jazz by mainly speaking of the avant-garde in extra-musical terms – those political or spiritual. The episode introduces the avant-garde right after (and in juxtaposition with) the story of Armstrong’s success with “Hello Dolly.” Stills from the civil rights movement are accompanied by the singing of Abbey Lincoln on Max Roach’s “Freedom Now!” and the voice over of Jackie McLean: “Musicians play because of the world around them and what goes on [...] and don’t forget that there was a lot of violence in the 60s.” McLean lists some of the events and victims of the civil rights struggle and as more stills and footage are shown he states that these events “caused the music to erupt into that hysterical and violent sound.” During McLean’s voiceover, the music increases in intensity and at this final statement Abbey Lincoln is no longer singing, she is screaming.

Lincoln comments on the “Freedom Now!” suite as voice over and talking head, recalling her original reservations to the piece, not thinking that “screaming was really music [...] It turned out to be.” This brief speculation on the nature of music and of the avant-garde never broadens as the narrator again turns to political and social issues. Avant-garde jazz was an attempt to “reclaim jazz from white control.” This is further backed up by Abbey Lincoln in a talking head shot: “They will steal your ancestors here if you let them.” The political emphasis remains as the focus shifts to Charles Mingus. He is described through romantic discourses of the artist: “the musical symbol of his time,” “supremely gifted” and “second only to Duke

Ellington in the breadth and complexity of his compositions.” But also through the discourse of the (equally romanticist) notions of the revolutionary: “hot tempered and unpredictable” and “Jazz’ most persistent apocalyptic voice.” The two discourses collapse into one another, but rather than presenting a longer example of Mingus’ “breadth and complexity” in music the series re-emphasizes the political by using his “Fables of Faubus” as the underlining music example.

“Militancy” is the word used to describe the sentiment of these musicians and to establish connections to Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement, by way of Archie Shepp and the cooperative movement that arose in the late 1960s and early 70s. The Art Ensemble of Chicago (AEC) is put forth as the band exemplar, and its move to control all aspects of production, distribution and publicity is likened to the idea behind the Black Swan Records of the early 1920s. But it is in the final analysis deemed unsuccessful, as “nothing that the Art Ensemble of Chicago, or any other avant-garde black cooperative did, seemed able to win back a black audience”³⁹. There are a number of discrepancies at play here: First of all, the avant-garde and the cooperative movement was, although to a large degree connected with the Black Arts movement, not exclusively black – as the narrator also mentions in the voiceover. The AEC played “great black music,” but did not limit the music or the reception of this music in racial terms. However, the failure of the avant-garde and AEC is deemed to be the failure to attract a black audience. Thus, by talking of the avant-garde as political in racial terms, the film avoids talking of the avant-garde as political

³⁹ The AEC failure is also couched in nationalist terms as the narrator states that “it attracted its largest following among white college students ... in France”. The pause that the ellipsis indicates is clearly to imply a certain irony. But the irony is only present if one accepts the premise of bourgeois and nationalist value judgement applied in the series. The question more pertinent to ask is perhaps whether the AEC would have existed for over 25 years and recorded more than 20 albums if they had considered the band a project a failure themselves.

in more general (anti-bourgeois) terms. Second, the Black Swan Records held up as the success story to offset the failure of the avant-garde was a non-cooperative and highly bourgeois undertaking. It only existed for a few years and was swallowed up by the white record industry once it became clear that there was a market for race records. Finally, the idea of the failure of the avant-garde to “win back” an audience (be it black or white) also suggests that this failure is deemed in commercial terms, but the question is whether the avant-garde can be judged by those terms at all?

As Peter Bürger points out, the avant-garde takes exception to exactly the terms that *JAZZ* uses to evaluate the music. That is “the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy” (22). Bürger argues that the strength of the avant-garde was exactly its criticism of the perceived autonomy of art and its own insistence on engagement that was made possible by the change of the art work from “organic” to “nonorganic” where “the parts have a significantly larger autonomy vis-à-vis the whole” (84). This allows for the individual (political) element to be effective on its own rather than subordinate to the whole. Bürger even suggests that “the avant-garde does away with the old dichotomy between ‘pure’ and ‘political’ art” as “the structural principle of the nonorganic is emancipatory in itself, because it permits the breakup of an ideology that is increasingly congealing into a system” (91). Thus, the implied criticism in *JAZZ* of the avant-garde’s political engagement as failing to be a commercial

success is based on the very same bourgeois system of thought that the avant-garde seeks to dismantle.⁴⁰

The implied criticism of the political element of the avant-garde turns to an explicit critique of the aesthetic and intellectual project of Cecil Taylor's music. The classical influence of Taylor is strongly emphasized, but when before the comparison to Beethoven has served to obtain cultural capital for America's classical music, there is now an implied understanding of Taylor as thus removed from the tradition. The contention of his music as "not jazz at all" is brought to the fore and the controversy summed up as "Taylor came to symbolize everything people loved, and everything they hated about the avant-garde." Next follows the single most unmodified and vitriolic condemnation of any musician throughout the 19 hours of film. As Taylor is quoted for expecting his audience to prepare for his music just as he himself prepared for a performance, Branford Marsalis contends: "that's total self-indulgent bullshit as far as I'm concerned." He uses as counterexample the fact that it is not required to be a great batsman to watch a baseball game. Beyond the fairly obvious fact that Marsalis most likely does *not* go completely unprepared to see a baseball game (he is an avid and knowledgeable sports fan), the use of this comment in a documentary series with a clear educational drive, a desire to inform and possibly expand an audience for jazz seems impossibly self-contradictory. The title of this subchapter is "Imaginary Concerts" and alludes to Nat Hentoff's poetic

⁴⁰ Another passage in Bürger's text has resonance with the discourse in *JAZZ*: "The historical avant-garde movements were unable to destroy art as an institution; but they did destroy the possibility that a given school can present itself with the claim to universal validity. That 'realistic' and 'avant-gardiste' art exist side by side today is a fact that can no longer be objected to legitimately" (87). It is interesting that Peter Bürger's assessment of the effect of the avant-garde lies so close to that stated in *JAZZ*, but where the film clearly sees this in negative terms – as the coming (and subsequent fall) of the Tower of Babel – Bürger (and I am inclined to agree) sees it as the great success and vindication of the avant-garde.

account of Taylor holding imaginary concerts when he could not get any work as a musician, just to keep his creativity alive, but the beauty of this becomes a mockery with Marsalis' comment in mind; imaginary turns into impuissant

This is, however, the only time that the avant-garde is discussed on something akin to creative or artistic terms. If the series does not speak of it in political terms, it tends to shift the focus to the spiritual, exemplified and personified by John Coltrane, also moving from the social to the individual. This section opens with archive footage of Coltrane and band playing 'Impressions' and the voice over of Gerald Early, making the key statement that "the avant-garde movement got its high priest with Coltrane." The camera cuts to talking head format, and Early goes on to talk of how Coltrane himself perceived of his music as religious music, defining Coltrane's solos as almost "speaking in tongues." Gary Giddins also emphasizes the spiritual when in voice over and talking head he recounts the first time he heard Coltrane live. He describes the music as "truly white noise," but also the feeling of elation he had when leaving. Coltrane's music "seemed to take you out of the conventional world." Finally, Wynton Marsalis' definition of Coltrane's sound as "the lyrical shout of the preacher in full heat attempting to transform the congregation" again touches on the spiritual aspect, albeit in a more traditional vein than perhaps Early and Giddins. When it comes to the actual musical output of Coltrane, *JAZZ* focuses on the album "A Love Supreme" from 1964. This album is without reservation central to the development of jazz in the last 40 years. The film's testimonies from tenor men, Joshua Redman and Branford Marsalis both younger generation musicians taking an eclectic approach to jazz, makes this clear. It is, however, also interesting that again the spiritual element seems to be given great emphasis. Joshua Redman talks of Coltrane "laying his soul

out there” and Branford Marsalis takes a clear “mind over matter” approach: “once you put yourself in a certain intellectual frame of mind, what is physical? [...] It was almost as if [Coltrane] had transcended the body when he started playing.”

Both in the case of the political and the spiritual focus on the avant-garde movement in jazz, the film manages to sidestep the musical merits of avant-garde jazz by dealing with it in extra musical terms. The importance of the avant-garde for Davis’ quintet is noted and appreciated, but more for its evocation than for its clear annunciation. No speculations are for instance made about whether or not Miles Davis’ fusion had ties to the avant-garde, or whether his use of electronic instruments and synthesizers has influenced later avant-garde jazz. The approach to the avant-garde only seems to be able to take one of two roads: viewing it either as collective and political or as spiritual and individual. Even if we do not consider the musical merits of the music, the possibility of the four categories being at times interconnected is also left alone. Through an asymmetrical axiology, the avant-garde is placed outside of the tradition as historical accident and/or individual dissent.

The focus on the individual and spiritual is obviously at the root of American mythology, its “imagined community” and it is of course also tied in with the theme of the artist/creator. In Episode Ten, John Coltrane is the ultimate representation of this archetype, with his almost mystic qualities mirroring those of previous subjects, such as Bolden or Ellington. Giddins’ closing comments on Coltrane make this clear: “Some people are shooting comets and we just have to appreciate their pain and feel lucky that we were on this earth at the right time to really appreciate it.” This notion of pain seems slightly arbitrary as the film has just provided various comments on Coltrane’s spiritual elation and his overcoming of physical limitations, but it

is of course connected to romantic ideals of *Sehnsucht* and spleen. “True art” springs from a reservoir of suffering and the agony of creating. In the exposition of the episode, record producer Michael Cuscuna elaborates on the “toll that it takes to be a jazz musician.” It is “draining to start from ground zero everyday and truly create something that’s as close as you can humanly get to a masterpiece by midnight.”

Another element of the notion of “true art” that ties in with the moment of creation is the notion of communication between artists as an almost mystic experience. In this episode, Miles Davis’ acoustic quintet is highlighted (as the Ellington/Strayhorn collaboration was in Episode Seven) for this inexplicable ability. “Things would just be happening” Hancock says, and Cuscuna speaks of “empathy” and how the 5 musicians could “think as one.” Juxtaposed with this is Davis’ fusion group where, according to Gerald Early “no-one was listening.”

Perhaps it is then not quite coincidental that the section on fusion is followed immediately by what most of all resembles the necrology of or memorial to jazz. This next subchapter is titled “Good Evening Everybody” and the first 20 minutes are given over to poignant descriptions of the last years and ultimate passing of Louis Armstrong, “the beginning and the end of music in America,” and Duke Ellington, “the greatest of all American composers.” The camera fades on the image of Ellington’s grave; and while the screen is still black, the sound of Duke Ellington and John Coltrane playing “In a Sentimental Mood” signals a sense of loss. The camera opens on an empty (contemporary) jazz club, panning among the empty tables and the abandoned instruments on the bandstand. The narrator starts listing all the famous clubs that closed down during the 1960s. The camera then cuts to panning across a mantelpiece with photographs of jazz greats, much like a little family album of (deceased) relatives. The narrator again provides facts

of the demise of jazz: “During the late 1930s jazz and swing had provided over 70% of the profits in the music industry. By the mid 1970s it was less than 3%.” At this point the music stops to add weight to the next statement: “In 1975 Miles Davis himself said that ‘jazz was dead.’” The two Marsalis brothers are each used to provide an analysis of what happened to jazz in the 1970s, pointing to other musical influences and modern recording technology as part of the problem. However, in this jeremiad⁴¹ lies also the root of Millennialism as Wynton Marsalis insists on jazz as the thing that “gives us a glimpse of what America will be like when it becomes itself.”

The “Homecoming” (the title of the next subchapter) of Dexter Gordon, as he returned to the US after 15 years in Europe “where jazz still had an enthusiastic audience,” comes to signify the return of jazz.⁴² Gordon is clearly celebrated for his ties to tradition, and thus placed in opposition to fusion: “He played straight-ahead jazz. Without synthesizers, without electronic bass, without a drum machine and the crowd stood to cheer him after every tune.” The film finds saving grace in the fact that there “still was an audience for the music that flowed directly from Louis Armstrong and Lester Young and Charlie Parker.” In this statement lies also the implication that only acoustic music can claim the heritage of the “jazz greats”. This privileging of acoustic jazz is also reflected in the importance attributed to the appearance of a new group of young predominantly acoustic jazz musicians in the early and mid 1980s, represented in *JAZZ* by Wynton

⁴¹ I here allude to the connection between the American jeremiad and millennialism. Sacvan Bercovitch describes the American jeremiad as “a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private identity, the shifting ‘signs of the times’ to certain traditional metaphors, themes and symbols.” The question these jeremiads poses relates to how the American errand can be fulfilled and it comes out of “an effort to impose metaphor upon reality” (Bercovitch 1978, xi, 11, 62).

⁴² He spent 14 of those 15 years in Denmark, where he and other American jazz musicians, such as Ben Webster, Kenny Drew, Thad Jones, Johnny Griffin and Oscar Pettiford made a lasting impact on the jazz scene. Just how important their contribution was is yet to be properly assessed.

Marsalis. The chapter, “A New Lease on Life,” on these “young lions” as the generation was quickly dubbed by the media, is also the closing chapter of the episode and thereby the entire series.

Marsalis is placed in a straight line to the “jazz greats” of the past by the film's positioning of him immediately after the section on Dexter Gordon and the previously quoted lineage. He is portrayed almost as a child prodigy (Michael Cuscuna: “A kid sat in on trumpet.”) and the fact of his first record selling more than 100.000 copies is regarded as an impressive and laudable feat. Here again we come across the interesting paradox where the commercial success of Wynton Marsalis somehow seems more acceptable than the one of Miles Davis’ fusion bands a little more than ten years before. Two factors may be determining in this: the commercial success of Marsalis was relatively smaller than that of Davis (100.000 records sold v. Davis’ 400.000), thus a certain element of “art for arts sake” is retained. But also, Marsalis’ *acoustic* approach and his much less ambiguous relations to the jazz masters of the past make him the rightful heir to the jazz tradition and the contemporary hero of the grand narrative of jazz. Michael Cuscuna underlines this emphasis given to the acoustic element when saying that “Wynton was the first new acoustic jazz player with something to say.” Furthermore, Marsalis’ commercial success is also pored with institutional recognition as he (so the narrator points out) in 1997 was the “first jazz composer ever to win the Pulitzer Prize in music.”

Wynton Marsalis’ appearance on the scene in the 1980s initiated what the film refers to as “a new lease on life” (in the chapter title): a generation of new young jazz musicians. Stills of young contemporary jazz players are accompanied by the narrator acknowledging that “by the very nature of the

music, no individual artist has ever been the sole focus of jazz in America.”⁴³ This shift in focus is also signaled by a shift in the soundtrack. While focusing on Marsalis, his music naturally provides the soundtrack, the “real sound” of a film clip with Marsalis and band playing “Caravan”. As the focus shifts to the generation as a whole, Cassandra Wilson singing “Death Letter” (in what also turns out to be real sound from a film clip) takes over. The move from Marsalis’ music to Cassandra Wilson’s signals a radically different approach to the tradition, something underlined in the list of musicians to follow: Christian McBride, Louis Nash, David Murray, Steve Coleman, Joe Lovano, Jacky Terrason, Greg Osby, Gerri Allen, Marcus Roberts, Joshua Redman and finally Cassandra Wilson, the camera cutting to the live film clip.

All of these musicians represent extremely diverse approaches to jazz. From McBride’s originally acoustic starting point and his now increasingly funk and fusion-based approach, over Murray’s and Steve Coleman’s clear ties with the avant-garde of the 1960s, to Cassandra Wilson’s eclectic use of pop, standards and blues. One could perhaps argue that only the jazz savvy viewers will be aware of the diversity represented in this list. The film only provides the names and faces and clearly ties them together, perhaps even bind them to the past, by using B/W stills and footage. Thus, only the sound of Wilson’s music serves as an indicator that other influences than the acoustic modern jazz is at play in today’s jazz scene. However, the focus on diversity is reemphasized in the following.

Cassandra Wilson departs somewhat from the usual image of the “suffering artist” by believing that “you can communicate tragedy by learning the lesson from someone else’s tragedy.” Rather, musicians today

⁴³ Again, the patriotic discourse is obvious. Surely, no individual artist has ever been the sole focus of jazz anywhere in the world. The “in America” would be superfluous if it were not for the underlying nationalist agenda.

“have a responsibility of extending the music [...] the responsibility of pushing the music into the 21st century.” Thus, the romantic notions of the artists as the suffering and purely intuitive (read instinctive/unconscious) creator are replaced by ideas of awareness and responsibility. Stanley Crouch briefly re-establishes the dichotomy between commerce and art by positioning young people in jazz in opposition to “Puff Daddy Combs or Madonna.” Choosing jazz as the main mode of expression takes “real courage, real aesthetic belief,” he says, while we are shown a film clip with James Carter, another of the young acoustic players, returning the narrative to the conception of jazz as acoustic and in line with the tradition.

The vision is broadened again with Joshua Redman’s comments, accompanied by footage of yet another diverse group of artists, all with eclectic and unessential approaches to jazz. This time, the live footage also provides the sound, giving the music relatively long, uninterrupted, playing time. Redman dispels the idea of a struggling jazz scene, focusing on the eclectic approaches of today:

... in terms of the combination of jazz with other sounds from around the world. Or from within American music. There’s a lot happening with the combination with, with R&B, jazz with hip-hop, jazz with Latin music, jazz with West Indian music, jazz with gospel music. [...] the important thing is that jazz is moving, expanding in many different directions. And that there are original artists out here who have something original to say. Who are expressing their original feelings and original experiences as human beings today. And as long as that as that continues, jazz will be fine.

This almost constitutes a counter narrative. Gone is the sense that jazz in all its diversity risks the danger of becoming a “tower of Babel.” Gone is the idea that acoustic jazz is the “real” jazz and that hybridity is problematic. Gary Giddins, when asked where jazz is going, quotes a musician for saying, “wherever we take it, we’re the musicians,” and he rightfully states that “nobody has ever accurately predicted” the new directions of jazz. However,

when he states that “someone brilliant will come along with something no-one has ever heard of and that will be the new movement,” he is still subscribing a developmental narrative of jazz history.

At this note, the film cuts to footage of a contemporary “second line” band in a parade. It is not clear if this is a partial answer to Giddins, but it provides a link between the present and the past also signified in the narrator’s final comments:

The musical journey that began in New Orleans continues and shows no signs of slowing down. Jazz remains wonderfully inclusive. A proudly mongrel American music. Still brand new every night. The voices of the past still its greatest teachers.

Then follows what is best termed a collage of film clips with all “the voices of the past.” The main difference from previous series of stills and clips is constituted in the use of each clip’s own “real sound.” Previously, the quick montages have been tied together by a single piece of music or the words of the narrator or an interviewee. The fact that this sequence is not, is possibly to underline the “proudly mongrel” element of jazz (aside providing examples from the history of jazz). Initially it paradoxically creates the effect of a “tower of Babel” or a highly modernistic sense of disjuncture, but via sophisticated editing all the different snatches of music lead into each other until it all seems to be part of the same piece. It becomes one single song, effacing the differences – musically and philosophically – between for instance Ellington, Count Basie, Monk and Benny Goodman.

We get a sense of arriving at the tonic chord in a cadence when the collage comes to rest on the tightly swinging Count Basie’s All-Stars. The film clips of musicians are replaced by clips of swing dancers, both archival and contemporary and the sense that this *is* what jazz is all about. That Swing represents the golden age of jazz and the tradition that should be kept alive. Clips of musicians return, but this time with the swing music creating

the correlation – and with the added factor that not a single of these clips show the musicians playing. They listen, snap their fingers, stare into space, turn over music or have just taken the horn from the mouth. It is clearly not coincidental and creates an eerie contrast to the vigorous swing music. Perhaps it is meant to signify that the musicians have said their piece, or simply just that we have reached the end of the narrative. Instead, it leaves the rather unsettling impression that the musicians have no more to say, musically, or that the *music* has reached the end, that jazz remains a thing of the past. The very final sequence is certainly an attempt to linger in mythical time: The music finishes with a sustained cord from the horn section (accompanied by the image of horns), and “Take the A-Train” opens along with a film clip of Duke Ellington looking pleasantly into the camera with the Duke Ellington Orchestra in the back: “Thanks so much Ladies and Gentlemen. All the kids in the band wants you to know that we *do* love you madly.”

JAZZ is not a history of jazz – it is a history of *American* jazz, and a fairly narrow vision of that as well. Ken Burns has in all his productions a clear nationalist agenda and jazz functions in this case as the perfect metaphor. Jazz’ qualities of improvisation, of foregrounding the individual within the context of the group, even its qualities of diversity are particularly apt in connection to the greater American mythology. However, in this final episode, *JAZZ* starts to contradict itself. On one hand it shows the dire consequences of the many styles in the 1960s, on the other hand it celebrates the “mongrel American music.” By insisting on compressing 40 years of history and music into a single episode – and especially the last 20 years into a 20 minute sequence – the film rushes headlong into paradox.

But perhaps this character of collage, of haphazardness, is what makes Episode Ten all the more fascinating. It has not been possible to smooth out

the internal contradictions, cracks and fissures, to fit them all neatly into the grand narrative of American Jazz – even though attempts toward this are made at the very end. The episode is, compared to the previous ones, uneven and full of internal contradictions, making it a more apt document of the present than any of the other episodes were of the past. Jazz maintains a tension between the common pulse and the individual’s sense of time, between public and private time. But it also maintains a tension between historical and personal pasts. In jazz, the constant reworking of the standards, the signifying on the tradition, has created a praxis of making the historical past a personal past by, as a manner of speaking, superimposing private time onto it.⁴⁴ In this last episode it is as Bhabha argues: deprived “of the unmediated visibility of historicism [...] the nation turns from being the symbol of modernity into becoming the symptom of an ethnography of the ‘contemporary’ within culture” (DissemiNation 298).

In the process of remembering or writing history it is easy to fall into the trap of creating mythology. Or, as Ralph Ellison put it in his essay on Minton’s Playhouse, “The Golden Age, Time Past”:

That which we do is what we are. That which we remember is, more often than not, that which we would like to have been, or that which we hope to be. Thus our memory and our identity are ever at odds, our history ever a tall tale told by inattentive idealists. (237)

Ken Burns’ mythology of jazz (and/or America) is a construct and it can only remain stable as long as the film deals with the actual past. Moving into the present, the whole structure is destabilized, it starts to contradict itself and we get a glimpse of jazz as the essentially unessential music of the moment.

⁴⁴ Here I have in mind Stephen Kern’s ideas in *The Culture of Time and Space* on public time versus private time (33-35).

DIALOGIC OPENINGS: TRANSCRIPTS

JAZZ is not just the actual film, or series, broadcast in 2001. The whole production entails CDs, a book, and a comprehensive website with teaching guides, biographies, discographies and sections that place styles or musicians geographically and/or historically. There is even a section devoted to the basic music theory of jazz, including interactive tools to let visitors experiment with the form themselves. One section of the website, “About the Show,” is devoted to credits, descriptions of the episodes and interviews with the producers/directors. In this section are also transcripts of many of the interviews conducted for research and for the film. With more than 500 pages of transcripts of interviews with a wide range of people – musicians, critics, and people involved in the industry – they provide a unique opportunity to investigate the discourses in *JAZZ*: what was included and what was excluded. But more importantly, the transcripts can be viewed as part of the production as a whole (that is; the film, the website, and the cd’s) and as such they constitute a “voice” in the narrative. If we allow this interpretation of the transcripts, it opens up for the possibility to approach the discourse in *JAZZ* from an angle of the dialogic.

The first thing that becomes apparent when reading the transcripts is the interviewer’s role. In the transcripts, it is never clearly stated who is conducting the interviews, thus lending anonymity and an implied impartiality to the interviewer.⁴⁵ In some respect the interviewer’s voice takes on the same role as the narrator of the series – disembodied and omniscient.

⁴⁵ Several of the interviews are noted as taking place in the home of Ken Burns and the occasional interviewee directs a “Ken” at the interviewer, but of course we cannot on that basis make the deduction that all interviews are then conducted by Ken Burns himself.

The direct link between the interviewer's voice and the greater narrative line of the series can be detected in the emphasis put on some of the key issues of the series. For instance the apparent confusion of the last episode becomes explicit in the following question, put to Branford Marsalis: "Please talk a bit about the last 30 years. We're having a hard time understanding where jazz is going. What do you see over the last couple of decades?" (Branford Marsalis 1996, 9)

The emphasis of the film on America and the use of jazz as a metaphor, through which the film approaches the grand narrative of American history, also permeate the voice of the interviewer. In the interview with Mercedes Ellington she is asked 3 questions in a row that all have "America" as the operative word; how Ellington's music was significant for America (Ellington 2000, 6-7). It becomes even more explicit in a statement presented to Wynton Marsalis that carries connotations of millennialism and "manifest destiny":

So I made this film on the Civil War which defined us. Shelby Foote said the Civil War defined us. And we made a film about Baseball because I thought it was a way to ask the question what had we become. If we were to define what it was that had begun. And I have seen almost from the beginning that jazz is about some redemptive soul of the country and that that's what this is about and it seems that this story of jazz is the story of promise. (Wynton Marsalis 1999, 27)

The driving force behind Ken Burns' documentary trilogy seems to be an urge to establish definitions on what America and being American means. But faced with the *mélange* of that, the almost impossible heterogeneity, come perhaps a need for "purer" concepts – for a "rhetoric of consensus"

in order to imagine the Nation.⁴⁶ And in the wake of that, the tendency to set up definitions that ultimately become limitations, displacing other narratives that suggest alternatives to the narrative presented in *JAZZ*

However, the interviewees are not always cooperative, thus exposing the construct of discourses attempting to establish imagined communities. They constantly evade, ignore or refute some of the more heavy-handed statements and questions. Chan Parker sidesteps throughout her interview the attempt to paint a one-sided picture of Charlie Parker as a difficult, hot tempered and plagued man (Parker). Branford Marsalis downright refuses to make the comment the interviewer is looking for:

INTW: Can you say music in my life is not an emotional fix?

BM: (Laughs) You want me to say that? Did I say that?

INTW: Yeah. You did say that.

BM: No I didn't, did I?

INTW: Didn't you say that? I read it somewhere.

BM: I might, I might have said it then.

INTW: I've got some old interviews...

BM: No, I might have said it then, and that would have been true then.

INTW: Yeah.

BM: I recognize that fact, but I've worked on that so... (Laughter) (10-11)

Of course, Chan Parker may have her own motives for painting an almost equally one-sided picture of Charlie Parker as caring, warm and affectionate, as Branford Marsalis may have his for not reiterating his own previous statements. The point is not who is the bearer of truth, but the reluctance by the interviewees to be fixed in one place by definitions. When asked for a definition of jazz Branford Marsalis again baulks:

⁴⁶ The expression is Sacvan Bercovitch's. He suggests that the liberal openness in American ideology is a function to maintain this consensus: "Heterogeneity [...] was a function of hegemony. The open-ended inclusiveness of the United States was directly proportionate to America's capacity to incorporate *and exclude*, and more precisely to incorporate by exclusion" (Bercovitch 1993, 14).

INTW: I'd like to go back to the first question in a few minutes - what is jazz?

BM: Dude. You killing me. What is jazz? Like I said, it's a sound. Just a sound, you know, it's... You know what it is when you hear it. Well, I know what it is when I hear it. There're a lot of misconceptions about it, but a lot of those people, just, they're misinformed. A lot of misinformation about what jazz is. (Branford Marsalis 27)

The interesting point here is that Marsalis, on the one hand, refuses to provide a definition, and, on the other hand, clearly has a specific personal frame of reference to guide him through various soundscapes. But the subjectivity of this conception of the “sound” of jazz also prevents him from providing any positive definitions – in terms of what is. Instead, he is left to define jazz in negative terms – that which it is not.

There are other times when the interviewees refuse to take the bait of a heavy-handed question. When the issue of race appears, the interviewees – especially the working musicians – tend to present a nuanced and open view, often dismantling common preconceptions on issues of race and cultural belonging in the process. For instance, Dave Brubeck not only refuses to separate friends and colleagues into classes of race, but also delights in recounting Willie “the Lion” Smith’s signifying on categories of race, culture and geography:

INTW: About blacks and whites, who's music is this? Give me give me your take on that.

DB: When you think of jazz, you think of all the people don't think black and white. You just think about the music and the devotion to the music and my friends like Jerry Mulligan, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles, Stan Kenton... I only think of how great they played and what they tried to do with the music. [...] I've seen times when you were tried to be put in a trap blindfold test, and my favorite blindfold test, where I was put in a trap was mostly black musicians mostly playing the Blues and Willie “the Lion” Smith was the one that was being asked to identify them. When they got to me, Willie said, ‘He plays like where the Blues was born, havin’ straw, hackin’ straw, I forget the name in New Jersey, New

Jersey.’ And he didn't think Blues were born in New Orleans.
(Brubeck 2000, 12)

As evidenced in the last episode of the series, Brubeck is acutely aware of race as a factor in American society, but he refuses to let it define his personal or musical relationships, using Willie “the Lion” Smith’s comments as lever in a deconstruction of these categories.⁴⁷

The voice of the interviewer on the one hand maintain nuance when stating that “[w]e confuse things when we begin to blame white musicians for the sins of the society,” but on the other falls back onto simplifications, claiming that “at the same time, African-American musicians have always had to deal with the fact that they knew that their playing was superior but it was always the white musician that was being promoted” (Wynton Marsalis 6). The statement is directed at Wynton Marsalis and he, in turn, qualifies this by stating that the musicians are all just working with the music, regardless of color, but that white musicians gets “gobbled up by the larger society.”⁴⁸ A society that puts emphasis on race where the musicians do not: “The music itself is, is not segregated in any way the way that the society is. You’ve got like George Gershwin, he’s a piano player.. He’s out, he’s listening to James P. Johnson, Fats Waller. He’s trying to learn. And they also are listening to him” (7). Wynton Marsalis also at the very start of the interview points to the relationship between black and white as a “dance” of appropriation and re-appropriation. Several interviewees point to this complexity, making it “impossible to separate white from black” (Branford

⁴⁷ Dave Brubeck is from California, not New Jersey and Willie “The Lion” Smith, who *was* from New Jersey, is making a joke just as much directed at himself as any generalizing conception of origin and authenticity.

⁴⁸ This would have been particularly true in the early years of jazz and in the swing era when jazz’s status as popular music made it a commodity, a commodity that would be easier to sell, in America, if sold as a white commodity.

Marsalis 1), and likening the relationship to that of the black and white keys on the piano keyboard (Terry 23).

Jazz is seen as the medium to break down barriers of race, as white and black musicians enter a relationship that is focused on the music (Crouch 1997, 5). Margo Jefferson eloquently explains jazz as signifying on essentialism:

What it tells you about race. Hmmm. It tells you, oh so many things but probably, in some ways what it, what matters most to me is it, it constantly takes apart, you know, and goes past and then, works some wonderful variation on whatever fairly constrained, deterministic definition of the relationship of race to style, aesthetics, you know, your kinds of technical and emotional choices. Jazz always, you know, shoots any kind of limit, set of conventions or limitations out. (Jefferson 1999, 26)

One set of conventions that seems to be persistent both in the film and in a majority of the interviews is the gender bias that leads to an absence of female jazz musicians, composers and bandleaders in the film. The interviewer seldom directs questions on female jazz musicians towards the interviewee, except for the occasional question about the three great – and unavoidable – singers, Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. Of the 15 interview transcripts with musicians only one is with a woman, Joya Sherrill. Furthermore, the most persistent and problematic references to women focus on women as audience, rather than participants and on their supposed affinity for certain instruments or types of sound:

INTW: What is it about the saxophone...?

SC: Well, see all the one.. well, see, I think the saxophone, I don't know why, see, I think the saxophone has a... Well, first thing, women like the saxophone. Now, don't ask me why they like it, but they like them some saxophone. (Crouch 1997 21)

...

INTW: It's important not to respond to Miles's style with any didacticism. What is he, who is he speaking to? Why can a woman hear that?

WM: Well, Miles has really a bisexuality in his sound. And his sound is very, very tender to come out of a man. (Wynton Marsalis 6)

...

INTW: How does this music – this is essential – how do we know how...

WM: You have to ask a woman that. I mean, Miles's music, Miles's music appeals to the vulnerable side of people. His music, it makes you feel very vulnerable. It's, it's very fragile, but it's tough. (Wynton Marsalis 22)

There are two issues at stake here: First of all there is the patriarchal construct of women's supposed affinity to emotion. This falls under the number of dichotomies that surround the construct of gender along lines of male/female such as active/passive, rational/emotional, productive/reproductive, culture/nature. These binaries enter into various cultural contexts in complex ways often resulting in ambivalence and ambiguity (for example, a number of the signifiers on the "female" side of the dichotomies are in the context of race applied to people of color, creating ambivalence in the equally racialized ideas of black male sexuality).

This brings us to the second factor at play in particularly the last two quotes. They do not only contain the correlation of women and emotion, but also that of creativity and certain "female" delineations. As Lucy Green points out in *Music, Gender, Education*, masculinity "is most often revered when marked by the discursively constructed feminine characteristics which characterize the genius" (Green 133). She goes on to argue that although these feminine characteristic may be attributed to the masculine genius, genius is hardly ever attributed to the feminine, a factor that becomes all too apparent when for example the transcripts shows the interviewer asking "Why are there so many great instrumentalists but no women?" (Crouch 1997, 55) In the light of the list of instrumentalists that Clark Terry offers

(23), the question seems slipshod at best and only the writer and critic, Margo Jefferson, provides an adequate explanation:⁴⁹

No form of music, when it comes to women, has been fully democratic – folk music, jazz, classical – it hasn't. And I think, you know, let's move up through the centuries. I think that once you get past folk music, the criticism that keeps coming up is women don't have the guts. You know, they can't seize, seize the emotional moment and master the form. And if they don't, or haven't, that's in the large part for two reasons. One, guts in, guts are partly a social entitlement, social and, you know, the culture encourages men to have guts, you know. And to claim them even if they're a little lacking. Women have not as, as anything other than singers had that kind of cultural blessing and encouragement bestowed on them and believe me, it matters. (2)

Jefferson also senses the gender bias at an instance when she starts talking of Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith. The interviewer answers: "We've haven't gotten to Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith yet. You can mention them but we won't use it." Jefferson's response constitutes a clear critique: "That's why women don't feel entitled to be." (9)

Some of the simplifications found in *JAZZ* can be traced back to the tendency to mythologize the history of jazz (and America). The transcripts offer examples of this, but also examples of the opposite; that is, positions that attempt to deconstruct the myths or simply present a less essentialist view. Again, the voice of the interviewer mirrors that of the series narrative voice, leaning toward myth:

INTW: You say, you wrote that jazz is about slaying the dragon. My question is, "What critic Stanley Crouch called 'Slayin' the dragon?" "

SC: Oh, well I, I've, I've thought about jazz as, as slaying the dragon because from talking with Albert Murray, he often connected the fairy tale problem of dealing with the dragon as a fundamental part of the story and that the hero has to deal with this monster.

⁴⁹ A curious thing happens in the interview with Margo Jefferson. For some reason the majority of the questions directed at her focus on women in jazz, as if by virtue of being a woman is she an expert and spokesperson on this matter.

And, and, and, in jazz, the, the, the, the dragon is, is the totally disorganized present. See, what, what improvising is about is it's about giving form to the present. (Crouch 1997, 2)

Here Crouch draws parallels between jazz and the myth of the frontier. Both this and the metaphor of slaying the dragon represent the ability – the mythical promise of America – to control and form your own destiny. Branford Marsalis also makes a connection between jazz and one of the American metaphors of the film – the ongoing negotiations of American democracy. But he maintains a pragmatic eye for the realities of Americans “constantly trying to find a way, at this point, of re-evaluating who we are, without ever really dealing with who we really are. I mean, it, it is the denial that makes our country more interesting than most” (2).

Wynton Marsalis offers another myth, that of the oppressed becoming the bearer of truth, tying race and jazz together:

But we have to all, also realize that it's, it's the, the, the stuff of myth of Louis Armstrong and these men. That's how it always is in myth. The person who... Cinderella. The one who you keep out and you push down and you kick – that's the one with the moral authority, with the gift. That's as old as night, night and day. That's as old as dust. And it's not about black or white. But here it is now, that same myth, in black and white. (2)

Thus, Marsalis makes an attempt to fit race and jazz and its protagonists into a greater pattern. But the pattern is also a simplified one and will never adequately explain the complexities of race, jazz or America. In fact, by smoothening out the contradictions, the mythic model is a static one at best, offering no room for the dialectics of understanding and change. Branford Marsalis again offers a counterpoint stating how Americans tend to make their historical characters into heroes of mythic proportions. This, he feels, “does a disservice to the music and to the musicians” as musicianship is and should be separated from issues of personality (28). This un-romanticist

stance toward the musicians and the music is echoed in Jon Hendricks' reluctance to make jazz mean or be something else than music:

The music really has no motivation and it can't be the cause of anything or the effect of anything. The music is itself. [...] The music is neutral. It's the force in which everyone is involved. Now how they use that force, what they do with it, that's that's where the individual assessment of what it is comes in, or isn't. What it is or isn't. It's itself. (Hendricks 7)

Definitions of jazz have in the transcripts a tendency to lean away from just that: definitions. As Joshua Redman says "we need to be able to use labels like jazz to describe music, but labels for music don't really have definitions. They're suggestions rather than definitions" (Redman 12). When asked for definitions of jazz Clark Terry talks of the "ten zillion different explanations" (14); Jackie McLean states that "jazz" is "not my favorite word" (McLean 24); and Artie Shaw says that "Jazz is a very strange word, it has no meaning at all" (Shaw 9). Practically all the interviewees – the musicians in particular – seem hesitant to define jazz. Many of the metaphors present in the film seem to not disappear, but to be balanced with a sense of the music as a phenomenon in its own right. Gary Giddins makes this explicit:

When people talk about what makes jazz great, they frequently speak metaphorically. They talk about the sense of liberation and a celebrational music and a music of freedom. All of which is true. [...] But, I also think there's something, a special pleading in that because the real phenomenon of the music is not metaphorical, it, it's direct. It's, it's the beauty and the excitement and the originality of the music. (Giddins 1996, 48)

However, both interviewer and interviewees talk of jazz metaphorically. Stanley Crouch insists on a connection between American democracy and

jazz in its propensity to constantly re-asses the situation (3).⁵⁰ Giddins, just before the quoted passage above, makes parallels between the American pioneer/frontier mentality and jazz – its “rugged individualism,” and later on takes comfort in jazz being American. He sees jazz as the potential promise of America that “remind[s] us of how good we can be” (70). These statements bring forth three of the most central elements of the greater American mythology: Democracy, the individual and Manifest Destiny. The special pleading that Giddins mentions is perhaps the desire, the inclination, to make jazz *mean* something, to enroll it in the building of an identity for a young nation.

The understanding of jazz as an American art form runs through all the transcripts. This is, however, often complemented by or pored with a more inclusive perspective that entails respect and appreciation of the origins and the tradition of jazz, alongside openness toward the rest of the world as well:

I think that eventually, it will be called America's music, because it's certainly the only music that this country had produced that's original on this planet, you know. [...] it came from the American experience. It didn't come from a European experience, it didn't come from an African experience. It came from an American experience. And, and it also used some of the mores of the European music and some of the concepts of African music and some of the feelings of, of the music of the world. And as the world is becoming smaller now, this music is going to all fuse together and become one, the music of the planet Earth, you know? (McLean 24)

...

You know why, because it has, uh, the cultures of, of so many different races, it has the culture, European culture it has the African culture, it has mix from the Indian culture, it's the true music of the world, of true music, of, of people, humanity. That's why it has traveled so far, and it keeps traveling so ... it's the most played music in the whole world today. And that, that is why, because it's, everybody can relate to Jazz, you know

⁵⁰ That jazz has this propensity certainly holds true, and for democracy this occasionally holds true as well, but that this should be a particular or singular quality of the American democracy seems, again, a simplification at best.

[...] Jazz goes beyond, uh, race or culture, it, it, it goes to the human being, what we are as, as human beings. (Arvell Shaw 13)

...

...ultimately, what's important about any piece of music is not the category under which it belongs. It's the emotions that are being expressed and I think that's something which is very important for a jazz musician always to keep in mind. I mean, yes, we as jazz musicians have to honor the jazz tradition and yes, we have to know our music and its language but we also have to keep an open mind and an open ear to everything around us because ultimately, I think, we're not trying to play jazz, we're trying to play ourselves through music and jazz just happens to be a style that we're working with. But if we close ourselves off from the other forms of music that are out there, our other experiences, then we're not going to be playing good music and we're not going to be playing good jazz because we're not really going to be playing the fullness of our experience, and the totality of what we have to say. (Redman 13-14)

Interestingly, it seems as if the writers and critics are more focused on the American aspect – or perhaps more accurately, less focused on the international. Perhaps criticism has an inbuilt tendency to assess the cultural product within a national framework. As noted in the introduction, jazz criticism even today is still shaped by the move in the post WWII years and during the Cold War to position jazz as part and parcel of Americanism. Perhaps being a touring musician provides a different perspective, constantly being confronted with not just other culture's interpretations of jazz, but with other musical traditions. This does not mean that musicians should be privileged as the bearers of "Truth." The discourse of "globalism" can just as easily become laden with essentialism as one of nationalism. The pedagogical and performative conflate, and the great historical national narrative is split of into individual voices. To quote Bhabha:

"From that place of the 'meanwhile', where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity make their claims on the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, a minority discourse that speaks betwixt and between times and places" (DissemiNation 309).

However, the transcripts, as a body *and* as part of *JAZZ*, rather show that a unified and final truth or essence is impossible if at all desirable. The transcripts come to function as an example of the diversity and dialogue that runs through the jazz community. Not in a strict Hegelian dialectical sense of action and reaction in a forward motion, but as a perpetual conversation with both what has gone before and what is to come.⁵¹ Bakhtin speaks in the essay, “Discourse Typology in Prose,” of three types of discourse: 1) the direct, unmediated and intentional discourse, 2) the represented or objectified discourse, and 3) the double voiced discourse that contains and emphasis – a direction – towards the other speech act (Bakhtin 1978, 191-92). If we, as I suggested in the beginning of this subchapter, for a moment use the transcripts as the dialogic pivot of *JAZZ*, the different levels of discourse begin to unfold.

As already pointed out, the interviewer and the narrative voice in the series seem to be emanating from the same point of an authorial - direct and unmediated - discourse that continuously moves towards the mission of the grand narrative and “knows only itself and its referential object” and any outside knowledge applied to this type of discourse does not in any way change or destabilize the mission or discourse (178). This sort of discourse may utilize another’s speech as part of the authorial intention “by manipulating the utterances of another addresser, utterances intentionally created and deployed as belonging to someone other” (179), thus objectifying the utterance. Here, several types of utterances in *JAZZ* can be conceived in this manner. Certainly, the quotes from writers and culture personalities, often “performed” by an actor (like Samuel L. Jackson reading Ralph Ellison) are placed within the greater narrative as part of the authorial

⁵¹ Any creator of art not only directs a ‘reply’ to the past creators, but also an imagined listener/reader/audience.

discourse and intention. And at first glance the talking heads may serve the same function (and may have been conceived as such), but the degree of objectification is automatically lessened by the fact simple that each utterance so clearly belongs to an individual with his or her own referential intention, thus providing the beginnings of a dialogic relationship.

This is by no means an easily discernible system of classification, but more a sliding scale where each utterance may move back and forth according to the immediate context in the series and in a larger cultural context. But I would suggest that the less coherent the immediate context – as exemplified in the last episode and to a certain extent also in Episode Seven – the lesser the objectification and the higher the level of dialogue. Finally, again keeping the transcripts as part of *JAZZ* in mind, there is the possibility of these providing the entirely self-referential context for the talking heads, thus moving both the transcripts *and* the talking heads close to what Bakhtin refers to as “*skaz*” where the speech act of another is utilized “in such a way as to impose a new intention of the utterance, which nevertheless retains its own proper referential intention” (180). Thus, the transcripts open up the possibility for inner dialogue, not just in the use of talking heads but throughout the narrative of *JAZZ*.

JAZZ, BLUES AND BEYOND: DOWN BEAT 1985-2005

The presence of the other's word and the dialogic, combine to produce what Bakhtin refers to as heteroglossia. Here languages do not exclude one another, but intersect. Language is a site that "represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups of the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth" (Bakhtin 1981, 291). As such, the discourses surrounding jazz is no less heteroglot. Even when an attempt is made toward a unified epic, as in the production of *JAZZ*, does the polyphony threaten to destabilize the unity. And also in such mainstream trade publications as *Down Beat*, do the different languages and "ideologemes"⁵² in the jazz community intersect and interact.

As the longest running jazz publication in America, the *Down Beat* magazine represents an extraordinary resource on jazz and a path in to, not just the music, but also the mainstream community and its cultural codes. First published in 1934 by Maher Publications in Chicago as a trade sheet for Chicago-based dance musicians it quickly grew to nationwide publication with an estimated readership of 80,000 in 1939 (Gennari 2006, 88). Thus, *Down Beat* has been a voice in jazz since the music briefly entered the American mainstream with Swing, but curiously little scholarly work exists that deals with the role and influence of the magazine.

In 1995, a 60th Anniversary book on *Down Beat* edited by Frank Alkyler, one of the main contributors to the magazine and editorial director from 1989, was published, but the book serves as a celebratory volume and it does not engage the magazine in any critical debate. Frank Kofsky

⁵² The term is another one of Bakhtin's, which he uses as shorthand for "a particular way of viewing the world" in "Discourse in the Novel" (1981, 333).

attempts in his book *Black Music, White Business* (1998) to describe some of the mechanisms at work in publications such as *Down Beat* through a Marxist/Black Nationalist analysis. He produces some good insights, although the theories of white supremacist conspiracies, and the constant debunking of music writers that do not share Kofsky's musical tastes or political stance, leaves the reader fatigued. The "dogmatic and rigid ideological purity" (Gennari 2006, 263) does both Kofsky's text as well as its subject matter great disservice.

The work by John Gennari, both in his 2006 book, *Blowing Hot and Cold: Jazz and its Critics*, and in his 1993 dissertation from University of Pennsylvania, *The Politics of Culture and Identity in American Jazz Criticism*, offers the best insights so far. In his thorough and insightful analysis of the history and role of jazz criticism in the US he discusses the position of *Down Beat* and its writers, particularly in the first 3 decades of the magazine's existence. In its infancy the magazine was clearly directed at popular culture and the youth market with a decidedly tabloid quality, but as jazz started to slip to the margins of popular culture the magazine took on a more analytical character, giving more space to criticism and the technical matter of the music. In the 1950s and 1960s, colleges and universities became a new factor in arts and music, and the magazine increasingly aimed its marketing efforts in this direction with advertisements for instrument builders, talent agencies and record labels (2006, 212) as well as covering events at campuses around the country. *Down Beat* also took an active role with the annual Down Beat Student Music Awards, inaugurated in 1978, promoting jazz education across the country and simultaneously tapping into and creating future generations of readers.

The magazine has over the years settled in to a position somewhere between trade magazine, "fanzine" and criticism. On this Frank Kofsky

rightly points out how music writers to a certain degree are dependent on the goodwill of labels and publicists and the “favors” that they bestow, from fees for liner notes, free review copies of new albums, concert tickets, invitations to recording sessions and the possibility of being in the proximity of not only musicians they admire, but also the latest hearsay and rumors of the music world (Kofsky 84). This also is strengthened by what Gennari refers to as a desire to reach a mass audience. On the one hand surrendering to the consumer discourse and on the other engaging in “armchair reflections” and “diatribes against the forces of commercialization” (174); balancing on one side the commercialism of the trade magazine with the disavowal of the same that the traditional discourse of criticism and the devoted fan dictates.⁵³

The period that this chapter investigates (1985-2005) falls under the general time period of this study. But within this period, I am also aiming to encompass both the debates on “jazz as America’s classical music” in the mid 1980s to mid 1990s as well as the sense of watershed and urge to evaluate that the turn of millennia brought on in almost every aspect of our cultural lives. Over those 20 years, the range of themes, musicians and musical (as well as extra-musical) debates covered in *Down Beat* are plethora. Because of this, I chose to focus on some permanent features, such as the editorial column (initially titled “On the Beat” and changed to “First Take” in February 2002) and the polls, as well as changing features on musicians or debates in the industry, attempting to assemble a representative selection on mainstream, fusion and avant-garde. I did deliberately not undertake a close reading of the reviews. Both out of a consideration of the feasible in terms of hours spent combing through the already considerable bulk of material,

⁵³ Here I have in mind Bourdieu’s analyses of cultural economies as functioning “only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly ‘economic’ interest” (74). I shall return to this later in the chapter.

and also from the assessment that the form of the review (in particular the brevity) not often produces material that lends itself easily to close reading. As mentioned in the introduction, my readings center on three sets of discursive formations – on lists and hierarchies, on geography and place as invested with meaning, and finally on tradition as a contested site. Through these readings flow a number of the same issues as encountered in Ken Burns’ series of authenticity, race, gender, canon, and homogeneity vs. heterogeneity. But before I move onto this, I will briefly try to outline a more general context for these discourses.

In the last twenty years, the advent of fusion the return to the tradition, and the increased influence of world music have highlighted the debate of jazz’ nature and its role in American culture (59:8, 6).⁵⁴ The magazine has also undergone various remakes of both layout and editorial content, sometimes asking its readers for advice and feedback on the changes (53:2, 6; 62:4, 6).⁵⁵ The change that elicited the greatest response took place in 1990, when *Down Beat* decided to change its subtitle or “credo” from “For Contemporary Musicians” to “Jazz, Blues and Beyond.” The shift from one credo to the other might have been an attempt to distance the magazine from the genre of smooth jazz, otherwise also know as the radio format of “contemporary,” or “adult contemporary” music, thus signaling a

⁵⁴ When citing *Down Beat*, I have chosen to simply list them by volume and issue numbers, followed by page numbers. For the sake of bibliographic brevity there is just one listing of *Down Beat* that covers the entire 20 year period that I have been working with. However, on the occasions where the author (i.e. both journalists and/or musicians interviewed for the magazine) is deemed important, I will provide the name either in the body of the text or in the citation.

⁵⁵ In 1986, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1999 and 2002. The physical magazine itself has undergone significant changes. In 1985, the average length of the magazine was 64 pages, and in 2005, the page count had increased with almost 100 percent to an average of 124 pages. It is particularly the features surrounding the two annual polls – critics poll in August and readers poll in December – that has increased dramatically in size, but also generally longer interviews as well as more space given to music from outside the US and outside the jazz idiom has contributed to the increased volume.

commitment to the jazz format. But it was in particular the “beyond” that gave rise to some criticism from the readers. Although the magazine had affirmed its allegiance to jazz in the editorial that announced the change (57:4, 6), *Down Beat* chose to re-emphasize this and defend the choice of “beyond” in an editorial the following year:

Our backbone will always be jazz, both in and outside “the tradition.” But jazz remains an elusive entity. In a 1951 article Dave Brubeck wrote for DB, the piano great stated, “It is fitting that the country which has been called ‘the melting pot of the world’ should have as its most characteristic art form a music with as mixed a parentage as jazz. . . . Jazz hears all, plays all of the sound language which makes up America.” Jazz is a mongrel, a mixed bag with a distinctive heritage. For it to survive, this indigenous American art form must feed off its neighbors, integrating musical ideas and forms from surrounding cultures. And not as a parasite, but as a transformer, breaking rules en route to new music.” (58:9, 6)

The first noticeable element in this statement is the quotation marks surrounding “tradition.” It is as if the word needs hedging; as if it, in its earnestness, smack of conservatism and looking backward. Thus, the term needs to be couched in postmodern irony. And it is equally interesting that this “tradition” is placed in opposition (through the “but” in the following sentence) to the elusiveness and the hybridity of jazz, while at the same time traditional paradigms of art are evoked when using terms such as “piano great” and “American art form.” These linguistic markers all draw up some of the central issues that are constantly debated and negotiated over the 20 years worth of material that this chapter aims to investigate.

Furthermore, it is also significant that a musician is quoted as corroboration for the choice, to lend it authority, as it is the musicians as *auteurs* that remain central to the magazine. It is their words and stories that readers and writers revere. In one of the remakes of the magazine (April 1995), it is pointed out that the readers have requested more “classic” interviews that is, archive interviews with the great musicians of the past

(62:4, 6) and it is these interviews (classic and contemporary) that make up the essence of the magazine. The affinity towards the musician becomes even more prominent when musicians act as journalists.⁵⁶ The assumption is that insight is heightened, and that “Prominent musicians interviewing other prominent musicians, or writing essays with an insider’s perspective on the scene, elicits a level of musical comprehension – an affinity for a shared cause – that makes for fascinating reading” (70:1, 10). This conscious foregrounding of the musicians’ words, the desire to hear it from the horse’s mouth so to speak, becomes increasingly prominent in the last issues of the period covered. *Down Beat* “prides itself as a musicians’ magazine, a venue where the artists can open up and really talk about the music” (71:8, 8). I will return to these issues further on in the chapter, but will for the time being note the inherent paradox that lies in the representation of the word of the artists as the final truth. Because, as Gennari points out, the words themselves are representations and “the idea of an unmediated discourse capturing the pure, undiluted truth about jazz is untenable” (38).

⁵⁶ These interviews clearly have the character of pieces for the initiate. They are often very technical and quite narrowly focused on the music (for example Greg Osby’s interviews with Andrew Hill/Jason Moran, January and with Jack DeJohnette in November 2003). Interestingly, one of the more technical features of the magazine, the boxes of “Equipment” and “Discography” that accompanies each interview throughout most of the period covered, disappears in the beginning of the 2000s, a feature that first and foremost was aimed at those with a hands on and practical approach to the music. Both in the change of credo, as in the disappearance of such items as the equipment and discography boxes one could read a shift from the producers to the consumers, a reverse motion of the previous shift from tabloid “fanzine” to critical magazine. It is a complicated back and forth movement, as there is also a slight increase in the space devoted to the “woodshed” and “toolshed” sections, but if the shift is a more overall cultural shift towards consumerism then musicians are also to be considered consumers. The shift resembles the double stance that *JAZZ* takes, on one hand refuting commercialism and on the other creating a commodity, with all that that entails in terms of advertising and promotion. Again, Kodat’s argument that there is an increased emphasis on appreciation rather than production carries some weight (15-17).

The privileging of the musicians' words first of all ties in with notions of authenticity, which remains a concern throughout the magazine, in almost any subject: In the debate over the status of jazz versus "beyond," in the debate over what defines the tradition, in the idea of classic interviews, and in the general prominence of the interview and the anecdote. The idea of art, the creative act, and authenticity in and for itself became linked in the 18th century as art shifted from mimesis to poiēsis – from representation to creation. At the same time the search for a true self also shifts from a moral search, to a search valuable for its own sake. Self-discovery becomes an imaginative act, the creation of an original and unique self. Vice versa "artistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self definition. The artist becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as agent of original self definition" (Taylor 62). Walter Benjamin suggests that with the introduction of technical reproducibility, art lost its criterion of authenticity and became emancipated from its dependency on ritual (Benjamin 220-224). This of course poses an interesting paradox in relation to jazz, particularly in the double bind between live and recorded music. On the one hand are the strong notions of authenticity associated with the live performance. On the other, the importance of recordings, both as a means to acquire the tradition and as documents of those live moments of authenticity.

In *Down Beat* even different practices of recording can hold different connotations in terms of the authentic. For one there is the issue of the studio album versus the live album. The studio recording represents a controlled environment with the possibility to perfect the performance, but in jazz authenticity is tied in so strongly with the idea of immediacy that the live recording becomes the privileged form. The interaction between audience and performers is seen as artistically fruitful as live audiences "put

performers at risk. And risk did inspire musicians to reach for their best. It humanized performance” (55:4, 6). But although the live performance holds a higher position in a hierarchy of jazz and authenticity, the jazz album possesses a special character of both fetishized object and historic record. To John McDonough, *Down Beat* contributor, it is “a check against the monopoly of the present over the past, of banality over brilliance.” He imagines “a museum of moments in which records will forever hold the future of jazz accountable to the greatest achievements of its past” (59:2, 27).

The phenomenon of reissues figures strongly here, and more so in jazz than anywhere else, as each recording and performance represents a unique document of the moment. There is an idea of the purity of older recordings (until mid 1960s) with the common perception being that the less sophisticated technology of the time prevented too much “tampering” with the original material. This notion is somewhat refuted in a 1994 editorial, stating that producers at least since the 1940 made extensive use of tape editing (61:5, 6). With the advent of the CD another dimension is added to the matter of reissues: that of alternate takes. Again, questions of authenticity arise. The primary argument for reissues and alternate takes is the assumption that the “great masters” of the art form deserves as complete a documentation as possible. The boxed sets of for example Miles Davis’ *The Complete Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965* or *The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard* recordings of John Coltrane become items for the serious jazz collector and perhaps even the scholar, allowing a glimpse into “the steps/missteps taken in the creative process” (65:6, 6). But these sets also represent a sudden use of material that the musician may have deemed imperfect and unfit for release into the public domain, thus disregarding the musician’s artistic vision (ibid). Finally, the argument is also made that the

alternate takes not only run the risk of redundancy, but the risk of adding “another barrier to overcome and increase the appearance that enjoying jazz requires an elite esoteric knowledge” (66:1, 6). Nevertheless, the reissues figure strongly in *Down Beat* with a separate column in the review section and as a separate category in both the Critics and Readers Poll and clearly function as a means of constructing the canon.⁵⁷

In choosing the artists and records to be reissued, Avakian, without realizing it, laid the pylons of a permanent jazz canon. They would remain in the catalog for the rest of the decade, and profoundly influence the next generation of jazz critics and the way they would interpret jazz history. (John McDonough, 64:6, 13)

The canonical meaning of Avakian’s reissues at Columbia is attributed after the fact. It is as if the unconsciousness of the act lends it certain purity. However, the canon John McDonough presents so innocently remains one contingent on extra-musical dynamics. The reissue market is deemed a profitable one, but only major labels with an extensive back catalogue have the available material and smaller labels are being pushed out of this market. This means that the majority of the reissues stem from the mainstream of jazz and smaller tributaries are overlooked. As John Gennari also argues, these “complete” versions distributed by the labels are usually anything but. They are “partial histories” constructed only from the materials that each individual label possesses, so that “The Complete Billie Holiday Sessions” (issued by Verve) only consist of sessions recorded for Verve and likewise the Columbia reissues that Avakian produced. Thus, rather than the objective and pure canon that McDonough evokes, “record companies have shaped constructions of the jazz tradition in their own image” (Gennari 1993, 44-45). In contrast, *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* marks an

⁵⁷ However, it did not appear in the reader’s poll until 1999. An indication, that the reissues are considered to be more for the advanced than the lay listener.

effort to produce a canonical set of “texts” that surpassed the corporate canon, a canon where purity lies in the non-commercial and educational aspect. But as Gennari again points out, the cultural capital that was to be gained from creating, and ultimately possessing, such a collection had to be one:

[...] well within the imaginary lives of potential buyers, themselves evidently assumed to be educated, middle-class, and white. Accordingly, the words “black,” “Afro-American,” or “African-American,” or indeed any reference to the music’s social background, are nowhere to be found in the marketing kit. [...] as a commodification of the social and creative experience of black Americans into a bourgeois art tradition that functions for the benefit of a predominately non-black audience. (48)

Issues of authenticity and the accessibility of jazz to a greater audience are also at stake when *Down Beat* addresses the matter of jazz in the media. The magazine clearly – and naturally – positions itself in opposition to the mainstream media in its coverage and representation of jazz. On television, the question is not so much of the kind of representation that jazz is given, but whether there is any representation at all. The absence of jazz from television (both commercial and PBS) is a constant source of frustration (52:8, 62; 53:5, 6) with occasional glimpses of hope as for example *Night Music* (hosted by David Sanborn) and for a short while *The Tonight Show* when the “house band” was lead by Branford Marsalis both on the NBC network. The redeeming feature of both shows (aside from the fact that jazz was getting any airtime at all) seems to be the perceived eclecticism or hybridity of both shows. *Night Music* possibly took the eclectic element a little further, but neither Sanborn nor Branford Marsalis are known for a “purist” stance on music in general and jazz in particular. Their attempts to bring jazz to a mass audience by letting the more commercial aspects of popular television (and music) become infused with high quality jazz performance is met with general enthusiasm and optimism. The mass media

is still represented as driven by commercial interest, and that very same commercialism is blamed for the shutting down of *Night Music* in a “classic tug-of-war between art and commerce” (57:4, 17) as well as for Branford Marsalis eventually leaving *The Tonight Show* (62:1, 6).

Mainstream media is represented as unable to deal with the hybridity of these shows and *Down Beat* places itself in opposition to this, running a cover story on *Night Music* in the same issue that introduced the change of credo to “Jazz, Blues and Beyond,” using “Beyond” as the signifier of the hybrid. However, it can be argued that the position is essentially a construct that serves to create the symbolic capital that is so vital in a bourgeois discourse of art and which is set up to in the long run produce the desired economic profit (Bourdieu, 76).⁵⁸

The archetypical tale of conflict between commercial interests and art is once again the pattern in the story of how a straight jazz format is pushed out of the airwaves for the smooth jazz format. The initial reactions in the mid 1980s to what was to be known as a smooth jazz radio format was not entirely negative. Some optimistically perceived the format, then known as “Contemporary Adult,” as a bridge between pop and rock on one side and modern “classical” jazz on the other, as a means for jazz to reach a broader

⁵⁸ In contrast, the shows produced for PBS is deemed less governed by commercial interest, possibly because of the perceived “nature” of PBS as a non-commercial channel of discourse. *JAZZ* receives surprisingly little mention, when considering the controversies it provoked. The only substantial piece is a preview/review in the December 2000 issue which overall receives Ken Burns’ series positively. The writer, John Murph, praises the cohesiveness of the narrative and the accessibility for a mainstream audience, in contrast to the objections of “jazz aficionados” who “thrive on obscurity.” The only criticism is directed towards the last episode, both in terms of the condensed period and the derision towards jazz beyond the series narrow definition of the tradition. (67:12, 24-25). *The Blues* series was seven individual films presenting the blues through the “personal, idiosyncratic and impressionistic visions of the filmmakers” (Alex Gibney, series producer, 70:9, 66). Interestingly, the departure from a linear mode of presentation, that for example *JAZZ* represented, is denounced by the blues community, thought to be “more confusing than enlightening” (71:2, 14).

audience (54:6, 6). The conjunction of the terms “smooth” and “jazz” only start to appear in the mid 1990.⁵⁹ By then, the smooth jazz format was perceived as a real threat to the survival of jazz radio as it continued to push straight-ahead jazz out of commercial radio. The attitude and discourse surrounding smooth jazz changed dramatically. The music came to be described as “clichéd” and “one dimensional,” lacking in musicality, without artistic merit, and producer Michael Cuscuna even uses a well known term for radical brain surgery to describe the music (63:12, 10; 69:11, 46).

The main points of criticism directed towards smooth jazz are the commercial interest involved with the format and its status as “bad” music. As Chris Washburne notes in his essay on the smooth jazz phenomenon, Kenny Gorelick – or “Kenny G,” “bad” music is a political rather than aesthetic assessment, a means of positioning (Washburne 142) allowing for more traditional jazz formats jazz to be placed in opposition as “good” music – or rather, as highbrow versus lowbrow, as non-commercial versus commercial. Thus, jazz has come to be described through a “canon position” rather than a “process position,” and this way of positioning the music no longer leaves room for neither its popular origin nor its popular present (138).

Central to this is also the discussion on the role of repertory orchestras such as Gary Giddins’ American Jazz Orchestra and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, as well as what is often referred to as a “return to the mainstream,” something which Art Lange defines as “a renewed vitality and emphasis on classic mainstream values, styles and material – in short, a renaissance” (52:11, 6). These “classic mainstream values” seem to be tied in with the insistence of knowing and using the tradition, using “classic” to

⁵⁹ I find the first appearance in a piece from June 1995 titled: “The Sorry-Assed State of Jazz Radio”.

evoke the canonic and enduring.⁶⁰ In the mid 1980s, there was a new optimism for a bigger and new audience to tap into jazz. Musicians like Wynton Marsalis was brought to the fore as those able to return jazz to not just its own mainstream, but also the larger American culture. John Gennari notes how of all the different American vernacular musics, only jazz “has cultivated intellectual discourse as a core element of its superstructure.” This emphasis on jazz as the only indigenous American art form, he argues, shows to what degree jazz criticism has managed to carve out a place in American high art discourse (2006, 14).

When a *Down Beat* Lifetime Achievement Award in 1988 is given to Congressman John Conyers, Jr., the author of Resolution 57, his commitment to jazz as an *American* art form is highlighted.⁶¹ The dissemination of jazz outside the borders of America is also integral to this, and another Lifetime Achievement Award is given to Voice of America host Willis Conover in 1995. The magazine’s praise of him takes on biblical proportions as Conover is referred to as “a jazz messiah ‘round the globe, the best-known and -loved ambassador for America’s art form since Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie” (62:9, 28). This is a constantly recurring theme in *Down Beat* over the last 20 years. The variations stretch from commiserations of the fact that there are only a couple of US postage stamps commemorating jazz (56:3, 6), to jazz’ role as a political and dissenting art form upholding the democratic values of America. This type of discourse represents the remnants of a cold war discourse when, “America’s ascendancy to international political and military leadership led to an effort to define the distinctiveness of American culture by identifying

⁶⁰ Lange also makes use of old world canons in legitimizing his call to the mainstream: “I suppose some would say that it’s old fashioned music, and out of date – but I guess that’s why we don’t read Shakespeare anymore, either” (57).

⁶¹ That, and the fact that he keeps a bass in his office showing “his strong feelings for the music by devoting that amount of space to an instrument” (DB55:8, 20).

forms seen as integrating American experience with American political ideals” (Gennari 1993, 169).⁶² It bears repeating that jazz as “Americanism” has its origin in the cold war discourse and ties with American modernism, but the nationalism that fuels this discourse utilizes notions of canon and classics in order to gain an aura of historicity. A history so long it turns ahistoric, thus becoming the natural state of affairs (Anderson 1986).

In *Down Beat* there are some voices of concern pointing out that in trying to elevate the music to “America’s Classical Music” there is a risk of distancing the music from the public (62:12, 6), and more importantly developing what Frank Alkyler refers to in 1993 as “historical tunnel vision” (60:10, 6). This is nevertheless a pit that also *Down Beat* risks falling into. The magazine performs a constant balancing act between the past, present and future of jazz. The most obvious case is that of running obituaries and memorial pieces on those jazz musicians that pass away over the years: “dedicating proper space to the memories of music giants while not having the magazine read like one long obituary. We remember our roots while keeping an eye on the future” (68:9, 12). This – keeping an eye on the future – often takes the shape of various predictions, typically at the turn of the year, the decade, and naturally, the century. The January issue of 1990 is themed around this, but inevitably the predictions often end up looking at the recent past as the title to one of the issue’s features, “What’s Next: The music industry reflects on the ‘80s for clues on the decade ahead” (57:1, 22), clearly indicates. This is followed by a similar piece that asks “music writers and personalities” (which do not include musicians) on what is to come, and

⁶² Interestingly, there is a marked increase in the coverage on jazz and politics toward the end of the period, starting with Bill Clinton’s inauguration in 1993, where jazz played a prominent part, much to the delight of *Down Beat* (DB 60:4, 6, 30). But with the start of the war in Iraq, the emphasis on jazz as counter voice to isolationist and undemocratic tendencies grow stronger (DB70:6, 28; DB70:7, 26; DB71:3, 20; DB71:9, 13; DB71:11, 23).

here the tendency to look back is not so pronounced, but many of the answers remain mildly entertaining in their (in hindsight) unsuccessful guesses (57:1, 26-27).

More successful is a large feature in the June 1999 issue titled “25 For the Future.” Over 27 pages, the magazine features 25 young musicians and evoking the impending turn of the century, stating that *Down Beat* feels “the need to take stock and watch for those young players who not only ensure the music’s survival but promise to take it to the next level” (66:6, 18). Thus, the feature refrains from making predictions or looking back, but rather, let the present moment contain the future. However, in the 65th anniversary issue of *July* 1999, the past again becomes central, this time with “a cover-to-cover dedication to the 90 members of the Down Beat Hall of Fame” (66:7, 8).⁶³ The introductory editorial repeat many of the terms that the Ken Burns series also utilized, to tie jazz in with the canonic and a bourgeois understanding of the arts, such as the mythical realm of gods and the struggle of the artist:

Several of the interviews we conducted for this issue, and the archival material we researched and reprinted, tell the stories of the jazz gods in their glory years [...] But the heart of this issue is about the struggles these musicians went through for the sake of their art. (ibid)

⁶³ *Down Beat* uses anniversaries on several occasions for this type of features. In September 1989 the magazine celebrates its 55th anniversary with an overview of *Down Beat* decade by decade. The 60th anniversary is celebrated in the February 1994 issue with a selection of ‘classic’ interviews. The 70th anniversary is celebrated several times, first in July 2004 and then again in January 2005. The first time the magazine balances the past and present by letting musician of the present make personal reflections on the musicians that influenced them (both present and past). The second time almost the entire magazine consists of archival material. (DB71:7, DB72:1) In both the 65th and well as the second of the 70th anniversary issues, considerations are also given to the photographers and writers that has contributed to the magazine over the years. The self-consciousness of the magazine in producing history becomes evident at these occasions.

With the two issues, one dedicated to the future and one dedicated to the past back to back, it makes sense to compare the two in terms of layout and presentation. To start with the “past,” the July issue opens its celebration of the Hall of Fame with a big 1½ page black and white photo of Louis Armstrong. The layout is symmetric and calm, with a color scheme of black, burgundy and light olive and with a solid top bar (in either black or burgundy) running through it all. The typeface of the headings is slim and elongated the verticals slightly thicker than the horizontals, and with only small serifs. The June issue’s feature on the “future” is also kept in a symmetric and calm layout, with a very similar color scheme of burgundy and light olive, adding gold and light blue. Rather than the solid top bar, there is a slim line across the top of the page with the heading of the feature set in the 4 colors above it, giving it a lighter feel. The typeface here is also slim and elongated, but significantly more ornamental, with marked, curly serifs and much slimmer horizontals than verticals, giving it a calligraphy-like character. Although the layout is fresh and lighter in style than the July issue, it also contains a certain tastefulness and elegance. The colors are zestier, but still fairly subdued, and the feature opens with a full spread photograph of Regina Carter and Brad Mehldau working together, tinted gold and sepia; all to connect it visually with the past. There is a distinct “turn of the century” feel to it, although the previous one, not the impending, placing it alongside the early 1900s and the beginnings of jazz, evoking the ahistoricism of a canonic positioning. Thus, the present is embraced in terms of the past.

MAKING LISTS: POLLS & (FOLK)TAXONOMY

The *Down Beat* Hall of Fame that was celebrated in the July 1999 issue was instituted in 1952 as part of the readers poll (and with the critics poll joining this endeavor in 1961) with the intention of naming the “number 1 musical personality” and using “international importance as a yardstick of true immortality among the greats of music” (58:9, 20).⁶⁴ I say “instituted” as the Hall of Fame *has* become an institution in more ways than one. At least once a year, it gives rise to full page features on the inductee of the year as well as a re-run of those who came before. Unlike the polls that essentially are snapshots of tastes and trends in a given moment in time, the Hall of Fame speaks of permanence. The discourse around it aligns itself strongly with traditional evaluations systems with the use of words such as “immortality,” “greatest,” “best” and even “canon” when it is stated that “a place in the Hall of Fame does mean ‘the best.’ It means a permanent place in the historical canon of jazz.” (62:12, 24) It generally supposed that the quality of these musicians and their music has universal and enduring value.

But with the increased focus on establishing jazz as an important national art form, the Hall of Fame could no longer exist in just ephemeral form, as a list in a magazine behind which lay certain constant and universal criteria of selection. In 1996, the plans for a physical location for the Hall of Fame got under way with plans to include it in the “E Zone entertainment complex being built adjacent to Universal Studios Florida in Orlando,” set to

⁶⁴ In 1981, another category was added; that of ‘Lifetime Achievement Award’, the purpose of which to “recognize the contributions of non-performers in jazz, and more particularly to recognize John Hammond, who was its first recipient” (DB54:10, 11). As with Hall of Fame, categories of permanence and universality are evoked when the criteria for the achievements are stated as “the achievements must have advanced the development of jazz in a fundamental way; there must be a broad consensus on the value of these achievements among musicians, historians, and audiences; the achievements must have proved their worth under the test of time” (DB53:8, 19).

open in 1998. The importance of having this physical location is stated in terms of American culture and timeliness: “It’s about time we had a Jazz Hall of Fame. Jazz predates rock, and there’s already a Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. It also predates professional football, which already has its Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.” (63:8, 6)

With the physical location, the *Down Beat* Hall of Fame attempts to straddle the dilemma of past and present, by not only presenting the visitor with images, information and memorabilia of the inductees, but also by presenting live music in a jazz club setting, creating what is “one part club, one part museum, one part educational facility and one hell of a good time” (66:4, 6). However, the discourse surrounding the project is couched in such (oxymoronic) terms as “a living museum” and “a living shrine” (65:5, 16; 66:4, 6), and a description of the club clearly evokes the settings of a temple:

As you step into the club, you’re immediately taken by the respect given to the artists enshrined. At the entrance, each and every member of the Hall of Fame is listed, encased in glass and chrome, on rich wood pillars. Take another step in and you’re hit by floor-to-ceiling murals with glorious, larger-than-life graphics of everyone from Jelly Roll Morton to Miles Davis to Benny Goodman to Count Basie to Ella Fitzgerald. Then there’s a stage worthy of any world-class musician with acoustics that would do them justice, too. (6)

The religious overtones that come into play here underline the Hall of Fame’s function as consecration (both the list and the physical location), as creating the charismatic legitimation (Bourdieu 50) that jazz requires in order to enter the American canon.

There is a certain level of self-awareness to be found in the speculations on the changing trends of who gets elected for the echelons of jazz. It “continues to reflect the changing concerns of our readers and critics, the dynamics of a changing musical world,” but still the “enduring contributions

of individuals” are at the center (58:9, 20).⁶⁵ There is a pervasive tendency to create lists and hierarchies, throughout the magazine.. Not just limited to the two yearly polls but also in lists such as “50 Essential Piano & Keyboard Jazz Recordings” (69:9, 76-77), “Blues Pantheon: The 50 Top Blues Albums of the Past 50 Years” (70:9, 61-67), and “25 great Moments in Jazz Festival History” (72:5, 95-107).⁶⁶ As can be seen from the volume numbers, the lists are a recent phenomenon (aside from the polls), as is the “Best CD’s of” lists. The first one appeared in the 2000 January issue, and was a survey of the “Best CD of the ‘90s”⁶⁷. The list is the most prominent feature of the issue, taking up the entire cover and 25 pages of the CD’s that “received a 5 or 4½-star review during the 120 issues of Down Beat published during the decade, from the January 1990 to December 1999 issue.” When asked, the critics present a very varied picture of what exactly constitutes a “5-star” album, emphasizing the subjective element of reviewing (67:1, 12). However, John McDonough, who is the one to point out the subjectivity of the reviewing process, nevertheless proceeds to describe the trends in the jazz CD market in the 90s in terms of canon:

⁶⁵ One interesting reading of the changes in the type of choices made for the Hall of Fame is one that implies an evolution among the readers from mere fans to connoisseurs – aligning themselves closer with the critics: “In Down Beat Hall of Fame history, readers have tended to vote in populists while critics have favored experimentalists. Increasingly though, jazz fans have learned to distrust simple classifications” (DB69:12, 34).

⁶⁶ A peculiar list if there ever was any. What type of moments qualifies, and how does one rank them? The #1 moment is Duke Ellington Orchestra at Newport in 1956 and in particular Paul Gonsalves’ solo (possibly the first instance of mass ecstasy in a crowd before rock concerts patented the experience) and the last is a performance by a 13-year old Italian saxophonist sitting in with Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in 2003. The two ends of the spectrum points to the character of myth those moments in jazz come to hold, especially as some of them were never recorded and only exists in the shape of anecdote and hearsay. The further back in time the more mythological and revered they become.

⁶⁷ Subsequently there has been a “Best CD’s” every January, surveying the best CD’s of the previous year.

[...] the '90s have seen an incredible strengthening, solidifying and deepening of the jazz canon along with its preeminent figures. [...] With the physical presence of the artists removed and their output capped, a more impersonal perspective has begun to take root. It will be another half century or more, of course, before the perspective itself matures and divests itself of the emotional distortions of nostalgia and personal memory. But the process seems to have begun in earnest over the last decade, which is why it has been, above all perhaps, a decade of retrospective. (22)

Here, the assumption is that history will provide perspective and objectivity. What McDonough fails to include in his speculations, is that the dynamics that govern a particular work's endurance is equally contingent as that which ascribes artistic value in the present. Barbara Herrnstein Smith points to this when describing how, if a work of art fills a number of desirable functions in its moment of production and continues to do so for a time, thus remaining in circulation, it will start to not only fit the desirable functions, but start to *shape* which functions are desirable. "Nothing endures like endurance" (50). Thus, the idea of an objective "test of time" remains problematic, and it is not surprising that only a few paragraphs further down the idea of the canon and the purity of the historical gaze starts to implode:

A look across the names that have dominated the major reissues since, however, reveals a canon that is as much a function of demographic realities as historic scholarship. The emerging jazz canon of the '90s contains distortions of history as well as insights into a generation, not to mention the power of promotion. [...] Someone gauging the jazz canon according to the reissues of the '90s might reasonably conclude that the history of the music began sometime around 1957. What the reissue picture of the decade really reflects, of course, is the demographics and tastes of the present market in general and the critics of that generation in particular; born after 1950 and shaped by what was fashionable during its adolescence and college years. (23)

It becomes clear that the canon, with its supposedly enduring and universal value is exactly as contingent of the dynamics of economy as Herrnstein Smith points out.

The tendency towards not only canon, but the idea of the objective or pure gaze that correctly evaluates the individual art work and its position in the canon also grows out of a critical tradition within jazz criticism. Martin Williams, who John Gennari refers to as “probably the most influential jazz critic of the last twenty five years” (1993, xiii), was deeply rooted in the literary critical tradition, and in particular the approach of New Criticism. This took its beginning in the first two decades of the 20th century, almost simultaneously with jazz, and reached its pinnacle in the 1940s. The idea in New Criticism, that the work of art must and can stand alone and be evaluated only on its own terms, rather than by the contextual circumstances of neither creation nor reception, deeply impacted Williams approach to the music (20). This approach is rooted in the belief that there *exists* a set of objective and universal standards by which the individual work can be judged. However, the model generally carries what Herrnstein Smith refers to as an “asymmetrical” standard of evaluation: Those works and tastes that fall *within* the said objective and universal values, are explained by that very model of non-contingency, but the works and tastes that stand outside, are explained by variables of social and historical contexts. Thus, when John McDonough deems the reissue market to be governed by “demographics of taste,” he is upholding the prior principle of universality by implying the latter principle of asymmetry.

Nevertheless, the making of lists persists (and not just in *Down Beat* or even just jazz). The lists clearly function as a means to construct a jazz canon and the increase over the last years is a symptom of this. Over the last 20 years, the same movement towards canon and more specifically, the desire

to enter the greater *American*⁶⁸ canon, so prevalent in Ken Burns *JAZZ*, is also evident in *Down Beat*. Even the polls have seen a significant increase, not in the number of poll per year, but in the number of pages spent to cover each poll. In 1985, the Critics Poll was spread out over three pages and so was the Readers Poll. In 2005, the Critics Poll had increased to 20 pages and the Readers Poll to 12 pages. The reason for the expansion of the polls is not an increase in the number of categories as one might have suspected, deeming on the proliferation and crossover of styles and genres in jazz today, whereas, as a matter of fact, the number of categories have gone slightly down. Rather, the addition of interviews of and features on (selected) winners significantly expands the page count of the polls. This trend starts in the mid 90s, and has the effect of slightly obscuring the polls' character of lists while simultaneously bestowing importance on the results.⁶⁹ The musicians themselves also give emphasis to the significance of winning the polls, both as a means to reach a wider audience, as a “career steppingstone.” (John Scofield, 61:4, 17), and as a greater recognition of

⁶⁸ The magazine occasionally touts its “international” line, but the lists are predominantly American. As of 2005, out of the 104 members of the Hall of Fame, only three were non-American: Django Reinhardt, Stephane Grappeli and Antonio Carlos Jobim.

⁶⁹ Until then, only the Lifetime Achievement Award (LAA) and the Hall of Fame (HoF) inductees received mention beyond the list itself: In 1985 only the LAA got mention in the Critics Poll; in 1986 both the LAA and the HoF got mention in the Critics Poll, but there was no mention of the HoF inductee in connection with the Readers Poll that same year. This trend continued until 1990 when the LAA and HoF mentions was moved from the August issue to the September issue and the first short mention of the HoF for the Readers Poll appeared in the December issue. The Readers Poll in 1994 was the first to run longer features on winners of some of the other categories.

what they do⁷⁰, especially if they, like Dave Douglas, try to create music that lies at the margins of mainstream:

Of course I was happy. Surprised? Yes, but also flattered and honored. This is very prestigious. [...] This is larger than just my victory. I hope it will help anyone doing something different in music, that it will be easier for artists on the fringes of the genre to be encouraged. Sure, it's a vote for me, but it's also a vindication of the view that the music will expand and broaden. There are many musicians who feel the need to define jazz so as to control it. But winning these awards signals that there are too many musicians exploring new pathways to let that happen. (67:8, 27)

Words like “victory” and “vindication” suggest an element of antagonism in Douglas’ remarks. He defines himself as a “stealth candidate” and as such in opposition to the very establishment that just named him the winner of not only “Jazz Artist of the Year,” but also “Jazz Album,” “Trumpet,” and “TDWR Composer”,⁷¹ while simultaneously expressing his pleasure at the poll results. As Bourdieu points out, in the field of cultural production it is in the interest of the “newcomer” to not only disavow economic interest, but also to attempt in “overturning the hierarchy of the field without disturbing the principles on which the field is based” (83).

Down Beat’s two annual polls do however complicate the matter. The Readers poll, started in 1936, was initially a product of the magazine’s character of a fanzine. The first Critics Poll, in 1953, clearly correlates with a time when jazz was looking to gain a foothold in the “established” arts. Serious criticism was one of the means employed to produce symbolic value,

⁷⁰ *Down Beat* prides itself of the significance when stating that “Of course, jazz artists make music for music’s sake, not for winning awards. But when their accomplishments are recognized by a body of international critics-112 of them in this year’s 53rd Annual Poll-it’s an affirmation that their efforts are having a profound effect on the ears of those who make a living listening to and writing about this music” (DB72:8, 8).

⁷¹ TDWR – “Talent Deserving Wider Recognition.” A somewhat contested category as it tends to lump together both up-and-coming musicians and older, “established” musicians who didn’t get a vote in the “regular” categories. See also (DB54:8, 5).

thus providing consecration for a work of art or even an entire art form (261). Interestingly, the very first Critics Poll did not exclusively represent the “pure” gaze of the esteemed critic, as less than half of the votes came from actual critics and the remainder from “record executives, club owners and disk jockeys.” However, the value of the critic over the cultural businessman is made clear in the following: “If *Down Beat* had continued on this path, we might be celebrating the 50th anniversary of a jazz industry poll” (69:8, 8). One can almost hear the conceptual shudder. The function of the Critics Poll as one of consecration is also one of classifying and canonizing as the “critics provide a certain insight into which musicians should be considered important contributors to the overall art of jazz” (64:8, 6). *Down Beat* prides itself of the breath and international scope of the poll (64:8, 6) and emphasis is very often on the patterns that emerge over time:

If jazz polls tell us anything it’s that artists don’t live and die on each album they make. Rather, their popularity and esteem is based on the breath of their recorded work and the consistency of their live performances. Indeed, a true jazz musician’s career is a long-tone exercise, a steady burn. (64:8, 16)⁷²

But the Readers Poll continues to hold a unique position in the magazine. It is not just a carry over from the fanzine days, or even a way to keep up with what interests the readers in order to make good editorial choices (64:8, 6). Rather, the Readers Poll in some ways holds a more privileged position than the Critics Poll. As thrilled as the pianist Brad Mehldau for example is to win the Critics Poll, the Readers Poll is another matter:

“It’s great to be loved and appreciated by the critics,” he observes from his Los Angeles home, “but it’s nice, for a different reason, to be appreciated by the fans. The critics are one step ahead of people, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that what they like is something everyone’s

⁷² See also (DB65:8, 41).

enjoying. This is really cool, to know that people who love jazz are digging me.” (66:12, 43)

Again, we are met with the assumption that the critics have the more sophisticated ears, but the readers are the ones with the more immediate and natural approach to the music. The case of the matter is of course that readers are also consumers, and their recognition is more likely to be directly translatable into sales. Even record labels understand this and have on occasion used the two polls in opposition to each other in order to present an artist as “the people’s choice,” much to the chagrin of the editors of *Down Beat* (55:9, 6)⁷³.

If jazz criticism, as Gennari points out has its roots in New Criticism then this implies an attitude towards criticism as a form of “science.” In this regards, the Critics Poll could be termed as a sort of scientific taxonomy, with the Readers Poll at the other end of the spectrum as a folk taxonomy. Scientific taxonomy generally claims to be isolate from social context and thus objective and universal, whereas folk taxonomy is rooted in the vernacular and embedded in local culture and social systems (Brown et al. 84; Durkheim 145-148). However, the critics that vote every year in the Critics Poll cannot be said to be isolate from social context or from the culture of the jazz community. All taxonomies that are non-scientific are systems of folk classification. The idea of canonicity itself is connected to systems of folk taxonomy (Anderson and Zanetti 346). Never the less, in the *discourse* surrounding the polls the critics are invested with greater power of determining that of universal value than the readers. The Readers Poll is more often than not questioned or qualified in terms of subjectivity and arbitrariness:

⁷³ This despite the fact that the Readers Poll was initially constructed out of part editorial curiosity and part business considerations as it sold ads in the magazine and generated pr on the radio for the magazine (DB62:12, 24).

After all, they're supposed to be voting for artists they've heard in the past year – but which artists are most people going to be willing to pay to hear? Their old favorites, of course, so they hear no one new and the cycle continues. (52:12, 6)

...

Once again this year the readers have proven that the only thing you can predict about the poll results is that they'll be unpredictable. Straddling a line between sentimental favorites and surprising newcomers, db readers have voiced a commitment to contemporary music in all its forms. (54:12, 6)

There is an inherent contradiction in this, as the continued election of familiar favorites implies conservatism whereas the said unpredictability implies the readers' ability to respond to the new. Faced with these contradictions the meaning or function of the poll tends to lose its focus and attempts to grant it some form of validation dissolves into oxymoronic terms:

Has jazz balkanized into too many categories? Perhaps. "But you can't hold the poll responsible for what's right and wrong with jazz," says [Chuck] Suber. "It's only the messenger of what the readers are thinking. That's its value now and its value to history." Or, says Morgenstern, "You may like or dislike what it tells you, but you can't attack it. The poll follows the music." (62:12, 27)

Implicit in the last qualifier, "the poll follows the music," is the assumption that the music is the primary product, produced in a pure or empty aesthetic space beyond the influences of economics, social contexts or trends in polls, and also that the choices of the readers are beyond other influences than the music itself. But if ascribing only to universal aesthetic values, the polls should stay constant – and so should the supposed divide between critics and readers.

In the following, I create a setup in which to test the possible constants and divides by choosing five different categories to make my comparisons on. These five are all central in terms of jazz history and in terms of ideas of art. They are all focusing on the "creator," both as an individual and as part

of a group context. If we look at the first polls of the twenty year period, both Critics and Readers from 1985, it is possible to trace a certain demarcation between the two polls. The Critics Poll features the “Lifetime Achievement Award,” but has no “Jazz Musician of the Year” (see Table 1), and also the “Record of the Year” is in the Readers Poll called “Jazz Album of the Year” (in order to differentiate it from “Pop/Rock Album of the Year” and “Soul/R&B of album of the Year”).

Table 1

1985	Critics Poll	Readers Poll
<i>Record of the Year/Jazz Album of the Year</i>	Various Artists: <i>That's the Way I Feel Now (A Tribute to Thelonious Monk)</i>	Jack DeJohnette: <i>Album Album</i>
<i>Jazz Musician</i>	N/A	Wynton Marsalis
<i>Composer</i>	Carla Bley	Carla Bley
<i>Acoustic Jazz Group</i>	Art Ensemble of Chicago	Phil Woods
<i>Big Band</i>	Sun Ra	Count Basie

The Critics Poll, unlike the Readers Poll, only has categories for Pop/Rock and Soul/R&B groups, not albums or musicians. Instead it has some industry categories; that of “Reissue,” “Record Label” and “Record Producer.” (the Critics Poll has 36 different categories to the 37 in the Readers Poll). Furthermore, where the popular categories are placed at the end in the Critics Poll, they are at the very beginning in the Readers Poll. As can be seen from the table, the Critics Poll leans more towards music with an avant-garde sensibility than the Readers Poll.

Jumping five years ahead, to the 1990 polls (Table 2), the trend is still discernible, but the two polls have moved closer to one another. First of all, there is a marked rise in categories in both polls. The Critics Poll has practically exploded with a total of 48 categories, the main additions being more popular/populist categories such as “Rap Album,” “World Beat

Album,” “Blues Album” w. corresponding group categories as well as “Jazz Artist of the Year” & “Non-jazz Singer” (male & female).⁷⁴ The “Hall of Fame” and “Lifetime Achievement Award” winners were moved to the September issue that year.

Table 2

1990	Critics Poll	Readers Poll
<i>Jazz Album</i>	Cecil Taylor: <i>In Berlin</i>	Miles Davis: <i>Aura</i>
<i>Jazz Artist/Musician</i>	Benny Carter	Wynton Marsalis
<i>Composer</i>	Henry Threadgill	Benny Carter
<i>Acoustic Jazz Group</i>	Phil Woods Quintet	Red Rodney
<i>Big Band</i>	Sun Ra & His Arkestra	Count Basie

The Readers Poll has 43 categories, collapsing the “Blues” and “Soul/R&B” categories. However, it is generally far more analogous to the Critics Poll than in 1985, for example in the order of the different categories (I will return to this in a moment). As for the winners, again the critics lean more toward the avant-garde, also emphasizing the artist when using “Jazz Artist” rather than “Jazz Musician” as in the Readers Poll. The term *artist* has stronger connotations of art for art’s sake and bourgeois art, whereas the term *musician* has more utilitarian and craftsmanship connotations. There is, however, a softening of the demarcation as Benny Carter appears as winner in both polls and Phil Woods (who was a winner in the 1985 Readers Poll) now appears in the Critics Poll.

This softening of differences comes full circle in 1995 as the winners are almost if not entirely identical (in the categories I focus on, they are completely identical, whereas some differences may be noted in individual instrument categories). Only the artist/musician demarcation persists, but

⁷⁴ I am not counting the TDWR as separate categories.

even that dissolves in the following years (see Table 4 and 5). The number of categories have gone down again (41 for the Critics Poll and 37 for the Readers), as the popular/populist categories have been collapsed into the category “Beyond”.

Table 3

1995	Critics Poll	Readers Poll
<i>Jazz Album</i>	Joe Lovano: <i>Rush Hour</i>	Joe Lovano: <i>Rush Hour</i>
<i>Jazz Artist/Musician</i>	Joe Lovano	Joe Lovano
<i>Composer</i>	Henry Treadgill	Henry Threadgill
<i>Acoustic Jazz Group</i>	Charlie Haden’s Quartet West	Charlie Haden Quartet West
<i>Big Band</i>	McCoy Tyner Big Band	McCoy Tyner Big Band

Table 4

2000	Critics Poll	Readers Poll
<i>Jazz Album</i>	Dave Douglas: <i>Soul on Soul</i>	Terence Blanchard: <i>Wandering Moon</i>
<i>Jazz Artist</i>	Dave Douglas	Terence Blanchard
<i>Composer</i>	Wynton Marsalis	Wynton Marsalis
<i>Acoustic Jazz Group</i>	Dave Holland Quintet	Dave Holland Quintet
<i>Big Band</i>	Mingus Big Band	Mingus Big Band

Table 5

2005	Critics Poll	Readers Poll
<i>Jazz Album</i>	Maria Schneider: <i>Concert in the Garden</i>	Maria Schneider: <i>Concert in the Garden</i>
<i>Jazz Artist</i>	Dave Holland	Dave Holland
<i>Composer</i>	Maria Schneider	Maria Schneider
<i>Acoustic Jazz Group</i>	Keith Jarrett	Keith Jarrett Standards Trio
<i>Big Band</i>	Dave Holland Big Band	Dave Holland Big Band

The commonalities between the two polls continue from 1995, as can be seen in table 4 and 5. The only clear diversion is in the choice of best jazz album and best artists in 2000. Here the critics' choice of Dave Douglas reinforces the position of the critics as advocates for a restricted production and art for art's sake. The accompanying piece on Douglas represents him as the outsider, the "stealth candidate." He is a rebel with a cause; aware that too much success might weaken his cultural capital, but whose "classic" approach to jazz and knowledge of the tradition is exactly what facilitates his position within a bourgeois definition of the arts (DB67:8, 27-31). Much in the same way that Davis' association with (but not full embrace of) the avant-garde made his quintets acceptable in the Ken Burns narrative. In contrast, the readers' choice of Terence Blanchard is couched in much stronger terms of tradition, sincerity and craftsmanship, but with semantic similarities. As Douglas' critical success endangers his cultural capital so does Blanchard's successful career as a composer for film. Again, a balance clearly needs to be established between tradition and whatever might threaten it, be it commerce or the avant-garde (DB67:12, 40-45).

The assumption that the critics and the readers differ greatly in their evaluation of the music only applies to the mid 1980s and perhaps early 1990s, but as we move closer to the turn of the century, this no longer holds. As noted in connection with the Hall of Fame (see note 65), the audience for the magazine has made a shift from mere fans to connoisseurs, aligning themselves closer to the critics.

The number of categories continue to go down from 39 and 38 (Critics and Readers respectively) in 2000, to 36 and 29 in 2005. The peak in 1995 was what provoked the previously quoted question on whether jazz had "balkanized into too many categories?" (62:12, 27). If the decrease in categories in the polls is to be seen as an answer, the answer would be yes.

There is a return to more “straight jazz” categories and less emphasis on genres that may be neighbors and may influence or be influenced by jazz, entirely in keeping with the increased level of consecration of the art form. If jazz is to step into character as “America’s classical music” there is a need to purify the vision of the music.

This consolidation is also traceable in the way the polls are organized, that is, in what order the different categories are listed. As with the various winners there is a greater discrepancy between the Critics and the Readers Poll in the beginning of the period, compared to the later years. In 1985 the Critics Poll first make special mention of the Lifetime Achievement Award, and places the Hall of Fame and Record of the Year winners on the same page. It then lists the “industry” categories, such as reissue, record label and record producer, followed by the “creator” categories: various groups (big band, acoustic jazz group and electric jazz group), composer, and arranger. After this come the individual instruments: trumpet, trombone, saxes (S,A,T,B), clarinet, flute, violin, miscellaneous,⁷⁵ keyboards (vibes, acoustic piano, electric piano, organ, synthesizer), strings (guitar, acoustic bass, electric bass), drums, percussion, singers (male, female, vocal group), and to finish the list; Pop/Rock group and Soul/R&B group.

The Readers Poll creates a different list by virtue of having categories that are not present in the Critics Poll, but also by reshuffling the order. It starts off with a special mention of the Hall of Fame winner, the Jazz album of the Year, Jazz Musician and acoustic and electric group follows. As mentioned, the Readers Poll, has more “popular” categories and these (Pop/Rock and Soul/R&B album, musician and group of the year) follows, with Big Band tucked in between the Pop/Rock and Soul/R&B winners.

⁷⁵ Toots Thielman on harmonica remains the unrivalled winner of this category in both Critics and Readers Poll throughout most of the period.

The list continues with the “creator” categories of arranger and composer before moving on to the individual instruments that are listed as follows: bass (acoustic, electric), misc, trumpet, trombone, flute, clarinet, saxes (S,A,T,B), keyboards (acoustic, electric, synthesizer), guitar, drums, percussion, vibes, violin, organ, singers.

The difference between the two lists, the Critics and the Readers Poll, carries two sets of implications. For one, there is the matter of taxonomy – what instruments should be classified in which groups. For example, whether vibes belong with the keyboard instruments (as it is listed in the Critics Poll) or with percussion and drums (as in the Readers Poll), or whether flute should be grouped with the woodwinds or the brass (Critics and Readers Polls respectively). These discrepancies of taxonomy remain fairly constant. But there is another set of implications, which is that of hierarchies. The fact, that the Critics Poll places the “popular” categories such as Pop/Rock and Soul/R&B at the end of their list and the Readers Poll at or very near the beginning, is a reflection of the hierarchies that govern the two polls, and also the implied author- and readership of the two.

The Critics Poll is the poll that is supposed to reflect a higher degree of “artisticness,” of adherence to the universal value of art for arts sake. The authors or producers of the results possess, by implications of the term “critics,” a privileged position in the symbolic economy of culture. They are responsible for “good taste” and the aesthetically pure. Thus, it must give higher importance to those categories that, according to a bourgeois understanding of art, not only upholds the traditional values of the art form, but potentially carries greater cultural capital than economic yield. Remembering Bourdieu, the active disavowal of economic interest is a necessity in the production of belief (79). The Readers Poll, on the other hand, is the layman’s poll and as such is allowed a greater degree of

“populism” and interest in genres that carries higher economic capital than cultural capital. Of course, a jazz audience is by no means a mass audience and cultural capital, as well as “art for art’s sake” are still important values in the polls’ significance as consecration.

The difference between the hierarchies of the two polls in 1985 reflects the demarcations between the two polls that were also traceable in the winners. Likewise, the hierarchies of the polls become increasingly similar as we move toward the turn of the century. In 1990, the Critics Poll seems to have given in to pressures of mass market, not only adding a whole host of “popular” categories to the poll, but placing them at the start of the list, making the poll resemble the Readers Poll to a much higher degree. But even here, in both polls, there is an implied hierarchy of art forms, with blues placed right after jazz and rap placed last of the non-jazz categories. In 1995, the many different popular categories either disappear or are collapsed into one another and are once again placed at the back of the lists. As the polls expand their coverage of individual winners, we see some reshuffling of the order of different categories. The Critics Poll gives increased focus to the TDWR winners in 2000 and “Rising Star” in 2005 with features on several of them, but in the general listing, the order of the two polls comes to resemble one another more and more, with the Readers Poll shifting towards the Critics.

Aside from the hierarchy of genres there are two other hierarchical systems at work. One is that of instruments, where what one may term “lead instruments” (trumpet, saxophones, trombone – in that order) sits higher in the hierarchy than the rhythm section (piano, bass, drums). Interestingly, singers, who would also belong in a “lead” section of a band or combo, are consistently placed at the back of the list. This indicates the general assumption, not just in the jazz world but in the music world at large, that

the mastering of an instrument holds greater value than the mastering of the voice. In general, the voice is considered a “natural” medium of expression, that does not require the same element of technical ability as an instrument, and gender plays an important role in the evaluation of singers (Green 27). I shall return to the issue of gender in the last part of this chapter, but it is notable, that even in the category of singers there is an implied hierarchy of gender, as female singers are consistently placed after male singers.⁷⁶

The last hierarchical system I wish to touch upon is that of sound. As mentioned earlier, ideas of authenticity are closely tied in with ideas of sound, and in the polls as well as in the rest of the magazine the acoustic sound is the privileged sound. In those categories that can be split up into acoustic and electric the acoustic category is consistently placed before electric (and synthesizers always at the very bottom). In the mid 1980s, the debate in the magazine in general (that is, not just in the polls) centers on acoustic or “traditional” instruments (including amplified sound) versus synthesizers. The issues at stake are mainly whether the technology somehow removes the music from immediacy and inventiveness. The debate does not remain quite so trenchant, as the new technology loses novelty and comes to be considered a tool like any other (53:9, p. 18), but a certain unease remains, just as the hierarchy of the polls persists. The hierarchy of sound, privileging the acoustic over the electronic, correlates to the privileging of the individual artist and the concern is that the “uniqueness found in an individual musician’s approach and sound is on its way to being standardized by a machine” (58:2, 6). The same issues are at stake as when interviews and features emphasize orality and the telling of the

⁷⁶ One may even speculate as to why this category is the only one that is split up along lines of gender. Of course the female voice and the male voice are very different in character, but could it also be that if there was just the one ‘singers’ category, women would dominate?

story: Jazz is a soloist's art and the *voice* of the musician, be it in words or notes, remains the central "objet d'art."

GEOGRAPHY IS FATE: NATIONS AND CITIES OF JAZZ

The hierarchies and expressions of authenticity that are apparent in the polls also exist in terms of location. Certain *places* hold higher connotations of authenticity in jazz while others are conceived or constructed as devoid of swing.⁷⁷ Although *Down Beat* defines itself as an international magazine (63:8, 6), the focus is overwhelmingly American. This section will look at how different values of origin and authenticity are ascribed to different areas of the US, but the construction of America as the homeland of jazz first requires a drawing up of boundaries and establishing of the other.

Part of the desire to establish jazz as an art form with its own canon, on par with for example classical music, is to also establish it in relation to the general western canon with its perceived eurocentricity. The old world/new world dichotomy plays an important part in the construction of America as jazz-land. There is a curious sense of inferiority, not in the quality of the music, but in terms of sheer history and culture (the two often correlated, as at the Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy (53:11, 6)) and in the way music and art is celebrated in Europe. The emphasis lies on the reception of jazz in Europe as more enthusiastic, more enlightened or "cultured," than that in the US (52:6, 64; 52:7, 6; 53:11, 6; 70:5, 22), and more respectful towards the musicians and creators of the music (55:1, 24; 60:5, 17). The old regret that

⁷⁷ By "place" I refer to a physical location that has been invested with meaning, constructed by people(s) and society. Among humanist geographers there is some discussion as to the primary natures of place and/or social constructs (Cresswell 32-33), but for the purpose of this reading of place, I will be primarily concerned with how we construct "place" by inscribing it with different meanings.

European intellectuals and artists had embraced jazz early on as a new sound and new form, and continues to show a greater commitment to jazz as an art form, rather than part of the entertainment industry (on equal terms with all other entertainment) lies buried in this (Gennari 2006, 112).

The European scene and audience perceived as more open, especially for music that lies outside the mainstream. Cecil Taylor expresses a disillusion with the American music business as he returns from sold out concert tours in Europe to “a man big in the business saying, ‘Well, we cannot present that kind of music on television because the audience will not accept it’” (53:11, p. 24). Carla Bley and Steve Swallow also state a preference for the European scene as more receptive:

SS: To our surprise, we found a sympathetic and enthusiastic public, and it did a great deal to convince us that we weren't simply pissing in the wind, that there was an audience and we only had to be patient to find it. There was a stark contrast with what was going on in America and what was going on in Europe.

[...]

CB: Yeah. I've only worked in New York City twice in the last 10 years. It's strange. I work over here as much as I like. But I prefer being over here because I think the food is better and the wine is better and the cars are better and the people are better and the pianos are better. So I don't care so much about working in the States. (68:5, 37)

The reception of the music becomes entwined with the perceived qualities of the *place*: the food, the wine, and the instruments. Europe in this sense is not just a “scene,” an outlet for the music, but a whole set of meanings all pertaining to the assumed higher level of culture, and thus higher cultural hierarchy, of Europe.

But this hierarchical order is not necessarily a stable one.⁷⁸ Steve Lacy, another avant-garde jazz musician that settled in Europe in search of an audience, insists on not being an “expatriate” as he does not “want to be an ex-anything if you’re ex-, you’re gone really. You’re not there anymore!” (64:2, 23) He eventually moved back to the States as work dwindled in Europe and the desire to contribute to the ongoing debate of the music grew stronger (69:10, 33). The same sense of not being near the well spring of the music pervade Steve Coleman’s assessment of Europe: “cats go to Europe and they lose it, and they don't even *realize* they lose it [...] You go over there to hang in the expatriate scene or to settle, and you get comfortable or forgotten” (55:2, 22). Europe may have first dips on western canon culture, but it doesn’t quite *swing* (70:4, 48). John Zorn points to America’s own tradition of creative collaboration as the carrier of equal or higher value to the European romantic myth of “ivory-tower composers” (55:4, 23), and David Murray insists that European musicians do not have the ability to tap in to the American source of the music:

”The two essential elements of jazz from the U.S. are gospel and blues. When you take those elements out I’m not sure what you get. But the Europeans have to take those elements out, because they have a difficult time with them. “I’m not knocking the Europeans because where they take gospel and blues out of the music, they insert their own identities from their own countries,” Murray said. “I think they think they got it, but I’m not quite sure. The European musicians I like the best are the ones who don’t try to think like that, who are more creative and don’t even try to get into playing a soulless kind of jazz. The ones I like are probably guys who aren’t even playing jazz; they’re playing creative music. I can enjoy it, but I’m not going to sit up and say, ‘That was a great jazz solo.’ Because it’s not that. The others, who are trying to play jazz ... I’m not

⁷⁸ Gennari also makes the point that while the pilgrimage of such young white Eurocentric critics as Leonard Feather (British) and John Hammond (old money American) to Harlem, “the very symbolic center of black culture,” in the mid 1930s raised issues of racial colonialism, it also carried the “seeds of an emergent U.S Cultural nationalism” (2006, 21-22).

saying they're not using the *form*. I'm talking about the *feelings*." (70:5, 45-46)

The use of the phrase "soulless jazz" does not necessarily imply that Murray deem the European musician without soul – just that they posses *European* soul, or creativity. Nevertheless, the notion of a particular jazz sensibility implies a cultural essentialism and David Murray's statement clearly shows, that although Europe may rank higher in the traditional western cultural hierarchy, it does not posses or have access to authenticity in jazz.⁷⁹

In order to firmly establish jazz in the national and cultural continuum, it must be placed in the nation's "immemorial past" (Anderson 1991, 11), and New Orleans figures precisely as such a place. As in Ken Burns' series, New Orleans is repeatedly referred to in terms of history, authenticity and legacy (52:2, 18; 54:11, 17-18; 56:2, 12; 67:7, 35). It provides perhaps not just jazz but the nation with a cultural heritage "long there" (Anderson 1986, 659):

In addition to the parade bands, church music, r&b, and jazz, New Orleans was the gateway for various types of Caribbean musics in the States, and had a direct link back to African percussion in the unbroken tradition of drumming in Congo Square dating back to the days of slavery. (60:9, 23)

Not only do the roots of the music stretch back to the early beginnings of the nation, but even further back, to an almost indiscernible past out of which looms jazz, African American culture and thus – contested perhaps, but nevertheless – American culture. Great emphasis is put on the continuation of this heritage and the re-casting of the brass band tradition in New Orleans, mainly exemplified by bands such as 'The Dirty Dozen, who

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that neither Murray, Zorn, nor Lacy are musicians that ascribe to the neo-classical take on jazz, which is most commonly associated with a more national romantic discourse. This goes to show that culturally and nationally bound ideas of authenticity have been and is pervasive in the American jazz community, regardless of genre.

are referred to in terms of revitalization and resurrection (52:8, 28; 66:3, 8; 69:9, 33; 72:4, 60-61):

The most striking development in New Orleans these days is the resurgence of the brass bands. The brass band tradition is a century or so old, an important component in the “birth” of jazz, and the source of such major talents as Louis Armstrong. Brass bands have remained popular in the city’s black community, as well as finding an eager audience among tourists. But for decades now the style and repertoire have remained static and conservative, for the most part, until the recent emergence of groups like the Dirty Dozen Brass Band (see db, Aug. ‘85.) The tradition has now been revitalized-but not diluted or dominated-by modern influences, replacing a rigid concept with a vibrant movement led by young black players. (54:1, 60-61)

Here two conflicting views of the past and tradition clash. One is the sense of tradition as a stable or static entity that remains meaningful only as a commodity of tourism (that is as artefact) or as part of a local and vernacular culture. The other view is that of tradition as something to be integrated into the present as a fluid component in a more wide-ranging culture. But the differences between the two are not entirely resolved in this quote. Tradition as a constant remains privileged by the insistence on it not being “diluted or dominated” by other influences. The new brass bands are brought to the fore as managing to maintain ties to the past without compromising an American self understanding as continuously moving toward the future.

David Harvey discusses how place can be brought into play as a site for heritage and/or sense of belonging, creating a connection to the past as a “locus of collective memory” (Harvey 304). Urban areas are cleaned up and marketed as heritage areas, as for example New Orleans’ French Quarter. These sites can be a “contested terrain of competing definitions” where the imaginings are not just about the past but also about releasing “a different imaginary as to the possibilities in the future” (309). However, these constructions of place as sites for memory are also “the perpetuation of a

particular social order that seeks to inscribe some memories at the expense of others” (Cresswell 62):

New Orleans’ French Quarter, in case you haven’t heard, has a new bedtime. The same streets Louis Armstrong sang on for pennies near the turn of the century are now off-limits to musicians after 8 pm, the result of city council legislation passed late last year. [...] And while there’s little doubt about the clubowners’ resentment of competition from the street musicians, there’s another factor that appears to be at work here—the desire to lure wealthier residents to the area by toning down its rowdy lifestyle. (53:8, 6)

The area of contestation here is clearly whether New Orleans is to be represented as a site for “Culture” or “culture”.⁸⁰ Whether there is room for its “rough edges and excesses” and its local artists are to be “revered as home-town folk heroes and treasured community resources” (56:5, 59). Or whether the city is to be re-imagined as part of a venerable and classical jazz tradition that has already entered the canon.

The devastating effects of hurricane Katrina in 2005 left both musicians and the music homeless, and the discourse on the cultural importance of New Orleans was greatly intensified. In the opening lines of the November 2005 issue, dedicated to New Orleans and the effects of Katrina, *Down Beat* talks in terms of indebtedness; the magazine owing its existence to “the musical innovations that emerged from the city. Without King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong and the hundreds of other jazz pioneers, who knows where, how or if this music would have developed” (72:11, 8). Wynton Marsalis clearly signifies on the city’s status as national icon when stating that “When you take New Orleans from America, our soul equation goes down. Our city will come back, but it will take the entire country” (40). New Orleans is not just a city, but a place – a meaningful location as a repository for the Nation’s spirit and memory.

⁸⁰ Cf. Terry Eagleton’s *The Idea of Culture* (2000, 38).

In the aftermath of the hurricane, jazz probably got more publicity in national media than during the entire 10 previous years, and it is clear from the coverage in *Down Beat* that the jazz community saw the hurricane as a devastation (which it certainly was, and the loss of archive material and memorabilia remains irreparable), but also as a possibility to re-emphasize the importance of the city and the music. But again, the various meanings to attribute to the city are contested. Drummer Johnny Vidacovich attempts an open interpretation of the meaning of New Orleans as history when stating that “New Orleans was not just about history. It was a history in motion” (38). Whereas Ben Jaffe from the Preservation Hall in New Orleans puts emphasis on the connections with the past in terms of antiquity and purity:

New Orleans is a city that has remained pure, free from modern advances in culture and changing etiquette. Thought by some to be old-fashioned and antiquated, New Orleans has managed to make being ‘behind the times’ endearing. Old World charm and decadence drip from the heavy black iron rails of the city’s gates and walls.” (42)

The Old World connection provides cultural capital, but the representation of the city as a pocket in time beyond the pollutions of the modern world approaches ossification. But the purity of such an imagined place, a petrified city, is bound to be washed away by masses of dirty water, and as musicians, uprooted, are spread out over the nation.

The greater culture-geographical landscape of America does not generally receive a great deal of coverage in *Down Beat*, but when it does, it is often represented in terms of “Americana” – as wide open cultural plains where folk and culture intersects, each corner of the country putting its own flavor into the mix (53:7, 20; 54:3, 18; 54:8, 63; 57:1, 19; 63:3, 10; 66:8, 6; 70:4, 44). But there is also a tendency to represent it in terms of cultural vacuum and void (53:6, 17; 53:7, 6; 56:3, 18). Especially the West Coast seems steeped in discourses of cultural stagnancy. The L.A. scene is

described as “staid”; arresting artistic development as “musicians who got sick of New York, came to L.A., and stopped doing the thing that made them great in the first place” (Branford Marsalis 59:9, 25). One feature on the L.A. jazz scene sets out to refute the myth that there is none, but considering its title: “Lost in LA – Legends Who Stayed Behind,” as well as the opening sentence: “Jazz in Los Angeles. To some, those four words will sound like an oxymoron,” it never the less ends up perpetuating just that. It persist in setting up a dichotomy between New York and Los Angeles, portraying New York as hard and fast in contrast to the more laidback attitude of LA where it is easier to just make a living teaching. (62:9, 20-23). The implied sense of the slower pace of West Coast living, as being somehow detrimental to the creative drive, connects back to romanticist notions of the creative process as something that must necessarily be a struggle. Branford Marsalis is given considerable space to express his opinions of the West Coast and particularly the L.A. jazz scene as he moves from New York to L.A. for the job at the *Tonight Show*. Not surprisingly, he also tends to compare L.A to New York, with unfavorable outcome for the former. There seems to be no sense of jazz community:

L.A. is so spread out, musicians don't want to get together if they have to drive 45 minutes to someone's house. I wish there was more motivation, but it doesn't exist. L.A. doesn't lend itself to that esthetic. New York does. It's concentrated. Boom - a pile of musicians. Plus New York's got 30 more clubs than L.A. They got two clubs: Catalina's and whatever the other one is. (62:6, p. 23)

The disdain is quite clear in Marsalis' “whatever the other one is,” as he would probably be able to name most of the 30 New York clubs he alludes to, but can't even remember the name of one of the two clubs in LA. Los Angeles has not become a *place* for Marsalis, invested with meaning and purpose, except perhaps as a non-place, as it lack the sense of centre or hub that Marsalis so clearly values in New York. In this he is not alone.

New York is the place against which all other places are measured in the jazz community (52:12, 16; 57:2, 6; 57:5, 28; 60:12, 18). It is “the jazz capital of the world. It’s where many of the top working musicians live and play, where you can find a heavy concentration of labels and studios, and the city offers an abundance of clubs filled with music night in and night out” (71:9, 8).⁸¹

The mythologies that connect jazz with New York City – and Manhattan in particular – are numerous. The city came into its own in the 1920s and 30s along side with jazz and came to signify modernity in a way that no other American (or European) city did in the middle of the 20th Century. In 1954 John A. Kouwenhoven listed under things distinctively American both the Manhattan skyline and jazz, connecting the two by quoting Le Corbusier for describing the effect of the simultaneously ordered and idiosyncratic of the skyscrapers as “hot jazz in stone and steel.” Kouwenhoven found that “the structure of a jazz performance is, like that of the New York skyline, a tension of cross purposes” (Kouwenhoven 127-28). Of course, his comparison was based on a simplification of the principles of both jazz and architecture, but the position that both New York and jazz holds in the American imagination as signifiers of modernity remains central. When New York in the post WWII years saw a surge of jazz clubs and musicians it *did* become a hub for musicians and fans alike. As New Orleans is constructed in the jazz community as the site for heritage and tradition, New York is the site for newness and forward motion.

⁸¹ The identity as jazz capital is perceived as so strong, that when in 1986 the City interfered, enforcing a 1950s cabaret law that stipulated the use of trios rather than for example quintets, it created an uproar in the entire jazz community (DB53:7, 55). So much so that the American Federation of musicians sued the City and in 1988 it was found that “the three-musician law was unconstitutional because it abridged the First Amendment right of composers and performers and it limited the free expression of musical ideas” (DB55:5, 6).

Especially the opportunity to meet and work with different musicians seems to be key in creating a sense of community:

It's late-night, New York – the jazz jam-session world where musicians young and old go to meet. Veterans go to unwind after a three-set night. Young players, who make up the bulk of late-nighters, search for fresh encounters with their idols and a locale to brush shoulders with contemporaries on the bandstand. New York City – the jam-session nerve center of the world. (63:2, p. 26-27)

The jam-session is seen as the ultimate setting for creativity. It is represented as an impromptu site for “antagonistic cooperation”.⁸² And the ideal site for the improvised nature of jazz as even the names and skills of the participating musicians is an unknown. The perfect jam-session is an elusive experience that might take place in one club one night and in another the next. Viewed as such, New York becomes less a fixed place for memory than an open space for creativity, and the jazz community a fluid entity constantly on the lookout for that moment of improvised play. Of course, New York has places that become sites of memory and heritage and are designated so even by official bodies. One such place is the Village Vanguard that over the years has become gradually less bohemian and more established as “quintessential home for the music.” Its heritage status was firmly established when “New York City Council-man Tom Duane and Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger proudly unveiled a street-sign marking “Max Gordon Corner,” which now stands where Seventh Avenue South and Perry streets connect” (62:5, 10).⁸³

⁸² The expression is Ellison's denoting the exchange between exchange between intellectual (or musical) adversaries and the resulting move towards clearer, but possibly also more complex definitions (Ellison *Jug* 188). Albert Murray expands on the concept as the dynamics of the heroic (Murray 1998, 574).

⁸³ Max Gordon opened The Village Vanguard in 1935 in Greenwich Village, initially hosting cabaret and variety acts along with folk music, jazz, poetry and spoken word. In the late fifties switching to an all-jazz policy and becoming one of if not *the* longest lasting jazz club in the world.

However, the centrality of New York in the representation of jazz is not necessarily of a hermetic character. The fluidity of the jam-session scene is akin to an idea of New York as a site for open cultural interchange, as when Joe Lovano draws lines connecting New York and the rest of the world:

I've always been cross-generational, but I'm speaking of international influences, too. This last year I've played in Chile, I've been in Europe a bunch of times, played all over Japan and Hong Kong. The different flavors of the countries and their people – if you let all that influence you, your music can go anywhere. That's what Duke Ellington did, and look at all the beautiful music he gave us. To respect different cultures and let all peoples into your life to influence you is a rich thing-it filters in through my music, for sure. I don't ever want to lose that. That's why I love living in New York City. (60:3, 19)

Doreen Massey writes in her paper “Power-geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place” of how, instead of “thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations” (Massey 66). It is exactly this sense of place that seems to pervade most of the representations of New York. Even the events of September 11, 2001, do not cause the community to close in on it self, as one might expect. Instead, the discourse emphasizes inclusiveness and music as building bridges between countries and cultures (68:12, 14: 69:3, 18). Although jazz business was as deeply affected as other business in New York, there is an insistence on keeping the music going for exactly those reasons:

The Jazz Gallery – which has always billed itself as “An International Jazz Cultural Center” – maintained its schedule, and Fitzgerald acclaimed Sam Newsome's Global Unity ensemble as perfect “for helping us deepen and underscore our mission: to cast this music as the music of the globe, without boundaries. (68:12, 23)

Massey points out that defining space in terms of boundaries “does not have to be through simple counterposition to the outside; it can come, in

part, precisely through the particularity *to* that ‘outside’” and just as people may have multiple identities, so can places (67). The jazz community may make use of place as a way to assign continuity and memory, a way to lock identity into place. But place can also be engaged as both global and local at the same time.

TRAVERSING TRADITION: THE MUSICIAN AND THE JAZZ COMMUNITY

Just as a place may or may not have boundaries and/or multiple identities, so can tradition. It might be useful to think of tradition, if not as place then as *space*, an abstract field of contesting definitions and values. As jazz is increasingly invested with meaning as one of the great American traditions, the field becomes ever more contested and run through with divisions and disagreements. Issues of gender, race, the marketplace, artistic control and the canon all intersect and interact in this field. In keeping with the spatial metaphor (however abstract) these divisions can be looked upon as “fault lines” – like the San Andreas Fault: creating tensions and release, opening fissures and pushing up new ridges. The fault lines are interfaces that cannot simply be seen as conflicts or dichotomies, but as the constant push and pull of negotiation (occasionally resulting in major or minor earthquakes). As we move toward a reading of the musician and the jazz community in *Down Beat* this becomes ever more apparent as the heteroglossia of the voices in the magazine can be read as constantly engaging in the act of defining and naming the tradition.

However, not all sites of conflict are always represented as such in *Down Beat*. This applies to two of the most contested fields in culture in

general: that of gender and that of race. Of course, race is mentioned. There is no attempt to “white out” the origins of the music, on the contrary. Issue is taken with previous strategies of effacing the black American presence in jazz.⁸⁴ But the discourse nevertheless still engages in strategies of evasion, as when evoking race in terms of authenticity or historicity. Kenny G, key representative of the smooth jazz format, emphasizes his non-white, or mixed, musical background as growing “up in a black neighborhood in Seattle, and that neighborhood and the schools that I went to were primarily ethnic - Asian, black, and white - and we listened to r&b mainly” (55:1, p. 17). Even though smooth jazz originated from and is still mainly listened to by a black audience, it has essentially been labeled as a “white” format. Possibly aware that this has less cultural capital in terms of authenticity within the jazz community, Kenny G evokes a black – or non-white – tradition as part of his tradition. Of course, as Ralph Ellison so often pointed out, the influence of African American culture on mainstream American culture is pervasive. But it is the recognition of this that holds a particular cultural value in Kenny G’s representation of himself as a jazz musician.⁸⁵ Chris Washburne points out that Kenny G has not only appropriated a black art form, but also a black audience (135), and there is an element of cultural blackface in his insistence of a culturally non-white (ethnic by proxy) background. In what has now become a central text on the topic, Eric Lott uncovered in *Love and Theft* (1993), how blackface and

⁸⁴ For example Billy Taylor who denigrates radio for turning the black audience away from jazz (DB58:2, 28). Mark Ruffin denigrates the way black artists have been pushed out of the smooth jazz format (DB70:6, 21). Also, Nick La Rocca and ODJB taking the credit of the first jazz recording seems an injustice and “as if history has conspired to cheat black culture of a milestone event” (DB59:2, 27).

⁸⁵ It is not just Kenny G that engages this strategy. There is a general tendency to bestow authenticity to white jazz musicians by African American association. For example in Eric Nisenson’s *Blue: The Murder of Jazz*, white jazz musicians are frequently granted authority by quoting the admiration/appreciation of black musicians (37, 42, 85, 110). Ken Burns’ *JAZZ* also constantly applies this approach.

minstrelsy, and the continued appropriation of black American culture by white mainstream America, rest on complex issues of simultaneous attractions and anxiety towards black culture and in particular perceptions of black male sexuality (Lott 6). Paul Gilmore expands on this argument when pointing out that “the minstrel show produced race and gender as authentic” by simultaneously destabilizing and re-invoking the idea of a stable identity (Gilmore 2001, 50-51). However, the concept of authenticity, in this case authenticity by association with certain ethnic groups, is a construct and one that deflects attention from the actual issues of race and culture by focusing on the imaginary.⁸⁶

Likewise, historicity provides a strategy of evasion as it places problems of race in the past rather than the present. In a piece on Coltrane, Bill Shoemaker states that “more acutely *then than now*, the politics of the day for Black musicians centered around establishing a self-determined economy” (53:9, 63 – my italics). In an interview with Clark Terry, his experiences of racial hatred is placed in the past while at the same time he worries that school jazz bands are predominantly white (63:6, 19). The ambivalence in this type of position resembles that of Wynton Marsalis talking of race in terms of the fairy tale in Ken Burns’ series. It seems to deal with the issue of race, but in reality relegates it to a sphere of myth, where history becomes nature and thus loses its dynamic impact on the present. The writer/interviewer on the Clark Terry piece (John McDonough) introduces Clark Terry’s reflections on race in equally ambivalent terms:

It somehow seems both corny and patronising to suggest that Terry’s ebullient gift as an “ambassador” might also be offered as an explanation for how he has managed the “race issue” in his life. At 75, he was born

⁸⁶ Here I have in mind Homi Bhabha’s definition of the stereotype as placed within “the Lacanian schema of the Imaginary”. The stereotype functions much like Lacan’s mirror-phase in its simultaneous narcissism and aggressivity (Bhabha 2004, 109-110).

witness to the worst of racial times. He remembers it all. Yet it's been his choice not to hate.⁸⁷ (ibid)

Despite his opening sets of disclaimers and misgivings of simplistic and stereotypical explanation, John McDonough's "yet" at the end of the quotes passage is the linguistic loophole that allows him to offer exactly those types of explanations to Terry's strategies in the face of racism, evoking, however subtly, stereotypes of jovial and cheerful black people, by emphasizing on Terry's "ebullience." But most striking is the quotation marks around "race issues." Quotations marks can either signal the use of another's utterance or a distancing between the signifier and the signified. Either way the words are objectified and in this case the reality of race and race issues are made null and void – it is as if the words need fencing in.

The media and the marketplace are often represented as the culprits of erasing black presence or creating division and narrow definitions, and there is a general disinclination to talk of racial division within the jazz community.⁸⁸ Joshua Redman touches on internal divisions in an interview from 1996, but reiterates the sense that the *media* "categorizes music and pegs people into different camps." (63:5, 20). Wynton Marsalis insists on the

⁸⁷ The Jazz Ambassador Program was run by the State Department as a conscious effort in the cold war, starting with Dizzy Gillespie's tour of the Middle East in 1956. Clark Terry partook in the late 1970s during the last run of the original program. The Department of State revived the program in 1997 and it is still running (now under the name "Rhythm Road – American Music Abroad") providing a "highly successful vehicle for conveying this uniquely American music – instilled with American cultural heritage and American values – to millions of people, worldwide" (An Evaluation of the Jazz Ambassadors Program 10). The program was initially seen as a way of countering negative images of America as racially biased and solely driven by capitalist consumerism, and today the targeted areas of the program continues to be places where the US may suffer from "image problems" as a nation of white supremacist hedonists.

⁸⁸ In these cases *Down Beat* conveniently overlooks its own place in the mass media, often by invoking the marginalized position of jazz and the assumed lack of economic capital, thus distancing itself from the marketplace and the media channels that cater to this.

metaphor of the American melting pot that erases the very same fault lines jazz comes out of:

And that's why the people are ready for this music. Everybody wants it, they're ready for change, and they're ready for positive change, and they're ready to start trying to get together. They're tired of fighting each other, they're tired of being white and black. People are ready to be Americans, and that's why it's time for jazz. (59:12, 21)

However, as Gennari states, the “uncomplicated notions of jazz as an oasis of interracial harmony in an otherwise racist society” need to be critically analyzed. Although personal relationships between musicians, fans and critics forged across the color line, crosses racial barriers, the dynamics and systems of institutional racism are not so easily dismantled. He continues to point out that the media and the jazz critics (whom Joshua Redman and others peg as responsible for creating divisions based on more or less obviously racial parameters) continue to be predominantly white (2006, 384).

Despite Marsalis' insistence on jazz as erasing racial difference, there is no doubt that the controversy surrounding Jazz at Lincoln Center (J@LC) has its roots in the very same dynamic. The discussions focused on whether or not their commissions and hiring were racially motivated, and whether the canon that was being defined by and from J@LC was exclusively African American. This debate which was very prominent in for example the *Village Voice* and *New York Times* in the first half of the 1990s, reflected the ongoing struggle over definitions of tradition and canon. Only once, in 1993, does *Down Beat* give explicit and editorial space to the dispute, with both John Ephland and Martin Johnson describing the various complaints that had been lodged against the program and focusing on the commissions and honorary programs as racially biased (60:11, 6, 9). But as Gennari points out, some of the accusations brought against Marsalis and J@LC “smacks of its own racial obsession and double-standard-ism”:

[...] as today there is no public outrage over the overwhelmingly white racial composition of the Met, the New York Philharmonic, and the other organizations under the Lincoln Center umbrella (2006, 364)

The J@LC program conceived by Stanley Crouch, Wynton Marsalis and Albert Murray is no doubt an attempt to create a counter hegemony to institutional racism and canons defined by a predominantly white jazz criticism. This is an understandable and perhaps even necessary consequence of previous Anglo-American/-European dominance. The civil rights and the Black Arts movement contributed to a raised consciousness of the value of the contributions of non-white peoples to American culture – and beyond. Nevertheless, counter canons and counter-hegemony continue to engage the same systems of thought as the traditions they attempt to defy. In an interview from 1994, Anthony Braxton aptly analyzes the narrowing of perspective that any canon implies:

All of this is part of what the jazz world has become, what jazz journalism has become, what the jazz recording complex has become. An attempt to enshrine blackness and jazz exoticism and contain it within one definition-space runs contrary to the total progression of the music. [...]The African-American intellectual community from the '60-'70s time cycle has now embraced Eurocentricity on a level that boggles the mind. Remember now, I'm called the 'white negro.' Nobody wants to use those terms, but I'm supposed to be the embodiment of that which has not been black, when in fact I never gave one inch of my beliefs or experiences. What is this notion that you can corral blackness? That's a marketplace notion. You can be sure that when you start hearing arguments about what is properly black we're moving toward another spectacle and diversion cycle and a narrowing of possibilities. (61:4, p. 29)

Braxton also reiterates the influence of the market place on the definitions of jazz, while pointing out the effect of a bourgeois cultural economy/production. He correlates “blackness and jazz exoticism” with “Eurocentricity,” on the surface two antithetical systems of thought, but connected through the ambivalence present in both. Homi Bhabha, in describing colonial discourse and stereotype, point out the double nature of

this, the oscillation between repulsion and attraction, between metonymic and metaphoric modes of representation (113). The idea of blackness represents the metonymic and exoticism the metaphoric, just as the ‘corralling’ off provides a site for both “spectacle and diversion.” Thus, the counter movement of a canon defined from an African American perspective risks enforcing systems of thought based on stereotype and othering.

When jazz is represented as the art form that effaces differences, “a music of *inclusion* based on ability, not on race or gender” (Donald Byrd 60:5, 6), it is more a representation of the ideal situation than the actual. But where the fault line of race generally has been a site of interface, gender largely remains a fissure, a gap of silences and stereotypes. *Down Beat* does give attention to what is generally referred to as “women in jazz,” and various “women in jazz” events occasionally gets mention in the magazine (52:4, 13; 58:8, 55; 64:1, 12). However, mentions are often couched in terms that hold connotations of the *femaleness* of women. Events and concerts are described as “warm” and “engaging,” possessing “style” and “pizzazz” (58:5; 64:1 *ibid*). A feature on Dianne Reeves opens up with a description that adheres to almost every cliché about women in the book: “Mother Earth” – “pretty, round face” – “rich, resonant voice” – “subdued” – “without affectation” – “an honest, open woman” – “authentic” – “intuitive” – even calling her latest album “her new baby” (64:2, 28). Toward the end of the piece we also for some reason need to know what her eating and fitness regime consists of, all indicating a preoccupation with the body that is deeply entwined in constructs of gender and music. Not only is the singing woman “literally and metaphorically, in tune with her body,” but she is also removed from ideas of technology as the voice it the one instrument that is

specifically embodied in the artist and entirely non-mechanical, thus reinforcing patriarchal notions of femininity (Green 28-29).

Perhaps the most striking example of these discursive idiosyncrasies is the two back to back features in the November 2002 issue on drummers Terri Lyne Carrington and Jeff “Tain” Watts. What first leaps out of the pages of these two stories are the openings. First on Terri Lyne Carrington:

One can tell a lot about someone’s personality by how well they keep their house. In the case of Terri Lyne Carrington, the first thing one notices about her home is its order and serenity. Crisp Southern California sunshine illuminates her sparsely decorated living room. Subtly elegant but comfortable furniture adorns the room; and one can practically eat off the floor. It looks like an Ethan Allen showroom - amazing considering that she has two dogs, a cat and a bird peacefully coexisting.

In most households, the four animals would cause home-wrecking havoc. And even though Carrington insists that one of the dogs constantly hassles the cat and eats its food, a Zen-like vibe permeates. Of course, it helps to have a strong-willed yet peaceful person to keep chaos at bay. And with Carrington, her surrounding extends to her as she juggles a schedule as a drummer, composer and producer. [...] But when Carrington talks, she seldom gives the sense of being harried, pre-occupied or unnerved. She exudes an inviting and sharply focused confidence. Her bright eyes sparkle with childlike optimism and curiosity, but they also emit a sagacious glow that belies her 37 years. (69:11, 35)

And on Watts:

When he isn’t on the road with Branford Marsalis, Michael Brecker or his own group, Jeff “Tain” Watts often plays in the cramped environs of Manhattan’s Zinc Bar, a low-ceilinged shotgun basement on the north edge of Soho where an international mix of New York’s finest musicians workshop various projects. In the front section, patrons and waitresses vie for elbow room in a narrow aisle between a well stocked bar and a long line of dime-sized banquette tables. The tables run past a 10-foot by 5-foot performance area and a sheetrock wall that conceals a pair of dimly lit restrooms. No matter how esoteric the material, the bands never stray too far from a groove, the better to keep the party going. Watts knows how to play the room and push the envelope as well as anyone.

The Zinc Bar’s skronky-cosmopolitan ambiance figures prominently in *Bar Talk* (Columbia), Watts’ latest release. Consider the CD’s cover photo. Shot in tones of boudoir red, Watts, wearing a leather jacket, perches over

a drink, perhaps anticipating a round of conversation with Jean-Claude Rakotoniaina, a Madagascanian charmer and *bon vivant* who until recently mixed and poured \$10 mojitos, caporinhas and martinis to a varied clientele. Watts signifies their profound banter – “He’d say, ‘Tain, you are the man’; I’d be like, ‘No, J.C., you know you’re the man!’” (41)

Even considering that the two features are written by different writers (John Murph for the Carrington piece, Ted Panken on Watts), the difference of the information we are given and of the discourse this information is delivered in, is remarkable. Our first encounter with Carrington is as a homemaker (the various animals providing a substitute for the children that would have completed the picture), whereas we encounter Watts in a work setting. The description of Carrington and her surroundings in terms of spirituality is contrasted sharply by the locale of male bonding that Watts is attributed. His “pushing the envelope” stands in opposition to her “Zen-like vibe” and “childlike curiosity.” Carrington is the only one of the two to which being a “drummer, composer, and producer” is a juggling act; nowhere in the piece on Watts is the various role of the working jazz musician described in these terms. On the contrary, where Carrington’s eclecticism is described as “often criticized for venturing to pop-oriented music rather than the straight and narrow path” (36), Watts’ similar forays into different musical forms provides him with “skills, predispositions and stylistic idiosyncrasies that make Watts perhaps the most influential hardcore jazz drummer of his generation” (42). The gap between discourses continues throughout the two pieces. The Carrington piece does attempt to specifically *not* mention gender issues, but does not succeed in “de-gendering” its discourse and only at the end does the piece become self-conscious, noting Carrington’s resistance to even privileging “women in jazz”:

[...] women still have uphill battles in gaining due recognition. Major events like the Annual Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Festival at the

Kennedy Center help, but even then, an element of tokenism exists that doesn't sit well with Carrington.

"I look at it as the same as Black History Month," Carrington says. "The accomplishments of African-Americans should be celebrated all year long. Why do we still need a month to do that? It's the same with women in jazz." (38)

Carrington's point remains salient.⁸⁹ To speak of "women in jazz" is still to gender the discourse, it still marginalizes women musicians. These patterns are so set that it remains inconceivable to talk of "men in jazz." As Sherrie Tucker notes in her essay "Bordering on Community": "If taken uncritically and unself-consciously, the term [women-in-jazz] threatens *not* to expose these naturalized equations of men and jazz; in fact, in very powerful ways it constructs women who accept this category as women-out-of-jazz" (Tucker 2004, 255). However, defining themselves in musical terms women musicians consistently eschew stereotyped conceptions of gender, sidestepping or reversing the question.

As bassist Marion Hayden-Banfield who insists that the all-women constellation of the group "Straight Ahead" is down to chance rather than gender: "It just kind of happens that we're women and that we're in a band together, but that's not the focus of our group" (60:8, 14). Or Abbey Lincoln, who consistently speaks in terms of music, poetry, politics, tradition, and ancestry, rather than gender. Her stance reflects on the interviewer (Jim Macnie), who describes her art as having "some of the most forceful temperaments in jazz. It's a power born of commitment" (64:7, 29). And similarly, Cassandra Wilson ignores the implied gendered categories when being compared to other (current) female singers, insisting instead on

⁸⁹ A much younger Carrington positioned herself a little more ambivalently in 1986. When faced with the (inevitable) question on being a woman in jazz – and a drummer at that – she first insists on gender differences and that being a woman "gives me a certain sensitivity that men have to work harder on developing." However, in her final analysis she eschews any extra musical notions: "No one cares if you are nine or 90, girl or boy or whatever. The question is, can you play?" (53:2, 45).

her musical connection with Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington and Miles Davis (69:4, 30).⁹⁰

By steering clear of issues of gender and instead addressing issues of genre and tradition, Wilson places her self along fault lines much more openly dealt with in *Down Beat*. These divisions are matters of constant debate in the magazine, where interviews and editorials form parts of an ongoing dialogue. John McLaughlin states that “nothing is contemporary unless you feel the tradition behind it” (53:3, 18), thus encompassing the central problems the discussion evolves around: the privileging of either tradition or the contemporary – or locating a position that can hold both in a balance. We are back to the issue of the past versus the future and the different positions oscillate between the impossibility (and undesirability) to try and capture the past and the necessity to maintain close links to the past (53:4, 63). Furthermore, there is also the question of genres and defining which of these that are part of the tradition.

In the second half of the 1980s, the reverberations of the fusion-debate still produces a certain anxiety with regards to pop and rock music, at least the choices need to be defended (52:12, 17; 54:7, 22; 55:6, 18), but as the 1990s progress there is less anxiety and more confidence in the potential of jazz as a hybrid form that has always used popular genres for material and inspiration (64:6, 37; 65:7, 30; 66:2, 29). New hybrid forms might bring “a new generation to jazz” that “got here in part by following their own agenda through pop music and have no intention of discarding their fondness for it” (64:4, 16).⁹¹ The same arguments are voiced when addressing links between jazz and classical music (52:1, 6), but the general discourse on jazz

⁹⁰ In addition see also 59:6, 18 and 68:12, 46.

⁹¹ The comment pertains to the acid-jazz movement, but also the so-called “jam-band” scene is celebrated for its emphasis on “innovation and improvisation above the glitz and grandstanding associated with most of today’s popular music” (67:6, 12).

and classical is less a site of contestation than one of affirmation. Classical music provides a connection with the western canon and history (52:2, 25). Also, the electric/acoustic divide figures in: If the acoustic sound to a higher degree connotes authenticity, then classical music will sit higher in this hierarchy – or rather, the connections between authenticity and the acoustic sound are *based* in the western romantic tradition and classical music, thus naturally privileging this over contemporary “amplified” sound.⁹²

Critics receive a fair share of, well, criticism for being the main operators in this game of naming and labeling. The mission of early jazz criticism is described as creating those divisions (of what is and is not jazz) in order to solidify the art form and the community (68:10, 39). Later critics are depicted as engaged in crystal ball gazing (53:1, 18), whereas the musicians are represented as having to deal with the reality of the music:

every critic picks out one inch and says, “That’s jazz and all the rest is junk.” Well, they’re not picking out the same inch so there’s an endless lack of accordance between what they’re saying and reality. I’m stuck with reality, as much as I can deal with it. [...] The music that I made was, willynilly, an attempt to make a living in a very confusing world. I had other aspects to me, such as the stories that I’ve written over the past 45 years. I gave somebody an epitaph for myself, I think for Who’s Who: “He did the best he could with what he had.” I’ve since revised it into something much more elegant: “Go away.” (Artie Shaw 68:11, 39)

The emphasis here lies on the impossibility to pin down life, even in musical form, and not just the impossibility, but the futility of the exercise and the lack of desire to do so. However, despite Artie Shaw’s caustic refusal to

⁹² This also raises the issue of “acoustic” amplified sound – that is, the use of microphones with traditionally acoustic instruments, but in the main, the dichotomy resides with the “artificial” or electronically instrument/created sound. However, there are trends towards the “pure” sound, such as the World Saxophone Quartet: “We would go into places and make them take all the microphones, all the speakers and everything out. We had to fight with people, but in the end they would hear every note and enjoy it. Now we’re in the process of going against digital and back to analog and making music the way music should be heard.” – Hamiet Bluiett (63:9, 26).

participate in the game of divisions and definitions,⁹³ the tight dichotomy between critics on one side and the musician, as well as the fan, on the other is denied by their function based on the homology between his or her position and the position of their readership. As Bourdieu explains:

in accordance with the law that one ever only preaches to the converted, a critic can only ‘influence’ his readers in so far as they extend him this power because they are structurally attuned to him in their view of the social world their tastes and their whole habitus. (96)

In the case of *Down Beat* we can to a certain extent substitute “readers” with “artists” (or at least add them to the equation), as the magazine becomes less of a fanzine. Thus, it seems even more paradoxical that *Down Beat* on the one hand is engaged in conducting jazz criticism, and on the other leaves considerable space for the debunking of critics. But as previously established, the paradox rests on the back and forth movement of both aiming to ground jazz firmly as high art and privileging the artist and the unmediated experience of reality as the site of authenticity.

The contesting fields of genres all reside in the discourses surrounding the greater field of tradition. The fault lines here run along varying definitions of the tradition as open and fluid in one end of the spectrum, and closed or stable in the other. Whether tradition is something that is in constant dialogue with the present or whether the present must rather incorporate a stable definition of the past. To those who adhere to the former position, the latter seems almost like moving *against* the tradition, as Pat Metheny indicates when stating that:

[Jazz] seems to demand that each new generation makes peace with something specific that is uniquely theirs. There is something about that particular negotiation that informs the music with a kind of living,

⁹³ Shaw was nothing but consequential when leaving the music world for good in 1954.

breathing molecular structure that can never be re-created or even accurately simulated by other means. (70:12, 38)

If it is part of the jazz tradition's imperative to constantly "be able to take materials from various sources [...] and use them as a vehicle for improvisation" (Lester Bowie, 58:8, 25), then the repertory bands and the desire to create an established (and constant) canon, are examples of definitions of the music that not only operates in terms of very strict rights and wrongs, but operate in terms that lie outside tradition. A young Wynton Marsalis polemically argues, that a real regard for the jazz tradition will not "allow someone to function under the illusion that he is playing music when he is destroying it" (54:11, 17), thus cordoning off and placing value judgments on different kinds of music. Underlying all this is the belief that "lasting artistic value [...] rises up through an informed cultural consensus involving musicians, critics, and the public" (59:1, 30-31), and that history somehow provides objectivity (64:1, 17-18). Counter to this runs the argument against too narrow definitions and the tidying up of history (and the tradition) in neat narratives (66:4, 28; 69:2, 80; 71:3, 47-48).

The divisions are essentially about naming – even for those who object to easy labels. It is about the right to name and define the tradition and thus, claim it. However open those definitions may be, the tradition always comes into view. Steve Coleman and the collective of young Brooklyn-based musicians named their music M-base in the early 1990s both in order to control the naming and the definition, but also out of too much respect for the tradition "to play music that draws from so many sources outside the tradition and still call it jazz" (56:1, 26-27). Even the avant-garde claims the tradition (53:11, 23). Henry Threadgill who is represented as an "outspoken nonconformist" (63:3, 17) is placed not only in the jazz tradition but as part of the greater American tradition and canon. His music "recalls the best

American artistic visions - idiosyncratic and sardonic, and constantly surprising in its lyrical generosity of spirit - from Twain to Doctorow's *Ragtime*, from Ives to Ellington" (56:2, 20). Jazz as the quintessential American art form, thus can be defined as part of the American tradition as interface and crossing point, as the "only music that's representative of all of us" (67:3, 26).

Forming communities and collectives are part of the identity shaping activities we all engage in on a daily basis, and always on several levels or tiers. Within the jazz community, the heterogeneity provides for structures of collectivity that disperse along both horizontal and vertical lines. By horizontal I am referring to the difference in opinions, the fault lines and the fissures between different ideological or creative approaches to the music. But there is also a vertical differentiation that takes the shape of the aforementioned levels or tiers, as a sense of the collective as it takes place in a working band; with the audience; with the local community of musicians, industry, critics and audience; within the greater jazz community and finally on national and international levels.

On the first tier, moving from the individual is the band. The importance that is given to this is almost equal to the privileging of the artist as creator as it constitutes the one of the two parties interacting in jazz: the individual and the group, and the most frequent metaphor used in the discourse of the jazz band is that of democracy as each member represents an accomplished musician in his or her own right with creative ideas that influence the whole (55:10, 23; 55:10, 26-27; 64:5, 34-38; 67:4, 28). But the emphasis in particular lies with the so-called "working band" – that is, a group of musicians that works together over a prolonged period of time, preferably years, with none or little change in the personnel. The key word is continuity, as the musicians establish a musical intimacy:

The great thing about having a band with continuity is that you have a chance to follow up on ideas and suggestions that we have about the music. You bring your experiences to the table, and they don't have to be musical. We've all shared quite a lot of personal stuff together, and that's changed the music. The communication adds up to a whole lot more than just the notes. The music's coming from a place that's real life. It's honest. (Dave Holland - 69:8, 25)

The focus shifts from the musical to the extra-musical, as “real life” provides “honesty” – or authenticity. The real life element is also represented as closer to the immediacy of the improvisatory character of jazz, in some cases taking precedence over technique and polished performance, as when Wayne Shorter challenges the “unknown” in his “Footprints” quartet and no longer rehearses because “How can we rehearse what we don't know?” (70:8, 38).⁹⁴ The leader of the working band is represented as someone who allows the individual members to express themselves in musical terms, and who “deliberately places his own creativity on the line, surrenders it to be at the mercy of the band he heads” (55:10, 24). The element of romanticism that is present here also shows itself in a great deal of nostalgia. The financial difficulties in keeping a working band together in today's entertainment economy is reiterated with regularity and a whole series of articles, “Fanfare for the Working Band” is presented through 1997 (March, May, July, and November issues). The four part features focus on different aspects of keeping a working band working and emphasizes the difficulties involved. Especially the market place (in the shape of record companies, clubs and festivals) is represented as undermining the foundations of the working band by investing in so-called “celebrity bands” – bands of renowned and legendary players put together for just one album and/or concert/tour. The

⁹⁴ Of course, the level of musicianship greatly determines the outcome of such a venture. Wayne Shorter's choice of some of the most accomplished young musicians for his groups naturally facilitates this approach, thus still letting the level of technique with the individual musician play an important role.

charge is that it is “festivals themselves have likely influenced jazz listenership, encouraging a less consistent engagement with the music and allowing fans to approach it more like a sporting event than as a regular part of their cultural calendar” (64:7, p. 36).

Another benefit of the working band that is seen as in danger of disappearing is the educational aspect. The Big Bands of the 1930s are held up as examples of the band as educational institutions. Again, the change in how jazz is both consumed and produced is laid to blame for the disappearance of these opportunities, as well as young musicians not taking advantage of these opportunities. The continuum and the education can also take the shape of the band reaching an audience or a wider community as is the explicit mission of both the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and Steve Coleman’s Jazz Outreach. However, the approach or the ideologies behind the two projects are split along the fault lines of the music. Rob Gibson claims the canon and to do nothing less “than putting this music in the rightful position of respect where it belongs in American society” (67:10, p. 30). Whereas Coleman works with the more loosely defined entity of “improvisational music” insisting “that he’s not even operating in the j-word realm,” but only aiming to educate people about “what it means to work collaboratively and creatively” (63:10, p. 30-31)⁹⁵. Coleman’s approach signifies an attempt to eschew divisions and fault lines, but the jazz community remains a contested category, as Ellis Marsalis brings to the fore:

I don’t think there is a jazz community. Not if I understand what a community is. A community is a group of people with shared interests. It’s very difficult to look at jazz in terms of a community. It’s more like a bunch of neighborhoods. (68:10, Jazz study guide, 7)

⁹⁵ Actually reaching an audience and a community is represented as the challenge of the late 20th and early 21st century as jazz has disappeared out of the mainstream media and market place as “jazz has become an inaccessible genre for younger music fans” due to “prohibitive costs and staid environments of the clubs” (67:6, 33).

The metaphor of the neighborhood returns us to the idea of the tradition and the jazz community in terms of space and how different groups and individuals have different strategies for negotiating space (and place). There are people who spend their entire lives in just one neighborhood, never really venturing outside, but often supplying the cement of the neighborhood, providing it with identity. Of course, even the identity of a very specific neighborhood can be contested by those occupying it and those definitions may not be simply divided into reactionary or progressive strategies (Cresswell, 79). In addition, there are also people who crisscross the boundaries, the “eclectics” who uses different neighborhoods for different things and finally the “holistics” who thinks of all the neighborhoods in terms of a whole.

The Internet represents space in its total abstraction. As such, it is represented as the new media format that offers musicians both the control of the recording and distribution of their music, as well as offering a way in to a community, potentially reaching further and wider than the traditional channels of interaction and promotion. In the editorial of the February 1999 issue, a number of predictions were presented as to the possibilities of the internet. The distribution and downloading of music has turned out to be an accurate forecast, whereas the cybercasting of live jazz concerts remains more of a fantasy. The production of a CD is a one-off cost and the musician might even control the distribution of it themselves (as with ArtistsShare.com). But producing and filming concerts to then subsequently make available online still involves people on the ground and often substantial copyright fees to the production/film company as well as composers/arrangers (66:2, 6). Online communities serve both as forums for fans and musicians to interact and communicate and the individual websites of both musicians and organizations are represented as sites of

signifying where the control of definitions and naming belongs wholly to the individual:

For the next century, the history of jazz will be preserved in real time, through the words and pictures of the musicians themselves. The advent of all this new communication technology has made it possible for the working musician to be the historian; to give that history a very personal point of view. (68:2, 10)

Despite the emphasis on the importance of collectivity the individual musician remains in focus, “jazz is primarily a soloist’s art” (64:10, 6) and authenticity comes out of the personal – in history, in musical ideas and in sound. Joe Lovano is quoted for quoting Charlie Parker stating that “If you don’t live it, it can’t come out of your horn” (65:1, 17). The assumption that lived life and art is inextricably linked is one based in bourgeois notions of art for arts sake. This, however, creates a paradox in the representation of the contemporary musician. He is supposed to be reaching for the same heights as the mythological creatures of the past, but without direct access to the time that created the experiences and the music. In representation, this is solved by encasing the musicians of the present in the discourse of legend. Phrases such as “living legend,” “hero,” and “giant” are frequently utilized, and the romanticist image of the devoted creator is perpetuated. However, contemporary musicians are still among the living and the pragmatics of life are ever present. TS Monk, the son of Thelonious Monk, aptly points out the perceived discrepancy between lived life and legend – even for the legends:

I felt like the son of Pharaoh [...] People were always saying, ‘Do you know who your father is?’ I knew there was something special about him and his friends, even though I didn't know their last names for the first 10 years of my life. They were just Bud and Bird and Trane and Miles and Diz and Max and Art and A.T. and Klook. They were the guys running through the house all the time-but everybody talked about these guys like

they were gods! I felt like I was growing up on Mount Olympus. (59:11, 32)

As for these actual legends of the past, often the person disappears and only the myth remains. Dizzy Gillespie is depicted as “an emblem of America” (60:4, 17) and when celebrating Louis Armstrong’s birthday, *Down Beat* chooses to adhere to the legend by honoring Armstrong’s “heroic lie” of being born on the 4th of July 1900 since “sometimes a person's achievements elevate them above reality, to become a timeless classic.” (67:7, 22).⁹⁶ Even the music may disappear, as is the case when John Coltrane’s legacy is deemed to be “a sum greater than its parts – in this case a coherent feeling, a vibe, an effect on the spiritual level. You can absorb his specific musical accomplishments *or not* – but what really matters is this spiritual aspect” (65:6, 24 – my italics). In the “or not” lies a dismissal of the music for the extramusical. Not to claim that the music is not important or central to any jazz listener, be it as a fan, critic or musician, but the stuff that legends are made of is the lives lived and the meaning we attribute to the sometimes unreliable reports from these.

The most common way musicians of legendary stature are imagined is through anecdote. *Down Beat* regularly runs features on “the greats” in celebration or memory: Charlie Parker in an August 1995 feature (in celebration of the 75th anniversary of his birth); Ella Fitzgerald in September 1995; Miles Davis in December 1991, December 1995 and May 2001; and Ray Brown in October 2002 – just to name a few. The features are structured around the voices and stories of various friends, colleagues and collaborators, having more resemblance to eulogy and remembrance than history or journalism.

⁹⁶ He was born on August 4th 1901.

There are generally two types of anecdotes: those that are centered in a musical situation and tell of the musical genius and those that have extra-musical settings and seem to provide a rare glimpse of the actual person behind the myth. Both often have a disarming point or a punch line. But this is exactly what makes them suspicious as accurate accounts, as life rarely provides punch lines. Like myth, the anecdotes are polished and perfected by the telling and retelling. They are the kind of “equipment for living” that Kenneth Burke refers to as “strategies which artists have developed with relation to the naming of situations” (Burke 1973, 301). In an introduction to a collection of anecdotes on being on the road, Dan Quellette points out that:

Jazz history is part fact, part hearsay. Some events have been witnessed and documented. Other anecdotes come from both reliable and unreliable sources, then get spun into myth as they’re retold countless times on tour busses and at sound checks. (69:10, p 40)

The anecdote is possibly the most apt strategy for narrating and imagining the tradition and the community. Like the proverb, which is the starting point for Burkes theorizing on both American slang and literature, the anecdote is a distinctly oral mode or strategy. Its brief form and punch line-like endings make for perfect oral narratives, and as so little of especially early jazz history exists in the shape of conventional historic documents, it becomes the primary mode of remembering and imagining the jazz community.

In *Down Beat* this element of orality is frequently put into play, oftentimes self-consciously so, as in the above quote. The musicians and critics often use terms that evoke the oral situation to describe the music. “Telling your own story” or expressions to the same point is the most frequent way of defining a central point in soloing. Jimmy Heath talks of speaking “your own language” and phrasing and sound are termed individual

markers of excellence, more so than technical prowess. Branford Marsalis points to this emphasis on sound when stating that:

[...] the majority of American musical culture was developed by African Americans, who have a completely different aural sensibility. That's a-u-r-a-l, not o-r-a-l. But [...] from the Western vantage point, everything is written down, everything is understood through the literal text. Whereas, for the African sensibility, the tradition is passed down orally. (59:1; 20)

Although he initially differentiates between aural and oral, what Marsalis' statement reveals is that the orality in the jazz community is both perceived *and* produced. As coming out of the African American experience orality is part of the jazz tradition, but it is also emphasized and privileged. As discussed earlier, the word of the musician takes precedence in the magazine as it is perceived as bearer of authenticity, and there is emphasis on the responsibility to pass on the tradition orally (70:1, 27). *Down Beat's* "First Person Project" is a perfect example of this when in 2000 the magazine ran a series of articles, "interviews with the legends of jazz" (67:3, 42), that were to document the history of jazz.

By nature of the magazine, the interview is the most pervasive form throughout *Down Beat*. Whether conscious of this or not, it lends the magazine itself a certain "oral" quality. Especially when more than one person sits as interviewee or when the interviewee talks in an associative manner does the interview form take on a dynamic quality. However, by placing the term in quotation marks I wish to indicate that it should not be taken too literal (pun intended). First of all, interview sessions are performative (Peretti 127). The subject (or interviewee) has already established a mode of narrative that he or she feels comfortable with and the ubiquitousness of anecdotes is evidence of this: carefully selected and polished over the years they represent strategies of naming and definition rather than "truth" and "hearing it from the horses mouth." Second, these

interviews are transcripts and the spoken word is continuously mediated. Selections have been made, ramblings have been tidied up and anecdotes have been once more through the polisher.

Walter J. Ong also points to the primacy of the oral and to the secondary nature of the written text, noting the impossibility of capturing the dynamics of the oral in writing (Ong 8-13). Like the jazz community Ong to some extent privileges orality as the primary mode of communication and “natural” as opposed to the “artificial” of writing, with orality producing a greater sense of group coherence (69, 82). The jazz community constructs similar dichotomies via the primacy of improvisation, of that which is not notated, as well as the importance given to group interplay, but with the significant difference that the individual is at the center of both the oral/aural as well as the group. But the matter is more complex than that. Terry Goldie critiques Ong’s notions of orality as essentialist and “attracted to orality not for meaning but for presence. [...] (Goldie 124). An essentialism that, as Eva Rask Knudsen also points out, is based on “a long Eurocentric hegemonic tradition that has constructed orality as an ennobled but anachronistic cultural condition.” By naturalizing orality, it is also neutralized and the struggle between orality and writing as two forms of communication, two opposing views of reality and the right to control ways of seeing and naming, can be smoothed over (Knudsen 37-41).

Thus, it is not only a question of the ability (or inability) of capturing the words of the subject. Rather, it is question of mediation as the word of the other imposes itself upon the oral. This is speech represented, in dialogue with the interviewer and not just in the sense of q&a. As with the use of the talking heads in Ken Burns’ series, Bakhtin’s treatment of *skaz* and other stylized discourse provide us with a tool for grasping the different

levels of discourse in the interview form. Of course journalism is not novelistic discourse, but it is – especially when it is well done – prose and thus, from a “bakhtinian” understanding, a set of discourses brought together. Various degrees of direct intentionality and objectification persist, and it is only when two intentions collide in one type of discourse that speech becomes double-voiced (1978, 180). But as Bakhtin also points to in the essay “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in all aspects of life (meaning even those outside prose), utterances are never “indifferent to one another, and are not self sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another,” thus carrying within them “dialogic overtones” (1999, 130-131). And if we consider the mediated nature of the other’s speech in the interview, we are left with “another person’s set of devices precisely as the expression of a special point of view” (1978, 181). The representation of the interviewee’s words is never just directed at itself as orality but always also towards the other’s speech and “ideologemes”. Thus *Down Beat* is, despite its character as trade magazine and its bias towards mainstream jazz, a site for heteroglossia in jazz. The desires to classify, to place, to define and to name are all strong currents in the last 20 years. Confronted with the diversity of opinions and definitions of this period, it would be tempting, but erroneous, to start to classify and name the neo-classicists, the iconoclasts and the “moldy figs.” In the contested space of the jazz tradition, the fault lines are plural, constantly shifting between doctrine and dialogue.

IMAGES OF MILES: READINGS IN (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY

Few characters in jazz history have managed to create such a diversity of opinions and definitions around not only his person, but also his music, as Miles Davis. Not that anyone ever questions Davis' impact on modern jazz in the 1950s and 60s, on that the consensus is general and widespread: Miles Davis brought a new sound and approach to jazz in those years, although his persona and performance began to rub some people the wrong way as early as the late 1950s.

The controversies revolve around his production from the 1970s (sometimes as early as the late 1960s) and onwards into his last ten years of production and performances from 1981 till 1991, after the 5 year hiatus in the late 1970s. Those years provoke a variety of responses, from Gerald Early's comment in Ken Burns' series on Davis as "playing tennis without a net" to the image of him as the "Dark Magus" and "Sorcerer." Both of these latter terms are titles of Miles Davis albums and are symptomatic of one of the two extremes in representations of Miles Davis' last two decades:⁹⁷ either an early genius who lost direction and control in his music, or the direct opposite – the ultimate master of control who never lost his artistic vision but remained true to a credo of constant flux, his control so strong yet subtle, that magic seemed the most apt metaphor.

The appropriation of these metaphors by jazz writers, put in place by Davis himself, only corroborates this last definition, and there is little doubt that Davis worked consciously and hard at his own image. The controversy produce a discursive site where contrasting definitions and dialogues

⁹⁷ *Sorcerer*, released in 1968 (original: Columbia CL 2732, current cd release: Sony SRCS 5708) and *Dark Magus*, released in 1974 (original: CBS/Sony 28AP 2165/6, current cd release: Columbia/Legacy C2K 65137) (Szwed 461, 466).

surrounding jazz are brought into play, thus providing valuable material for the investigation of those very discourses. The simultaneous centrality and contentiousness of Davis creates a dynamic site where the jazz community in imagining Miles Davis, in turn, also imagines itself.

The following chapter seeks to uncover some of these imaginings through readings of biographical and autobiographical material on Miles Davis. The three central texts consist of Miles Davis' autobiography from 1989, John Szwed's biography, *So What*, from 2002 and finally the volume of essays, poems and interviews, *Miles Davis and American Culture* edited by Gerald Early and published in 2001. This last volume has been included as an example of a text that is centered around the biographical figure of Davis, but moves beyond the traditional narrative chronology of (auto)biography as well as linking Davis explicitly with greater American culture.

The two previous chapters deal with material that in different ways encompass a wider field of jazz, covering most of the history of jazz as well as a variety of artists and styles. Centering this chapter on biography and autobiography provides a change in the nature of the material and a shift in focus, moving from the plural to the singular. But questions of truth, of uncovering the past and recasting the facts, remain central. As does the desire in these texts to somehow simultaneously capture an essence, creating narratives that move beyond the immediately personal towards the allegorical. The connections between Ken Burns' grand narrative of a Nation and its music, the negotiations between the local and the universal in *Down Beat*, and the reconstruction of the individual yet exemplary life, lies in what Amy Shuman refers to as "the politics of memory":

Narrative creates chronologies and invents origins, crystallized moments in the past made to appear more significant than ongoing life in the present. Narrative creates the person as a character who can stand in for a

larger human experience. Narrative invents testimony as truth, as if only the past can provide meaning for the present. (25)

Miles Davis' singular figure appears several times in the Ken Burns series⁹⁸. Cast in the role of haunted visionary the emphasis here lies on his lyricism, his romanticism and his vulnerability, both in his sound and in his persona. The narrator talks of Davis childhood as “cushioned isolation” and Wynton Marsalis describes Davis' sound as “very, very tender to come out of a man.”⁹⁹ This is contrasted with what is referred to as Davis' “inner demons,” “deep insecurities,” and “arrogance.” Combined, they represent something inexplicable, ambiguities that the series cannot contain except in terms of myth and iconicity. An extended sequence in episode 9 lets various talking heads meditate on Davis' persona, and he is consistently imagined in terms of the mystical genius, with almost erotic connotations, ultimately the epigone of a superstar – possibly the first and last in jazz. Nevertheless, this position is only upheld in the series as long as Davis stays within the accepted form. When Davis is first mentioned in the series, the year is 1949 and he is described as “an impatient, relentless innovator, who over the next quarter century would continually push the boundaries of jazz.” The expression “the next quarter century” is of course more sweeping than for example “the next forty years,” and no doubt used for its rhetorical effectiveness. But it is curious that the period of Davis as an influential and important musician, is limited to those 25 years of his production that stayed within the tradition. Once he turns to fusion (in episode 10) his cultural capital drops rapidly, and his musical “betrayal” is in the last analysis spoken

⁹⁸ In episodes 8, 9, and 10; each charting a new development in his music. Episode 8 focuses on his arrival on the jazz scene, the *Birth of the Cool* period, episode 9 on his work with Evans and modal jazz, and episode 10, as already discussed in the first chapter, on fusion.

⁹⁹ Restraints of gender and preconceptions of what constitutes masculinity versus femininity are (potentially at least) equally limiting on both sides of the gender debate.

of in more critical terms, than for example his abuse of women and drugs in the previous episodes.

In *Down Beat* the representations vary along the lines of both the mentioned extremes, with characterizations of Davis (especially his later years) as having both “finally crossed that line into caricature” (DB53:10, 54) and being a “Sorcerer” with “tricks up his sleeve” and “more miles to go” (DB55:10, 16).¹⁰⁰ However, the dominant image of Miles Davis is that of him as the modernist and the innovator, with the majority of articles on Davis focusing on his music and groups up until the early 1970s. He is portrayed as uncompromising towards his art and with the ability to maintain control and focus whilst surrendering to flux – especially as a leader: Two long articles, in continuation of each other, in October and November 1988 both carry the subtitle “The Enabler.” They focus on how Davis’ leadership left the individual musician in charge, but with Davis steering the direction so imperceptively as to again evoke the idea of magic, of a world “through-the-looking glass” where Davis governs by means of “sight of hand” and “zen” (55:10, 22-24). The one thing that remains constant is his sound – his tone – which as an incorruptible essence stands beyond and above any stylistic experiments or errors (DB58:10, 26; 58:12, 16).

These various metaphors all serve to render Miles Davis less human and more genius, a figure shrouded in mystique and apocrypha. Gene Santoro recognizes the fact in referring to the “archetypical story” of Miles Davis’ leadership, told with variations by different musicians (DB55:10, 22). John Szwed opens his biography by acknowledging the fact that the stories surrounding Miles Davis are legion and most of them difficult if not impossible to corroborate. These stories serve the function of establishing

¹⁰⁰ These types of puns on his name are obvious, and endlessly recycled.

the legend of Miles Davis, and despite their contradictory character they provide us with a mythologized image of the genius and the eccentric – all in keeping with the cult of personality. The contradictions become part of the myth, rendering them fixed, as the nature of the process of mythologizing stabilizes the tension and dialectics between signifier and signified.

Before I turn to the texts on Davis, some considerations on issues of biography and autobiography will be helpful to understand the genre and its prerequisites. As biography is generally considered non-fiction, enlisted alongside history and documentary in a search for objective truth, the common conception of the genre is that it is to provide the antidote to myth. Biographers in preface after preface testify to a desire to uncover the real “man behind the myth,” and today, years of painstaking research, interviews and fact-checking constitute the foundation for any “serious” biographer.¹⁰¹ All of it part of the ritualistic search for truth and completeness. But how does one explain and document an entire life, be it one’s own or someone else’s?

The French critic Philippe Lejeune has written extensively on autobiography and recognizes the problematic position it holds. His first step is to differentiate autobiography from fiction by means of what he calls “the autobiographical pact.” A contract between the narrator (or the text) and the reader that “supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author [...], the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about”

¹⁰¹ Especially in today’s market, biography has split into “popular” and “serious.” Biographies of personalities within mass popular culture, be it singers, actors, talk show hosts or politicians (those that have enough media appeal to capture a mass audience) are generally marketed as popular culture, sold to a mass audience and completely ignored by the academic and critical establishment. Only biographies of literary, historical or political figures (those that do not hold great media appeal) are given any serious attention as documenting important cultural and historical facts (Casper 2), often based on the assumption that they are generally better researched and more accurate. Biographies of jazz musicians tend to fall under the latter of the two categories, both confirming and utilizing the cultural capital of the art form.

(Lejeune 12). This contract, or “pact,” establishes an expectation, both for the writer and the reader, of a certain claim to truth. However, as Lejeune later points out, this claim to truth holds an ambivalent position at best:

‘In the field of the subject there is no referent.’ ... We *indeed know* all this; we are not so dumb, but, once this precaution has been taken, we go on as if we did not know it. Telling the truth about the self, constructing the self as complete subject – it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible this in no way prevents it from existing. (132)

This double stance does not just limit itself to the autobiographical narrative, but also to the idea of a unified self. As Mary Evans suggests in her book *Missing Persons*, “this ‘whole’ person is in any case a fiction, a belief created by the very form of the auto/biography itself” (Evans 1). Thus, our understanding of who and what the “whole person” is, is formed in dialogue with the many narratives of self in the tradition of (auto)biography – from St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, over Rousseau’s *Confessions*, to Henry Adams and Frederick Douglas.

The shape a life takes in the conventional (auto)biography is governed by a chronological narrative order that the experience of a life lived rarely conforms under. The classic “Bildungsroman” provides the blueprint for a narrative where a progression towards the fullness of life makes the child “the father of the man,” to use Wordsworth’s aphorism, and early years are seen in the light of later accomplishments. Patterns are formed in retrospect, the ambiguities are ironed out, and we are usually left with the construct of the “great man.” Individual biographies may vary along these lines, but the function they perform remains the same: As exemplary lives they serve as constructive and instructive narratives, as a means of defining our selves and our cultures. Scott E. Casper traces in his book, *Constructing American Lives*, how biographies in American popular culture in the 19th century were “the essential genre for creating American pantheons.” But he also provides a

reading that suggests that biography engaged with history in a dynamic sense, both “reinforcing larger master narratives of the American past” and challenging those narratives by “adding neglected individuals and groups.” Biography, lacking historical sweep allows space for minor figures, not necessarily rejecting the dominant understanding of history, but adding other voices to the dialogue (5-8).

Christopher Harlos also points out in his dissertation on jazz biographies and autobiographies, that the “effort to *textualize* the jazz musician’s life story” reveals an “American ambivalence towards jazz.” On one hand lies the attempt to place the music and its artist at the center of national culture “by means of traditional life writing,” and on the other “simultaneously celebrating those same subjects as figures of a marginalized counter-culture” (Harlos 8-9). As Casper points out, those “other” narratives could not always be put together through documented fact, but biographers were still bound by the credo of the objective truth. Thus, in the 19th century they “argued that corroborated memory should be counted authentic where documents were lacking, or went to the subjects themselves for information and stories” (9). This convention still holds true for even those “serious” and carefully researched biographies. Especially in the matter of jazz biographies, it would most likely prove exceedingly difficult to produce anything of book length on the documented material alone.

Much of this oral material also provides the narrative glue that makes biographies pleasurable reads in the first place, connecting all the dry facts and data with anecdote and personal quotes. These anecdotes function as what Kenneth Burke refers to as “equipment for living” and “proverbs writ large” (Burke, 296) – a means to understanding and dealing with certain reoccurring situations and characters in the course of a life. The manners in which we produce and present those narratives are important, negotiating

questions of individual ownership and the need for allegory. The more a particular story can be imagined in terms of a greater collective experience, the higher the stakes in claims of entitlement (Shuman 4).

Harlos argues for the element of “folk” and “orality” in jazz culture as signifiers of carnival, suggesting a Bakhtinian, dialogic reading of these texts. In his insistence that textualization and even slightest commercialization “decarnivalizes” jazz, he risks romanticizing his readings of the culture.¹⁰² Furthermore, he neglects to consider that Bakhtin’s notion of carnival is itself a “textualized” version that Bakhtin reads from Rabelais’ *Gargantua & Pantagruel*. The strength of Bakhtin’s reading lies precisely in the understanding of the dialogic between the folk culture of carnival and Rabelais’ text, in the dialogue between voices and world views. Likewise, this chapter is not concerned with which representation of Miles Davis is more accurate and true, but with how those representations, those images of Miles, and the dialogic relationships between them, present us with equipment for understanding the jazz community and its understanding of itself in the larger context of American culture.

Two major biographies were published by non-American writers in the 1980s: Ian Carr’s *Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography* first published in Great Britain in 1982 and subsequently revised and published in a new expanded edition in 1998, and Jack Chambers’ *Milestones: The Music and Times of Miles Davis* first published as two volumes in 1983 and 1985 by University of Toronto Press, pulled together in one volume in 1989 and published again

¹⁰² He posits the jam session as the utopian moment of carnival and argues that in the paid performance, the musicians only “attempt to replicate” this “transcendent moment” (34), disregarding the countless transcendent moments captured on LP from live and studio performances (all paid – musicians need to pay their bills, too).

by Da Capo Press in 1998 with a new introduction.¹⁰³ Both biographies are substantial in size and scope, thoroughly researched with long bibliographies and, in the case of Carr, containing both a discography and musical examples. Both works center on the recordings, the oeuvre, as the main evidence of the progressions (and regressions) of Davis. In jazz this is often the only actual “documentation” there exists of the artist. Chambers also spends considerable space on the life and musical production of the musicians that surrounded and collaborated with Davis, providing a community and professional context that moves toward dismantling the myth of the lonely genius. However, he does portray Davis as a musician first, foremost and last, leaving out large chunks of his life that does not seem to relate directly to his musical production, most notably the women in Miles Davis’ life who are conspicuously absent from the narrative.¹⁰⁴

Chambers from time to time places both Davis and his music in context with American arts and politics. For example letting Miles Davis and Gil Evan’s music signify the changes of postwar America, a change from the more aggressive sounds of an America first pulling itself out of a depression and then going to war overseas, a change toward a more subtle and

¹⁰³ A few other biographies are out there that either fall outside the period or cultural/geographic area of my study. These include Bill Cole’s biography from 1974 as well as Richard Williams’ *The Man in the Green Shirt*. Both of these books, although very different in format and style (the Williams book is really a coffee-table book with plenty of beautiful jazz photography and not that much text), present the classic “great man” narrative, glossing over or dismissing the elements of Davis’ music and persona that do not fit. Among the latest published works is the book written by Davis’ eldest son, Gregory Davis, *Dark Magus: The Jekyll and Hyde Life of Miles Davis*, which rather than glossing over the inconsistencies makes a point of them. (Cole 1974,; Davis and Sussman 2006,; Williams 1993).

¹⁰⁴ Chambers names an entire chapter after the tune “Fran Dance” which in turn was named after Davis’ first wife Frances Taylor Davis, but in that same chapter he dismisses Frances Taylor as nothing more than a commodity in Miles Davis’ life: “Her striking beauty and quiet dignity completed Davis’s image perfectly. [...] He could well afford to sit back a minute, look around and say, “[...] I got my music, I got Frances, and I got my Ferrari.”” (Chambers 298).

understated sound (90-94). By contrast Carr's focus remains much more European, providing the reader with in depth information on the reception of Miles Davis in Europe and particularly in the UK. One very interesting example is Davis' concert in at the Warsaw Jazz Jamboree in 1983 where Carr clearly states the importance that jazz held in Europe during and, particularly for East block countries, after World War II, as a "metaphor for democracy and liberty." He expands some on the meaning of the interplay between individual and the group, "autonomous control" and the "trust in one's associates" as "anathema to totalitarian regimes" (Carr 405), but he refrains from making overt connections with an American context or rhetoric, thus placing democracy and individual freedom as values in a larger (Western) cultural framework.

Carr is also generally more lyrical in his style, inserting quotes by poets and philosophers as Yeats and Kierkegaard (413, 531).¹⁰⁵ It often becomes a matter of striking a precarious balance between a lyricism that creates pleasurable prose and sheer hyperbole. The use of Yeats is perhaps the most extreme example of the latter, but also the rhetoric surrounding the death of Charlie Parker spins slightly out of control: "Bird was gone, but Miles had arrived. The king was dead; long live the king" (94). The result is a tendency to invest the music and musicians with romanticist notions of art and genius. Carr's uses Kierkegaard to explain and validate Davis' move towards rock/fusion, in contrast to Chambers who refuses to see the move as a commercial one, but one driven by artistic choice. However, both Chambers' disavowal and Carr's affirmation uphold the bourgeois dichotomy of art and commerce as they both recognize it as a valid paradigm.

¹⁰⁵ The Kierkegaard quote is not acknowledged as his, but there is no mistaking "Life has to be lived forwards, but can only be understood backwards" – it is one of the most quoted aphorisms from Kierkegaard's journals (JJ 167, 1843).

Significant for both biographies is the fact, that a new version was deemed necessary after the passing of Davis in 1991 and, perhaps even more so, the publication of his autobiography in 1989. Carr seems to have simply just added the last seven chapters which can be determined from the sudden occurrence of citations from both the autobiography and Chambers' biography, but has left the previous chapters as they were with no post-autobiography amendments or additions. The autobiography does clearly not inspire a full revision, but enters the book and the writing process as an extra resource at the time of it becoming available, with no further comments. Chambers, however, does comment on the autobiography, albeit in a singularly negative way, in his new introduction to the Da Capo Press edition.

Central to Chambers' critique is a matter which in a back-handed way also become a central point to his own biography – that of the possible plagiarism of Chambers' book for the autobiography.¹⁰⁶ He provides examples of almost verbatim “thefts” (XXI), that leaves little doubt of the actual and heavy recycling of his material in the autobiography, and he does concede that this can be seen as some sort of ultimate approval of the veracity of his narrative. But it is Chambers' conclusion as to the motives behind this that are interesting in terms of representation. He deduces that Davis used his book as both a substitute for his own faulty memory as well as a quick fix to solve “the legal hassles of keeping the sizable advance for a book neither he nor Quincy Troupe could possibly deliver” (XXIV). But the main point, perhaps, is that the Miles Davis who wrote the autobiography is not the Miles Davis that Chambers wrote his biography about. Rather, it is

¹⁰⁶ Chambers credit Stanley Crouch for being one of the first to point this out publicly in his scathing review in *The New Republic* of the autobiography (and of Miles Davis the fallen hero) as “full of stories that take the reader down into the sewers of Davis' musical, emotional, and chemical decline” (Crouch 1990, 36).

“Freaky Deaky, his burnt out alter ego” (VIII). The man that Chambers admired and wrote about seems to him to have disappeared in the last years of Davis’ life.

As Mary Evans argues, 20th century western culture has become less tolerant of ambiguity in human existence “and thus we provide ourselves with icons of experience and reality” (143). Chambers cannot reconcile what he considers two diametrically opposed figures, and in order to continue admiring the former, he constructs an almost schizophrenic Davis, a Jekyll and Hyde character. There is a sense of betrayal shining through Chambers comments as he describes himself and other fans as “in denial” and “not ready to admit” that the Davis they loved had disappeared. He goes even further calling the autobiography “a self-portrait of a sleazeball” putting “decaying flesh [...] on the skeleton of Davis’s career” (XVIII-XX). And it is exactly because Chambers invents this “Freaky Deaky” alter ego that that he does not need to consider the elements of the autobiography that differs from his own narrative, passages where Davis clearly departs from earlier version of his life, as possible truths that would require amendments in his own new edition.

It all comes down to the question of who owns a life. The immediate response must surely be the subject of that life, having lived it and been a first hand witness, so to speak. As Crouch quotes Troupe for saying in response to accusation of plagiarism “the man can quote himself” (Crouch 1990, 36). But what of the subject of that life becomes such an important figure that he touches the subjects of other lives in formative ways? What if he becomes part of a collective memory to the point where scenes or stories from his life almost become part of someone else’s life, someone like Chambers or Carr or Crouch?

ADJUSTING THE LENS: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The first memory that Davis professes to have from his childhood is that of a blue flame jumping of a gas stove and almost burning him. Everything before that is described as “just fog,” but the immediate fear crystallizes the moment and in Davis’ recollection of the situation he also felt:

[...] some kind of adventure, some kind of weird joy, too. I guess that experience took me someplace in my head I hadn’t been before. To some frontier, the edge, maybe, of everything possible. [...] The fear I had was almost like an invitation, a challenge to go forward into something I knew nothing about [...] In my mind I have always believed and thought since then that my motion had to be forward, away from the heat of the flame. (Davis and Troupe 11)

In theories of memory and narrative, the Freudian concept of “primal scenes” is complicated by the concept of “Nachträglichkeit,” as those early childhood memories are less recalled than reconstructed. The act of reconstruction takes place at a later point in life that, in turn, imposes its reality and perspective on the event (King 17). Literary critics have in this context appropriated the term of “rememory” from Toni Morrison’s writings as it “stresses the afterwardsness of memory, the *an* in Lyotard’s *anamnesis*,” suggesting “re-remembering’, a remembering *after* a forgetting” (158).¹⁰⁷ Ashraf Rushdy suggests that the primal scene is a critical event “whose significance to the narrated life becomes manifest only at a secondary critical event, when by a preconscious association the primal

¹⁰⁷ Morrison first coined the term “rememory” in her novel *Beloved* (1997, 35-36), and the idea of memory as a willed act is central to her writings. In an interview in *Time*, she touches on the need to make an effort of memory as “the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember” (1989, 120). She also, in her essay “The Site of Memory,” describes memory as a creative act and, vice versa, as “the act of imagination is bound up with memory” (1987, 119).

scene is recalled.” Once such secondary critical event can be the moment of re-evaluation (when for example creating ones autobiography) and a “primal scene is, then, an opportunity and affective agency for self-discovery through memory” – as well as “rememory” (Rushdy 303).

Miles: The Autobiography can be seen as an act of “rememory” and by this act Miles Davis claims ownership of his own life. Again and again he clearly states a desire to correct various versions and stories of himself. He directly addresses what he refers to in one place as “a lot of jive writers” (51) and what various people might have written about him in their books (96). He is clearly referring to previous biographies, and although he does not name anyone specifically, he is obviously entering into a form of dialogue with those earlier narratives. Thus, Chambers indignation of being “plagiarized” or cited without being credited, is perhaps based on the faulty assumption that Davis simply used the material in his book as a means to reconstruct his own faulty memory, rather than as precursor with which to argue, answer and signify upon. Chambers himself states that in “several places Davis seems to be responding directly to what I said in *Milestones*” (XX). But he misses the point and fails to see these answers in the context of a dialogue, dismissing Davis as an authorial voice when stating that “needless to say, these “corrections” find their way into the *Autobiography* only because they were recounted in *Milestones* in the first place” (XXI).

Ultimately, Davis’ use of material from Chambers (and possibly other sources as well) can be seen in a framework of African American tradition. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey* points to autobiography in Black literature, starting with the slave narrative, as a “search of the black subject for a textual voice” (169). This takes place via strategies of repetition and revision, with signifying as a means of addressing issues of identity and naming, in order to “redress an imbalance of power, to clear a space,

rhetorically” (124). In addition, jazz – the chosen mode of expression for Miles Davis – is one of the most eloquent forms of signifying in African American culture, using indirection, riffing and revision as important structural elements. The indirection lies both in the way that jazz often implies a beat rather than states it and in the way that musicians quote each other and popular music in the process of soloing. Popular songs even become object of revision as the Tin Pan Alley tunes of the 1930s were recycled and reinvented by jazz musicians.

Seen in this light there is little doubt that Davis is engaging in an act of signifying on Chambers. Even Davis’ refusal to name him or anyone else directly is part of this strategy as indirection is a key element where signifying “depends on the success of the signifier at invoking an absent meaning ambiguously “present” in a carefully wrought statement” (86). The riffing and the cutting contests are central to the (good-humored) competitive element of signifying. For someone like Davis, steeped in this culture, signifying on Chambers or any other writer whom Davis had felt misidentifying him would have been second nature. As Kathy Ogren points out in her essay “Jazz Isn’t Just Me,” jazz autobiographies are “textual performances” that enable the subject to create a literary persona in conjunction with the musical one (Ogren 112). *Miles: The Autobiography* can be contextualized in these terms and not only in the literal print-on-the-page sense, but also – and possibly foremost – in terms of searching for a musical voice, an aspect I shall return to a little later in the chapter. As for the matter of a textual voice several issues are at stake.

First, signifying is in origin an oral strategy and tradition that, as Gates argues, has become pervasive in black culture. In the case of *The Autobiography*, the element of signifying is no doubt heightened by the fact that the text is by and large an “oral” text, that is, interview transcripts from

Quincy Troupe's many sessions with Davis. But the character of the text as ghost-written, undermine simple notions of voice and orality, as well as the idea of "truth" in the narrative. As Harlos also points out in his essay (and his dissertation), Lejeune's "autobiographical contract" is profoundly destabilized by ghost-written narratives (Harlos 1995, 146). However, Lejeune *did* (contrary to Harlos' statement) consider this contingency in his essay "The Autobiography of Those Who Do Not Write." Here he discusses the implications of the life told to a second party who, in turn, writes the narrative of this life (Lejeune 190). Lejeune coins the word "heterobiography" for the narrative in which two "pretend to be only one" (264, n. 10). Again, Bakhtin's heteroglossia comes to mind, and it provides a way in to these texts – as dialogic relationships between languages and world views. Lejeune points out that life "is always the product of a transaction between different postures" (197), and Harlos suggest the same when quoting Albert Stone for considering the collaborative narrative less of a "literary *problem*" and more a "cultural *solution*" (1995, 146).

Second, in the case of autobiography, the issue of voice and oral material becomes either significantly simpler or more complex, depending on what approach is taken. It can either just be assumed that the voice in the autobiographic narrative is the unmediated and authentic voice of the subject, in which case the matter of objectivity becomes almost obsolete on the basis of the complete subjectivity in place. Or one can let an understanding of autobiographical voice be informed by theories narrative voice in general, thus allowing for a certain distance between the (implied) author and the narrative voice – and even a certain distance between narrative voice and subject. The implication is that both the narrative voice and the subject are constructs and again, the matter of objectivity is destabilized, although in this case the assumed purity of the subject is equally

as constructed as the idea of an objective truth. Thus, destabilizing both objectivity as well as subjectivity allows for greater dynamism between the two positions, a constant dialogue between subject, voice and “fact.”¹⁰⁸

In *Missing Persons* Mary Evans uses Simone de Beauvoir as an example for how autobiography can be used to negotiate subject position by the silencing of certain facts and emotions:

[...] in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature which de Beauvoir knew, there were few women who achieved personal autonomy of a genuinely heroic kind. Little wonder, then, that in writing her autobiography, de Beauvoir set out to write herself a narrative of heroic achievement. (46)

Miles Davis can not be said to have censored himself in the autobiography, on the contrary. However, the lack of narratives depicting black jazz musicians with integrity and personal autonomy, as well as the desire to correct any perceived misrepresentations, may well have governed both Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe in the constructing the narrative of Davis' life. In the process of converting interview transcripts to narrative, Troupe also endeavored to write the *voice* of Davis. Krin Gabbard suggest in an unpublished essay, scheduled to appear in a forthcoming collection by Oxford University Press, that Troupe not only had to edit out his own questions and make it all cohere as a narrative, but also changed and/or added phrases to create a more vernacular voice.¹⁰⁹ Gabbard has had access to the transcripts and concedes that there is plenty of material in the autobiography that does not appear in the transcripts; mainly the many

¹⁰⁸ When in the following I refer to Miles Davis as the narrator/author, all of these destabilizing factors are implied and should be kept in mind. Referring to the narrator as “Davis,” is not to be taken literally, but as a rhetorical device that contains all the factors concerning voice.

¹⁰⁹ The essay is listed in the bibliography with the title “Writing the Jazz Life: The Many Faces of Miles Davis,” but as the essay has not been published yet I cannot provide page references or direct quotes. I thank Professor Gabbard for kindly letting me read his manuscript.

details on personnel at recording sessions. This material has undoubtedly been put together from previously published material, such as Chambers' biography. Gabbard speculates whether these lists of fellow musicians were made more likely (and likeable) and less like a jazz geek's perfect recall, by the insertion of slightly hedging phrases such as "I think" and "I forgot," something that would also support the suggestion that the narrative has been "vernacularized" or made to appear more oral after the fact.

Miles Davis' autobiography employs a different strategy than de Beauvoir's, that of disclosure rather than suppression, but with the same purpose of (re)constructing the narrative of their lives. Gabbard proposes that the lists of personnel along other things were part of a strategy of representing Davis as a more gentle man, and that the lists showed concern for fellow musicians as well as giving everybody their dues. He concedes that constructed or not, the narrative voice of the autobiography does sound like Miles Davis. Of course, the actual aural experience of Davis' voice – the hoarse whisper that was the result of several operations to remove nodes from his larynx and him using the voice too soon after these operations,¹¹⁰ as well as the continued pressure on the throat from years of trumpet playing; the voice that required for people to be quiet and listen in order to get everything he said; and the voice that has been described as intense, menacing, filled with heat, compelling, sexy – that voice can only reign in the imagination of the reader. Nevertheless, the evocation of a voice, an aural experience, is brought forth in the very first word of the text: "Listen.." With one single word we are addressed directly, compelled to listen for the aural sound of the narrative voice.

¹¹⁰ One of the more persistent stories circulating about Miles Davis is exactly on the origin of "the voice," all claiming (with variations) that Davis ruined his voice when, after one of his throat operations, shouting down an industry personality (usually Morris Levy, who ran the club Birdland). Davis never confirmed this story.

The actual direct transferal of the aural and oral qualities of voice to the medium of text is a fictitious one, as discussed in the previous chapters. However, the tradition for using the vernacular in African American literature is long and has proven to be an effective strategy for clearing a rhetorical space for black literature and language. Troupe, who himself is a poet and a writer steeped in the tradition, has in his transcript and transposition of Miles Davis' narrative voice clearly made use of this, using vernacular slang, syntax and speech rhythms:

Dexter [Gordon] didn't think my dress style was all that hip. So he used to always tell me, "Jim" ("Jim" was an expression a lot of musicians used back then), you can't hang with us looking and dressing like that. Why don't you wear some other shit, Jim? You gotta get some vines. You gotta go to F & M's," which was a clothing store on Broadway in midtown.

"Why, Dexter, these some bad suits I'm wearing. I paid a lot of money for this shit."

"Miles, that ain't it, 'cause the shit ain't hip. See, it ain't got nothing to do with money; it's got something to do with hipness, Jim, and that shit you got on ain't nowhere near hip. You gotta get some of them big-shouldered suits and Mr. B shirts if you want to be hip, Miles."

So I'd say, all hurt and shit, "But Dex, man, these are nice clothes."

"I know you think they hip, Miles, but they ain't. I can't be seen with nobody wearing no square shit like you be wearing. And you playing in Bird's band? The hippest band in the world? Man, you oughta know better." (Davis 111)

The quote reveals a number of things about the text as a whole. The story is undoubtedly one related by Davis himself and most likely the dialogue as well, clipping away with fast comments and an (implied) slightly wry smile from Davis over his own innocence. But the explanatory comments on 'Jim' and 'F & M' clearly breaks the rhythm of the anecdote and was most like added by Troupe (or Davis himself) after the fact. Had this type of exchange appeared in a strictly fictional context, in a novel or a short story, the dialogue would probably have been left to stand on its own. But bound by

the rules of autobiography and biography as non-fiction and historical document, the explanatory asides are added. What we are left with is several layers of double-voiced discourse, which in effect creates exactly that sense of a true depiction of voice – more so than if it had simply just been strictly reported speech as voice is always filled with and entering into dialogue with the words and voices of others.

First is the dialogic relationship between the oral and the literary – *skaz* – the use of oral speech which is simultaneously directed towards orality *and* the other’s speech. This other (Davis) is reporting, stylizing the speech of another as well (Dexter Gordon), and then follows the insertion of yet another’s discourse (that is: the explanatory comments) into the first level of discourse. Finally, the quote is also a perfect example of a small game of Signifying being played on Davis by Gordon. Thereby the vernacular becomes an explicit factor in the narrative as a whole, imposing additional meaning on the vernacular game, pointing to the style and the function of Signifying, in this case as a ritual of mentoring and male bonding. Transposing the vernacular like this does not necessarily erase the dynamics, but rather adds layers of meaning and dialogics as the original meaning of the exchange is retained while the meaning as exemplar vernacular is superimposed (Dvinge 2006, 197).

It is no coincidence that the subject of Gordon’s mockery is the matter of Miles Davis’ apparent lack of style. Davis is throughout the narrative concerned with style: in clothes, cars, women and music. It was a preoccupation that especially in the latter years served as a point of derision for critics, but only as Davis abandoned the clean-cut look he had been sporting since the 1940s. Stanley Crouch, wrote in the *New Republic* article of Davis’ musical and dress style as being in a simultaneous decline, “the erstwhile master of cool” looking “like an extra from a science fiction B

movie” (35). The autobiography states that the change of style came as a natural consequence of both a change in fashion and new performance praxis:

I had moved away from the cool Brooks Brothers look and into this other thing, which for me was more what was happening with the times. I found I could move around on stage much better. I wanted to move on stage, play in different places, because there are areas on stage where the music and the sound are much better than other places. I was starting to explore for those places. (310)

Style is pervasive in all areas, all intimately connected with each other. At a very early stage in the autobiography, the connection is made again, as his teacher’s advice on the principle of developing a distinct musical style is mentioned in practically the same breath as Davis talking about creating “a kind of hip, quasi-black English look” (32), the look that is referred to as the “Brooks Brothers look” in the quote above. Again, critics and biographers derision of Davis’ preoccupation with (extra-musical) style and the implied vanity, not only evokes Eurocentric and bourgeois artistic values and their obsession with purity and art for arts sake, but also misses the point of form determining content, and the importance of this principle in African American culture. Gates explains how signifying “turns on the sheer play of the signifier” (78) and it is exactly this foregrounding, not on what is being said, but *how* it is being said, that is so central. It is the principle that governs the repetition and difference of “Surrey with a Fringe on Top” and “My Favorite Things” over and over again, and it is the principle that guides the construction of Davis’ style as well as his voice, both textually and musically.

It is also one of the principles behind Davis’ fascination with boxing; style is clearly an important factor when Sugar Ray Robinson is named as the “hero-image” that Miles used to discipline himself. Robinson’s “socialite” style, with its limousines, beautiful women and fine clothes was an example to follow, especially as he was “all business” when in the ring (174). There

might also have been the attraction of danger and there is a clear element of cultural and racial pride involved as well. For example, when Davis first tries to explain his love of boxing with the reminiscence of the whole family being gathered around the radio, listening to a Joe Louis fight, and the sense of pride and joy in the community whenever he won. But it is style that remains central as the autobiography places boxing in the larger context of Davis' life and work. Throughout his life, he used boxing as both an outlet and a way to maintain the level of physical fitness that is required when playing three sets a night. He would come to the same gym as Sugar Ray Robinson and stop to watch him work; performing a move he calls "the swivel":

It's a move you have to practice over and over again until you get it, until it becomes like a reflex action, instinctive. It's like practicing a musical instrument; you have to keep practicing, over and over again. [...] Boxing is a science, and I love to watch boxing matches between to guys who knows what they're doing [...] Now that's science and precision, rather than just some kind of fucking mayhem like people say it is. [...] Boxing's got style like music's got style [...] you've got to have style in whatever you do – writing, music, fashion boxing, anything. Some styles are slick and creative and imaginative and others aren't. Sugar Ray Robinson's style was all of that and he was the most precise fighter that I ever saw. [...] You don't just learn any kind of shit like that naturally. That's something somebody teaches you. Like when you teach somebody how to play a musical instrument *correctly*. After you've learned how to play your instrument the *right* way, you can turn around and play it the way you want to, anyway you hear the music and sound and want to play it. (181-82)

The style of boxing or music is not to be confused with mere surface. It is something learned, a skill, something acquired through hard work and discipline – an art.

The autobiography both works with and against bourgeois discourses of art as the two central dichotomies – art versus commerce and art versus entertainment – are being played against each other throughout the text. In the case of the latter, Davis is quite clear in his position on jazz as an art

form and not entertainment. He places himself in opposition to musicians like Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, stating that “I loved Dizzy, but I hated that clowning shit he used to do for all them white folks.” He goes on to clearly state that if people were to come to hear him play, it would be for the music only (163). The text constantly negotiates between the desire to acknowledge the tradition and the accomplishments of both Armstrong and Gillespie as musicians, whilst attempting to carve out a rhetorical space (both literally and musically speaking) that belongs to Davis. There is a recognition of different generations (although Gillespie was not even ten years his elder), different temperaments, different class and social background, and finally the matter of coming out of different geographical regions and the different attitudes toward the dominant white society that follows (83).¹¹¹ But still, there is a clear demarcation being made between considering oneself an entertainer or an artist, implying the two to be mutually exclusive:

I didn't look at myself as an entertainer like [Armstrong and Gillespie] both did. I wasn't just going to do it just so that some non-playing, racist, white motherfucker could write some nice things about me. Naw, I wasn't going to sell out my principles for them. I wanted to be accepted as a good musician and that didn't call for no grinning, but just being able to play the horn good. And that's what I did then and now. Critics can take that or leave it. (83)¹¹²

¹¹¹ What Davis might miss, precisely because of the different socio-geographical background, is the element of signifying in both Armstrong and Gillespie's performance praxis. In contrast, Ralph Ellison did not perceive of Armstrong's performances as “Tomming,” but saw the liberating forces at play when Armstrong donned the mask of minstrelsy (Ellison “Change the Joke” 106).

¹¹² Davis relationship with the critics was far more complex than he here implies. He considered a handful of critics the exception to the rule of white racists, and those he drew quite close, using them to secure his position in the marketplace. He even arranged a small event in his home in 1961 inviting critics and musicians in a “press conference in reverse,” turning the tables on the critics and letting the musicians ask the questions (Gennari 2006, 203-205).

Davis even took this attitude so far as to stop announcing tunes, insisting that the names of the tunes were irrelevant. In this lay the assumption that most of the audience knew the standards that were being played already, thus identifying the practice of announcing as mere banter rather than the mediation of vital information and that the audience “weren’t coming to hear me speak but to hear the music I was playing” (180). By insisting on this he also aligns himself with western classical performance practice where no announcements are made and no applause is required or even desirable between for example the movements of a symphony. The music becomes the central focus, not the individual musician or the audience. The interaction between audience and musicians that is frequently referred to in the jazz community as key to any jazz performance is here left out of the equation of presentation and reception of music. The desire to be recognized as an artist on the basis of one’s art alone is a clear adherence to the romanticism of art for art’s sake, but there is a simultaneous counter-hegemonic move in the refusal or revision of the accepted mode of behavior from a (black) jazz musician.¹¹³

The same to and fro movement between positions is also detectable in Davis’ negotiations of categories of art, commerce and the mainstream. Here, he almost reverses his position on art for art’s sake when stating that “as a musician and as an artist I have always wanted to reach as many people as I could through my music” (205), insisting that jazz does not necessarily belong outside the American mainstream as some rarified object d’art:

¹¹³ Again Ellison, possibly misreading the motive, but still pointing to the irony of the situation when the Bebop’ers insisted on a new performance praxis: “The result was a grim comedy of racial manners, with the musicians employing a calculated surliness and rudeness, treating the audience very much as many white merchants in poor Negro neighbourhoods treat their customers, and the white audience were shocked at first but learned quickly to accept such treatment as evidence of “artistic” temperament. Then comes a comic reversal. Today the white audience expects the rudeness as part of the entertainment” (‘On Bird’ 259-60).

So I never, ever felt bad because a lot of people were beginning to like what I was doing. I never felt that because the music I was playing was becoming popular that meant that my music was less complex than some that wasn't as popular as mine. Popularity didn't make my music less worthy, or great. [...] And yes, going with Columbia did mean more money, but what's wrong with getting paid for what you do and getting paid well? I never saw noting in poverty and hard times and the blues. [...] As long as I could get what I needed from the white world on my own terms, without selling myself out to all those people who would love to exploit me, then I was going to go for what I know is real. (206)

Here Davis clearly eschews the usual dichotomies of art and commerce by refusing to disavow economical interests. The idea that popular culture and high culture are mutually exclusive is cancelled, and Davis sets up a distinction between the “system,” i.e. the music business and the critics, and the audience that resembles the demarcations between for example critics and readers in *Down Beat*. Jazz is a vernacular form in its origin; despite its increased complexity and heightened cultural capital, it retains a link to the vernacular, to folk, mainstream and the popular. There is also a certain amount of romanticism involved in this position as Davis sets himself up as an uncompromising folk-hero who uses and defeats the establishment on its own turf.

This can be seen as yet another piece to the puzzle of constructing a life – and both implicitly and explicitly correcting previous representations of this. The quoted passage above is clearly directed, by indirection, toward the criticism Davis received in the wake of his interest in and use of rock music. Shortly before, as he talks of the desire to reach as many people as possible, he also touches on the idea of jazz as living and developing art form, one that does not “become a museum thing locked under glass like all other dead things that were once considered artistic” (205), thus indirectly engaging in a discussion with a neo-classic discourse. Towards the end of the narrative, he also more explicitly engages with Wynton Marsalis and the neo-classicist

position, insisting on the validity of jazz as a form on par with Western classical music, but still with the connection to black vernacular culture:

I don't see why our music can't be given the respect of European classical music. Beethoven's been dead all these years and they're still talking about him, teaching him and playing his music. Why ain't they talking about Bird, or Trane, or Monk, or Duke, or Count, or Fletcher Henderson, or Louis Armstrong like they're talking about Beethoven? Shit, their music is classical. We're all Americans now, and sooner or later whites are going to have to deal with that and with all the great things that black people have done here. [...] They've also got to accept that we do things differently. Our music isn't the same on Friday and Saturday night. Our food isn't the same. [...] We aren't into that kind of shit and Wynton isn't either, not really. But they had him believing that this was the thing to do, that is was hip and everything. But it wasn't, at least it wasn't hip to me (361)

The interviews that were the basis of the autobiography were all conducted in the mid 1980s, placing it in the same timeframe as the emergence of the “jazz as America's classical music”-discourse and the text clearly participates in this discourse. However, it only does so with a clear revisionist stance, insisting on this as the difference in attitude that informs black American culture in relation to a more Euro-American culture, the element of signifying and reworking. Marsalis is in this context represented as the dupe and Davis, who is being “called out of his name” as a sell-out to American rock and *lowbrow* culture, turns the tables and names Marsalis as the one that is buying into the hype of Euro-American *high* culture.

There is no doubt that Davis' main argument with Marsalis was not in regard to whether jazz deserved recognition in American culture (high and low), but on what terms that recognition should be achieved. More than anything, Davis seemed surprised and hurt by the vitriolic of Marsalis' criticism, the disrespect towards an elder and an influence (360). Marsalis' clear attempt to carve out a rhetorical and musical place for himself in this manner, is represented in the text as conflicting with Davis' understanding of music as not “about competition, but about cooperation, doing shit

together and fitting in”(375). Of course, Davis is in no way consistent in this. For instance, his own criticism of Armstrong and Gillespie as “clowning” is engaging the same sets of signifying strategies as Marsalis. There is a element of “anxiety of influence” present, with an almost Oedipal conflict lurking in the wings, but in a jazz or signifying context, Bloom’s psycho-critical theory does not quite encompass the complexities. The rhetorical (and musical) revision is a constant dance between the anxiety *and* the joy of influence, between absence and presence of both contemporaries and ancestors.

The ideas of cooperation rather than competition as representative of jazz, along with the centrality of African American culture that Davis insists on, connects with another important element in the construction of self, that of community. Mary Evans discusses how de Beauvoir in her autobiography constructs a self that stands alone, a “Prometheus unbound” (28), and in the tradition of (auto)biography of “great men” (and the occasional impressive woman), the strategy is commonplace. But in *Miles: The Autobiography* a different route is taken. For one there is the already mentioned strategy of naming every musician Davis ever worked with, to be sure couched in “I forgot” and “I think,” but nevertheless prevalent throughout the text, thus embedding Davis firmly within a community of jazz musicians. Second, he constantly talks of how he is influenced by this musician or other, starting with Dizzy Gillespie and other trumpeters, but also naming pianists like Thelonious Monk (70) and Ahmad Jamal as well as guitarist Jimi Hendricks. In the case of both Ahmad Jamal and Hendricks, the back and forth between anxiety and joy of influence is again evident:

When people say Jamal influenced me a lot, they’re right; but what you’ve got to remember is that I was into liking this kind of feeling and was playing it for myself for a long time before I ever heard of Ahmad Jamal. (190)

...

I'd play [Hendricks] a record of mine or Trane's and explain to him what we were doing. Then he started incorporating things I told him into his albums. It was great. He influenced me, and I influenced him, and that's the way great music is always made. Everybody showing everybody else something and then moving on from there. (293)

Davis, on the one hand, claims influence while, on the other, positioning himself as the primary inventor, destabilizing the uncomplicated image of continuous interchange that is key in establishing Davis within the community.

Lastly, and perhaps more significantly, is the fact that most of the "corrections" that the text attempts (that is, circulating stories, myths and anecdote that Davis insists are false) deals with interrelations between Davis and other musicians. As an example, Davis describes how an argument between himself and Charles Mingus caused a cooling off in their friendship, but he also insists that "We were still friends, though, no matter what some of the people said who wrote about us in their books," and he complains that these writers had no way of knowing without consulting Davis or Mingus. "Mingus and me just went our separate ways, like a whole lot of other people do. But he was my friend, man, and *he* knew it" (96). Davis refutes the alleged near-fight between himself and Thelonious Monk at a recording session in 1954 as "bullshit and rumors that people just keep repeating until it has become fact" (186). And again, in a typical jazz situation of sitting in with Clifford Brown and Max Roach, Davis emphasizes mutual respect as simultaneously manages to resurrect himself from the image of the only semi-conscious jazz musician on drugs:

But they got the story all wrong when they say that I just came stumbling in out of the rain with my horn in a brown paper bag and walked up on stage and started playing "My Funny Valentine." [...] I guess it would make a nice scene in a movie but it didn't happen. Now, in the first place, I wouldn't ever just walk up on Max and Brownie's gig like that without

asking them if I could sit in. Second, I wouldn't have been carrying my trumpet around in no fucking brown paper bag in the rain because my instrument is too important to me. [...] I don't know where that other story came from. That's just legend. I might have been a junkie, but I wasn't as strung out as all that. (173-74)

Davis here actively engages in the deconstruction of the drugged out, self-centered "Miles Davis" and the *re*-construction of "Miles," on drugs but in control, and never without his self-respect and the respect of other, the two being mutually contingent. The sense of the connection between legend and the cinematographic neatly underlines the iconic nature of mythologized "Miles Davis."

Another iconic image that the text engages is that of "The Street" – that is, 52nd Street in New York, which the mythology of jazz names as the birthplace of bebop. Davis deconstructs this by juxtaposing the clubs on 52nd street with Minton's Playhouse and the Cecil Hotel in Harlem, creating an uptown/downtown dichotomy:

Minton's and the Cecil Hotel were both first class places with a lot of style. The people that went there were the cream of the crop of Harlem's black society. [...] People who came to Minton's wore suits and ties because they were copying the way people like Duke Ellington and Jimmie Luncheonford dressed. Man, they was cleaner than a motherfucker. But to get into Minton's didn't cost anything. It cost something like two dollars if you sat at one of the tables, which had white linen tablecloths on them and flowers in little glass vases. It was a nice place – much nicer than the clubs on 52nd Street – and it held about 100 or 125 people. [...]

Minton's was *the* ass-kicker back in those days, not the The Street like they're trying to make it out today. It was Minton's where a musician *really* cut his teeth and *then* went downtown to The Street. (53-54)

Davis not only insists on the primacy of black people and culture, but also reverses the usual stereotypes of black New York and Harlem vs. white New York. Elsewhere he describes the hustlers, drug dealers and hookers hanging around the small "hole-in-the-wall" clubs of The Street (72) contrasting this to stylish Harlemites and the ample, classy and musically innovative space of

Minton's. Davis continues by maintaining that the music that was presented on *The Street* was a "whited down" version as "white folks downtown couldn't handle the *real* thing," and blames the legend of 52nd Street on white appropriation of all things black. How, after "bebop became the rage, white music critics tried to act like they discovered it – and us – down on 52nd Street" (55).

Race is a constant presence in the autobiography. Davis frequently calls attention to any perceived racial slight doling out his share of angry name-calling. No doubt, quite a few white fans and critics of Davis have felt uncomfortable with the heat of resentment, and some charged him with racism. However, not only is it possible to read these charges in the same context as the accusations of racism towards Wynton Marsalis – as partly biased by the critics own racial anxiety – but it would be also a simplistic reading of both the text and of Davis' musical life. The text makes very clear distinctions between the institution of racism, that is, those that hold the power in the music business and in the culture as a whole and individuals, especially musicians.¹¹⁴ Again and again the primacy of musicianship is held over issues of color, a not always popular choice on either side of the color line. Davis insists that he's "hiring a motherfucker to play, not for what color he is" (117), but he simultaneously sustain a battle for a black music form in a white industry (176). The position carries echoes of Amiri Baraka's understanding of the difference between "hate whitey" to an awareness of "whitey [as] system and ideology." But as he also points out, the tendency of the same system to focus on the element of race, absolves it from dealing with the underlying structures of class and economy (Baraka 1999, xiii).

¹¹⁴ As problematic and uncomfortable a truth as this may be, the fact remains that both the music industry and jazz criticism are – still – dominated by white males.

The Autobiography performs a constant dialogue between these positions of margin and center, on the one hand disavowing for example Julliard for being Eurocentric (and when dealing with black culture for doing so in a simplistic and paternalistic manner¹¹⁵) and on the other Davis immersing himself in the Western canon. He would “go to the library and borrow scores by all those great composers, like Stravinsky, Alban Berg, Prokofiev” (61). Davis is preoccupied with modern art and modern classical (compositional) music, and throughout the book, Europe is described as a more cultured place where a black jazz musician is not only free of the everyday racism that permeates American culture (126). But it is also as a place where the proper respect is given toward jazz as an art form and toward the musicians as artists.¹¹⁶ Here, the bourgeois categories of art that Davis in a backhanded manner continues to strive toward are open to jazz in a way not possible in the US. To a certain extent Davis also subscribes to the sentiment so pervasive in the American jazz community, that settling in Europe would be detrimental to his musical development:

[...] the musicians that moved over there seemed to me to lose something, an energy, an edge, that living in the states gave them. I don't know, but I think it has something to do with being surrounded by a culture that you know, that you can feel, that you come out of. If I lived in Paris, I couldn't just go and hear some great blues, or people like Monk and Trane and Duke and Satchmo every night, like I could in New York. (218)

However, Davis idea of culture is not one of essentialism – a specific culture being *inherently* part of a specific ethnic group – but rather one of, if not relativism, then of familiarity. Culture is something acquired and learned over time. But again, a sense of place and the importance of geography

¹¹⁵ The scene where a young Davis corrects a teacher on the origin and meaning of blues is priceless (59). However, teaching the subject of blues at Julliard, the ivory tower of Western classical music, in the mid forties does seem fairly advanced.

¹¹⁶ Later in the narrative, Japan seems to usurp Europe in this respect.

come into play as central to community and to music. When in Paris, New York becomes the symbolic “Uptown,” the only place to be in order to keep inventing. In an American context, the mix of African American urban and folk culture is represented as key. The narrative again and again evokes the Midwest of Davis’ childhood, an area that still has a taste of frontier to it. The music of “Kind of Blue,” the album that remains the most sold jazz album on Columbia, is likened to a dark road in Arkansas (234), the same road that is depicted almost at the start of the narrative, right after young Davis is described as being fascinated with a radio show called “Harlem Rhythms”:

I also remember how the music used to sound down there in Arkansas, when I was visiting my grandfather, especially at the Saturday night church. Man, that shit was a motherfucker. I guess I was about six or seven. We’d be walking on these dark country roads at night and all of a sudden this music would seem to come out of nowhere, out of them spooky-looking trees that everybody said ghosts lived in. [...] But I think that kind of stuff stayed with me, you know what I mean? That *kind* of sound in music, that blues, church, back-road funk kind of thing, that southern, midwestern, rural sound and rhythm. I think it started getting into my blood on them spook-filled Arkansas back roads after dark when the owls came out hooting. (28-29)

That road represents another primal scene in Davis’ “remembering” of his life, but also in a more collective sense as the metaphor of the road is of course deep-rooted in both African American culture and mainstream American culture. The American mythology of always pushing forward toward new frontiers make heavily use of the road and, from Mark Twain to Kerouac and *Thelma and Louise*, the road is the place where the individual comes to possess the freedom and agency. Those two values are of equal, if not higher, significance in an African American reading of the road, as a way out of slavery. In the above quote the African American vernacular with its

mix of secular and sacred is connected with geography and place.¹¹⁷ The music itself changes according to the place and the time of performance, be it Minton's or 'The Street in the forties, Paris in the fifties or Fillmore East in the seventies and the significance of place, or, in a more abstract sense, of *space* is intimately connected with time, memory, and narrative.

Davis' preoccupation with style in its different manifestations can all be seen as configured in space. Fast cars and stylish clothes are ways of simultaneously surpassing of and situating oneself in space. In the passage quoted earlier in the chapter on Davis' change of style from 'Brooks Brothers' to 'Funkadelic', clothes is a means to negotiate space in order to negotiate the music. Boxing is the ultimate commandment of both time and space, the ability to know where you and your opponent will be in the next moment. Davis repeatedly configures music in spatial terms, as when he explains his work with Charlie Parker as giving him "all this space for him to do his shit in" (71) or when talking about Thelonious Monk's playing and use of space. Davis' preference for pianists like Ahmad Jamal and Bill Evans (or no pianists at all) is also presented as contingent of his need for space. When Davis describes his group with John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Red Garland, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones, he describes his desire to push the boundaries both in himself and in others in terms of space/place, making musicians play "above the place where he's been playing all along" in order to "change the concept of music and take it someplace altogether different, a new place" (220).

Music is an art that deals with the time/space continuum like no other - where, as in Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (84).

¹¹⁷ It is also worth noting how strong the vernacular speech patterns with repetition and ellipsis are in this passage.

But the chronotope also evokes metaphors of memory as time “thickens” and “space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (Bakhtin 84). Thus, those moments that in memory receives this heightened sense of time and space – this condensation, do so precisely through the “nachträglichkeit” of (re)memory and narrative. Davis’ recollection of the two primal scenes from his childhood, the gas stove flame and that dark road in Arkansas, constitute primal chronotopes that have shaped Davis narrative of his self. In the act of recalling and recounting, the moment and the meaning of the moment is both constructed and reconstructed: The first crystallizes a moment of profound individualism, the flame that drives him, and if anything Davis’s perpetual forward musical motion has at times seemed to be more towards and into the flame than away from it. The second stands as metaphor for collective memory though music, containing meanings of culture and tradition.

Miles: The Autobiography constitutes an attempt to narrate the disjointed and arbitrary moments of a life, adjusting the lens through which it should be viewed. In the process, contradictions arise and others are smoothed out. Davis’ shifting allegiances to art and commerce, to ethnic particularism versus musical universalism ties in with questions of the individual and the collective, and by reconfiguring himself in terms of community he also confirms continuity.

FROM INSIDE THE CRYSTAL BALL: JOHN SZWED’S “SO WHAT”

The sense of direction that despite his various idiosyncrasies is present in Davis’ narrative becomes in John Szwed’s reading of Miles Davis’s life diffused and filled with ambiguity. As mentioned at the beginning of this

chapter, Szwed begins by pointing out the apocrypha surrounding Davis, and the way stories on Davis has become jazz-folklore, by recounting the telling of a story as well as the reaction he is met with when inquiring to the origins of the story: “You want attribution! This is *Miles* I’m talking about – he belongs to everyone!” (1). The appropriation of Davis as legend and folk hero is clear in both the refusal to provide accreditation and in the typical strategy of being on “first hand basis” with Davis (as true jazz fans are with a number of the jazz “greats”: Dizzy, Bird, Prez, Trane, Ella etc). But also stories such as that dark road in Arkansas that Davis himself evokes become part of the collective memory¹¹⁸. As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, all those little anecdotes and “Miles-stories” become part of the history of the community, fulfilling a need for allegory. In his autobiography, Davis claims some of these stories back, repositioning both them and himself in the process, but the stakes for the community in Miles as an allegorical figure are too high and fact and fiction surrounding Davis is constantly worked and reworked into myth and folklore.

John Szwed uses the introductory chapter to his 2002 biography on Miles Davis to establish a rhetorical framework for his narrative in the same way that the vamp in music provides the soloist with a harmonic framework over which to improvise: What Szwed is aiming to do with his book is not to write “a biography in the contemporary sense, as it does not attempts to track down every event or person in his life,” but rather use those many

¹¹⁸ Toward the end of the book Szwed provides yet another example of how material and stories on Davis becomes part of the public domain in a constant recycling. The interview by Alex Haley, printed in *Playboy* in September 1962 came to stand as one of the main resources on Davis and “was sampled again and again, the same quotations floating through countless other interviews, suggesting that some journalists were “cooking” them – pirating Haley’s material, rephrasing Davis’ answers, filling in the blanks on their own”. And not only does the interview become part of a common pool of reworked Davis-material, but the interview itself contains its share of reworked material and “blanks” that has been filled in (227).

stories as a basis for what he describes as “a meditation on Miles Davis’ life, one that looks at the variety of meanings that were (and continue to be) projected on to him” (3). Szwed goes on to point out that many of those meanings are contradictory and difficult to contain in a traditionally structured narrative. Thus, he builds his narrative around a structure that tries to break with conventions of biography, providing the basic rhythm so support his meditations, much in the same way that the opening “Vamp” implies the “chord base” for the narrative. The overall structure is a loose chronology arranged in numbered chapters, framed by “Vamp,” “Interlude” and “Coda.” Each provides a rhetorical space in which Szwed can engage with the “meanings” of the material presented in the numbered chapters; as a sort of supra-structure, improvising and riffing on the meanings, rather than presenting a unified Miles Davis persona. The book is presented as a counter narrative; in the sense of refusing to makes sense of the whole and resisting the biographical master narrative.

Szwed’s narrative provides a critique of the tradition of the biography as “Bildungsroman” by producing a text with a strongly fragmented quality. Individual episodes are often placed in short paragraphs separated from the next and the following by not only a line break, but line space and with no connecting words or sentences. For example, when Szwed early on in the text first briefly recounts how Miles Davis in 1949 was contacted by Duke Ellington, but chose to continue down his own path. This is followed by a hard paragraph break (leaving a blank space between paragraphs). Next Szwed, in equally brief terms, speculate on the grounds for the decreasing contact between Miles Davis and Gil Evans in that same period. Again the text jumps, this time to a quote by Simone de Beauvoir that resembles the epigraphs that each chapter is opened with, this time without beginning a new chapter, but indicating a shift in scene (moving the narrative from New

York to Paris) (78-79). The text is full of similar passages and this fragmentation of the narrative heightens the impressionistic character of the text and a sense of montage.

Montage can, in its juxtaposition of objects and materials, besides being a profoundly modernist technique, function as another way of describing jazz in its juxtapositioning of rhythm, harmony and melody, creating a form that can be accessed/read both horizontally and vertically. Szwed thus opens up the text when he, rather than forcing disparate information into a unified narrative, allows for gaps and discontinuities. This means that no grand narrative unity is forced upon the complexities of a human life, allowing for such events as Miles' various wife-beatings to stand side by side with moments of creative expansiveness.

Amy Shuman argues that a clear entitlement claim only resides with the subject of a story, and once the story travels, the personal entitlement becomes supplanted by empathy. However "empathy is a weak claim to entitlement; in fact, empathy is almost always open to critique as serving the interest of the empathizer rather than the empathized" (18). Although Szwed does let his moral indignation towards Davis' abuse shine through, the refusal to connect them in any explicit or allegorical way creates a position of dis-interestedness – a critique of empathy. We are left with a greater sense of disconnectedness, not just from community but from the modern idea of self even, leaving us with much a more disjointed Miles Davis.

There is an ambivalence at play though, strengthened by the epigraphs to each chapter, as they provide intertextuality as well as function to comment on the events in the chapters. Some of the epigraphs consist of a combination of quotes from canonical writers, jazz writers, and people in Davis' life, or even Davis himself, continuing the sense of fragment and

polyphony. However, they also imprint meaning on Davis and his life, as in chapter 3 which opens with first a quote from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*:

What a thing is man, this lauded demi-god! Does he not lack the very powers he has most need of? And if he should soar in joy, or sink in sorrow, is he not halted and returned to his cold, dull consciousness at the very moment he was longing to be lost in the vastness of infinity.

It is followed by a quote from Whitney Balliett that also refers to Goethe's text, speculating that the "young-Werther ruminations most clearly reveal the content of Davis' music – a view of things that is brooding, melancholy, perhaps self-pitying, and extremely close to the sentimental." And the final quote is from Davis' first wife Irene Cawthon Davis¹¹⁹, "What had jazz done to him!" (67). All three quotes strike the same chords of romanticism and spleen and as the chapter deals with various episodes in Davis' life the epigraphs serve as key to reading these: the bohemian "salon" that took place in Gil Evans tiny basement flat, Davis' first trip to Paris and the love affair with Juliette Greco, ending with his subsequent descent into drug abuse as he returned to the US. It is interesting that Szwed, contrary to his stated purpose, here imposes these rather bourgeois categories of art and the suffering artist on these events, clearly indicating that it was the pain of being an artist that brought on Davis' spleen and drug use.¹²⁰

The use of epigraphs only consisting of a single brief quotation from Davis (appropriately and typically enigmatic) as the one opening chapter 5, "My name's my color" (139), provides a different and perhaps more open reading, evoking Davis' signifying on categories of race, be it musical or

¹¹⁹ Davis never actually married Irene Cawthon, but she was the mother of his first 3 children and later added the Davis to her name.

¹²⁰ A slightly less obvious allusion to drugs appears in first epigraph to chapter 9 – a quote from Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* (yet another Romantic), is juxtaposed with a more pragmatic connection between music/art and drug use as Miles Davis is quoted for saying "Music is like dope. You use it until you get tired of it" (305).

cultural/social. The climax of the chapter is the recording of *Kind of Blue*, surrounded by on one side the years and recordings leading up to this, notably Davis' collaborations with Gill Evans and the soundtrack he recorded for Louis Malle's film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, and on the other the police beating that Davis received on August 26th 1959, when standing outside the club Birdland where he was working. Szwed describes the recordings leading up to and the recording of *Kind of Blue* as Davis' movement towards music that eschewed any given correlation between music and race. The recordings for the Louis Malle film in Paris also offered an environment free of racial prejudice. However, as Szwed quotes Jeanette Utreger for, it was a naïve conception of Paris as even in France "there was latent racism everywhere" (153). Davis' refusal of racial categories become even more quixotic in the face of the clearly racially motivated beating in 1959, what Szwed calls a "defining moment in race relations" in the New York arts community (182). The epigraph thus represents both a rhetorical stance against race as a definition of music and people, and an ironic reversal of itself in the face of realities in America and Europe.

Kind of Blue is, as in just about all other biographies on Davis, given the status of the defining recording; the recording where Davis shifted both his own direction in music and jazz in a wider sense. Szwed's approach to describing the album is symptomatic for the whole book as he first outlines the musical watershed that jazz was at in the late 1950s, and then offers modal jazz as a way through this. The production of *Kind of Blue* illustrates a process involving a higher degree of accidents and collaborations than a traditional conception of the "masterpiece" usually leaves room for. His description of the album lightly touches back on the chord of the epigraph as something fluid and defying narrow definitions:

It's the album as a whole that finally impresses the listener, an extended exercise in what was to become known as modal jazz, a music free of the fixed harmonies and cadences of pop songs. In Davis's musicians' hands, it was a flowing weightless music, but one that refuses to fade into the background. In retrospect every note seems perfect. [...] In the differences between each of the musicians' approach to these pieces, it's possible to hear them thinking, worrying their way through such unfamiliar territory. All the more remarkable then, that the record seems so placid, coherent, and predetermined. (175)

Szwed here juxtaposes the apparent coherency of the recording, the “work,” with the idea of art (and perhaps jazz more than any other) as process or, to use Christopher Small's term, as musicking. The shared flow produces the work. Szwed also turns to George Russell's analogy of a modal music as a “river trip” when attempting to explain modality and how it differs from other approaches to improvisation. Music is a verb rather than a noun. This encompasses Szwed's general approach to the recordings as documentation and material in his text as he investigates them not so much as objects or documents than as events. A discography is provided in the back for documentation, but within the narrative there are no lists of data or minute “track-by-track-including-alternate-takes” descriptions of each album or recording session. His writings are more impressionistic and in keep with both the fragmented structure and the stated intention – the basic chords – of the book, with for example his reflections on alternate takes revolving around the perception of them as “artworks in themselves, as versions of some platonic ideal, sensed or dreamed of, or of a perfect work revealed as the takes began to accumulate” (50).

Szwed goes on to consider the takes of Miles Davis' first recording session with Charlie Parker's group on November 26, 1945. Most reviewers and biographers remain distinctly unimpressed with Davis' performance at this session, and Szwed uses the alternate takes to read against the grain pointing out how each subsequent take “shows [Davis] making changes and

refining his line,” providing the listener with an alternate musical reality “muted [...], playing against the harmonic structure, playing against the blues, even playing against Parker” (51). These takes, as Szwed reads them, provide a glimpse of the sound of Miles to come. A sound which Szwed focuses his narrative around, preempting the connection between sound and voice as early as in the very first chapter, when describing Davis sound as containing:

[...] a vocal quality that disguised its valve-and-piston mechanical nature and erased the instruments heritage of war and heraldry, the masculine identity attached to its history. He had found a way to personalize the instrument return breath and voice to it, and in doing so he converged on a style of music that had often been identified with white players from the Midwest like cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, a style rooted in lieder and European brass bands. But Miles’ playing was also deeply inflected by the blues: he could signify with a single note, make it sing with the phrasing and declamatory note of some blues singers, or murmur with the small vibrato and introspective vibrato of others. Or he could make that note shimmer and hang in the air, like the steel-string stroke of a blues guitarist. (21)

When I say “preempt,” I am alluding to the fact that Szwed here is inserting a sound that is yet to come at a time in the narrative when Davis was in his teens and had just started on his way towards becoming a professional musician. Thus, the sound and the voice we are here made privy to is anachronistic, but introducing it at this point serves to establish it as a central trope, a tonic chord in the progression of the text’ harmonic flow. As such, there are a number of elements to consider in the quote. Aside from the vocal/oral/aural qualities of the sound, it is also presented as a sound that deconstructs traditional notions of masculinity as well as race. It is a sound that Szwed presents to us as containing all the elements that jazz is said to consist of – blues, brass, European classical music, and the signifying

connects it firmly to greater African American culture.¹²¹ It is an amalgam of disparate components that defies uni-linear definitions.

At the very center of the narrative, with six chapters on either side and a “Vamp” and “Coda” in each end, is a section named “Interlude.” Szwed uses this section to expand on his meditations on the meanings of Miles Davis, and again sound is the starting point. He performs a to-and-fro between such terms as “mystical,” “alchemist” and “alloy” and a sense of music and personal sound as craft rather than a gift, something to be achieved through long and dedicated labor (183-84). Szwed also makes the connection between sound and body, noting how Davis insisted on his own hearing and physical resonance as a means to playing and how phrasing can be intimately connected with a physical feeling of pulse and timing¹²². And this, in turn, connects to the trope of voice as something that resides in the field between the oral/aural and the written/notated:

“Voice” is a poet’s metaphor, of course, an analogy between the speaking voice and the writing voice, conveying the sense that the poet is not only what he says, but how he says it. But Miles went further and added an African American dimension to the equation by declaring that the instrumental voice is analogous to the human voice. (183)

What Szwed is implying here is related to Gates’ theories of voice as central to African American literary tradition; that is, using voice to carve out a rhetorical place for oneself in the greater tradition and mainstream culture. Szwed places Miles in a continuum of Louis Armstrong, the one figure in the jazz trumpet tradition that must be dealt with, suggesting that Davis reworked Armstrong rather than circumvented him as a matter of repetition

¹²¹ Just above he has quoted the passage in the autobiography where Miles evokes the sound of African American church music on a dark road in Arkansas. This image has remained particularly resilient in readings of Davis – like a memory that exists outside the individual for others to “bump into”.

¹²² Producing sound on the trumpet is a physical act in the first place, one that requires control of breath and diaphragm along with good embouchure.

and revision. This, Szwed argues, he accomplished mainly through the use of the mute which gave Davis sound an affect not of “calm, but repressed emotion” allowing him to step “back from Armstrong’s country brashness and exuberance, softening the gruff voice he shared with Armstrong on both horn and larynx, and thus reinforced the perception of his playing as the essence of black urbanity” (186).

Davis speaking voice is conflated with his musical voice, in much the same way that Armstrong’s was, suggesting an affinity beyond the usual readings of the two. Another of the usual Armstrong/Davis dichotomies is that of the difference in performance practice, and Szwed again produces a reading that suggests an alternative perspective. For example, there is Davis’ openly voiced rejection of the stage manner of Armstrong and Gillespie, his insistence on jazz as an art for in and for itself that needed no extra-musical gestures to hold the audience. Szwed in particular points to Davis’ performances as eschewing set notions of trumpet playing and masculinity when Davis “unlike other musicians who played their trumpets like weapons, horns erect and at the ready, he pointed his down.” But rather than reading this and Davis’s use of broken notes and allowance of “errors” as the (conventional) symbol for impotence, he suggests that this was part of Davis’ art, “making them seem like sobs and whispers from an introverted, interior monologue being carried out on the bandstand” (189).

Interpreted in this way, Davis’ entire stage manner, including the much criticized “back-turning,” can be seen, not as a rejection of performance as such, but anti-performance *as* performance. Thus, the shift from the Brooks Brothers’ look to the more extravagant and flamboyant, but still detached, is all part of the same gesture of stylization. Szwed names this as “elements of the cool” and points out that cool “has its roots in West and Central African philosophy, where beauty and character are joined in self-possession free of

anger. But it also resonates with a nineteenth-century European sense of the artful self, the dandy” (198-99). Here Szwed again draw parallels to the posing of spleen, although this time in a later Baudelairian sense of the word. But by juxtaposing this with African aesthetic and thought, he brings forth a more complex meaning of the word, one that suggests cool as yet another strategy of signifying. He goes on to describe Davis’ impact as depending on a “clash of interests and perspectives” that all implied a redrawing of lines of race, gender and art (202). In other words, Davis’ constant signifying on what he saw as limiting assumptions and stagnant practice was what produced the mythical persona. The individual always slipping away from the expected, the one sidestepping the rules and creating new ones in the process, the one always changing the joke – the ultimate trickster:

A discourse developed around him, one that bore inordinate weight in matters of race – Miles stories – narratives about his inner drives, his demons, his pain, and his ambition. Invariably the stories climaxed with a short comment, crushingly delivered in a husky imitations of the man’s voice, capped by some obscenity. [...] He was the man. (205)

As a true trickster Davis remains impossible to pin down. Szwed’s text, with its fragmented structure and character of *meditations* rather than *interpretation*, allows him to remain so, even foregrounds this image. On the one hand is the drug-using, wife-beating Davis, all excess and no moderation – and on the other hand is the visionary, the artist, the leader, sparse in words and music. Szwed’s representation of Davis’ discourse (and actions) remains constantly double voiced, slipping back and forth between the two extremes. We are left with an image of Davis both myopic and hyperopic, a man caught within his own crystal ball.

When it comes to race Davis is at times represented as strangely short sighted, insisting on a black essentialism and even using racial slurs that flies

in the face of his collaborations with Gil Evans. In contrast stands his refusal to let his music and his persona be pinned down by notions of race and genre. For instance, Szwed points to Davis' intuiting that jazz was becoming an increasingly ethnic label in the late 1960s, early 70s and his subsequent attempt to name and place his music in a different setting (303). Szwed uses a quote from Greg Tate to emphasize this point:

The power of Miles Davis was that he always seemed to be waving back from the other side of Black culture's transcendable horizon, from the post liberated side of Black potentiality. That other shore was not emblematic of emancipation. What was over there was freedom from fear of a Black romantic imagination. (252)

The quote is the epigraph to chapter 7, following the "Interlude" and reinforcing the trope of the trickster. As Gates points out, the trickster performs the role of mediator, but endlessly displaces meaning into indeterminacy (Gates 42, 56). This "trick" can be reconfigured as a form of hyperopia, a constant shift of the gaze to what lies ahead and it allows for what Tate identifies as Davis' transcendence of emancipation.

This far-sightedness, a transcendence of the immediate horizons of possibility, is also how Szwed configures Davis as a musician and most importantly as a band leader. Especially when it comes to the "second quintet" (Williams, Carter, Hancock, Shorter and Davis) is this foregrounded in what is called "an aesthetic of discovery that was given priority over a finished perfected performance" (264). Szwed again and again refers to Davis' talent for in this setting to be the mediator, the one who from time to time would provide directions or capture the right moment – all in a setting that required that a constant re-articulation of self and musical principles. Szwed uses the album *Filles de Kilimanjaro* to emphasize the innovations as resulting in reinventions of both rock and jazz (272), and the fact that much of this music and especially what came in the years immediately after, often

was met with confusion and even resentment as evidence to Davis' ability to see further than his contemporaries (327) – of being “Miles ahead.”

As the narrative moves into the 1970s and Davis' music moves away from an easily recognizable jazz format, Szwed's meditations on the music, on the sound/voice of Davis start emphasizing the mystical. His recording sessions are described as “Faulkner country ... the forest primeval” (313), and the musical voice of Davis is replaced by groves or even a sudden absence of sound, which Szwed points out “can feel like a physical leap into space, or something like a gravity-free move into another kind of music [...] the effect of loss of rhythm is heart-stopping, if not apocalyptic” (328). It is as if Szwed is tracing a move in Davis that goes beyond sound, on that culminates in the last two issues of Davis' before his 5 year hiatus, *Agartha* and *Pangaea*. Both albums were concert recordings from Osaka, Japan in 1975 and first released there – *Pangaea* was not released in the US until 1990 – and the titles of both albums suggest the realm of myth or the ancient. “Agharta” is according to Szwed alluding to a mythical land ruled by an Ethiopian king, and in a quoted description by Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre it is “drowning in celestial radiances all in a single chromatic of light and sound, singularly removed from the usual notions of perspective and acoustics” (342).¹²³ “Pangaea” is the geological name for the supercontinent that existed some 270 million years ago and from which the current continents was formed as they moved apart.¹²⁴ However, Szwed

¹²³ Some confusion reign over the term, but most sources on the word focus on the fact that the mythical land of Agharta/Agartha/Agharti/Asgarhi is connected to various hollow earth theories and that the mythology names it to be a great civilization or city under the surface of the earth. It has also been connected to various myths on the origins of the Aryan race. For a thorough overview of the genealogy of the myth see Joscelyn Godwin: *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival*, Thames & Hudson, London 1993 (79-94).

¹²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online (Academic Edition)
<<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9058254>>.

imposes a different set of connotations as he describes it as “the mythological primordial continent (surrounded by Panthalassa, the original ocean)” (343). Thus, Szwed reads a mythologizing content into both album titles, one that becomes invested with meaning as the last recordings before Davis’ prolonged silence. The music no longer is an expression of the individual or even the band, but of some higher, spiritual and mythological reality:

Some have heard in this music the feel and shape of a musician’s late work, and egoless music that precedes its creator’s death. As Theodor Adorno said of the late Beethoven, the disappearance of the musician into the work is a bow to mortality. It was as if Miles was testifying to all that he had been witness to for the past thirty years, both terrifying and joyful. (343)

What we are presented with here is a disappearance of the Subject. Davis did not physically die for another 16 years, but there is a distinct sense in the narrative that the most important musical production had come to a climax, and an end. “For the first time, the music in his head had stopped” (345). As the text deals with Davis’ silent years and his subsequent slow return to music, like both previous biographies as well as the autobiography, the narrative disintegrates. The fragments become even shorter and less connected than previously, events and honors bestowed upon Davis are listed rather than narrated, all to come to an end in what for the genre of biography is an almost classical death bed scene; filled with anxiety and the slightly embarrassing details of someone dying.

At the close of the narrative stands the “Coda”; that concluding passage of a musical work that often provide an extension or elaboration of one or more motifs from the main composition. The epigraph Szwed has chosen for this, is Art Farmer’s by now famous characterization of Davis’ playing: “Miles plays the way he’d like to be” (403). This is often read as an allusion to the vulnerability and poetry in Davis’ sound. But in the context of

Szwed's coda, it can be read as an expression of the desire to play one's future self, a sound constantly deferred. Szwed returns here to the idea of Davis as enigma, emphasizing the complexities and the element of self-conscious construct. The hyperopia of Davis' artistic vision is reiterated in his "doing whatever was necessary to stay ahead of the others" (404). The trope of the trickster again comes to mind, both when Szwed points to Davis' "ability to disrupt continuity [...] and unsettle the listeners' passive acceptance" (405), but also in that sound or meaning deferred. What is left is a voice "beyond voice, beyond music itself, even to the unplayable: to playing what's not there" (406).

The *So What* of Szwed's title neatly sums up the Davis we are left with – or left without. Like a dismissive shrug of the shoulder, a refusal to explain or care to be explained. Of course, it is also the title of the tune, "So What," from *Kind of Blue*. The emblematic modal jazz tune points to connotations of fluidity and departure from conventions of form. Szwed's stated desire to refrain from constructing a narrative that explains Davis or attempts to produce a unified "whole person" ties in well with his title and the fragmented structure of the narrative underlines this. The claim to "transform the inexplicable into the meaningful, describes one of narrative's most powerful failed promises" (Shuman 10). However, Szwed does not entirely succeed in simply meditating on the projections on Davis, but manages to create a few of his own. Here especially the epigraphs function as signposts to what meanings the text attributes to certain passages in Davis' life. Reading these, the narrative shifts between, on one side, a romanticist and bourgeois notion of the great artist, suffering for and through his art. To a certain degree it is a man disconnected from an immediate sense of community, standing above the crowd by virtue of his talents and perhaps some indelible spirit or quality. On the other side stands the trope of the

trickster, permanently shifting and signifying on those very same bourgeois connotations. As such, the latter trope offers perhaps a less rigid projection, but still somehow disconnected.

Despite the fact that the figure of the trickster is one rooted in African American vernacular, the fragmentation of the narrative leaves Miles Davis as a “Prometheus unbound” – at least outside of the immediate sense of musicking. Szwed uses the image of the road in Arkansas – that rememory that by now exists beyond Davis’ consciousness – to note the different musical influences that Davis absorbed, but without making the connection to a wider culture or community. Bakhtin points to the chronotope of the road as one filled with the concreteness of everyday life (120), one where “the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways, even as they become more complex and more concrete by the collapse of social distances” (243). However, in Szwed’s recreation of this primal chronotope Davis’ road is a strangely sort of disembodied road, leading nowhere in particular in the dark, except perhaps towards the music.

THROUGH A PRISM: “MILES DAVIS AND AMERICAN CULTURE”

The Prometheus unbound, suggested above, is nowhere to be seen in the collection of essays, interviews and poetry that forms *Miles Davis and American Culture*. As the title clearly states it is directed toward a wider American context, moving beyond the biographical (and the received conventions of the genre) and approaching a more openly interpretive text where the reception of Miles Davis – those projected meanings that Szwed also engages – is the focal point, as well as the biographical figure of Davis.

There is an insistence throughout the volume of attempting to connect Davis to artistic, cultural, political and geographical spaces in America. In this sense it aligns itself closer to both Ken Burns' documentary and even *Down Beat* than the two previous texts.

Visually the volume clearly marks its departure from the linear biographical narrative. The book has a distinct "coffee-table" look and feel, with a square format and strong graphic design, both for the cover as well as the layout of the text. The cover is dominated by the title, but also carries a small photograph of Davis outside Café Bohemia in New York in 1956. Davis is standing leaning up against the poles of the awning, smoking a cigarette in an otherwise deserted street and there is an almost "Edward Hopperian" quality to the moment. This is strengthened by the muted blue colors and the lower case type of the title: we are entering an Americana of coolness and understatement.

The layout inside the book continues with a distinct design. Each chapter is marked graphically with a full page b/w photograph that illustrates the individual chapter. Opposite is a partial black disc that holds the title, invoking the image of the vinyl record. As if each chapter represents a groove on the long playing record of Miles Davis-musings. The text is presented in an unorthodox manner, in columns of irregular length, much like a syncopated rhythm or the carefully spaced notes of Miles Davis. Scholarly essays alternate with personal essay and interviews in a loose chronology (ranging from a historical piece on the St. Louis music scene immediately before Davis entered it and coming full circle with a piece on the lack of media coverage in St. Louis when Davis died), but nothing that resembles a linear and unified narrative. Possibly, the book is not meant to be read in progression, from cover to cover. Its coffee-table feel, the short pieces and variety of material invites a more associative and desire-driven

reading: flipping through the pages and stopping when an image or a headline catches the eye.

In the back, a chronology provides three levels of time: The biographical time of Miles Dewey Davis III, a jazz history time and an African American cultural history context. We are offered this African American context, juxtaposed with the stated purpose of a wider American cultural reading, the two not necessarily excluding one another, but exemplifying the flux between an African American particularism and an American universalism (Ostendorf 265). This is also evident in Gerald Early's introductory essay "The Art of the Muscle: Miles Davis as American Knight and American Knave," as he insists that it "is impossible to know modern American culture since 1950 without knowing what [Davis] did and why" (Early 2001, 22). He connects Davis with an American mythology of the frontier by way of Huckleberry Finn as "one of the great tales of "manhood" and morality in modern American culture" (5). But Early also reconfigures this image of the "American picaro" – the American knight of the headline – in terms of a specifically black masculinity of "the black man who rebels against white male authority" (21), the knave or the trickster, all about "artifice and masculine stylization" (22).

The trickster, by now a familiar trope in connection with Davis, is also evoked in Ron Carter's description of Davis as someone "who was able to turn the world of music in any direction he chose" (105) and again in John Gennari's essay on Davis' relationship with jazz critics. Gennari points to Davis' ability to negotiate the various alliances and issues of race in a way that enabled him to move freely between simultaneous categories of cool and bourgeoisie. He suggests that to Davis:

[...] interracial exchange was not motivated out of a strong commitment to racial integration for its *own* sake, but was part and parcel of black art and black cultural independence. This carried over into his relationships

with the few white critics he saw as an exception to the racist norm. These critics he challenged, provoked, titillated, humiliated – and used to secure the cachet and cultural capital that he needed to triumph in the white-dominated marketplace. (70-71)

There is an ambivalence inscribed in “an exception to the racist norm” indicating that Davis’ relationship to critics and a white marketplace was a complex one, and it is this very same complexity and ambivalence that leads to the difficulty in placing Davis on one or the other side of the “jazz culture wars” (76).

Gennari hints at a somewhat apolitical reading of Davis (and in this he is not alone), in the suggestion that Davis’ interracial relations were not overtly political actions, but part of the African American culture of indirect appropriation – and revision – of any influences that might help shape the music and establish a (rhetorical) space or standing ground from which to operate. Ingrid Monson however, reads against this in her insistence on reading Davis in a civil rights context charting what she calls “three politically marked moments in Davis’ career” (88) – that is, the incident outside Birdland in 1959, the benefit for the African American Research Foundation (ARF) in 1961, and the Lincoln’s birthday benefit concert for voters registration in 1964. Monson argues for reading of Davis as a culture hero that “improvised his musical voice, attitude and image against the turbulent backdrop of the civil rights movement and African nationalism” (95). However, her examples do not resolve the ambivalence of Davis’ political position: the Birdland incident was put into a civil rights context more by the media than Davis himself; the ARF was contested even at the time as colonialist in attitude; and at the Lincoln’s birthday concert Davis bullied his musicians into foregoing their fee. Monson rightly points out that the jazz world has been “wedded to the modernist notion of the artist as a

transcendent genius to whom nothing matters but the music” and she continues that it in the process:

[...] missed the fundamentally social processes by which a musical voice becomes heard, evaluated, identified with, and ultimately takes on symbolic force [...] Miles’s voice became larger than itself, not simply because he always chose the right notes, but because a large number of people have wanted to sing along with his most poignant, militant, and uncompromising moments. Miles’s voice was not disembodied after all, but delivered by a complex human being prodded by the same social forces as everyone else. (95)

Despite the sympathetic affirmation of Davis’ humanity and being-in-the-world, Monson’s argument risks contradicting itself, engaging in that very process of symbolic interpretation that she herself points to, opening a fissure in the text where the “militant” moments of Davis may be as much a construct as the apolitical and romanticist Davis. There is however an astute point to be drawn from Monson, which is that of the political and ideological shaping of the reception of an artist.

This is what Eric Porter attempts to trace in his essay, “‘It’s About That Time’: The Response to Miles Davis’s Electric Turn.” As Porter points out, African American music has since W.E.B Du Bois been marked as signifier of black “double consciousness” and as a vehicle for political and cultural uplift. By turn jazz has also been endowed with this set of symbolic meaning and with them a certain assumed moral responsibility. But, as Porter states, jazz has proven an unstable factor in this equation as:

[...] this struggle to locate black meanings in jazz has been complicated by the reality of a multiracial jazz community and audience in America and abroad, the multiple cultural referents from which its practitioners have drawn, the music’s position as a culture industry commodity, and the diverse musical tastes of members of the black community. (134)

Thus, jazz becomes a contested space in which to negotiate both the mentioned ideas of responsibility as well as the realities of marketplace and

political influences (or lack of). Porter outlines how Davis' figure, his persona, provided a "model for personal deportment as African American men coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s" (138). With this iconicity came a moral and political accountability, and Davis was perceived by some to be failing this, as he turned toward fusion and (white) rock music. Porter uses Gary Tomlinson's two rhetorical tropes of absence and transgression to trace the different value judgments on Davis' music (and persona) in the 1980s and 1990s, placing these along a continuum with largely positive reception of Davis in one end and negative in the other. The latter is represented by Stanley Crouch's move from Black Nationalism and avant-garde jazz towards what Porter refers to as a "talented-tenth fashion" in which blues and the jazz of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington are seen as the embodiment of "refinement, heroism, and democratic values" (142). In this view of the music – the American universalism inherent in "America's classical music" – Davis failed as a black culture hero and transgressed his social and moral responsibilities "by letting popular tastes dictate his aesthetic and social vision and presentation of self" (143). By contrast, Porter uses the concept of unity music in the writings of Amiri Baraka and Greg Tate to highlight a different reading of Davis, one that also rejects a "prescriptive cultural nationalism," but where African American particularism still might offer a route for black music's social function in a more creolized understanding of social and cultural forces.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ The terms is Baraka's, put forward in the essay, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" from 1966. Baraka envisions the emergence of a "Unity Music" where the various forms of black music come together and where the "artificial oppositions" of R&B and what he terms New Black Music (that is, avant-garde/free jazz – from Albert Ayler to Sun Ra) can be resolved, thus creating a unity that draws on black culture as a whole: "That growth to include all the resources, all the rhythms, all the yells and cries, all that information about the world, the Black ommmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm, opening and entering" (Baraka 209).

Davis's music represents the possibilities of black musical integrity surviving not only in the culture industry of the 1980s and 1990s, but as expressed in a hybrid popular form, serving a social purpose by appealing across race and class lines and mending the "cultural fractures" of a postindustrial society. (144)

What is clear from Porter's essay is more than anything the contingency of the value judgments on Davis, all taking place within the dynamics of history and politics and furthermore destabilized by Davis' own ambivalence and inconsistencies.¹²⁶ The paradox lies in the fact that the higher the sense of ambivalence, the greater the desire seems within a community (be it the jazz community or a larger cultural or national community) to be for narratives that eradicate these ambivalences by rationalizing the contingencies that create them.¹²⁷ Crouch does so by pathologizing Davis' later music, thus placing it outside the community and Baraka/Tate by incorporating it into the idea of unity music – either way the contingencies *within* the community are erased.

Waldo Martin also attempts to reconcile some of the ambivalences surrounding Davis by placing him alongside the avant-garde. In this, Martin's strategies resemble those of Ingrid Monson's insistence on Davis as a civil rights fighter, although on different parameters – aesthetic rather than socio-political. However, Martin's argument also risks internal contradiction, especially in the tendency to conflate modernism and avant-garde when he states that Davis' oeuvre "was vital to his expanding avant-garde and modernist capital" (107). Martin bases his argument for Davis as avant-

¹²⁶ Porter rightly points to the climate of revision within cultural politics over the last 20 years, a climate where "the cultural and social movements of the 1960s (and 1970s) continually are revisited as a source of both the cause and solutions of the problems of the present". (144)

¹²⁷ Barbara Herrnstein Smith again provides valuable insight when pointing out that "institutions of evaluative authority will be called upon repeatedly to devise arguments and procedures that validate the community's established tastes and preferences" (40).

gardist on constant search for newness and change while simultaneously making a case for Davis' modernism in his rootedness in the tradition (108). There is no doubt that Davis worked from modernistic parameters, with tradition and change in constant dialogue, but as Peter Bürger points out, "newness" is in itself not a sufficient category to delineate the avant-garde in relation to modernism.¹²⁸ What Martin's argument accomplishes is not to place Davis firmly in the avant-garde movement, but it does attribute avant-garde capital (including a whole host of connotations such as artistic integrity, freedom from the marketplace, and political/ideological consciousness) to Davis, again an example of the symbolic meanings invested in Davis and his music.

Farah Jasmine Griffin's essay toward the end of the book is also an attempt to reconcile ambivalences in Davis' persona and sound. Griffin seeks to unite "the promise of safety and understanding offered by Davis's horn – the safety of the black woman's voice within a black man" (183) with Davis' frank admonition to his physical and psychological abuse of women. She does so by revisiting Hazel Carby's argument on Davis as using the all male environment of his music as an escape from women, and revising the argument by making a distinction not between male/female, but "between those part of the music-making and those not" (185). As inconclusive as any speculations on whether Davis only abused those women who wasn't part of his creative universe may be (bearing in mind Davis' general abuse of anyone

¹²⁸ Bürger argues for "the limits of the usefulness of the category of the new when one attempts to understand the historical avant-garde movements. If we sought to understand a change in the means of artistic representation, the category of the new would be applicable. But since the historical avant-garde movements cause a break with tradition and a subsequent change in the representational system, the category is not suitable for a description of how things are. And this all the less when one considers that the historical avant-garde movements not only intended a break with the traditional representational system, but the total abolition of the institution that is art" (Bürger, 62-63).

close to him, including musicians), Griffin's subsequent readings (listenings) of Shirley Horn and Cassandra Wilson's interpretations of Davis' material, shows the desire to re-configure and re-appropriate Davis' figure. What is interesting is how the essay deals with Davis' autobiography. Faced with Davis' matter-of-factual accounts of abusing women, the symbolic meanings invested by Griffin and other (black) women in the sound of Davis are destabilized and a sense of betrayal emerges: "we experienced these admissions as brutal slaps to our collective brown faces." The same sense pervades Chambers' introduction as well as Crouch's dismissal. It is clear, that all post-autobiography writings on Davis somehow have to take it into account, as it undermines previous mythologized versions of Davis. This is not to argue that the autobiography does not potentially offer equally mythologized (and at least performative) narratives, but the contradictions between the myths of fandom and the autobiography result invariably in narratives that have to respond to Davis' autobiographical voice, either by dialogue or dismissal. As Gates points out "all texts Signify upon other texts, in motivated or unmotivated ways" (Gates, xxiv), and the discourse surrounding Davis becomes increasingly double voiced as the autobiography becomes part of the texts to signify upon. One result can be the (almost parodic) dismissiveness of Crouch and Chamber's "Freaky Deaky" and in the other end of the scale the fragmentation of the narrative, such as Szwed's.

In *Miles Davis and American Culture* the dialogues with Davis' autobiographical voice are numerous and various. Generally it is used to corroborate the central argument of the essay, be it whether Davis belonged with the avant-garde, the civil rights movement or refused to limit himself to

just one audience and/or musical style.¹²⁹ Some of these arguments can be seen as interrelated, some of them as discrepant to one another and the significant factor is that all read the autobiography as document rather than narrative, but as a body end up demonstrating the internal ambivalences of the text. Farah Jasmine Griffin attempts to engage the autobiography in a critical dialogue, and in her treatment of Horn and Wilson she re-establishes the connections between Davis' *sound* and a feminine quality, but his *voice* remains outside her vision.

Quincy Troupe for natural reasons engages differently with the autobiography than anyone else. In his essay, "From *Kind of Blue* to *Bitches Brew*," he consistently refers to the text as "our book" (121, 122, 125 etc), thus conflating his own narrative voice with that of Davis' and he openly confesses to his inability of objectiveness when it comes to Davis:

He was so much a part of my formative experience, and I worked so closely with him later in life in assisting the telling of his life story, that I confess from the outset that it is sometimes difficult for me to get perspective on the man. (120)

Nevertheless, Davis' – musical rather than narrative – voice is one of the two themes central to his essay, the other being geography as origin of self as well as voice. Troupe makes the connection between himself, Davis and the voice of Davis a matter of geography when he points out that "I grew up in north St. Louis [...] I grew up around people who spoke like Miles" and he goes on to tell the story of how he discovered Davis at the age of 15 when a group of "hip older men" were listening on the juke box to "sounds I had either never heard before or never paid attention to. Whatever it was, it was new to me..." The young Troupe overhears the conversation about

¹²⁹ Respectively: Waldo E Martin: "Miles Davis and the 1960s Avant-Garde," Ingrid Monson: "Miles, Politics, and Image," and Martha Bayless: "Miles Davis and the Double Audience."

the music and learns that these sounds were being “played by a “homeboy” from across the river, someone named Miles Davis” (120).

At the point of *Kind of Blue*, Troupe recounts the story of the inspiration of sounds coming to Davis on a dark road in Arkansas, bringing forth the rememory of the *place*. As the essay moves to Davis’ second quartet, Troupe describes his sound as evolving from the lyrical and the tender to a “power player” that “was almost spitting out notes, exploding them outwards and upwards in bursts that were incredible in their improvisatory heat.” This sound, akin to the sound and approach of a guitar, is however still connected to Davis and Troupe’s common place of origin, coming “from his deep roots in blues and roadhouse funk music, the guitar and organ-based music he had grown up with back in East St. Louis and St. Louis” (125).

The constant evocation of St. Louis, this sense of “geography is fate,” that runs strong in almost every narrative of the jazz tradition, is also present throughout *Miles Davis and American Culture*. St. Louis is situated at the intersecting point of two major axis of geographical movement in the US: the Mississippi River and the Missouri River, providing access to both the north-south migratory path as well as being “the gateway of the West,” opening up towards not just the general mythology of the American west, but also the association in African American culture of the Midwest and the Territory as “a territory of hope” (Ellison 'Territory' 601). Thus, Davis’ place of origin holds powerful connotations of the search of the frontier and the quest for freedom that are either explicitly or implicitly invoked as essays and interviews touch upon the subject: Clark Terry, who in his foreword brings forth the trumpet sound and the fighting spirit coming out of St. Louis; Gerald Early as previously mentioned talks of the lighting “out for the territories” and Davis’ uncompromising black male authority as

connected to his Midwestern roots, as does William Howland Kenney in his essay on jazz in St. Louis. Benjamin Cawthra (who also conducts most of the interviews in the volume), reverses the connection in his essay “Remembering Miles in St. Louis” by looking into how Davis’ “relationship to St. Louis reveals as-yet-unresolved issues of identity and community contained in American culture in general and St. Louis in particular” (189). Using the example of the virtually non-existent press coverage in St. Louis at Davis’ death (the editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*’s Sunday edition “had decided that Miles Davis was not “that big a person in his field”” (189-90)), Kenney argues that the city and the region suffers from a “cultural amnesia,” a reluctance to deal with “the racism so deeply ingrained in it’s history and acknowledge a legacy full of division and compromised hopes” (189). Thus, because Davis and his music are so intimately connected with the greater St. Louis area, an active act of remembrance will also function to both heal severed links back to “a rich heritage of African American musical culture in this region and confront the legacy of racism that traces back to slavery” (196).¹³⁰

The same connection between music, site and memory is made in Eugene B. Redmond’s contribution, ““So What’ (?)... It’s ‘All Blues’ Anyway: An Anechdotal/Jazzological Tour of Milesville.” The piece is by far the most writerly (in a Barthensian sense) of the volume and falls in three parts. The first, titled “Prologue,” is a poem that associatively riffs on East St. Louis and Miles Davis, making connections between the music, the city, and the man. The second part, “Acoustical Sketches of Milesville: Excerpts from an Aural Innerview, September 9, 2000,” is a prose exposition on the poetry of the first section, and the third and last section, “Milestone: The

¹³⁰ One of the sources for the volume was the Missouri’s Historical Society’s exhibition on Davis, *Miles: A Miles Davis Retrospective*, curated by Cawthra in 1998.

Birth of an Ancestor” is another piece of poetry, part of a eulogy for a Davis memorial in 1991. As the *aural* of the subtitle to the second part suggests, there is a distinct *oral* quality to the piece as a whole. Even the prose of the second part is associative and vernacular in its character, signifying both on itself and other texts. For example when Redmond quotes Jane Cortez for saying ““I ain’t no fly by night. Check out my resumé”” (54) to illustrate East St. Louis’ complexity (and complicity); only to connect Davis and East St. Louis by riffing on the phrase and the concept when stating that “Miles is the apex, but there is a foundation beneath him. Check out the resumé” (55). The complexity he points to lies in the nature of East St. Louis as “a rural-urban place” and in the fact of it being both segregated and integrated at the same time (53), making it simultaneously transitory and traditional:

so, come, s/whirl, & bop on this ...
 if rural-rich Rush City & Sister Southend co-birthed the “Cool” ...
 while slaughter house-hips/Goose Hill wailed “So What” ...
 & bass-lined “Pollack” town intoned “It’s ‘All Blues’ anyway,”
 then 15th & Broadway, as pivotal “riff,”
 rhythm section & tone-setter, became the hipsofical nerve center –
 a *Kind of Blue* metronome/polymetric/layering –
 of citycentric ethnicities: African-Americans & Armenians & Germans
 & Greeks & Jews & Poles ... 15th & Broadway,
 stationary like Ben Thigpen’s “trap” set – and later,
 in the 60s & 70s, like Rene Calvin’s conga and Mor Thiam’s djembe
 – stationary, but spinning like a rim-shooting turret
 keeping time & track of art & enterprise,
 its spokes/streets shuttling intravenous “Toodle-oo’s”
 from “Lock” Town to Rush City to Goose Hill
 to the Great White Way/way North across State Street ...
 to “booze cruises” to Chi-Town, KC, Memphis & Saint Blue ... (50)

In this excerpt, the poem performs a constant shift between metaphor and metonymy; on one hand creating lists of locations and populations, making titles of Davis’ tunes part of the vocabulary of the city and its peoples, while evoking the simultaneously static and fluid *Kind of Blue* as metaphor for the

most integrated part of the city: 15th and Broadway. The drum set (using the musician's term 'trap set') becomes another metaphor/metonym – both signifying the stationary-but-dynamic on metaphorical level, while metonymically replacing the streets of the intersection with the spokes of the drum.

This constant shifting represents the same movement that was evident in Ken Burn's *JAZZ*: the slippage from the metaphoric language that binds together communities to the narrative metonymy of that narrative strategy that enables the imagining in the first place. However, in the poem as well as in the volume as a whole, Davis remains more a sign of indexicality than iconicity – perhaps the difference that would lie in titling it “Miles Davis *in* American Culture” instead of “Miles Davis *and* American Culture.” Rushdy writes that “memory is neither as stable nor as intensely personal a thing as perception. For memory exists as a communal property of friends, of family, of a people” (321). The volume of essays, the exhibition and seminars that gave birth to it are all communal acts of rememory, and through this act remembering, which is always an act of “incretions as much a re-creations” (303), not just Davis but the community that he was situated in, nationally, culturally and musically – and each essay may (or may not) engage with Davis and his music in terms of metaphor, but they all metonymically substitute on another. Thus, the biographical subject avoids only in the heterogeneity of narratives as they are held up against one another, brought into dialogue with each other.

The motion around the biographical subject from the autobiographical personal narrative of *Miles: The Autobiography*, over the dis-interested meditations of *So What*, to the both localized subject and universalized legend in *Miles Davis and American Culture* prescribes a wide loop, starting and ending at the point of intersection between the collective and the individual.

At the far end hovers the narrative of the singular individual, resisting allegorization by refusing the temptation of unified narrative meaning, but also withdrawing from possibilities of dialogue.

CONCLUSION: JAZZ IS – OR JAZZ AIN'T

From the deeply personal level to the interpersonal and collective, the narratives we produce are all inter-connected and reproduced in an attempt to close the gap between experience and meaning. The greater the number of experiences, the more difficult it is to bridge the fissures, to create coherent harmony from the polyphony, and the higher the stakes. National narratives are invested with imagining on the macro level, making the heterogeneous homogenous, but the imagining takes place on all levels and with all types of communities.

In and around the jazz community the stakes seem to have got higher as the heterogeneity has increased with each new addition to the idiom and sound, simultaneously with the emergence of an understanding of jazz as a uniquely American art form. Thus, as jazz becomes invested with extra-musical meaning, the desire or need to produce coherent narratives grows stronger, and as the heterogeneity of jazz as a form keeps expanding, those narratives become increasingly difficult to both create and claim.

Ken Burns' series clearly demonstrates this: The effort to tell the story of jazz couched in American mythology, as a metaphor for democracy and freedom, constructs a narrative unity by excluding those counter narratives that might destabilize the meanings and imaginings produced. Despite the notion of the melting pot, America also seems preoccupied with a notion of (at least artistic) purity - as if the melange of America creates the need for simpler (purer) concepts, perhaps to allow for an imagining of the Nation? But does that mean doing away with or embracing the hyphenations? An un-hyphenated "America" that faces, recognizes and appreciates its own hybridity is perhaps desirable, but is it not often so that an un-hyphenated

“America” ends up leaving very little room for any form of heterogeneity that does not confirm the dominant discourse? As long as the series remain in the realm of past – of memory – the aporia between the imagined and the experienced can be smoothed out as reconstruction also allows for redefinition. But as the series moves closer to the present, the many definitions and voices clamor for attention, illustrating how the tradition becomes increasingly difficult to unify.

And the tradition *is* at the center of the discourses, be it in *JAZZ*, *Down Beat* or (auto)biographies. The only exception is possibly Szwed’s *So What* with its deeply fragmented “protagonist,” largely disconnected from the very community that produces the many discourses on tradition. In this respect, Szwed’s book can be seen as the “anomaly” in the mass of texts presented here, clearly presenting a counter narrative that is both explicit and implicitly present in the text. Explicit in Szwed’s stated intention to avoid the neatly unified “Bildungsroman” narrative of an exemplary life – and implicit in the way he has chosen to let the fragmentation of “facts” of a life influence the very structure of the narrative. However, Szwed’s text does in a number of other ways align itself with various dominant discourses. For the text remains beholden to notions of Art and the individual artist, and paradoxically positions itself *within* the community by way of critiquing the dominant narrative of canon and a neatly defined tradition

The ambivalence present in the structure and meanings of *So What* mirrors the contested field of the tradition. The strategies employed in order to define this field range from the discourses of canon formation to an insistence on creolization and the eternally shifting hybrid. Canon formation rests on ideas of art as the carrier of certain sets of non-contingent and universal values that are deeply embedded in a bourgeois understanding of art as autonomous from the dynamics of politics and economy. Thus, the

surrounding discourses employ strategies based on this understanding such as the concept of “genius” and great men that leave their imprint on the rhetorical construction of the tradition. It is a highly genderized discourse that assigns a paternalistic system of gender differences to various factors, from forms of display to characteristics of musical voice. And any individual or group that steps outside those boundaries are often either pathologized or silenced.

Similarly, any artist or art form that aligns itself too closely with the marketplace, neglecting to disavow economic interest or the desire to reach a too wide mainstream audience are made suspect by evoking the classic dichotomy of art and commerce. Of course, the disavowal of economic interest is part of a strategy to gain cultural capital – which in the long run can be transformed into economic capital. This notion of the autonomy of an art form also carries the germ of the concept of purity, the idea that the authenticity of jazz resides within a clearly defined tradition and once the music (that is, the makers of the music) travel too far from this, seeking out other forms for inspiration or even synthesis, authenticity and purity are compromised and the term “jazz” is no longer applicable.

This narrow definition is what is most strongly contested and critiqued at the other end of the discursive field, where jazz is imagined in terms of hybridity and creolization. The claim on the tradition and on notions of authenticity is no less adamant here, though. Both discourses are strongly invested in notions of authenticity, only differing in what that signifies. A discourse that distances itself from the idea of the tradition in terms of canon and a uni-linear history of jazz evolution may do so in relation to one or any of the concepts and discourses inherent in this. The “tradition” can still be claimed in terms of creolization, stating the hybrid origin of the art form as evidence and *raison d’être*. And authenticity can still be defined

along lines of a gendered discourse while terms of race are contested. Commerce can be alternately embraced or disavowed. And the notion of place as signifier of authenticity, privileging for instance the US or certain parts of it, can still be maintained, while musicians spend most of their professional lives in the constant flux of touring.

Definitions crisscross these discursive terrains, with individuals and groups often positioning themselves simultaneously at various locations. The ensuing polemics are often lost in a maze of interfaces and fissures along the fault lines. Perhaps it could even be argued that some of the “jazz wars” are as much part of the imagining of the jazz community as “freedom,” “democracy,” and “a music essentially of the moment” is. The discourse of “jazz as America’s classical music” and the rhetoric of Resolution 57 represents the use of jazz as a metaphor in the imagining of a nation, but it also provides the jazz community with the means to imagine themselves at the *center* of American culture, rather than at the margins – resituating themselves, and providing them with cultural capital. The ongoing polemics situate the jazz community *within* an American consensus based on a culture of pluralism. Thus, the perceived promise of the music, to dialectically resolve those differences and come together in an American cadence, carries connotations of jazz as the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny.

This consensus is most strongly revealed in the pared notions of voice and orality. The privileging of the individual musician’s voice, his or her sound, is pervasive throughout every text and narrative. The factors that come together to create this uncontested paradigm reside in the perception of jazz as the soloist’s art, with the central mode of expression being the improvisation, where the individual must express his/her most inner essence in the matter of a chorus or two. This self-understanding also carries the germ to some of the contradictions present in the imagining of the jazz

community. Thus, the priority given to voice/sound also carries within it the very same focus on the great individual artists, which was so criticized the case of the Ken Burns series. The tendency to idolize and mythologize the great innovators is inherent in the culture itself, evident in the lists and poll's and in the various halls of fame as well as the more or less enigmatic monikers and the apocryphal anecdotes. The constant negotiations between the group and the individual, is best played out in the setting of the musical performance. But also outside of this setting do the many voices, all struggling for the right to define and name, take on a performative aspect. Thus, performance closes the gap between the rhetorics of signifying and orality as the privileged mode of representation, remembering, and imagining in the culture of jazz.

The strength of this foregrounding of the oral/aural lies in the possibility of dialogue and heteroglossia, where discourse – both musical and verbal – becomes a site for interaction and negotiation. But the commitment towards orality can also open up that previous aporia between meaning and experience. The liberating multiplicity can potentially split into so many individual and diverging voices, that they no longer make sense. Or the oral becomes romanticized in an essentialist construct where the “naturalness” of orality becomes conflated with authenticity. Orality is mythologized, the inner dialectics trickle out and even heteroglossia is neutralized in the metaphor of “e pluribus unum.” This ambivalence corresponds to that which exists between metaphor and metonymy in narratives imagining communities, as the narratives are stabilized through the shift from the metonymic chain of endless signifiers to the metaphorical manifestation of the signified. The promise of narrative is transferred to the promise of oral/aural as both signifier and signified. And in the case of extreme plurality as well as essentialist orality – where neither are mutually exclusive – we are

faced with the failing of that promise in a loss of dialogue: Either because of the inability of the many to hear one another, or because of the hermetic closure of the unified.

The possibility of dialogue does reside in and around jazz. The music itself has the potential to be dialogic and double voiced, constantly bringing in that other sound/tradition/voice to the conversation. The dialogues take place both openly in the active exchange between musicians and internally in the fact that every musician's personal utterance (the solo) carries within it, and builds upon, the sound/voice of the other, the chords of the ditty or the echoes of those that came before. This double voicing can transpose to the discourses surrounding jazz only when the balance between the many and the unified – not being one and the same – is kept, and with an awareness of even one's own utterance as double voiced, in constantly dialogue with those of others.

Any sort of research is a “slice” of its given field. It cannot – and should not – propose to provide the final analysis, but enter into the ongoing conversation. Jazz Studies is a field that is rapidly expanding, both in scope and in the numbers of those contributing. Furthermore, through a heightened critical awareness, a critique is increasingly being directed towards closed-circuit discourses. I have in the preceding pages tried to both trace the narrative closures and aporias, offering readings that attempt to read against the discursive grain of essentialism and mythologizing. I have aimed to let the dialogic possibilities pervade both my paradigms – allowing different material and different disciplines to engage in a conversation of sorts.

The understanding that “Jazz” is a discourse – filled with the imaginings of one self and others – does not detract from the beauty of this music of the moment. But the moment “an sich” will not provide us with a

sense of connectedness beyond itself. Thus we hover in the heterotopic space between history and hearsay, attempting to bridge the gap without closing it altogether.

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ABSTRACT

Over the last twenty years, jazz has experienced a significant shift in its cultural position within the US. It has increasingly been invested with cultural capital and as this position has grown stronger so has the claim to the right to define the boundaries and meanings of jazz as an American art form. This dissertation seeks to investigate American representations of jazz from 1985 till 2005, arguing that the jazz tradition is being consciously “imagined” at the center of American culture through discourses of canon, metaphor, and myth, often resulting in definitions that invariably preclude dialogue as well as simplify the complexities and heterogeneity of the music.

The dissertation consists of three main chapters each devoted to a particular cultural product representing jazz. The first chapter deals with Ken Burns’ documentary series, *JAZZ*, from 2001. The focus is on jazz as metaphor for national imaginings with in-depth analysis of episodes 1, 7, and 10. The last part of the chapter turns to transcripts of interviews conducted for the series as counter-text used to dialogically engage the series. The second chapter is a reading of the jazz magazine *Down Beat* along three main themes: hierarchies and canon formation, geography and place, and finally the ways that musicians and the community negotiate terms of tradition. The third and last chapter turns to jazz biographies and autobiographies with Miles Davis as the central figure in order to uncover the interplay between the personal and the collective.

The dissertation shows that jazz can be used to imagine a community, both in terms of jazz as a metaphor for wider national imaginings such as “democracy,” “freedom,” and “e pluribus unum,” but also as a way for the jazz community to imagine themselves in a dialectic movement between margin and centre, and between the collective and the individual. Central to this stands orality as the privileged mode through which the jazz community narrates itself – potentially engaging definitions of jazz dialogically, as it enables an understanding of both jazz and discourse as double voiced.

DANSK RESUMÉ

Igennem de sidste tyve år har jazzen undergået et betydeligt skift i sin kulturelle position i USA. Den har i stigende grad fået styrket sin kulturelle kapital og i takt med dette er også debatten omkring retten til at definere jazz traditionen og dens betydninger som særskilt amerikansk kunstform blevet stadig skarpere. Denne afhandling undersøger forskellige repræsentationer af jazz i USA i tidsrummet 1985-2005 med den tese at jazzen bevidst tænkes ind i en større amerikansk kulturel sammenhæng begreber som kanon, metafor og mytologi. Dette resulterer ofte i definitioner der indsnævrer kompleksiteten og det dialogiske aspekt i jazzen.

Afhandlingen er delt op i tre hovedkapitler der hver analyserer et specifikt kulturelt produkt. Det første kapitel tager fat på Ken Burns's dokumentarserie, *JAZZ*, fra 2001 med fokus på jazz som metafor for nationale diskurser og med dybdegående analyser af episode 1, 7 og 10 for til sidst at anvende transkriberede research interviews fra serien i en dialogisk tekstlæsning. Andet kapitel er en læsning af jazzmagasinet *Down Beat* der fokuserer på tre centrale temaer: Konstruktionen af hierarkier og kanon, geografi/sted som identitetsbærende og til sidst traditionen som til konstant forhandling. Det tredje og sidste kapitel undersøger interaktionen mellem individet og fællesskabet i en analyse af jazz biografi og selvbiografi med fokus på musikeren Miles Davis.

Afhandlingen viser at jazzen kan indgå i en konstruktion af fællesskabet, både som metafor for det større nationale fællesskab og værdier som "demokrati," "frihed" og "e pluribus unum," men også som en måde hvorpå jazz verdenen kan positionere sig selv i et dialektisk forhold mellem det marginale og det centrale og mellem det kollektive og det personlige. Igennem alt dette står det orale som den primære strategi hvorigennem jazz fællesskabet "fortæller" sig selv – en strategi der potentielt kan føre til mere dialogiske definitioner af jazzen idet den muliggør en forståelse af både jazz og diskurs som dobbelt-stemmig.

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