

## INTERLUDE

It is the thing that is most perceptible and least material. It is the archetype of the vital element. It is the first condition and the hallmark of Art, as breath is of life: breath, which accelerates or slows, which becomes even or agitated according to the tension in the individual, the degree and the nature of his [sic] emotion. This is rhythm in its primordial purity, this is rhythm in the masterpieces of Negro art, especially sculpture. It is composed of a theme--sculptural form--which is set in opposition to a sister theme, as inhalation is to exhalation, and that is repeated. It is not the kind of symmetry that gives rise to monotony; rhythm is alive, it is free. . . . This is how rhythm affects what is least intellectual in us, tyrannically, to make us penetrate the spirituality of the object; and that character of abandon which is ours is itself rhythmic.

-Léopold Senghor (quoted in Fanon 122-123)

The difference between our rhythmic conception and that of the Africans consists in the fact that we perceive rhythm by hearing, while they perceive it by movement. In this off-beat technique of the African we have before us an ecstasy in the truest sense of the word; for its essence is to disturb the state of static self-contained repose which distinguishes both metre and rhythm in addition to their character as time-spans. This it does by overlaying their static accents with ecstatic emphases, producing tensions between the two.

-Alfons Dauer, Der Jazz (quoted in Jahn 38)

By borrowing the principle of a two- and four-beat bar first from hymns and then from polkas and military marches, the American Negro made a sharp break with his [sic] African ancestors. However, his sense of rhythm was not completely at home within this rigid framework. An opposition arose between the container and the thing contained. Half a century after the birth of jazz, this opposition has not been smoothed away, and it probably never will be. The Negro has accepted 2/4 and 4/4 bars only as a framework into which he could slip the successive designs of his own conceptions. . . he has experimented with different ways of accommodating himself to the space between the measure bars.

-André Hodeir, Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence (quoted in LeRoi Jones 192)

It was the Negro's fluency with the technical references of Western music that made bebop (and all jazz, for that matter) possible, and it was certainly a fluency with these same superficial references of Negro music that produced, with whatever validity, the white cool style (or any jazz that white musicians played). What was not always attained in the case of the white jazz musician was the fluency of attitude or stance. And as I have said before, Negro music is the result of certain more or less specific ways of thinking about the world. Given this consideration, all talk of technical application is certainly after the fact.

-LeRoi Jones, Blues People (211)

## STRUGGLE

Rhythm can be heard as a crucial element in all social organization. One culture's rhythm is another's noise. The distinctions between music and noise, order and anarchy are not given a priori, but are determinations, productions of a (common) sensibility: in this case, a rhythmic sensibility. A culture's rhythms--which are by no means limited to "music" in the narrow sense, as Koyaanisqatsi so aptly demonstrates--are both representations and performances (enactments, completions) of that culture's means and modes of organization. Rhythm, as not-word, is the order-word par excellence: it does not primarily or even necessarily represent or signify, it enacts; what it enacts is an order, a particular form of organization. This organization can be social, spiritual, psychosexual, environmental. As with other discursive systems (i.e., power/knowledge formations) these rhythms and their corresponding organizations are both constraining and enabling as well as open to being undermined by the performances of alternative rhythmic sensibilities: "noise," "anarchy," "chaos."

Michel Foucault's discussion of The Order of Things is instructive both in terms of hearing music and rhythm as forms of order and in relativizing our common sense of rhythm. Encountering a bizarre (to Westerners) taxonomy of animals from an ancient Chinese encyclopedia, he writes:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought--our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography--breaking up all the ordered

surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things. (xv)

Being a Westerner, embedded in an epistemology and language dominated by spatial and visual metaphors, Foucault (re)casts order as a question of space: landmarks, surfaces, planes. Koyaanisqatsi has shown that such metaphors are by no means illegitimate as descriptions of the (both symbolic and material) templates with which we "tame the wild profusion of existing things." Yet we order our lives temporally as well as spatially, and that temporal order is, among other things, rhythmic. As Gilbert Rouget puts it, music "is an architecture in time. It gives time a density different from its everyday density. It lends it a materiality it does not ordinarily have and that is of another order" (121). Rhythm materializes a temporal organization.

The Kaluli of Papua New Guinea draw on their surroundings, using metaphors derived from different speeds and qualities of water flowing in streams to discuss the temporal qualities of their music (Feld).<sup>1</sup> Although this terminology includes a sensitivity to pulse and (ir)regularity, the emphasis is on the quality of the flow. Given such a framework, an awareness of something approximating a Western sense of rhythm as being composed of discrete units of time, as in a metronome or visual representations of time in musical notation (e.g., 4/4 time, quarter notes, pauses, et cetera), would seem unlikely. Foucault continues:

There is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the English word "rhythm" can be traced directly to the Greek rhythmos, derived from rhein, meaning "to flow." This sense, however, has been overshadowed by notions of discrete units of time, regular variations between stressed and unstressed beats, et cetera.

end of the application of a preliminary criterion. A "system of elements"--a definition of segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which there is a similitude --is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest form of order. . . . The fundamental codes of a culture--those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices-- establish for every man [sic], from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home. (Order xx)

What we apprehend from the alien and exotic character of the Chinese taxonomy and the system of thought it represents, Foucault writes, is "the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that" (xv).

#### West African Polyrhythmic Music

Confronted with the polyrhythms of West African music, many Europeans resort to phrases such as "completely incomprehensible," "I would become lost and disoriented," "syncopated past comprehension," and "the music is so monotonously repetitive that it just dulls the senses." I would like to draw from John Chernoff's analysis of African Rhythm and African Sensibility to demonstrate not so much the musicological accuracy of his analysis as the immense variability, not just in the speed and time-cycle of rhythms (e.g., 12/8 as opposed to 3/4 or 4/4), but of fundamentally different senses of rhythm and how this affects what it is possible for us to conceive as "order." The implications are in how that would affect how "social order" is performed (brought into being), and how systems of meanings (e.g., epistemology) and forms of social structure (e.g., hierarchy) are involved. (A more detailed musicological discussion of this rhythmic structure and of the validity of Chernoff's interpretation is carried on in the footnotes of

this section.)

Chernoff, writing from the standpoint of a Westerner, describes the overall relationship between African music and African social life in terms of the nature of the individual-community relationship:

African music is indeed different from what we ordinarily consider music to be, and as we examine the way African music becomes a focus for values as it mediates the life of a community, we will find that our assumptions about tribal communities are similarly challenged. Our history teaches us to consider the relationship of individual identity and communal unity to be a matter of common faith and common feelings, and we may be surprised to discover different conceptions concerning the nature of character and individuality, understanding and communication, participation and group involvement, and freedom and discipline.  
(37)

In African polyrhythmic music the focus is on the complex interweaving of contrasting rhythmic patterns. To Western ears, this often sounds incomprehensible because we cannot identify what the rhythm is among, for example, a metric unit of 24 sub-beats "being consistently used to produce a complex of simultaneous metres like 3/8, 2/4, 3/4, 6/8, 4/4, 2/2, 3/2, 4/2 (and possible additive asymmetric subdivisions of these) on top of each other" (Tagg 289). There seems to be no main beat, which is confusing for a Western sense of rhythm as a single, unifying force. African rhythms are not only multiple but incomplete, Chernoff argues. If it sounds like there is something missing in much West African music it is because there is--the listener (usually a dancer) must maintain the missing rhythm that completes the polyrhythmic "tapestry."<sup>2</sup> The Nigerian (Yoruba) drummer

<sup>2</sup>Jahn indicates that Alfons Dauer, in his 1958 work Jazz, uses a slightly different terminology, distinguishing between polyrhythmics and polymetrics. In polymetry, several different metres are heard simultaneously, as in Tagg's example. Dauer reserves the term

and philosopher Francis Awe, performing at the Festival of the Drum in

"polyrhythmic" to indicate a single basic meter accented and syncopated in different ways. Unlike polymetric music, the score of a polyrhythmic performance could be written so that the bars would correlate vertically. This distinction allows Jahn to claim, for example, that African-American music has retained polyrhythmics but not polymetrics. In contrast, Chernoff's use of the term "polyrhythmic," which I follow, appears to include polymetrics.

The work of the African musicologist Kwabena Nketia contradicts portions of Chernoff's analysis and confirms others. Nketia makes it very clear that there is a basic pulse and foundational time span in African rhythmic music. Various musicians may be playing rhythmic lines (1) based on a different division of the basic time span (e.g., a cross rhythm of two beats against three within the same time span), (2) using an unequal division of the time span (e.g., dividing a 12-pulse span into groups of seven and five instead of six and six), or (3) that "violate" the basic time span in that they are of a different length and/or "enter" at different points along the time line, thereby crossing the basic metrical line (the latter producing an effect that Nketia refers to as polyrhythmic). Nonetheless, there is a basic pulse or meter and, because of the difficulty in playing polyrhythmic patterns, this basic pulse is often externalized through handclapping or simple idiophones (e.g., shakers or concussion sticks). (See chapter 12 in Nketia for a more extensive discussion including examples and a more elaborate vocabulary.)

For the musicological novice, Koetting provides a clear, derivative account of Nketia's interpretation that also directly addresses the difficulties involved in describing African rhythmic structures with Western terminology. Koetting demonstrates how many compositions can and must be given a single meter, such as 12/8, while such an identification disrupts an understanding of any individual rhythmic line. Western metrical notation can allow for the description of the whole performance or of any individual rhythmic pattern, but not both at the same time (for reasons made clear in the previous paragraph). The paradox for Westerners trying to grasp African rhythmic structures is that "African drummers in my experience do not tap their feet; they do not necessarily think in terms of controlling underlying pulses (like the beats of a measure) to time their playing, but the music is nevertheless strictly timed" (Koetting 86).

Springdale, Utah, repeatedly stated that it did not make any sense for he and his troupe to be on stage while the audience sat in their seats: in his tradition, drumming is always accompanied by dancing and there is no place for passive observation and contemplation. The listener must be actively engaged in making sense of the music. According to Chernoff, in West African music you don't keep the time, you complete it.

These African rhythms are not separate, discrete, independent entities; each rhythm defines the others. As a consequence, it is extremely difficult for any one musician to play their part unless the whole ensemble is playing. In this form of organization, rhythm is something to respond to, not something to "get with." In this sensibility, "time" is not a single, objective phenomenon as it is in Western music and culture. "The establishment of multiple cross-rhythms as a background in almost all African music is what permits a stable base to seem fluid" (Chernoff 52; emphasis added). The listener in African music must become a participant (most commonly through dance), must be able to actively mediate the rhythms.

The music is perhaps best considered as an arrangement of gaps where one may add a rhythm, rather than as a dense pattern of sound. In the conflict of the rhythms, it is the space between the notes from which the dynamic tension comes. (113-114)

Christopher Waterman observes a similar tension:

Yoruba popular dance music relies upon a kind of temporal "stretching" in which interlocking parts purposefully do not articulate a precise duple or triple division of the pulse. . . . Interlocked patterns pull slightly apart in time, maintaining a slight but perceptible tension. My experience performing with jùjú bands suggests that it is these tiny discrepancies that propel Yoruba dance music: if strokes consistently fall too far apart from or too precisely on top of a subdivision of the ground pulse,



the rhythms lose vitality. . . .<sup>3</sup> (215)

Chernoff argues that this rhythmic sensibility is an enactment of a communal sensibility:

In the model of community presented in an African musical event, integrity is ideally a combination of diverse rhythms which must remain distinct, and the power of the music comes from the conflicts and conversations of the rhythms, from vivid contrasts and complementary movements. The music is judged in terms of the success of each performance, that is, by how well the formally established relationships of the rhythms are continually open to fresh and vital participation. . . .

Western ideals of freedom in relationships seem characterized by a search for newness, naturalness, or a utopian oneness, and we often tend to see social conventions as limiting our freedom. In an African context, interpersonal intimacy is achieved not through the elimination of social conventions but through the effective integration of as many social formalities as possible. (160)

For example, according to Chernoff the best improvisations by "master drummers" in this tradition are designed to draw attention to other parts of the ensemble more than they seek to emphasize their own rhythmic lines. Style is a matter of communal integration more than highlighting the individual.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>An interesting connection to Western rhythms here is that "imperfections" have been programmed into the rhythms in drum machines and other synthesizers to make them sound more human, to avoid a feeling of excessive monotony (Wallis and Maim).

<sup>4</sup>Again, Chernoff's interpretation is not completely shared. Master drummers are like leaders or conductors (see Koetting, for example), and in this sense mirror the hierarchical nature of African social orders. Their primary task, however, is not self-promotion but an integration of the parts, according to both Koetting and some of Nketia's native informants. The latter, in criticizing a performance, indicated that "the master drum

At the same time, this communal integration relies upon the differences between the rhythms of the individual players: in the terms of Léopold Senghor, poet and former president of Senegal, African polyrhythmic poetry appears "as a piece of architecture, a mathematical formula founded on unity in diversity" (quoted in Jahn 166). The structure and meaning of polyrhythmics embodied itself, for example, in the African response to foreigners. When Europeans first came to Africa, they were welcomed precisely because of their differences (Jahn). Many Africans readily allowed themselves to be baptized: as their polyrhythmic sensibility was intimately linked to their polytheism, the Christian God was incorporated into their existing pantheon. (To monotheistic missionaries, such a move is blasphemous: their God is threatened with a transformation from the one and only God to one divinity among others, and hence the authority of their "thou shalt" loses its force. They could not imagine authority divorced from singularity.<sup>5</sup>)

was...too persistent; the player should have stopped for a few seconds from time to time or played single waiting beats, so that there would be gaps or appreciable moments of silence while the other drums continued to play" (239).

The various discrepancies between Chernoff, Nketia, Waterman and others should come as no surprise. First, they are coming from Western frames of reference and/or using western terminologies to describe non-Western musical forms. The fit will always be imperfect. Second, there is a great deal of diversity among the musical practices of different African cultures. (On the latter point, however, Nketia argues that African rhythmic structures are far more uniform across cultural groups than pitch systems.)

<sup>5</sup>Jahn sees a significant parallel here in African-American religion and music: with the shift into the monotheistic framework of Christianity and because of the banning of drums in North America, "the polymetry which carries polytheism is lost, and all that remains is polyrhythm, which is constructed on the basis of a single metre" (219) (see the terminological

This model of rhythmic and communal organization smacks of more than a little idealism. A simple and direct isomorphism between this (Euro-American description of a) musical organization and the social organizations of West Africa is belied by the "reality" of those cultures. Various forms of violence and patriarchal domination are readily evident, and although much can be attributed to the destabilizing influence of colonization, overlooking indigenous forms of social violence is both naive and dangerous. Waterman, for example, in his study of the contemporary musical form jùjú among the Yoruba, makes clear that the hierarchical nature of Yoruba society is legitimated in their music--that multiple rhythms are a performance of communal inequality. However, whether Chernoff's utopian model is an accurate description is of less concern (to me, now) than its ability to help conceive of alternative ways of performing social order and different ways of knowing the world through different rhythmic sensibilities. If we can begin to imagine different types and functions of rhythm, perhaps we can imagine a different sense and/or valuation of order and, finally, different means for social organization.<sup>6</sup>

discussion in note 2).

<sup>6</sup>Joni Jones's work on African theatre provides a useful complement to the rhythmic sensibility I am working on describing here. Her discussion of the importance of improvisation and the narrowing of the gap between (active) performers and (passive) observers not only parallels the model of community described by Chernoff, but serves as an illustration of how the enactment of such a sensibility might manifest itself. In the terms I use here, she works to enact an alternative form of organization, one which is closer to a community than it is to a singular and imposed totality. For example, her discussion of the implications of improvisational theatre for the notion of a single-authored, scripted text is a nice analog to the roles of the original score, conductor, and monorhythmic base in mainstream Western music. A consequence of improvisation, as with polyrhythmic music, is the always open, incomplete, and participatory nature of both

Can we organize without hierarchy? Without top-down methods of control? How can we act collectively without the imposition of uniformity? How can we value and foster diversity without the need to impose a monologic consensus? How do we foster a less destructive relationship with the earth?

Take Nietzsche: due to the "stark impossibility of thinking that," my brain aches in trying to imagine what the will to power would be/act/feel/look/sound like. When I manage to get in "it," "it" is fleeting. My languages are structured to the core with the assumptions of being, with the disease of platonism. When becoming manages to manifest itself, it is generally in music and poetry, in less digital and informational media--hence my reliance on Talking Heads. But when Chernoff writes that a polyrhythmic sensibility allows "a stable base to seem fluid," I am pulled in by a concrete enactment of something that may approach or resemble becoming and a will to power; an alternative, Irigarayan symbolic that gives voice to the unconscious, the feminine, Woman, the real; a relationship to nature besides reification and possession. Not an abstraction, but as Haraway defined effectiveness: in practice. At the same time, this utopian impulse must be used dialectically, along with a hearty dose of skepticism, keeping a critical eye and ear open to the violence these forms--both Nietzschean and West African, in this case--may enable.

Perhaps the most striking parallels are between Chernoff's description and Bakhtin's dialogic view of language, his sense of the fundamentally

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performance and community. In particular, the value and relevance of Jones's work to mine is that she not only compares two different models of theatre, but works through the difficulties and transformative possibilities involved in enacting an African form of organization in a North American context.

heteroglossic nature of culture. I want to lay out elements of Bakhtin's approach, not only to make clear the connections to Chernoff but to problematize Chernoff's discussion of an "African" rhythmic idiom and our (that is, mine and Chernoff's) common caricature of a "European" musical and rhythmic sensibility.

### Dialogism

Bakhtin's understanding of language begins with the fundamental positionality of all utterances. Language manifests itself only in its embodiment, its concrete usage in specific utterances. In making this move, Bakhtin opposes structuralist views, what he terms "abstract objectivism," which posit language as an abstract system of rules and forms. The result is a shattering of the illusion that a "language" such as "English" is a singular, bounded, unified entity. Language "is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it." Within any abstractly unified national language there exist "a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems" (Bakhtin, Dialogic 288). A language, therefore, "is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions. . .all given a bodily form" (291).

Put another way, an abstract "national" language such as English is actually composed to a multitude of languages, each of which represents the worldview of a particular social group. Thus "language" is always heteroglossic: composed of multiple views, voices, languages, each of which enacts and embodies a social position amidst the polyphony of other voices that share the same abstract national "language."

All languages of heteroglossia. . .are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people. . . . As such, these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia. (Bakhtin, Dialogic 291-292)

Bakhtin does not, in his rejection of structuralism and other universalist conceptions of language, descend into what he terms "individualistic subjectivism." Each individual does not have their own personal language and their own world view. Language, by definition, only exists in between people, as a social entity, since to enter language an object or meaning must have interindividual significance (Volosinov).<sup>7</sup> The individual consciousness exists in an environment of heteroglossia, and hence is faced with a multitude of possible languages, each of which carries with it socioideological affiliations. In this sense, the individual consciousness is faced with "the necessity of having to choose a language" (Bakhtin, Dialogic 295).

This "choice," perhaps better heard as an appropriation, is fraught with social significance and, perhaps, conflict. If various social groups, many of which exist in antagonism (e.g., class conflict), enact and embody their world views by speaking different languages, they nonetheless may share the same "abstract" national language and thereby draw from similar (though certainly not identical) pools of semiotic materials and forms. "As

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<sup>7</sup>While the question of whether Bakhtin was the primary author of Marxism and the Philosophy of Language is open to argument, it is generally agreed that the ideas subsumed under the "author functions" of Bakhtin and Volosinov are strongly affiliated, and hence I am using them here as (practically) interchangeable.

a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle" (Volosinov 23).

As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, there are no "neutral" words and forms--words and forms that can belong to "no one"; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. . . . All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (Bakhtin, Dialogic 293)

This is the dialogic nature of the sign. Any utterance is socially positioned, and therefore implicitly or explicitly engaged in a dialogue with other specific utterances and social languages. In this sense, any utterance is engaged in an external dialogue. At the same time, however, since the utterance is composed of signs that are at least partially populated with the intentions of other languages, it is also internally dialogic. Not only is a national language multiple and heteroglossic, but any utterance is also necessarily multiple--fragmented, multiaccentual, populated with the intentions (that is, social accents) of its speaker as well as those of the past users of the same signs. Hence, any word "is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces" (Volosinov 41).

Listen, as an example of what Bakhtin describes, to LeRoi Jones's discussion of the transformation of Africans into African-Americans:

I mean, that until the time when you have sufficient ideas about this new country to begin making some lasting moral generalizations about it--relating your experience, in some lasting form, in the language of that country, with whatever subtleties and obliqueness you bring to it--you are merely a

transient. There were no formal stories about the Negro's existence in America passed down in any pure African tongue. The stories, myths, moral examples, etc., given in African were about Africa. When America became important enough to the African to be passed on, in those formal renditions, to the young, those renditions were in some kind of Afro-American language. And finally, when a man looked up in some anonymous field and shouted, "Oh, Ahm so tired a dis mess, /Oh, yes, Ahm so tired a dis mess," you can be sure he was an American. (xii)

This passage demonstrates a number of important implications of Bakhtin's approach. Identity and world view are a matter of language. The process of choosing a language is not a passive one, but an active appropriation, a filling of existing signs and forms with the accent of your social group, its values, ways of sense-making, life experiences and conditions. This appropriation is not merely the adding of a semiotic-ideological accent (e.g., a shift in the "connotation" of a sign), but also a transformation, a reworking of the signs and forms of the language system: accent manifests itself materially, as what is often termed a "dialect," but this dialect is *not mere surface change but the creation of another language*.<sup>6</sup> As Bernice Johnson Reagon puts it,

A lot of times when I think about black people and our survival I think about confiscation. You have to perceive us as confiscating, and putting all sorts of things together, in order to make whatever it is that comes out of us ours. (Dancing)

Reagon's use of the term "confiscation" emphasizes the often conflictual nature of the dialogic relations between languages. Bakhtin's approach is sometimes read as a kind of naive pluralism, as a celebration of the

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<sup>6</sup>As Jahn indicates, in most African-American languages ("dialects" such as Creole) the vocabulary is predominantly European but the grammatical structures remain strongly African.



multiplicity and diversity of culture. However, although "all socially significant world views have the capacity to exploit the intentional possibilities of language through the medium of their specific concrete instancing," this capacity is "in proportion to their social significance" (Bakhtin, Dialogic 290). In other words, this capacity is in proportion to their cultural authority, which is, in turn, in some way connected to their access to the material resources for ideological production. Put differently,

the polyphonic approach has nothing in common with relativism (or with dogmatism). . . . Both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism). (Bakhtin, Problems 69)

More specifically, this means that the success of any appropriation of a sign is by no means guaranteed in advance:

not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his [sic] context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. (Bakhtin, Dialogic 294)

This disproportionate influence on the accents of signs is not only a result of disproportionate access to cultural authority and other resources, but is a crucial factor in perpetuating those inequalities. A particular social class or ruling bloc maintains its hegemonic position precisely by passing off its social accent, its world view, as the only accent, the only world view. Creating the illusion of monologic discourse--singular, unified, consistent, unpositioned--is what allows ideology to pass itself

off as the truth. Only when the influence of heteroglossia can wash over a national language can the "absolute bonding of ideological meaning to language" be destroyed, the dominant ideology (myth, science) relativized as just one more language among many (Bakhtin, Dialogic 369).

### Bakhtin and Chernoff

At this point, returning to the African polyrhythmic sensibility with Bakhtin's dialogism in mind, I can both explain the appeal of Chernoff's description and problematize his claims. The dominant, Western monorhythmic sensibility carries with it the powers and dangers of monologic discourse: top-down control, the imposition of order, the illusion of both the existence and the desirability of singularity (identity), the valuing of being (solidity). As I have attempted to demonstrate in the previous two essays, this sensibility and its accompanying forms of organization and epistemology can be linked to various forms of economic exploitation and environmental destruction. According to Chernoff, West African musical sensibilities and styles of communal organization reject these harmful assumptions, embodying instead a pluralistic ideal: multiplicity, incompleteness, interdependence, interanimation, fluidity and becoming. These traits are not covered over, as in the dominant Western discourses, but are instead celebrated.

To be more specific, follow me as I lay out some of the striking parallels between Chernoff's description of African polyrhythmic music and Bakhtin's description of the polyphonic novels of Dostoevsky, which he reads as embodiments of the celebration of heteroglossia necessary to prevent the imposition of a singular, interested truth. Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky's novel

is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a

whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other. (Problems 18)

In contrast to Western music, wherein a single rhythm must be adhered to, Chernoff argues that the power of West African polyrhythmic music comes from the "conflicts and conversations of the rhythms, from vivid contrasts and complementary movements" (160). Consciousness in Dostoevsky cannot evolve and grow on its own, in isolation, but only in interaction with other consciousnesses. "The important thing in Dostoevsky's polyphony is precisely what happens between various consciousnesses, that is, their interaction and interdependence" (Bakhtin, Problems 36). In a polyrhythmic sensibility, rhythm is something to respond to, not something to get with; "it is the space between the notes from which the dynamic tension comes" (Chernoff 114). In Dostoevsky, "the idea lives not in one person's isolated individual consciousness--if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies" (Bakhtin, Problems 87-88). It lives in interaction. African musicians, Chernoff explains, cannot play their parts alone because the various rhythms are not discrete, independent entities. Finally, for Bakhtin understanding comes about only in the response: communication is not a linear transfer of information, but an active appropriation of the utterance within one's own language that can only happen in response. In an African musical event, there is no place for passive observers; the music only "makes sense" if it is responded to with another rhythm.

All of these parallels indicate a certain conception of the individual and community. "It is precisely in polyphony that a combination of several individual wills takes place, that the boundaries of the individual will can be in principle exceeded" (Bakhtin Problems 21). African polyrhythmic music embodies, according to Chernoff, a model of community in which social conventions do not prevent authenticity in interpersonal interaction, but one wherein "intimacy is achieved. . .through the effective integration

of as many social formalities as possible" (160). The role of authority, hence, must also change from that of the monologic novel or monorhythmic musical performance. In the polyphonic novel, the hero must not become fused with the author--a distance must remain between them that prevents the hero from becoming the author's mouthpiece. In a polyrhythmic performance, the master drummer's improvisations can draw attention to other parts of the ensemble rather than their own rhythmic lines.<sup>9</sup>

I am drawn to the polyrhythmic sensibility Chernoff describes as a source for alternative models of organization, as a model of community rather than totality. The sensibility's appeal is enhanced by its resonance with Bakhtin and by the fact that it responds, with a concrete and widespread cultural form, to the criticism that Bakhtin's dialogism is too idealistic to exist as the basis of a workable social formation. In addition, Chernoff's model fits my purposes nicely in that the difference in the forms of social organization is located in and made clear through the nature and role of rhythm. However, Bakhtin's own perspective also leads me to question, at least theoretically, Chernoff's analysis.

Bakhtin hears multiplicity at all levels of analysis: in response to the concept of a unified national language he posits a radical heteroglossia; in

<sup>9</sup>The strength of these parallels certainly raises the possibility that Chernoff was influenced by Bakhtin's ideas at some level. I find it unlikely that any direct connection exists, however. Chernoff does not cite Bakhtin (or Volosinov) and his book was written before any of Bakhtin's were translated into English. The one exception to the latter factor is Volosinov's Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (see earlier note). However, although the specific ideas and implications addressed by Bakhtin that parallel Chernoff's descriptions can be drawn out from Volosinov, they are not emphasized or in most cases even directly stated in that work. Nevertheless, Chernoff is a Westerner, encountering another culture through his own cultural frames, and Bakhtin's idealism is consonant with elements of that cultural milieu.

contrast to the assumption of a seamless, univocal utterance he demonstrates an internal dialogue; against the idea of the singular meaning of signs he claims a ubiquitous multiaccentuality. Chernoff, however, posits a singular, coherent entity that he calls an "African rhythmic sensibility," and that I have qualified somewhat as a "West African polyrhythmic sensibility." He then establishes a clear set of characteristics for this sensibility, this musical system. Clearly, the system Chernoff describes values multiplicity, yet the system itself is nonetheless presented as a singular entity. Across the cultural distance of a Euro-American learning and analyzing this system, his conclusions may seem reasonable enough. Yet, how can these traits be any less open to question than Saussure's structuralism or Chomsky's generative grammar? Why would it be reasonable to assume that this musical system is any less open to multiplicity and the forces of heteroglossia than the English language? To make the connection even closer to home, why would it be reasonable to assume that what I have referred to as the "Western" musical sensibility is also singular? What is gained from these claims, which are not simply generalizations (and therefore open to all the standard rebuttals against that type of claim), but which operate from certain assumptions about the nature of culture and sign systems (the very assumptions that Bakhtin questions)?

#### Musical Categories and the Desire of Caricature

Popular music scholar Philip Tagg "deconstructs" the use of terms such as "African music," "black music," "Afro-American music," "European music" and "white music." First, he finds these terms empirically sloppy. For example, when music scholars speak of "African music" they often explicitly or implicitly presume a cluster of traits as being characteristic

of such music, "polyrhythmic" and "improvisational" being the most common. In the case of the former, not all African musics are polyrhythmic. Even if they were, the term "African music" is almost always cast in opposition to "European music," which is thereby presumed to be monorhythmic. Yet, although Tagg grants that there are no truly "polyrhythmic" musical traditions in Europe, there are strong birhythmic traditions such as the "Scotch snap" (290). This, in turn, complicates the use of the term "Afro-American" music, in which it is generally presumed that all nonmonorhythmic music in North America originated from African influences despite the strong possibility that various birhythmic traditions from Europe were transplanted in North America.

In terms of the second trait commonly linked to "African music," improvisation, Tagg grants that late nineteenth century, bourgeois elitist conceptions of music in Europe did have a "notation fetish" that arose from the ideology that the individual composer's score was the purest form of a piece of music. As a result, "improvisation had been virtually eradicated from the classical scene by 1910." Nevertheless,

despite the dearth of improvisation in the European art music tradition over the last seventy years, it is absurd to present this sad development as conclusive evidence supporting notions implying that improvisation is more "black" or "African" than "white" or "European." (290)

In addition, British immigrants to North America certainly brought with them nonclassical ("folk") traditions in which improvisation played a role, thereby challenging the presumption that all improvisation in North American music comes from African influences.

To identify what is African and what is European in Euro-American and African-American music would require an enormous historical and empirical project: what musical traditions were transported from what

parts of Europe to what parts of the Americas, what musical traditions were transported from what parts of Africa to what parts of the Americas, what kind of musical traditions had developed in the Americas prior to the importation of large numbers of Africans, and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Examples that demonstrate the dialogic and heteroglossic nature of African-American musics abound, making any clear, generalized identification of what is African and what exactly is European (or Euro-American) in "Afro-American" music next to impossible. Take LeRoi Jones's description of "Northern Negro pre-jazz music":

Ragtime was a Negro music, resulting from the Negro's appropriation of white piano techniques used in show music. Popularized ragtime, which flooded the country with songsheets in the first decade of this century, was a dilution of the Negro style. And finally, the show and "society" music the Negroes in the pre-blues North made was a kind of bouncy, essentially vapid appropriation of the popularized imitations of Negro imitations of white minstrel music, which, as I mentioned earlier, came from white parodies of Negro life and music. And then we can go back even further to the initial "steal" American Negro music is based on, that is, those initial uses Euro-American music was put to by the Afro-American. (110-111)

In addition to these confusions, the assumption that "European" forms are free of African influence is also belied by, for example, the (generally forgotten) origins of the seventeenth century French court dance the sarabande, which came into France from Spain, where it first appeared in the sixteenth century. The Spanish sarabanda has been traced by different

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<sup>10</sup>See Holloway for an example of the difficulties in tracking the demographic make-up and cultural influences of African slaves in just one area of the "new world" (South Carolina). See also Nketia's brief overview of African musical traditions, in which he demonstrates the influence of Middle Eastern and European music on that of Africa and vice versa--not merely since colonization, but over the past 1500 years.

musicologists, in turn, to an African dance brought to Spain by Arabs, an African-American dance from Cuba, and a Native American dance from Mexico (Jahn). To take a similar but contemporary example, much of the "world beat" music coming from Africa today is represented or presumed to be "authentically" African. Yet a great deal of that music is not only constrained by the Western music industry's system of identification and recording, but is strongly influenced by African-American musicians, such as James Brown, who have had a profound influence on contemporary African music. So you have James Brown--representing some mixture of African and European styles and instrumentation, combined in and with elements uniquely North American and African-American--influencing African musicians, who in turn influence Euro-American musicians like Talking Heads (Goodwin and Gore). Amidst such heteroglossia, to say that the empirical accuracy of generalizations about "African," "European," and "African-American" music are questionable is an understatement.<sup>11</sup>

Tagg's strongest critique, however, is motivated by his political project of ending the hegemony of classical Viennese musicology and its standards of musical judgment. He notes the irony that when he and others who share this political project use the term "European music," especially in contrast to "African" or "Afro-American" music, its

meaning coincides with the most reactionary, élitist, bourgeois, conservative and non-dynamic view of European music imaginable. What seems to be implied is a weird caricature, not of European music, but of a small part of one out of several hundred important European music traditions. (292)

Tagg refers here to the characterizations, such as those I have relied on, of Western music as having four beats to the bar, self-controlled and

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<sup>11</sup>See Maultsby's analysis of "Africanisms in African-American Music" as an example of such an attempt.



straight-faced audiences, ego-tripping conductors, fixed and immutable scores, and so on.

The curious thing is that many of us, professing to be in opposition to such ignorant élitism, seem nevertheless, when talking of "Afro-American music," to have opted for a mindlessly élitist view of the music of our own continent. (292)

In the rush to idealize African musical traditions, nondominant European musical traditions have been erased or at least overlooked. "By falling into an idealistic anti-authoritarian position, we perpetuate the ideas of the hated authorities with whom we live in unresolved Oedipal relationship of interdependence" (Tagg 293). In Bakhtin's terms, the classical Viennese school of musicology retains its position of authority by proferring and perpetuating the illusion that "the European musical tradition" is synonymous with their particular tradition, that it is a univocal tradition. Oppositional, "popular" music scholars, by reducing the entire European tradition to the hated enemy, perpetuate this same illusion and the polyphonic richness of the European tradition is drowned out. These oppositional scholars, as a result, direct their efforts toward caricaturing another tradition, the African, instead of re-searching their own oppositional traditions.<sup>12</sup>

The damage is not limited to the "European tradition," however. The caricature of "African" and "Afro-American" music enacts its own damage,

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<sup>12</sup>Tagg, it seems to me, is including himself in these criticisms. He does not cite any specific, paradigmatic examples of the kind of research he finds problematic because, as he explains, the essay is a "polemical problematisation" not a scholarly article "attempting to attack or out-argue anyone else" (285). He does make clear, however, that they essay is directed toward white (European and North American) popular music scholars.

again against the goals of these oppositional scholars.

Indiscriminate use of such terms falls right in line with historical falsifications of the old European cultural patriarchy and credits Blacks with everything corporeal and spontaneous in today's popular music while attributing nothing corporeal or spontaneous to us Whites. . . . There is in other words the risk that by laying the trip so heavily on black people of African descent we embark on a musical equivalent to the sexual projection process described above. By disowning responsibility for our own musical corporeality we force black people into absurd court jester positions and use music we imagine to be little or none of our own doing as a corporeal panacea for [our] own problems of subjectivity, powerlessness and alienation. (Tagg 294)

Norman Podhoretz, for example, writes in 1963 that he envies African-Americans for "their superior physical grace and beauty. . . . I am now capable of aching with all my being when I watch a Negro couple on the dance floor. . . . they seem blessed to me" (quoted in Cleaver 191). David Byrne is more direct: African and African-American music "seemed to me a way out of the dead end, the one-sided philosophical blinder, that Western culture has gotten itself into" (44).

#### The Problem of the Other

Marianna Torgovnick demonstrates the centrality of the category of the "primitive" in Western discourses from anthropology to art to psychoanalysis to popular culture. The inhabitants of this category, along with a long list of other "Others"--women, homosexuals, the working class, the insane--are a site of profound ambivalence for the Western, masculine subjects that construct and define the category. On the one hand, we (I consciously include myself here) have projected onto these groups those traits we unconsciously know we embody but that we cannot consciously acknowledge: embodied, emotional, sexual, aggressive, and so on. As a

result, we are also drawn to these categories with an intense level of desire that we attempt to disguise with disgust. They become potent signifiers for denying our own psychosexual issues (Gilman).

The rising popularity of poststructuralist notions such as "Other" and "difference" moved marginalized cultural texts and practices to center stage: white cultural critics, for example, began to study marginalized African-American cultural forms such as hip-hop. The cultural products of female, colonized, ghettoized and nonwhite peoples are analyzed and often held up as examples of "nonlinear" and "resistant" or "counterhegemonic" practices. The literary canon is challenged and good white liberals (we generally prefer to call ourselves "radicals") purge our guilt by valorizing the margins.

Bell hooks, among others, challenges this move--not because of anything intrinsic to it, but because of its institutional contexts and ideological functions. She asks the oh-so distasteful questions regarding what groups of scholars are making their reputations from the study of these marginalized peoples. She points out the lack of any significant "discourse on race that interrogates whiteness," that race is always an issue of black/brown/yellow/red others (54). She calls for an open examination of the "issues involved when a member of a privileged group 'interprets' the reality of members of a less powerful, exploited, and oppressed group" (55).

One of the crucial issues hooks is getting at is whether, in this "inclusionary" process, the structure and function of the discourse of the "Other" is undermined or is instead perpetuated. As a part of the process of challenging the stereotypes and essentialist definitions that have been used to justify their oppression, hooks calls for black critics "to subvert static notions of black identity." Yet she finds that project extremely difficult given the white avant-garde's appropriations of those very same static notions, notions that are then held up as liberatory ideals. These white

critics construct "African-American culture as though it exists solely to suggest new aesthetic and political directions white folks might move in" (hooks 21). Some of the dangers in, to take but one example, my use of West African polyrhythmic music as a source of inspiration for new forms of social organization are (1) the caricature of African culture involved in such a move, (2) the reinforcement of negative stereotypes such as those about black people having an intrinsically better sense of rhythm, (3) the assumption that African culture exists as a resource to solve white problems, and (4) the existing structures of power, economic and otherwise, within which such an appropriation takes place (to name but a few of the more obvious ones).

I do not know that it is possible for me--middle class, Euro-American--to write about the music and culture of nonwhites and avoid these problems. And although the statement that I am not willing to give up writing about these "Others" simply because of my biology, my privilege, or some notion of academic freedom can sound hollow, I am still not willing to for several reasons, not the least of which is that people of my social positionings are appropriating these musical and cultural traditions. Such appropriations need to be critically examined from the perspective of both the appropriators and those whose culture is being appropriated. In my unwillingness, however, I need to be aware of the dangers and to attempt to minimize them. I need to keep clear, for myself and my readers, that, ultimately, I am writing about my own cultural circumstances and dynamics. Perhaps most importantly, I need to recognize that idealizations of another's culture can be as dangerous, disrespectful, demeaning and oppressive as demonizations. And, although this is also fraught with problematics--not the least of which is an identity politics grounded in essentialism--I hope to curb the risks of caricature by drawing from the

writings of those that identify themselves as members of these "other" cultures (though they are by no means immune to making analytic and ideological moves that hooks and others would find problematic, as shall become evident).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I need to keep my analyses grounded as much as possible in the concrete. To return to Bakhtin and Tagg, I need to be less concerned with grand classifications and more with the concreteness of the struggles manifested in specific cultural practices. Instead of idealizing, for example, an African-American dance or musical form, I need to examine it within its heteroglossic context, not for its purity but for its contradictions, tensions, fragmentations and struggles.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, I take my methodology from Bakhtin's conception of the utterance:

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. . . . It is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language. (*Dialogic* 272)

### African-American Music and Dance

The 1993 PBS series Dancing compares and contrasts various dance forms from around the world. In the episode "New Words, New Forms" the

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<sup>13</sup>This theoretical move will be challenged in my last essay, "Drumming," in the context of Euro-American appropriations of Native American cultural forms.

focus is on African-American dance forms in both Brazil and the United States. The framing narration of the episode characterizes these forms as the result not just of a "cultural fusion," but of "what happens when people reach across barriers of pride, fear and racial prejudice to try on each other's dances." Despite this attempt to make the narrative a peacefully humanistic one, many of the scholars and dancers interviewed in the episode emphasize the conflictual character of such a fusion.

Joao Jorge Santos Rodriguez claims that "dancing and music were the main fields of resistance" for Africans brought to the "new world." A number of complex reasons can explain or justify such a claim. As Bernice Reagon argues, drums can be banned but drumming does not exist in the drum, it exists in the heart and soul of the drummer. The African slaves, particularly in the Catholic context of Brazil, were able to find European ritual forms in which to "hide" their own rituals. For example, river submersions as a form of Christian baptism resembled a Yoruba ceremony for worshipping their goddess of water. Hence, despite the ban on African religion and culture, the Africans imported to the Americas were able to disguise their worship in the trappings of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Various Catholic

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<sup>14</sup>This is a prime example of a thoroughly multiaccentual ceremony, an embodiment of heteroglossia, internal dialogues both friendly and conflictual. River baptism doubled as the adapted form of a Yoruba ceremony for worshipping their goddess of water, a ceremony which remained disguised because African culture and religion were banned by the European captors in the "new world." Centuries later, this ceremony manifested itself in a late 1960s soul tune by Al Green and M. Hodges entitled "Take Me to the River." This tune was, in turn, picked up by the Euro-American "new wave" group Talking Heads in 1978. In 1984 it was again recorded by the expanded version of the same group, then composed of five African-Americans and the original four Euro-Americans, in the film Stop Making Sense. The tune was also recorded by the Commitments in the 1991 film of the same name about a band composed of working class Dublin youth in the early 1990s. Here, the logic goes as follows: the Irish are the

saints--in the case of the water goddess, the virgin Mary herself--became placeholders for African deities. Amidst the puritanism of North America, finding rituals that allowed some kind of music and dance was more difficult, but forms such as the ring shout were developed that allowed both dancing, disguised as a circular walk, and drumming, transformed into polyrhythmic clapping and stamping. Both of these examples demonstrate that African-American cultural forms are structured to their core in heteroglossia and inequality, that the internal dialogues in these forms are radically conflictual. In addition, separating and identifying what exactly is European-American and what is African in these African-American forms is exceptionally difficult. Nonetheless, a close examination of such forms can yield some understanding of the concrete struggles taking place within and between African-American and Euro-American cultures, and an understanding of how rhythm--in the form of dance and music--becomes a means of social struggle in and on the body.

For its discussion of North America, the Dancing episode primarily focuses its attention on dance in the northern cities in the 1920s to the 1950s, particularly the Lindy Hop. In the early twentieth century, millions of southern blacks migrated to the northern cities (lured in large part by the promise of five dollars a day for working at Ford's). Their dance traditions fused with the European tradition of formal ballroom dancing, and out of this fusion came the Lindy Hop. The center of these new forms

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blacks of Europe, Dubliners are the blacks of Ireland and northside Dubliners are the blacks of Dublin, hence, it only makes sense that these folks have an affiliation with soul and rhythm and blues. Some African-Americans, however, may not be overly pleased to hear once again their musical forms being appropriated by white folks to their ends and their profits. The diversity of accents--Yoruba and Christian, African and American, African-American and Irish, black and white, gospel and soul, soul and new wave--involved in any contemporary performance of this tune is astounding.

was Harlem, and the center of dancing in Harlem was the Savoy ballroom.

Bernice Reagon explains the general importance of dance in African-American life

in terms of what we had to go through to eke out a survival. And so when black people go out on a friday night or saturday night they are celebrating life and a release. . . . When black people go to juke joints or saturday night fish fries you are walking sacred territory.<sup>15</sup> (Dancing)

This "sacred territory"--in this case, the Savoy--was walked on by a lot of whites who began to flock to Harlem in the 1920s, creating a previously unknown level of social interaction between blacks and whites. Given the sacredness of the space and the practice of dancing, this mingling was filled with a strong ambivalence for some African-Americans: pride in their dance forms and the whites' desire for them, fear of loosing those spaces and forms, and a genuine desire for interracial interaction.

Listen, for example, to Norma Miller, a dancer from Harlem, talk about the Savoy:

It was our ballroom that opened in the heart of Harlem. This was our social center, our community center. And of course I didn't know it in those days, but when those doors opened in 1927, blacks walked through that door like whites. Whites came to our ballroom. (Dancing)

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<sup>15</sup>This sacredness is itself multiple: in part, because of the cultural heritage of West Africa, wherein deities manifest themselves in and through dance; in part, because of the nature of the dance hall as a primary site for social interaction outside the church, in which the daily--mundane, harsh--conditions of life in the U.S. were counteracted. This multiplicity is seen in some modern dance forms: the Charleston as the descendant of an Ashanti ancestor dance (LeRoi Jones) and the rumba as the westernized version of an Afro-Cuban courtship dance called the "yuka," which, in turn, was derived from a traditional West African religious dance (Jahn).



At this point, Miller exhibits not only a clear sense of pride but an acute sensitivity to the power relations, a pleasure taken in the reverse of those relations, a reverse perhaps possible only in a cultural realm (never political or economic). Then, immediately, she shifts to the more consensual reading of this event called for by a pluralistic ideology: "So consequently there was a mixture and mingling of black and white at a social level that had never existed before" (Dancing).

This mingling was not merely a positive cultural contact. Although Norma Miller does not seem to have a problem with whites coming to the Savoy or learning black dances such as the Lindy, she is acutely aware of the other consequences of such contact: appropriation, a threat to her ownership of her cultural forms. She does not hear this interaction solely as an example of "reaching across barriers of pride, fear and prejudice," but interjects her understanding of the conflicts involved. Listen to her talk about the Lindy Hop:

Of course a lot of people wanted to do this dance. But, you see, we had an edge, we felt like we had an edge and that's the way we danced. This will be something you will not do better than me, I don't care who you are. . . . It was always a battle because we didn't want them taking our dance. They had everything else, so we couldn't allow them to take the Lindy Hop. . . . We sweated for that, we busted our butts to get that the way it was and that's ours, we created it. It came out of the blood and sweat of Harlem. (Dancing)

Ernie Smith, a Euro-American dancer who came to the Savoy to learn new dances, states that the Lindy is a black dance, even when danced by whites, because it arose from black culture and experience. Hence, when whites formally adopted the Lindy, as in the dance studios where white middle class youth were instructed, it was no longer the Lindy. Smith explains that as the Lindy moved into white communities--as opposed to whites

going into black communities to learn and dance it--it was no longer a "cool" dance (in Bakhtin's linguistic terms, it put itself "in quotation marks against the will of the speaker"). The smooth, horizontal, sensual movements of the Lindy became the jerky, rigid, vertical movements of the Jitterbug. The dance was reaccented, appropriated and infused with white meanings, mores and "styles of the flesh."<sup>16</sup> The Jitterbug and other appropriations of African-American dance and music sent a message similar to the one Frantz Fanon sensed in response to his attempts to reclaim the grandeur of his African heritage:

"Lay aside your history, your investigations of the past, and try to feel yourself into our rhythm. In a society such as ours, industrialized to the highest degree, dominated by scientism, there is no longer room for your sensitivity. One must be tough if one is to be allowed to live. What matters now is no longer playing the game of the world but subjugating it with integers and atoms. Oh, certainly, I will be told, now and then when we are worn out by our lives in big buildings, we will turn to you as we do

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<sup>16</sup>"Styles of the flesh" comes from Judith Butler's discussion of Simon de Beauvoir's distinction between sex and gender. "Gender must be understood as a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form" (36). As de Beauvoir wrote, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Analogous to an understanding of gender as a "style of the flesh" would be a sense of the embodiment of ethnicity as opposed to racial heredity, "African-American" as opposed to "black." This distinction helps avoid essentialism in discussions of cultural forms. Theoretically, a "white" body could perform a "black" dance; however, the profound embodiment of cultural style would make it difficult for a Euro-American subject to produce an African-American dance with her/his deeply enculturated body. Eradicating the traces of my "native" culture in and on my body would be a rather intense process. Layering the "style of the flesh" of another culture on top of my "native" one would be possible but the underlying style would "bleed through" to some extent.

to our children--to the innocent, the ingenuous, the spontaneous. We will turn to you as the childhood of the world. You are so real in your life--so funny, that is. Let us run away for a little while from our ritualized, polite civilization and let us relax, bend to those heads, those adorably expressive faces. In a way, you reconcile us with ourselves." (132)

In the Jitterbug and Fanon's translation of its message are the central themes I have so far been exploring: the importance of subsuming one's rhythms (body, sensuality, sensibility) to the needs of industrialization (uniform, discrete, digital); subjugating the world with "integers and atoms"; the need to avoid too much body, to locate it elsewhere to maintain the integrity of "polite civilization" while also claiming the right to access it at will (in the form of dance, music, women of color).

Yet the Jitterbug was no more a "purely" white dance than the Lindy was a "purely" black dance: both drew from the forms of other (sub)cultures, both grew and developed amidst a heteroglossia they could not help but enact.<sup>17</sup> These rhythmic forms were performances of conflictual organizations in North American industrial society. Music and dance were sites for a dialogue, both antagonistic and cooperative, between Euro-American and African-American "theories of the flesh" (Madison): that is, between different epistemologies, rhythmic sensibilities, forms of order and organization. "Even us white kids who grew up on rock and roll have a

<sup>17</sup>For example, blues is held up by LeRoi Jones and others as a pure African-American musical form. But it is nonetheless both African and American. In contrast to indigenous African music, the emphasis in blues lyrics on the individual marks it as a Western form. In addition, Jones argues, "the whole concept of the solo, of a man playing or singing by himself, was relatively unknown in West African music" (66), as Chernoff's discussion confirms. Similarly, Jahn argues that dancing in couples is extremely rare in Africa and hence dances such as the Lindy are European to the degree that they are performed by individual couples.

common linkage with rhythms from Kongo" (Byrne 48).

Although Joao Rodriguez was speaking primarily of the context of slavery, his argument that "dancing and music were the main fields of resistance" still has some resonance. The reasons for that, however, are different in the context of twentieth century North America. LeRoi Jones argues that "only in music has there been any significant Negro contribution to a formal American culture" (130). Contributions in the areas of painting, drama, and literature had come primarily from the black bourgeoisie, and were therefore removed from the conditions that made African-American culture African-American instead of simply "American" (see also Jahn). Still connected with the lower classes of African-Americans, the emotional vitality of the music remained and it resisted, to a greater degree, dilution by mainstream (white) and black middle class culture. Although Jones finds much of the supposedly "black" music of the thirties, forties and fifties, such as popular ragtime, Dixieland, big-band jazz and swing, to be nothing more than "the debris, in a sense, of vanished emotional references," other forms retained their emotional power (221). Here is Jones's evaluation, formulated in the early sixties, of rock'n'roll:

To be sure, rock'n'roll is usually a flagrant commercialization of rhythm & blues, but the music in many cases depends enough on materials that are so alien to the general middle-class, middle-brow American culture as to remain interesting. Many of the same kinds of cheap American dilutions that had disfigured popular swing have tended to disfigure the new music, but the source, the exciting and "vulgar" urban blues of the forties, is still sufficiently removed from the mainstream to be vital. For this reason, rock'n'roll has not become as emotionally meaningless as commercial swing. It is still raw enough to stand the dilution and in some cases, even to be made attractive by the very fact of its commercialization. Even its "alienation" remains conspicuous; it is often used to characterize white adolescents as "youthful offenders." (222-223)

Think of this in terms of Volosinov's statement that the "inner dialectical quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes" (23). At other times, when the hegemony of the ruling bloc is more stable, the multiaccentuality of signs is submerged by the univocal (centralizing, homogenizing) force of the dominant ideology. What was happening around the time of the rise of rock'n'roll that allowed it to maintain its vitality--i.e., its polyvocality--more than other, previous hybrid forms (e.g., the commercialized versions of swing, ragtime and jazz)? Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat, Martin Luther King, Jr. began his rise to national leadership and the Supreme Court's Brown decision mandated school desegregation. The modern civil rights movement was gaining momentum.

#### Convalescence

In Soul on Ice, Eldridge Cleaver rewrites desegregation and the Brown decision as a story of Mind and Body reconnected, and the media for this reconnection were African-American forms of music and dance. Cleaver lays the groundwork for understanding the dynamics of this reconnection through a class-based, sexually-divided and historically-contingent semiotic schematic of white-black relations. In a class society, sexuality is fragmented because of an underlying alienation between Mind and Body. The men of the upper classes usurp the administrative roles in society, and hence become primarily thinkers, Omnipotent Administrators. They become alienated from their bodies, relegating all Brute Power functions to the working classes, the Supermasculine Menials. As a result of this alienation, the Omnipotent Administrators come to despise the Body and, in so doing, lose all associated traits, including virility, strength and physical beauty. In short, they become effeminate. Virility and strength, therefore,

become associated with the lower classes. Given that these class divisions are strongly racial, the development by whites of stereotypes about the sexual potency and uncontrollable desires of blacks, especially black men, is not surprising.

The effeminacy of the Omnipotent Administrators problematizes the role of the women of the upper class. To retain the illusion of his masculinity by contrast, she must come to project an image of hyperfemininity. The Ultrafeminine, therefore, also rejects bodily elements. To appear beautiful she must stamp out all traces of strength in her body: female strength becomes, by definition, ugly. In order to accomplish this disembodiment, she hands the physical aspects of the Domestic Function to women of the lower classes, who become more bodily, more masculine--hence the Amazon, the strong black woman, the matriarch.

Although Cleaver proceeds to lay out the ensuing sexual dynamics (repulsions and attractions) among these four groups, the basic alienation of Mind from Body is sufficient for understanding his argument concerning the effects of African-American musical forms on whites. "Condemned" by the race and class structures of North American society to their bodies, African-Americans developed forms of dance and music, senses of rhythm, "styles of the flesh," profoundly different from Euro-Americans, who had abandoned the Body not only for class reasons but "for puritanical dreams of escaping the corruption of the flesh" (Cleaver 193). For Cleaver, then, desegregation sent an electrical shock throughout the nation because the Body was reuniting with the Mind, and the site of that linkage, the source of that shock, was far more cultural than political or juridical:

The Twist was a guided missile, launched from the ghetto into the very heart of suburbia. The Twist succeeded, as politics, religion, and law could never do, in writing in the heart and soul what the Supreme Court could only write on the books. The Twist was a

form of therapy for a convalescing nation. The Omnipotent Administrator and the Ultrafeminine responded so dramatically, in stampede fashion, to the Twist precisely because it afforded them the possibility of reclaiming their Bodies again after generations of alienated and disembodied existence. (197)

However, even Elvis's "bumpgrinding" was "mechanical, alienated" (202)-- i.e., forced into quotation marks against his will. White dancers could not overcome their bodily training over night, "swinging like pendulums, mechanical like metronomes or puppets on invisible strings being manipulated by a master with a sick sense of humor" (199). But it was nonetheless a breakthrough, the sons and daughters of Omnipotent Administrators and Ultrafeminines "discovering new aspects of the Body, new possibilities of rhythm, new ways to move" (199). As Norman Mailer put it, "the Negro's equality would tear a profound shift into the psychology, the sexuality, and the moral imagination of every white alive" (quoted in Cleaver 200). "Condemned as a sign of degeneracy and moral decay," the appeal of these rhythmic, bodily forms "was actually a sign of health, a sign of hope for full recovery" (Cleaver 200).

This shift, the reuniting of Mind and Body, was not simply about "reaching across barriers of pride, fear and prejudice": it was not a pluralistic polyvocality, but conflictual to its core. Elvis Presley, "sowing seeds of a new rhythm and style in the white souls of the white youth of America," was also "ripping off fame and fortune" (Cleaver 194). Then came the beats:

Reviled, cursed, held in contempt by the "molders of public opinion," persecuted by the police. . . . "the Suzuki rhythm boys," as James Baldwin called them, derisively, in a moment of panic, "tired of white ambitions" and "dragging themselves through the Negro street at dawn, looking for an angry fix"; "with," as Mailer put it, "the black man's code to fit their facts." (195)

In this sense, the beats seem a good example of what a friend of Fanon's, a teacher in the U.S., told him:

The presence of the Negroes beside the whites is in a way an insurance policy on humanness. When the whites feel that they have become too mechanized, they turn to men of color and ask them for a little human sustenance. (129)

(Body, sensuality, rhythm: just whose problem is it, who is responsible for the alienation, the problems of subjectivity, encountered by Euro-American, middle-class, predominantly masculine subjects?)

And then, of course, the Beatles inaugurated the era in which alienated white youth would explore alternatives to their parents' world en masse. Yet they also represented the beginning of the end of the vitality of the link, the tail end of the electric shock caused by the fleeting contact of Mind and Body. Elvis "was still too much Body (too soon). . . ; whereas the Beatles, effecting the caucasoid crown of femininity and ignoring the Body on the visual plane (while their music on the contrary being full of Body)," presented "an incorporeal, cerebral image" (Cleaver 202).

Impressions of the Last Twenty Years: Epilogue  
to the Twist, Prologue to World Beat

In the 1970s, the body, for most Euro-Americans, was in large part and once again missing--it held on for a while in the form of the skinny, scar(r)ed, pale flesh wrapped in black leather bondage attire adopted by the punks, until killed off by Sid Vicious's overdose. (Not the body in pain, the body as pain, the guarantor of reality: is this really real? how can it be? My friend Tim would sew his fingers together for the lack of anything else to do.) And, of course, there was disco, admittedly a form of music linked to dancing, and therefore embodied--yet completely disembodied:



mechanical, almost hysterical in its fervent sexuality, its demand of sexuality: we are going to be sexual, damnit! John Travolta as Body, BeeGees as Voice ("caucasoid crown of femininity" indeed--Cleaver's homophobia bleeds through here, uncomfortably). The body's still moving, but...how well Cleaver's description fits here: "the dancers...were caught up in a whirl of ecstasy, swinging like pendulums, mechanical like metronomes or puppets on invisible strings being manipulated by a master with a sick sense of humor" (199).<sup>18</sup> Yes, exactly: Cleaver on the white dancers of the fifties fits my image of disco so well. Had anything changed?

In the 1980s dance music became increasingly electronic: often, the first musical role or instrument to be completely computerized was the base rhythm (i.e., the drum).<sup>19</sup> Working out of the innovations of early new wave electronic bands like Kraftwerk were the dance club biggies of the 1980s: Depeche Mode, Duran Duran, Berlin, Soft Cell, Ultravox, OMD, and so on. Having monotonized and automated the beat, the 1980s were spent

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<sup>18</sup>For a defense of disco in the context of gay culture, see Dyer.

<sup>19</sup>A disturbing connection between the automation of percussion and the appropriation of "foreign" rhythms in world beat is made evident, if not entirely clear, in the following statement from Peter Gabriel, written as part of an introduction to African music in a guide to world music:

At around the same time [as hearing some traditional African music], my interest in drumming, which had never been far from the surface, really took off. The main impetus was the invention of the programmable drum machine. This was an incredibly liberating tool, because for the first time when writing music you could take your hands off the keyboard, rest a moment and then come back with another idea... Also, you could experiment with focusing on different rhythms without the necessity of the cooperation of a drummer. (1; ellipses in original)

looking away, away, fixated on the increasingly anorexic (and often racially indeterminable) body of the fashion model, the lower-class body of Madonna as it became Ultrafem then transgressive then simply ludicrous, the ever-changing Michael Jackson: potent signifiers pointing to the increasingly ambivalent place of the body--even the black man's body--in the age of AIDS and the dawn of the cyber-era: cyber-space, cyber-punk, cyborg, cyber-music, cyber-beat. Robo-Cop and the Terminator. That the era of Reagan begat only a "virtual" reality is fitting (the teflon president, the dream of "Star Wars"). All-Star Wrestling was the closest that could be done: the body as pure burlesque. Rambo--ridiculously enormous knife, bow and arrow capable of blowing up armored helicopters, body camouflaged in a wall of mud--was hardly more serious but nonetheless struck a powerful, nostalgic chord in an age where John Wayne was no longer.

Into the 1990s, Madonna's bare breasts, burlesque cone-shaped bra and bisexuality become banal, as do Michael Jackson's (and Madonna's) crotch-grabs--that is, banal to all but neoconservative fundamentalists (Pat Robertson, Dan Quayle) and the Disney-headed, baby-boomer parents who claim to like rock'n'roll (Tipper Gore): both comprising, together, today's version of what Cleaver referred to as the 1950s, Eisenhoweresque "Hot-Dog-and-Malted-Milk" set (Bagels-and-Decaf-Cappucino?). (In this sense, I cannot seem to draw the line between eighties and nineties. I am wary of the notion that the nineties are a fundamental break of any kind with the eighties. I think we are merely carrying out the mandate of the eighties, still.) Now Tipper, Pat, Dan and the rest sit, fascinated, horrified, denying and desiring, as we hear of Jackson's care for the world's children beginning to look like, blur into, sexual molestation.<sup>20</sup> What happened?

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<sup>20</sup>I recently saw a documentary film entitled Blood Ties: The Life and Work of Sally Mann. Her photographs of her preadolescent children, many of them all or partly in the nude, have raised quite a controversy. A child

Why wouldn't we be reaching for something that seems more authentic, more meaningful, more grounded? How couldn't we be? Give me some Ladysmith Black Mambazo or some Babatunde Olatunji or--for a larger number of people who may be feeling a lesser impulse but nonetheless feeling one--some Paul Simon as he draws on African musical vitality in Graceland (or what remains of African musical vitality, which is in any case more than what remains of the West's). When faced with the realistic possibility that the opening lines of William Gibson's Neuromancer, the paradigm cyberpunk novel, will make sense, will seem totally plausible, how couldn't I? "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (3).

### Nostalgia?

You are damn right this is nostalgic in some large sense. "We must find another relationship to nature besides reification and possession" (Haraway, "Promises" 296). I must find another relationship to my own body besides reification and possession ("I have a body" not "I am a body"). I know world beat is not in the past, either my own past or someone else's present that I claim as my own past (the salvage paradigm): but it has to do with rearticulating the musical and rhythmic sensibilities of others (my past, others' past, others' present) into a present--i.e., into a practice.

psychiatrist--who generally walked the middle road concerning the effects of the photos on the children, granting that they are not pornographic and are born of good intentions, but admitting they could cause some social problems for the children and are therefore a legitimate source for some degree of concern--made a great comment, a wonderful parallel. There are only two groups who find Sally's pictures of her kids erotic: hardcore pedophiles and fundamentalist preachers. Nice: so what do these two have in common that they do not share with many other social groups/positions? (I know it plays into all my biases, but it just seems too perfect.)

Granted, that will never then be pure expressions of other(ness), but they are so desperately needed: the fluidity of Ladysmith, the groundedness of (even pseudo) Native American ceremony, the multiplicity of African rhythms, the nonpuritanical sensuality of African-American music. Hence the appeal of Talking Heads, which are nonetheless prey to Cleaver's description of the Beatles: their music full of Body but otherwise not at all (which is not to dismiss the absolute importance of the body that is there in their music). (Just look at their name: Talking Heads.) And Al Green's "Take Me to the River" is so central to their career, their story: recorded on their second album in 1978, it became one of their few "hits"; they played it on Saturday Night Live, on their first live album, and then in the concert film Stop Making Sense. I, at least, have always associated this song with Talking Heads. It was the first song of theirs I heard.

Why did I never connect (until this point): "take me to the river": the river, not only body, and all the history of ritualistic river submersion, but fluid: "dunk me in the water" ("the water flowing underground")? Amazing. Look what it's asking for: from the perspective of the Talking Heads/Rich Rogers-construct it is a desperate plea--"take me to the river": fluidity, sensuality, femininity, body, spirituality--"dunk me": my body, my mind, my soul, my spirit--"in the water." "hold me/squeeze me/love me/tease me/till I can/till I can't take no more." No wonder Talking Heads perform this song: amidst the postmodern era, after the failure of the sixties and the surgical operation to reunite Mind and Body: please, give us this. No surprise David Byrne has gone into world beat, particularly Brazilian music, or that after their first take of "Take Me to the River" Talking Heads went big-time into African music, out of which came great tunes like "Once in a Lifetime," "Crosseyed and Painless" and "I Zimbra." This or the vacuousness of Madonna, Michael Jackson, Duran Duran.

Ultimately, world beat and then drumming make sense, a logical

progression of sorts. As mainstream North American culture moves further away from body, sensuality, multiplicity, fluidity and toward disembodied existence (talking heads, virtual reality), hyperscientism, holographic sex, singularity, solidity, there arises a countermovement among that very culture. And these alienated, Euro-American, middle-class subjects turn to the only source for an alternative sensibility that they know: African-Americans, Africans, Native Americans, Aborigines, and other indigenous peoples. Toward history, toward other, toward "lesser developed" and "developing" people. Here is how Jahn, writing about Africa from Germany in the late 1950s, put it:

If western culture reflects on itself, it cannot, precisely in view of the machine age, wish for the destruction of African Kuntu ["mode of existence" or, in my terms, "sensibility"]. On the contrary, in a world where ends are sought without regard to means or--at the opposite extreme--no end is sought at all, nothing would be more valuable than a revived style in which sense and meaning are once more fully expressed. The Africans and Afro-Americans who were born into and raised in the western world have known and felt this discomfort, from which western culture suffers. So they have also developed a sense of calling in the conviction that they have a joyous message to bring from Africa to western culture. "For who would teach rhythm to the dead world of machines and guns? Who would utter the cry of joy to awaken the dead and the orphans at dawn? Tell me, who would restore the memory of life to the man of disembowelled hopes?" (237-38; quoted lines from Aimé Césaire)

Cleaver put it this way (read it out loud, hear and feel the rhythms in and between the words):

These observers were not equipped to either feel or know that a radical break, a revolutionary leap out of their sight, had taken place in the secret parts of this nation's soul. It was as if a driverless vehicle were speeding through the American night down an unlighted street toward a stone wall and was boarded on the fly

by a stealthy ghost with a drooling leer on his face, who, at the last detour before chaos and disaster, careened the vehicle down a smooth highway that leads to the future and life; and to ask these Americans to understand that they were the passengers on this driverless vehicle and that the lascivious ghost was the Saturday-night crotchfunk of the Twist, or the "Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!" which the Beatles high-jacked from Ray Charles, to ask these Calvinistic profiligates to see the logical and reciprocal links is more cruel than asking a hope-to-die Okie Music buff to cop the sounds of John Coltrane. (193-94)

Cleaver's last clause here needs to be taken seriously, not just as a rhetorical technique, a simile--it is one of the central points of this essay. To ask those in one musical sensibility (and hence one rhythmic sensibility) to hear what is so obvious to those in another--that rhythm "is the thing that is most perceptible and least material" (Senghor)--is to come up against "the stark impossibility of thinking that" (Foucault).<sup>21</sup> As Raymond Williams put it in his discussion of hegemony,

the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, [are] in effect a saturation of the whole process of living--not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense. Hegemony. . . is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. (Marxism 110)

Certainly one of my central themes has been that rhythm is a form of

<sup>21</sup>I would, in a Western context, reverse Senghor's description of rhythm. For us, I believe, it is the thing that is the least perceptible and most material. Our visualism diverts our attention way from rhythm, as does its materiality: that is, its physicality, its "primitiveness."

communication, a crucial element in culture, and therefore in the maintenance of certain systems of power. Alongside that, the role of rhythm and rhythmic sensibilities in hegemony points to the possibility and actuality of struggle. Hegemony is not about a univocal imposition of false consciousness, but about the polyvocality of lived reality that makes hegemony a fluid process in which consent is constantly being reworked. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, along with Bakhtin's heteroglossia, points to the fractured nature of any practice and therefore the possibility of resistance.

*An examination of African and African-American musical forms demonstrates both the possibility of different social orders and the actuality of the struggles between those orders. Resistance itself is always fractured--never pure--whether it be the fusion of two sensibilities (African and American by African-Americans) or the appropriation of another's sensibility (African or African-American by Euro-Americans). This is world beat's most abundant promise and its most troubling problem. Its resistance always involves a power-laden appropriation, is met by the ubiquitous forces of commodification.*

But I am getting ahead of myself--I am really not yet quite ready to head into a full discussion of the significance of world beat. I need to develop one more thematic, touched on by Williams, that lies at the center of this project: consciousness. But not simply consciousness as Gramsci, Volosinov and others describe it--as an internalized linguistic construct--but as a cultural and biological construct consisting of perceptions, experiences, feeling, meanings, and so forth that are not just symbolic, meaningful and immaterial but also chemical and rhythmic--profoundly material yet always cultural.