Kinds of Blue
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Notes to Prelude

1. Then again, that a drummer would describe his craft through the metaphor of storytelling is not so unusual after all, considering that in the antebellum South, Haynes’s ancestors were forbidden from playing the drums for fear of the powerful, seditious messages the instrument could convey.

2. For instance, in the 2002 special issue of *Callaloo* on jazz poetics, only one out of eighteen literary-critical articles (Fritz Gysin’s essay on the works of Xam Wilson Cartier, Leon Forrest, and Nathaniel Mackey) focuses exclusively on jazz and prose fiction.

3. Gates’s critical practice, however, betrays a certain unfamiliarity with jazz. See chapter 4 and the Coda as well as Stephan Richter’s essay “Magic Books and a Jam Session.”

4. The interested reader is invited to consult the Works Cited list, which, while not presuming to be representative in the least, includes many indispensable monographs by Amiri Baraka, Scott DeVeaux, Ira Gitler, or Gunther Schuller, to name just a few.

Notes to Chapter One

1. Mention must be made here of the improbably named James Reese Europe. Before jazz became jazz, so to speak, Europe’s Harlem-based Clef Club Orchestra was, in 1913, the first black American ensemble to make a recording. After leaving the Club, Europe led the famous 369th US Infantry “Hell Fighters” Band, which became tremendously popular in dance-starved, war-torn France. Tragically, Europe was stabbed to death in 1919 in the middle of his glorious homecoming tour by a demented drummer (D. Lewis 30–34; Polillo 95–97; Schuller, *Early* 247–52).

2. The dedication of Bechet’s bust on Congo Square was arranged to coincide with the city’s annual Jazz and Heritages Festival. The centennial celebrations also included a mass at St. Augustine’s Church, a scholarly conference hosted by the University of New Orleans, and many tribute concerts (Persica A-15).
3. The “Old World” in this case refers not only to Europe, but also to Africa, as Congo Square was, of course, an important slave market. Furthermore, Bechet had been honored years before the centennial in his hometown by the issuance of postage stamps bearing his portrait in the Republic of Gabon as well as the Republic of Chad (Chilton 290).

4. Like so many other musicians—Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Max Roach, and John Coltrane among them—Bechet, too, rejects the term jazz: “But let me tell you one thing: Jazz, that’s a name the white people have given to the music. . . . That doesn’t explain the music. There’s two kinds of music. There’s classic and there’s ragtime. When I tell you ragtime, you can feel it, there’s a spirit right in the word. . . . But Jazz—Jazz could mean any damn thing: high times, screwing, ball-room. It used to be spelled Jass, which was screwing. But when you say ragtime, you’re saying the music” (3). Accordingly, Bechet prefers the word ragtime—or simply refers to “the music”—throughout his autobiography, even though the term as he uses it clearly designates what is still called jazz today.

5. Jazz scholars have been in agreement for a long time, though, that designating New Orleans as the origin of jazz is an oversimplification that excludes similar developments elsewhere in the South and Midwest (Baraka, Blues 70–71; Schuller, Early 59–60; Polillo 60–63).

6. See for instance the biographical sketches in books by Rudi Blesh, Martin Williams, and Whitney Balliet, as well as the Times-Picayune’s front page article on the Sidney Bechet Centennial Celebration in the summer of 1997 (Blesh 35–36; Williams 136; Balliet 39–40; Persica A-14). In his study of African retentions in African American musics, Samuel Floyd enlists the ostensibly historical Omar prominently to elucidate his interpretive framework (Power 8–9). And in her article on jazz musicians’ autobiographies, Kathy Ogren is fully aware of the extent of Bechet’s liberties with facts, but curiously says of Omar’s story that it was “most likely apocryphal” (“‘Jazz’” 119; emphasis added). In what borders on a postmodernist twist, Bechet himself alludes to the fictional nature of the story he is telling. Commenting on Marie’s master, who fabricates the lie that Omar had raped Marie to cover his own craven desire for his slave, Bechet warns:

And when you start one of those lies, there’s nothing you can do but go about getting it finished. It gets all out of your hands, and you’re trying to catch at it every which way. But there’s nothing you can do once it has got started. All the mending and repairing you do to it, trying to keep it where it started, trying to keep that one lie from becoming a thousand lies. But you can’t do anything about it. You’re just like a dog that’s chasing rabbits when there’s so many of them he doesn’t know which one he’s after. (27)

The difference between Marie’s master and Bechet is, of course, that the latter is a ‘master’ improviser, whereas the former is not.

7. It is not clear whether Bechet had actually visited Senegal, and if yes, when. Chilton does mention a few brief tours through North Africa in his biography, but no visit to Dakar specifically. Even so, after grudgingly granting the country interior autonomy in 1955, the status of Senegal continued to be debated in France. President Leopold Senghor’s name appeared quite frequently in the French press,
which by and large echoed the government’s deep-seated suspicions of Senghor’s brand of African socialism. However, the continuing presence of French troops on Senegalese soil never led to anything near the bloody quagmire of the Algerian struggle for independence (Gildea 20–29; Yansané 309–14).

8. In this sense, Bechet’s narration of the fictional story of Omar echoes what Ralph Ellison wrote in his introduction to *Invisible Man*: “I knew that I was composing a work of fiction, a work of literary art and one that would allow me to take advantage of the novel’s capacity for telling the truth while actually telling a ‘lie,’ which is the Afro-American term for an improvised story” (xxii). Both texts in turn are reminiscent of Sun Ra’s incomparable epistemology: “They say that history repeats itself; but history is only his-story. You haven’t heard my story yet. My story is different from his story. My story is not part of history because history repeats itself. But my story is endless, it never repeats itself. Why should it? The sunset does not repeat itself. Neither does a sunrise. Nature never repeats itself. My story is close to mystery. My story is better for man than history. Mystery is better than history. What’s your story?” (qtd. in Szwed 317).

9. *Treat It Gentle*, however, also contradicts Andrews’s critical framework to an extent. First, Andrews claims that African American autobiography began to diverge more and more from the model of the slave narrative after the Civil War. Second, Andrews’s quasi-structuralist approach emphasizes the intertextual elements in the slave narratives by privileging “the dynamics of signification” in their “rightful participation in *logos*” (23, 7). That the semi-literate Sidney Bechet, who never had a regular education, consciously modeled his autobiography on slave narratives is virtually impossible; his favorite reading in later years consisted of a steady diet of *Mad Magazine*. Even though he could, with effort, read musical notation, his aversion against written arrangements or musical transcription was well known (Chilton 219, 286). (It is unlikely, nor is there any indication to that effect, that any of Bechet’s three literary collaborators were familiar with the African American slave narrative.) The interface between *Treat It Gentle* and the slave narrative therefore seems to corroborate Samuel Floyd’s concept of cultural memory—his gaffe regarding the historicity of Omar notwithstanding—which Floyd defines as “a repository of meanings that comprise the subjective knowledge of a people, its immanent thoughts, its structures, and its practices; these thoughts, structures, and practices are transferred and understood unconsciously but become conscious and culturally objective in practice and perception” (8). As literary jazz, *Treat It Gentle* hence constitutes, like the music itself, what Stephen Henderson has called “the ‘Soul Field’ of the Black Experience,” or what Jim Merod refers to as a “cultural archive” (S. Henderson 49; Merod 12–14). William Kenney’s and Thomas Carmichael’s critical readings of the autobiographies of Louis Armstrong and Charles Mingus also point to this connection between the slave narrative, cultural memory, and jazz music (Kenney 29; Carmichael 30).

10. It is possible that this is a result of the recording equipment being used—Meade Lux Lewis’s piano is barely audible throughout—especially since Blue Note did not acquire the reputation for high fidelity recording techniques until Rudy Van Gelder became the label’s engineer of choice a few years later. However, repeated listenings to the other tracks from that same session indicate that Bechet employed a dark timbre deliberately on “Summertime.” A highly unusual squeak, for Bechet, in measure ten of the first chorus, on A1 nonetheless, suggests that he might have been using a harder reed. (The soprano saxophone is tuned B-flat, so playing an A
actually produces a concert G. Since the focus of this discussion is on Bechet’s solo, I shall not transpose his notes into concert key.) I do not agree with Martin Williams’s contention that the saxist was plagued by a bad reed on that session (150). The impeccable glissandi, slurs, growls, and microtonal inflections would surely have produced more than one minor squeak on a severely chipped or otherwise damaged reed. But then again, Bechet was famous for a truly titanic embouchure as well as an utter indifference to his equipment; he was observed, on more than one occasion, whittling reeds from the cover of cigar boxes in emergencies, only to perform flawlessly thereafter (Chilton 122).

11. The reference to Langston Hughes’s trumpet player is intriguing on another level as well. Hughes was exposed nightly to jazz music when he worked as a dishwasher at the famous Le Duc club in 1924, managed by the even more (in)famous ‘Bricktop,’ in Paris, and the musicians he heard on a regular basis included the likes of Frank Withers and Cricket Smith, with whom Bechet would jam regularly only a short time later (Rampersad, Life I 84–85; Chilton 77). There is no indication that these two giants ever met in person; however, Hughes is likely to have heard Bechet at some point in late 1924 or early 1925, when the latter was a semi-regular member of Noble Sissle’s orchestra—which played at the grand Crisis gala (ostensibly honoring Jessie Fauset), with Hughes in attendance—and otherwise did free-lance work in New York (Chilton 67–68, 77; Rampersad, Life I 84–85, 96–97).

12. This is precisely the aspect of Treat It Gentle which Nicholas Gebhardt’s otherwise illuminating analysis of what he calls the remythologizing jazz act as also a social act suppresses (74–75). Gebhardt’s reading is a teleological one which approaches the autobiography as a homogenous, stable text that reaches its culmination in the last chapter. Such a reading must necessarily ignore the multiple authorship and convoluted editorial processes of which Treat It Gentle is the result.

13. In his study Understanding the New Black Poetry, for example, Stephen Henderson contends that “[t]he central problem is . . . the printed page’ and worries that “[i]n their insistence upon jazz as a model and inspiration for their poetry, these writers were and are confronted with enormous technical problems, some of which may be insoluble if they continue to write that poetry down. For their model is dynamic, not static, and although one can suggest various vocal and musical effects with typography, an extensive use of these rather mechanical devices may be ultimately self-defeating’ (30). However, Henderson’s concerns diminish when we remind ourselves that most of us, be it as poets or critics, encounter jazz improvisation more often than not as sounds fixed on recordings, sounds that are hence ‘readable’ much like a text.

14. Perhaps not quite coincidentally, both operas are also basically unmitigated tragedies of untimely death. Enrico Caruso, Bechet’s hero, recorded both “Miserere” and “Vesti la giubba.”

15. Bechet’s improvisation of the story of Omar in order to explain jazz music finds an uncanny parallel in the narrative voice of Toni Morrison’s Jazz, who feels compelled to narrate the antebellum story of Golden Gray—also a story about slavery and freedom, love and lust, racial identity and individual ancestry—in order to explicate an event in the present. (See chapter 4.)

16. Bechet’s reminiscences of Mezz Mezzrow, the controversial white reed player, underscore this as well: as far as Bechet is concerned, the problem with Mezzrow was not that he wanted to play ‘black’ music, but that he wanted to be black: “But
still, when a man is trying so hard to be something he isn’t, when he’s trying to be some name he makes up for himself instead of just being what he is, some of that will show in his music, the idea of it will be wrong” (168–69). Over the last few years, a revisionist school of jazz criticism has emerged, represented by James Lincoln Collier’s Jazz: The American Theme Song, Gene Lees’s Cats of Any Color, and Richard M. Sudhalter’s Lost Chords, which questions the primacy of African American innovators in the jazz canon and/or the presence of African retentions in the music. In my view, the arguments and documentation these critics put forth do not convincingly refute in its entirety Gunther Schuller’s premise that “every musical element—rhythm, harmony, melody, timbre, and the basic forms of jazz—is essentially African in background and derivation” (Early 62). Sudhalter, for one, implicitly retracted at least parts of his argument at a panel discussion organized by the San Francisco Jazz Organization in the spring of 2001 (“Jazz and Race”). Collier’s work is representative of this revisionist school of jazz historiography in that it appears to weigh “direct evidence” of written documentation or recorded performances more heavily than oral histories of the kind Art Taylor or W. Royal Stokes have compiled (Collier 189). What Schuller’s thesis does fail to take into account is the simple fact that jazz—excepting free jazz—is organized around the concept of diatonic music, which is, of course, European in origin. (For a critique of Schuller’s premise, see for instance Youngren 20–21.) Even Samuel Floyd, one of the most vocal proponents of the theory of African retentions in jazz, concedes that “African American musical practices in the United States cannot be traced directly to specific populations in Africa with any degree of certainty” (“African” 7). At the same time, however, that same lack of certainty also pertains to efforts to trace retentions of various European folk musics.

17. My terminology here derives from James Baldwin’s essay “Equal in Paris,” which recounts Baldwin’s arrest for allegedly stealing bed sheets from a rundown hotel. Sitting in the police station that December evening, waiting to be processed,

I was not a despised black man. They would simply have laughed at me if I had behaved like one. For them, I was an American. And here it was they who had the advantage, for that word, Américain, gave them some idea, far from inaccurate, of what to expect from me. In order to corroborate none of their ironical expectations I said nothing and did nothing—which was not the way any Frenchman, white or black, would have reacted. The question thrusting up from the bottom of my mind was not what I was, but who. And this question, since a what can get by with skill but a who demands resources, was my first real intimation of what humility must mean. (Notes 146)

18. I draw here on R. Baxter Miller’s discussion of diachronic and synchronic time in the short fiction of Langston Hughes (“Race”).

Notes to Chapter Two

2. It is intriguing, though, that Petry’s first published short story, “Marie of the Cabin Club,” features Georgie Barr, a jazz trumpeter (see chapter 3). Interestingly, Petry chose the male pseudonym Arnold Petri.

3. In her article on the function of music in Petry’s fiction, Johanna Garvey claims that Kid Jones plays “jazzy blues” in a blues combo (123). While Jones may indeed be playing the blues—most certainly he is playing blues-influenced music—Petry’s description of the orchestra’s personnel as well as the song performed makes it highly unlikely that what is being played is blues in the Bessie Smith/Ma Rainey vein. Moreover, while blues has its share of guitar and piano virtuosos, percussionists are hardly ever featured in an unaccompanied solo. In jazz, on the other hand, the swing era also saw the first drummers to play pivotal solo roles in their respective ensembles, most notably Chick Webb and Gene Krupa. Similarly, Kimberly Drake’s analysis of Lutie as a “blues singer” is not viable for much the same reason (91). As the following discussion of The Street will show, the songs Lutie sings, “Swing It, Sister,” and “Darlin’,” are decidedly not blues—even though, of course, both are to varying degrees blues-inflected—nor does the repertoire and personnel of Boots Smith’s orchestra correspond to an orchestra playing strictly blues.

4. Significantly, (musical) quarrels on the bandstand have involved drummers and pianists more than any other combination of instrumentalists. As drummer Charli Persip explains the historic antagonism, “Many drummers play too loud, and this can really do damage to a delicate acoustic instrument like the piano. . . . There are many wars between pianists and drummers” (qtd. in Berliner 396). Kid Jones’s homicidal fantasies cannot help but remind one of the deranged percussionist Herbert White, who knifed his boss, James Europe (a trained pianist), in the latter’s dressing room (D. Lewis 33–34).

5. It is therefore perhaps no coincidence either that all but one of the twenty-nine subjects Ferdinand Jones interviewed for his positivistic analysis of the psychology of improvising were male (149).

6. This is a recurring allusion in Petry’s fiction, the notion that consumer capitalism saps black music of its spiritual authenticity. Lutie Johnson’s experience here parallels that of Kid Jones as he bows after his spectacular drum solo. In marked contrast, The Narrows’s Mamie Powther is the only one of Petry’s singers or musicians who is not somehow marred psychologically. Mamie Powther, née Smith, is of course Petry’s fictional reincarnation of blues Singer Mamie Smith, whose 1920 “Crazy Blues” sounded the start of the blues craze (Baraka, Blues 99–100; Garvey 138–39; Spottswood 88–89). Unlike Mamie Smith, Kid Jones, and Lutie Johnson, Mamie Powther-Smith does not perform professionally. She possesses “[a] big warm voice with a lilt in it, and something else, some extra, indefinable quality which made Abbie [her neighbor] listen, made her want to hear more, and more; as though the singer leaned over, close, to say, I’m talking to you, listen to me, I made up this song for you and I’ve got wonderful things to tell you and to show you, listen to me” (22). This, then, is the quality that is being lost when African American music becomes a commercial commodity. African-derived storytelling-time, both musical and verbal, is thus different from Western “mechanical” time (Wilson 573–74; Reichardt 476–81; Raussert 519–25). Because The Narrows’ Mamie sings her songs outside the commercial realm regulated by the Junto of American capitalism, the authenticity of her art remains uncorrupted. (See also Jacques Attali’s concept of “living use-time” in chapter 3.)
7. "Being a woman, and being a black woman, and playing a trumpet—that’s three things I consider against me. Now, if I played piano, I don’t think sex or race would enter into it," says veteran jazz musician Clara Bryant (qtd. in Dahl 217). The “pattern of systematic erasure” of the so-called all-girl bands of the 1940s that Sherrie Tucker has found in jazz historiography is a pattern that continues to extend, only somewhat diminished, to recording and performance opportunities for female jazz instrumentalists today (Tucker, Swing 9; Gourse 8–9, 66–72; Handy 121–26).

8. The novel is set in November of 1944, the year after the AFM recording ban finally came to an end. Although recordings by vocalists were excepted from the ban, the wartime shortage of shellac caused a drop in record distribution. It was therefore not unusual for jukeboxes to be stocked with ten-year-old hits (Schuller, Swing 690–91; DeVaux, Birth 295–306). The Mills Brothers had started their career in 1930, when they became an instant success on CBS radio. Originally billed as “Four Boys and a Guitar,” the brothers’ vocal skills were so stunning that their early records were accompanied by a leaflet assuring listeners that the only instrument they were hearing was John Mills’s guitar. In the 1930s and 40s, their popularity rivaled that of the likes of Louis Armstrong or Frank Sinatra, and the quartet continued to tour and record in various incarnations into the 1990s (Friedwald, Jazz 173–77).

9. In addition, A. Yemisi Jimoh argues that the figure of Junto and the power he exerts over the street and its inhabitants functions like a jazz riff, subtly yet firmly directing the foregrounded ‘solos’ of Boots, Mrs. Hedges, and of course Lutie (125–26). However, a much more viable candidate is the character of Min. As the near-homonym of her name already suggests (Min/men), Min has lived with a series of men—she calls them “husbands”—who, for a while at least, provide her with some semblance of “a secure, happy feeling” (116, 117). She continues to follow this pattern when she leaves Jones and, realizing that “a woman living alone really didn’t stand much chance,” eyes the man whom she hired to move her cherished table and other belongings: “This was a very strong man. His back muscles bulged as he pushed the cart. She moved closer to him. ‘Say,’ she said, and there was a soft insinuation in her voice, ‘you know anywhere a single lady could get a room?’ Then she added hastily, ‘But not on this street’” (371). Min is certainly no strong improviser like Lutie, and so, rather than breaking the pattern, she continues with the riff of cohabitation. A riff is a recurrent phrase of two or four bars, whose repetitive melody is constructed in such a way that it requires but minimal adjustment to harmonic changes (“Riff”). Min’s minimal adjustment from Jones to the moving man, like the adjustments between any of her previous “husbands,” is just such a riff. And just as a riff is designed to heighten the tension and intensify the swing, so does Min’s departure effect yet another heightening of the dramatic tension: in the next chapter, Jones points investigators from the Postal Service in the direction of Bub, whose arrest directly leads to Lutie’s murder of Boots. I thank La Vinia Jennings for this suggestion.

10. Millinder’s trumpet section especially was considered to be “boss at that time,” remembers Dizzy Gillespie in his memoirs (60). Gillespie also offers some entertaining if probably not completely accurate insights into Millinder’s leadership qualities, especially his “fire complex” (60–62, 109, 163–64). High praise also comes from Count Basie, who had to concede defeat to Millinder in a battle of the bands: “Lucky and those guys turned it on! Boy, did they turn it on. Whew! It was a rough
night. Lucky had a lot of top-notch musicians in that band. . . . Lucky himself didn’t
play any instruments. He just fronted the band, but he was one of the best front men
in the business, right up there giving Cab Calloway and Willie Bryant some real
competition” (211).

11. Millinder’s orchestra became quite an influential musical force in the latter
half of the 1940s. Along with Louis Jordan, Millinder pioneered and perfected the
jump blues genre, an important antecedent of rock ‘n’ roll. Unlike Jordan, Millinder
left the music business in 1952 and fell into obscurity, trying to eke out a living in a
variety of occupations, most notably perhaps that of fortune-teller, until his death in
1966 (McCarthy 289–91).

12. The inside cover of *The Street* announces that two lines of the song are being
used by permission of the Duo Publishing Corporation. However, Lutie’s lines
“There’s no sun, Darlin.’ [/] There’s no fun, Darlin’” are not part of the recorded ver-
sion she is listening to, nor did Decca market different versions of “Darlin’,’” if alter-
mate takes were ever issued at all. Incidentally, A. Yemisi Jimoh errs when she gives
the release date of “Darlin’” as 1945; Decca’s records indicate that the song was
recorded and released in 1944 (Jimoh 220; Schenker, booklet). However, like Jimoh,
I have been unable to locate any recording with the title “Rock, Raleigh, Rock,” the
song Lutie hears in chapter thirteen as she ascends the stairs to her apartment (Jimoh
220, 243; Petry, *The Street* 312).

13. See Clark (501–2), N. McKay (133–35), Lattin (69–70), Pryse (118), and Wurst
(3–22).

14. Mrs. Hedges and Boots can only participate in the American Dream by
acknowledging the dominant status of the white man who controls all and who is
named after Benjamin Franklin’s secret society, Junto. Consequently, Boots must die
in the end because his rape of Lutie would have threatened the power of Junto. Min
is the only black character on 116th Street who is not destroyed, physically or men-
tally, by the economic system Junto oversees. Unlike Boots, Mrs. Hedges, and Lutie,
Min does not subscribe to the ideology of upward social mobility, and, as critics have
mentioned, Min’s involvement with the root doctor David the Prophet suggests an
alternative value system (Clark 499–501; Drake 68–80; C. Henderson 854–59; Pryse
123–27). Accordingly, the cross David gives her becomes a tool for her liberation
from Jones. Lutie, too, is confronted with a cross, but for her it symbolizes oppres-
sion rather than liberation. The lecherous advances of Mr. Crosse, proprietor of the
Crosse School for Singers, furthers Lutie’s entrapment even more: “Yes, she thought,
if you were born black and not too ugly, this is what you get, this is what you find.
It is a pity he [Mr. Crosse] hadn’t lived back in the days of slavery, so he could have
raided the slave quarters for a likely wench any hour of the day or night” (321–22).

*The Street* here echoes the essential contention of Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life
of a Slave Girl*, that “the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and,
in fact, renders the practice of them impossible,” especially for the female slave (55).
The socio-economic system that regulates life on the street and is governed by the
all-powerful Junto is hence a system of neo-slavery really, making Petry’s novel a
grim neo-slave narrative (Park and Wald 618–20). Perhaps not quite coincidentally,
musicologist Stephan Richter alludes to a related issue in his analysis of Thelonius
Monk’s “Blue Monk”: “Monk’s village of festivities is indeed a more democratic
concept than Winthrop’s city upon a hill,” as exemplified perhaps most effectively
15. The motif of the circle is prefigured in the scene in chapter six when Lutie goes to the Junto Bar and Grill. Trying “to recapture the feeling of self-confidence she had had earlier in the evening,” she cannot erase “the thought of day after day of work and night after night caged in that apartment” (147). As she is pondering the bleakness of her situation and her lack of options, “[s]he moved the beer glass on the bar. It left a wet ring and she moved it again in an effort to superimpose the rings on each other” (147). Fittingly, this is immediately followed by Lutie’s rendition of “Darlin’” that tells the story all the other patrons “knew by heart and had always known because they had learned it soon after they were born and would go on adding to it until they died” (148).

16. The connection between the trope of the circle and literacy (in its most general sense) is a recurrent motif in African American literature. For instance, this connection informs all of Frederick Douglass’s autobiographies, beginning with the famous description of the slave songs in the 1845 narrative where Douglass avers that “I was, myself, within the circle; so that I could then neither hear nor see as those without might see and hear” (57). The motif of the circle reappears in Jean Toomer’s Cane, in which the arcs prefacing the three sections symbolize the modernistic fragmentation of what the author elsewhere had called “the spiritual truth of the South” (qtd. in Kerman and Eldridge 95; Toomer 1, 39, 81). More recently, the motif of the circle also occurs in Toni Morrison’s Beloved, in the scene where Sethe is unable to put into words the killing of her baby daughter: “Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him [Paul D], the subject, would remain one. That she could never close it, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn’t get it right off, she could never explain” (163). It is perhaps not all too farfetched to discern in these literary examples an echo of the West African ritual of the ring, which survived in various transformations in the New World and which, according to Samuel Floyd’s research, has had a decisive influence on black American musics (Power 26–33). (See also note 15.)

17. I am referencing here the take that Columbia originally chose to release, the second take of the session, rather than the equally famous, but not readily available, take three that was not issued because, at three minutes and fifty-eight seconds, it exceeded the limitations of the 78 rpm records (Nicholson 90–91; Schaap 265).

18. By way of contrast, compare Holiday’s version of “All of Me” with that of Dee Dee Bridgewater, recorded almost half a century later. Taken at a faster clip than the Billie Holiday recording, bassist Hein Van de Gein’s rather conservative arrangement does not reharmonize or otherwise alter the original score either. Bridgewater’s snappy on-the-beat phrasing, though, assisted primarily by André Ceccarelli’s crisp snare drum accentuating her requests, changes the emotional content of the song, especially in the second chorus. There, with a nod to Ella Fitzgerald, Bridgewater practices a sort of inverted vocalese; that is, she retains the lyrics of the song but completely improvises the melody and rhythm. Her playful melodic and rhythmic recasting of the lyrics, followed by a prolonged scat solo, create a persona not lonely, pleading, and melancholy as Holiday’s, but rather teasing and flirtatious. Note that both Holiday’s and Bridgewater’s versions, like Lutie’s reinvention of “Darlin’,” change the emotional essence of the song not so much by altering the lyrics, but primarily by manipulating the rhythm; they are different not because of what they sing, but because of how they sing it.

19. Consider, for instance, Sidney Bechet’s solo on the old New Orleans staple
“High Society,” recorded on February 5, 1940. Bechet, on soprano saxophone, duplicates almost exactly one of the most famous of all ‘set’ jazz solos, the clarinet obbligato adapted decades earlier by Crescent City legend George Baquet from the original piccolo part. The inclusion of Baquet’s solo was—and still is—virtually mandatory in any performance of “High Society” (Chilton 122; Schuller, Early 183). In modern jazz, even a John Coltrane would practice set solos in advance. For his solo on “Giant Steps,” still considered to be the pièce de résistance for any aspiring jazz improviser, Coltrane lifted entire chunks from Nicolas Slonimsky’s Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns, then part of his extensive practice routine, and his solo on the last movement of A Love Supreme, “Psalm,” is a recitation of sorts of the poem in the album’s liner notes—Coltrane himself called it “a musical narration”—a recitation where each note corresponds exactly to the syllabic structure of the poem’s words, and a recitation that therefore suggests at least an unusual amount of pre-planning (Coltrane 5; L. Porter 148–51, 244–49).

Notes to Chapter Three

1. It is interesting to observe, and merits further study, that the exact same charges leveled against jazz in its early years—it’s not music, it corrupts our youth, it glorifies violence and debauchery, it’s primitive, and so on and so forth—have been leveled against hip-hop.

2. The connection between violence and music is nothing new in Western thought. In the twentieth century alone, Oswald Spengler and Theodor Adorno, to mention just two figures, theorized at some length about sound as a weapon (Jameson ix–x). For an in-depth analysis of violence in African American blues culture and how it differs from the jazz idiom, see Adam Gussow’s Seems Like Murder in Here (2–8).

3. While I largely concur with Alan J. Rice’s assessment of the significance of jazz in Home to Harlem, I disagree with his larger contention that many Harlem Renaissance prose writers availed themselves of a jazz aesthetic. Deploying a structuralist approach, Rice argues that “[t]he conscious use of alliteration, antiphony, non-standard punctuation, signifying, and repetition to build up passages that resemble jazz interactions in their construction is a process that began in the twenties soon after the arrival of jazz in the North and mirrors the development of the music itself” (“Finger Snapping” 105–6). I believe that “a jazz feel” or “an onomatopoeic reaction to the sensual sounds” of jazz alone does not suffice to constitute a jazz text (108, 110). (See also chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the shortcomings of structuralism for a literary jazz criticism.)

4. Hughes himself had no formal or informal musical training. With characteristic understatement, he writes in The Big Sea of the poetry he penned during his Washington years:

The blues poems I would often make up in my head and sing on the way to work. (Except that I could never carry a tune. But when I sing to myself, I think I am singing.) One evening, I was crossing Rock Creek Bridge, singing a blues I was trying to get right before I put it down on paper. A man passing on the opposite side of the bridge
stopped, looked at me, then turned around and cut across the roadway.

He said: "Son, what's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No," I said, "Just singing."

"I thought you were groaning," he commented. "Sorry!" And went his way.

So after that, I never sang my verses aloud in the street any more.

(217)

5. Not without Laughter is set in Kansas, and it is interesting to note that this account, without a doubt autobiographical, of the fictional Rattle Benbow's Famous Kansas City Band—a so-called territory band—describes the exact same kind of black music, weaving fluidly and daringly between different styles and genres, yet always grounded in the blues, that left an indelible impression on young Oklahoman Ralph Ellison. See Gunther Schuller's two-volume history of jazz for an in-depth discussion of these territory bands (Early 279–317, Swing 770–805).

6. The basic premise, as well as much of the text itself, of the original column and the revised short story is identical. The single major difference is that the 1949 column opens with Simple sitting at the bar scatting by himself, whereas "Bop" has Simple sitting on his stoop, scatting along with a recording of Dizzy Gillespie's "Ool-ya-koo" blaring out of an upstairs window (Hughes, "Simple" 6).

7. "Ool-ya-koo" is a simple yet infectious blues, spiced up with a quote from Thelonius Monk's "Well, You Needn't," whose hallmark is the humorous bop-scatt-tering of Gillespie and Kenny Hagood. Recorded by Gillespie's big band in 1947 (also the year of the copyright of Monk's composition), "Ool-ya-koo" was one in a string of recordings bearing similar titles—"Oop-bop-sh'bam," "Jump Di-le-ba," or "Oo-pop-a-da," for instance—which helped bring bebop to a broader audience. With composer credits usually attributed to Gillespie and arranger Gil Fuller, "Ool-ya-koo" is actually based on a riff by Joe Wilder (Shipton 222).

8. The reference to the death of bebop is one of the very few amendments Hughes made for the revised 1953 "Bop." Most jazz histories in fact place the end of the bebop era in that same year, 1953, with the famous Massey Hall concert of Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, Charles Mingus, and Max Roach in Toronto, commonly considered the swansong of bop—or in 1955 with Parker's death. Even so, Gillespie himself dates the end of the era in early 1950, with the demise of his big band (355–57). Of course, the transition from bebop to hard-bop (or cool jazz) was a very fluid one, without any definitive breaks. Bebop was certainly not "finished." It has established itself as the source and reference point for the entire postwar jazz tra-dition. As Scott DeVaux puts it succinctly, "[t]o understand jazz, one must under-stand bebop," because "jazz as we know it today is shaped in bebop's image" ("Advent" 292; Birth 3).

9. Consider saxophonist Budd Johnson's eye- and earwitness account of the tireless efforts of Dizzy Gillespie, "the theoretician to this music," to spread the gospel of bop to other jazz musicians and how the music got its name accordingly:

Dizzy tried to hum everything; he had to hum everything to everybody to get them to see what he was still talkin' about. It would be hard to explain it. It could be notated, but it was very hard to read, because cats weren't used to reading. . . . So he would sing [imitates
Diz], and actually, that’s how I think it got its name, bebop. Because he would be humming this music, and he’d say, “Ooop bop ta oop a la doo bop doo ba.” So people said, “Play some more of that bebop” because he would be saying, “Bebop.” And the cats would say, “Sing some more of that bebop,” and actually, I think that’s how it got its name, because that’s the way he would have to sing it to make you get the feeling that he wanted you to play with. (qtd. in Gitler, Swing to Bop 119)

10. This can be plainly heard on, for instance, an air-check of “Dizzy Atmosphere” from the Los Angeles “Jubilee” radio show of December 29, 1945, where emcee Ernie “Bubbles” Whitman announces Gillespie as “Professor Rebop.”

11. It is to be emphasized here that Attali’s theories are only partially applicable to jazz, as they are based on Western European history and art. Although Attali does reference African American musics, he betrays a rather rudimentary understanding of jazz. For instance, when he claims that “[t]he absence of noise (of blemish, error) in the stockpiled objects [i.e., recordings] has become a criterion of enjoyment,” he seems unaware that in jazz—as in other African and African diaspora musics—the exact opposite is often true (124). Both musicians and listeners value a highly individualized sound rather than an abstract sound ideal that performers must approximate, as is the case in classical European concert music. For example, Miles Davis’s trumpet sound would not only be considered ‘blemished’ by classical standards, but his ‘clams’ or wrong notes—on studio recordings, too—were so frequent that they became an integral part of his personal style, a style imitated by scores of younger trumpeters (Walser 158–63). Davis himself remained typically unconcerned about his clams: “Sometimes you run out of notes. The notes just disappear and you have to play a sound” (qtd. in Burns, liner notes).

12. Simple here refers to Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk, and Mary Lou Williams.

13. Interestingly, R. Baxter Miller comes to a very similar conclusion in his analysis of Hughes’s Ask Your Mama: the long poem, Miller writes, moves toward “a design of Pan-African and human struggle within the evolution of modern consciousness—Be” (“Framing” 12). Also, the more strictly musicological implications of Simple’s differentiation between bebop and rebop prefigure the scholarship of Charley Gerard and Jon Panish in this field (Gerard 97–115; Panish 141–44). How strongly the issue of race still resonates within the jazz community was exemplified by a special issue of Jazz Times in the fall of 2000 devoted almost exclusively to this subject matter (see also chapter 4). Hughes himself did certainly not subscribe to Simple’s view of jazz. After all, he tapped British musicologist and pianist Leonard Feather, who also wrote the liner notes, to score the first half of his album of poetry and jazz, Weary Blues. Interestingly, the music for the rest of the album was composed and arranged by Charles Mingus.

14. Accordingly, Simple moves from the relatively private confines of the bar in Hughes’s original column to the very public, secular pulpit of the stoop, with “Ool-ya-koo” resounding from high up above. For more in-depth analyses of the influence of bebop and jazz on Hughes’s poetry, especially in Montage as well as his later Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, see Hokanson (66–80), Miller (“Framing” 9–11), Lowney (368–79), and Brooker (“Modernism” 244–47). Michael Borshuk makes a
convincing case that even Hughes’s blues poems are the product of a jazz aesthetic at work: “Hughes is not a bluesman standing at a mythical site of black expressive origins—an anonymous folk voice singing at the crossroads of Africa and America—but rather, a jazzman who signifies on that tradition with an all-encompassing intertextual/intermusical approach” (19). Unlike some detractors of bebop (including Ralph Ellison), Hughes did definitely not see bop as a dilution of jazz’s roots in the blues, on the contrary: Montage, for instance, is informed to a lesser degree also by the recurrent, riff-like motif of boogie-woogie, a largely blues-based form of solo jazz piano (Tracy 224–36).

15. As if in an ironic counterpoint to Simple’s take on bebop, Hughes became a witness to jazz’s potential to turn symbolic violence into physical action: On July 2, 1960, a riot erupted in the genteel town of Newport, Rhode Island. The town had been the site of the annual Newport Jazz Festival since 1954—Langston Hughes, in fact, sat on the board of directors—which had turned into a great success despite the suspicions and objections of the city fathers. Early that afternoon, a throng of about three thousand, mostly young whites, found itself shut out from the concerts in Freebody Park, where a capacity audience occupied every last seat. Fueled by alcohol, the crowd outside became more and more restless and vocal and eventually stormed the premises, creating havoc all around. The ensuing riot subsequently spilled over into the streets of Newport, with local law enforcement battling youths throwing bottles and rocks with tear gas and water hoses. The situation spun out of control so dramatically that the governor sent in three companies of the Rhode Island National Guard, effectively shutting down the entire city, and order was not restored until around 2:00 AM (Berry 323; Rampersad, Life II 314–15). To be sure, the motivations of the predominantly white mob were hardly political, and yet, as Hughes’s biographer Arnold Rampersad relates perceptively,

The Newport riot, though modest as American riots went, seemed to him [Hughes] portentous. In the vented rage of these young whites he saw what a later leader, Malcolm X, would describe as chickens coming home to roost, the whirligig of American history bringing, at long last, a token of its nearing final revenge. The rioters had been like dry tinder, to which black jazz had been a lighted match. In a city of wealth and elegance built on the stinking cargoes of slave ships, and where Langston in the early days of the festival had more than once endured racist snubs, Africa had returned to haunt Europe. The descendants of masters now danced to the music of the descendants of slaves; American “civilization” had begun, in however modest a degree, a fateful slide toward revolution. (315–16)

Witnessing the growing unrest earlier that afternoon, Hughes had written the caustic “Goodbye Newport Blues” on the back of a telegram form and passed it on to the Muddy Waters band performing on stage, where it was sung by Waters’s pianist, Otis Spann (C. Murray 10). (Waters was only semiliterate, hence he delegated the vocals to his half-brother.) This anecdote, Dexter Gordon’s reminiscences, and, if to a lesser degree, “Bop” all appear to underscore another of Attali’s stipulations, namely that music is inherently premonitory (11).

16. One is reminded here of the more or less farfetched explanations the title of
the Charlie Parker composition “Klact-oveeseds-tene” engendered, which worship-
ing hipsters took to be everything from pidgin German to musical aesthetics in
code (Harrison 223; Komara 148). No one has yet offered a plausible ‘translation’ of
klact-oveeseds-tene—with the possible exception of Dean Benedetti, the supreme Bird
acolyte, who told Ross Russell, producer of the Dial recording sessions and victim
of many of the altoist’s notorious pranks, “Why, man, it’s just a sound!” (qtd. in
Russell, Bird 252). The introduction of the 1947 recording of the song is identical with
the one of “The Chase” penned by Dexter Gordon and recorded just a few months
earlier, also for Russell’s Dial label (see chapter 4).

17. “How High the Moon” was one of the anthems of bebop, especially as the
Barry Harris arrangement retitled “Ornithology.”

18. Although Ellison and Hughes had had a close, warm friendship initially—
Ellison’s career as a writer began when Hughes introduced him to Richard Wright—
the two grew apart more and more after the publication of Invisible Man. Hughes
was partly jealous of his protégé’s success, but irritated mostly at the younger
writer’s increasing reclusiveness. On his part, Ellison came to believe that his men-
tor was squandering his talent and blamed him for a lack of intellectual rigor
(Rampersad, Life II 200–202; Berry 252–53).

19. Callahan excised all but one paragraph of the “Cadillac Flambé” episode from
Juneteenth. In the context of the novel, the Ellisonian ironies of “Cadillac Flambé”
deepen even more: Senator Sunraider is possibly part black. Before he decided to pass
for white, Sunraider, then known as Bliss, was the child-protégé of Reverend
Hickman, a jazz trombonist turned itinerant preacher. The climax of their spiritual
revival routine included little Bliss dressed in a white suit rising from a white coffin—
just as Lee Willie wears a white suit and drives a white Cadillac convertible. Ellison’s
original manuscript also identifies the reporter-narrator of the “Cadillac Flambé”
episode as McIntyre, a white liberal journalist who keeps a mistress in Harlem, a rela-
tionship about which he feels rather ambivalent. At lectures, Ellison would frequent-
ly read “Cadillac Flambé” in conjunction with other excerpts from the manuscript
that identified these contexts (O’Meally ed. 212–13; H. Porter 95–106).

20. I wonder if Ellison got the idea for “Cadillac Flambé” from Dizzy Gillespie’s
parody of the popular spiritual which the trumpeter retitled “Swing Low, Sweet
Cadillac.” Gillespie had recorded the original spiritual in 1950, where the ironic jux-
taposition of Johnny Richardson’s saccharine string arrangement with Carlos Vidal’s
Cuban bongos already foreshadows the later parody. A year later, Gillespie record-
ed the first of several versions of “Swing Low, Sweet Cadillac,” and the tune quickly
became a crowd-pleaser at concerts: “I look over Jordan and what did I see / Comin’
for to carry me home / Oh, an Eldorado comin’ after me / Comin’ for to carry
me home” (Gillespie 370–71). Unlike Charlie Parker but like Louis Armstrong,
Gillespie never shied away from the role of entertainer. At the same time, though,
the bebop pioneer Gillespie played the kind of jazz Ellison saw as a corruption of
‘real’ jazz.

21. The narrator in this respect displays a complete lack of what Alan Perlman
and Daniel Greenblatt have termed “improvisational competence” that divides a
small “inside audience” from the much larger “outside audience” at a jazz concert:

The rest of the listeners—the outside audience—really do not hear or
understand improvised solos. For the outside audience, jazz impro-
visation does not have structural or historical meaning. Once the written melody of the song is over and improvisation begins, the members of this audience stop attending minutely and notice only gross features... They cannot follow the repetitions of the basic harmonic pattern of the song; in fact, they have no sense at all of what to expect from a solo. These people have no improvisational competence, and, although a jazz performance as a whole may have some significance for them... they do not understand the intent of the improvisational section. (181)

McIntyre's improvisational ignorance is corroborated by Hickman, the former jazz trombonist, in Juneteenth: "That reporter—McIntyre?—yes, waiting out there in the hall. He would've just thought that I was crazy the same as he does anyway. He wouldn't know how to add up the figures; couldn't get with the beat, even if I gave it to him" (274).

22. As Ellison's hero Duke Ellington said of the extended composition Black, Brown and Beige, his "tone parallel to the history of the American Negro": "Coming more up to date, we found the Negroes struggling for solidarity and in the confusion of it all, just as we were beginning to get our teeth into the issue, we discovered that our country was in big trouble again. So, just as always before, the Black, Brown, and Beige were soon in there for the Red, White, and Blue" (181, 182).

23. Oklahoma! was the result of the first of many collaborations between composer Richard Rodgers and lyricist Oscar Hammerstein. One song from the musical, "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top," has become a jazz standard reworked by the likes of Miles Davis, Wes Montgomery, Stan Getz, Ahmad Jamal, Sonny Rollins, and many others.

24. This utopian impulse is neither new nor unique to jazz. What Paul Gilroy has called "Black music's obstinate and consistent commitment to the idea of a better future" is, of course, the driving force in the slave spirituals, extending to the Soul music of the 1960s and, more recently, the so-called neo-soul movement (Black Atlantic 36). As Baraka himself pointed out correctly, "Black people's songs have carried the fire and struggle of their lives since they first opened their mouths in this part of the world. They have always wanted a better day" (Black 207). Naturally, the same utopian impulse also propels, to varying degrees, the slave narratives. Sometimes, the slave's glimpse of (utopian) freedom was even occasioned by an act of violence, as was the case for Frederick Douglass: to him, his fight with Covey was "a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom" (113). Also interesting in this context is Baraka's futuristic play Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical. In its post-apocalyptic setting, two unnamed black jazz musicians, a male tenor saxophonist and a female pianist (bringing to mind John and Alice Coltrane), combat and eventually vanquish the evil Money Gods Sado and Maso with "a solo, like the horn is talking! It's trying to identify the MONEY GODS and attack them murderously" and, respectively, with "an explosive piano run, like machine-gunning colonialists from the high ground, on a very clear day!" (442). Baraka's reference here is to the Lane-Lerner standard "On a Clear Day."

25. According to Jerry Watts, Baraka's jazz criticism displays "his ignorance of the formal musical qualities of jazz" (497). Consider, for instance, Baraka's attempt to describe the harmonic innovations of bebop: 'Bebop proved that so-called 'changes,' i.e. the melodic and harmonic structure of a tune, are almost arbitrary.
That is, that they need not be stated, and that since certain chords infer certain improvisatory uses of them, why not improvise on what the chords infer rather than playing the inference itself” (Black 77). First of all, while bebop amends the scalar and harmonic range—with extended chords that include the ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth interval; the notorious flatted fifth; or the popular tri-tone substitution (where a bII7 chord replaces the V7)—those extensions are anything but arbitrary, as are the changes themselves. Also, one may recall that, ironically, it was precisely the increased formal complexity of the bebop idiom which to Ralph Ellison signaled a deplorable turn away from jazz’s origins in black vernacular blues culture. Secondly, Baraka’s gloss is a simplified summary of Charlie Parker’s alleged epiphany:

I remember one night before Monroe’s I was jamming [with guitarist Bill “Biddy” Fleet] in a chili house on Seventh Avenue between 139th and 140th. It was December, 1939. Now I’d been getting bored with the stereotyped changes hat were being used all the time at the time, and I kept thinking there’s bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes but I couldn’t play it. Well, that night, I was working over [the Ray Noble composition] Cherokee, and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I’d been hearing. I came alive. (Shapiro and Hentoff 354).

This passage, among the most famous in all of jazz lore, is still taken to be bebop gospel when, in fact, only the two telling sentences “I kept thinking there’s bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes but I couldn’t play it” can be attributed to Parker directly. The rest is a very creative paraphrase of a 1949 Down Beat article, which critics Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff gave a dramatic makeover for their purported oral history of jazz, Hear Me Talkin’ to Ya (DeVeaux, Birth 189). Be that as it may, even if Watts is correct, it probably would not disturb Baraka greatly, for whom, at least in the sixties, formal musical training equaled “doctrinaire whiten- ing” (Baraka, Black 202). My hunch is that the finer points of music theory probably elude Baraka, even though he dabbled in piano, drums, and trumpet respectively when he was in high school—which in and of itself does not necessarily disqualify his jazz writings by any means (Baraka, Autobiography 63, 84–85). For proof that a writer’s ignorance of harmony theory does not result automatically in pretentious mediocrity, one need look no further than to Langston Hughes—who may not have been able to carry a tune, but he certainly had what jazz musicians admiringly call “big ears”—or indeed to any of Baraka’s own recorded collaborations with Archie Shepp, as for instance the Hughes-influenced “We Are the Blues: Funklore.”

26. It is therefore perhaps also not quite coincidental that Baraka’s conversion to Marxist-Leninism occurred in the 1970s, when the revolutionary music of free jazz had all but run its course (John Coltrane, Baraka’s hero, had passed away in 1967 at the age of forty) and was quickly succeeded by the commercialized excesses of fusion. Interestingly, starting in the mid-1970s shortly after his conversion, Baraka began an off-and-on collaboration with Swiss composer, bandleader, and pianist George Gruntz. Baraka agreed to furnish the libretto for the latter’s pet project, the “World Jazz Opera.” The opera was never performed in its entirety, and Baraka’s
libretto was eventually dropped in 1988 at the insistence of Rolf Liebermann, then the head of the Hamburgische Staatsoper. This rather surprising collaboration that lasted for the better part of fifteen years would have been simply unthinkable during Baraka’s nationalist phase (Gruntz 108, 128–41, 165–66). Baraka was even sufficiently interested in the project that he apparently recycled a few of the ideas for Gruntz’s opera for his own play Primitive World.

27. To be sure, Baraka was very much aware, too, of the intense spirituality of Coltrane’s music. In his interpretation, though—and true to the jazz aesthetic’s constant realigning of ostensible polar opposites—violence and spirituality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. On the contrary, for black spirituality to express itself authentically, it had to combat and kill white culture: for Baraka, “TRANE [Coltrane] is now a scope of feeling. A more fixed traveler, whose wildest onslaughts are now gorgeous artifacts not even deaf people should miss” (Black 173).

28. Ellison never thought highly of Baraka’s work, and his famous negative review of Blues People argued that its ill-advised emphasis on sociology was “enough to give even the blues the blues” (Shadow 279; Watts 201–7). Hughes had initially liked Baraka’s early work, especially Dutchman, but the increasing militancy expressed by the graphic verbal assaults in the former’s later writings disturbed him as he believed them to be counterproductive to the Civil Rights movement (Rampersad, Life I 383–84). “That Boy LeRoi,” the title of Hughes’s review of The Toilet in the New York Post, is clearly a direct jab at Baraka. (On the other hand, Baraka must have been pleased that Hughes also mentioned that “[a]t one point in the proceedings, [black actor Al Freeman, Jr.] pointed his pistol dead at [white jazz critic] Nat Hentoff in the first row of the auditorium” [22].) Both Ellison and Hughes were board members of the Newport Jazz Festival, which was not welcoming at all to the younger generation of black free jazzers, and this to Baraka most certainly indicated that the two older writers had ‘sold out’ to the establishment.

29. In “The Screamers,” the participants of the initially minor uprising “screamed and screamed at the clear image of ourselves as we should always be. Ecstatic, completed, involved in a secret communal expression. It would be the form of the sweetest revolution, to huckle-buck into the fallen capital, and let the oppressors lindy hop out” (79). This “sweetest revolution” eventually fizzles out, though, and the story ends with the narrator’s plaintive admission that “for a while, before the war had reached its peak, Lynn and his musicians, a few other fools, and I, still marched, screaming thru the maddened crowd. Onto the sidewalk, into the lobby, halfway up the stairs, then we all broke our different ways, to save whatever it was each of us thought we loved” (80). The character of Lynn Hope is not, as some critics have erroneously assumed, fictional. Philadelphia-based tenor saxophonist Lynn Hope was a so-called “honker”: honkers were, as Baraka’s story describes accurately, tenorists whose jazz-inflected rhythm-and-blues combined hypnotic riffing, often in the altissimo register, with antics like what was known as “walking the bar.” Hope, who had converted to Islam, and his band often performed wearing turbans, and Hope’s playing exerted a certain influence on John Coltrane, Baraka’s hero (L. Porter 96). The other honkers named in the story are also historical figures: Jean Baptiste “Illinois” Jacquet, Willis “Gator” Jackson, Cecil “Big Jay” McNeely, and Gene “Jug” Ammons (76).

30. “Answers in Progress” also makes mention of Smokey Robinson, the Motown Records star, whose music is blaring from loudspeakers along Newark
streets and is part of the soundtrack of the uprising (130). Although his primary allegiance lay with the young generation of free jazzers, Baraka also championed Robinson, James Brown, Martha and the Vandellas, and other soul acts. In them, he saw just another expression of what he called the blues continuum, but it was also partly due to his desire to ground his revolutionary aesthetics on a populist base (Baraka, _Blues_ 173; Coleman 94–95). One of the characters in the narrator’s posse is named Omar, which is probably purely coincidental, since Baraka seems to have named at least some of the black revolutionaries in the story after people he knew in his youth, most notably Pinball, like Baraka an aspiring bebop trumpeter, “who I thought was one of the hippest dudes in the world,” as he would later recall ( _Tales_ 127; _Autobiography_ 84).

31. Noteworthy in this context is that during his Black Nationalist phase, Baraka published some of his works by his own publishing house, which he named Jihad Press (Baraka, _Autobiography_ 346; Watts 216–17).

32. In his youth, Baraka had been an avid reader of science fiction and was later also influenced, in part, by surrealist art (W. Harris 51).

33. It must be noted here that Blakey himself always rejected a direct correlation between jazz and African musics. Although he had introduced certain African techniques into his drumming fairly early on—for instance, changing the pitch of the tom-tom through elbow-pressure applied to the skin—Blakey insisted that jazz was a music invented and perfected by black _Americans_ (Gerard 63–64).

34. The outspoken Baraka has always had to confront charges of racism, sexism, homophobia, or anti-semitism, some of them justified, some of them not. Jerry Gafio Watts, in his intellectual biography of Baraka, comes to the damning conclusion that “Baraka owes many black Americans a debt that he cannot pay. Because of his public actions, many political opportunities were either lost or distorted beyond viability. Yes, he was committed to black freedom. And yes, he was seemingly inexhaustible in his commitment to the struggle. But yes, he advanced a political line that was socially retarded even for the times. . . . _It is not enough to say that Baraka meant well_” (477; Watts’s emphasis). On the other hand, Komozi Woodard paints a much more positive picture of Baraka’s nationalist politics, in which “there are many examples of the community’s generating alternative rituals and progressive standards of both manhood and womanhood in the postindustrial society . . . . The overarching strategy was to provide an alternative value system that bound oppressed peoples together with new identity, purpose, and direction” (265–66). My aim here, however, is not to pass judgment on either Baraka himself or on his varying ideologies, but to investigate how he makes use of a literary jazz aesthetic in prose fiction. But since, as we have already seen, the jazz aesthetic deliberately denies any clear separation of art from politics, fact from fiction, or author from character, it does demand that one look not only at the text, but its context, too.

35. In his revised 1995 autobiography, Baraka confessed about this tumultuous episode that “[i]t was a very low point in my life. The Smokey Robinson hit ‘The Tracks of My Tears’ was popular at the time, and for me that summed up what was going on in my life. . . . Fuckin’ Smokey, the poet of the age” (334). In the discrepant escapism of “Answers in Progress,” this particular recording is conspicuously absent: “Smokey Robinson was on now. But straight up fast and winging. No more unrequited love. Damn Smokey got his thing together too. No more tracks or mirages. Just the beauty of the whole” (130). For detailed discussions of Sun Ra’s
music and ideology as discrepant engagement, see Graham Lock’s *Blutopia* (13–74) or John Szwed’s biography *Space is the Place* (310–16)

36. On the other hand, hip-hop’s rituals and images can easily be interpreted as just the latest reincarnations of the traditional trickster figure of African American folklore. Like many rappers, the trickster is wily, boastful, often endowed with irresistible sexual prowess, and profits from the manipulation of the dominant power structure. Especially considering that hip-hop is quite often an explicit expression of racial pride but its primary audience in terms of record sales are young, white, upper middle-class suburban males, rappers flaunting the status symbols of white America—Bentley limousines, Rolex watches, diamond jewelry—seem decidedly trickster-like. (Paul Gilroy has made a related argument in *Against Race* [201–6].) Nor is this to say that there is no good jazz in the twenty-first century. Artists like Joshua Redman or Branford Marsalis keep the language of jazz alive and vibrant, while others like Matthew Shipp, John Zorn, or Don Byron derive their own, new dialects from the tradition.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Feather, however, had his own agenda, too. Using Eldridge’s blindfold test, he goes on to criticize the widespread acceptance by European critics of what had come to be known as “Crow Jim,” that is, the idea that whites are incapable of fully appropriating the jazz idiom, as jazz was the intrinsic property of the black American. Writing in 1965, Feather—who, in 1958, had served as composer, arranger, and pianist for much of Langston Hughes’s poetry-and-jazz album, *Weary Blues*—was reacting against what he perceived as a lamentable rise in nationalism and separatism among African Americans in general (Book 53). As the doyen of jazz criticism, he was instrumental in orchestrating the jazz establishment’s branding of the free jazz avant garde as “anti-jazz” and insisted that music should be evaluated separately from the social conditions of those who performed it (Kofsky 120–30; Evans 1–10). Interestingly, in his analysis of the various authenticating strategies in Japanese jazz—or “yellow jazz”—E. Taylor Atkins reports a similar claim as Eldridge’s made by many Japanese jazz aficionados (40). And Joel Rudinow’s insightful essay on the blackness of blues attempts to find the answer to a similar question, namely, “Do the notes sound different when played by black fingers?” (128).

2. Janowitz’s only black character is Bibi, a dancer, who is relatively ancillary to the plot. And even though Janowitz is not interested in the sociology of jazz—to him, jazz was the ultimate expression of his utopian political dream, a pan-European democracy (Hentz 66; Riess 129–30)—it is nevertheless interesting to note that his *jazz* in this respect echoes the larger European tradition of “negrophilia,” where, as Petrine Archer-Straw observes,

The Negrophiles who fraternized with blacks cultivated a shadowy world of nightclubs and bohemianism; their interests were in conflict with mainstream, ‘traditional’ values. ‘Blackness’ was a sign of their modernity, reflected in African sculptures that scattered their rooms, in the look of natural furs that fringed their coats, and in the frenzy of
their dancing that mimicked the black bottom. Only rarely are black people depicted in this world. They and their mystique are the invisible presence in a multitude of negrophilic images and texts from the era... (19)

In Germany, as elsewhere, blackness (and jazz) signaled both sexual liberation and exotic-primitivistic rejuvenation on the one hand, as well as Dionysian chaos, moral decadence, and a threat to the national identity on the other. This ideological dialectic is also mirrored in the handful of novels from the period that portray jazz. Unlike Janowitz’s novella, however, these books by Vicki Baum, René Schickele, Bruno Frank, Hermann Hesse, and others “indicate a greater preoccupation with extramusical notions of cultural despair and with the recent memory of French-African occupational forces in Germany than with jazz,” as Marc Weiner points out (482).

3. All translations of Janowitz’s Jazz are my own.

4. For a detailed discussion of the jazz aesthetic in Morrison’s other novels, see Anthony J. Berret’s “Toni Morrison’s Literary Jazz” and the essays by Robin Small-McCarthy and Alan J. Rice. Morrison has tapped classical European concert music as well: her only published short story to date, “Recitatif,” draws its title from a musical term in classical opera, the recitative (recitatif is but one of several spelling variants), which is a musical declamation in between formal numbers where the singer is accompanied only by harpsichord and follows the rhythmic patterns of ordinary speech rather than song (“recitative”). Also, in 1991 Morrison collaborated with singer Kathleen Battle and composer André Previn, providing the lyrics to Honey & Rue, which the liner notes define as a cycle of “contemporary art songs” that could also be classified as Third Stream music (Gurewitsch 6). And in 2003, the Michigan Opera Theatre commissioned Morrison together with classical composer Richard Danielpour to write an opera entitled Margaret Garner, based on her novel Beloved (Stryker C1; L. Johnson E3). Curiously, Morrison herself has questioned how appropriate the title of Jazz really is, and several critics argue along the same lines, observing that jazz functions merely as metaphor or image rather than a crucial catalyst of the narrative (Bigsby 28; Brooker, New York 200–9; Peach 114–15; Tally 4–5; Townsend 121–23). As I hope my argument shows, though, the novel and the music, at least in some aspects, enact the same aesthetic gesture, Morrison’s doubts notwithstanding.

5. See also C. Brown (629–31), Dubey (303–4), Grewal (135–36), Paquet-Deyris (221–23), H. Rice (129–31), Rubinstein (152–55), Ryan (157), Small-McCarthy (293–94), and Walcott (320–22). Although Eckard offers only scant and tenuous textual evidence for her contention that the novel’s narrative voice is indeed jazz itself, it is not as far-fetched as it may appear at first. Roger T. Dean argues that musical improvisation in the group “involves the merging of the self with another, so that it may be impossible to tell who has done what” (35). This merging of selves and their voices is, of course, precisely what happens to Morrison’s narrator in the course of improvising new voices who sometimes take over narrative control.

6. This is another one of those murky contentions that is incessantly regurgitated by critics of literary jazz, and even Morrison herself has stated that jazz is open-ended and lacks closure (Morrison, “Toni Morrison” 42). In terms of form, this is correct, as in mainstream jazz the length of any tune or improvisation is theoretically open-ended as long as it consists of multiples of thirty-two measures, the length of
traditional AABA standards, or the twelve measures of the blues (or multiples of four respectively in an introduction or a coda). In modal jazz, the length of a chorus is not determined by the number of measures, for example in John Coltrane’s 1960 version of “My Favorite Things.” However, most jazz—modal jazz too—is diatonic music; that is, within the structure of the chord progression, there is almost always a return to the tonic, even in the chromaticism of bebop (Kofsky 262–64, 280, 317; Heble 32–33). The move towards a truly open-ended form and harmony happens only in free jazz, as for instance in the music of Ornette Coleman. But even there, a theme more often than not frames the solos: to pick just one obvious example, Coleman’s “Story Writing” even includes the proverbial stranger (in the guise of Coleman’s violin) coming to town. However, my aim here is not primarily to critique the criticism but to arrive at more feasible jazz criticism of literature. For an insightful if occasionally flawed discussion of some of the mistakes and errors committed by Morrison’s jazz critics, see Alan Munton’s essay “Misreading Morrison, Mishearing Jazz” as well as Stephan Richter’s much more balanced analysis in “Magic Books and a Jam Session.”

7. That the narrator is not Janowitz himself, becomes clear when Henry is being interviewed by an American journalist: “If you want to know more, Mr. Hennings, how Lord Punch’s Jazz Band got together and so on, then read that story in Hans Janowitz’s jazz novel, Mr. Hennings, in chapter five, if I’m not mistaken” (33). This quasi-postmodernist moment is echoed in numerous passages in which the narrative voice identifies itself as presently engaged in composing the story of Jazz.

8. See also Berret, “Jazz” (115), Eckard (16–18), Pici (382–89), and Walcott (320–21).

9. Friedrich Hollaender, one of Germany’s jazz pioneers in the 1920s, reminds us that Germans used to pronounce the word jazz as ja:s: “Jass! Jass! rufen alle, als ob jemand vergessen hätte, den Hahn abzudrehen. ‘Jazz’ meinen sie, und jeder will’s haben” (qtd. in Rotthaler 135).

10. Like John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Charlie Parker, Clifford Brown, or Charlie Christian, Wardell Gray died at a young age and is one of those tantalizing ‘what-ifs’ of jazz history. Gray’s body was found in the middle of the desert outside of Las Vegas in 1955 just ten weeks after Parker’s passing. The circumstances of Gray’s death were rather suspicious—he had sustained severe head trauma and a broken neck—and have never been fully explained. Gordon later claimed that Gray had overdosed on heroin in his hotel room, after which two panicked band mates dumped his body in the Nevada desert (Britt 19–20; Morgan, liner notes). Although it is usually Gordon who is credited with being the first to translate Parker’s innovations to the tenor saxophone, a very solid case can be made for Gray having at least paralleled Gordon in that regard. His homage to Lester Young, “One for Prez,” based on the chord changes of “How High the Moon” and recorded in the fall of 1946 for the Sunset label, displays Gray’s matured bebop style and indicates that at that time, he had already fused the previously pervasive Young influence with the new idiom seamlessly. Gray was “one of the first to put it all together,” seconds fellow Central Avenue graduate Hawes (Hawes and Asher 80). Due to the recording ban, there is unfortunately no recorded evidence of Gray’s career beginnings, but it is likely that he developed his bebop chops in the Earl Hines band, where he played alto saxophone initially, replacing the departed Charlie Parker (Britt 53; Morgan, liner notes; Gitler, Jazz 216–17).
11. A variant of “I Got Rhythm,” “The Hunt” is also known as “Rocks ‘n’ Shoals.” (Joop Visser posits that “The Hunt” derives from “Stompin’ at the Savoy,” which of course betrays a close affinity with “I Got Rhythm” [26].) The recorded track lacks the head; since the jam session was recorded on two portable disc cutters, it is likely that the recording was started late in order to conserve as much disc space as possible for the solos. “Rocks ‘n’ Shoals” probably acquired its new title only when the appropriately named if short-lived Bop record label issued it commercially on four 78s in an attempt to capitalize on the success of “The Chase” (Visser 26; Tarrant 177). Incidentally, this is the very recording purchased by the narrator of Jack Kerouac’s On the Road: “They ate voraciously as Dean, sandwich in hand, stood bowed and jumping before the big phonograph, listening to a wild bop record I had just bought called ‘The Hunt,’ with Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray blowing their tops before a screaming audience that gave the record fantastic frenzied volume” (113). In fact, “The Hunt” became so popular that musicians began to get wary of bootleg recordings. Sonny Criss, the altoist on that jam session, complained that Ralph Bass, the jazz enthusiast who recorded the battle, had hidden his two portable disc cutters underneath the bandstand, “[a]nd this is what really started the musicians to frown on people bringing recorders around, because prior to that, if somebody wanted to bring a recorder and record us, fine. But after that everybody really became very, very conscious of that kind of thing. ‘Cause nobody got paid for that” (qtd. in Gitler, Swing 170).

12. Here, the numbers in parentheses denote minutes and seconds elapsed.

13. Gray deploys the exact same lick in another encounter with Gordon three years later at a jam session at the Hula Club in Los Angeles. Although not a cutting contest, “Move” is nevertheless textbook call and response, with all the soloists feeding off of each other’s musical ideas and challenges. Gray’s signature lick occurs in measures nine through twelve of his fifth solo chorus. (Note that the Prestige CD-reissue misidentifies “Move” as “Scrapple from the Apple.”)

14. In terms of the novel’s narrative aesthetics, Morrison is not interested in a synchronic historicity of the period jazz of the 1920s, as her numerous interviews make clear, even though Nicholas Pici argues that the novel “remains faithful to jazz history by referring only to . . . particular instruments and by never mentioning instruments that had not yet come on the jazz scene” (379). Pici’s argument is flawed, however, since it misses the allusion to Charlie Parker, and generally fails to explain why a novel whose narrative structure moves across time and space would strive for mimetic historicity of aesthetic referents to begin with. Even more inconsistent is Pici’s use of a diachronic critical approach when he adduces “Jig-A-Jug,” a tune composed and recorded in 1995 by tenor saxophonist Joshua Redman, son of the free jazz iconoclast Dewey Redman. Even if jazz were employing a literary aesthetic derived exclusively from 1920s jazz music, Pici undermines his own argument by citing a composition perhaps best classified as a post-bop tune (even though its title, of course, is a nod to Gene “Jug” Ammons) instead of any 1920s recording by, say, Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, or of analyzing the Washingtonians’ “Trombone Blues.”

15. Coincidentally, Hunters Hunter’s double name echoes another track by Gordon, recorded in 1945 and entitled “Dexter’s Deck.” The session that produced “Dexter’s Deck” yielded several other sides, whose titles all include Gordon’s first
name in some fashion. However, the record label, Savoy Records, was responsible for the titles, not Gordon himself (Gitler, Jazz 209).

16. “Double-time” denotes the seeming acceleration of the rhythm where a soloist, for example, halves the predominant note value from, say, eighth notes to sixteenth notes, thereby ‘doubling’ the speed. In pre-bop jazz, this technique was also referred to as “double-tongue,” deriving from the tongue-technique used by wind players in fast staccato passages (“Double-time”; Smith 214). Again, the ‘chase’ sections of Morrison’s text interface with this term as well, as there are two ‘tongues’ or voices soloing over the same theme.

17. In this context, it is worth pointing out again that many jazz musicians use the metaphor of a conversation to describe their art (Berliner 348–86; Monson, Saying 73–96). For example, drummer Ralph Peterson’s observation of musical interaction on the bandstand is remarkable for its similarity to Morrison’s narrative strategy: “But you see what happens is, a lot of times when you get into a musical conversation one person in the group will state an idea or the beginning of an idea and another person will complete the idea or their interpretation of the same idea, how they hear it. So the conversation happens in fragments and comes from different parts, different voices” (qtd. in Monson, Saying 78). Critical to this conversational interaction is what Paul Berliner calls “the third ear,” that is, the individual musician’s ability to assess and adjust, in the practice room as well as on stage, not just his or her own ideas, but how they fit in with and contribute to those of others (243–44). Towards the end of the novel, it seems that the narrative voice begins to develop just such a third ear.

18. Where Mark Tucker counts twenty-five breaks out of a total of 139 measures, I can count—generously—only eighteen, thus bringing down the average from roughly one break every five-and-a-half to one every seven-and-a-half measures; still, I must concur with his assessment of the performance. Tucker speculates that the overly prominent novelty effects of the arrangements—presumably penned by Ellington—might have been Ellington’s or the record company’s effort to increase further the Washingtonians’ appeal as a popular (commercial) dance band (153–55). Ellington’s is the only known recording, even though the song was in Fletcher Henderson’s band book. It, like “I’m Gonna Hang around My Sugar,” was composed by Spencer Williams, who had scored a hit earlier that same year with “I’ve Found a New Baby”—which, it so happens, applies both to Violet’s kidnapping of the baby boy at the beginning of the novel and the Traces’ adoption of Felice at the end (M. Tucker 149–50).

19. Robinson (reeds), Hardwick (reeds), and Davis (trumpet, filling in for an absent Bubber Miley) were among the musicians recording “Trombone Blues” and “I’m Gonna Hang around My Sugar.” My point here is not to judge the musicianship of these men, but to extend Tucker’s point to Morrison’s novel. Although the comparison of Otto “Toby” Hardwick with Gordon and Gray is admittedly somewhat unfair if not to say pointless (as comparisons of this kind are wont to be in jazz), the latter two also played in big bands at the beginning of their careers. What is more, it stands to reason that the arranger, at least as much as the musicians themselves, is to blame for the shortcomings of “Trombone Blues.”

20. For another first-hand account of the Weimar Republic’s lively jazz scene, see Michael Danzi’s engrossing memoir, American Musician in Germany, 1924–1939.
Danzi’s recollections bear out Janowitz’s take on jazz in Europe: like Henry, Danzi performed in ensembles whose personnel was multinational and whose music often straddled the fence between jazz and cabaret. “Berlin,” Danzi avers, “was jumping” (17). Although he does not mention Janowitz, it is possible that the latter heard one of several Berlin-based bands with whom Danzi was crisscrossing Europe in the 1920s, especially since Danzi also worked for the silent movie industry (11–35). In Berlin, jazz had by the middle of the decade become what Cornelius Partsch calls a “metropolitan Gebrauchsmusik,” reaching its apex with the premiere of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill’s Die Dreigroschenoper, that influential fusion of European art song and African American jazz (Partsch 107; Tischler 190–92).

21. Golson here concisely (and, probably, inadvertently) echoes what has become the accepted analytical model in the field of so-called ethnomusicology. As John Blacking summarizes it, “Because in music the code is the message and unwritten music can only be produced by social interaction, in the analysis of oral traditions the musical product cannot be isolated as a niveau neutre from the performance meanings it has to those who are making it and perceiving it” (189). The analytical approaches of Berliner’s Thinking in Jazz and Monson’s Saying Something, for instance, both heed this kind of integrative analysis.

22. See Christian (489–91), Hardack (453–54), Kubitschek (139, 157–61), and Nowlin (160–66). Also, Dorcas’s name harks back to a character in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s short story “Roger Malvin’s Burial,” in which Dorcas’s husband shoots and kills their son in a hunting accident. Furthermore, Morrison’s Dorcas is in many ways the foil to a minor character by the same name in Uncle Tom’s Cabin: the injured Tom Loker is taken to “Grandmam Stephens there,—Dorcas, they call her,—she’s most an amazin’ nurse” (Stowe 200). Stowe’s Aunt Dorcas is “a tall, dignified, spiritual [Quaker] woman, whose clean muslin cap shades waves of silver hair, parted on a broad, clear forehead, which overarches thoughtful gray eyes. A snowy handkerchief of lisse crape is folded neatly across her bosom; her glossy brown silk dress rustles peacefully, as she glides up and down the chamber” (380). And finally, in the Old Testament, Acts 9 tells the story of “a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” and is eventually resurrected from her deathbed by Peter (Acts 9.36–42; emphasis added).

23. Lutie’s nightmare recalls the opening paragraph of the vignette “Rhobert” in Jean Toomer’s Cane:

Rhobert wears a house, like a monstrous diver’s helmet, on his head. . . . He is way down. Rods of the house like antennae of a dead thing, stuffed, prop up in the air. He is way down. He is sinking. His house is a dead thing that weights him down. He is sinking as a diver would sink in mud should the water be drawn off. Life is a murky, wiggling, microscopic water that compresses him. Compresses his helmet and would crush it the minute that he pulled his head out. He has to keep it in. Life is water that is being drawn off. (42)

24. In another intertextual linkage between the two novels, Bub, who is arrested for mail theft, is reincarnated in Jazz’s Sweetness, guilty of the same crime. Furthermore, both The Street and Jazz revisit the traditional trope of literacy and free-
dom in their final paragraphs, and in both texts, jazz offers not only opportunity, but also harbors danger.

25. In addition to Wild, Jazz has yet another “Omar,” this time even a documented one: Morrison has said that the initial inspiration for the novel came from a photograph in James Van Der Zee’s The Harlem Book of the Dead depicting the body of a young black woman who had been killed by her lover (Gates, Rev. 53).

Notes to Coda

1. To indicate modernism’s fluctuating boundaries, Craig Werner for instance uses the term “(post)modernist” (4). Similarly, I feel the distinction between modernism and the avant-garde is not really a useful one when it comes to jazz. For example, Scott DeVaux’s and Gary Giddins’s studies of bebop both echo Andreas Huyssen’s classification: at least in Europe, “the historical avant-garde aimed at developing an alternative relationship between high art and mass culture and thus should be distinguished from modernism, which for the most part insisted on the inherent hostility between high and low” (DeVaux, Birth 22–24; Giddins, Rhythm xiii; Huyssen viii). But the modernists around Charlie Parker were after all the avant-garde in the 1940s, while the avant-gardist John Coltrane of the 1960s was decidedly modernistic in his esoteric forays and his explicit and repeated insistence that his art was not directly related to any socio-political concerns. And, as Alfred Appel reminds us, the modernisms of preceding jazz movements were the avant-garde in their day, too: “To call Armstrong, Waller, et al., ‘modernists’ is to appreciate their procedures as alchemists of the vernacular who have ‘jazzed’ the ordinary and given it new life” (13).

2. The narratives referenced here are thus also, interestingly, in the tradition of American modernism because, as Hugh Kenner notes at the outset of A Homemade World, “it is characteristic of American genius that the casual eye does not easily distinguish it from charlatanry” (12).

3. Edward Pavlič correctly points out that Ellison’s literary modernism is actually more closely related to Bird’s bebop than to the modernism of Ellington or Armstrong (44–50).

4. For other examples of how literary criticism in the wake of Baraka and Gates has canonized Coltrane as a representative of authentic blackness, see Berret (280–81); A. Rice (“Jazzing” 424–25); Small-McCarthy (298); or Snead (71–73). In general, Gatesian Signifyin(g) frequently betrays an unfamiliarity with jazz and its history in its tenuous connections and erroneous interpretations, as Stephan Richter has shown in his detailed analysis of the jazz references in Gates’s books (“Magic” 28–36). At the opposite end of the critical spectrum is Alan Munton’s polemic “Misreading Morrison, Mishearing Jazz,” which accurately exposes many of the distortions to which Morrison’s jazz critics subject Coltrane’s music, but is flawed in other aspects: his categorical pronouncement that jazz and literature have nothing in common is simply not tenable in light alone of the poetry of Langston Hughes. Munton pontificates that “Coltrane’s achievement is to have united European forms with rhythmic and improvisatory devices which originated in Africa” and then goes on to argue that “[t]he image of a black diaspora is the only generic concept that is true both to Morrison’s fiction and to jazz; but if we accept this as truth, we must
refuse the Africanization of jazz and any ‘Africanization’ of Morrison’s fiction based upon it” (243, 251). And when Munton concludes that therefore “[a]ny search for authenticity will be in vain,” one must wonder why his own rhetoric implies an ideology of cultural authenticity throughout, as for example in the quotation above that situates the origins of certain musical forms in Europe, the origins of certain rhythmic patterns in Africa (251). Apparently, then, Europe and Africa are each loci of cultural authenticity, but black America cannot make the same claim. And lastly, Munton states that the term “cut” is unknown in jazz lingo (245). While he is correct in pointing out how other critics have misused the term, he is apparently unaware of the cutting contest.

5. It must be mentioned here that, at least according to his drummer Elvin Jones, Coltrane and his bandmates did not view Indian and African musics as unrelated: “even Indian music has its origins in the African art form. You can see the influences. Whatever we do, it can be traced to some of the African art forms” (qtd. in Kofsky 231). Coltrane’s admiration for Shankar was such that, some years later, he would name one of his children after him. In recent years, Ravi Coltrane has become an accomplished saxophonist in his own right who has recorded several critically acclaimed albums with major record labels.