Disalienating Movement and Sound from the Pathologies of Freedom and Time

The discovery of the existence of a Negro civilization in the fifteenth century confers no patent of humanity on me. Like it or not, the past can in no way guide me in the present moment. — Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1967

Thus far we have explored how practices of analyzing, listening to, and embodying music and dance as black and of African origins operated as particularly intensive modes of temporalizing and spacializing individuals, along with their musicking and dancing, to distant times and places. In his concluding chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon identified the notion of scientific objectivity (analyzing) and the racialized body (embodying) as mechanisms of alienating individuals, black and white, from their present situations, doing so, however, without taking into account these mechanisms’ rectifying capacities in the context of performance. Even in one of the few passages in which he addresses music, Fanon reiterates his singular theoretical concern, ontology’s racial strictures, by relating the following incident: “A few years ago, the Lyon Association of Overseas Students of France asked me to reply to an article that made jazz music literally an eruption of cannibalism in the modern world. Knowing exactly what I was doing, I rejected the premises of the Association’s representative, and I asked the defender of European purity that he get rid of a spasm that had nothing of cultural [significance]. Some men want to swell the world of their being.”


Fanon goes on to refer to a “German philosopher [who] had described this process [i.e., swelling the world of one’s being] under the notion of the pathology of freedom.” That philosopher was Günther Stern Anders, whose “The Pathology of Freedom: An Essay on Non-Identification” (1936) theorizes the self in its “freedom” of identification to be in fact indeterminate, contingent, and thus unfree. Stern, who changed his surname to Anders while working as an editor in Berlin in the early 1930s, conceived of human freedom in its basic ontological form as humanity’s “a priori separation from the world.” As such, humanity is condemned, Stern argued, to create its relationship to the world, the symptoms of which he identified in the nihilist, the “historical man,” and most acutely in one’s “desire to render the world congruent with oneself.” According to Stern, the nihilist “reaches a pathological extreme in so far as he . . . does not realise his freedom in practice, in the constitution of his world.” Whereas historical man “escapes from the strangeness of the world” by taking possession of his life in the world, by uniting not only with his own past but with the pasts of other persons as well. The latter’s “freedom” of identification reveals itself to be pathological, however, because “man must comply with and answer to the claim to identity” that other subjectivities place on him. Fanon thus understood the “defender of European purity” and individuals who want to “swell the world of their being” in general as exhibiting and exerting such pathological symptoms of humanity’s ontological freedom. What, then, did Fanon prescribe for humanity in order to achieve disalienation from freedom’s pathologies?

After declaring that he “did not have to take up a position on behalf of black music against white music but rather to help my brother to give up an attitude in which there was nothing beneficial,” Fanon attributed the pathological condition exhibited in the association’s request of him to answer for jazz to the problem of *temporalité* (temporality), for which he offers the following solution: “Those Negroes and Whites will have been disalienated who have refused to be let shut away in the Tower given as the Past. For many other Negroes, disalienation will arise in other ways through the refusal to take the present scheme of things as definitive.” In other words, Fanon proposed disalienation as a strategy for individuals, regardless of race, to engage the world without allowing it to subsume one’s presence (or being) under the long shadows of modernity’s temporal schemas. In this sense, he was drawing from psychoanalytically and phenomenologically defined conditions of being based on conceptions of logical or original time (temporalities of the present) differentiated from chronological time (temporality). In taking into account how race factors directly in the ontological straightjackets that are schemas of chronological time
(e.g., Christianity, evolution, modern civilization, colonialism, and capitalism), Fanon theorized the way for racialized black individuals in particular to take action not only in but upon the present in order to achieve nonalienated freedom from the pathologies of society’s political economy of race and its contingencies in the form of the performativities of race and historical time.

In spite of his lack of attention to performance, Fanon’s recourse to action in order to take hold of one’s freedom of identification in the present actually constitutes one of the most explicit and radical challenges to the temporalizing and spatializing practices given to the black body, Africa, and, with that, the logic of black music’s and dance’s African origins. In rejoining Fanon’s disalienation with Stern’s theorizations of “the fact of human action,” “authentic listening,” and “being in music,” we are led back to dance-music as smooth spaces of identification wherein disalienation may be enacted (as was the case during moments of Katherine Dunham’s fieldwork) against this logic’s and its practices’ many pathological manifestations. As Stern concluded, there is nothing more suspect than philosophical anthropology’s demand for a “moment’s pause to pose questions of ‘authentic’ definition,” this coming six decades before Christopher Small’s call to conceive of music and dance as action or movement and not merely as abstract entities conceived in the notion of “the work.” As Veit Erlmann concludes regarding Stern’s theory of “authentic listening,” time stops when the truest manifestation of one’s being in the world materializes, this occurring as a result of our well-intentioned actions, as when being in music: “It is in the plenitude of presence, in a realm beyond the threshold of sensory immediacy,” says Erlmann, “but also well below the arrogance of reason, that musical situations put a stop to time.”

Whereas the previous chapters looked at analyzing, listening, and embodying as this logic’s constitutive practices, this chapter explores seemingly fleeting actions taken by Katherine Dunham, Duke Ellington, and Harry Smith that resisted these practices and, in doing so, brought this logic’s temporalizing and spatializing practices to bear upon itself. Their actions included taking possession of key conceptual devices, such as the authentic, origin, progress, and linearity, in order to recuperate moments of their own authentic (disalienated) selves in performance, devices that otherwise were given to things and others as a matter of course not only for the propping up of the logic (décalage) but also in constricting their everyday lives. Dunham and Ellington took action in this regard under the cover of the New Negro ideal of self-identification, a strategy that, as we will see, often landed them in what Stern described as the pathology of the “historical man,” or what Fanon rejected wholesale as the taking of a position on behalf of Negro dance and music.
abstract or nonobjective films, desired to cut off the dominant representational devices otherwise necessary for the practices of the logic of black music’s and dance’s African origins to materialize. Rather than identifying the results of such actions (disalienation achieved or not), this chapter seeks to measure their reverberations connecting to and shaking up in varying directions the political economies of race and gender as well as history and capitalism.

It is difficult to compartmentalize Katherine Dunham’s work as anthropologist, recording artist, dancer, educator, and entrepreneur, especially when considering what her work entailed in producing *Heat Wave: From Haiti to Harlem* (ca. 1943), *Tropical Revue* (1943–1945), and *Bal Nègre* (1946–1947), as well as in establishing her Dunham School of Dance and Theatre in 1945. During this period she reiterated her imperative to synthesize her anthropological training and dancing to create serious Negro dance, a challenge that she described as a “problem” and “paradoxical.”\(^\text{13}\) Like Paul Robeson, Duke Ellington, Zora Neale Hurston, and many more of her contemporaries, Dunham was faced with reconciling her New Negro ideals and principles with the strictures of race, gender, and sex with the entertainment industry’s capitalist system, from which she procured financial backing for her artistic and educational ventures. As she had done in her proposals to the Rosenwald Foundation, she resorted to anthropology’s primitivist discourse in her production proposals written for potential financial backers and in her promotional publications, which we can interpret as one of her tactical actions in her maneuvering in and around the economic flows traversing the anthropological and entertainment fields. Yet what we see in *Heat Wave*’s script is a bitingly satirical portrayal of the anthropologist as scientist and anthropology as a science set within the context of jazz’s concurrent traditionalist-modernist debate. Although Dunham did use her anthropological training, as Susan Manning notes, to subvert the “critical conundrum of natural talent versus derivative artistry that white critics had scripted for African-American choreographers,” her ideas for *Heat Wave* reveal an underlying irreverence toward that which had projected upon her an alienated double consciousness as Negro woman anthropologist and artist.\(^\text{14}\) Drawing from VèVè A. Clark’s method of analyzing Dunham’s choreographies, this analysis takes a proposal-to-performance-to-proposal (and so on) approach to consider how Dunham maneuvered through the field of dance entertainment to realize Negro dance’s universal properties, her acts of which did provoke disalienations of dance and music, no matter how fleeting, from the ontological straightjackets of anthropology as science.\(^\text{15}\)

Duke Ellington’s *Liberian Suite*, commissioned for the centennial anniversary of Liberia in 1947, reintroduces the significance of West African politics
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into this analysis of freedom and the logic of black music’s and dance’s African origins. The fact that American abolitionists and slaveholders, with the assistance of the American government, founded Liberia in 1822 as a settler colony for freed black Americans complicates the historical pageant’s and acculturation theory’s unidirectional narratives of Africa as origin, particularly since these black American settlers, as Claude A. Clegg III notes, constructed an ethnic minority-dominant society “marred by many of the same exclusionary, oppressive characteristics common to modern colonial regimes.”

Moreover, the League of Nations commission report of 1930 that documented forced labor practices by Americo-Liberian government officials exposes Ellington to charges of complicity in the government’s ongoing propaganda efforts to improve its reputation internationally and among its own native populations. In fact, the analysis of Ellington’s *Liberian Suite* and the circumstances surrounding its commission and reception indicate that Ellington shrewdly registered his critique of the world’s second black-ruled republic’s official historical narrative by referencing Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms and, most significantly, a fifth freedom that he tactically left undefined. As both Kevin Gaines and Eric Porter note, jazz critics’ formalist concerns in Ellington’s music and the economic and historiographical strictures of the jazz canon have obscured or altogether erased the freedom he took in using musical formulas, European-derived or otherwise, as platforms to strike a balance between his New Negro ideals and aesthetic convictions.

Yet there seems to be no place for *Liberian Suite* in Gaines’s paradigm for his analysis of *Black, Brown and Beige* (1943), Ellington’s most recognized tone parallel of the history of the American Negro: “I am concerned here with his self-conscious construction of historically situated narratives of African-American group consciousness as part of a progressive, antiracist agenda during World War II.” If Liberia poses a narrative of black American complicity in colonialist oppression in Africa, one so contradictory that it compelled most black intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s to deflect blame for Liberia’s precarious international standing onto capitalist imperialism, then what does Ellington’s *Liberian Suite* do to the jazz canon’s dominant historical narrative, which in overlooking this piece has perhaps implicated itself in perpetuating this historical amnesia? Moreover, Ellington’s consternation over the economic contingencies of tactics used by civil rights organizations, in regard specifically to his and his musicians’ livelihoods, places further doubt as to the notion of American Negro group identity and Ellington’s contributions to it.

Finally, Harry Smith, along with other American avant-garde filmmakers of the 1940s, created films that manipulated space, time, and motion in response
to the stark reality of the postwar nuclear age. Smith, who was identified with the nonobjective school of abstract film design in San Francisco, employed abstract images, color, and movement “as an experience in itself apart from their power to express thoughts or ideas.” He tested, however, the realization of his images, colors, and movements as nonobjective films of the late 1940s by showing these while playing records of “Guarachi guaro” and “Manteca,” songs composed by Chano Pozo and Dizzy Gillespie and recorded by Gillespie’s big band, as well as having jazz musicians improvise to his films.

Smith incorporated “Guarachi guaro” as his Film No. 2’s soundtrack and based the production of Film No. 4 on his abstract painting Manteca, thereby attempting to translate these cubop recordings into images, and vice versa, in order to transcend the boundaries between sound and image as well as the linear unities in film and music. These films are indeed striking in their capacity to disrupt the delineation between image and sound, particularly when compared to the reception of Pozo and Gillespie’s music among jazz critics, which largely unfolded within the analytical, listening, and embodying practices of black music’s and dance’s African origins.

Taking into consideration Antonin Artaud’s and Gilles Deleuze’s caution, however, regarding abstract film’s inability to provoke “critical and conscious thought and the unconscious in thought,” we might conclude that Smith’s abstract films obscured rather than overcame the temporal and spatial strictures that compelled individuals such as Pozo, Gillespie, Ellington, and Dunham, not to mention Paul Robeson, to operate strategically within the material world’s racialized and gendered scheme of things. Indeed, Smith’s unconventional lifestyle, along with his abstract films, constituted his own attempts at disalienation from the macropolitics of American capitalist society and the Cold War, actions that were accessible to him due in no small measure to the privileges of whiteness. In the end, by juxtaposing the work of Smith, Ellington, and Dunham within the frameworks of Fanon’s and Stern’s notions of disalienation and the pathology of humanity’s freedom in the world, we uncover micropolitical flows of artistic and political actions wherein the logic of black music’s and dance’s African origins, along with wartime and Cold War American capitalist society, implicate modernity to be utterly indeterminate, yet hegemonically constitutive of self nonetheless.

“Cool Scientist or Sultry Performer?”

As discussed in chapter 1, Katherine Dunham formally left graduate school in the fall of 1937 after feeling disillusioned about what she perceived to be Melville Herskovits’s and Robert Redfield’s doubts that she had the intellec-
tual capacity to conduct the scientific work of an anthropologist beyond the study of primitive dance. This, in addition to her busy professional dancing career, factored into her leaving the program at the University of Chicago. From 1938 through the end of the war, Dunham devoted much of her work to directing her dance company and creating choreographies, many of which were drawn from the dances she had studied in the Caribbean. At first her company performed mostly in Chicago, but by 1940 they toured regularly throughout the country, adding to its repertory choreographies of Cuban and Brazilian dances, in addition to those of Haiti and Martinique, as well as black American dances. While dance critics and journalists praised her choreographies and her company’s performances for their uniqueness and artistry, most also stressed her anthropological training, citing her research of native dances for the authenticity they anticipated in her choreographies.

Indeed, Dunham worked toward developing dance choreographies centered on the artistic techniques and social functions of the dances she had studied, participated in, and filmed in the anthropological field. Her synthesis of her artistic and anthropological work materialized in her Dunham Technique, of which much has been written, but her work in its entirety, particularly in regard to her belief in dance’s universal properties, has best been described as a “philosophical meditation on how individuals can achieve some degree of equilibrium within larger community formations . . . , locating dance as a primary means of stimulating self- and communal discovery.” Whereas Dunham valued her anthropological training as key to demonstrating the “links between social activism, self-awareness, and self-actualization,” it was her desire to ultimately realize in her dance schools the universal principles of the dances she had studied in the anthropological field, the first permanent school of which she opened in New York City in 1945. Yet, for most of her artistic aims that she pursued in her choreographies leading up to and following her school’s opening, Dunham proved to be willing to compromise these in large part for the financial viability of her school.

Like Asadata Dafora, Dunham choreographed dances from the Caribbean and Latin America in her productions to broker cultural understanding—not, however, of Africa, nor for that matter of the origins of American Negro dances, but rather of these dance’s universal qualities. Dunham thus registered the notion of Negro dance in a different temporality than that put forth by Dafora, a difference of temporality, however, that did not take hold with most audiences and spectators. In addition, the everyday rhythms of a woman director of an all-black dance company proved to consistently challenge Dunham’s realization of her philosophical ideals and aesthetic principles. She portrayed,
for example, the sultry dancer in Broadway and Hollywood film productions, beginning with *Cabin in the Sky* (1941) and followed by appearances in *Carnival of Rhythm* (1941), a short produced by United Artists, and *Stormy Weather* (1943), produced by 20th Century Fox. Critics tended to interpret her performances in these productions through the combined lenses of race and sex. Dunham and her company also confronted discrimination wherever they performed, for example, at hotels that refused them accommodations in cities such as San Francisco. But if Dunham really intended to put forth dance’s universal properties regardless of race, style, and so forth, then why do the notions “zombies,” “deep in the jungle,” and “the Other World of the tropics” appear in her promotional material, not to mention her choreographies? In situating her script for *Heat Wave* (1943) in this context, her use of satire to criticize what she had always considered to be anthropology’s major problematic, that is, its scientific prerogative to put individual human action into its temporal and spatial place, seems to further confuse the matter.

*Heat Wave*’s caricature of the anthropologist and his mishandling of the program’s jazz sequence calls forth both the emerging traditionalist-modernist debate surrounding jazz music—wherein swing music marked either jazz’s decadence and decline or its progress—and the confluence of anthropology and comparative musicology in this debate. A close look at the script’s contents lends important insight into Dunham’s response to not only the tenets of this debate but also the events organized by some of its purveyors, such as John Hammond’s *From Spirituals to Swing* concert at Carnegie Hall in 1938 and Rudi Blesh’s jazz lecture series at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1943. It also invokes comparison to the uses of satire by some of her contemporaries in their own responses to anthropology’s and society’s handling of issues concerning race and racism. Her eventual transformations of the script, however, leading to the production of *Tropical Revue* will shed further insight into her maneuverings in and around the economic flows of the entertainment industry, maneuverings that involved taking another approach to resolving her apparent vexed relationship with anthropology.

Dunham’s original conception for *Heat Wave* was a humorous and dance-filled revue in two acts titled “The Tropics” and the “Blues to Boogie-Woogie.” The script calls for a “milquetoast actor” to play an anthropologist who serves as the revue’s emcee. Most of the revue’s musical and dance numbers are introduced by the emcee, whose lines are filled with plays on words intended to belittle the anthropologist and anthropology as a white patriarchal and exoticizing field of inquiry. Examples include the emcee’s instructions to “define anthropology as Study of Man,” followed by “Now on field trip to broaden Anthropol-
ogy to include the Study of Woman”; the stage instruction that the “Voodoo pantomime of terror frightens M.C. who scurries across stage, stops and introduces [Nanigo Priest] as sister-anthropologist”; and a description of the song “Apology to Anthropology” as an “Afro-Egyptian-Mayan-Persian-West Indian mélange, mixing styles and locales into a World’s Fair phantasmagoria consisting of excavators, snake charmers, priests, belly-dancers, houris—running wild during the annual convention of the Society of Anthropology.” These sardonic moments of anthropological bumbling alternate with serious dance numbers, including the Caribbean-inspired “Afro-Rumba-Jive,” “Nanigo Priest,” and “Shore Excursion,” and featured performers that were to include boogie-woogie piano duo Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, singer-guitarist Josh White, the Original Dixieland Band, and Puerto Rican singer Bobby Capo.

These and other elements of the script point to not one particular anthropologist or jazz historian as a target of its satire but in fact a number of events that factored in the growing traditionalist-modernist divide in jazz discourse and the formation of a jazz historical narrative. To begin with, *Heat Wave’s* subtitle, *From Haiti to Harlem*, references the historical impulse in Hammond’s *From Spirituals to Swing* concerts of 1938 and 1939, signifying on the concerts’ construction of the “history of jazz rooted in the African American experience” in several ways. For instance, its proposed featured musicians, Ammons and Johnson, had performed on Hammond’s program in 1938, representing in both cases boogie-woogie music as one representative of authentic preswing hot jazz music. But whereas, according to the program, Hammond’s concert began with “African Tribal Music: From Scientific Recordings Made by the H. E. Tracy Expedition to the West Coast of Africa,” part 1 of Dunham’s script, “The Tropics,” called for a hodgepodge of dance and musical numbers described as South Pacific native pantomime, a native Mayan chant, and a plaintive Haitian song, in effect satirizing anthropology’s and jazz criticism’s obsessions with the scientific pursuit of musical origins and its authentic iterations. Finally, Dunham’s bumbling emcee might have been a satirical dig at Hammond’s own inauspicious performance as the emcee for the concert in 1938. The specious erudite portrayed by *Heat Wave’s* emcee was, it seems, less a personal attack on Hammond or, for that matter, on Blesh, than an attack of anthropology’s claims of scientific rigor as implied nevertheless in Hammond’s use of field recordings, which went off apparently with little explanation, either in his introductory remarks or the concert’s program, as to the recordings’ relationship to the program’s music.

Certain details in part 2 of *Heat Wave’s* script suggest that it was drafted around spring 1943. For one, this section of the script lists, among other featured
performers, the Original Dixieland Band, whose members are described as “jazz musicians, aged 60 to 77, each of whom have actually played in one of the famous Dixieland bands. They were once mustered by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art for a single performance—and will be recruited for this show.” Dunham’s troupe performed at San Francisco’s Golden Gate Theater and the Mark Hopkins Hotel in April and May 1943. At the time, Rudi Blesh was giving a series of lectures on hot jazz at the San Francisco Museum of Art that culminated in a concert at the Geary Theater on May 9 featuring veteran New Orleans jazz musicians Willie “Bunk” Johnson, Kid Ory, Papa Mutt Carey, Bertha Gonzales (or Gonsoulin), and others. Based on the script’s reference to this concert and on the presence of her company in San Francisco at the time, it is very likely that Dunham attended the concert and perhaps even one or more of Blesh’s lectures earlier in April. Blesh eventually edited his lectures at the San Francisco Museum of Art into his book *Shining Trumpets: A History of Jazz* (1946), one of a growing stream of books that put forth jazz’s historical roots and evolution. According to John Gennari, Blesh’s was the first of these books, however, to base its claims of the African origins of jazz on contemporary anthropological and comparative musicological scholarship, namely that of Melville Herskovits, Mieczyslaw Kolinski, and Richard Waterman.

Hammond’s and Blesh’s use of field recordings played on the very same listening practices (analyzed in the previous chapters) that accounted for listeners’ reifying their anchorage in the modern present. Whether in the concert hall, laboratory, or home, listeners of either black bodies performing the African native or recordings of black music made in the field or studio in Cuba, the United States, or elsewhere heard that music as of the distant past, unchanged. The fact that field recordings contained music performed by the listener’s temporal contemporaries, as with Hammond’s audience and musicians, went very simply unnoticed due to the epistemological power of the Western philosophies of history. With this in mind, we should interpret the significance of Blesh’s use of Herskovits’s and Waterman’s scholarship not only in terms of its innovation in jazz scholarship but also as another instance in which science was tapped to address, in Blesh’s words, the “position of the Negro in this democracy and . . . our white attitude toward the art of this black minority.” Accordingly, Blesh believed that a “thorough treatment of jazz as music not only deals with the American Negro but goes all the way back to Africa.” In addition to receiving assistance from Herskovits, Blesh got access from Waterman to the field recordings at the Laboratory of Comparative Musicology at Northwestern University. What is more, he drew from Waterman’s Gestalt-based inter-
pretation of extended offbeat accentuation as a characteristic of African and American Negro music, to include (he noted) ragtime and boogie-woogie, for his lectures in April 1943.38

The confluence of such intellectual production and public musical events, centered on addressing the presence of Africa in society, politics, and history, had similarly been occurring as curated by Modupe Paris, Asadata Dafora, and K. O. Mbadiwe in the United States, and Zoila Gálvez, Salvador García Agüero, Fernando Ortiz, Gilberto Valdés, and others in Cuba. Dunham’s Heat Wave belongs to this artistic and intellectual production across constituencies and national boundaries, but only tangentially, for it distinguishes itself by questioning in satirical form anthropology’s epistemological tenets with respect to origins and authenticity, which was also fueling the traditionalist-modernist debate in jazz. To be clear, the historical narrative of part 2 of the script is similar to the narrative constructed in Blesh’s Shining Trumpets as well as in Hammond’s From Spirituals to Swing concerts. For instance, part 2 includes allusions to pre-jazz dance styles, “Plantation Dances” (“Darktown Strutters’ Ball,” “Ballin de Jack,” and “Cake Walk”) and “Barrelhouse—A Florida Swamp Shimmy,” which Dunham’s company had been performing since 1940 and 1938, respectively.39 According to Dunham herself, she began exploring the rural roots of black urban dance forms soon after returning from her field trip to the Caribbean in 1936. Unlike Hammond and Blesh, however, she pursued the roots of American Negro and Caribbean dances not to use these to constrict her dancers and musicians to authentic imitations but rather to create new pieces or creative translations of these sources—translations, that is, with which she hoped to provoke individuals to achieve their own equilibrium between self- and communal identification. Furthermore, for Hammond’s and Blesh’s narratives, the blues served as the essence linking jazz’s authentic incarnations, yet part 2 of Dunham’s script called for Josh White to represent the blues. In light of the conventionally regarded lines drawn by Blesh and other jazz traditionalists, on the one hand, and jazz modernists such as Leonard Feather and Barry Ulanov, on the other, White fell decisively through the cracks, which is precisely where Dunham located this debate’s and anthropology’s shared shortcomings.40

As already mentioned, Heat Wave’s script rather mercilessly lampoons the anthropologist turned jazz historian serving as the revue’s emcee. To introduce Josh White, the proposed opening act of part 2, the script instructs the emcee to describe the “music of jazz with complete incoherence; he only learned of the existence of jazz at 5 P.M. the day previous and is agog at his discovery. Quick in research, he has already found a clinical case.”41 Putting aside the hyperbolic reference to the emcee’s supposed amateur status (Blesh and
Hammond were serious, if ideologically driven and paternalistic researchers of black American music) and focusing on the words “incoherence” and especially “clinical case” points to additional logical peculiarities in the traditionalist-modernist debate. Specifically, characterizing White as a “clinical case” of the “early American blues” implies a pathology of sorts in White’s music, the emcee’s diagnosis of which contributes to the incoherence in his description of jazz. Indeed, in his discussion of “postclassic” or contemporary blues in *Shining Trumpets*, Blesh characterizes White’s approach to the blues as exhibiting “intellectual sophistication,” using the “blues for their social significance.” But, he continues, “There is a measure of artificiality in this, although the singer’s sincerity is not to be questioned. Such singing may be, in some degree, effective as propaganda, but it remains to be seen whether it is more so than the stark power of the pure folk blues, the grim drama of Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, or ‘Chippie’ Hill.” After further criticizing White’s singing as lacking in deep conviction, Blesh settles on categorizing his blues style as “revivalist.”

Blesh’s rhetoric indeed exhibits the kind of subjective judgments based on the observation method characteristic at the time of conventional psychological and anthropological practice. But his notion of authentic blues does the same kind of temporal violence to White’s and, for that matter, folk blues musicians’ place in modern society as that committed by, for example, Herskovits toward Trinidadian calypso singers (see chapter 2). What we have here, in other words, are examples of what Fanon accused the Lyon Association’s representative of committing, the jazz historian and anthropologist “swelling” or temporalizing the world with their being. Blesh’s desire to define the boundaries of authentic and artificial (folk and sophisticated) blues contradicted his prefatory stated goal of studying jazz music “thoroughly” in order to question the “position of the Negro in this democracy” and “our white attitude toward the art of this black minority.” For the outcomes of White’s music and performances in the early 1940s, particularly his duo performances with blues musician Lead Belly and white Broadway star Libby Holman in New York City, helped bolster at least white progressive attitudes toward black American folk music and against segregationist practices if even at a micropolitical level. It is through White’s presence in her script against the backdrop of jazz’s traditionalist-modernist debate that Dunham intended to restore his music without concern about questions of origins or authenticity, folk or urbanity, but rather in terms of the communal and humanistic aspects of the blues; her outlook in this instance as pertaining to the blues joined those of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray.

As for the introduction of Ammons and Johnson and the boogie-woogie dance routine “Barrelhouse—A Florida Swamp Shimmy,” the script instructs
the emcee to give an “incomprehensible explanation of boogie-woogie, the jargon of the hepcats flows out of his elbow.” Unlike his assessment of Josh White, Blesh did consider Ammons’s and Johnson’s music as authentic representations of barrelhouse boogie-woogie piano music.46 What is significant here is the script’s instruction for the emcee to be “incomprehensible” by using jive or the “jargon of the hepcats.” This is not simply a case of irony in that a “hepcat” in fact is aware, competent, and has the ability to perceive quickly, but rather another dig at the expense of the anthropologist turn jazz historian feigning to have a command of the language of urban black youth.47 In this way, Dunham’s sardonic tone delves into the kind of satirical social commentary that writers George S. Schuyler and Dan Burley had contributed since the 1920s in their editorials, articles, stories, novels, and other published work. As Jeffrey B. Ferguson explains, Schuyler used satire as an antiracist weapon to oppose the tenets of New Negro and white supremacist ideologies, encouraging a nonmoralistic “balance of reason and play as the proper response to an empirical world much more complicated than any of the interpretations invented to explain it.”48

As for Dan Burley, his work on various areas of black American culture and society came primarily in his editorials and articles. In addition to his work as a writer, Burley was a barrelhouse and blues pianist whom Blesh helped record on the Circle label in 1946.49 Perhaps best known as the author of The Harlem Handbook of Jive (1944), Burley also wrote a social gossip column, “Back Door Stuff,” for the New York Amsterdam News from 1935 through the 1940s. His satirical piece “Anthropologists Study Meaning of ‘Conk’” from 1947 is particularly relevant here.50 This piece, worded mostly in Burley’s customary jive style of writing, casts a bewildering and sarcastic eye toward the “assorted probers” at “Columbia, NYU, CCNY and other founts of knowledge in these parts” who are teaching jive (or the “meaning of such words as ‘conk,’ ‘solid,’ and ‘alreet’”), “food habits of the North American Negro,” the various grades of Negro hair, and other stereotyped aspects of black American rural and urban cultures. In identifying the anthropological “probers” by name, Burley targets Ruth Benedict, Gene Weltfish, Ralph Linton, and Margaret Mead, all of whom (in addition to Melville Herskovits) were associated with Columbia University and the Franz Boas school of anthropology. The piece ends with a stark assessment of anthropology’s alienation from the day-to-day survival of those whom it claims to study: “Anthropology is a heluva subject in that all you gotta do is to look out the window at the nearest zoot suit or drape shape and write what you think is on his mind as he dodges streetcars, police, his gal’s old man, crumbling walls of rotten tenements, jumps out of windows in the middle of the night.
to keep from being burned up, and runs like hell all the time to get out of the dangerous shadow of his own color!”

Burley’s unraveling of social science’s pretensions by situating it in the language and world of the dispossessed further reveals a perspective of suspicion, if not complete indifference toward, claims of scientific research on black American culture, society, and history. One of Burley’s readers, Ollie Okala, whose husband, Julius Okala, had worked as Richard Waterman’s informant at Northwestern University starting in 1941, wrote to the columnist, thanking him for addressing topics that are “concerned with the very core of our lives.” She described his satirical entry on anthropologists as outstanding and a masterpiece, and disclosed that it made her husband, an anthropologist himself, “do some thinking!” These insights provide yet more examples of anthropology’s problematic standing among both its practitioners and its subjects of research, which Dunham experienced and encountered herself while conducting research in Jamaica and Haiti (see chapter 1).

Following her success in the Broadway show *Cabin in the Sky*, Dunham began to lecture and write about the tricky place her anthropological training and dance research occupied in her dancing and choreographies, attempting, it seemed, to close the gap that separated, as we have seen, anthropology from the day-to-day life of black Americans. Meanwhile, she criticized reporters for exaggerating the distinctions between her training “in the awesome science of anthropology” and her success in the “popular art of Broadway dancing,” rather than recognizing the “synthesis between them,” which her former professors refused to recognize as well. But even her producer, Sol Hurok, could not resist referring to her “split personality”: “She is,” he stated in his memoir, “a quite superb combination of exoticism and intellectuality.” In fact, it seems that Dunham began to foster this dilemma in her production’s programs and in her press releases in order to create a liminal space between the authentic and interpretive for her choreographies, particularly her Caribbean and Latin American dances, to reside. What we read, then, in the reception of Dunham’s performances of *Heat Wave*, *Tropical Revue*, and *Bal nègre* are reviews that are as much the writer’s reiteration of Dunham’s promotional material as their own impressions of the company’s performances. In terms of publicity, Dunham’s tactic worked, but in regard to her universalist philosophy of Negro dance, it on occasion backfired, sometimes even in ways that raised questions about the ethics of her representations of black dance music of the Caribbean.

The Dunham troupe premiered *Heat Wave: From Haiti to Harlem*, produced by Sol Hurok, at the Chez Paree nightclub in Chicago in June 1943 and then took the revue to New York City, where it premiered in September and ran
for eight successful weeks at the Martin Beck Theatre on Broadway.\textsuperscript{55} Also in July the film \textit{Stormy Weather}, starring Lena Horne, Bill Robinson, Cab Calloway, and Katherine Dunham, premiered in New York City to very positive reviews.\textsuperscript{56} Riding the wave of \textit{Stormy Weather}'s popularity, \textit{Heat Wave} also garnered positive reviews, but little mention was made of the revue's satirical underpinnings. Will Davidson, writing for the \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, described the “tropical motif” of the first part as a “gay, kaleidoscopic concert of native movements decorated with humor and exuberance,” and the second part as “jive in its glory—insolent Barrel House, the imaginative and delightful Honky Tonk Train.”\textsuperscript{57} Davidson described Jack Marshall, who played the emcee for the Chicago production, as a “crowd pleaser for sure, with his rubber face and his speedy, sure delivery. He's good fun, and a safe bet for Chez Paree fame.” According to another article, Mead Lux Lewis, whom Blesh wrote about extensively and who also performed at Hammond's first \textit{From Spirituals to Swing} concert, was the featured boogie-woogie pianist for the troupe's tour of the West Coast that summer.\textsuperscript{58}

Then for the revue's opening on Broadway's Martin Beck Theatre, Hurok and Dunham decided to change the revue's title to \textit{Tropical Revue}.\textsuperscript{59} In his attempt to further fashion the production for Broadway audiences, Hurok had Dunham drop the role of the emcee and, with that, the revue's satirical undoing of anthropology's and jazz criticism's power of representation. As Hurok explained, “It did not take me long to discover the public was more interested in sizzling scenery than it was in anthropology, at least in the theatre. Since the \textit{Tropical Revue} was fairly highly budgeted, it was necessary for us, in order to attract the public, to emphasize sex over anthropology.”\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, the company's weekly operating costs were on average $13,500, and thus Dunham, according to Hurok, supported his proposed changes to the program and its overall theme.\textsuperscript{61} The program now shifted focus to its variety of Haitian, Cuban, Brazilian, and American Negro dance numbers, and Hurok and Dunham hired popular musical acts performing in various nightclubs throughout the city to boost the program's featured entertainment. They included the Leonard Ware Trio, who also provided the music for the blues and boogie-woogie portions of the program; Bobby Capo, who was listed in the original script as a featured vocalist but joined the cast in October to sing “Callate” and “Choro” during part 1's Latin American music and dance portion; and the Original Dixieland Band, which was also listed in the original script but joined the cast for its opening in Philadelphia in January 1944.\textsuperscript{62} Through the end of the revue's run in May 1945, Hurok and Dunham continued to revise the program, replacing, for example, Dunham's Haitian dance-influenced “Rites de Passage” with her
ballet in three parts, *L’ag’ya*, which her troupe had originally premiered in 1938 (see figures 1.3 and 1.4).  

John Martin, for one, was critical of the revue’s Broadway production, suggesting that Dunham had “sacrificed” commentary and integrity to “conform to what Broadway expects the Negro dance to be.” Indeed, as Dunham’s company took *Tropical Revue* on tour, both black and white newspapers ran advertisements and reviews in which the revue’s intended exotic and sexual themes were highlighted, while her anthropological credentials were also foregrounded. Examples of titles of reviews included “Katherine Dunham Learned Voodoo from Natives” and “Dunham Revue Is Altered, but It Still Sizzles.” The articles themselves reprinted highly exoticized stories of Dunham’s activities in the field with the “secretive peoples of the West Indies,” her participation in “voodoo ceremonies” and “uninhibited African-born dances,” and her having “black magic spells” performed “over her in graveyards.” And the dancing and music itself were described as being “from African primitive to boogie woogie,” “music that spills from jungle drums, from the Dixieland Jazz band,” “‘L’Ag’ya, the voodoo number from French Martinique,” and “a musical heatwave from the south of the equator to north of jive!”  

Dunham’s *Tropical Revue* excited in most critics the practice of seeing, hearing, and feeling the exotic and erotic from bodies racialized as black. But what if we disalienated Dunham’s and her dancers’ movements from such practices (or machines), attempting to conceive for example, *L’Ag’ya* not as an object of anthropological study or an artistic interpretation of primitive black dance but rather as flows of movement and sound? In the previous two chapters such practices and their effects—as generated, for example, in observing comparsas on the streets of Havana, listening to the “chillingly weird” numbers on Dunham’s Decca records, or in performing the African native and American Negro ancestor by Modupe Paris—were attributed to the conceptual equipment at hand, listening in the subjective assurance of modernity, and the performativity of race of these occasions. Only by reconstituting the temporal and spatial distances disavowed in the exoticism and eroticism of *l’ag’ya*, as performed either by Martinicans or Dunham’s troupe can we then attribute the perceived distances in historical time and geographic space to modernity’s practices of observing, listening, and embodying in order to finally get at the flows of movement and sound coming from the bodies depicted in figures 1.3 and 1.4, bodily moving in sound that modernist dance critics Edwin Denby and John Martin indeed attempted to capture in writing.  

Yet, even though Dunham’s work as scientist and artist prioritized movement in sound, she simultaneously operated accordingly to maximize her profitabil-
ity from modernity’s racial, gendered, and capitalist machines. To wit, one reporter simply congratulated Dunham for turning “an anthropological fellowship into irresistible box office.” Indeed, the changes Hurok and Dunham made to *Tropical Revue* enabled it to run for fifty-seven weeks and make a net profit of over $250,000, a large portion of which Dunham used to open her Dunham School of Dance and Theatre in Manhattan in September 1945. Although hers was not the first interracial dance school, the Dunham School certainly distinguished itself by virtue of its far-reaching and innovative curricula and degree programs—which it prominently listed on its advertisements (figure 4.1)—not to mention the fact that the director was a black American woman. For by 1946 the school (which was also called the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research) included a Department of Cultural Studies and an Institute for Caribbean Research, along with the Dunham School of Dance and Theater. Employing a faculty of over twenty instructors, the school offered elementary, master graduate, and professional certificates in the fields of dance, drama, and primitive cultures. While the aim of the school’s curricula was to foster a “new way of doing art [and] of looking at peoples and cultures,” its connection with Dunham’s professional company, according to Dunham herself, served as a “model to the student as well as an incentive for those who otherwise might be inclined to doubt a career in the performing arts, particularly in the social structure existing in America.”

In addition to the opening of Dunham’s school, her new production, a musical drama titled *Carib Song*, played at the Adelphi Theater on Broadway on September 25, after premiering on August 30 in New Haven, Connecticut. World War II had just ended on August 15, and Dunham’s performance and teaching careers seemed to be flourishing. *Carib Song* closed after only eight weeks, however, and Dunham had to soon mount another production to generate additional revenue to keep her school open. She began to solicit potential producers as early as January 1946. Eventually, she secured Nelson Gross and Daniel Melnick to produce *Bal nègre* and began rehearsals in August, but not before writing several drafts of the script. Following the revue format, which she felt had been the most successful for her company, Dunham proposed that *Bal nègre* be produced at a larger scale than *Tropical Revue*. It was to be set in three acts, and many of the dance numbers (e.g., “Nanigo,” “Choro,” “Haitian Roadside,” “Shango,” and “L’ag’ya”) had been performed in *Tropical Revue, Heat Wave*, and even earlier productions. According to one report, Dunham had set a goal of grossing $1.5 million from *Bal nègre* to help fund her school. Thus, along with proposing “expert staging,” “expert costuming,” and original music, she planned for the revue to feature virtuoso musicians, native drummers
and instrumentalists, and additional featured groups. One of the featured musicians was to be “Cuban drum virtuoso” Chano Pozo, whom she proposed to feature in the second part of “Haitian Roadside.” As mentioned in previous chapters, Pozo had achieved national and international recognition by 1941 as a percussionist, composer, and stage entertainer. It should be no surprise, therefore, that Dunham planned to feature him playing multiple conga drums as he “furnishe[d] the accompaniment for ‘Primitive Rhythms B,’” the choreography for which consisted of a “pas de quatre, pas de deux, ensemble variations, etc.” A revised version of the script indicates that Dunham eventually replaced two featured musicians, Pozo and Bobby Capo, with another, Gilberto Valdés, whom Dunham hired as the orchestra director. In addition to directing, Valdés con-
tributed several of his compositions, including “Ilé-nko Ilé-nbe,” which was featured as the revue’s overture.76

After premiering to very positive reviews on September 13, 1946, at the Schubert Theatre in Philadelphia, Bal nègre opened in New Haven before playing at the Belasco Theatre in New York City for six weeks in November and December. Predictably, reviewers writing for both black and white newspapers and periodicals characterized Dunham as a scientific researcher of primitive dance and a sultry dancer of film and the Broadway stage—the “Dunham schizophrenia,” as John Martin put it.77 These same writers described the dancing, accordingly, as flashy, undulating, highly sexed, and orgiastic, while they characterized the dance numbers as interpretive or authentic. In either case, they regarded the dances as primitive or modern, referring to the former as a “frenzied jubilee of uninhibited tropical passions,” and to the latter as “jive.”78 Other reviewers noted that parts 1 and 2 of the three-part revue featured songs sung mostly in Spanish and whose setting was exclusively the West Indies. The part 3, on the other hand, evoked nostalgic commentary on the golden age of 1920s jazz.79

Rarely did reviewers assess the social significance of the actual dancing and music of Dunham’s productions. One rare example was Dan Burley, who in his “Back Door Stuff” column dating back to 1943 made the following telling assessment: “Katherine Dunham is today to dancing what Duke Ellington has been to swing music. The importance of what she is doing cannot be minimized. That is why she has been accepted so widely as the ultimate in Negro dancers and choreographers. What she doesn’t do is more important, in a sense, than what she does, for Katherine Dunham and her dancers never seem to overexert themselves as might be expected. Instead, their art is so subtle and expressive that even the twitch of a shoulder or the wink of an eye can speak volumes.”80 Burley’s assertion that the dancers “never seem to overexert themselves as might be expected” represents an intentional foil to the exoticized and eroticized reportage of almost all of the other critics, much of which derived from Dunham’s own promotional material. For what Burley achieves here is not unlike Edwin Denby’s assessment of Asadata Dafora’s company, a kind of meditation on their bodies’ most subtle movements that enabled a critique of the capacity of exoticism and eroticism to temporalize and spatialize individuals out of their present situations. Indeed, Burley does not attribute such powerfully subtle movements to any one category of dance, whether West Indian or American Negro, primitive or modern, authentic or interpretive. Rather, it seems as though he was able to listen past the sonic signifiers employed by Dunham’s musicians, including the “native” drummers, to accompany these varying
dances while at the same time analyze their movements past the textual signifiers in the programs, not to mention their racialized and sexed bodies. Denby himself commented on the “provocative and yet discreet” and modest character of Dunham’s dancing and the overall “pelvic litheness” of her dancers in her production, demonstrating in no uncertain terms his modernist predilections for abstracting meaning from movement and not the racialized body itself.

However, Burley does not say much about the musicality of Dunham’s movements (as Denby did of Dafora’s dancers) except to equate her with Duke Ellington in terms of their importance to Negro dance and music, respectively. As jazz historians today readily credit Ellington for helping to develop jazz as an art form, dance scholars similarly credit Dunham for having established Negro dance as a black self-represented modern art form. Burley’s and Denby’s assessments thus represent two rare examples whereby Dunham’s and her dancers’ self-identificatory aspirations in movement were recognized. For most other critics, audiences, and even her promoters at the time, Dunham’s work continued to provoke mixed and contradictory reactions. For instance, by the time of its New York premiere, Dunham’s producers Gross and Melnick promoted Bal nègre as “A Musical Revue of Caribbean Exotica.” Previously, in New Haven, they had promoted the production as a “torrid, sexy attraction,” to which Dunham objected and about which she complained publicly, threatening to walk out if her promoters did not change their advertising style. An article published in the Chicago Defender quoted Dunham stating, “I hate this kind of advertising. My show is a serious and artistic study of native Negro dances. The only thing torrid and sexy about the revue is the dirty minds of those customers who come to see sex.” Perhaps Dunham’s public rebuke of her producers’ advertising methods was a promotional tactic itself given that Tropical Revue and Bal nègre did indeed feature dances such as “Barrel House” whose intentions were in part erotic.

But the most damning criticism of Dunham came from Ezra Goodman, a film critic who happened to write a review of Bal nègre for the January 1947 volume of Dance magazine. While we can attribute his opinion that Dunham was “an inferior dancer” for “not using her body in a vital, creative pattern of movements” to a flawed or narrow application of modern dance aesthetics (compare with Denby’s modernist assessments of Dunham’s and Dafora’s dancing), Goodman’s accusation that Dunham was “exploiting the ethnic of a people” was in fact a fair question. In citing her credentials as an anthropologist, author, and educator, he asserts that Dunham has the obligation to be the “custodian of a minority people’s folkways.” “In a world troubled by suspicion, ignorance and intolerance,” he continues, “her role as a dancer-sociologist
could constitute her a true ambassador of the arts.” Instead, he concludes, “Miss Dunham has seen fit to . . . dish up an ethnic without ethic, to turn her material into voodoo-jungle frenzies in Hollywood’s best Technicolor tradition.” Goodman’s review provoked impassioned letters to the editor of Dance magazine condemning his accusations and defending Dunham’s “transformations” of her “raw material” as her “privilege as an artist.” It was Goodman’s article, furthermore, that compelled Dorathi Bock Pierre, the administrative director of the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research, to write the article “Katherine Dunham: Cool Scientist or Sultry Performer?” for the May volume of Dance, for which she interviewed Dunham. In the article, Pierre affirms that Dunham is both a “torrid, sultry performer” and a “cool, analytical scientist,” but, more importantly, she is, quoting Dunham, “only interested in dance as an education, as a means of knowing peoples, and I want students who want to learn and have a desire to develop peoples and tastes.”

Goodman’s critique and the letters to the editor raise what at first appears to constitute the two opposing types of theater in Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of performance, the theater of representation and the theater of presence. The latter attends to the escaping of institutionalized representation namely by depending on the purposeful disruptions to this kind of representation generated in the actions of repetition and variations themselves. Key to the ethics of Deleuze’s theater of presence is the subtraction of not merely representations of power but also actual representation itself as power, the actions of which bring the performers and audiences closer to the real. In short, it is difference generated in the act of repetition, according to Deleuze, wherein the “real” or, better yet, perception of sameness resides. Dunham’s most successful actions toward creating a theater of presence, wherein her company exposed anthropology’s and jazz criticism’s power to represent as power itself, took hold in their earliest performances of Heat Wave: From Haiti to Harlem, before she and Hurok replaced anthropological satire with sex. But even then, the sameness desired by Goodman and most other spectators of Dunham’s productions resided not in the minority people’s ethnic or folkways to be represented on stage but rather in their desiring of sameness or authenticity itself. Dunham was correct when she located the sex attributed to her productions in none other than “the dirty minds of those customers who come to see sex.” Goodman, it seemed, went to see the ethnic of a minority people and thus did not see and hear Dunham’s re-presentings of her own experiences in the world, re-presentations in which she actively muddled the distinctions between her scientist and performer selves. She, as did Pearl Primus and Zora Neale Hurston, found such tactics not only useful but necessary as an American Negro woman.
But not all of Dunham’s spectators fell into representation’s epistemological straitjacket as did Goodman. Richard A. Long, a black student at Temple University, was inspired to represent the affectivity of Dunham’s performance in *Bal nègre* in a poem he titled “Dance Movements”:

> Shorn of the impedimenta of time and place,  
> Rhythm is abstracted, color-inlaid,  
> Fused with pulse-urgency.  
> The jungle path is thick and dark.  
> Passion alone is the swift spark  
> That can send light racing across  
> Thick, vine-entangled fern, and moss.  
> Passion, long compressed, is now free  
> Sweeping a sirocco through me.  
> Subtle the speech of forms now still, now wind-gyrated,  
> Subtle the beat of the drum,  
> Subtle the path the dancer insinuates before my eye.\(^\text{90}\)

The poem’s references to Africa are indeed subtle; moreover, we can observe Long’s sense of equilibrium and freedom in his own temporal present. We need only read the first line to be convinced that what Long was expressing at the moment is what Fanon intended to capture with his notion of disalienation. Long’s poem, therefore, joins Dunham’s, Burley’s, and the Okalas’ recognitions of the dislodgments of racialized subjects, whether within the domains of anthropology or entertainment, and it is these recognitions that embody the kinds of action that Fanon theorized as having the capacity to rectify one’s presence in modernity’s present. As we will see in the next section, the pervasive and pernicious dislodgments of the racialized subject’s present condition also swelled from the very histories and agents of freedom themselves.

**Freedom from the Pathology of Freedom**

As discussed in chapter 3, the decolonization movement led by African activists in the United States intensified after delegates to the United Nations Conference on International Organization in 1945 failed to guarantee a plan for the decolonization of Africa. In addition to Asadata Dafora and the African Academy of Arts and Research, other activists and organizations worked continuously to raise awareness of European colonialism in Africa by linking decolonization to the domestic struggle for civil rights. Among these organizations was the Council on African Affairs, whose rallies calling for the liberation of the
“oppressed people of Africa and other imperialist-dominated lands” received the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Leonard Bernstein, black American ministers, and other public figures. But the joint actions taken to realize decolonization and civil rights were not always successful, due in no small measure to the emergence of Cold War politics. In the months leading up to the House Un-American Activities Committee’s opening hearings in October 1947, Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other black activists publically denounced government proposals to outlaw the Communist Party as a fascist measure threatening American Negroes and other minorities, while they also held rallies in support of African decolonization. Then the annual “Negro Freedom Rally” at Madison Square Garden took place on June 16 and was to include Nigerian nationalist leader Nnamdi Azikiwe. However, Azikiwe pulled out after members of the Universal Africa Nationalist Movement protested the rally, accusing it of being “communist dominated.” The African Academy of Arts and Research, which had sponsored the rally in past years, also disavowed any involvement with the 1947 rally. According to one report, organizers of the “Negro Freedom Rally” in turn denounced the African protesters’ “black nationalism” and accused them of protesting the rally’s inclusion of white speakers.

Whereas the strain in the coalition among American Negro civil rights and African anticolonial activists emerged in part from the divisive forces of domestic Cold War politics, Liberia’s centennial of July 26, 1947, entailed a renewed yet no less ambivalent articulation of African and black American cooperation to a shared history steeped in slavery, freedom, nation building, and modernity. The week before the “Negro Freedom Rally,” on June 7, the National Committee for the American Celebration of Liberia’s Centennial, representatives of the Liberian government, and the Liberian Centennial Commission met in Washington, DC, to plan for the West African republic’s centennial celebration. The three-person American committee consisted of William Dawson, a black Democratic congressman from Illinois; Perry Howard of the National Republican Committee of Mississippi; and Frank Stanley, president of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association. An executive committee for the centennial’s American organization included Mary McLeod Bethune, Charles S. Johnson, and Rayford Logan, while in the preceding weeks, invitations to join a committee at large had been offered to Marian Anderson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, Lionel Hampton, George Schuyler, Duke Ellington, and other black leaders in politics, education, and entertainment.

In addition to discussing plans for the celebrations in both countries, the American committee announced three commissions, for composers Duke Ellington and James E. Dorsey and poet Melvin G. Tolson, whose works celebrating
the centennial were to be premiered and broadcast live on July 26. Ellington accepted the commission at a public ceremony, where he was photographed with Moss H. Kendrix (executive secretary of the National Committee), Ruth Spencer (president of the Baker’s Dozen Youth Center in Washington, DC), and Willis Conover (WWDC radio announcer), but he would not premiere his new composition, Liberian Suite, until December.

Into his third decade as an orchestra leader, composer, and recording artist, Ellington continued to maneuver strategically in and around the paradoxical strictures of the jazz industry, especially in regard to critics’ identifications of his music with “jungle jazz,” swing, modern jazz, or, in Rudi Blesh’s opinion, “ridiculous and pretentious,” “hollow and stagy” jazz. Ellington instead staked his and his music’s identity on the stability implied in the New Negro ideal of self-identification such that his and his musicians’ aesthetic principles of creating “authentic Negro music” were inspired not by prescribed definitions of swing or jazz but rather by, as he stated, “our lives, and the lives of those about us, and those that went before us.” Ellington’s understanding of American Negro history indeed carried a deep significance in his formulation of his ideals and principles, as his following statement from 1932 further attests: “The music of my race is something more than the ‘American idiom.’ It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we could not say openly we expressed in music, and what we know as ‘Jazz’ is something more than just dance music.”

Africa, on the other hand, seemed to occupy an elusive, even contradictory place in his formulations of his ideals and principles. At various times in his career Ellington proclaimed, “Jazz had its origin in Africa” (1931), “Even the Negroid element in jazz turns out to be less African than American” (1947), or “After writing African music for 35 years, here I am at last in Africa!” (1966). In reality, he knew who his audience was, whether he was performing or giving interviews, such that we can attribute the inconsistencies of these statements, respectively, to inquiries about his music’s evolution, to his music’s legitimization among music educators, and to his presence in Senegal at the invitation of president Léopold Sédar Senghor. His engagements with African history in his actual music showed similar instances of ambivalence, if strategically so.

From as early as 1930 Ellington planned to compose a multimovement piece narrating the “history of the Negro,” beginning in Africa. According to one early report, the music was to take the “Negro from Egypt, going with him to savage Africa, and from there to the sorrow and slavery of Dixie, and finally ‘home to Harlem.’” By 1933 he conceived of the piece as a suite in five parts, titled “Africa,” “The Slave Ship,” “The Plantation,” “Harlem,” and a finale.
Brian Priestley and Alan Cohen suggest, his plans for a “negro suite” in five parts eventually materialized as *Black, Brown and Beige*, which Ellington described as a “tone parallel” of the history of the Negro in the United States, but not after reportedly admitting in 1941 that he was “having trouble in representing the Negro American as he is today, what he wants, what he’s got, what he’s tried to get and didn’t, how he is going to get it.”

The Ellington orchestra premiered *Black, Brown and Beige* in Carnegie Hall on January 23, 1943. Besides forming a prominent part of Ellington’s oeuvre, *Black, Brown and Beige*, including his earliest plans for the work, joined Sallie W. Stewart’s *Ethiopia Lifts as She Climbs* (1933), *O, Sing a New Song* (1934), and the many other pageant-like performances of American Negro history in which Modupe Paris, Katherine Dunham, Asadata Dafora, and others participated. It is important to note that the first part of the “Brown” section of the tone parallel included what Ellington described as a dedication to the “700 Negroes who came from Haiti to save Savannah, Georgia during the Revolutionary War, so we call it ‘The West Indian influence.’” He marked this “West Indian influence” by using a *tresillo*, or “Latin” rhythm, for this section’s rhythmic and melodic phrasing. The Carnegie Hall concert’s program notes added that this “West Indian influence” was an “important one to the whole Negro character.”

Whereas Ellington’s inclusion of Haiti lent his tone parallel of Negro history a hemispheric dimension, the absence of Africa suggests otherwise. Indeed, performances of the African slave and the native savage, as we saw in the previous chapter, entailed difficult ideological, political, and social consequences, particularly for black Americans such as Paul Robeson, which might explain why Ellington chose to leave Africa out of *Black, Brown and Beige*’s programmatic narrative. Would representing Liberian history in music pose similar challenges to Ellington’s ideals and principles as those confronted by Robeson and others?

Liberia, the sole republic of West Africa, held a precarious, complex, and conflicted place in the thinking of most American Negro and non–Liberian African intellectuals and political leaders. In his memoir *Music Is My Mistress* (1973), Ellington states that the “moods and rhythms” of the five movements in his *Liberian Suite* “were related to what I knew of the Liberian past and present.” What he knew of Liberia at the time of his commission was in no doubt shaped by the propaganda generated by the National Committee for the American Celebration of Liberia’s Centennial as well as by the Liberian government itself. It is also very likely that he had come across what Alain Locke, George Schuyler, and others had written about Liberia in the early 1930s, perhaps even what Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois had also written in the 1920s—
all of whom attempted to grapple with Liberia’s social and political standing within the context of European colonialism and American imperialism.

“By an irony too tragic to dwell on, a small black republic, itself founded in 1847 under anti-slavery auspices as an asylum from American slavery, has just been pilloried in the stocks of world opinion as an internationally indicted slave-holder and oppressor of labor.”108 This is how Locke began his essay “Slavery in the Modern Manner” (1931), in which he commented on the findings of the League of Nations’ International Commission on Forced Labor in Liberia published in 1930. After years of rumors, complaints, and investigations concerning the forced export of native Liberian laborers to the Spanish island of Fernando Po, the League of Nations, with the approval of the Liberian government, commissioned a three-man committee to investigate any such practices. The committee, consisting of sociologist Charles S. Johnson, British medical doctor Cuthbert Christy, and former Liberian president Arthur Barclay, did indeed find that some government elected officials and appointees under the administration of president Charles D. B. King, with the collusion of some native chiefs, had forced laborers to work on government projects and had plotted with the Firestone Company to forcibly export laborers. Among the elected officials who were indicted was senator (and future president) W. V. S. Tubman.109 For his part, George Schuyler went on assignment to Liberia in early 1931 for the New York Evening Post, and the articles and editorials he wrote there were also published in the Washington Post, the Afro-American, the Pittsburgh Courier, the Philadelphia Tribune, and other newspapers, both black and white, across the United States.110 Schuyler reported on slave labor, sex slaves, native children who had been pawned, and the tributes exacted of natives, attributing these practices to Liberian officials in Monrovia, and he complained that, first, these officials were blocking reforms mandated by the International Commission, and, second, the largely black American missionaries in Liberia remained “silent on Liberian outrages.”

Marcus Garvey, in 1924, had already criticized what he called the Americo-Liberian oligarchy in Monrovia for its exploitation of native Liberians and obstruction of his plans to realize Liberia as the black Zion, whereas Du Bois, even after traveling to Liberia beginning in 1923, perpetuated what many black Americans believed and what Ibrahim Sundiata described as a “mythic Africa visualized from the Diaspora and projected back onto the continental reality.”111 Writing in 1924, Du Bois praised the virtues of both city life in Monrovia and native life of the bush. Liberia, in symbolizing the whole of Africa, was for Du Bois the “Spiritual Frontier of human kind,” where “life is slow . . . life slows down . . . a civilization without coal, without noise,” all the while ignoring
the nation’s caste system, which marked Americo-Liberians as the politically dominant ethnic minority in Monrovia, who exerted their power over the nation’s native populations which included the Vai, Kpelle, Gola, Grebo, Kru, and others. By the time the International Commission report and Schuyler’s articles were published in 1930 and 1931, Du Bois as well as Locke, Azikiwe, and others were careful to attribute Liberia’s troubled situation not merely to government corruption but also to economic imperialism, which, they all argued, affected much of the world, not only Africa and not only the colonial world. The United States, too, practiced forced labor within its territories as well as in Liberia by virtue of the role that the Firestone Company played in Liberia’s forced labor practices. Economic freedom was linked directly to personal freedom, and thus colonialism and imperialism, not to mention Jim Crowism, were in their view merely clandestine modern forms of slavery. They argued all of this as bulwarks against the racist exploitation of the Liberian situation as proof of the inability of the “black man’s incapacity for self-government,” an argument that had also been used in rationalizing the American occupation of Haiti starting in 1915.

Liberia represented yet another African past for some black Americans and Americo-Liberians alike, a past whose consummation in the resettlement in West Africa of freed American and African slaves beginning in the early nineteenth century was invoked and celebrated in the discourse of the nation’s centennial. The discursive formation of this more distant yet equally troubled past, centering on the notion of a common ancestry of black Americans and Americo-Liberians, can be attributed to the “mythic Africa” upheld among some black Americans as well as to the Liberian government’s ongoing efforts to repair and reconstitute its image following the 1930 and 1931 reports. Ellington’s press agent and adherent to jazz’s progressive and modernist purview, Leonard Feather, wrote the program notes for the Carnegie Hall concert in which Liberian Suite premiered. Both his and Ellington’s descriptions of the suite, along with contemporaneous Liberian and American reports surrounding the centennial, and the wording of his commission itself suggest that all parties were in concert with representing the Ameri- lo-Liberian elite—and not Liberia’s native populations—as the brethren of black Americans, and Liberia as the beacon of colonized nations in and beyond Africa aspiring to democratic self-rule.

In its official commission, dated June 7, 1947, the National Committee for the American Celebration of Liberia’s Centennial made clear its rationale for choosing Ellington to compose a musical tribute to the centenary. The commission celebrates Ellington as a “composer and proponent of modern musical
development” whose musical works “embrace the toils and struggles of mankind.” The commission mandated that Ellington “prepare a musical score depicting the inception and national growth of this member of the World Family of Nations.” In the days leading up to the premiere of Liberian Suite, newspapers published excerpts of the concert’s press release, which described the piece, accordingly, as a “serious study with themes depicting the growth and development of the small West African republic.” At least one report included the following brief historical fact of Liberia’s founding—it was “first settled as a colony by American Negroes in 1822.” Thus, Ellington’s commissioned composition was to be a modernist work representing the nation’s progress from its founding by freed American slaves to its current status as a modern African republic. At the time of the premiere of his Black, Brown and Beige, Ellington characterized his band as the “only serious exponents of Negro music.” We might thus situate Liberian Suite as a product of his aesthetic principles based not on European models of composition, an inference made from his other extended compositions that he had always disavowed, but rather on his and his musicians’ commitment to self-identification based on their lived experiences as Negro men. But Ellington’s convictions, musical or otherwise, were often ironic by design, which was as much an expression of his New Negro ideals and aesthetic principles as his putting into action his belief that what he was unable to say openly could be expressed in music.

In the program for the Carnegie Hall concerts of December 26 and 27, Leonard Feather quotes Ellington’s own explanation of Liberian Suite’s intentions, in which he creates through a use of subtle irony the rhetorical space to simultaneously celebrate Liberia’s centennial and disavow the nation’s official historical narrative of freedom, national unity, and progress:

This is the spirit in which the republic of Liberia was founded. In this work we salute a group of people who decided to go to Africa and set up a government. They sailed away, with little more than hope to spur them on, and the land they had bought and paid for had to be fought for, inch by inch, as hostile tribes were encountered. But in 1847 they established themselves and were recognized by the major powers of the world as a nation. So today, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Liberia, we interpret the event musically in a gay spirit of celebration.

The spirit in which Liberia was founded and developed was in fact one of hope and hostilities, beneficence and aggression, international recognition and condemnation. As the Monrovia newspaper the Liberian Age retold the story in
the months leading up to the centenary, the black colonists who founded Liberia were sponsored by the American Colonization Society, and up until the time of the presidency of Hilary R. M. Johnson (1884–1891), American-born Liberians filled the chief executive chair. The American Colonization Society was formed in the United States in 1816 by a group of abolitionists and proponents of slavery in order to resettle free blacks in Africa; as Claude A. Clegg III explains, however, this unlikely coalition of Americans pursued resettlement for freed blacks for divergent beliefs, including that blacks could not attain true liberty in a white dominated society, and that free blacks posed a threat to the regime of slavery in slave states.

The “group of people” that Ellington referred to as establishing the nation of Liberia were eighty-eight free American blacks who, under the auspices of agents of the American Colonization Society and, by extension, the American government, purchased by force from a native chief Cape Mesurado (current-day Monrovia) on the West African coast in 1822. For the next few decades, the black American colonists who continued to receive freed blacks from the United States battled malaria, extreme weather conditions, and so-called hostile tribes, namely, the Dei and Gola, as they established by force additional settlements along the coast. All the while the black American colonists differentiated themselves in language, religion, dress, and social organization, which Clegg III and Yekutiel Gershoni argue served as their rationale for claiming racial and cultural superiority over neighboring native African populations, whom they regarded as heathens and uncivilized. Thus, their shared sense of community and citizenship rested on a sense of a providential purpose in the civilizing experiment they were undertaking, a worldview that drove the black American colonists toward declaring their independence in 1847. Over the next one hundred years, the Liberian Age proclaimed, “there is not recorded one revolution within her borders, administrations have thru the ages peacefully assumed the reins of government. . . . Liberia has been very fortunate to have leaders for the moment and they have been all God fearing men receiving the respect of the international world.” In reality, between 1884 and 1946, native chiefs did not have representation in the legislature, a policy that was initiated by the nation’s first president born in Liberia, Hilary R. M. Johnson, but reversed by president William V. S. Tubman in time for the nation’s centenary.

Returning to the concert program notes, the following paragraph gives more insight into Ellington’s conception of Liberian Suite and, in so doing, further indication as to his wishes for perhaps not the Liberian nation but instead its native populations, who had suffered under the tyranny of Americo-Liberian
domination: “The work comprises five dances—parallel, says Duke, with the four freedoms ‘and the fifth that we hope for.’ The five parts are punctuated by a device borrowed from Billy Strayhorn, linking the movements together” (my emphasis). Here we see that Ellington reaffirms the shared demands of civil rights and freedom from colonial oppression that K. O. Mbadiwe and many other African and black American leaders had invoked as well. His reference to Franklin Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms (freedom of speech, religion, from want, and from fear) is his most forthright reflection on Liberia’s one-hundred-year history, about which the official Liberian narrative also commented, including in regard to the recently guaranteed rights granted to its native citizens. In anticipation of the arrival of foreign dignitaries and visitors to Monrovia to participate in centenary celebrations, the Liberian Age published two articles, “We Welcome You—Meet Our President” and “The Tubman Administration 1944–1947,” in which were listed all of President Tubman’s recent legislative accomplishments, including guaranteeing all citizens the right to employment, securing congressional seats for “three Representatives purely natives from the hinterland,” and women’s suffrage. It is important to note, however, that these articles, while praising President Tubman’s progressive policies, also congratulated the nation for “having all but completely conquered the jungle wilderness” and referred to native Liberians as the “uncivilized element,” indicating that the Americo-Liberian ontological worldview of the nineteenth century as modern civilization’s purveyors in Africa remained unbroken.

So, then, how free did Ellington believe Liberia’s native populations to really be? What was the fifth freedom that he hoped for? Did the answers to these questions have anything to do with Strayhorn’s musical device or devices linking together the suite’s five parts? In programmatically reading the music of Liberian Suite as performed at its premiere Carnegie Hall concerts, and its reception, several possible answers to these questions emerge. The roughly thirty-minute suite opened with the slow ballad “I Like the Sunrise” sung by Al Hibbler, the protagonist of which expresses hope for a bright, new tomorrow in the face of the nighttime’s dreariness. In his introduction to the Liberian Suite at the December 27 concert, Ellington, from the stage, described it as starting with “the spirit in which this small group of people set out to establish a government in Africa.” The song text clearly narrates the kind of hope and struggle experienced by the founders of Liberia, former slaves, but since the lyrics do not contain specific historical references, nor even mention of Liberia, it can also describe any oppressed group’s hopes for a better future, including Liberia’s native populations who remained under the political and ideological yoke of the dominant Americo-Liberian minority. The piece is in aaba thirty-
two-bar song form. After Hibbler’s first verse, the music transitions into a harmonically unstable and dissonant eight-bar interlude featuring Harry Carney’s baritone saxophone solo, the first seven bars of which are based on a pentatonic scale. The dreariness of the “nighttime” is then invoked by particular features in the second verse’s arrangement, the first two sections of which are led by Carney while the orchestra emphasizes every other beat with drawn-out half-note chords. Sonny Greer, meanwhile, strikes every quarter-beat on the floor tom, accentuating the feeling of drudgery not unlike that conveyed in the use of the floor toms in “Work Song” from Black, Brown and Beige.

Recalling Ellington’s enumeration of the suite’s first four dances with Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, “Dance No. 1” is supposed to express the freedom of speech. Read programmatically, however, nothing explicit occurs in any of these instrumental dances to suggest the Four Freedoms. Furthermore, the concert’s program notes describe this first dance as the “building of a nation” and as having, “says Ellington, a sexual beat,” notions that hardly represent the theme of freedom of speech. Rather than only seeking to read such programmatic explanations into the music, we might instead take into account Ellington’s overarching definition of jazz as the “freedom of musical speech” unrestrained by musical form to convey the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of a people.128 He expressed his preference for dissonance, for instance, as one musical device that he believed represented the “Negro’s life”: “Dissonance is our way of life in America. We are something apart yet an integral part.”129 The devices he attributed to his arranger, Billy Strayhorn—dissonant chords along with pentatonic, octatonic, and whole-tone scales—are indeed the most recurring characteristics of Liberian Suite and thus link its otherwise stylistically and structurally distinct movements. As such, the dissonance Ellington attributed to the Negro experience of belonging yet not belonging in the United States can similarly be attributed to the native situation of marginality and disenfranchisement in Liberia. It is, it seems, Ellington’s own career-long resistance to the dominant contingencies of jazz critics, the popular music industry, and the United States’ political economy of race, including black civil rights organizations, that suggests what he hoped for as the fifth freedom, that is, the freedom from freedom’s pathologies, materialized in the context of Liberia as neocolonialism. Such a fifth freedom in the context of Liberian history pertained to the pathology of freedom and time that determined Americo-Liberian and native relations, which Ellington began gesturing toward in the lyrics of and musical devices used in “I Like the Sunrise.”

“Dance No. 1” follows, with Oscar Pettiford’s and Junior Raglin’s bass line descending down a whole-tone scale before settling on a pedal G, at which
point the trumpet and saxophone sections play mostly consecutive inversions of a G7 chord with varying harmonic extensions drawn from the octatonic descending scale played by the trombones. Greer resumes striking every quarter-beat on the floor tom but at a faster tempo compared to the tempo set for “I Like the Sunrise.” Screaming tone clusters played by the trumpet and saxophone sections follow over Greer’s incessant quarter-note beats on the floor tom, conveying a sense of laborious work, as in “building a nation.” After additional whole-tone and octatonic scalar passages, played first by Jimmy Hamilton on the clarinet, followed by other sections of the orchestra, the main section of the dance in ternary form begins, featuring Al Sears’s tenor saxophone over a moderate swing beat executed by Greer and Elaine Jones on timpani, this perhaps being the “sexual beat” referred to as such by Ellington. The A and B sections hover over F minor and B-flat minor chords, respectively, thus lending this dance a harmonically static quality, which may be read to counteract the sense of progress otherwise implicit in the notion of “building a nation.”

“Dance No. 2,” which Ellington described as expressing a “gayer mood,” is in cut time and features clarinetist Hamilton and vibraphonist (and trombonist) Tyree Glenn. The piece is built on two disjointed sections, the first of which is again harmonically static, with the exception of its first two iterations, which include a harmonic and melodic passage built on whole-tone scales. The B section, based on an altered sixteen-bar blues form, is less tonally unpredictable. After Glenn’s extended vibraphone solo, based on the B section’s altered sixteen-bar blues form, the orchestra returns to repeat the B section before playing the outro.

“Dance No. 3” follows, contrasting dramatically in style, which Ellington described as a “sort of Aframantique.” His description’s allusion to blackness and romanticism seems to be borne out in the bass’s habanera rhythmic ostinato and the tango-like arpeggiated figures played on the violin by Ray Nance. In fact, in an earlier handwritten draft of this movement, its title was given as “Rhumba, Dance No. 3,” further indicating that Ellington, as he had done in the “Brown” of Black, Brown and Beige, intended to incorporate the sounds of the Caribbean and Latin America into this tone parallel of Liberian history. Yet no Caribbean or Latin American nation, with the exception of Haiti, factored in Liberian history. In the decades leading up to the colonization of Liberia, Haiti seemed to be the most promising nation to which some freed black Americans aspired to emigrate and, in fact, American abolitionists succeeded in sending freed blacks to both Haiti and Liberia during the 1820s and 1830s. Moreover, black American political leaders and pan-Africanists rose to both Haiti’s and Liberia’s defense in the late 1920s and 1930s, when the former
black republic was under American occupation, while the latter was in danger of falling under foreign occupation as well. Thus, the fact that “rhumba,” the habanera rhythm, and tango are not typically associated with Haitian music did not take away from the more immediate necessity, at least in Ellington’s estimation, of situating Liberian history within a broader Negro history that transcended the structural boundaries of the modern nation-state. In other words, Ellington seemed to be paralleling his music’s freedom from conventional jazz or classical musical forms with the freedom from neocolonialism’s contingencies of official national narratives, not to mention of colonialism and imperialism as well, a gesture indeed toward a fifth freedom from the contingencies of another’s subjective formations in the world.

The concert program describes “Dance No. 4” as a “galloping affair” and quotes Ellington further characterizing this dance as being “full of the velocity of celebration.” After fifteen repetitions of a two-bar ostinato phrase, played in a bright tempo, drummer Greer and timpanist Jones perform solos, which are interspersed with orchestral interludes characterized by simple melodic themes that are harmonized in block chords for the saxophone section. “Dance No. 5” features, according to the program, “an exotic bass figure” along with a signature Ellingtonian wah-wah trombone solo played by Tyree Glenn. For a finale, this dance is set in a seemingly misplaced moderate tempo, with relatively sparse orchestrated material. The “exotic bass figure,” which Ellington doubles on the piano, stresses the tonic, fourth, raised fourth, and fifth of F minor, while rhythmically it is very reminiscent of contemporaneous cubop patterns such as the bass figure in Chano Pozo and Dizzy Gillespie’s “Manteca,” which was recorded the same month as Liberian Suite’s premiere. The bass figure’s exotic quality is amplified by the music’s harmonically unstable and dissonant character. Indeed, this final dance’s harmonic language moves slowly, starting in F minor, to the not so tonally distant but nevertheless dissonant chords F major, D-flat 7, A-flat 7, and C7, which include flat and raised fifths, flat ninths, and sharped sevenths, ninths, and elevenths.

Jazz critics at the time of its premiere paid relatively little attention to the Liberian Suite compared to the wide critical reception Black, Brown and Beige had received. The newspapers that did publish reports on the piece’s premiere nevertheless represented a diverse range of black newsprint media, including mainstream black newspapers (e.g., the New York Amsterdam News and the New Journal and Guide), leftist black newspapers (e.g., the People’s Voice), and African anticolonial newspapers (e.g., the African). In addition to reporting on Ellington’s commission and the premiere concert, these newspapers also covered a luncheon honoring Ellington and hosted by the National Committee for the American
Celebration that took place on the afternoon of December 26. Guest speakers at the gathering included Mary McLeod Bethune; Channing H. Tobias, director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund (an American philanthropic organization that had supported American involvement in instituting Liberian reforms following the 1930 report and during the crisis of Liberian independence); and former Liberian president Charles D. B. King.

After seventeen years the League of Nations’ report of forced labor in Liberia was, according to the Liberian Age, “still green in the minds of Liberians.” For King in particular his resignation from the presidency following the report’s implication of his administration in the scandal was also a source of embarrassment, though he remained within Monrovia’s circle of oligarchic power. Thus he attended both Ellington’s luncheon and the premiere concert as an official representative of the government with the title “First Minister Plenipotentiary of Liberia.” The concert, unfortunately, occurred on the same day that a snowstorm hit New York City, which significantly delayed the concert’s start. Although the event had sold out, reports indicate that only half of the seats were filled. Apart from these logistical challenges, writers complained that the orchestra’s performance was marred by “insufficient rehearsal” and “sadly lacking in fire and technical execution,” while others praised Liberian Suite as adding “another lustrous page to his considerable record of achievements” and being “perhaps the best work from the Ellington pen.” The program allotted time during the second half of the concert for King to deliver a speech in which he presented Ellington with an award on behalf of the Liberian government. In addition to thanking him for his piece, which he described as a “sensitive musical picture of the life and pulse of the Liberian Republic,” King proclaimed that Ellington’s “soul was in Africa.”

Once again, Africa’s multitemporal and -spatial dimensions allowed for the primitive past to coexist alongside the modern present and the future, lending, in King’s case, the ability to extol the nation’s “remarkable progress” while not having “lost sight of the grass roots of the sacred rites of the jungle.” King was not the only audience member to invoke Africa’s temporal and spatial distance in situating the sound of Liberian Suite. The New York Amsterdam News identified the predominant characteristics of the five dances as the “jungle beat and exoticism of primitive emotions.” The same reviewer also complained that the fifth dance’s use of “wow-wow blues [took] the suite from its locale and [placed] it in a medium of early American rag-time with all its banal tricks.” The finale, the reviewer suggests, should have instead concluded with a “note of triumph,” “a chant of exultation and jubilation . . . denoting a new day of freedom and progress for all races and nationalities.”
These assessments of Ellington’s *Liberian Suite* reiterated the kinds of temporal and spatial hypotheses about sound and racialized musicians that as a matter of course observers (both black and white) in Cuba, Africa, and the United States articulated to the notions of progress, the jungle, primitive emotions, and the nation. To be sure, Ellington as well often followed the same logic in reflecting on the history and nature of jazz music. But in relating this final anticlimactic movement, “Dance No. 5,” to a “fifth [freedom] that we hope for,” Ellington staked his relationship to the world via Liberian and African American history on a different logic. None of the anxieties, shame, or even pride having materialized in the embodiments of the African native and black Other explored in the previous chapter pertained to Ellington’s formulation in this regard. Nor could charges of ethical transgression have been made against his participation in the centennial events so long, again, as his formulation of a fifth freedom was concerned, for it bespoke his judgment on the forestalled promise of real political and social progress—that which “we hope for”—for all oppressed people, black Americans and native Liberians alike. Even so, it is not enough to explain the *New York Amsterdam News*’s critique of the fifth dance by claiming that Ellington intentionally reserved such musical tropes of triumph in the pursuit of progress because of Liberia’s history of oppression of its native peoples.

Instead, bringing to bear Günther Anders Sterns’s notion of human action on Ellington’s *assertion* of a fifth freedom restores its phenomenological independence beyond the legitimating limits of philosophical anthropology and epochal or historicist analysis. In other words, his assertion of a fifth freedom (as understood here) has no obvious homologous relationship with the canonical structures of jazz historicism or Ellington’s biography, a fact that helps explain the *Liberian Suite*’s relative obscurity in either canon. Opposed to the universals or generalizing of jazz criticism, white supremacy, New Negro ideology, acculturation theory, African origins, and so forth is, borrowing from Sterns, the “fact of human action.” Ellington’s proposal of a fifth freedom suggests a commentary on what he had always experienced and knew he would continue to experience as the impingement of another’s freedom of being upon his own self-identities, whether such swellings of another’s being in the world irrupted from the jazz industry, New Negro ideology, Africa, progress and modernity, or even American Negro civil rights organizations. His will to obtain freedom from the pathology of, for example, the will of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to freedom is indeed highly paradoxical, yet such a pathology emerged in fairly mundane ways.

Up until 1951, Ellington had maintained a long record of financial and political support for the work of the NAACP, the Council on African Affairs, and
other civil rights and anticolonial organizations. His standing with the NAACP and with many black Americans soured, however, after a series of incidents occurring at two of his concerts brought to the fore, from Ellington’s perspective, the impingements of both segregation and the NAACP’s tactic of boycotting segregated public venues on his performances and livelihood. First, after J. M. Tinsley, the president of the Richmond branch of the NAACP, announced plans to boycott an Ellington orchestra concert that was to take place in January 1951 at the segregated venue the Mosque, Ellington decided to cancel the concert, expressing nevertheless his anger over the local branch’s targeting of concerts featuring black musicians but not white musicians. In that month, not only did the Richmond branch of the NAACP boycott Marian Anderson’s concert at the same segregated location, but Ellington’s orchestra performed at a NAACP benefit concert at the Metropolitan Opera House, an event that reportedly raised fourteen thousand dollars for the civil rights organization’s national office.

Then, later that year, Ellington’s orchestra, along with Sarah Vaughan and Nat King Cole, were booked to perform at the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium. Shortly before the performance was to begin, the concert’s black promoter, J. Neal Montgomery, in placating the demands of white policemen, announced to black ticket holders that they needed to enter the auditorium through a side entrance. In order not to lose the five thousand dollars guaranteed to the musicians, Neal decided not to cancel the concert, but he as well as Ellington, Vaughan, and Cole felt indignant, not merely over the fact of segregation—Ellington and other jazz performers regularly but grudgingly accepted performances at segregated venues—but at the indeterminate way in which the city-owned auditorium’s Jim Crow policy was doled out. According to reports, the last-minute decision to implement segregated access points to the venue was made after more black ticket holders than expected, four thousand in total, arrived at the venue. Only four hundred black ticket holders decided not to go in. After these and surely many more similar incidents of segregation and humiliation, Ellington lashed out to Otis Thompson, an Afro-American reporter, stating that the fight for integration was a “silly thing,” that “nothing can be done” about Jim Crow, and that “we ain’t ready yet.” His inflammatory remarks were published widely and, unsurprisingly, were met with anger and disapproval from many readers. Some editorial writers, however, did come to his defense, blaming, as had Ellington, both the indeterminate enforcement of Jim Crow and the NAACP’s ill-conceived boycotting strategy, which affected black entertainers only. One editor concluded simply, “Like everybody else, Duke Ellington has to live in order to continue his artistic endeavors which indirectly benefit all of us.”
Whereas others have explained such conflicts as a result of the NAACP’s transitions in ideology, tactics, and strategy over time, what Ellington’s action did in attributing the fifth dance of the Liberian Suite to a fifth freedom “we hope for” is invite analytical attention to the self’s subjective contingency as it rubs up against identification formations more desirous of power or simply more pathological. Conceived of in this way, actions such as Ellington’s discussed above suggest his desire of being emptied of others’ determinations of the past, which Frantz Fanon and Katherine Dunham similarly hoped to attain for their own subjectivities in the present. Not unlike the pathology of freedom and time that Fanon detected in the request made by the Lyon Association of Overseas Students of France, Ellington—who indeed willingly took the position of authentic Negro music against European music and even jazz—did so, but without never experiencing at times feelings of consternation. Given the heavy investment demanded by identification formulations in the past, a bet that Fanon outright refused to take for its conferring “no patent of humanity on me,” what if any cultural conventions were actually available for avowing the loss of spatialized and temporalized identities? Or was modernity’s inability to once and for all grieve the contingency of its normative subjectivities (white, male, and straight) preempting the ontological promise of disalienation for all?

Movement and Sound in Nonobjective Time and Space

According to a report published in 1949, avant-garde film production in the United States had experienced an “unexpected outburst of concern and activity” due in part to the spread of film use and techniques during the war and the formation of film interest groups following the war. Frank Stauffacher and Richard Foster led one of these groups, the Art in Cinema Society, which, with the sponsorship of the San Francisco Museum of Art, organized a series of avant-garde film showings starting in 1946. Just three years earlier the San Francisco Museum of Art had sponsored Rudi Blesh’s hot jazz lecture series, and it hosted the United Nations Conference on International Organization in 1945. From 1946 to 1954 the Art in Cinema film series featured experimental films by foreign filmmakers such as German émigré Oskar Fischinger as well as American filmmakers Maya Deren, John Whitney, James Whitney, Harry Smith, and many others. One of the technical and aesthetic concerns characterizing avant-garde filmmakers in the United States at this time was the manipulation of space and time by the use of “abstract images, colour and rhythm, as an experience in itself apart from their power to express thoughts or ideas.” Some of these filmmakers paired dance and music with various filmic
techniques in their explorations into the fundamental nature of space and time. Harry Smith, in particular, pursued such experimentation in filmmaking and music in order to address his metaphysical questions concerning forces of the spiritual and physical worlds. In his films of the late 1940s, Smith indeed shattered linear unities of time and space, though in still adhering to binary logics of various sorts he never fully extricated himself from modernity’s pathologies of identification.

In a letter written in 1950 to Hilla von Rebay, his patron and the artistic director of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (later known as the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum) in New York City, Smith explained the aim of his films in the following way: “To me, the soul is expressed in the relations that exists between the rhythm of the physical world and the rhythm of the spiritual world. In worldly life the limits imposed by the material state keep us from comprehending the ultimate physical unit or the ultimate spiritual unit, however our intuitive perception of the ever changing relation between the two clarifies them both. My films so far have been examinations of these forces.”

In articulating the materialization of the human soul to what he believed to be the interrelated “rhythms” of the spiritual and physical worlds, Smith suggests in interesting ways the musical significances in his technical and aesthetic imperatives. In this regard, he continues, “these films are made up of visual percussions in strict time like music, and must be thought of by the mental sequences that integrate strongly rhythmic auditory sensations, for example, and not the ones used for stationary art.” Although Smith claimed that his films were best shown silent, the fact is that by 1948 he began regularly incorporating live bebop and recorded cubop music into his film showings, even including in one of his films a painting that he created, the content of which represents the notes and rhythms of Chano Pozo and Dizzy Gillespie’s “Manteca.” Why, then, did Smith use bebop and cubop over other genres of music when choosing to show his films with music? His metaphysical conviction in the intuitive capacity of humans to create nonobjective art, his earlier activities and training as an anthropologist and comparative musicologist, and his drug use offer not only possible answers to this question but also insight into how binary logics of objectivity and non-objectivity, of intuitive and learned, or even of space and time itself structured his understanding of the multiplicities of nature and everyday life.

Before his first film showing in 1947, Smith had conducted extensive field recordings, along with musical transcriptions, on the Lummi and Salish reservations in the Pacific Northwest before matriculating at the University of Washington, where he studied anthropology from 1942 until 1944. He had also started to collect records of American folk music and had begun to use 35-millimeter film
as a medium for his paintings. One of his more consequential early biographical events was his first experience smoking marijuana in 1944 in Berkeley, where he attended a Woody Guthrie concert, after which he decided to discontinue his formal training at the University of Washington and move to Berkeley and eventually to San Francisco.\textsuperscript{149} From a young age and continuing throughout his career, Smith pursued what Rani Singh described as an “alchemical synthesis of the arts and sciences, which culminated in the melding of music, anthropology, linguistics, ethnology, film, occultism, design, and the plastic arts.”\textsuperscript{150} In pursuing his alchemical and metaphysical interests, however, Smith still conveyed (as did Rudi Blesh and other jazz critics at the time) commonly held understandings concerning race and folk music, such as that of the illiterate but intuitive and genius black musician. It is striking indeed to read in Smith’s letters to Rebay, for instance, of his disdain for the very material world whose political economy of race, as analyzed thus far in the preceding three chapters, dictated the logical terms by which he and others racialized musicians as vehicles bearing human universal qualities that were increasingly endangered by a modernizing and oppressive world. Whereas he intended his films to transcend the temporal and spatial strictures generative of objective narratives, emotions, and formal structures, his conviction in what he and others considered to be the metaphysical, nonobjective, and intuitive qualities immanent in bebop musicians betrayed, as we will see, his rejection of the mechanizations of the macropolitical or material world. Such contradictions were, in fact, immanent in his initial uses of recorded music to accompany his films.

Smith’s first contributions to the Art in Cinema series were his \textit{Film No. 2}, \textit{Film No. 3}, and \textit{Film No. 4}. Scheduled for October 24, 1947, this showing’s program included the film \textit{Horror Dream} by Sidney Peterson and Hy Hirsch, with an original score by John Cage. The program lists Smith’s films as “color animations,” though he used this technique of hand painting designs in each of the frames only for \textit{Film No. 2} and \textit{Film No. 3}, and for \textit{Film No. 1}, which he completed in 1946 but did not premiere until the Art in Cinema series showing of February 11, 1949.\textsuperscript{151} Up until 1948, Smith’s film showings were silent. According to his own account, he first realized that music could be put to his films after attending a Dizzy Gillespie concert in July 1948, when Gillespie’s big band premiered at the Trianon Ballroom in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{152} Smith recounted, “I had gone there very high, and I literally saw all kinds of colored flashes. It was at that point that I realized music could be put to my films.”\textsuperscript{153}

Ralph J. Gleason’s review of Gillespie’s San Francisco concert in \textit{Down Beat} magazine gives important insight into the reception he and bebop music were garnering at the time, including the controversy surrounding Gillespie’s
stage antics as well as critical praise of his band’s technical virtuosity and sonic power. It also enables an ideologically broader context in which to analyze Smith’s decision to incorporate bebop and cubop music into his films. Gleason listed Gillespie’s “specials” of the night’s performance as “Manteca,” “Second Balcony Jump,” “Good Bait,” and “Things to Come,” reporting that “by the time Dizzy got through playing Manteca and seated himself on top of the piano to play Second Balcony Jump the crowd was absolutely wild.” Gillespie’s big band had recorded “Manteca” for RCA Victor in December 1947, the cocomposer of which, Chano Pozo, was also the band’s conga player. Indeed, much of the excitement over Gillespie’s big band was centered on Pozo’s stage presence and seamless integration of his conga playing with Teddy Stewart’s drumming, about which Gleason stated, “[Pozo] and Stewart have so many rhythmic patterns worked out between them that they seem almost to act as one man many times.” Gleason also dispelled jazz critics’ charges of Gillespie’s music being “without form” by noting that members of the audience sang along with the arrangements, which “couldn’t be done if there weren’t some definite pattern.”

However positive Gleason was of the Gillespie band’s performance, much of his review was intended to counteract the damning criticisms of Gillespie’s and bebop’s associations with “Mohammedanism,” psychoanalysis, abstract art, drug use (heroin and cocaine, in addition to marijuana), elitism, cultism, and so on, which writers typically identified as evidence of the moral decay of modern life as well as of the decadence of jazz itself. In other words, in rejecting or defending bebop, writers such as Gleason, Leonard Feather, John Hammond, Barry Ulanov, Ralph Ellison, and others were perpetuating the traditionalist-modernist debate that had started a decade earlier and that Katherine Dunham, Duke Ellington, and Dizzy Gillespie had satirized or else utilized, if only rhetorically, to further their professional careers. As for the not so subtle racial implications of bebop’s associations, Harry Smith’s decision to use Gillespie’s records and live jazz musicians with his films owed as much to white American liberalism in all of its contradictions in regard to race relations and racial politics as to the impact of his drug-induced experience at Gillespie’s concert. For Smith, along with his white liberal jazz critic contemporaries, shared a desire for a metaphysical (or magical) essence in black culture (whether urban or rural, modern or traditional) that, when engaged seriously and properly, carried the potential to counteract the morally corruptive aspects of modernity, including the threat of nuclear annihilation, totalitarianism, mass culture, and, of course, racism.

To put music to his films, Smith chose two methods. The first involved simultaneously playing a film and a 78-rpm disc, the time constraints of which seemed to counteract his aesthetic desire for his films to aid the viewer in tran-
scending the limits imposed by the material world toward one’s full realization of the soul. He went as far as to “cut down [Film No. 2] to match” the length of “Guarachi guaro” (3:12). Moreover, since he had already painted designs on the film, there was no intentional synchronization between the visual and the sonic contents of the film and record. In fact, in a letter to Rebay, he stated that the “rhythm of my films will automatically synchronize with any music having the same general speed. They are best silent, however.” Many listeners of cubop music like “Guarachi guaro” at the time characterized the music’s temporal aspects as repetitive, formless, or primitive. Gleason, as noted above, attempted to dispel the notion that bebop was also formless. Unlike Gillespie’s bebop music, which is in fact structured in conventional song forms, “Guarachi guaro” and most of “Manteca” are indeed based on short repeating or cyclic figures typical of much, but not all, Afro-Cuban music at the time, much to the chagrin of even Gillespie’s arranger, Walter “Gil” Fuller: “If you listen to ‘Guarachi guaro,’ it will drive you nuts because it does the same thing all over again because it just keeps going and repeats itself ad infinitum. And it never got off the ground like it should have because it wasn’t structured. It wasn’t structured in terms of something with form. The form was lacking.” Duke Ellington similarly complained that the “most desperately unmodern thing in the world is the repetition of one chord. The idea is to make it sound that way—but not to do it.” As for some in Gillespie’s audiences, watching Pozo play the conga drum evoked materializations of the native savage not unlike that which had occurred with his performance in Conga Pantera in 1941. At a Gillespie concert in Paris in February 1948, French jazz critic and historian André Hodier recorded one woman’s reaction to Pozo accordingly: “A real cannibal,” said one brave lady sitting next to me, with a little shiver of horror at the idea she could meet him at the corner of the jungle.”

It is important to also compare how Fuller and Ellington listened to cubop music with how M. André Demaison listened to the Gilberto Valdés orchestra’s performance of “Tambó” and “Sangre africana,” in that all three auditory experiences seemed to be overwhelmed with those sonic chronotopes typically associated with the primitive or African past to different effects. For Fuller and Ellington, the result was psychologically pathological (insanity or desperation), whereas for Demaison, it was ontologically transformative. In all three instances, however, the sounding of musical modernism’s chronotopes, as in seventh chords with ninths, thirteenths, and sharped elevenths, remained as the ground of their subjective assurance in the modern present. Gillespie and Smith, however, heard in these sounds redeeming qualities in the face of modernity’s or the material world’s failures and shortcomings. For Gillespie, as for Fernando
Ortiz, Salvador García Agüero, and Richard Waterman, Afro-Cuban music and the black Other retained the material and metaphysical culture of the African past, which in Gillespie’s case included “our drums,” which he lamented had been taken away from slaves in the United States. In this way, Gillespie’s and Pozo’s music, as captured in their recordings of “Guarachi guaro” and “Manteca” and performed on stage, entailed the same listening and embodying practices that spatialized and temporalized Kwesi Kuntu, the white ocobios of the Abakuá, and Jamaican Maroons, for instance, to African pasts and Kuntu’s black American audiences, Harold Courlander, and Katherine Dunham in their modern presents. Accordingly, as he had done in Havana before relocating to New York City in 1947, Pozo maneuvered within these practices as he pursued the expansion of his professional career into the jazz industry. Smith’s engagement with Gillespie’s and Pozo’s recorded music unfolded within yet another distinct spatialized and temporalized modern present.

Since Gillespie’s big band recorded “Guarachi guaro” in December 1948, the earliest Smith could have edited his Film No. 2 was March 1949, when the recording was released for sale. Just one year later, Smith explained the content of the film to Rebay as “an investigation of the rhythmic organization of man’s mind. Just as the atom is a small model of the solar system, in that both consist of a central force with circling points around it, the mind of man is miniature of a greater mind.” Out of this description, cyclic phenomena in proportional relationship to each other emerge as the film’s organizational basis. This exact type of phenomena—that is, the cyclic clave pattern and its aggregate patterns as sounded from the congas, saxophone section, trumpet solo, chorus call-and-response, and so on—function as the temporal and sonic structures of “Guarachi guaro.” It is important to make this comparison without regard to harmonic language, as these linearly conceived musical phenomena functioned as modern aurality’s pathologizing basis upon which Fuller, Ellington, and others measured sanity and progress in order to distinguish bebop from cubop music. Rather, it seems that Smith listened to “Guarachi guaro” in atomistic terms (i.e., sonic cyclicities having proportional relationships) and thus chose it to give sound to his film’s visual representations of the rhythmic relationships that he perceived linking the metaphysical and material worlds.

As he continues his explanation of Film No. 2 to Rebay, other types of temporalities and temporal relationships emerge also in contradistinction to the linear unity of modern music, or bebop in particular:

This film is like the diary of the earth’s path around the sun during the two years I worked on it. I feel that certain forces effecting us originate
in the sun. It is possible to partially explore these by comparison of creativity among musicians playing, unconsciously, at different angles to the sun, and also at night when the forces must pass through the earth and be changed in quality for that reason. In making this film I suppressed sensory impulses from my body, as much as possible, and tried to record actual daily changes in the brain. The film divides itself into two general sections. This is partly due to my being able to induce a more perfect trance state as time went on, but is perhaps also because the sun’s changing position in the Galaxy changes the strength of energy coming from other sections of the universe.

In this instance, Smith articulates a perception of time and space to music so radically distinct from but no less temporalizing or spatializing than that posited by Fuller, Gillespie, Ellington, and many others. Both sounds and images as captured and represented in the synchronization of “Guarachi guaro” and Film No. 2 emanate from multiple locations and temporalities, whether the calendrical cycle encompassing the film’s production, forces originating in the sun, one cycle of the Earth’s rotation, the transition from a worldly to a transcendental mental state, or the sun’s position in the universe as perceived from Earth. On the one hand, Smith’s temporalization and spatialization of the forces determining the origin and meaning of his films follow a universal and not human evolutionary time scheme. On the other hand, such cyclic relationships in universal time still required dualisms, the Earth and sun, playing consciously and unconsciously, day and night, body and mind, optical and auditory, and so on. What reigned over all of these was a logic of distance measured in time and space.

In his Film No. 4, Smith abandoned his hand-painting technique in favor of film photography using an actual camera. The film begins with Smith panning the camera over his Manteca painting, each stroke of which he described as representing a “certain note on the record. [. . . ] The main theme in there, which is [sings the main theme of the A section], are the curved lines up there. Each note of the painting is on there” (figure 4.2).166 With his painting of the recording of “Manteca,” Smith again subverts the mechanisms of power, this time to represent as embodied in Western musical notation a technology that he in fact used earlier in his career as an anthropologist. Musical notation’s graphical system, in addition to its exclusive scientific legitimacy in ordering the linear unity of music, also entailed a signifying regime of complexity and progress (e.g., in the form of chords with harmonic extensions), all of which Smith reconfigured in his use of curved lines, circles, and hornlike shapes in blues, reds,
FIG. 4.2 Harry Smith, *Manteca*, ca. 1951, gouache and mixed media on board, approx. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy Harry Smith Archives.
greens, and yellows. The painting appears for only ten seconds, during which time the camera pans both up and down and chaotically in circles primarily across the central region of the painting. The remaining portion of the film portrays in black and white grills and circles whose movements are engendered by the camera’s own movements.

Smith’s forging of the temporal and spatial significances in his films were no less determined by binary logics of time and space than those Dunham choreographed for Heat Wave and its revisions or those Ellington composed in Black, Brown and Beige and Liberian Suite. Whereas Dunham’s and Ellington’s temporal and spatial representations were of the orders of chronology, evolution, progress (whether oppressed or realized), and geography, Smith’s representations were of the orders of basic or pseudo astronomy and physics. Regardless of the scientific veracity, or lack thereof, of his explanations, his renderings of astronomy and physics were clearly not equipped discursively or logically to enable racializations of Gillespie, Pozo, “Guarachi guaro,” or “Manteca.” His desire, however, to produce nonobjective films whose function it was to enable the viewer to comprehend or experience the forces binding the spiritual to the physical world was, according to his own admission, complicated by the everyday contingencies of museum culture as generated, in fact, by the pathologies of his own subjective identifications.

Like his previous three films, Film No. 4 was intended, it appears, to be shown not exclusively with the recording of “Manteca” but rather with any recording, or even accompanied by improvising musicians. Indeed, for his showing at the Art in Cinema series of May 12, 1950, Smith titled films 1 through 4 “A Strange Dream,” “Message from the Sun,” “Interwoven,” and “Fast Track” (respectively, in their numerical succession), all under the main title Five Instruments with Optical Solo. As he explained, “The titles . . . were added for the museum audience. Originally they were not titled and I still feel that giving specific titles is destructive because it tensions them to specific emotions, and for these particular films are as out of place as a chemist naming his experiments according to the colour they produce, rather than the purpose. But, for an audience as at the museum who represent as a really stupid element who are prejudiced against accepting anything unless they are first told what it is, titles are of some value.”167 Thus the contingencies in showing his films to the museum’s film series audiences, or else Smith’s concern over his films’ nonobjective functions (as opposed to film’s subjectively held emotional effectuations), led to the kind of pathologizing or swelling of the world with one’s being that Sterns and Fanon theorized as occurring in one’s acts of spatializing and temporalizing.
This was particularly evident in Smith’s explication of the jazz musicians who participated in the showing of his *Five Instruments with Optical Solo*.

This showing’s program describes, for example, Smith’s films, or “optical solo,” as serving as the “sixth instrument in a be-bop jam session. . . . This is the first presentation anywhere of a performance in which the optical images will be tried, not as visualization of the music, but as a basis for its departure.”168 Another version of the program explains that the musicians improvise based on their interpretation of the “measured rhythmic designs” composed by Smith. “Each frame itself is considered as a separate composition, altering gradually from frame to frame.”169 In addition, a short article published in *Down Beat* described the “shape and color of the designs” on the films as suggesting “all the harmonic possibilities and the progression of the music.”170 The musicians who performed Smith’s *Five Instruments with Optical Solo* were Atlee Chapman (trombone, bass trumpet), Henry Noyd (trumpet), Kermit Scott (tenor saxophone), Robert Warren (bass), Warren Thompson (drums), and Stanley Willis (piano), all local San Francisco jazz musicians. Of these six musicians, Kermit Scott was the most widely known at the time for having played at Minton’s Playhouse in New York City with Dizzy Gillespie, who credited Scott with helping to develop bebop in the late 1930s.171 In fact, Scott and Willis gave a short talk on bebop music before the start of the Art in Cinema program. As for Smith’s general impressions of their improvised music, these shed light, if not on the specific musical qualities of their playing, then on his attitudes toward popular music’s “vulgar” “striving for effect” and “objectivity.” For example, he proclaimed that the musicians who have played his films “are now intuitively creating a new kind of music that will not be accepted by the public probably for 50 years. They are all really poor, sometimes hungry, because they would rather express what they call ‘soul’ in their playing than hurt themselves by changing it to fit the backward standards of today’s listeners.”172 He continued by characterizing the creators of spirituals, ragtime, jazz, blues, boogie-woogie, swing, and bebop as “intuitive, but uneducated geniuses who died without getting any money or recognition. . . . But now . . . a great change, unsuspected, to the world is about to occur in music.”

In his excitement about what we can perhaps interpret as a precursor to avant-garde jazz, Smith further expresses his resolve to compare his recordings of the film/jam sessions “with each other and with the films . . . to make a start toward an investigation of intuitive creation. By investigating these observable forces which effect man, but which are scorned by pedantic science, it will be possible for us soon to realize the final stages of man’s development.”173 Like Katherine Dunham, Smith had grown skeptical of anthropology’s scientific im-
perative in spite or because of his earlier formal training in anthropology. Both Smith and Dunham, it is clear, desired to engage with the universal qualities of movement in time and space rather than New World Negro culture’s “objective” elements as Melville Herskovits, Richard Waterman, and Mieczyslaw Kolinski continued to promulgate. Yet, at the same time, Smith considered such a study of intuitive creation and its generating forces to potentially bring about, in his words, “the final stages of man’s development.” In this instance, Smith, or the “fabulous alchemical magician painter-filmmaker,” as Allen Ginsberg described him, reverted to a temporality that, in conjunction with his racializing identifications of Willis and the other “intuitively genius” jazz musicians, intersected dangerously with the evolutionary temporalities of anthropology, comparative musicology, and jazz’s traditionalist-modernist debate.  

To conclude, the ideals of avant-garde film of the 1940s raise questions regarding art’s potential as a nonrepresentational space. Could Pozo, Gillespie, Ellington, or Dunham have created nonobjective music and dance had they desired to do so as disalienating expressions of their selves in the world? More to the point, did they have access ontologically to such a space, or were avant-garde artists’ ideals of abstract and nonobjective expression a prerogative of the temporal and spatial privileges that came with (or determined) one’s status as a racially unmarked or white modern body? That critics associated avant-garde jazz musicians of the 1960s with black nationalist thought, regardless of the actual politics of individual musicians such as John Coltrane, lends provocative insight into likely answers to these questions.  

Smith, it seems, had no recourse to avow the nonobjective experimentalism of his film’s jazz musicians without shutting them away as he did (in Fanon’s words) “in the Tower given as the Past.” Smith’s representation of them as “intuitive” and in the racialized lineage of the “creators of the spirituals” was as much constitutive of his own normative whiteness as it was constitutive of their racial otherness. Indeed, as Matthew Frye Jacobson argues, in the political economy of race in the United States during World War II and the Cold War, the biracial logic of black-white solidified such that whiteness, which now unified previously differentiated white ethnics under the newly conceived category of Caucasian, rendered race “something possessed only by ‘other’ [i.e., black] peoples.” But Judith Butler reminds us that such racial boundaries must be continuously reiterated precisely because of the anxiety their inherent tenuous status generates, regardless of the kinds of historical developments that Jacobson cites.

To understand further the theoretical implications of this notion of normative whiteness as the social field of the racially unmarked, we turn to the peculiarities of capitalist democracy in modernity. Gilles Deleuze and Félix
Guattari’s analysis of capitalistic schizophrenia suggests that conditions such as alienation and disalienation never completely “come into being” (as Fanon asserted) due to capitalism’s “twofold movement of deterritorializing flows on the one hand [smooth space], and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other [striated space].” Indeed, American capitalism at the start of the Cold War touted individual freedom regardless of race, nationality, or gender as a matter of economic progress and international order at the same time that its political economies of race, gender, and sexuality worked to inhibit the full realization of freedom by recoding oppressed identities and rechanneling them as racially inferior and sexually subservient or deviant. Such a regime, as the next chapter will further explore, was predicated on maintaining white heterosexual male privilege in spheres of human activity—whether political or economic, sexual or familial, academic or artistic—and across national boundaries. Even not so subtle intimations of avant-gardism in Cuban popular music of the 1940s and early 1950s were mowed over by capitalism’s reterritorializing machines. In focusing on the national, international, and transnational movements of the mambo, the final chapter will explore how such strictures of capitalism and Cold War politics intensified while at the same time obscured the practices of the logic of black music’s and dance’s African origins into the 1950s.