

FIRING THE CANON: MULTIPLE INSULARITIES IN JAZZ CRITICISM

By

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Christopher Robinson

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Chairperson, Sherrie Tucker

Randal Jelks

Tony Bolden

John Gennari

William J Harris

Date Defended: April 7, 2014

The Dissertation Committee for Christopher Robinson
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chairperson, Sherrie Tucker

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ABSTRACT

Whereas many jazz scholars focus on jazz criticism's construction and implications of a single, or insular, jazz canon, this dissertation argues that what many jazz critics do is precisely the opposite. These critics disrupt the sense of a singular and insular jazz canon by challenging it through the creation of what I call an insularity, which is a bounded collection of artists and music with a definable tradition, values and established criteria which regulates what is suitable for inclusion. This dissertation argues that jazz does not consist of a single canon and music that exists beyond the canon's boundaries; rather, jazz contains multiple insularities that challenge the canon and vie for the opportunity to overthrow the canon in order to reach canonical status. This dissertation conceptualizes jazz critics as cultural authorities who create or deconstruct insularities through a variety of race, gender and nation projects. It examines the criticism of Leonard Feather, Val Wilmer and Nathaniel Mackey to highlight the numerous ways in which critics engage with multiple insularities. Feather believed that jazz was university and that it transcended social difference. As such, he worked to create an insularity where female musicians deserved acceptance by the jazz world. Wilmer emphasizes that jazz is a social practice and that it belongs to those who created it. Working to counter the marginalization of African American musicians, she constructed an insularity that showed musicians as real people as opposed to mythological figures. Mackey rejects the concept of insularities and this dissertation shows how his novel *Bedouin Hornbook* works to deconstruct insularities. Feather's, Wilmer's and Mackey's criticism attempts to solve perceived social exclusion marginalization wrought by the jazz canon. Multiple insularities in jazz criticism exist as a byproduct of the complexity of jazz's cultural space, the problems which exist in that space, and the multitude of ways in which critics attempt to address these problems. A heterodox practice involving

innumerable methods and strategies to address social problems, jazz criticism, itself a diverse practice involving people of many social backgrounds and experiences, manifests itself in the construction and challenging of multiple insularities.

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Introduction: Jazz Criticism as Field of Multiple Insularities

When I was in high school I was deep into the band Phish, and I strongly remember having – conversations isn't the right word, more like frustrated disagreements with my sister, who could not stand the band. While there was nothing that I could do to convince her to like them, I took a different tack, asking her if she at least appreciated their musicianship; I was in essence - foreshadowing my intellectual crush on Kant and his third critique - trying to steer her towards accepting that Phish was a good band, even if she didn't like its music. No dice.

Years after my high school Phish obsession, while deep into reading old *Downbeat* Blindfold Tests for my M.A. thesis on Leonard Feather, I remember having lengthy conversations with the archivist at the International Jazz Collections about what “good” music was and if music had to be “good” to have any kind of value. I.E., was Britney Spears' music good because a lot of people enjoyed it? Who has the power, or even the right, to make judgments about the inherent quality and worth in any given piece of music, or any art form for that manner? Does relative popularity have any effect on something's worth or aesthetic quality? While our discussion in no way brought up new points – in fact these questions have been asked and debated about in jazz criticism since the music's inception – these issues have always interested me.

After finishing my thesis I got the opportunity to consider these questions in a new way, as I began writing CD and concert reviews for *Earshot Jazz* and *Downbeat*. While writing my first review for *Downbeat* a whole new set of questions entered my mind: what if my opinion of the CD is "wrong"? How will I defend myself if I get angry letters from readers who disagree with my evaluation? Two questions were particularly worrisome: who am I to say whether or

not a performance by Joshua Redman is good or not? Who or what gives me the right to make this judgment? In short, the answers to these questions were relatively simple. Part of the critical jazz establishment felt I was knowledgeable enough about jazz and could write well enough to state my opinions. If someone disagreed with a review of mine, so be it. I was not etching the definitive and true statement in stone; rather, I was adding one voice to a large and ongoing conversation about what jazz is, what it isn't, what was of value and should be remembered, and what should be ignored and quickly forgotten. I had gone from someone who debated questions of value in the abstract to answering these questions in reality. I had become someone who is partially involved, if only in a miniscule way, in the process of creating a jazz tradition.

One element in the process of creating the jazz tradition, at least as far as jazz magazines go, are the annual critics polls or "top 10 lists" published by *Downbeat*, *JazzTimes*, Rhapsody.com, and other mainstream jazz publications.¹ In these polls critics are invited to vote for their favorite artists, groups and albums. In my 2012 critics poll ballot for *Downbeat* two of the three artists I voted for Jazz Musicians of the Year are Indian Americans (Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa) and the third (Miguel Zenon) is Puerto Rican. Given that jazz is almost universally considered to be black music and that each of the three musicians and other people voted for draw heavily upon the music of their cultural heritage, what does my vote say about the current state of what jazz is and who can make it? How do my selections for artists of the year jive, or perhaps not jive, with the standard definitions of jazz that most people have come to accept? Furthermore, what does it say that very few people would consider my 2012 Jazz Album of the Year (Colin Stetson's *New History Warfare*, vol. 2 *Judges*) to be "jazz"?

¹ For an in depth discussion of the significance of the *Downbeat* critics polls, see Anne Dvinge, "Between History & Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Copenhagen, 2007), 95-105.

Furthermore, what does it say that Stetson started his musical career as a classical saxophone prodigy who studied with one of the foremost classical saxophone educators and now tours with high profile pop music acts? My annual critics poll ballots and "top 10" lists are often quite divergent from the results. I asked a friend of mine who is a highly regarded jazz critic if there was anything "wrong" - or as I might have put it "whacked" - with my ballots or top 10 lists. He said no, suggesting (perhaps a bit facetiously) that I have a "valuable alternative viewpoint."² After thinking about that for a long time, I came to the realization that I have a slightly, if not completely, different viewpoint of what jazz is and what it could be than other people. My version of the jazz canon and what was eligible for inclusion into the canon is different from others. I'm not working with the exact same canon as other critic; mine is different, it is shaped by ideologies and biases that might not influence another critic. Could it be that there is not just one canon, but multiple canons?

Whereas many jazz scholars focus on jazz criticism's construction and implications of a single, or insular, jazz canon (what Scott DeVeaux calls a "core"), in *Firing the Canon* I argue that what many jazz critics do is precisely the opposite.³ These critics disrupt the sense of a singular and insular jazz canon by challenging it through the creation of what I call an insularity, which I define as a bounded collection of artists and music with a definable tradition, values and

² An example of my "valuable alternative viewpoint" can be seen when comparing my top three selections for artists and albums of the year with the results of the *Downbeat's* 2012 Critics Poll. While my top artist of the year, Iyer, won that category, my other two selections did not place well. Rounding out the top ten was pianist Robert Glasper, bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding, tenor saxophonist Sonny Rollins and pianist Jason Moran, all of whom are of African American descent. Rudresh Mahanthappa was twelfth, and Miguel Zenon did not crack the top twenty. Stetson's album did not receive enough votes to be in the top thirty, neither did my third favorite album, *The Coimbra Concert* by Mostly Other People Do The Killing (although it did - and, at least for me somewhat inexplicably, as I find the group coming straight out of the jazz tradition - placed seventh in the "Beyond Album" category, just behind pop star Björk and hip hop group The Roots) . My second choice for album of the year, Craig Taborn's *Avenging Angel*, received the thirtieth most votes. "60th Annual Critics Poll," *Downbeat*, August, 2012, 30, 60, 65.

³ Scott DeVeaux, "Core and boundaries," *The source: Challenging jazz criticism* 2(2005).

established criteria which regulates what is suitable for inclusion. A canon is an insularity, but not all insularities are canons. In a way, an insularity is a "would-be" canon. I argue that jazz does not consist of a single canon and music that exists beyond the canon's boundaries; rather, jazz contains multiple insularities that challenge the canon and vie for the opportunity to overthrow the canon in order to reach canonical status. Just as the canon is governed by its own aesthetic values, social ideologies, evaluative methodologies, and discourse, so too do insularities. The difference, of course, is that because jazz consists of multiple insularities, there is a multitude of aesthetic values, social ideologies, evaluative methodologies and discourses at play in the shaping of each insularity. While different insularities may consider many of the same artists and works to be canonical, they are each unique: they come from different points of view, they are motivated by different factors, they serve different social goals. Each critic builds his or her own specific insularity, which may or may not share much in common with the canon or other insularities. Or alternatively, a critic may choose to deconstruct an insularity.

And now please allow for a brief, but relevant, although it may not seem so at first, side-excursion. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the members of the Fellowship of the Ring, which was tasked with destroying the ring of power, had a difficult decision to make. The Fellowship (the hobbits Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin, the wizard Gandalf, the dwarf Gimli, the elf Legolas and the men Aragorn and Boromir) was stuck high in the mountain pass of Caradhras, facing a blizzard and rockslides created by the evil wizard Saruman. Frodo, who carried the ring, felt that continuing up the pass was too perilous. Gimli suggested that the Fellowship pass through the Mines of Moria, while Boromir argued for going through the Gap of Rohan on the way to his city, Minas Tirith. In the end, Frodo chose the route through Moria. As the members of the Fellowship became separated they each faced difficulties navigating the

terrain of Middle Earth's geography and were forced to make choices on how to deal with obstacles.

The navigational choices the members of the Fellowship of the Ring were forced to make are similar too, I argue, to those faced by jazz critics. As Bernard Gendron argues in his article "Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)" jazz critics create their opinions shaped on existing discourses: art/commerce, Folk culture/European culture, Black/White, etc. Gendron defines aesthetic discourse as "a grouping of concepts, distinctions, oppositions, rhetorical ploys, and allowable inferences, which as a whole fixed the limits within which inquiries concerning the aesthetics of jazz could take place, and outside which the claim that jazz is an art form would be merely an abstraction or an incantation." The jazz wars between the Moldy Figs and Modernists "engendered a new mapping of the terrain on which jazz was debated - a new construction of the aesthetic discourses of jazz . . . The new aesthetic discourses, by no means pure, were laced with the idioms of commerce, politics, gender, and race."⁴ Using Gendron's model, critics make choices based on what is available to them. They exercise their agency by forging their own path though the map's terrain, which is shaped by discourse - commerce, gender, race, etc. Like the members of the Fellowship of the Ring who had to decide the best way to get to their destination (To go over, under or around the mountain?) critics have to find ways to traverse the discourses Gendron mentions, and in doing so, they create their opinions.

An insularity then, is the path, route, or the path one takes to navigate the terrain. How does a critic deal with race? Does he or she take the same path forged by other critics? Do they take the Pass of Caradhras, do they go through the Mines of Moria, or do they make for the Gap of Rohan? Do they engage with race in a new way, carving their own trail? The canon can be

⁴ Bernard Gendron, "Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 34.

thought of the primary and most well-trod trail through the terrain. In their creation or disruption of insularities which challenge the canon, critics, especially those I analyze in this dissertation, do not want to follow established paths, instead navigating the terrain in new ways, carving their own trails.

A major goal of this dissertation is to theorize, examine, and show how jazz critics construct, deconstruct and engage with multiple insularities. It asks the following questions: what leads critics to challenge the canon? I.E., what is at stake in the construction or deconstruction of multiple insularities? Who are the major players in the construction and deconstruction of multiple insularities and how do they create these insularities? How does challenging the canon work and what methods are more effective than others? What role do issues such as race, gender, aesthetics and politics play in the creation and negotiations of multiple insularities? Answering these questions, and thinking about jazz as consisting of multiple insularities, as opposed to containing a single canon, allows scholars to understand the practice of jazz criticism as a much more varied, fluid, diverse and dynamic practice that is more fractious, contentious and divisive than previously thought.

My work responds to a small but growing sub-field of scholarship that can be called jazz criticism studies, although it may not be directly referred to as such. Scholars of jazz criticism have persuasively argued that jazz critics need to be studied. Ron Welburn, who has written some of the earliest scholarly work on jazz criticism, urges that studying jazz criticism is essential because it is so important to the "ways in which we think and write about jazz."⁵ In his book on jazz critics, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and its Critics*, John Gennari, the leading

⁵ Ron Welburn, "Jazz Magazines of the 1930s: An Overview of Their Provocative Journalism," *American Music* 5, no. 3 (1987): 255.

proponent of jazz criticism scholarship, argues that jazz criticism is "the noise – the auditory dissonance - that gives the music cultural meaning."⁶ Even though jazz critics have often been maligned figures they are worthy of study, Gennari insists, because of the heavy and undeniable influence they have had on jazz.⁷ Gennari, who suggests that looking at jazz criticism is one way to draw a less static picture of jazz, is especially interested in the process by which jazz became canonized as an art form, and it is his view that critics played an important role in the canonization of jazz. In order to understand and to analyze the cultural history of jazz it is necessary to consider the importance and role of jazz critics and the various genres criticism takes, as critics have been some of the most important mediators due to the ways in which they shape how and in what ways jazz reaches their audience.⁸ Using jazz criticism as a lens allows us to "understand the history and political economy of jazz." This requires us, in Gennari's words, to "probe and untangle knotty intersections of black, brown, beige, and white; complex dynamics of race, gender, class, nationality, and power; interlocking cultures of sound, image, and word."⁹

In general, critics of any genre of high art, which includes jazz, are essential members of what Howard Becker calls an "art world." Becker defines an art world as "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized by their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for."¹⁰ Art worlds "consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the works, which the [art] world, and perhaps others as well, define as art."¹¹ Becker's major intervention into the sociology of art is

⁶ John Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 386.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ Howard Becker, *Art worlds*, 25th anniversary ed. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008), xxiv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

his argument that there is a vast network of people outside of an individual artist who are also responsible for the creation, distribution, and explanation of a work of art. The critic is one member of the "network of cooperating people" which is responsible for the final outcome, reception and perception of an artwork.¹² Successful analysis of any world, regardless of the type of art, Becker argues, requires examining all those who participate in that particular art world.¹³ As such, in order to gain a fuller understanding of jazz, it is necessary to study jazz critics, who play major roles in the jazz art world. To not include jazz critics as objects of studies of jazz - a form of popular culture - runs the risk of painting an incomplete picture of jazz. As jazz is so completely intertwined with American culture, examining these issues in jazz through the lens of criticism allows us to see these issues played out in a larger cultural context. Thus, studying jazz criticism is essential to understanding American popular culture as a whole. Any study of popular culture, Andrew Ross argues, must include an examination of the intellectuals who help define what becomes popular.¹⁴ As those in a position to determine which jazz becomes popular or canonized as art, jazz critics, who are perceived to be "experts in culture," must be studied.

By pursuing these issues, the scholar of jazz criticism can begin to determine the jazz critic's role and influence in shaping one of not only one of America's most enduring and unique art forms and symbols, but in shaping the terms of American national cultural identity as well. Thus by studying jazz criticism, one can understand the dynamics and inner workings of American culture through another lens and provide a new and unique glimpse into the inner workings and intersectionality of American music, literature, art, race, class, gender and nation. Doing so also sheds much needed light on some of America's most influential, understudied and

¹² Ibid., 25.

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Andrew Ross, *No respect: intellectuals & popular culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 5.

unacknowledged cultural workers. In an essay entitled "Jazz Criticism and Its Effect on the Art Form" Amiri Baraka argues that the main institutions of jazz criticism echo the other main institutions of American culture. Thus, jazz criticism and its effects echo those of the mainstream white superstructure.¹⁵ In this way, scholars who examine jazz criticism can continue to investigate the processes that are involved in the creation of American culture.

In general, the field of jazz criticism studies examines three large issues, all of which are reoccurring themes in this dissertation. First, a number of scholars have written about the creation and maintenance of the jazz canon. This dissertation builds upon the work of those such as John Gennari, Ron Welburn, Bernard Gendron, Krin Gabbard and others who have examined and theorized as to how jazz became canonized as art.¹⁶ Much of the work to establish a jazz canon can be attributed to jazz critics, who started writing about jazz as soon as the genre appeared. Gennari, Welburn, and Paul Lopes describe how many of the early critics started as record collectors and jazz fans. Often young, well educated and privileged white men, these

¹⁵ Imamu Amiri Baraka, "Jazz Criticism and its Effect on the Art Form," in *New perspectives on jazz: report on a national conference held at Wingspread, Racine, Wisconsin, September 8-10, 1986*, ed. David Baker (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 58-60, 68. For a similar argument see Baraka's essay entitled "Jazz and the White Critic," in Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Black music* (New York: Akashic, 2010), 15-26. While Baraka invokes Marxist theories of base and superstructure, thus leaving himself open to popular post-structuralist critiques of meta-narratives, he raises valid criticisms of the predominantly white nature of jazz criticism and the media. In his essay "Jazz and the White Critic" from 1963 he points out that the vast majority of jazz critics are white while the majority of jazz musicians are black. It is reasonable to assume that as mainstream white culture has been, and continues to be to a certain extent, oppressive of minority groups it is only common sense that this would manifest itself in jazz criticism, explicitly and implicitly.

¹⁶ For further reading on the jazz canon, see: Scott DeVeaux, *The birth of bebop: a social and musical history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 16.; Scott DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991).; Steven B. Elworth, "Jazz in Crisis, 1948-1958: Ideology and Representation," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995).; Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics.*; John Gennari, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991).; Paul Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).; Nicholas M. Evans, *Writing jazz: race, nationalism, and modern culture in the 1920s* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000).; Herman Gray, *Cultural moves: African Americans and the politics of representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Although the consensus is that jazz has achieved the status as one of the canonical arts, Gennari argues in "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies" that jazz has not quite reached the "cultural acceptance and intellectual respectability of other arts," 451. He acknowledges the inclusion of jazz into Lincoln Center but argues that jazz does not have an equitable share of respect and status (452).

critics established the critical language, vocabulary and critical methodology of jazz criticism.¹⁷ This critical language and methodology allowed for jazz narratives to be written and a jazz canon and tradition to be established. A large amount of scholarship which focuses on jazz criticism analyzes and attempts to problematize and critique the established narrative of jazz. Numerous recent works in jazz studies that include jazz criticism as a subject take aim at challenging accepted jazz narratives. Among others, David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett and Daniel Goldmark's edited collection *Jazz/Not Jazz* seeks to do just that.¹⁸ Bruce Raeburn's *New Orleans Style and the Writing of American Jazz History* calls into question the idea of a traditional "New Orleans style" and traces the narrative's origins.¹⁹ Much of this work in jazz studies, as Sherrie Tucker points out in her essay in *Jazz/Not Jazz*, "has taken up the call to critically interrogate the official narrative, to deconstruct the binaries on which it established itself as whole (art/commerce, pure/contaminated, etc.), to interrupt its confidence, expose its exclusions, and to insist on its historical particularity."²⁰ I find this dissertation to be in keeping with Tucker's description of current trends in jazz studies, in that by arguing for the existence of multiple insularities I problematize the idea of a single jazz canon, tradition, core, or other term used to describe a single insular body of jazz music.

The second large theme in jazz criticism studies is examining the social implications of being included in or excluded from the canon. Inclusion in the jazz canon gives a musician access to resources and recognition that those marginalized musicians who occupy the

¹⁷ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*; Ron Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940" (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1983); Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*.

¹⁸ David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garret, and Daniel Goldmark, ed. *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2012).

¹⁹ Bruce Boyd Raeburn, *New Orleans style and the writing of American jazz history* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

²⁰ Sherrie Tucker, "Deconstructing the Jazz Tradition: The 'Subjectless Subject' of New Jazz Studies", in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and Its Boundaries*, ed. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garret, and Daniel Goldmark (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2012), 268.

"boundaries" of jazz do not.²¹ As Anne Dvinge points out, a canon's "exclusions become as important as its inclusions" and "any work and artists left out of it implicitly become 'less worthy.'" Canons, Dvinge notes, "privilege those dominant in a society and silence those already marginalized."²² Likewise, Dana Reason notes that "formation of canons and the inclusion of some voices over others reveal certain ideological tendencies and political positions."²³

Critics, by virtue of their ability to help determine what falls in the jazz tradition, wield the power to exclude, which often occurs along gender and racial lines. In her dissertation on female improvising musicians Reason notes that the critical establishment, which is overwhelmingly dominated by men, marginalizes women in numerous ways. Because these women are rarely covered in the press a perception exists that female improvisers do not exist. Reason labels this phenomenon the "myth of exclusion." She also points out that when women are covered in the press they are often marginalized through gendered representations or treated as "exceptional women."²⁴ While numerous scholars have addressed how the ideologies governing the dominant jazz canon work to exclude women, I will argue in subsequent chapters that critics actively work against these ideologies not by trying to change them, but by creating counter-hegemonic insularities that reflect ideologies of gender inclusion.

Jazz criticism has often excluded and marginalized racially as well. This is especially apparent when looking at mainstream criticism during the mid and late 1960s in relation to the avant garde jazz of African Americans. Several scholars, including Christopher Bakriges, Scott Saul, Ingrid Monson, and Iain Anderson, examine the social, aesthetic and economic impact that the critical marginalization of avant garde jazz had on African American musicians. In this

²¹ DeVeaux, "Core and boundaries," 15-16.

²² Dvinge, "Between History & Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century," 18.

²³ Dana Reason Myers, "The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception and the Music of Experimental Women Improvisors" (University of California, San Diego, 2002), 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, xi, 2-7, 54-75.

dissertation's second half I will argue that as a result of critical marginalization some critics did not attempt to get the canon to include their views; rather, they used their criticism as a tool to create or challenge alternate and multiple insularities, that were based on a completely different set of ideologies.²⁵

Third, the relationship between the jazz canon and American cultural and national identity is of paramount importance to those studying jazz criticism. Music has long been key to a nation's cultural identity, and as I outline in Chapter One, music critics have been instrumental in shaping a national music aesthetic for centuries. In *Struggling to Define a Nation*, Charles Hiroshi Garrett explains how musicians and composers attached meanings to music that signified a national narrative.²⁶ Considered to be "America's Classical Music," jazz has long since been a site where national identity and culture is debated. As Dvinge argues, the "jazz tradition is being consciously 'imagined' at the center of American culture through discourses of canon, metaphor and myth, often resulting in definitions that invariably preclude dialogue as well as simplify the complexities and heterogeneity of the music."²⁷ In addition, as Nicholas Evans points out, jazz critics were debating the relationship between jazz and American national culture in the 1920s, which was before the practice of jazz criticism had been codified.²⁸ The relationship between canon, inclusion/exclusion and national identity as they relate to the construction of multiple insularities is a major theme in Chapter One.

²⁵ Iain Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Ingrid Monson, *Freedom sounds: civil rights call out to jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Scott Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Christopher Bakriges, "This music is climate controlled: Critical reaction to the African American vanguard in post war jazz, 1945–1957," *The source: Challenging jazz criticism* 2(2005).

²⁶ Charles Hiroshi Garrett, *Struggling to define a nation : American music and the twentieth century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

²⁷ Dvinge, "Between History & Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century," 203.

²⁸ Evans, *Writing jazz: race, nationalism, and modern culture in the 1920s*.

Where this dissertation differs from other work on jazz criticism is primarily in terms of how it theorizes the act of jazz criticism and the cultural work that criticism does. I am primarily interested in uncovering the mechanisms and strategies which some critics used in their attempts at creating social change. Many of these attempts at change involved challenging the jazz canon through the construction of multiple insularities. Although others eschewed the concept of insularity altogether, critiquing and attacking the very values and logics which create them. While this directly relates to the jazz canon, I intend to go beyond the canon itself and look at the social implications of jazz critics' various interactions with the canon. This involves analyzing not only what was written, but also how and why it was written.

This dissertation's theoretical base draws from theories of the performative power of writing to critical race and gender theory. In Chapter One I adapt Herman Gray's use of "cultural work," as it compliments theories of cultural authority as laid out by Paul Starr and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's theories of social construction.²⁹ Following Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who writes about how language orders social relations and can be used to challenge or remake social relations, I use the theories about writing's subversive potential to challenge hegemony as outlined by Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous.³⁰ I will draw from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Alex Ross, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, and Jacques Rancière by applying their theories of the relations between taste and power to the inner processes that shape jazz

²⁹ Gray, *Cultural moves: African Americans and the politics of representation*; Paul Starr, *The social transformation of American medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, 3d ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967).

³⁰ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich, Vermont: Argo Books, 1970); Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Hélène Cixous and Susan Sellers, *White ink: interviews on sex, text and politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Susan Sellers and Hélène Cixous, *Writing differences: readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988); Luce Irigaray, *This sex which is not one* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

criticism.³¹ I make use of theories of ideology and the habitus as outlined by Louis Althusser, Bourdieu and Franz Fanon to show how critics reproduce dominant gender ideologies in their work.³² I also engage with feminist standpoint theory, especially the work of Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Alison Jaggar and Dorothy Smith.³³ The work of postmodern critics such as David Harvey, Frederic Jameson, Brian McHale and Jean Francois Lyotard is essential to my reading of Nathaniel Mackey's work.³⁴ I use the work of the above theorists to show how critics use language to construct and challenge multiple insularities, the effects of their construction in terms of inclusion and exclusion, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the attempts to construct multiple insularities.

Focusing on the work of three prolific jazz critics, Leonard Feather, Valerie Wilmer and Nathaniel Mackey, this dissertation examines the attempts of these critics to challenge the jazz canon in different ways and for different reasons by constructing or deconstructing multiple insularities. The act of grouping Feather, Wilmer and Mackey together represents my view that the practice of jazz criticism is diverse and that the definition of who can be considered a jazz

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of value: alternative perspectives for critical theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); Ross, *No respect: intellectuals & popular culture*; Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: on politics and aesthetics*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010).

³² Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*; Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine domination* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Louis Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001). Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

³³ Nancy C.M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004). Dorothy E. Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004). Alison M. Jaggar, "Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004). Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³⁴ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Jean-François Lyotard, *The postmodern condition : a report on knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987). David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity : an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: Blackwell, 1989).

critic is broad. Feather, the most mainstream of the three, as well as the most active in the public sphere and jazz recording and media industry, defined jazz in relatively conservative terms. He stuck close to the established canon and fervently argued that jazz was a universal art form available to all. Wilmer, on the other hand, has argued and continues to argue that music is social practice, that it is not universal, and that people of African descent are the only people who can claim ownership of the music. Her musical insularity is broader than Feather's, notably in her embrace of avant-garde jazz. Mackey, whose literary criticism, and experimental poetry and fiction has been highly influential in poetry and academic circles, rejects the logic and processes which govern the creation of insularities, finding them to calcify the music and deny those who make it agency. These three critics engaged with multiple insularities in different ways. As I will argue, Feather and Wilmer constructed their own insularity, while Mackey set about to deconstruct insularities by breaking down the borders between them - a much different project than insularity construction. Analyzing these three critics, whose writing, ideologies and engagement with insularities vary greatly, highlights how diverse the practice of jazz criticism is, and I hope to show that the practice is more varied and exists in more realms and in more forms than has previously been recognized. In addition, the great difference among them brings into stark relief the concept of jazz criticism as a field of multiple insularities.

This dissertation is split into two parts. Part one consists of the first chapter, which theorizes the cultural work of jazz criticism and the ways it creates multiple insularities. It also discusses what is at stake in the challenging and construction of insularities. Part two consists of chapters two through four, each of which are a type of case study of how each critic challenged and (de)constructed multiple insularities. Each chapter in part two asks the following questions: Why did the critic challenge the canon? What is the insularity they attempted to build or

challenge and how did they do it? What was the result of each critic's cultural work at engaging with multiple insularities and what led to that result? Part two proceeds chronologically, beginning with Leonard Feather's work in the 1940s and 1950s, moving to Valerie Wilmer's work in the 1960s and 1970s, and ending with Nathaniel Mackey's writing in the 1980s.

I have chosen to focus on Feather, Wilmer and Mackey for several reasons.

Leonard Feather provides an excellent example of a critic who attempted to challenge the canon from within. As a critic, journalist, performer, producer, television and radio personality, lyricist and publicist, Leonard Feather was active in nearly every aspect in jazz. Studying the ways in which Feather negotiated his varied roles and interests in the pursuit of his work offers insight into the forces shaping jazz criticism. Feather is an important figure to study for the ways in which he challenged the canon's gender ideologies. Reducing sexism was one of the overarching goals of his career, and he attempted to break down the barriers that made jazz a male space using every tool at his disposal. Looking at Feather's efforts to reduce gender bias presents a fuller picture of the complicated inner workings of the cultural work of jazz criticism, especially as Feather was involved in so many extra-critical pursuits, such as radio, television and producing records.

One of this dissertation's contributions to jazz criticism studies is its chapter on the British critic Valerie Wilmer, who Gennari acknowledges is a critic deserving of further study.³⁵ While some attention is given to criticism in the 1970s it is relatively small when compared to the scholarship on earlier decades. Studying Wilmer, who published her highly respected book *As Serious As Your Life* in 1977, helps to fill some of the gaps in jazz criticism scholarship on the

³⁵ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 17.

1970s.³⁶ Wilmer is the author of three other books: 1970's *Jazz People*, her 1989 autobiography entitled *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This: My Life in the Jazz World*, and *The Face of Black Music*, a book of her photography. Wilmer has also written for numerous music periodicals, including *Downbeat* and *Melody Maker*. Beginning in the 1960s Wilmer challenged the structures of power in the mainstream jazz press, calling into question many of the mainstream's racial, gender and aesthetic ideologies. Wilmer was highly critical of what she saw as the European oriented aesthetic positions of most of the white critics and attempted to show how jazz and black music was influenced and shaped by African American culture and politics. In addition to her work on challenging what she saw as the European oriented aesthetic positions of most of the white critics, Wilmer expanded the possibilities for what issues jazz criticism could discuss. Wilmer's experiences, such as when men called her "the chick who did that story on Thelonious [Monk]" also shows how examining her presence in the masculine world of jazz provides insights into the gendered world of jazz in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁷ In *As Serious as Your Life* she included chapters on the difficulties female jazz musicians faced and on the partners of jazz musicians and their roles in the music, which are topics rarely written about by other critics. This chapter helps to expose the gender relations in the jazz world and shed light on the patriarchal nature of jazz. In this way, Wilmer shows that there is much to jazz than just

³⁶ Paul Lopes' *The Rise of a Jazz Art World* ends its narrative at the end of the Jazz Renaissance in the late 1960s. Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*. Iain Anderson's book *This Is Our Music* provides a great example of how to examine the politics of ownership and authenticity in jazz in the 1960s, but he fast forwards to Marsalis and JALC in his conclusion. Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*. In *Blowin' Hot and Cool* Gennari provides a discussion of Gary Giddins and other critics who rose to prominence in the 1970s, as well as the work and influence of Albert Murray and Stanley Crouch, but this section is relatively short compared to the other critics and decades Gennari deals with. Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 339-71. There is an excellent article by Ronald Radano that discusses how critics turned to Anthony Braxton and tried to position him as a figure who would resuscitate jazz; however, works that focus on jazz criticism, canonization and the role of jazz in the construction of American culture in the 1970s are few and far between. Ronald Michael Radano, "Critical Alchemy: Anthony Braxton and the Imagined Tradition," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995).

³⁷ Val Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world* (London: Women's Press, 1989), 135.

the music; rather than an insulated art form to be judged on universal qualities, it is a multi-layered social practice and a site of contention.

Studying Mackey allows us to expand our notion of what jazz criticism is and who counts as a critic. Nicholas Evans considers people like W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson, two people who might not be thought of jazz critics, to be jazz critics. I also consider people who write in genres outside those of jazz criticism and in venues other than mainstream jazz magazines, newspapers, blogs and liner notes to be critics and their writing to serve a critical function, whether those efforts are meant to support the canon or to construct an alternate one. By expanding our notions of who is a jazz critic, what counts as jazz criticism, and by looking at writers who address numerous genres of American music and art, we can broaden our understanding of the people who (re)create or deconstruct the jazz canon and where their work fits into the jazz art world and American culture in general. I argue that Mackey writes jazz criticism in alternative forms and genres that may not usually considered to be jazz criticism. As such, by studying their work, we can gain a fuller perspective on the cultural work of many types of jazz criticism, not just the dominant views published in the pages of *Downbeat*, *Metronome* or *The New Yorker*. Besides writing jazz criticism which often falls out of the mainstream, Mackey also represents different approaches to challenging the canon. Mackey's work is experimental and highly informed by literary and critical theory. His writing is meant to be performative, making the nature of his writing and the goals it is supposed to achieve highly conducive to highlighting the multiple insularities in jazz criticism.

I have chosen to group Feather, Wilmer and Mackey together for four main reasons. First, I like their writing styles and they are all unique stylists who attempted to create change with their writing. Second, the diversity of their experiences, styles, ideologies and biases and

music they wrote about presents a large and diverse cross-section of jazz criticism in the second half of the twentieth-century. Third, that they all represent diverse backgrounds and points of view, yet all use(d) their writing to work toward change, provides an ideal way to view their work through the lens of multiple insularities. In other words, their work to challenge the canon and use their writing to effect social change highlights the process of the construction and challenging of multiple insularities. Fourth, I find their work to represent a general trend of cultural criticism in the second half of the twentieth century in which hegemonic canons and viewpoints were challenged from numerous directions. Feather, Wilmer and Mackey all to varying degrees challenged the canon created by 1950s mainstream criticism, which was primarily marked by white, privileged men who felt jazz could be judged by universal values and who felt that the social context of the music was not important. I contextualize the collective writing of these three critics within Michael Kammen's description of the declining social and cultural relevance of cultural critics from the middle twentieth century to the present. In short, Kammen argues that in the last half century the dominance and influence of cultural critics has drastically declined as the democratization of culture has increased.³⁸ By the 1970s Kammen notes that "traditional cultural authorities" became "increasingly irrelevant."³⁹ The end result of the decline of the critic's influence is that no "one person or side is any longer seen as absolutely authoritative" and that "there is no longer an authoritative position; only divergent points of view."⁴⁰ These three writers worked against a system in which a small number of people held sway over the canon while at the same time worked towards the democratization of culture through the construction or deconstruction of multiple insularities.

³⁸ Michael G. Kammen, *American culture, American tastes: social change and the 20th century*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1999), 134-51.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

Chapter One, "Theorizing the Practice of Jazz Criticism and the Stakes of Insularity," outlines the numerous activities that the practice of jazz criticism entails. It defines the "jazz critic," or anyone who engages in jazz criticism, to be a cultural authority and a cultural worker whose judgments help to shape the ways in which people think about and perceive jazz. This chapter describes the activities of early jazz critics to show how the practice of jazz criticism and the creation of the jazz canon was created. Jazz critics are hugely influential in the social construction of the jazz art world and influence the ways in which people think about and perceive jazz. Critics may create or deconstruct insularities to challenge the canon's values for cultural or political reasons. The chapter's major intervention in jazz criticism scholarship is in the ways the practice of jazz criticism is understood. I theorize the practice of jazz criticism as cultural work that deploys a variety of race, gender and nation projects that challenge the canon and create multiple insularities in an attempt to reap the benefits of having the power to regulate the dominant definitions of jazz. The existence of multiple insularities suggests the existence of multiple jazz art worlds, not a singular art world that Paul Lopes has argued for.⁴¹ The second half of Chapter One puts the critical practice of multiple insularities into relief by providing a brief overview of the history of gender, race and nation projects in jazz criticism. First, I outline how jazz critics have historically defined the canon as a male enterprise and the discursive mechanisms and practices that have allowed critics to do so. Second, I address how a largely white body of critics has defined jazz as a largely African American art form and the tensions that arise from this process and how this practice affects the jazz marketplace. Finally, I discuss jazz criticism and its role in the construction of American cultural and national identity. As jazz has long been considered to be an American art form it is important to discuss nation and cultural identity as it relates to jazz criticism. If jazz criticism helps to create the social world of jazz,

⁴¹ Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*.

and that world is intertwined with American cultural identity, what are the stakes of being included or excluded from that social world as it relates to American cultural identity? It is by answering this question that we can understand the stakes of the construction of multiple insularities as encompassing power struggles over gender, race, and national and cultural identity.

Chapter Two, "'Feather's Nest': Leonard Feather's Unintentional Reinforcement of Jazz as an Androcentric Space," examines the cultural work of Feather and the ways in which he unintentionally reinforced jazz as an androcentric space. While one of his main career goals was to reduce gender bias in jazz he was, as this chapter argues, ineffective at doing so. The primary reason for this was despite his admirable intentions and hard work he was acting within the canon's dominant gender ideologies and the ideologies of the jazz marketplace. I argue that had he created or worked within an alternative insularity he would have been more effective. Paraphrasing Audre Lord, Feather was unable to tear down the master's house using the master's tools. Drawing on Feather's personal collection at the International Jazz Collections at the University of Idaho, I examine three bodies of work from his career, all of which demonstrate in different ways he attempted and ultimately failed at his goal. First, I look at his work producing alto saxophonist and vocalist Vi Redd's 1962 album entitled *Bird Calls* and her 1963 album *Lady Soul*. Feather successfully pitched both albums to the labels, produced it, wrote the liner notes for it, composed some of the music, and wrote an article on Redd for *Downbeat*. He subsequently made numerous attempts at convincing both labels to pick up their options for additional albums. The discussion of Redd's album sheds light on the complexity of the practice of jazz criticism and the relationship between the active parties in a jazz art world, as Feather was involved in nearly every aspect of the album's production. It also demonstrates the ways in

which he worked in the jazz industry affiliated with the canon and outlines the importance of the role of the jazz market and the gender ideologies which influence it in determining the album's production. Second, I discuss his Blindfold Tests for *Metronome* and *Downbeat* magazine to show how he not only used them to legitimize female musicians, but how he attempted to use them to show that gender is not identifiable in sound, which he hoped would prove his assertion that women could play just as well as men. His Blindfold Tests provide further evidence of his efforts to reduce gender bias through dominant strategies and media. The results of the Blindfold Tests suggest that he was correct in his assumptions that "gender" was inaudible, but they also show Feather to be reinforcing the very same patriarchal ideologies of the canon that he was working against. Third, I examine his time as the jazz editor of *Playboy*, a position which he held in the late 1950s and early 1960s. His work for *Playboy* underscores the idea that jazz is a masculine activity and that it was a core element to a popular form of American masculinity during the time period. Combined with the first two sections, this discussion of Feather's work at *Playboy* underscores my argument that he was unable to reduce gender bias because he was working within, and ultimately for, the dominant ideologies that create jazz as an androcentric space, ideologies which are at the heart of the canon.

Chapter Three, "A Living Entity Rather Than a Piece of Plastic Stuck in a Sleeve": Val Wilmer's Standpoint Insularity," focuses on the British writer and photographer Valerie Wilmer. It argues that Wilmer, whose main goal is to show musicians as real and complex people, created what I call a "standpoint insularity." Using feminist standpoint theory as a lens through which to examine Wilmer's work, this chapter analyzes her music writing and photography, showing the ways in which Wilmer challenged any insularity that viewed music as divorced from its social and historical context. Wilmer was more critical of jazz criticism's role in

defining and limiting jazz, which she felt had many negative consequences, especially in terms of race. By highlighting the lived experiences of the musicians she wrote about and photographed, Wilmer illuminated the discrimination, subjugation and marginalization suffered by African American musicians. In doing so, she provides not only a critique to the canon, but a standpoint that provides the foundation for further critique. In addition, this chapter argues that her photography is a form of jazz criticism, a practice which is generally not considered to be jazz criticism.

Chapter Four, "'Jazz Paracriticism' and the Anti-Insularity Project of Nathaniel Mackey's *Bedouin Hornbook*," analyzes the epistolary novel *Bedouin Hornbook*. The first volume in his *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* series, *Bedouin Hornbook* is a significant alternative form of jazz criticism and a political work which seeks to enact social change.⁴² Using textual analysis, placing it in the context of other jazz fiction, and using postmodern theories of knowledge creation and narrative, this chapter shows how the novel works as a "paracritical hinge," that is a tool which allows flow between borders of various types. In this way, as a piece of jazz criticism, or rather as I categorize it, as a piece of "jazz paracriticism," the novel works against the concept of insularity, which reinforces ideas that music is a living and dynamic process, not fixed around genre or insularity lines. The book is written in many styles and transcends genre, and Mackey challenges the critic/musician and critic/reader divide by writing about a musician who writes about music, which is jazz criticism on at least two levels. This approach to writing about music suggests, but also calls into question, who is best suited to write about the music - a musician or a non-musician? It also calls into question the value of

⁴² Nathaniel Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3* (New York: New Directions, 2010).

constructing insularities and in doing so, reminds us that while an insularity may be created out of a wish to improve social relations, it still excludes.

The conclusion puts Feather, Wilmer and Mackey into conversation with each other, answering the what, why and how of insularity construction and deconstruction. Using the work of these three writers, I conclude that their engagement with multiple insularities, including the canon, results from dissatisfaction with the effects of predominant views of jazz have on those who produce and enjoy the music. As I will show, Feather, Wilmer and Mackey, and in fact most critics, engage with multiple insularities in different ways. They do so as both a reactive maneuver to critique the problems wrought by the canon and as a proactive one that seeks to remedies these problems. I emphasize that not all critics construct insularities. While Feather and Wilmer both worked to create their own insularities, Mackey works at deconstructing them, which is a different way to work with multiple insularities. Jazz criticism is an activity where its participants constantly debate, argue, and agree or disagree about not only the merits of the music, but about the consequences of these evaluations. And the result of these activities is the creation of multiple insularities.

Following the conclusion is a brief postscript, in which I bring the anecdote I led off this introduction with full circle. In the postscript I discuss the ways in which my thinking about jazz criticism as a practice, especially my jazz criticism, has evolved. This evolution from my thinking of criticism as more or less aesthetic value judgments to acknowledging it as a more complex act full of subtleties and implications, as well as my desire to write in more creative ways, is in no small part due to the work I've done in this dissertation. Part cathartic activity, part self-reflexive narrative, part attempt to begin to think through and examine my own insularity, and as a way to albeit briefly break out of the writing style and voice demands of the

dissertation genre to reach for something more personal, the postscript is my attempt at placing myself in the context of jazz criticism.

Chapter 1: The Practice of Jazz Criticism and the Stakes of Insularity

What is the definition of jazz? And who was authorized to make one?

-LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka)¹

Criticism articulated the realization that, however it was constituted and calibrated, aesthetic value was inherently ideological.

-Richard Wrigley²

I usually wrote about an area where I was trying to effect a particular something.

- Helen Oakley Dance³

INTRODUCTION

When I got my first assignment writing CD reviews for *Downbeat* my editor sent me a basic star rating guide, which was meant to assist me in assigning the five star heuristic rating that accompanies each review. Albums are rated from one to five stars. A five star rating indicates that the critic feels that the album is a "masterpiece" - or put another way, it's an album that is comparable in quality and artistic achievement to Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*. A one-star album is "poor," and as such, the critic thinks the album so bad that it should not have been made. The criteria and characteristics for each star rating are the product of decades of debate about how to judge the relative merits of jazz. How well does the band play together? How technically sound are the performances? How strong are the solos and compositions? How does this album compare to what the artist has done previously? How does it compare to other albums released the same calendar year? In a way, the rating guide represents a microcosm of much of the practice of jazz criticism in and of itself, in that it deals with issues of technical standards, evaluative methodology, and canon. Assigning a star rating to an album is far from

¹ Baraka, *Black music*, 23.

² Richard Wrigley, *The origins of French art criticism: from the Ancien Régime to the Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³ Helen Oakley Dance, quoted in Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 177.

scientific however, as the critic's individual tastes, ideologies, background and social location all play a part in the critic's rating. The system, while it is structured in a way so as to produce an objective rating, relies on the individual critic, which is of major importance when considering a critic's judgments. This brief description of *Downbeat's* star rating guide illuminates some of the basic practices a jazz critic undertakes when evaluating a record. Using the star rating guide as a point of departure, this chapter will not only define the practical aspects of jazz criticism, but more significantly, it theorizes and argues that the cultural work of jazz criticism is the construction or deconstruction of multiple insularities. Rather than suggesting that critics work in concert to create a single canon, I argue that critics work independently, engaging with multiple insularities in diverse ways for different reasons.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the general activities, qualifications and practices of the "jazz critic." Following the work of Andrew Ross, Paul Starr and Michael Kammen, it concludes that the job of jazz critics is to perform as cultural authorities. The second part builds upon Herman Gray's definition of cultural work and argues that jazz critics are significant cultural workers. The third section argues that jazz critics use race, gender and nation projects in various ways, drawing on the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant. I also give an overview of the history of these projects as manifested in jazz criticism. I argue that critics who challenge the definitions and values of the jazz canon use race, gender and nation projects to create an insularity with its own traditions, values and definitions of jazz. This chapter's main intervention in the study of jazz criticism is the concept I call "multiple insularities." Multiple insularities can be understood as the collection of individual insularities that each contain their own definitions of jazz and regulate the line between jazz and not jazz. The results of the creation of multiple insularities structure the social relationships of

those who engage with jazz in some way. Multiple insularities in part come from debates driven not only by musical values but by ideologies of race, gender, nation, etc. The working out of these ideologies are crucial in drawing the line between jazz and not jazz in any given insularity. I argue that one of the main products of jazz criticism is in the construction of multiple insularities, as opposed to constructing a single canon.

This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: Who can be considered a jazz critic? What is the role of the jazz critic? What things should guide a critic's judgment? Who is the critic to say what performance is good or bad and what is the source of that critic's authority? How and why do the discourses of race, gender and nation influence jazz criticism? What overall effects does a critic's work have? The answers to these questions, which have swirled around my head ever since seeing my editor's star review guide, suggest that far from being a practice that lists what jazz albums are good or not, the practice of jazz criticism does political cultural work that is executed through a series of race, gender and nation projects. In this chapter, I am primarily interested in trying to pin down and find an answer to the holistic and perhaps unanswerable question: "what is it that jazz critics *do*?" What follows is my attempt to do just that.⁴

⁴ Whether music critics set the aesthetic boundaries by singing the praises, or excluding and deriding musicians for their work, they all make value judgments about the music and serve to mediate music to their audience. In this dissertation I use the word "value" rather than "aesthetic" when talking about judgments of music that appear in music criticism. As opposed to Immanuel Kant who argues in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that it is possible to aesthetically judge a work disinterestedly, I take the position, following Pierre Bourdieu, Barbara Hernstein Smith and others, that all judgments are not only inherently biased based on the social location of the person doing the judging, but that none of the art works under assessment were created and exist in a vacuum devoid of all societal and cultural influence. As such, the word "value" more accurately reflects the biased nature of judgments and the social nature of art works more than "aesthetic," which implies disinterested judgment based on the evaluation of an art work's immanent configurations, something that is not possible. In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Pierre Bourdieu shows how "taste" is conditional, and argues that the "pure gaze," which is a concept espoused by Kant, David Hume, and others who feel that one can evaluate something disinterestedly, is a "historical invention," and that "aesthetic perception is necessarily historical." The adoption of the "pure gaze," Bourdieu argues, implies one's break with the social world. Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, 1, 3, 4, 31. Barbara Hernstein Smith takes a similar position as Bourdieu. Smith argues that "our experience of 'the value of the work' is equivalent to *our experience of the work in relation to*

JAZZ CRITICS AS CULTURAL AUTHORITIES

Jazz journalism is a challenging but worthwhile profession. To do the job well, one must have some or all of the following qualities: nuanced critical sensibilities; musical, social, and psychological insights; well-honed skills of immediate recall as well as long-term memory; personal literary, photographic and/or broadcasting style; business acumen, and the imaginative flexibility of a good improviser. A jazz journalist has to know how to (and be able to) write on deadline, should be something of an anthropologist, and have at least basic chops as a researcher, entertainer, teacher and traveler. A jazz journalist . . . should be able to hang with the cats and be as conversant, if not expert, with the totality and trivia of contemporary culture as anyone else in the room.
- Howard Mandel⁵

In this excerpt from his essay "The History, Myths, Values and Practices of Jazz Journalists," Howard Mandel, president of the Jazz Journalists Association, provides a long laundry list of what he thinks the ideal skills, experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge a jazz journalist should have (I will discuss the journalist/critic semantic divide below). Considering the variety in Mandel's list, it is no surprise that the practice of jazz criticism is diverse and can take many forms. To this end, the jazz critic can serve a multitude of roles and purposes. In his book *Classical Music Criticism* Robert Schick lists several of the music critic's roles. The music critic teaches and educates his or her audience, chronicles and historicizes the music, supports and advocates the music and performers, and present new arguments and viewpoints in essays.⁶ Georgia Cowart provides a succinct definition of what the classical music critic is and does, which can be applied to jazz critics as well: "the critic is most generally understood as a person who tells his audience what he thinks is good and why. His means of determining quality may

the total economy of our existence." It is not possible for one to judge something disinterestedly, as a work's value is always attached to our backgrounds. "All value is radically contingent," Smith says, and it is the "product of the dynamics of a system, specifically an economic system." Smith, *Contingencies of value: alternative perspectives for critical theory*, 16, 30.

⁵ Howard Mandel, "The history, myths, values and practices of jazz journalists," *The source: Challenging jazz criticism* 2(2005): 71.

⁶ Robert D. Schick, *Classical music criticism: with a chapter on reviewing ethnic music* (New York: Garland, 1996), 24-32.

range from subjective personal impressions to objective standards and rules, but most criticism of value falls somewhere between these two extremes. The modern critic is also a shaper of taste whose guidance helps to form public opinion; his audience consists primarily of informed amateurs – concertgoers and readers of periodicals – who look to the informed opinion of an expert.”⁷

Similarly, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka) requires jazz critics to tell their audience what is of value and what is not, preferably when the music is new.⁸ While Stanley Crouch and Jones (Baraka) often have fundamentally opposed views, Crouch echoes the job and requirements of the good jazz critic. Like Cowart, Crouch argues that critics should serve as pedagogues, taste makers and that they should be in a position to judge whether new music positively contributes to the musical tradition.⁹ Similarly, critic Stanley Dance “felt the first duty of the critic was to serve as a liaison between musician and public.”¹⁰ Coming from yet another perspective, Martin Williams laid out in an article for *Downbeat* in 1958 what he believed the critic’s main goals and responsibilities to be. Williams stated that “the critic’s questions are ‘How?’ and ‘Why?’ not merely ‘What?’” He then established what he thought were criticism’s four main goals. “The critic’s first question is what is the work trying to do? Notice that this does not say, what do you think the artist *ought* to be trying to do.” His second question asked “how well does it do it, and how and why so. The third is, is it worth doing? Notice that this is the last question and *not* the first.” Fourth, “the critic should compare everything with the best that he knows whenever the comparison seems just and enlightening.” Williams concludes that, “ultimately, the critic makes

⁷ Georgia Cowart, *The origins of modern musical criticism: French and Italian music, 1600-1750* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 61.

⁸ Baraka, *Black music*, 22. For additional views on Jones' (Baraka's) opinions of what the jazz critic should do, see "Jazz Criticism and its Effect on the Art Form," in Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Digging: the Afro-American soul of American classical music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 72-85.

⁹ Stanley Crouch, *Considering genius: writings on jazz* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 216-29.

¹⁰ Stanley Dance, quoted in Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 169.

a judgment, an evaluation."¹¹ More broadly, Nicholas Evans considers any writer who explores the cultural meaning of jazz to be a jazz critic.¹² Regardless of the critic's social location, knowledge, ethics, motivations or the methods and media through which the critic reaches his or her audience, the critic ultimately makes value judgments, the impacts of which may be far-ranging.

I define jazz criticism as any and all of the work which comes from the processes these writers describe above. Jazz criticism manifests itself in many genres, ranging from a 250 word album review, to concert and book reviews, opinion columns, lengthy interviews and artist features, record album liner notes, to short news announcements, to poetry and fiction, to non-fiction books which give jazz a historical narrative and/or analyzes jazz. In addition, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, photography can also function as jazz criticism. Although, a consensus of what counts as jazz criticism does not exist. Ronald Welburn includes journalism and reportage under the rubric of criticism, making the definition of what counts as jazz criticism quite broad.¹³ Mandel prefers to separate journalism from criticism, arguing that as opposed to journalists, "critics can contemplate the music at considerably more length, possibly more depth, and often from a greater remove."¹⁴ In his essay "A Bad Idea, Poorly Executed . . ." legendary record producer and former critic Orrin Keepnews finds a distinct, yet at times hard to identify boundary between the lines of critic and reviewer. Keepnews characterizes a reviewer as someone who primarily writes short recording or concert reviews for a newspaper or similar publication, while a critic deals with music in the larger historical and social context, examining

¹¹ Martin Williams, "Criticism: the Path of the Jazz Critic," *Downbeat*, August 21 1958, 11.

¹² Evans, *Writing jazz: race, nationalism, and modern culture in the 1920s*, 288.

¹³ Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 11.

¹⁴ Mandel, "The history, myths, values and practices of jazz journalists," 73.

recordings though a unifying theme.¹⁵ Based on the wide range of genres and forms jazz criticism takes it is at times difficult to distinguish criticism from journalism, history, musicology, or even gossip, especially when considering a single "critic" can write in all of jazz criticism's numerous genres. Given this difficulty, I choose not to separate delineate boundaries among journalism, reviewing and criticism.

One way in which to unify these genres and the people who write them under the rubric of jazz criticism is to use Gennari's concept of the "critic's pose." Those who take up the critic's pose locate themselves in a place of cultural authority above mere fans who are too busy dancing and pursuing "untutored adolescent passions" to appreciate jazz as an art music.¹⁶ I consider anyone who writes in one or more of jazz criticism's genres, and who takes on the critic's pose and assumes the position of authority the pose provides, to be a jazz critic.

It is important to keep in mind that jazz critics are not just professional writers and journalists. Eric Porter describes how some African American musicians wrote in order to present their musical ideas and aesthetic philosophies directly to the public rather than having them mediated (perhaps incorrectly) by critics. Porter states: "their ideas were rooted in a long conversation in the jazz community and, to varying extents, in their positions as workers within the jazz industry. Implicitly and explicitly, these writings operated as critical interventions in the jazz discourse; they remain a testament both to continuing difficulties avant-garde musicians experienced while trying to make a living and to the effect of pejorative reporting from jazz critics and other commentators."¹⁷ This statement suggests that studies of criticism should

¹⁵ Orrin Keepnews, "A Bad Idea, Poorly Executed . . ." in *Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now*, ed. Robert Gottlieb (New York: Pantheon, 1996), 1044-45.

¹⁶ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 66, 87. Also see Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 177-83.

¹⁷ Eric Porter, *What is this thing called jazz?: African American musicians as artists, critics, and activists* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002), 240. Porter's observation is important to keep in mind because one of the earliest jazz critics was African American bandleader, composer, war hero and civil rights activist James Reese Europe. His early comments about the music that was beginning to be called jazz in the popular press helped to set

include musicians who offered critical interventions in jazz discourse in addition to critics who are primarily writers. As Gennari and former editor of *Downbeat* and head of the Institute of Jazz Studies Dan Morgenstern point out, the jazz critic may also wear several hats in the music world that do not preclude them from being a critic, such as critics who are also prominent composers, performers, or record producers.¹⁸ As the experiences, backgrounds and occupations of those who write jazz criticism are far from uniform, I hesitate to label any individual person a "jazz critic" purely by virtue of their writing activities. Rather, I apply the term "jazz critic" to identify any person who engages in the practice of jazz criticism.

Anyone who engages in jazz criticism, regardless of their non-writing activities, is a cultural authority vested with cultural power. In his book, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, Paul Starr outlines a theory of how individuals are given power by way of their perceived knowledge and competency. Although he theorizes about the power, authority and legitimacy of physicians and the medical profession as a whole, his theory works nicely when considering the role, power and authority of the music critic. He defines modern medicine as an "extraordinary work of reason" that contains "specialized knowledge, technical procedures, and rules of behavior." By virtue of their specialized knowledge "some people stand above others in knowledge and authority" and are in control of various institutions.¹⁹ Or in the words

the tone for the criticism to come. Ron Welburn, "James Reese Europe and the Infancy of Jazz Criticism," *Black Music Research Journal* 7(1987): 35-44.

¹⁸ Gennari points out in the introduction to *Blowin' Hot and Cool* that jazz critics, unlike rock or pop critics, have been unable to make a living only writing jazz criticism or journalism. He cites former *Downbeat* editor and current director of the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University Dan Morgenstern, who explains that in addition to their activities as writers, jazz critics have worked as "editors and a&r [record company artist-and-repertory] men, broadcasters and emcees, publicity flacks and personal managers, concert producers and TV script advisors, songwriters and lecturers." Morgenstern, quoted in Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 8.

¹⁹ Starr, *The social transformation of American medicine*, 3.

of Andrew Ross, intellectuals and critics carry the "authority of cultural competence."²⁰ Starr describes power as originating from relationships of dependence and notes that in terms of professions, power originates in the professional's knowledge and competence. Most laypeople, he argues, see the professional's power as legitimate, because "when professionals claim to be authoritative about the nature of reality, whether it is the structure of the atom, the ego, or the universe, we generally defer to their judgment."²¹ Just like the physicians and other medical professionals who mediate modern medicine to their patients,²² music critics help bridge the wide gap between the music and the layperson, as knowledge of a particular art's conventions are what help distinguish who is inside and outside of the art world.²³ Those with cultural authority, Michael Kammen suggests, have "the capacity to bestow legitimacy or respectability upon a cultural custom or 'product.'"²⁴ This can be directly seen in jazz criticism through critics' efforts to frame jazz as a respectable genre and ultimately as a high art.

As gatekeepers, taste makers and cultural authorities, jazz critics position themselves as those with the skills to educate the public about jazz. The demystification of music provided by critics is exactly what Starr talks about in terms of the "extraordinary work of reason," an assumption that music that needs to be explained to a less knowledgeable public. Applying Starr's theory to jazz, it is possible to see how an audience depends upon jazz critics for their "superior competence."²⁵ I would suggest that the audience *assumes* such a superior competence because the critic profession has been institutionalized. Therefore the jazz critic is given

²⁰ Ross, *No respect: intellectuals & popular culture*, 6. Howard Becker makes a similar argument to Starr and Ross. Becker suggests that some people in an art world are more entitled to speak on behalf of the art world because they have more institutional authority. Becker, *Art worlds*, 151.

²¹ Starr, *The social transformation of American medicine*, 4.

²² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²³ Becker, *Art worlds*, 48-50.

²⁴ Kammen, *American culture, American tastes: social change and the 20th century*, 133.

²⁵ Starr, *The social transformation of American medicine*, 11.

authority because the jazz criticism establishment, i.e., those institutions that publish criticism, have validated the jazz critic's competence.²⁶

But not only does the critical establishment validate a critic's competence, but the critic, by virtue of taking up the "critics pose," often validates his or herself, which can be seen in Gennari's discussion mid twentieth century critics. The critics at the focus of Gennari's examination, such as Martin Williams, Whitney Balliett, Dan Morgenstern and Gene Lees, were part of a larger cadre of post-World War Two Cold War American cultural critics who "saw themselves as not merely consumer guides, but priestly agents of moral authority in an 'age of anxiety' marked by the pervasive threat of nuclear annihilation, totalitarianism, bureaucratic standardization and a conformist mass culture."²⁷ In addition to framing jazz as a serious art form, these critics saw themselves as intellectuals and their own writing as a serious practice comparable with literary criticism.²⁸ These critics, who considered and positioned themselves as cultural authorities, felt that they were working on not only the behalf of jazz but for the American people as well. The nature of their work is the focus of the next section.

THE CULTURAL WORK OF JAZZ CRITICISM

Jazz critics have always influenced how we remember, perceive, value and judge music, its musicians and its discourse. Emphasizing their importance, Gennari notes that critics help us to understand jazz, and that they have acted as "proselytizers, intermediaries, gatekeepers, translators, rhetoricians, conceptualizers, producers, and analysts of jazz." Jazz critics "have

²⁶ Ibid., 12.

²⁷ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 167.

²⁸ Ibid., 179-84.

been undeniably powerful voices," who provide a "first draft of jazz history."²⁹ In other words, music critics do cultural work. I define cultural work as the work one does by engaging in cultural projects and interventions with the aim of creating some kind of cultural change. In his book, *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*, Herman Gray discusses several types of cultural workers, such as musicians, who engage in what he calls "significant cultural practices." In Gray's book these "significant cultural practices" consist of projects and cultural work that aim to project certain representations of African American life and culture into the image of mainstream American culture above other representations. Gray notes that the cultural is the political and vice versa, and as such cultural work can also be understood as political work.³⁰ I consider jazz critics to be cultural workers and their writing to be cultural work, because as I argue, their writing serves cultural and political goals. As such, jazz criticism should not be understood as a monolithic institution with uniform practices, goals and audiences; rather, that the practice of making value judgments is loaded with social, cultural and political implications.

As I outlined in the Introduction, where I break from current jazz studies scholarship is my argument for the existence of multiple insularities. One of the main effects of the jazz critic's mediation of music is the creation, either intentionally or unintentionally of an insularity. A canon can be loosely defined as the best of what has been made in a specific art form or musical genre. In addition, a canon also contains the definitions of the art form or musical genre and a narrative of the history of that art or genre. The canon is a regulating and ordering device with

²⁹ Ibid., 3, 5. Also see Becker, *Art worlds*, 346. One manifestations and outcomes of the "first draft of jazz history," as Gennari describes it, is the influence that jazz critics have on shaping what is taught about jazz in schools, which can be found in any jazz history survey which is used in higher education. In this way, jazz critics shape the jazz curriculum just as the modernist literary critics in the mid twentieth century shaped what was taught in undergraduate literature courses. David A. Hollinger, *In the American province: studies in the history and historiography of ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 78.

³⁰ Gray, *Cultural moves: African Americans and the politics of representation*, 1-5.

defined boundaries that mark off the divisions between what fits in the canon and what does not. As a "would be" canon, an insularity has the same characteristics as a canon without occupying the position of power and privilege in the field of multiple insularities. While I argue for the existence of multiple insularities, I find jazz studies scholarship on the construction of an individual jazz canon or tradition to be relevant to this discussion, as the processes and ideologies that create and govern individual insularities are similar to those of a single canon.

A large part of canon creation is the defining of the genre, which distinguishes it from other genres and creates boundaries for what is eligible for inclusion in the tradition. In his article "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography" Scott DeVaux notes that much of the discussion and debate about a particular genre, in this case jazz, deals with the struggle of defining jazz and who has the right to define it.³¹ DeVaux points out that the process of defining a genre is always contested, it grows and evolves and definitions are often the results of compromise between those of different ideologies.³² I would add that if compromise cannot be met, then alternate insularities can appear. When music critics define the music and its tradition, they "reify the music and claim that there is a body of music defined by a genre that encompasses musics of divergent styles and sensibilities."³³ The jazz canon and "tradition is a constantly transforming construction."³⁴ Through the creation and maintenance of a canon, jazz, Iain Anderson argues, "acquires a sacralized aura by embodying supposedly timeless, universal qualities."³⁵ Ultimately, the cultural work that music critics do is the construction of a canon, a

³¹ DeVaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography," 531.

³² Ibid., 539.

³³ Ibid., 530.

³⁴ Elworth, "Jazz in Crisis, 1948-1958: Ideology and Representation," 58. Not only are canons in a constant state of flux, but as Becker argues, the entire art world is in a constant state of flux. The arrival of new artworks that challenge existing conditions can often result in a change in the art world, which then can result in a change in the art form itself. Becker, *Art worlds*, 300-09.

³⁵ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 3.

process which Krin Gabbard reminds us "is scarcely value free."³⁶ Once a genre of music is canonized as art the genre can be "properly understood as an autonomous art, governed by its own laws and judgeable only by its own criteria."³⁷ Each insularity asserts its autonomy, as it has its own laws and is judgeable by its own criteria. As Becker argues, while all members of an art world "have the power to legitimate work as art," critics are often the most specialized figures who create an art world's aesthetic, which further underscores the importance of studying critics.³⁸

It is important to point out that those who take part in canon creation and the struggle to define a genre are not limited to critics. In jazz, this process required the existence of what Paul Lopes, following Howard Becker, calls a jazz art world, which consists of musicians, the recording industry, concert producers, club owners, critics, magazines and the audience. The jazz art world constructs "the aesthetic, cultural and social significance of jazz music."³⁹ Lest this acknowledgement of the importance non-critics play in the defining and canonization of jazz downplay the critic's influence, Lopes, again echoing Becker, reminds us that criticism "legitimized jazz as a distinct music tradition."⁴⁰ Critics were not the only people who defined jazz and the jazz canon, but as those with a position of authority with the power of the pen, critics were some of the most visible and influential people within the jazz art world. While jazz needs support from audiences, concert promoters and others in the jazz art world, critics - as a

³⁶ Krin Gabbard, "Introduction: the Jazz Canon and Its Consequences," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 10. No canon is constructed value free. Hollinger describes how the creation of the modernist literary canon by American critics in the mid twentieth century was the result of a "very special agenda." Hollinger, *In the American province: studies in the history and historiography of ideas*, 81.

³⁷ DeVaux, *The birth of bebop: a social and musical history*, 443.

³⁸ Becker, *Art worlds*, 163, 64.

³⁹ Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 186.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 158.

function of their writing - are most responsible for creating the ways in which people perceive, speak and write about jazz.

One of the main ways in which the early stages of music criticism directly affected the music is through its ability to shape and frame the terms of debate and how critics discuss music. Establishing the rules of engagement for discussing jazz is crucial, for they provide "a crucial framework, a set of assumptions within which the community can operate."⁴¹ Gennari points out that when we talk about jazz, "we're talking in a language and through conceptual categories that have been established by critics."⁴² It is the rules of engagement which literally determines how the music, as well as those aspects related to the music, is discussed at any given time and context. Put another way, the rules of engagement govern the art form's conventions and helps to regularize the artistic practice.⁴³ Developing these rules helps establish the standards of judging the new musical genre and provides the foundation for how the history of the genre would be written and the genre itself canonized. In addition, the existence of a codified form of jazz criticism that "tapped into the cultural capital signified by classical learning and a cosmopolitan appreciation of all the finer things in life" was necessary in order for jazz to be considered a high art form, which was the goal for many jazz critics.⁴⁴

When jazz first emerged a set vocabulary did not exist to describe it musically, let alone evaluate it. Ron Welburn notes that one of the problems of early jazz criticism of the nineteenthens is that "there hardly existed a journalism to clarify the kinds of definitions about jazz that are so vital to genuine criticism."⁴⁵ The lack of an existing model required early jazz critics to

⁴¹ Ken Prouty, "Creating Boundaries in the Virtual Jazz Community," in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and its Boundaries*, ed. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, Daniel Goldmark (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2012), 80.

⁴² Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 3-4.

⁴³ Becker, *Art worlds*, 132-34.

⁴⁴ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 34.

⁴⁵ Welburn, "James Reese Europe and the Infancy of Jazz Criticism," 35-36.

define the music. Defining the boundaries and characteristics of jazz was of paramount of importance for critics, for as Mary DuPree points out, during the 1920s a panoply of views and definitions of what jazz was existed. "Few writers, in fact, sought to define jazz in musical terms."⁴⁶ Defining jazz in musical terms was a prerequisite for developing a critical vocabulary and evaluative criteria, which American writers were engaged in throughout the 1930s.⁴⁷ By the end of the first wave of jazz criticism in the early 1940s, the first jazz critics "established the bases for criteria in their reviews and recordings, their perspectives of history and biography, and their development of critical research tools like the discography."⁴⁸ In other words, these critics had constructed the vocabulary and the rules and guidelines which were appropriate to discuss and write about jazz.

It is in this experience of language . . . that the world begins to open up and achieve order in all the domains of existence.
- Hans-Georg Gadamer⁴⁹

Language establishes social relations. It orders the world. Language structures the ways in which people think about themselves and others. It shapes the ways in which people think about the things in and out of their social world and experiences.⁵⁰ The language about jazz is no different: it frames the ways in which people speak, write and think about jazz, and it influences who is in and who is not in a given insularity. Exclusion from an insularity, especially the canon, comes with consequences, as jazz criticism's creation of multiple insularities shapes the social relationships among those in a jazz art world. In short, language about jazz, especially

⁴⁶ Mary Herron Dupree, "'Jazz,' the Critics, and American Art Music in the 1920s," *American Music* 4, no. 3 (1986): 287.

⁴⁷ Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 32-33, 117, 60.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Second ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 547.

⁵⁰ Rosenstock-Huussy, *Speech and Reality*, 115-33.

jazz criticism, plays an essential role in the social construction of the jazz art world and the ordering of social relations within it. The creation of multiple insularities and the effects of this creation is the cultural work of jazz criticism.

A single insularity, like a canon, is a linguistic manifestation of the views of those who subscribe to that insularity. As each insularity has its own definition of what jazz is, each insularity represents and helps to govern its own jazz world. The implication of this is that there is not just one jazz art world, but multiple ones. One can think of a jazz art world as a socially constructed "symbolic universe." Despite the term's clunky-ness it is useful to think about the structure of meanings and relationships in the jazz art world. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann define a symbolic universe as the realm in which all meanings and institutions reside.⁵¹ Thinking of a jazz art world as a bounded symbolic universe that is guided by its own definitions, rules and traditions, one can see how, in Peter Martin's description of the jazz community, people "come to share a common acceptance of certain symbolic representations, often relating to such things as particular musicians, the value of their music, and various narratives of jazz history."⁵² Each jazz art world contains its own insularity, or tradition. By thinking of jazz as containing multiple traditions it, in Scott DeVaux's words, "makes it easier to think of it as a separate world, governed by its own rules." A jazz tradition "provides a sense of 'depth' . . . to our conceptions of what jazz must be."⁵³ Berger and Luckmann point out that certain people, who they call "universal experts" have the power and ability to create and regulate any given symbolic universe's definitions.⁵⁴ Jazz critics, who can be considered a jazz

⁵¹ Berger and Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, 96, 103.

⁵² Peter J. Martin, "The jazz community as an art world: A sociological perspective," *The source: Challenging jazz criticism* 2(2005): 9.

⁵³ DeVaux, "Core and boundaries," 15-16.

⁵⁴ Berger and Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, 120-21.

art world's universal experts, by virtue of their ability to create the rules of engagement for a particular jazz art world, have the ability to define the reality, values, and tradition of jazz.

A jazz art world's language not only constructs the meanings associated with jazz, but it also creates subjects within that discourse. Catherine Belsey stresses that subjects are constructed in language, discourse and ideology, for "it is in language that people constitute themselves as subjects."⁵⁵ This allows for people to take active positions, to create their own subjectivities and identities through language. Identities, as Inderpal Grewal reminds us, are always "strategic," suggesting that identities are created and deployed for a purpose and do not exist *a priori*.⁵⁶ Identities, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, create different "kinds of persons" who "are brought into being by the creation of labels for them."⁵⁷ The creation of identities is important, as identities help to give people agency. Collective identities, Appiah says, "provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their projects and in telling their life stories."⁵⁸ Appiah says that the existence of collective identities in general "requires the availability of terms in public discourse that are used to pick out the bearers of the identity by way of criteria of ascription, so that some people are recognized *as* members of the group."⁵⁹ By taking part in jazz discourse one becomes at some level a member of a single or multiple jazz art worlds. Membership in a jazz art world "represents a potential source of identification for individuals, and one which can offer them considerable benefits and satisfactions."⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Catherine Belsey, "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," in *Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robin R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 595.

⁵⁶ Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: feminisms, diasporas, neoliberalisms* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 2005), 13.

⁵⁷ Anthony Appiah, *The ethics of identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 65.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-67. Italics in original.

⁶⁰ Martin, "The jazz community as an art world: A sociological perspective," 9.

As I will show in Chapter Two in my discussion of Leonard Feather's interpellation of female musicians, one can have part of his or her subjectivity created by someone else. The active ability to create one's own subjectivity is positive only if occupies a dominant social position. For as Derrida points out, the subject must *conform* his or her speech to the dominant discourse.⁶¹ This is problematic for those subjects on the social margins, whose seemingly only option to create their subjectivities through language is to conform to the subjectivities provided for them by those who create(d) the dominant language, discourse and ideology.

An insularity and its associated jazz art world compete for the power to have the ability to create the canon, thereby allowing it to control the dominant definitions of jazz. Jazz criticism, through the creation of multiple insularities, is one way in which individual jazz art worlds engage in power struggles. These struggles are often waged on the discursive fields of race, gender, nation, etc. As I will outline in subsequent chapters, there are numerous strategies that jazz critics employ in their efforts to make the definitions, values and traditions which govern their particular insularity dominant. In general, the most important method for maintaining the dominance of one's definitions is by creating boundaries and marking divisions between that which is acceptable and that which is not, designating the undesirable as "the Other." The most obvious example of this in practice is the jazz canon: the music that the dominant parties in a jazz art world values become accepted and incorporated into the tradition; the music that does not is excluded and those who make it are excommunicated. Marginalizing and delegitimizing "the Other" is key to the survival of a jazz art world's dominant ideologies, as the existence of the alternative view offered by "the Other" challenges the validity of the dominant ideology. An

⁶¹ Belsey quotes Jacques Derrida, who posits that one "becomes a speaking subject only by conforming his speech . . . to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences." Jacques Derrida, quoted in Belsey, "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text," 595.

example of this marginalization or delegitimization in jazz criticism can be seen whenever a jazz critic derides a piece of music because he or she does not find it to be "jazz."⁶²

Jazz critics can also use their writing for counter-hegemonic purposes with the goal of challenging the canon. As I will demonstrate in my chapter on Nathaniel Mackey, some jazz critics played with the structure of language as a way to challenge the canon and the dominant critical establishment. Theories about the performative potential of language inform ways to understand how some critics challenge the canon's dominance. Although the concept of *écriture féminine* as outlined by French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray is not without its faults, the way it theorizes the performative potential of writing is a helpful lens through which to view the writing of radical and experimental jazz critics such as Mackey.⁶³ As Cixous writes,

⁶² A well known example of this is John Tynan's calling John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy's music "anti-jazz." See: Howard Mandel, "Anti-Jazz: The New Thing Revisited," *PMP: The Online Magazine of the Philadelphia Music Project*, March 4, 2010, accessed August 18, 2012, <http://pmpmagazine.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/anti-jazz-the-new-thing-revisited/>. For a discussion of the marginalization of styles of jazz in the context of free jazz and Tynan's "anti-jazz," also see: Daniel Robert McClure, "'New Black Music' or Anti-Jazz: Free Jazz and America's Cultural De-Colonization in the 1960s" (M.A. Thesis, California State University, Fullerton, 2006), 7-8. Using Berger and Luckmann's notion of the "symbolic universe" one can think of an alternative or marginal definitions and aesthetic ideology of jazz as consisting of an "alternative symbolic universe." These alternative symbolic universes pose a threat to the dominant symbolic universe because their "very existence demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable." Berger and Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, 108. To minimize the threat of alternative symbolic universes it is useful to brand them as "the Other." It is necessary to deal with the Other, because in the words of Roland Barthes, the Other is "a scandal which threatens his existence." Roland Barthes, quoted in Dick Hebdige, *Subculture, the meaning of style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 97. Berger and Luckmann prescribe two methods for suppressing challenges from the Other: therapy and nihilation. Therapy, which controls all those existing within the dominant universe, entails dealing with deviations from "reality," accounting for these deviant behaviors, and creating a system to "cure" deviants. Nihilation, on the other hand, delegitimizes everything outside the dominant universe by either assigning the challenging universe "an inferior ontological status, and thereby a not-to-be-taken-seriously cognitive status" or by trying "to incorporate the deviant conceptions within one's own universe, and thereby to liquidate them ultimately." Berger and Luckmann, *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*, 112-15, quote from 15. Dick Hebdige offers two solutions similar to those of Berger and Luckmann's: "First, the Other can be trivialized, naturalized, domesticated. . . . Alternatively, the Other can be transformed into meaningless exotica." Hebdige, *Subculture, the meaning of style*, 97.

⁶³ The main critique of *écriture féminine* stems from the fact that it is grounded upon a binary construct of sexual difference. In theory, *écriture féminine* has its origins in the female body, which Ann Rosalind Jones, among other critics of the theory such as Nina Baym, finds to be highly problematic. Her main critique is that Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva "make of the female body too unproblematic, pleasurable and totalized an entirety." In this way these theorists ignore the diversity of women's experiences. She attacks these theorists for providing an essentialist reading of Freud and argues against a sexuality that is sexually based. Sexual identity, Jones posits, never happens for a person in isolation and she sees these theorists as reducing or ignoring the importance of family and other socialization in the creation of the gendered subject. Ann Rosalind Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward and

"writing is *precisely the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures."⁶⁴ Cixous believes that writing is political, whether done intentionally or not.⁶⁵ For Hélène Cixous "language is endemic to the repressive structures of thinking and narration we use to organize our lives."⁶⁶ Thus, in order for repressed subjects to create their subjectivities through language and escape repression they must create new forms of language and discourse, based in counter-hegemonic ideologies.⁶⁷ This strategy is something that we find in Mackey's writing, which I will return to in Chapter Four.

Regardless of which insularity a critic finds himself or herself working for or against, their work consists of expressions of taste and value. Following Pierre Bourdieu, expressions of taste and value create individual life styles and practices.⁶⁸ One final element of the cultural work of jazz critics is their role in shaping the life style and practices of their readers by influencing their readers' consumption of jazz. Jazz criticism directly influences the choices its readers make in regards to what music they consume, which makes some insularities more

Understanding of 'Ecriture Feminine,' in *Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 363, 61-65.

⁶⁴ Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 337. Italics in original.

⁶⁵ Cixous and Sellers, *White ink: interviews on sex, text and politics*, 84.

⁶⁶ Sellers and Cixous, *Writing differences: readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous*, xxix.

⁶⁷ Cixous articulates this when she writes: "If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of." Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 343. For Luce Irigaray, the nature of language is the key for women's liberation. In her essay "This Sex which is not One" she argues that women's liberation "requires transforming the economic realm, and thus necessarily transforming culture and its operative agency, language. Without such an interpretation of a general grammar of culture, the feminine will never take place in history, except as a reservoir of matter and speculation." Irigaray, *This sex which is not one*, 155.

⁶⁸ Bourdieu writes: "It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e., the space of life-styles, is constituted." He adds: "taste, the propensity and capacity to appropriate (materially or symbolically) a given class of classified, classifying objects or practices, is the generative formula of life-style, a unitary set of distinctive preferences which express the same expressive intention in the specific logic of each of the symbolic sub-spaces, furniture, clothing, language or body hexis." Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, 170, 73.

financially viable than others. Therefore the financial viability or success of an insularity has real life consequences for those who support that insularity and its attendant jazz art world.

Welburn points out that from the beginning of jazz criticism record reviews were done in part "to serve an economic purpose."⁶⁹ The descriptive nature of record reviews "assisted the reader-consumers in making their purchase selections."⁷⁰ The importance of album reviews in the jazz audience's purchases, and indeed reviews of all jazz performances, continues to this day.

Positive coverage and reviews of large jazz festivals are important to driving ticket sales, and as a result, Howard Mandel notes that critics and journalists who cover such festivals are "treated like royalty."⁷¹

Coverage and reviews in the press certainly impact the market by helping to sell more albums and concert tickets, but jazz criticism's effect on the jazz marketplace is much more complex than a record label or concert producer's bottom line. Naming and defining genres allows for marketing. For example, Christopher Bakriges explains that once a loose definition of "bebop" came into existence, album and concert producers found that bebop could be commercially viable. Creating borders around styles and genres was a way for people to "understand, respond to, and ultimately use and transform historical experiences for commercial gain." Jazz musicians who were pegged as beboppers, boppers or reboppers questioned the critics' construction of borders and felt that these borders were being used as instruments of power.⁷² Bakriges explains that some musicians rejected the term jazz, or tried to come up with new terms as a way to counter the what they felt were negative commercial aspects with the term

⁶⁹ Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 53.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁷¹ Mandel, "The history, myths, values and practices of jazz journalists," 74.

⁷² Bakriges, "This music is climate controlled: Critical reaction to the African American vanguard in post war jazz, 1945-1957," 50.

jazz.⁷³ The marketing of jazz, which requires the existence of musical definitions, standards and a tradition or canon, is at once an outgrowth of the cultural work of jazz criticism and a mechanism that reinforces the social and musical divisions that jazz criticism creates.

GENDER, RACE AND NATION PROJECTS

What we need to understand, then, is how we make the boundaries that shape our perception of the music. We can think of these criteria as dichotomies. One side of the equation is embraced and included, the other side distanced and forgotten. These criteria contain a good deal of truth - which is why they are so hard to budge. But they also contain a good deal of falsity.
- Scott DeVeaux⁷⁴

I highlight his quote from Scott DeVeaux because it speaks directly to everything I have discussed thus far. Critics determine that a performance is good or it is not; if it is jazz or it is not. The performance fits into different categories based on established criteria which create artificial boundaries or it does not; if it does not, its performers and supporters are excluded from a particular jazz community and likely suffer social marginalization and may adopt insurgent behaviors in a struggle for social and political power. DeVeaux gives five dichotomies which shape our perceptions of jazz and lead to divisions in the jazz community. The first dichotomy is race. It is, according to DeVeaux, "the most visible, and the most heavily policed boundary in jazz, because that boundary has been so deeply embedded in the history of the United States."⁷⁵ The second is gender, as jazz has always been overwhelmingly a male domain. The third is class. The project of making jazz into a high art, thereby escaping the perceived lowly social conditions it sprang from has been a major goal for those in the jazz world. Fourth is groove: jazz swings. And fifth, while it has spread around the globe, jazz is, at its core, quintessentially

⁷³ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁴ DeVeaux, "Core and boundaries," 22.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

American.⁷⁶ These dichotomies consist of the discourses which shape jazz's discursive terrain, upon which critics map their insularities. In following chapters I will examine in detail DeVeaux's first, third and fifth dichotomies: race, gender and nation.⁷⁷ But before jumping into that, I suggest that one way to understand how the practice of jazz criticism creates multiple insularities is to theorize the practice of jazz criticism as often consisting of race, gender, and nation projects. To do so, I use and expand upon Michael Omi and Howard Winant's idea of the "racial project."

In their book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant claim that the concept of race is formed in the United States by a "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed."⁷⁸ They argue that "racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized."⁷⁹ Omi and Winant call these projects racial projects and for them racial formation is "a kind of synthesis, an outcome, of the interaction of racial projects on a society-wide level."⁸⁰ They suggest that racial projects "do the ideological 'work'" of linking social structure and racial representations. "A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race *means* in a

⁷⁶ Ibid., 22-24.

⁷⁷ I am less focused on class/art and groove individually, because they are often subsumed under race and gender. The idea of art and class has strong racial overtones, especially considering that the primary champions of jazz as an art music were privileged white men. Groove often falls under the rubric of race as well, given debates about definitions of jazz, whether it should "swing," whether or not jazz is exclusively a black art form, etc. These are subjects I will take on at great length in following chapters.

⁷⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 55-56.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 60.

particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning.”⁸¹

The clearest example of jazz criticism working as a racial project, and one that I will flesh out in subsequent chapters, is the various ways in which criticism defines or attributes racial identities to jazz; i.e., to what degree jazz is a "black music." The practice in jazz criticism of linking a form of music to a racial and cultural identity is an example of a racial project, as jazz criticism "do[es] the ideological 'work'" of linking social structure and racial representations. Conceived as a racial project, jazz criticism actively and discursively connects "what race *means*" with the social structures of the jazz art world and American culture in general. Matthew Frye Jacobson supports this notion that racial identities and meanings are socially constructed. He notes that racial identities are particularly strategic and reside "not in nature but in politics and culture" and that it is important to "recognize race as an ideological, political deployment rather than as a neutral, biologically determined element of nature."⁸² This process of constructing race is seen throughout the history of jazz criticism and examining it through the lens of a racial project allows for a more detailed description of the cultural work of jazz criticism and its stakes.

As gender is as socially constructed as race, Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation and racial projects can be adapted to explain gender projects and gender formation.⁸³ Just as

⁸¹ Ibid., 56. Italics in original.

⁸² Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different color: European immigrants and the alchemy of race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 2, 4.

⁸³ For a brief outline and discussion of the various ways gender is considered to be socially constructed, see Ann Curthoys, "Gender," in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennet, Lawrence Grosseberg, and Meaghan Morris (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 140-42. To see how the concept of gender has changed, see the "Sex" entry in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 283-86. Williams does not include an entry on gender in his book and he briefly mentions it in the sex entry as a term that some scholars are beginning to use when discussing critiques of sexism.

“race is an element of social structure” and is “a dimension of human representation,”⁸⁴ so too is gender. Judith Halberstam points out that “scholars working on race have traced very specific histories of gender formation in relation to racial projects that attribute gender and sexual pathology to oppressed groups.”⁸⁵ This work on gender formation as a result of gender projects, as related to racial projects, that is, described in terms of oppressed groups, can be directly applied to this discussion of the domination of male jazz musicians over female musicians. Adopting Omi and Winant’s language and concept of racial projects: A gender project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of gender dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular gender lines. Gender projects connect what gender means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are organized and gendered, based upon that meaning.

Gender projects, by extension of Omi and Winant’s theory of racial projects, can serve to perpetuate structures of dominance. Gender projects are sexist if they “create[s] or reproduce[s] structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race [or gender].”⁸⁶ Such projects are only sexist if one can “demonstrate a link between essentialist representations of race and social structures of domination. Such a link might be revealed in efforts to protect dominant interests, framed in racial [or gendered] terms, from democratizing racial [or gendered] initiatives.”⁸⁷ As gender projects are used to create or reproduce structures of domination, the implementation of gender projects in jazz criticism serves to normalize and essentialize jazz musicians and jazz as both “male” and “masculine,” thereby creating jazz as an androcentric space. An example of

⁸⁴ Omi and Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 55.

⁸⁵ Judith Halberstam, "Gender," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 116-20. Halberstam provides an alternate view of how gender is produced in her explanation of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. Whereas gender projects assign gender characteristics to women by men as a way of maintaining power, performativity explains gender in a much more active way in that subjects perform their gender and sexuality.

⁸⁶ Omi and Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 71.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

such a project, which I will expand upon below, can be found in Anne Dvinge's discussion of the way women are often portrayed in *Downbeat*. She notes that when women appear in the magazine they are "often couched in terms that hold connotations of the *femaleness* of women."⁸⁸ In this way, by emphasizing their femininity - a move that is rarely if ever applied in a masculine fashion to men - writers for *Downbeat* and other magazines reproduce structures of gender hierarchy. Gender projects serve to create a jazz world that is male, a world where exceptional women are held up to demonstrate that women can succeed, yet are still framed in gendered terms, serving to marginalize them.

Finally, jazz criticism operates as a nation project, as it has played an essential role in the linking of jazz with American national identity. As Dvinge points out, "the jazz tradition is being consciously 'imagined' at the center of American culture."⁸⁹ Jazz is often used as a metaphor for America, especially in terms of how critics connect what they see as the jazz performance's democratic aspects with American democracy. This equivalence of jazz performance with the fundamental ideals of the American nation is clearly a nation project, as it links the social structure of jazz with national representations.

In sum, jazz critics, either consciously or subconsciously, engage in various forms of race, gender or nation projects, or combinations thereof. In doing so, they inevitably "race," "gender" and "nation" jazz, making any consideration, conception or perception of jazz inseparable from social issues. Depending on the race, gender or nation ideologies at play, these projects create division and boundaries that lead to the creation or challenging of multiple insularities.

⁸⁸ Dvinge, "Between History & Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century," 121. Italics in original.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 203.

Gender, race and nation projects are the ways in which jazz critics navigate the discursive terrain I discussed in the Introduction in their construction and engagement with insularities. These projects connect what gender, race and nation mean as articulated within jazz discourse, in that they link the social structure of an insularity's jazz art world with the ways in which gender, race and nation are conceived of. In this way, the gender, race and nation projects that jazz critics engage in effectively "(re)gender," "(re)race," and "(re)nation" jazz. Given that each insularity has its own distinct governing ideologies and definitions of jazz, jazz critics shape each insularity by the gender, race and nation projects they engage in. Thus, as a result of the implementation of these projects, each insularity and its associated jazz art world contains not only individual definitions of gender, race and nation, but a unique social structure as well. However, this does not mean that definitions of gender, race and nation necessarily diverge greatly among insularities. As I will discuss below, most insularities espouse overlapping or slightly varied patriarchal values, even though their definitions of jazz, race or nation may be vastly different. The following four subsections outline some of the results of these projects and identifies points of conflict and tension that arise out of competing ideologies and insularities.

Jazz as Androcentric Space

Jazz, especially the canonical jazz art world, has always been, and continues to be, an "overwhelmingly male domain."⁹⁰ In the preface to her book *Stormy Weather*, Linda Dahl notes that

⁹⁰ David Ake, *Jazz cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 64. While gender bias and inequity has greatly improved in jazz there is still a long way to go before female musicians will enjoy the same privileges as their male counterparts. As Aaron Cohen, the associate editor of *Downbeat*, pointed out in 2007 "gender parity in the music remains far from ideal, and some outstanding women instrumentalists are still asked if they also sing (something hardly ever requested of their male counterparts). Behind the scenes, men, by and large, still run record labels and other media." Aaron Cohen, "First Take," *Downbeat*, July 2007.

Still, the male jazz musician accepts and takes for granted that at every step he'll be dealing with other men - from club owners to booking agents to bandleaders, fellow players, reviewers and writers in the press: a male-dominated profession. The language that describes jazz, and jazz musicians, reflects this reality. Full of masculine metaphors, the sense of fraternity or of a male club is everywhere evoked. A fraternity that both offers a refuge from the hostile or square-seeming outside world and which also provides camaraderie-cum-healthy competitiveness. The actor in this world of music is with good reason commonly called the "jazzman."⁹¹

Dahl makes it clear that jazz is a male space and is essentially gendered as masculine. As such its musical aesthetic values favor masculine ideals both in the music and in who can perform it. Sherrie Tucker points out that "jazz and swing musicianship is gendered before anyone blows a note."⁹² Linda Dahl notes that "jazz means improvisation, and the prevailing view, at least until recently, has been that instrumental improvisation means assertiveness means masculinity."⁹³ In other words, jazz, in terms of the jazz associated with the canon, is an androcentric space. Sandra Lipsitz Bem defines androcentrism as "the privileging of male experience and the 'otherizing' of female experience; that is, males and male experience are treated as a neutral standard or norm for the culture or the species as a whole, and females and female experience are treated as a sex specific deviation from that allegedly universal standard."⁹⁴ In an androcentric space, "it follows," Pierre Bourdieu argues, "that the position regarded as normal is that in which the man is 'on top.'"⁹⁵ Noticing an unequal gender distribution among Norwegian jazz musicians, Trine Annfelt argues that jazz is a "hegemonic masculine discourse" that leads to

⁹¹ Linda Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, 1st Limelight ed. (New York: Limelight Editions, 1989), ix-x.

⁹² Sherrie Tucker, *Swing shift: "all-girl" bands of the 1940s* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 7.

⁹³ Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, 36.

⁹⁴ Sandra L. Bem, *The lenses of gender: transforming the debate on sexual inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Pierre Bourdieu gives a similar definition of androcentrism. He writes that "the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral" and that "the social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded." Bourdieu, *Masculine domination*, 9.

⁹⁵ Bourdieu, *Masculine domination*, 18.

heterosexual men's dominance in jazz.⁹⁶ It is also a space, according to David Ake, which "has served to create and recreate notions of manhood for its participants."⁹⁷ Annfelt describes various ways in which jazz is attached to masculine values and practices and concludes that "the connection between jazz and hegemonic masculinity is a discursive manoeuvre which marginalises [*sic*] participants to whom such attributes are not ascribed, namely women and homosexual men."⁹⁸

The roots of male hegemony in jazz and music in the public sphere in the United States go back at least as far as the nineteenth century, when there were very few female professional musicians. Scholar Linda Dahl explains that "women were not active as professional musicians for a simple reason: strong social conventions decreed that 'nice' women did not work. They were not to demean themselves by handling money – i.e., playing for pay." And if a woman developed enough skill to play professionally, she was "typically regarded as box-office poison. The public, entrepreneurs claimed, just wouldn't accept women on the concert stage, unless they were opera singers. The American woman, like music itself, was thought best kept in the parlor."⁹⁹

These attitudes held about women musicians in the nineteenth and early twentieth century continued on through the mid-twentieth century. Several examples in *Downbeat* from the 1930s through the 1950s coincide with the idea that women are incapable of playing on the same

⁹⁶ Trine Annfelt, *Jazz as Masculine Space*, KILDEN Information Centre for Gender Research in Norway, <http://eng.kilden.forskningsradet.no/c52778/nyhet/vis.html?tid=53517>. Accessed September 19, 2012. Annfelt's use of "hegemonic masculine discourse" is based upon R.W. Connell's theory of "hegemonic masculinity," which refers to "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable." Hegemonic Masculinity "can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees . . . the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." Raewyn (R. W.) Connell, *Masculinities*, second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 76, 77.

⁹⁷ Ake, *Jazz cultures*.

⁹⁸ Annfelt, *Jazz as Masculine Space*.

⁹⁹ Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, 8.

professional level as a man. This connection of masculine values to jazz is in some ways attributable to the work of jazz critics. Emerging from the male homosocial record collecting and fan culture, early jazz criticism was a highly masculine endeavor. Gennari notes that the practice of jazz record collecting was one way in which privileged white men at this time could assert and demonstrate their masculinity. Many of these collectors and connoisseurs helped establish jazz collecting clubs which provided a space for male homosocial activity. Those collectors who would become critics used their extensive discographical knowledge of jazz and focused much of their criticism on recordings.¹⁰⁰ Collectors were, in the words of 1940s jazz writer Ralph de Toledano, a "rare breed of men who thrive on the dust of Salvation Army depots, hock shops, thrift shops, and the backwaters of the record trade, who live for the pleasure of turning up an unknown master, a well-known soloist on a forgotten label, who feel that of such is the kingdom of heaving if they unearth a cache of Claxtonolas or a King Oliver Gennett."¹⁰¹ These collectors, or as Paul Lopes refers to them, "jazz enthusiasts," were "righteous' aficionados who were avid supporters of what they called genuine or real jazz."¹⁰² Criticism "was intended to expand the community of jazz enthusiasts as well as combat those unconvinced that jazz was an art form worthy of appreciation."¹⁰³ Early critics worked towards convincing people that jazz was not just a fun type of music to dance to, but that it was a "serious" art form.¹⁰⁴ They legitimized their own positions as critics, and although they were untrained, they considered themselves specialists and wanted to be considered on the same level

¹⁰⁰ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 62-78.

¹⁰¹ Ralph de Toledano, quoted in *ibid.*, 80-81.

¹⁰² Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 157. Lopes notes that jazz enthusiasts were the primary players in the construction of a jazz art world, whether they worked as club organizers, concert promoters, club owners or discographers.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁰⁴ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 27. For more on the notion that jazz is a "serious" art form, opposed to one that allows for humor, see Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "The Humor of Jazz," in *Jazz/Not Jazz: The Music and its Boundaries*, ed. David Ake, Charles Hiroshi Garrett, and Daniel Goldmark (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2012), 49-69.

as classical music critics. In this way, they took up the "critic's pose," positioning themselves above the average fan who did not appreciate jazz as art.¹⁰⁵ The critic's pose adapted by early jazz critics of the 1930s evolved into what Gennari sees as a "masculinist authority" in the critics who came of age in the 1950s. These Cold War critics reasserted the high art status of jazz, separating it "from the realm of mass culture, imagined as a space where putatively feminized, passive consumers were spoon-fed a diet of easily digestible pablum."¹⁰⁶ These critics essentially created a binary system where jazz was equated with art and masculinity, and where mass culture was associated with femininity. In this system, femininity and jazz are mutually exclusive.

One of the main ways in which jazz became and continues to be an androcentric space is through discourse. There are several ways to think about discourse. It can be thought of as "text which is thematically or situationally unified as a coherent formation of knowledge or truth"¹⁰⁷ or in a Foucauldian sense it "is a mode of organization of knowledge in relation to material institutions" that "has to do with practices and configurations of power."¹⁰⁸ Jazz discourse can then be thought of as organizing knowledge about jazz, most commonly through its popular magazines and books. As Annfelt points out, "the discourses of jazz structure our understanding of what jazz *is*."¹⁰⁹ Just as Roland Barthes argues that fashion magazines transmit what fashion means, jazz magazines transmit definitions of jazz.¹¹⁰ In general, these transmissions of what jazz is define jazz in masculine terms, often expressing and reinforcing patriarchy. It is important to keep in mind that there is a diversity of definitions of masculinity that insularities

¹⁰⁵ Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 178-83.

¹⁰⁶ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 181-82.

¹⁰⁷ John Frow, "Discourse," in *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennet, Lawrence Grosseberg, and Meaghan Morris (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 91.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰⁹ Annfelt, *Jazz as Masculine Space*. Italics in original.

¹¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *The fashion system*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 21-22.

espouse. A multiplicity of masculine ideologies and practices exist throughout insularities, and while these ideologies and practices are all patriarchal, they can compete with each other, all while marginalizing women. These transmissions are communicated through album reviews and the selection of which artists to write feature stories on. In other words, magazine editors, journalists and critics legitimize those artists who are interviewed, covered, and whose albums are reviewed, and those artists were almost all invariably male.

Men dominate the discursive space of jazz as well. For example, a quick glance at the contemporary writers of any mainstream jazz publication will find that there are very few female critics and journalists, clearly showing that current jazz discourse both is, and continues to produce, a male dominated space. However, this does not mean that there are little or no female critics writing on the margins of the mainstream. It merely suggests that a majority of the dominant voices in mainstream jazz criticism are men. As most jazz criticism and journalism is written by men, jazz discourse and the identities of both male and female musicians has been largely written and created through an androcentric lens which serves to treat male musicians as the norm and women musicians as “the other.” As a result of their cultural authority, magazine editors, journalists and critics legitimize those artists who are interviewed, covered, and whose albums are reviewed, and those artists were, and for the most part continue to be, almost all invariably male. In addition, this legitimization of jazz artists is expressed, whether implicitly or explicitly, in an androcentric fashion.

An important influence on the ways in which magazines either legitimize female musicians or marginalize them has to do with the economics of print journalism. To exist, most jazz publications require income from paid advertising, in addition to subscriptions and individual issue sales. As such, publications must deliver readers in the targeted demographic to

advertisers. This means that content needs to appeal to the readers advertisers hope to reach, which in turn means that publications must provide content that aligns ideologically with its advertisers and readers. In trying to reach as large a mainstream audience as possible in order to sell issues and advertising space, publications work within mainstream ideas about gender. If a publication's targeted demographic largely holds androcentric viewpoints, its content will be driven to reach those readers. I will expand upon this in Chapter Two in my discussion of Leonard Feather's work as jazz editor for *Playboy*.

In addition to the differences in the way men and women are covered in the jazz press, musical and aesthetic standards are gendered and androcentric as well. There is a long tradition of gendered attitudes and sexual aesthetics in Western Art Music that exist in American music and jazz. Instruments have been traditionally gendered, in that some instruments have been seen as being appropriate for only one gender. The physical appearance and attractiveness of female instrumentalists has often been of more importance than music and women have been discouraged from playing some instruments, like the tuba, as it would obscure their physical features. Stereotypes about women's lack of physical strength or mental capacity has been translated into a line of thinking that women are not capable of the same performance as men. In effect, there are separate standards of excellence for each genre, with the male standard serving as the norm; thus, as a result of the lower standards and expectations, it is the rare woman who can achieve on the same level as men.¹¹¹ And when a woman is thought to be performing on or

¹¹¹ Carol Neuls-Bates, *Women in music: an anthology of source readings from the Middle Ages to the present*, Rev. ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 192-227. Also see Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, 35-44.

above the level of a "man," she is often pegged as an "exceptional woman" as opposed to a gender neutral exceptional musician, as was the case with pianist Mary Lou Williams.¹¹²

There are numerous examples in *Downbeat* and other magazines in the first half of the twentieth century in which male writers argue that women are not only incapable of playing jazz, but of even liking it. I highlight one example to show the kinds of gender projects which contributed to the creation and perpetuation of jazz as an androcentric space. In 1941 Marvin Freedman explained in his *Downbeat* article "Here's the Lowdown on Two Kinds of Women" that "there are two kinds of women, those who don't like jazz music and admit they don't, and those who don't like jazz music but say they do. The latter always have ulterior motives." Under the heading "Philosophy and Stuff," he explains that what is ruining jazz is that "Women control the public taste, and women do not like jazz!" He goes on to explain how movies, radio programs, dances, and advertisements cater to women's taste and so the "public hears the kind of music women want to hear. If the public never hears jazz it can't ever know what it's about. And we're all against anything we don't understand. So if women won't let jazz be played commercially, jazz will never have an audience." After explaining why women do not like jazz, he concludes by saying "The way out is not to try to teach women to like jazz. They never will. The only thing to do is to demand proportionate representation for men. Since men are the only ones who produce any music (or, forgetting Bessie, ever have produced any), it doesn't seem to be an exorbitant demand." Freedman explains that women do not like jazz because "Good jazz is hard masculine music with a whip to it. Women like violins, and jazz deals with drums and

¹¹² Nichole T. Rustin, "Mary Lou Williams Plays Like a Man!: Gender, Genius, and Difference in Black Music Discourse," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 3 (2005): 457-58.

trumpets."¹¹³ Here Freedman draws definitive lines around gender, naturalizing perceived differences in musical aptitudes and taste between men and women.

Writing about successful female jazz musicians emphasizes these differing standards. In an article from 1952 Nat Hentoff outlined the privileging of male experience and treating that experience as a neutral norm. Hentoff, who fervently worked for Civil Rights, asks how many times one hears or reads a comment from a disc jockey or writer refer to “Mary Lou Williams as ‘the best of the female pianists?’ The implication always is that in the minor leagues of feminine jazz, she’s peerless” but compared to male pianists, “she’s all right – for a woman.” He sums up the double standard by saying that even though women should be judged on the same criteria as men, what usually happens is that women are “judged by themselves on a lower criterion of excellence from their male contemporaries.”¹¹⁴ More recently, the scenario and attitudes that Hentoff observed and described sixty years ago played out in the June 2012 issue of *Downbeat*, where trumpeter Darren Barrett predicted that the twenty-two year old alto saxophonist Hailey Niswanger "has the power to be one of the best female alto saxophonists in the country, if not the world."¹¹⁵

This bias towards documentation of male jazz artists and the marginalization of female ones as leads to and is produced by what Dana Reason Myers refers to as the "myth of absence." Dahl, writing many years before Myers, found that despite female musicians "being buried in footnotes, or in the memories of other musicians," there have been scores of female musicians who suffered under "a blanket of silence." The myth's power is grounded in a logic that concludes that there must not be very many female jazz musicians, because if there were many of them, they would receive media coverage. Or as Dahl puts it: "the assumption about women

¹¹³ Marvin Freedman, “Here’s the Lowdown on Two Kinds of Women,” *DB*, February 11, 1941, 9.

¹¹⁴ Nat Hentoff, "Cherchez Les Femmes," *Downbeat*, December 3 1952.

¹¹⁵ Darren Barrett, quoted in Michael J West, "Hailey Niswanger: the Right Direction," *Downbeat*, June 2012, 51.

in jazz was that there weren't any, because jazz was by definition a male music. Therefore, women could not play it. Therefore, they did not do so."¹¹⁶ The lack of coverage of female musicians perpetuates the marginalization of these women. When women do receive coverage, Myers argues that this coverage "often embodies tokenism, essentialism, and negative gender constructions, all of which undermine women's contributions."¹¹⁷ In addition, female musicians have often been portrayed as gimmicks, freaks or novelties, as Dahl and Tucker point out. In her analysis of coverage of women in *Downbeat*, Anne Dvinge notes that when women are discussed in the magazine the "mentions are often couched in terms that hold connotations of the *femaleness* of women."¹¹⁸ The effects of this type of coverage are great: "reviews of women musicians that call attention to personal traits, physical attributes or compares their music to other male musicians can obscure why these women's voices are important to be heard and learned from."¹¹⁹ In general, Nichole Rustin points out that "discussions of black women in jazz, particularly singers, have tended to obscure both the myths and the realities of their genius."¹²⁰ The overall effects of the type of strategies used to write about women outlined above serves to reinforce the ideas that male jazz musicians are the norm, that women players must be able to "play like a man" to succeed, and that jazz is a man's world.

The type of negative coverage of female jazz musicians that Dvinge and Myers critique continues. The September 2012 issue of *JazzTimes* is "The Women's Issue." And while the

¹¹⁶ Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, x, xi.

¹¹⁷ Reason Myers, "The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception and the Music of Experimental Women Improvisors," 55.

¹¹⁸ Dvinge, "Between History & Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century," 121. Dvinge provides a striking example of the gendered ways in which musicians are written about in her analysis of separate stories on drummers Tammy Lynne Carrington and Jeff "Tain" Watts. Ibid., 122. Myers also analyzes the gendered approach taken stories on drummers Dottie Dodgion and Susia Ibarra. Reason Myers, "The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception and the Music of Experimental Women Improvisors," 66-71.

¹¹⁹ Reason Myers, "The Myth of Absence: Representation, Reception and the Music of Experimental Women Improvisors," 71.

¹²⁰ Rustin, "Mary Lou Williams Plays Like a Man!: Gender, Genius, and Difference in Black Music Discourse," 447.

magazine's editor, Evan Haga, would argue that this issue works towards reducing gender inequity in jazz, I would argue that it is in line with the type of negative coverage of female musicians that Dvinge and Myers critique.¹²¹ This can be seen by looking at the issue's cover, which uses a photo of Cohen from her press kit, which can both be viewed online.¹²² To adapt the press photo for the cover *JazzTimes* cropped the image and added descriptive text (such as "The Women's Issue" and "Jenny Scheinmann: Motherhood and Musicianship") in pastels and white. Less overtly gendered is the cover's color scheme. Based on soft pastels, the cover can easily be seen as signifying the female gender. In addition, the photograph of clarinetist Anat Cohen is very subtly gendered as well, as it is taken in soft focus and Cohen is wearing a lot of makeup. The overall effect is similar to Glamour Shots.¹²³ Although the photograph is part of Cohen's press kit, that *JazzTimes* chose to use it shows the magazine's implicit gendering of her. In addition, that such a strongly gendered photograph is part of Cohen's press kit demonstrates the values that those in publicity and promotions think will best sell to a mostly male jazz audience.

Compare the cover of the *JazzTimes* issue to the cover of the January 2012 issue of *Downbeat*.¹²⁴ In this cover, which is not taken from Cohen's press kit, she is flanked by her two brothers, trumpeter Avishai and soprano saxophonist Yuval. Unlike the *JazzTimes* cover, the *Downbeat* one is not in soft focus and Anat Cohen is not heavily made up. It appears as if she

¹²¹ Haga writes: "in the weeks leading up to deadline, I wasn't surprised to hear grouching about the ideal of a 'women's issue': It's patronizing; it's pandering; it's no longer necessary. As one candid industry friend put it, 'It's like, yeah, women play jazz. So what?' I'd like to believe that gender equality in jazz is at the point where magazines like this one (not to mention festivals like the Kennedy Center's Mary Lou Williams event) are moot or worse, but it just isn't so. The music is still largely a boy's club, and I'm convinced that homing in on the contributions of jazz women - especially non-piano-playing instrumentalists - helps more than it hurts. I accepted those complaints as good signs, actually - as proof of progress in not only jazz as it exists on the bandstand, but in jazz journalism as well." Evan Haga, "Women's Issue Issues," *JazzTimes*, September, 2012, 6.

¹²² "September 2012 Contents," *JazzTimes.com*, <http://jazztimes.com/issues/201209>, Accessed April 17, 2014. Anat Cohen Publicity Photograph, by Jimmy Katz. www.anatcohen.com/about, Accessed January 16, 2014.

¹²³ Thanks to Mary Huntimer, who pointed out the picture's soft focus and likeness to glamour shots.

¹²⁴ *Downbeat* January 2012 issue, *Downbeat.com*, <http://www.downbeat.com/digitaledition/2012/DB201201/default.html>, Accessed April 17, 2014.

and her brothers were posing for a pre- or post-gig photo. While the obvious difference between the two covers is that the *Downbeat* one has men in it and is not gendered as female, the editors and photographer of *JazzTimes* made an effort to accentuate Cohen's "femaleness."

The more obviously gendered elements of the *JazzTimes* cover are the short tags under the featured artists' names. The tag below violinist Jenny Scheinman's name, which reads "Motherhood & Musicianship," places a greater emphasis her gender and status as a mother than her work as a musician. Andrew Gilbert's story on Scheinman further emphasizes her femaleness above her musicianship. The first full paragraph, which begins with "there's nothing quite like having a kid to make you reflect on where you came from," places Scheinman within the context of motherhood, family and domesticity. The bulk of the second paragraph does this as well, painting for the reader a vivid picture of Scheinman nursing her newborn daughter, whose "downy" and "still flaky" head signifies her "recent emergence."¹²⁵ While the bulk of the well written story focuses on Scheinman's music, especially her new band Mischief & Mayhem, references to Scheinman's pregnancies and life as a mother abound. The article's penultimate paragraph returns to Scheinman nursing: "finished with her meal, Rosa lolls contentedly, her eyes half closed in the blissful reverie of the milk-bombed."¹²⁶ While Scheinman gives the reader a lot of information about her childhood home and the complexities of simultaneously being a mother and a full time professional musician, it's obvious that the angle of Gilbert's story is motherhood. While reading this article it is impossible to forget that Scheinman is a woman and a mother. The article, in Dvinge's words, "hold connotations of the femaleness of women."

I am not arguing that the *JazzTimes* editors, writers and those responsible for securing advertising, as well as other jazz publications throughout history, have intentionally attempted

¹²⁵ Andrew Gilbert, "Motherhood & Invention: From her rustic childhood home on the Lost Coast, violinist Jenny Scheinman explains the hard-won harmony between family and creativity," *JazzTimes*, September 2012, 39.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

to marginalize the contributions of female jazz musicians. However, their actions reflect the logic of the dominant gender ideologies and ideas about what representations of women can best sell magazines that exist in American society and which help govern the jazz canon. In this way, these writers subconsciously enact actions shaped by what Bourdieu refers to as the habitus. The habitus, or "a somatized social relationship, a social law converted into an embodied law," reflects the deeply embedded social practices of a given society that are so ingrained they are taken to be natural.¹²⁷ In the case of jazz criticism, the habitus and gender ideologies that shaped and informed the social conditions and activities of the early jazz critics led to the practice of mainstream jazz criticism as one that creates and reaffirms jazz, as it exists in the canon, as an androcentric space. Many critics, such as Leonard Feather and Val Wilmer, were in part motivated in their efforts at creating alternative insularities that challenge the androcentrism of jazz and the dominant gender ideologies that shape it.

Race and the Politics of Ownership

Race has always been at the forefront of how jazz is thought and written about. As noted above, Scott DeVaux finds race to be one of the ways in which borders are drawn around jazz. Race has been part of the definition of jazz, even before the word jazz made the transition from verb to noun. In his article "James Reese Europe and the Infancy of Jazz Criticism" Ronald Welburn shows how Europe's "decidedly pro-Negro" comments in New York newspapers in 1914, linked African American musical and cultural values with the African American race.

¹²⁷ Bourdieu, *Masculine domination*, 39.

Europe's comments, made three years before the first jazz recording, made race one of the most pressing issues in jazz writing.¹²⁸

That the overwhelming majority of jazz critics involved in the creation of the canon have been white has created an ongoing dynamic and tension regarding which group of people have the right to define a musical practice. This tension has deep historical roots in slavery, American race relations, and white appropriation of black culture. Stemming from the long tradition of white ownership of black bodies and the exploitation of slave labor, the existence of de facto slavery as manifested in sharecropping, the practice of whites defining, framing and economically capitalizing on black artistic practice has flourished throughout jazz's history, even predating the music. Ronald Radano points out numerous early examples of whites characterizing black music as a way to "other" African Americans. In the nineteenth century call and response was a musical practice shared by blacks and whites, but as blacks began to adopt it more widely whites moved away from it; it thus became associated with black musical practice. Also during the nineteenth century, as white scholars transcribed black spirituals, black musical practice began to be primarily understood as rhythmic. It was in one of these collections of spirituals, *Slave Songs of the United States*, in which white musical practice was separated from and reaffirmed the blackness of black musical practice. As Radano points out, "rhythm would supply the basis on which 'black essence' was enacted, affirming the mythology of black and white."¹²⁹ In Radano's account, it is clear that although African Americans would later celebrate rhythm and call and response as a marker of race and black musical practice, they had little agency or influence in the creation of these definitions.

¹²⁸ Welburn, "James Reese Europe and the Infancy of Jazz Criticism," 37-40. For a discussion of James Reese Europe and early jazz and the early definitions of jazz see Reid Badger, *A life in ragtime: a biography of James Reese Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 190-221.

¹²⁹ Ronald Michael Radano, *Lying up a nation: race and Black music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 151-60, 206, 23, 70-72. Quote on 276.

Perhaps the largest and most influential example on whites defining black cultural practice are nineteenth century minstrel shows. The shows, the most popular form of entertainment in the United States, were a gross distortion and trivialization of black life. As Eric Lott puts it, the black materials and models that provided the show's foundation "were worked over, transformed, reinvented, and re-presented by its white practitioners." They were more "white responses" to black culture than a representation of black culture. Lott points out that one of the disastrous consequences of the minstrel shows was that blacks had no way to counter and critique the representations of their culture and lived experience, making the presentations of black life in minstrel shows unchallenged.¹³⁰ Just as blacks had little opportunity and ability to provide an alternative to views of black life and expression in the minstrel shows, so too did they often lack the resources to challenge the dominant ways in which white writers conceptualized and defined jazz.

There are many critiques of the negative impacts of white critical hegemony, all of which have a long history in American race relations. Perhaps the most important critique is related to what is seen as white exploitation of black labor. Or in the Marxist terms Frank Kofsky uses to describe the situation, black musicians are alienated from their labor.¹³¹ In addition to the exploitation of black musical labor by the recording industry, there is a long held view among many African American musicians, writers and intellectuals that white critics have been the main beneficiaries from criticizing black music. African American entertainment writer Billy Rowe, who began writing for the Associated Negro Press in the 1930s, exemplifies this feeling: "most of the whites were the ones who really made money out of jazz, writing about it, playing it,

¹³⁰ Eric Lott, *Love and theft: blackface minstrelsy and the American working class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 101-04. Quote on 101.

¹³¹ Frank Kofsky, *Black Music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz* (New York: Pathfinder, 1998), 19-20.

selling it, and whathaveyou [*sic*]." White critics, Rowe felt, were not only simply word merchants who did not understand the music, but that they should not even be considered jazz critics because they "are people who can't do anything, in that artistic vein."¹³² One of the impacts of the dominance of white critics is that because white critics are primarily those who define the music and set its standards, whites have had more control over the jazz art world's institutions than African Americans. As a result, a great disparity of wealth often existed between whites in the jazz business and the black musicians whom they profited off of. Central to many of the strategies African Americans used to achieve social equality was attempting to be economically self sufficient. In an effort to regain economic and aesthetic control, especially during the 1960s, which I discuss further below, many African American critics attempted to construct an alternative insularity to redefine what jazz meant so that African American critics could determine whether or not an African American musician deserved the economic benefits from having their music positively affirmed. Attempts such as these were difficult, however, given the small number of mainstream African American jazz critics and popular notions of what "counts" as jazz criticism, as well as the publication venues available to African American writers.

The relative lack of African American jazz critics who were involved in creating the canon compared to white ones can be attributed to the structural racism that exists in American culture. The clearest explanation for the existence of racial inequality in jazz criticism can be attributed to the fact that African Americans have historically been more disadvantaged and had fewer opportunities than whites. Dave Dexter, a white writer from Kansas City who wrote for the *Kansas City Journal-Post* in the 1930s, told Ronald Welburn that he knew of very few black writers and speculated that was due to "poorer educational opportunities," which he suspected

¹³² Billy Rowe, quoted in Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 237, 38.

"precluded blacks' writing."¹³³ Preston Jackson, a black jazz trombonist and writer who published in several European publications, similarly noted that "the Black Jazz music critics, seem to lack opportunity. They seem to have a hard way to go, especially in America."¹³⁴ Rowe explained to Welburn some of the practical reasons why black publications did not contain jazz criticism. Record reviews did not exist in the black press because no record companies purchased advertising space, so these publications chose not to support record companies if they were not getting any financial benefit. Rowe also noted that in the 1930s "black critics could not afford the luxury of being critics" because writers did not want to criticize black musicians who were getting gigs and being successful.¹³⁵

In addition to the lack of opportunities for aspiring African American critics, the small number of black critics can also be attributed to the black middle class's attitudes towards jazz and their attempts at attaining equality in the 1920s and 1930s. John Hammond noted that during that time the black bourgeoisie was not supportive of jazz and that black publications like the *Kansas City Call* or *Crisis* featured very little jazz writing.¹³⁶ In general, the black middle class did not feel that supporting jazz was the best way to achieve racial equality. Guthrie Ramsey outlines the ideological split between two groups of African American intellectuals and music scholars. Those writers of the Cosmopolitan school, such as James Monroe Trotter and Alain Locke, were heavily influenced by European musical standards and aesthetics and argued that the best way to raise the status of African Americans in American society was through adopting and accepting mainstream American musical values. Conversely, writers of the Provincial school, such as Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson, took their inspiration

¹³³ Dave Dexter, quoted in *ibid.*, 200.

¹³⁴ Preston Jackson, quoted in *ibid.*, 218.

¹³⁵ Billy Rowe, quoted in *ibid.*, 230, 31.

¹³⁶ John Hammond, in *ibid.*, 208.

from African aesthetics and African American vernacular musical traditions such as blues and jazz. These writers argued that embracing African aesthetics and black vernacular music was the best way to uplift the race.¹³⁷ For those who embraced the ideals of the Cosmopolitan school, the path to equality was not challenging dominant aesthetic values or presenting an alternative. Those in the Provincial school can be thought of as arguing against accepting the dominant European based musical ideologies and for an African American based alternative insularity. Regardless of the reasons behind the relative lack of African American critics, many black critics challenged the jazz canon and what they felt were its ideologies that led to black exploitation and marginalization.

An example of the tensions between African American and white critics is the debate over whether free jazz had a place in the canon. The discussion and debate surrounding free jazz was driven by competing insularities, each with their own definition of jazz and evaluative methodologies. The advent of free jazz in the late 1950s and early 1960s fundamentally challenged the jazz canon. Many musicians and critics challenged the notion supported by critics like Williams and Schuller that jazz, like all art forms, should have universal qualities and should be able to transcend difference. The debate surrounding free jazz musicians, Iain Anderson argues, “embodied the contradictions inherent in jazz music's reputation as 'America's art form.’”¹³⁸ Due to many of the liberties that it took with established jazz practice, free jazz shook traditional notions of what constituted jazz, and in doing so, not only challenged critics and other gatekeepers of the music, but forced them to negotiate over and revise the canon as well.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., "Cosmopolitan or Provincial?: Ideology in Early Black Music Historiography, 1867-1940," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (1996): 11-28.

¹³⁸ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 52.

¹³⁹ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 254.

There were two main sides of the debate about free jazz. For the most part white critics, many of whom were trained or influenced by New Criticism and who judged jazz on “universal” aesthetic standards, heavily criticized the new genre. Those who supported free jazz were primarily African American critics (although there were some white critics such as Frank Kofsky and Val Wilmer) who argued against the idea of universal jazz values and emphasized the importance of the African American roots of jazz. Many African American free jazz musicians argued that colorblind philosophy that underpinned the “art as art” position taken by critics, many of whom objected to free jazz, masked African Americans' struggles against discrimination. The linkage of free jazz with African American ideology, aesthetics, and culture challenged the notion of jazz as America's art form, as many African American musicians argued that free jazz, and jazz in general was the “preserve” of black musicians.¹⁴⁰ This is a subject I will engage with deeper in the subsequent chapter on Val Wilmer's work. African American critics and musicians, such as Jon Hendricks, criticized white critics and other gatekeepers for having too much control over jazz and suggested that for the most part African Americans could not “control the aesthetic or commercial direction of the music.”¹⁴¹ In a similar critique, Frank Kofsky argued that white jazz critics helped maintain white hegemony.¹⁴² Hendricks and Kofsky's critiques further underscore the idea that those who have the power to shape the canon also maintain social hierarchies.

Critics made many efforts to marginalize free jazz and locate it outside of the jazz tradition. According to Anderson, "individual critics had much to lose from the emergence of free jazz. They had invested their reputations in a set of values that represented personal tastes

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 98.

¹⁴¹ Lorenzo Thomas, "Ascension: Music and the Black Arts Movement," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 265-66.

¹⁴² Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 252.

and outlooks."¹⁴³ Those who fought against free jazz did exactly what Barbara Hernstein Smith says is required of those who represent dominant taste are challenged: they must defend the canon from free jazz by reaffirming the canon's standards and discounting free jazz, which did meet those standards.¹⁴⁴ As a way to prevent losing their positions as jazz authority figures, anti-free jazz critics used several strategies to marginalize free jazz, namely by referring to free jazz as avant-garde jazz, thereby signifying "a tenuous regard for convention." These critics also made attempts to separate cultural nationalists, such as Shepp and Baraka, from the jazz mainstream, in effect excluding them from the jazz tradition.¹⁴⁵ Looking back, the efforts of these critics to marginalize free jazz from the canon have been, for the most part, successful. This can be seen when examining major canonical projects, such as the virtual exclusion of free jazz from Ken Burns' documentary *Jazz*, the canonical pronouncements by the Jazz at Lincoln Center program, and the current state of jazz education, which devalues any jazz that is not directly derived from swing and bebop.

In a move to construct an alternative insularity, during the 1960s writers such as Amiri Baraka and musician such as Archie Shepp tied free jazz to black nationalism and constructed jazz and blues as a contrary force to bourgeois African Americans who preached assimilation. Here we see that Baraka et al were not only working against white critics who objected to free jazz, but to African Americans who did not agree ideologically. This shows that there is not a simply "black" insularity or a "white" insularity and that insularities cannot be simply and always drawn around racial or ethnic lines. Recalling my definition of insularity in the Introduction, especially in how critics must deal with discourses, such as race, differently, critics find a multiplicity of complex ways in which to engage with race. Anderson points out that in tying

¹⁴³ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 156.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, *Contingencies of value: alternative perspectives for critical theory*, 40-42.

¹⁴⁵ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 157.

free jazz to black nationalism Baraka and the “cultural nationalists took free jazz, a travesty of accepted norms of musical discipline, and turned it into a symbol of racial distinction.”¹⁴⁶ Many black musicians, writers and artists argued that black music was itself an independent African American musical institution, separate from white culture and European derived musical styles. As Iain Anderson points out, free jazz was at the center of the black aesthetic in the 1960s. During this time many argued that jazz was a "preserve of African American musicians" and that "free jazz represented both a defiance of Euro aesthetic discipline and a rejection of integrationist ideology."¹⁴⁷ Scott Saul notes that jazz musicians linked jazz to a "soul aesthetic" and that the new musical practices of free jazz focused on blackness. Saul refers to this focus on blackness as a "project of cultural reclamation."¹⁴⁸ Many of these critics and musicians shared the views of Malcolm X, who felt that "freezing out the white people and drawing the racial line was seen as crucial to the promotion of a unity against a common enemy."¹⁴⁹ This directly relates to the strategy of creating institutions solely for African Americans. By placing black music in a realm reserved for African Americans, black musicians, writers, artists and others used black music as an independent institution to buoy all African Americans and to separate themselves from whites.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 119. This point is echoed by Scott Saul, who shows how many cultural critics and activists of the 1960s interpreted John Coltrane's music and used their opinions and readings of his music to further their agenda. Amiri Baraka and other black militant critics and artists were drawn to his music, as they considered it to be "the soundtrack, and the tool, of cultural liberation." Saul points out that Coltrane's scream was the musical gesture that many black militant artists and critics held up as an example of "exemplary behavior by black militants." Saul writes that Coltrane's scream was "seized upon as a vehicle of hope: a new world, a world without ghettos, seemed impossible to imagine without a disfiguring act like that scream, and the whole regime of nonviolent direct action." This appropriation of Coltrane's music to serve as a cultural tool further points out the ways in which critics can be seen as cultural workers. Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*, 248, 45.

¹⁴⁷ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 94-102. Quote on 98.

¹⁴⁸ Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*, 304, 05, 06.

¹⁴⁹ Monson, *Freedom sounds: civil rights call out to jazz and Africa*, 277.

¹⁵⁰ Brian Ward makes this point in a similar way, arguing that "claiming, naming and evaluating distinctive elements of a shared black world according to black standards" in a black form was psychologically empowering to the black community. Brian Ward, *Just my soul responding: rhythm and blues, Black consciousness, and race relations* (Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press, 1998), 211.

In addition to placing jazz in a strictly African American cultural context, African American critics, such as Baraka and Ron Welburn, attempted to create alternate forms of criticism through the establishment of independent magazines, such as Baraka's *Cricket*, and by experimenting with preexisting genres and approaches to jazz criticism.¹⁵¹ These efforts can be seen as attempts at renegotiating and redefining the time's predominant rules and boundaries of evaluating and discussing jazz, attempts which were aimed at creating an alternative insularity that valued free jazz and more African derived aesthetics more than the canon did. In addition, these interventions by African American critics and musicians functioned as cultural work which was meant to improve the social, economic and political conditions for African Americans.

Just as gender projects continue to persist as exemplified in the Anat Cohen and Jenny Scheinman examples above, debates about race continue to play a large role in contemporary jazz criticism. In the winter of 2011-12 Nicholas Payton caused somewhat of a firestorm in the jazz art world with his decision to reject the word jazz in favor of what he calls "Black American Music," or BAM, a term that he feels is a more fully encompassing and less racist than the term jazz. He first levied his case on November 27, 2011 in a post entitled "On Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore." He wrote:

Jazz died in 1959. There maybe [*sic*] cool individuals who say they play Jazz, but ain't shit cool about Jazz as a whole. Jazz died when cool stopped being hip. Jazz was a limited idea to begin with. Jazz is a label that was forced upon the musicians. The musicians should've never accepted that idea. Jazz ain't shit. . . . Some people may say we are defined by our limitation. I don't believe in limitations, but yes, if you believe you are limited that will define you. Definitions are retrospective. . . . My ancestors didn't play Jazz, they played Traditional, Modern and Avant-garde New Orleans Music. I don't play Jazz. I don't let others define who I am. . . . The man who lets others define him is a dead man. With all due respect to the masters, they were victims of a colonialist mentality. Blacks have been conditioned for centuries to be grateful for whatever

¹⁵¹ Thomas, "Ascension: Music and the Black Arts Movement," 270-72. Also see Scott Saul's discussion of the journal the *Liberator* and other cultural nationalist publications. Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*, 312-15.

crumbs thrown to them. . . . Jazz is a marketing ploy that serves an elite few. The elite make all the money while they tell the true artists it's cool to be broke. . . . Jazz has nothing to do with music or being cool. It's a marketing idea. . . . Jazz is a brand. Jazz ain't music, it's marketing, and bad marketing at that. It has never been, nor will it ever be, music. Here lies Jazz (1916-1959).¹⁵²

I quote this excerpt from Payton's post at length because it brings up many of the critiques black musicians and critics have been making at not only the practice of mainstream jazz criticism but at the music industry as a whole. Like many jazz musicians and writers before him, he critiques the idea of genre labels, seeing it as a form of control, with jazz being tied to the market. In his post he defines himself as a "Postmodern New Orleans musician" who plays Black American Music.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Nicholas Payton, "On Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore," *Nicholas Payton*, November 27, 2011, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/11/27/on-why-jazz-isnt-cool-anymore/>, Accessed January 16, 2014.

¹⁵³ Shortly after Payton posted "On Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore," National Public Radio jazz critic Patrick Jarenwattananon put a link up on his NPR hosted blog, *A Blog Supreme*. He summed up Payton's argument and urged his readers to read Payton's piece with an open mind, and to try and understand Payton's argument. As he rightly noted, Payton's piece "has clearly touched a nerve in fans and musicians this week." Patrick Jarenwattananon, "Something Said Something Negative About Jazz As A Whole Again," *A Blog Supreme*, December 2, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ablogsupreme/2011/12/02/143059425/someone-said-something-negative-about-jazz-as-a-whole-again>. Accessed January 16, 2014.

In his post alerting his readers to Payton's polemic, Jarenwattananon also put up a link to trumpeter Ian Carey's blog, in which Carey, writing to primarily white jazz musicians, explained some of the reasons why African American musicians share Payton's views and the need for white musicians to understand these views and reasons. Ian Carey, "How Not to Become a Bitter White Jazz Musician," *Ian Carey: Blog/News*, December 11, 2012, <http://iancareyjazz.com/blog/2011/12/how-not-to-become-a-bitter-white-jazz-musician.html>. Accessed January 16, 2014. Other writers who weighed in on the controversy include Ted Panken and Nate Chinen. See Ted Panken, "A Few Thoughts on 'B.A.M.' and 'Jazz,'" *Today is the Question: Ted Panken on Music, Politics and the Arts*, December 12, 2011, <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2011/12/12/a-few-thoughts-on-b-a-m-and-jazz/>. Accessed January 17, 2014. On his blog, Nate Chinen held an email conversation with writers Angelika Beener, Aaron Cohen, Joe Tangari and K. Leander Williams. Payton's views were part of the conversation. Nate Chinen, "Year of the Cannibal," *The Gig*, December 12, 2011, <http://thegig.typepad.com/blog/2011/12/jazz-year-of-the-cannibal.html>. Accessed January 17, 2014.

The BAM controversy appeared in numerous publications, and even spawned what was billed as the "Inaugural #BAM Conference NYC 1/5/12." The conference, which was held in the New York City club Birdland, featured a panel of Payton, saxophonists Gary Bartz and Marcus Strickland, pianist Orrin Evans, and bassist Ben Wolfe. The panel was moderated by writer Touré. The panel was covered in publications such as the *Village Voice*, which gave a brief synopsis of the panel discussion and included some of the more important quotes. Jozen Cummings, "Live: Nicholas Payton and Guests Don't Need All That Jazz," *Sound of the City*, January 6, 2012, http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2012/01/nicholas_payton_black_american_music_panel_january_5.php. Accessed January 16, 2014. For a video of the panel, see: <http://vimeo.com/34718095>. Accessed January 16, 2014.

I also jumped into the fray, not only on facebook, but on my own blog. See: Chris Robinson, "An Open Letter to Nicholas Payton: How Far Are You Willing to Go?" *OutsideInsideOut*, December 11, 2011, <http://outsideinsideout.wordpress.com/2011/12/11/an-open-letter-to-nicholas-payton-how-far-are-you-willing-to-go/>. Accessed January 16, 2014. Also see: Robinson, "On the Need to Keep Proper Critical Perspective,"

After receiving a large amount of blowback from musicians and writers, Payton further explained his views. He points to prior musicians such as Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Abbey Lincoln and others who did not like the term jazz, a term Payton characterizes as "an oppressive colonialist slave term."¹⁵⁴ In his response to saxophonist Marcus Strickland's critique, Payton wrote that "they are trying to steal this music away from Black people. . . . I am trying to fight for what Duke Ellington wanted to do for this music years ago, call it Black music. Why? Because he knew back then that if we didn't label it in a way that spoke of its origins, that years later, White folks would try to lay claim to it like it was a collective invention. Don't get me wrong, there are some brilliant, genius White cats that have played this music, but it's ultimately a Black art form."¹⁵⁵ Five weeks later Payton further went on to explain that BAM is not only for African Americans, but it "is for people of all races, sexes, cultures and colors." He lists several white musicians who played BAM, and emphasizing that his use of BAM is "to strip itself away from the derogatory j-word and to acknowledge that though anyone can play it, it is indeed a Black creation."¹⁵⁶

OutsideInsideOut, December 13, 2011, <http://outsideinsideout.wordpress.com/2011/12/13/on-the-need-to-keep-proper-critical-perspective/>. Accessed January 16, 2014.

¹⁵⁴ Payton, "An Open Letter To My Dissenters On Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore," *Nicholas Payton*, December 2, 2011, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/12/02/1319/>. Accessed January 16, 2014.

¹⁵⁵ Payton, "An Open Letter to Marcus Strickland And His Facebook Friends," *Nicholas Payton*, December 4, 2011, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/12/04/an-open-letter-to-marcus-strickland-and-his-facebook-friends/>.

Accessed January 16, 2014. Payton also responded to trumpeter Jeremy Pelt. See "No One Plays More Horn Than Nicholas Payton: An Open Letter To Jeremy Pelt," *Nicholas Payton*, December 10, 2011, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/12/10/no-one-plays-more-horn-than-nicholas-payton-an-open-letter-to-jeremy-pelt/>. Accessed January 16, 2014. Pelt shared some of his thoughts with *JazzTimes* writer Tom Reney on the BAM controversy. See Tom Reney, "Jeremy Pelt: On BAM, Blossom Dearie, and Groove," *JazzTimes.com*, March 8, 2012, <http://jazztimes.com/articles/29675-jeremy-pelt-on-bam-blossom-dearie-and-groove>. Accessed January 16, 2014. Also see Payton's response to bassist Christian McBride, who opposes Payton's idea to use BAM, feeling that it is a term to replace another term. Payton, "An Open Conversation With Christian McBride - by Nicholas Payton," *Nicholas Payton*, January 27, 2012, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2012/01/27/an-open-conversation-with-christian-mcbride-by-nicholas-payton/>. Accessed January 16, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ Payton, "#BAM Is For People Of All Races, Sexes, Cultures and Colors," *Nicholas Payton*, January 12, 2012, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2012/01/12/bam-is-for-people-of-all-races-sexes-cultures-and-colors/>.

Accessed January 16, 2014.

Although Payton did not articulate any new points or objections that other African American critics and musicians had not already raised for decades, the controversy surrounding his writing points to the continued existence of tensions between African American musicians, the media, and the music business over the ways in which jazz music is framed, written about and produced. Payton's personal insularity, like many before him, encompasses all black musics, and is not limited to jazz. He is in line with Amiri Baraka's notion of the "Changing Same," which puts all of black music, regardless of genre lines, into the same continuum. As Payton explained, black music is not off-limits to non-black musicians, but it is, however, African Americans who created the music and are its major innovators. Payton's work is one of the most recent and influential racial projects to appear, and it is a reminder of the long history of such projects in jazz criticism.¹⁵⁷

Jazz and American Cultural Identity

Since its inception and permeation of American culture, jazz has been associated with debates about American national cultural identity and what part music played in shaping it.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Payton's critiques were not limited solely to race. He also reiterated a common critique shared by many musicians - that unless a critic can perform on a professional level, that critic's views have little relevance. In a December, 2011 blog post entitled "How 'Brent Black' Can Go Smoke a Carton of Cocks!" - which has since been removed from his website - Payton specifically attacked jazz critics, arguing that they are unqualified to evaluate jazz, as they are not musicians. Addressing himself to critic Brent Black, who negatively reviewed Payton's CD *Bitches* (Black has since removed that review from his website), and to jazz critics everywhere, Payton writes "until you post your music, you are not qualified to speak on what it is. Gone are the days of critics who judge projects and decide who the major players are. What pianist George Colligan . . . and myself are doing on our blogs is the wave of the future. We the musicians are taking back control of the music. Fuck the *New York Times*. With all due respect, until I hear Nate Chinen and Ben Ratliff sit in at Smalls and rip everybody in the club to pieces, nothing they say matters." Payton, "How 'Brent Black' Can Go Smoke a Carton of Cocks!," *Nicholas Payton*, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/12/11/brent-black-can-go-smoke-a-carton-of-cocks/>. Accessed October 20, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ Jazz not only played an important role in shaping American national and cultural identity but other nations as well. See Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, rock, and rebels: cold war politics and American culture in a divided Germany* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000), 1-30.; Matthew F. Jordan, *Le jazz: jazz and French cultural identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).; Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making jazz French: music and modern life in interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

Jazz has been called “America's Classical Music.”¹⁵⁹ Such a statement signifies many things: first, that as a “classical” music, jazz is deemed art, just as Beethoven's symphonies or Puccini's operas are art; second, that before jazz the United States had no classical or indigenous art music to claim as its own, no uniquely distinguishable aesthetic with which to bind its national cultural identity to; third, such a label suggests that the United States needs a high art form to help solidify its national cultural identity; and fourth, jazz cannot be the classical art music of any other nation, as the United States owns jazz. The label of “America's Classical Music” was not thrust upon jazz until decades after its creation. In fact for much of its early life it was the United States' most popular music, which is interesting given that popular music and art are often considered to be mutually exclusive.¹⁶⁰ But over time jazz transformed from a popular music with roots in the brothels and other rowdy night spots of New Orleans to respectable concert music that is seen to represent American culture. The debates over the jazz canon take place, Iain Anderson argues, in the context of jazz as “America's art form” and are echoes of “Cold War exceptionalism.”¹⁶¹ “Canon formation,” Anna Dvinge writes, “is an intrinsic element in the narration of history - in this case the narration of the history of jazz, or rather, the history of American jazz.”¹⁶² In the construction of the debates arguments about the jazz canon the issues of nation, race, who is an American and what is American are salient. I would also add to

¹⁵⁹ The phrase “Jazz is America's Classical Music” has almost become a cliché. Grover Sales titled his jazz survey book *Jazz: America's Classical Music* and a Google search with those terms yields numerous results that range from blog posts, Smithsonian Jazz educational guides, and discussions of Ken Burns' documentary *Jazz*.

¹⁶⁰ There have been ongoing debates in American culture about whether music, and all art in general, that is popular and commercially successful can be considered legitimate art. On one side people argue that fine art and commercial success are mutually exclusive. Gendron points out that one of the main issues in the jazz debates of the 1940s was in terms of whether jazz became compromised when it became commercially successful. Some argued that swing, the most popular jazz style of the time, to be less of an art form than more New Orleans based “traditional” forms of jazz because its commercial success had corrupted it and made it less of a pure art form. Those on the other side argued that commercial and popular success validates its status as an art. In the words of critic Barry Ulanov: “music pays off according to its merit.” Gendron, “Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946).”

¹⁶¹ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 187.

¹⁶² Dvinge, “Between History & Hearsay: Imagining Jazz at the Turn of the 21st Century,” 19.

Dvinge's point that insularity formation, not just canon formation, narrates history. The following section will outline the ways in which jazz critics helped to make jazz America's Classical Music.

Music, regardless of what gender or racial discourses accompany it, has worked in concert with many other cultural texts and symbols, such as flags, national heroes, and literature, to shape a nation's cultural identity. Music has played a crucial role in shaping national identity and culture for centuries. Benjamin Curtis argues that “nation building is incomprehensible without an understanding of the role that art played in it.”¹⁶³ The battle of national aesthetic ideology waged by music critics has existed since at least the seventeenth century.¹⁶⁴ Many European composers and "nationalist intellectuals" employed nationalist ideology to foster a national identity by associating a style or practice of music with the national culture.¹⁶⁵ In addition to composers, several authors argue that critics have created and shaped a culture and nation's sense of artistic and cultural identity through their reviews. Mary Sue Morrow explains how German language critics in the late eighteenth century used rhetorical devices to create a "German aesthetic" which helped to shape a German musical and cultural identity.¹⁶⁶ They achieved this, in part, by devaluing and “othering” non-Germanic music and by lauding music which they deemed to display Germanic characteristics. For example, Morrow describes how

¹⁶³ Benjamin W. Curtis, *Music makes the nation: nationalist composers and nation building in nineteenth-century Europe* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2008), ix.

¹⁶⁴ This can be seen in the aesthetic battles between France and Italy during that period. Georgia Cowart notes that “seventeenth century quarrels over French and Italian music may be traced to the cultural rivalry between France and Italy during the Renaissance.” As a result, “writers arguing the virtues of opposing historical and national styles were forced to posit standards by which aesthetic judgments could be formulated.” What stoked this national aesthetic debate were the relative merits of nationally distinct operatic styles which called for the expression of competing national aesthetics. This was especially apparent in France after 1661, when French culture asserted French national pride and held “skepticism of Italian domination in the arts.” French music critic Jean-Laurent Lecerf saw “French culture as a tradition to be maintained against the invasion of Italian bad taste.” Cowart, *The origins of modern musical criticism: French and Italian music, 1600-1750*, x, 2, 20, 61.

¹⁶⁵ Barbara L. Kelly, *French music, culture, and national identity, 1870-1939* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 7-12.

¹⁶⁶ Mary Sue Morrow, *German music criticism in the late eighteenth century: aesthetic issues in instrumental music* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 46.

the “review collective,” as she calls these critics, “took up the crusade” against Italian musicians in order to support Germanic music.¹⁶⁷ Sandra McColl argues that nationalist music critics had a case of what she calls "artistic national chauvinism" which caused them to use the national aesthetic as the ruler for which all other music, regardless of origin, was to be measured.¹⁶⁸ The act of "othering" the music of nations not one's own and using one's indigenous musical genre or style as a ruler with which to judge other musics are processes that help to create a distinctly insulated form of music attributable to a single group of people. Critics' creation of a definable Germanic style of music is similar to the ways in which American critics would define jazz as an insular American music.

It took some time before music critics in the United States began to assert an identifiable American musical aesthetic. This occurred for several reasons, but primarily because many Americans felt that European classical music, and high art in general, could serve as a civilizing agent in America. As Lawrence Levine points out, the emphasis placed on the importance and value of European based culture was meant to help establish a European styled civilization in the United States.¹⁶⁹ These American classical music critics played a similar role in educating their audience about high art music as did the European nationalist critics and composers. These early American music critics felt the need to educate and help shape the taste of their readers about classical music. They took pleasure in sharing their love for classical music and championing it in the United States. These critics began as tastemakers and activists who introduced the concept of art music to the American public. They then explained musical standards of well played music

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 46-48.

¹⁶⁸ Sandra McColl, *Music criticism in Vienna, 1896-1897: critically moving forms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107.

¹⁶⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/lowbrow: the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 220-21.

and the Western art music canon. They tried, and to a certain extent, succeeded in creating a culture of classical music institutions and appreciation in the United States.¹⁷⁰

Beginning in the 1840s and 1850s U.S. critics began to support American composers, even though the criticism at this time was less developed relative to the criticism of Europe.¹⁷¹ The beginning of critics seriously promoting American composers came about with the rise of the composer-critics in the United States.¹⁷² This is not surprising, given that as American composers, they would argue for a more native classical music.¹⁷³ The music journal *Modern Music*, which existed from 1924-1946, featured the writing of several of America's most influential composers whose works have entrenched themselves into the modern canon, thereby helping to establish a body of American art music.¹⁷⁴ This in turn, whether intended or not, helped to create a musical culture in the United States that was separated and distinct from other national musics.

Around the turn of the twentieth century there was a fierce debate about modernism in classical music, demonstrated by composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schoenberg. During this time American classical music critics were largely in two camps: those who favored

¹⁷⁰ Mark N. Grant and Eric Friedheim, *Maestros of the pen: a history of classical music criticism in America* (Boston, Mass.: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 337, 28, 34-42, 56-57. The Transcendentalist Boston music critic J.S. Dwight was highly influential in the mid nineteenth century in making Ludwig van Beethoven's music popular in the United States and did so because he felt that Beethoven embodied Transcendentalist values.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29, 62-63. For example, criticism went still largely unsigned and a preponderance of music critics knew very few technical aspects of music. For the most part nineteenth and early twentieth century American classical music critics were supportive of European composers. The Old Guard, which consisted of less than a dozen prominent critics in New York and Boston were crucial in educating the American classical music audience and helped shaped today's standard classical music canon, which is largely comprised of European composers. These critics helped to create a culture of philanthropy and the support of the arts in New York and Boston. During this time these critics were as responsible for codifying the classical music canon as the conductors who programmed concerts and during the reign of the Old Guard "classical music critics had never before been so important and were never again to be so influential." *ibid.*, 58-60.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 161-65.

¹⁷³ For example, the mid-nineteenth century composer-critic William Henry Fry's most enduring contribution was as a polemicist who constantly supported American art music. *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 188-93. These composer-critics included Aaron Copland, Roger Sessions, Virgil Thompson, Henry Cowell, Paul Bowles, Colin McPhee, Lou Harrison, John Cage, David Diamond, and Conlon Nancarrow.

modernist music and progress, and those neo-conservatives who favored the music of earlier composers. What is interesting is that critics on both sides of the debate would argue for the importance and validity of jazz and other African American derived musical forms. The novelist and music critic Carl Van Vechten, who supported the modernists, helped to add African American and African American-inspired music into the Western canon. Van Vechten was also the first highbrow critic to crossover and write positively about jazz and other forms of popular music.¹⁷⁵ By crossing over from the highbrow to middle and lowbrow worlds Van Vechten helped to revise notions of culture.¹⁷⁶ Henry Pleasants argued against the modernist composers and instead suggested that the real art music revolution of the century was located not in Europe, but in New Orleans and Chicago and was in the form of jazz and its related musics. He argued that "the European art music tradition had played itself out and was now being supplanted by another continent's influence."¹⁷⁷ Pleasants' argument further underscores the divisions in and around musical styles from different places and cultures.

One of the earliest debates surrounding jazz was wrapped up in its ability to help shape American national cultural identity. This debate was strictly centered on two intertwined issues: race, and notions of high and low art. As Lawrence Levine points out, the ideologies of "high" and "low" art are not fixed and "have been the products of ideologies which were always subject to modifications and transformations."¹⁷⁸ The transition of jazz from popular music to art music was the result of the working out of competing insularities driven by separate ideologies in a struggle to gain control of the definition of jazz and its associated signifiers. Those who were

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 292-93.

¹⁷⁶ Evans, *Writing jazz: race, nationalism, and modern culture in the 1920s*, 109.

¹⁷⁷ Grant and Friedheim, *Maestros of the pen: a history of classical music criticism in America*, 300.

¹⁷⁸ Levine, *Highbrow/lowbrow: the emergence of cultural hierarchy in America*, 8, 30.

and continue to be at the forefront of the battle to place jazz into any given cultural category are jazz critics.¹⁷⁹

Ron Welburn argues that one of the primary achievements of the jazz criticism of the 1910s and 1920s was to help define jazz as an insulated and identifiable genre. This task was essential because there was no language to discuss jazz because it was so new. He points out that in the 1910s American music criticism was still focused on classical music, thus there was no critical apparatus in existence from which to base jazz criticism.¹⁸⁰ In fact, R. D. Darrell and Constant Lambert, who were two of the most important early jazz critics in terms of developing a style and format to the jazz record review, started out as classical music critics.¹⁸¹ A generation of writers who began their careers as jazz critics writing for jazz based publications, as opposed to the newspapers and non-jazz focused publications earlier critics such as Darrell and Lambert wrote for, did not emerge until the 1930s.¹⁸²

In the 1920s several intellectuals and jazz critics, such as Daniel Gregory Mason, argued that America's high art music (read "white") could only be used to help create American national culture and identity while others, including W.E.B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson, argued

¹⁷⁹ Similar debates about jazz as high or low culture took place in Germany during the 1950s, and jazz critics and writers were just as central to the debate and struggle to define jazz as their peers in the United States were. See Poiger, *Jazz, rock, and rebels: cold war politics and American culture in a divided Germany*, 137-67.

¹⁸⁰ Welburn, "James Reese Europe and the Infancy of Jazz Criticism," 35-36.

¹⁸¹ Ron Welburn, "Duke Ellington's Music: The Catalyst for a True Jazz Criticism," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 17, no. 1 (1986): 116-22. What is notable in Welburn's article is that Darrell, Lambert and other critics, such as Roger Pryor Dodge and B.H. Haggin, considered jazz to be an art music, which is something that a majority of jazz critics did not argue until twenty years later in the 1940s. *Ibid.*, 114-16. For a discussion of how early jazz critics in the nineteen-thirties also established criteria for judging jazz, see Welburn, "Jazz Magazines of the 1930s: An Overview of Their Provocative Journalism," 267. Lambert, according to Mark Grant, was a "Leonard Berstein-like prodigy" who was successful in many areas of the music business: as a classical composer in many genres, arranger, critic, radio lecturer and conductor. Grant and Friedheim, *Maestros of the pen: a history of classical music criticism in America*, 297. Also see Gennari, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies," 467-70.; James Lincoln Collier, *The reception of jazz in America: a new view* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Institute for Studies in American Music, Conservatory of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, 1988), 35-41.

¹⁸² See Welburn, "Jazz Magazines of the 1930s: An Overview of Their Provocative Journalism."

the opposite.¹⁸³ Mason felt that American identity was tied up with language and that the music that best represented “Standard English,” which was the language that should best represent American identity and culture, was Western art music. Mason ridiculed ragtime as the equivalent of slang and low culture, thus making ragtime and ragtime derived musics ineligible and inappropriate to symbolize American culture. He used the Symphony form as the standard bearer of national cultural identity and argued that only fine art music could “communicate the ideal.” His “racialized aesthetics” placed Germanic music as good and characterized the music associated with Slavs and other “lower” ethnic groups as romantic, childlike and primitive. He saw promise in folk and African American music, but only if it was appropriated into high art music, just as the Czech composer Antonin Dvorak did in his *From the New World Symphony*. Eventually, Mason's project lost the battle to define American national culture and identity with European classical music.¹⁸⁴

DuBois argued that the music that best represented the “amalgamated essence of America” were African American spirituals. He felt that Negro songs embodied American national character primarily because they emerged from the United States' diverse cultural milieu. DuBois' project shifted the emphasis of American national cultural identity from European fine art to African American centered folk/fine art. In doing so, DuBois asserts equality between European and African American art forms. Johnson was for the most part supportive of DuBois' ideas, but he felt that commercial black music was authentic and because of its widespread popularity it more easily gave the U.S. a distinctive art form. This was in direct opposition to DuBois who felt that popularity caused music to lose its authenticity.¹⁸⁵ But what both men argued for was the primacy of the role African American derived musics had in

¹⁸³ Evans, *Writing jazz: race, nationalism, and modern culture in the 1920s*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-57.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 64-74.

defining American national cultural identity. In the end, Nicholas Evans points out that DuBois, Johnson, and those sharing their views won out and jazz and other African American derived musics became associated with American national cultural identity. However, the debate about race and high and low culture did not abate. Instead, it morphed into a debate about how jazz and its African derived elements should manifest itself. Evans points out that during the 1920s, there were two forms of jazz: that performed by small ensembles in the New Orleans style, and a hybridized version that found its way into more orchestral and art music settings.¹⁸⁶

Outside of the African American community the debate about jazz and African American music as it relates to Europe and Africa is most notably exemplified by the discussion surrounding the premier of George Gershwin's work *Rhapsody in Blue* by the Paul Whiteman Orchestra at Aeolian Hall in February 1924. Whiteman, the white dance band leader and self proclaimed "King of Jazz," famously quipped that he wished to "make a lady out of jazz."¹⁸⁷ Whiteman's comment gets to the heart of the raced and classed nature of the debate about what form of jazz would be preeminent in American culture. In the early 1920s Whiteman's, Gershwin's and Irving Berlin's Europeanized take on jazz, referred to as "symphonic jazz," was more popular than the "hot jazz" styles that stayed closer to the African American vernacular aesthetic (or at the very least what was perceived to be or constructed to represent an African American vernacular aesthetic), suggesting that a large segment of Americans wanted the music to be highly informed by European standards. But from the late 1920s hot jazz, manifested in the form of big bands led by musicians such as Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson and Benny

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹⁸⁷ "Paul Whiteman and His Orchestra," *Red Hot Jazz Archive*, accessed May 11, 2010, www.redhotjazz.com/pwo.html. Whiteman's comment is similar to the views of those who reviewed the Aeolian Hall concert who "found something encouraging about the possibilities of jazz dressed, as it were, in formal attire." Welburn, "Duke Ellington's Music: The Catalyst for a True Jazz Criticism," 112.

Moten, began to become more popular.¹⁸⁸ The rise in popularity of hot jazz demonstrates that the more popular form of jazz was African American based, and came from vernacular, lowbrow, and lower class origin. That the discussions in the 1910s and 1920s about the future of American music, its place in shaping American cultural identity, and whether or not European or African American derived musics would take primacy in mainstream American music, shows that these contests are wrapped up in race, class and nation.

Through the efforts of critics and other members of the jazz art world, by the mid and late 1950s jazz had largely moved in the American public's mind out of the rowdy, low-down New Orleans night spots into more "respectable" middle and high brow venues. Paul Lopes refers to this period in jazz history as a "Jazz Renaissance" and argues that the jazz art world had succeeded, in that jazz had reached the status of a high art.¹⁸⁹ In addition to being recognized as an art form, it was during this time that the notion of jazz as "America's art" became calcified. Iain Anderson points out that this had numerous implications. As the popularity of jazz increased in the United States during the Cold War the State Department appropriated jazz a positive cultural symbol and exported it abroad on Willis Conover's Voice of America radio shows. As such, jazz became popular around the world and was seen as "uniquely American."¹⁹⁰ Jazz began to move from the nightclub to more respectable middle and high brow venues like concert halls and the Newport Jazz Festival. This move to respectable venues and the billing of jazz as a concert music created a situation in which jazz was safely mediated to middle and high brow audiences. At this time movies depicted jazz as art and academics and jazz critics used

¹⁸⁸ Collier, *The reception of jazz in America: a new view*, 16-20. Welburn defines symphonic jazz as "the music composed for symphony orchestras or chamber ensembles that possesses [*sic*] elements of jazz rhythm, melodic contour, and the kind of harmony associated with blacks." Welburn, "Duke Ellington's Music: The Catalyst for a True Jazz Criticism," 112.

¹⁸⁹ Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 1, 217.

¹⁹⁰ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 19, 24.

jazz to create a national cultural identity and argued that jazz espoused “American political ideals.”¹⁹¹ Jazz not only demonstrated American values, but it that it "offered an alternative, more democratic version of American society" as well.¹⁹²

The influential role played in the creation of an American cultural identity is vividly seen in how the United States promoted jazz throughout the world as a symbol of America during the Cold War. While jazz had been seen as representing America culturally it became officially sanctioned by the United States government in 1956 with the first government sponsored jazz tour, which featured, among others, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. These jazz tours were intended to promote the image of the United States abroad, especially in regards to race, which was something that hurt the U.S.'s image. Sending African Americans abroad to represent the U.S. as a symbol of racial harmony was inherently contradictory, given the existence of Jim Crow laws and other forms of discrimination. For the U.S. government, sending black and white jazz musicians abroad was another tool to use in conducting foreign policy. One of the primary reasons why the U.S. State Department employed jazz was that it was uniquely American in origins, which was not the case with ballet, theater or classical music. Jazz was also seen to exhibit and reflect American values, such as freedom and the value placed on self expression; in short, jazz represented American ideals.¹⁹³

In the 1980s and early 1990s jazz achieved a second renaissance and once again enjoyed a more visible status in American society, most notably with the establishment of the jazz

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 31-34, 38. Pianist Dr. Billy Taylor argues that jazz “demonstrates the democratic process at work,” “defines the national character and the national culture,” and that “the syntax, semantics and kinesthetics of jazz are American, and its attitudes reflect prevalent American viewpoints.” William Billy Taylor, "Jazz: America's Classical Music," *The Black Perspective in Music* 14, no. 1 (1986): 21, 22, 24. Also see Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*, 15.

¹⁹² Monson, *Freedom sounds: civil rights call out to jazz and Africa*, 118.

¹⁹³ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo blows up the world: jazz ambassadors play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-8, 16-17. Also see: Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz diplomacy: promoting America in the Cold War era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 5-8.; Gennari, "Jazz Criticism: Its Development and Ideologies," 478.

program at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City in 1991. As one of America's most premier cultural institutions, Lincoln Center helped to further legitimize the status of jazz as a high art form and strengthened the bond between jazz and American national identity.¹⁹⁴ Much has been written about Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC), the most heavily funded jazz institution, and its decision to hire trumpeter Wynton Marsalis as its director. The discussion surrounding JALC and Marsalis rehashes and recontextualizes many of the same issues that critics have been discussing about American music, jazz and American cultural identity for decades.¹⁹⁵ Among others, these issues include the relative "blackness" of jazz and its status as black music, how its status as black music relates to and challenges the notions and perceptions of jazz as "America's classical music," which artists and styles are considered canonical, and the proper aesthetic criteria for judging jazz, and who is best qualified to make these judgments. In addition, JALC Orchestra has been criticized for its lack of hiring female musicians, pointing to the continuing marginalization of women.¹⁹⁶ This discourse further demonstrates that the cultural work, projects and interventions, that music critics have been, and are currently engaged in, are and continue to be wrapped up in race, class, nation, and national identity.

¹⁹⁴ Gray, *Cultural moves: African Americans and the politics of representation*, 4-5, 32.

¹⁹⁵ With the endorsement of Lincoln Center and major corporate sponsors Marsalis "took on a role as authoritative spokesperson for the future of music itself." George Lewis, *A power stronger than itself: the AACM and American experimental music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 444. In addition to Lewis' discussion of JALC and Wynton Marsalis, see DeVeaux, *The birth of bebop: a social and musical history*, 16.; Elworth, "Jazz in Crisis, 1948-1958: Ideology and Representation," 57-59.; Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 341-68.; Gray, *Cultural moves: African Americans and the politics of representation*, 32-51.; Eric Nisenson, *Blue: the murder of jazz*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).; Ronald Michael Radano, *New musical figurations: Anthony Braxton's cultural critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 269-74.; Porter, *What is this thing called jazz?: African American musicians as artists, critics, and activists*, 287-334.

¹⁹⁶ Lara Pellegrinelli, "Dig Boy Dig: Jazz at Lincoln Center Breaks New Ground, but Where are the Women?" *The Village Voice*, November 7, 2000, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2000-11-07/news/dig-boy-dig/>.

Although I have chosen to separate the above discussions of gender, race and nation, they all intersect and intertwine in messy and complex ways. Gender, more specifically masculinity, is an binding agent in the relationship between jazz, race and American cultural identity. Eric Porter notes that throughout the intellectual history of jazz manhood "was often a crucial element in a discussion of aesthetics, culture, race, economics, national identity, and other issues."¹⁹⁷ Discourses and notions of masculinity are so embedded in American identity and culture that Michael Kimmel argues that it is not possible to fully understand American history without understanding masculinity.¹⁹⁸ Dominant, or hegemonic, masculinity in America has traditionally been conceived of in racial terms. This was especially so in the nineteenth century, when race precluded non-whites from being considered masculine.¹⁹⁹ Given these racial ideologies, the "self made man," who came to represent the dominant form of masculinity in America, was inevitably white.²⁰⁰ While what John Pettegrew refers to as the "discourse of individualism" may seem gender neutral, it is in fact understood to be gendered male. The self made man is the gendered embodiment of the idea of "rugged individualism," which since the turn of the twentieth century has "been of the most widely used terms to describe national character overall."²⁰¹ That the eminent jazz critic Gary Giddins conceives of jazz as "the ultimate in

¹⁹⁷ Porter, *What is this thing called jazz?: African American musicians as artists, critics, and activists*, 26.

¹⁹⁸ Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: a cultural history*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

¹⁹⁹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & civilization: a cultural history of gender and race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 23-29. Bederman notes that African Americans "were depicted as unsexed primitives who had never evolved the perfect manhood or womanhood characteristic of more civilized races." "Manliness," Bederman argues, was seen as "simultaneously cultural and racial: white men were able to achieve perfect manliness because they had inherited that capacity from their racial forebears." *ibid.*, 28, 29.

²⁰⁰ Kimmel, *Manhood in America: a cultural history*, 13.

²⁰¹ John Pettegrew, *Brutes in suits: male sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 23, 37.

rugged individualism" points to the underlying existence of masculinity in the ways that jazz, race and American cultural identity are intertwined and thought about.²⁰²

CONCLUSION

Considering the above, it is quite clear that what jazz critics *do* - to answer my driving question - is quite a lot. On first glance looking at what the *Downbeat* star rating guide requires might seem rather benign, as it basically asks the critic to tell the reader if this is an album they should listen to. After deeper exploration into what goes into evaluating a jazz performance and theorizing the practice of jazz criticism as cultural work that creates multiple insularities that help to shape and order the linguistic and social relations in a jazz art world, it becomes evident that rendering a critical judgment is an activity of deeply profound significance. Jazz critics, by virtue of their status as cultural authorities, have been powerful figures in not only the ways we think about jazz, but in terms of how ideas about race, gender and American cultural identity permeate discussions of "America's Classical Music."

As I have outlined above, gender, race and nation projects have played key roles in the creation of multiple insularities. Regardless of how these projects are created and deployed, the ways in which they shape jazz criticism have to be exclusionary, as insularities must exclude in order to exist. Ideologies about class, gender, race and nation have deep historical roots and shaped the critics viewpoints and actions with necessarily being aware of it. The privilege that white men have in American society allowed early jazz critics to gain the education and opportunities needed to be able to have the platform from which they could share their views on jazz. As they were influential in setting up the rules for debate about jazz, the ideologies in

²⁰² Gary Giddins, quoted in Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *Jazz: a history of America's music*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), xv. Giddins finishes his quote, saying that jazz is "going out on that stage and saying: It doesn't matter how anybody else did it. This is the way I'm going to do it."

which they existed shaped their opinions, biases and points of view on jazz and American culture. In this way, these critics shaped the practice of jazz criticism as one that was androcentric, privileging masculinity as a musical and social ideal in jazz. Jazz criticism continued in the long tradition of grievances that African Americans had against whites controlling and defining their culture and cultural products. Subsequent generations of critics continued to wrestle with questions of gender and race as they pertained to establishing jazz as "America's classical music." The anointing of jazz as a high art whose values were universal and transcended social divides highlighted the critique that critics were divorcing the music its social context. As debates about what styles of jazz were acceptable for inclusion in the canon were waged, especially in regards to avant garde jazz in the 1960s and 1970s, critics engaged in cultural work to maintain a firm boundary between the canon and the outside. The stakes of this battle were high, as exclusion from the canon meant artistic and social marginalization. Given this, the motivation behind the construction of alternative insularities is clear: their creation is a form of cultural work aimed at reshaping the power dynamics and structures created and maintained by the existence of the canon. Chapter Two looks to the ways in which Leonard Feather attempted, yet ultimately failed, at remaking social relations and power dynamics in the context of gender.

Chapter 2: "Feather's Nest": Leonard Feather's Unintentional Reinforcement of Jazz as an Androcentric Space

In fact, it reflects shame on the music world and on recording executives and male musicians, rather than credit on me, that during the 1940s and 1950s most of the recordings led by female instrumentalists were instigated and produced by me, and that of the all-female sessions I was responsible for very nearly 100%.

- Leonard Feather, 1987

INTRODUCTION

In a 1953 edition of his "Feather's Nest" column for *Downbeat*, Leonard Feather wrote about the singer Dell Scott. Feather's larger point was that talent does not always win out in the competitive world of jazz and that sometimes talented musicians do not reach the level of success that their talent would allow because of bad luck. According to Feather, Scott was one of these unlucky musicians who deserved a break. Throughout his column he emphasized her looks and how important it is for a woman to be attractive. Feather's introduction of Scott reads: "the blonde in this picture – and you'll have to take my word for it that she's 10 times prettier in person." After telling Scott's story, he concluded his article: "The years of optimum opportunity pass very fast for a girl with such visual qualifications. Maybe next year or the year after she will be just a trifle less beautiful and will have missed the bus forever. And the public will never know that there was a girl named Dell Scott whose name could easily have been as familiar as that of Jane Russell or Rosemary Clooney."¹

In this brief column Feather one can see several recurring themes and ideas in Feather's work. First, he is well aware that jazz is not a meritocracy, and that those deserving of success do not always achieve it due to external forces no fault of their own. Second, throughout his

¹ LF, "Feather's Nest," *DB*, September 23, 1953, 21.

career Feather made it a point to introduce his readers to female musicians who may not be well known, and he actively worked to challenge the dominant ideologies that governed the jazz canon. Third, despite Feather's best attempts, the way he went about fighting for change was self-defeating. Even in attempts at challenging gender bias he used the discriminatory language of the time, such as referring to women as "girls," and he often emphasized a woman's appearance and accentuated her femaleness. These tendencies are all apparent in his column on Scott. Feather took it upon himself, and quite admirably, to use his position of power to fight for social change. However, he did so from a paternal position, making the path towards gender equality begin at "Feather's Nest."

Throughout his career, Leonard Feather attempted in various ways to show that women can play on the same level as a man. In other words, he believed that gender is inaudible and that jazz, as an artistic endeavor, can be performed at a high level by men and women alike. As I discussed in Chapter One, jazz has been characterized and perceived as an androcentric and masculine enterprise. Feather rejected this notion, although as I will show, not in a way that was problematic. His insularity did not challenge the jazz canon on musical or stylistic grounds. It was rather conservative: he felt that bebop was a high art form, he never embraced free jazz or fusion, and held men such as Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong in high esteem. Rather, his insularity included women, and did not exclude on the basis of sex. He placed women such as pianist Mary Lou Williams, saxophonist Vi Redd and composer Toshiko Akiyoshi right alongside Bud Powell, Paul Desmond and Billy Strayhorn in his insularity. In this way, Feather attempted to create an alternative jazz insularity that would be more inclusive and less discriminatory. But as I will argue, despite Feather's best intentions of challenging the

gender bias in jazz, he was ineffective at doing so, as he worked within the dominant ideology that governed the jazz canon.

After providing biographical background on Feather, this chapter includes three sections, which each focus on three areas of work from his vast output: the two albums he produced for alto saxophonist and vocalist Vi Redd, his Blindfold Tests for *Metronome* and *Downbeat* magazines, and his tenure as jazz editor at *Playboy* magazine. The first two sections exemplify two of the main ways in which Feather worked for change: first, through behind the scenes work such as record production, and, and second through the much more visible practice of writing criticism. In addition, juxtaposing Feather's work as a record producer with his criticism serves to further problematize the figure of the "jazz critic." This is especially the case when considering that Feather worked in nearly every aspect of the jazz business, often in contradictory and self-serving ways. The final section on his work at *Playboy* displays his general subconscious participation and tacit acceptance of the same ideologies he was working against.

Leonard Feather, who was born in London on September 13, 1914 to an upper-middle-class Jewish family and died in 1994 in California, is primarily known as a jazz critic but was also deeply involved with composing music and lyrics, record producing, promotion, broadcasting, education and other fields. Feather was hugely important in jazz achieving the status of a canonical art. John Gennari describes Feather as someone "who set out to convince the world that a music born of slavery and segregation was the true American art, the singular twentieth-century art, and as such a symbol of America's emergence as a self-sustaining cultural

entity."² Feather, along with many other jazz critics, was not only instrumental in the canonization of jazz as a high art form, but in the process through which jazz became a potent symbol of American culture as well.

Another of one of Feather's large contributions was his support of racial equality. Gary Giddins notes that Feather "went to work on Jim Crow in the musicians union and movie studios."³ To help combat these problems, Feather joined the NAACP when he moved to Los Angeles and did what he could to break down the problems of segregation and race.⁴ Feather always strove to judge the music based on the quality of the music's content rather than on who was playing it. Gennari notes that "colorblindness was the ideology that grounded Feather's Jewish liberalism" and that he "challenged the idea that race was a determining factor in jazz performance." "As jazz criticism's liberal conscience, Feather peppered nearly all of his writing – even his ostensibly value-free, fact-driven jazz encyclopedias – with the grim details of racism." Gennari also says that "one wonders whether interracialism as an end in itself became an *idée fixe* that undermined the objectivity Feather was so keen to claim for himself."⁵ Feather also used the Blindfold Tests to support his colorblind opinions that there is no audible difference between black and white musicians.⁶

² Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 22.

³ Gary Giddins, *Leonard Feather: 1914-1994*, http://www.leonardfeather.com/feather_obituary.html

⁴ See the chapter entitled Race in pages 115-126 and page 215 in *The Jazz Years* for some of Feather's views and opinions on race in jazz. Feather expressed his opinions about inverted Jim Crow in an article published in the May 13, 1950 issue of *Melody Maker* magazine. He described the role race played in the jazz community by saying that "there is no factor more vital in its effect on the average musician's career than Jim Crow. Directly or indirectly, the vicious bigotry of racial prejudice has affected countless thousands of jazzmen, white and coloured [*sic*] alike." Leonard Feather, "Jim Crow versus 'Crow Jim': An inverted form of race prejudice is becoming evident among jazz fans," *Melody Maker*, May 13, 1950, 3.

⁵ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 56.

⁶ See the Blindfold Test with Roy Eldridge, who Feather challenged to identify the race of the musician Feather played for him. Eldridge failed, which Feather used as proof that race was inaudible. Feather, Blindfold Test: Roy Eldridge, *DB*, July 13, 1951, 12.

Giddins also notes that “what is perhaps not as well remembered is his service on behalf of women musicians, whom he tirelessly represented in his writings and as a producer.”⁷ Among critics and others in the jazz industry, Leonard Feather was perhaps the biggest champion of female jazz musicians. Throughout his career he produced albums by women and promoted them in various ways. In 1938, he produced pianist and vocalist Una Mae Carlisle’s first recording session. A year later he produced the first recording session for pianist and vocalist Hazel Scott on the RCA Victor label. Feather claimed that these sessions were not produced because of any intentions on his part to further the advancement of women in jazz. He notes in his autobiography that “although the sessions” with Carlisle and Scott “could have given the impression that these were attempts to campaign for women in jazz, it was not until a few years later that I made a conscious effort to correct what I now realized was a problem affecting women musicians.” The problem, Feather claimed, was “another form of prejudice [like racism], one against which its victims were equally *helpless* to effect change.”⁸ He summed up his involvement in producing albums for women: “In fact, it reflects shame on the music world and on recording executives and male musicians, rather than credit on me, that during the 1940s and 1950s most of the recordings led by female instrumentalists were instigated and produced by me, and that of the all-female sessions I was responsible for very nearly 100%.”⁹ According to jazz historian Linda Dahl, Feather was “one notable exception” among jazz critics who ignored female jazz musicians, as “he actively sought out, recorded and reviewed women players and singers in the forties and fifties.”¹⁰

⁷ Giddins, *Leonard Feather: 1914-1994*.

⁸ Leonard Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 127-29. Emphasis mine.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 163. For a much more thorough discussion of Feather’s support of women in jazz, see *The Jazz Years* pages 127-164. Through his career, he produced several recording sessions for female artists including Mary Lou Williams, piano; Mary Osborne, guitar; Clora Bryant, trumpet; Stacy Rowles, trumpet; Vi Redd, alto saxophone, Melba Liston, trombone, composer, and arranger; and Viven Garry, bass.

¹⁰ Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, 43n.

LEONARD FEATHER, VI REDD, AND THE JAZZ MARKET

In addition to introducing his readers to female musicians who he felt deserved wider recognition, Feather produced numerous albums by female musicians. For Feather, producing albums by female musicians was another way to challenging the gender bias of the jazz canon. A great example of his work on behalf of female musicians and the ways in which he unintentionally reinforced jazz as an androcentric space can be seen in his work in the production of albums by alto saxophonist and vocalist Vi Redd. In 1962 and 1963 Leonard Feather produced two LPs by Redd. The first, *Bird Call* was recorded in 1962 for United Artists; the second, *Lady Soul*, was recorded in 1962 and 1963 for Atlantic Records. The details surrounding the recording and release of both albums, especially the former, reveal a great deal about Feather's various and often conflicting roles, his personal goal of reducing gender bias in jazz, and the importance gender views play in the production and marketing of female musicians. Materials from Leonard Feather's personal collection, which include personal correspondence between Feather and record companies regarding Redd's recording sessions, contracts and ephemera from the recording sessions illuminate Feather's behind the scenes activity, which Redd's listeners and Feather's readers were unaware of. Combining these archival materials with Feather's published writing, both in the form of print journalism and record jacket liner notes, creates a complicated picture of a man with a multitude of goals: to reduce gender bias, introduce an artist he felt deserved to be heard by a wide public, and market her in a commercially viable fashion that would be profitable for the label, the artist, and for him. The production of Redd's albums shows the difficulty and complexities of trying to challenge and change the dominant musical and social values within the jazz canon.

Vi Redd was born on September 20, 1928 in Los Angeles. Her father, Alton Redd, was an accomplished jazz drummer and she learned music from her great aunt, Alma Hightower, who had numerous music students in L.A. She made her professional debut in high school and played at Los Angeles State College, where she graduated with a degree in social science. Between 1954 and 1957 she played professionally in southern California and then took four years off to work for the county as a social worker. In 1961 she returned to music, performing in Los Angeles clubs, such as Shelly Manne's Manne-Hole. After recording *Bird Calls* and *Lady Soul*, Redd worked with a variety of professional groups, performing in clubs and jazz festivals. She toured with Earl "Fatha" Hines in 1964, performed at the 1966 Monterey Jazz Festival with her own group. In 1967 she performed at Ronnie Scott's club in London for a record breaking ten weeks. The following year she toured internationally with Count Basie's orchestra, Max Roach, and with Dizzy Gillespie.¹¹ Teaching became her primary occupation in 1969 when she went to work for Compton Unified Schools. Since the 1960s Redd has maintained a rather low performing profile in terms of touring and recording. Redd appeared on two albums in the late 1960s with the Count Basie Orchestra, on the 1970 album *The Chase!* by Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon, and on a live date from 1977 led by Marian McPartland entitled *Now's The Time*. In 2001 Redd won the Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Award.¹²

In his 1987 biography Feather wrote that despite her accomplishments

Redd has seen success pass her by and has been obliged repeatedly to return to her basic job as a school teacher. She talks, with surprisingly little rancour [*sic*], of having been resented as a female, of being passed up for jobs, of seeing men

¹¹ Redd can be found performing "Stormy Monday Blues" with the Count Basie Orchestra in 1968 on YouTube, Vi Redd and the Count Basie Orchestra, "Vi Redd & Count Basie - 'Stormy Monday Blues' - Juan les Pins July 231968," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9cM3ALga80>, accessed 25 October, 2012.

¹² Feather, Recording Liner Notes, *Bird call*, Solid State SS 18038, 1969. Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 159-61. Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler, *The encyclopedia of jazz in the seventies* (New York: Horizon Press, 1976), 281. Dahl, *Stormy weather: the music and lives of a century of jazzwomen*, 86. Scott Yanow, "Vi Redd Artist Biography," <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/vi-redd-mn0001175117>. Accessed January 20, 2014. Yoko Suzuki, "Invisible Woman: Vi Redd's Contributions as a Jazz Saxophonist," *American Music Review* XLII, no. 2 (2013).

walk off the bandstand as soon as she walked on. Yet she seems at peace with the world. She knows how many black men, as well as black women, have been forced to make sacrifices, have lost opportunities for which they waited too long. Why did none of those apparent breaks amount to anything? The dates with Basie, the airplay for the albums, the unprecedented Ronnie Scott engagement? She was born in 1928; is it too late for a groundswell of acceptance? Perhaps it is too late even to conclude that time will tell, yet Vi Redd continues to wait, hope, pray and practise [*sic*].¹³

While plenty of fine male musicians have career trajectories such as Redd, in that they record a couple of albums, tour with high profile acts, and sink into obscurity, these men do not have the difficulty that Feather describes as a result of the androcentrism in jazz. Feather felt that by convincing those in the jazz art world that women can and do perform as well as or better than men, that women like Redd would not have to face the difficulties outlined in the above passage.

Leonard Feather secured a recording contract for Redd with United Artists, the end product of which was *Bird Call*. The album was recorded in Los Angeles in two sessions on May 21 and 22, 1962.¹⁴ Joining Redd were trumpeter Carmell Jones, vibist Roy Ayers, pianist Russ Freeman, bassists Leroy Vinnegar and Bob Whitlock, guitarist Herb Ellis, and drummer Richie Goldberg, who was Redd's husband. *Bird Call* is a concept album of sorts, in that it features tunes all made popular by Charlie Parker. Redd also performed Feather's original composition "I Remember Bird," which he dedicated to Parker.¹⁵ With this material Feather was likely attempting to place Redd squarely in the wake of Parker, who in the early 1960s was already at the center of the jazz canon. I argue that with the material selection, which as producer he certainly must have been influential in picking, Feather may have been trying to legitimize Redd as a serious jazz musician by demonstrating she could play the same tunes as one of the most important saxophonists up to that point in jazz history.

¹³ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 161.

¹⁴ Feather, "Itemized Year Book Day by Day, 1962." Writing files, box 6, folder 12. LGFPC.

¹⁵ Feather, Recording Liner Notes, *Bird Call*, 1969.

If I was assigned to review this album for *Downbeat*, I would write something along the lines of: Redd turns in a fine saxophone and vocal performance throughout *Bird Call*. In particular, her saxophone playing is excellent. Her alto saxophone tone is sweet and round, reminiscent of fellow Los Angeles alto saxophonist Sonny Criss, although Redd's sound is a little bigger. Redd's phrasing is smooth, almost liquid, and her lines, especially on ballads, are very melodic and inventive. Redd also sings on five of the album's ten cuts, including the first three tracks of side A: "If I Should Lose You," "Summertime," and the bebop standard "Anthropology." She has a smoky voice, ends her phrases with a touch of vibrato, and slightly embellishes each tune's melody.

Redd's performance on the album is almost split equally between vocals and saxophone, and the album to my ears is a little quirky. I would attribute this to Feather's influence as producer, although it is not known who made final decisions on each song's arrangement. Both "If I Should Lose You" and "Now's the Time" finds Redd singing the head up front, and in an unconventional strategy she plays the restatement of the head on saxophone rather than singing it. The vocals up front on both tunes seem almost like an afterthought. On "Anthropology" she sings the melody at the beginning and end of the tune, but she only gets eight bars of alto saxophone soloing, split into two four bar sections in a short sequence in which she trades with the drummer. The song also features Feather's original lyrics, which emphasize that all people come from a common past and that people should put aside their differences and come together. Presumably these lyrics reflect Feather's response to the social unrest during the early 1960s. In general, *Bird Call* features some excellent saxophone playing from Redd and very good solos from Jones and Ayers, but its inconsistent use of vocals and arrangements that often seem to hem in Redd's alto soloing, make the album a bit weak and a little overproduced. Had she been

afforded more space to open up and stretch out on her solos, as she did on "All the Things You Are," *Bird Call* would have been a much stronger album.

I attribute the "quirkiness" I hear in *Bird Call* to its not knowing what kind of album it wants to be. There is a tension at work: Does it want to be a vocal album? Does it want to be an instrumental album? Its compromise, to give Redd equal time on vocals and saxophone, shortchanges both of her abilities. As is well documented, women were accepted in jazz as singers, and to a much lesser extent pianists, but they were not accepted as horn players. By emphasizing Redd's vocals as much as he did, Feather succumbed to the gendered expectations of the market, where women were expected to sing. In his sincere attempts at getting Redd exposure and a hit record, Feather had to yield to the forces that shaped the market. Would United Artists release an album by a female saxophonist without vocals? Perhaps not, and as such, Feather had to do what he did to secure a recording contract for Redd. The album's quirky qualities may not be so much a result of Feather's poor production during the recording session, but an inability to buck the gendered expectations of the jazz market at the time.

Soon after the release of *Bird Call* came Redd's second, and final, album as a leader. *Lady Soul* appeared on Atco, a subsidiary of Atlantic records, in 1963. In a self-admittedly rare instance, Atlantic Records owner Nesuhi Ertegun signed an artist to his label without having heard their music. Such was the case with Ertegun's decision to offer Vi Redd a recording contract, which he did based solely on Feather's high opinion of her. In a letter dated April 9, 1962 from Ertegun to Feather, Ertegun proposed a nine month contract (the signed contract is not extant in Feather's personal collection) between Atlantic and Redd to record one LP, with Redd being paid scale and receiving a four percent royalty. In addition, Ertegun offered three one year

options "at 5% royalty, guaranteeing a minimum of 2 LPs a year."¹⁶ Vi Redd recorded *Lady Soul* in two sessions: November 23, 1962 in New York, and January 16, 1963 in Los Angeles, with each session having different personnel.¹⁷ Of the eleven tracks, only two were instrumental, Redd's composition "Lady Soul" and the standard "That's All." The album focuses almost exclusively on Redd's vocals, with her saxophone solos never exceeding two choruses in length. Redd does not play alto on three of the tracks. With only two tracks over four minutes in length, and the majority of them under three minutes, it appears that Feather and Ertegun attempted to make *Lady Soul* radio friendly in hopes of scoring a hit single.

Yoko Suzuki's recent article on Redd for the *American Music Review* adds further details to the motivations and ideas behind *Lady Soul*. Drummer Dave Bailey, who played on most of the album, told Suzuki that "I think Ertegun, the owner of Atlantic, selected the tunes we recorded. I think they were trying to get her more recognized as a singer."¹⁸ I agree with Suzuki, who argues that the shift from *Bird Call*'s instrumental approach to the vocal oriented *Lady Soul* reflects Atlantic's and Feather's attempt to "follow traditional gender categories in the recording industry."¹⁹ Whatever Atlantic and Feather's motivations were, Redd did not like the album, telling Suzuki that "it wasn't the right thing to do."²⁰

Perhaps Redd's reservations and dislike of the date shed light as to how the album turned out. Putting on my jazz critic hat once again, as a whole, *Lady Soul* falls flat. It lacks energy

¹⁶ Nesuhi Ertegun to Leonard Feather, 9 April 1962. Writing files, box 9, folder 11. Leonard G. Feather Personal Collection, International Jazz Collections, University of Idaho. I will refer to Feather's personal collection in subsequent notes as LGFPC.

¹⁷ Feather, "Itemized Year Book Day by Day, 1962, 1963." Writing files, box 6, folder 12. LGFPC. The New York session personnel is as follows: Redd, alto saxophone, vocals; Dick Hyman, organ; Paul Griffin, piano; Bucky Pizzarelli, guitar; Ben Tucker, bass; Dave Bailey, drums. The Los Angeles personnel is as follows: Redd, alto saxophone, vocals; Bill Perkins, tenor saxophone, flute; Jennell Hawkins, organ; Barney Kessel, guitar, Leroy Vinnegar, bass, Leroy Harrison, drums. Most of the arrangements were by Dick Hyman. Feather, recording liner notes, *Lady Soul*, Atco AS 128 016, 1963, LP.

¹⁸ Dave Bailey, quoted in Suzuki, "Invisible Woman: Vi Redd's Contributions as a Jazz Saxophonist," 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Vi Redd quoted in ibid.

throughout, and at times it feels as if the musicians phoned in their performances. For example, Redd's delivery on the medium blues shuffle "Next Time You See Me" is somewhat reserved, having none of the fire of her 1968 performance of "Stormy Monday Blues" with the Count Basie Orchestra.²¹ Her single alto chorus on the tune is bluesy and funky, outshining the individual and bland choruses from pianist Paul Griffin and organist Dick Hyman. The album occasionally sounds dated, especially on the tracks with Hyman. His organ has a carnival organ type sound, quite far away from the Hammond B3 sound, which has been the dominant instrument for organists since the 1950s. As was the case on *Bird Call*, *Lady Soul* included compositions by Feather, "Salty Papa Blues" and "Evil Gal's Daughter Blues." For the most part the performances on *Lady Soul* are competent, but rarely scintillating. Given the talent, it could have been a much stronger album, and it is not surprising that it was released on one of Atlantic's imprints and that the label chose not to pick up their option for further albums by Redd.

Five months after *Bird Call*'s recording date, and near to the release date of *Lady Soul*, Feather published a one page piece on Redd in the September 23, 1962 issue of *Downbeat* which reads as part promotional biography, part polemic. He briefly outlines Redd's biography and notes that one of her strongest advantages is that "few players in the last year, irrespective of sex, creed, height, weight, national origin, or shoe size, have a more Bird-like sound or a better blues-rooted feeling than Vi Redd. She reminds one at times of Sonny Stitt." In his praise of Redd he reveals his personal beliefs that jazz is universal and available for anyone to play if they learn the craft. In addition he implies that those who would discriminate based on sex or national origin are just as trivial as those who would discriminate based on shoe size. In addition to her great saxophone and vocal skills Feather claims that Redd "gives jazz a new dimension. We have seen

²¹ Vi Red and the Count Basie Orchestra, "Vi Redd & Count Basie - 'Stormy Monday Blues' - Juan les Pins July 23 1968," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9cM3ALga80>, accessed 25 October, 2012.

it in recent years allied with many other arts: jazz-and-painting, jazz-and-the-theater, jazz-and-ballet. Surely jazz-and-physical-beauty is an alliance no less desirable. Yet her attractiveness, far from helping her, has led only to the usual skepticism suffered by girls in jazz." Articulating a familiar refrain, Feather concluded his article by noting the struggles faced by female jazz musicians. He notes that Redd "is not thought of as an available saxophonist who plays and reads well and can hold down a chair in any man's reed section, but rather as a novelty who can't really be that good." Feather predicts that "the honor of becoming the first major horn woman in jazz history may well fall to the talented and indomitable Mrs. Goldberg [Redd]. But first, a lot of people are going to have to divest themselves of a long-out-moded prejudice and realize that emancipation is with us."²² Note that Feather is not saying that Redd may be one of the top saxophonists in jazz, but that she could be the "first major horn woman," a statement that, in addition to referring to Redd as Mrs. Goldberg, serves to highlight and accentuate her femaleness, a critique I highlighted in Chapter One. Looking back it is impossible to view Feather's article as anything but a biased piece of writing. It is in effect a piece of publicity masquerading as journalism. Its publication date was conveniently close to the release date of *Lady Soul*, and the article served two purposes: first, to promote albums that Feather was personally and professionally invested in; and second, it allowed him to continue railing against gender discrimination.

Included in the contract between United Artists and Redd for *Bird Call* was a clause that the label had an option to produce and release a second album by Redd.²³ Despite numerous efforts from Feather on Redd's behalf, United Artists was hesitant at best to pick up the option on

²² Leonard Feather, "Focus On: alto saxophonist soprano saxophonist vocalist Vi Redd," *Downbeat*, September 13, 1962.

²³ Recording contract between United Artists Records, Inc., and Vi Redd, April 13, 1962. Writing files, box 6, folder 7. LGFPC.

a second album, primarily because *Bird Call* sold very little. Feather's repeated efforts to convince United Artists' Art Talmadge to produce second Redd album demonstrates the importance the gendered values of the jazz marketplace play in the production of music. On February 11, 1963, Feather wrote to Talmadge: "The general feeling among people I have talked to is that Vi has considerable pop potential, especially as a singer. She would like to do an album including one session with about nine strings, doing mostly ballad vocals along the lines of If I Should Lose You in the last album. For the other session she could use a smaller group with horns, also use full arrangements."²⁴ Feather makes little note of Redd's abilities on the saxophone, and it is quite clear Feather thinks Redd is far more marketable as a singer than as an instrumentalist.

In November, having not heard back from Talmadge, Feather wrote to him again, where he emphasized *Bird Call*'s positive reviews noted that "the record is getting great d.j. play around town [Los Angeles] and there are definite indications that she may make it commercially as a singer." As in Feather's letter to Talmadge in February, Feather emphasized Redd's singing, following the dominant gender norms of the time which accepted women as singers, but not as horn players. Feather also informed Talmadge that a review of *Lady Soul* was published in the November 9, 1963 issue of *Billboard*. Feather acknowledged that sales of *Bird Call* were slow: "but between that terrible cover Alan Douglas put on it and the many delays in getting it to distributors, the potential sales were more or less wiped out. I'm sure that a more predominantly vocal LP, with a cover that makes Vi look as attractive as she really is, and with carefully selected material, can't fail to do substantially better; in fact, I'll do my damndest to include one or two things with hit single potential too."²⁵

²⁴ Leonard Feather to Art Talmadge, 11 February 1963. Writing files, box 16, folder 7. LGFPC.

²⁵ Leonard Feather to Art Talmadge, 6 November 1963. Writing files, box 16, folder 7. LGFPC.

Three days after receiving Feather's second letter, Art Talmadge wrote back, asking "to receive as soon as possible some kodachrome pictures of Vi that might be used to recover her first album." He also asked Feather to give him "a brief idea as to cost, tunes and instrumentation" for the album.²⁶ That Talmadge asked for this information suggests he had either forgotten or not read Feather's February 11 letter in which Feather provided those details. Feather wrote back to Talmadge on December 2, with a slightly different pitch for a second United Artists album by Redd. "The idea," Feather wrote, "is to do an album of Andy Razaf songs. Razaf has an extraordinary number of good tunes and it's about time somebody dedicated an album to him. . . . The budget for the album as specified in the renewal option in Vi's contract would call for \$500 in addition to the regular scale payments. I think we could bring the whole thing in for \$2500, including some small arrangements if necessary, using seven musicians on one session and four or five on another." Ever the salesman, Feather used Razaf's recent deterioration in health as an angle that would boost sales. "Incidentally, Razaf has been very seriously ill and is now a paraplegic and, having nothing else to do with his time, he would give us tremendous cooperation in the promoting of this album. His story would probably enable us, additionally, to get considerable publicity for any album of his works, with the possibility of a story in Time magazine, etc."²⁷ After sending a follow up letter to Talmadge on December 31, Feather heard back from him on January 9, where Talmadge tells Feather he does not want to do another album, as "her first album sold very little."²⁸

From the exchanges between Feather and Talmadge it is clear that one of the main reasons why United Artists did not decide to pick up Redd's option was purely economically based. Based on the sales of *Bird Call* United Artists did not think a second album would be

²⁶ Art Talmadge to Leonard Feather, 12 November 1963. Writing files, box 16, folder 7. LGFPC.

²⁷ Leonard Feather to Art Talmadge,

²⁸ Art Talmadge to Leonard Feather, 9 January 1964. Writing files, box 16, folder 7. LGFPC.

profitable. That Feather emphasized Redd's possible pop success as a singer to Talmadge underscores the point that female jazz musicians were more marketable as vocalists than as instrumentalists, especially horn players, at this time. This perhaps explains why there is a mix between Redd's vocals and saxophone playing on both albums. The way to increased sales, for Feather, was to record a predominantly vocal LP as opposed to not capitalize on Redd's excellence as a saxophone player. By partially blaming the album's low sales on the "terrible cover" which did not make "Vi look as attractive as she really is," Feather acknowledges the importance physical attractiveness has in marketing - a point he emphasized in his September, 1962 article on Redd. Instead of trying to fight gender bias in jazz by critiquing the importance of physical attractiveness in the marketing of women and emphasizing Redd's potential commercial success as a singer, Feather succumbed to the gendered expectations of female jazz musicians and how they relate to the jazz market, acknowledging that the only way to sell Redd's albums was to produce them in a way that conformed to dominant gender ideologies in jazz. He would adapt the same strategies of promotion and marketing of Redd in the late 1960s.

In 1969 Solid State, which was a subsidiary of United Artists, reissued *Bird Call* with new cover artwork, packaging and liner notes from Leonard Feather. Solid State specialized in hard bop, soul jazz and funk inspired albums by artists such as Jimmy McGriff, Thad Jones & Mel Lewis, Sonny Stitt and Dizzy Gillespie. Based on the music in its catalog it was most likely marketed to African American listeners.²⁹ The artwork for the Solid State reissue of *Bird Call* indicates a potential shift in marketing strategy from the first pressing. Redd's dress features a brightly colored, somewhat Afrocentric print, and she has her hair in an afro. *Bird Call's* new

²⁹ A discography of Solid State Records releases can be found on the Discogs website, which is a go-to source for record collectors. <http://www.discogs.com/label/31325-Solid-State-Records-2?page=1>, accessed January 21, 2014.

cover art, along with it appearing on the Solid State label, indicates a not-so-subtly attempt on Feather and United Artists to market Redd to a more African American listenership.

Feather's new liner notes hit on the same themes as his prior writings on Redd. After giving the reader/listener a brief biography of Redd, description of the band and tunes, Feather writes that "For those who have been inspired by Vi Redd's performance in person, only to find no records available, these sides will come as a welcome documentation of a unique and singularly soulful talent. It is still uncertain which direction her career will take. A hit record as a singer could leave her horn in the background; an instrumental reaching the charts might relegate her singing to second place. Of course, all of us who have followed the activities of this charming and gifted girl are hopeful that she will ultimately hit the jackpot both ways."³⁰ There is much to decode in Feather's statements. First, as any album annotator must do, he is continually arguing that Redd is a talent worth hearing. Second, he notes that the jazz market will likely dictate the rest of her career, especially in terms of deciding whether she will make it as a singer or saxophonist. In a way, he is somewhat removing Redd of her agency, suggesting she will do whatever necessary to follow the market demands. Third, note his use of the word "girl," as opposed to "woman," which is incorrect given that Redd was about 40 years of age when the album was re-released. The use of "girl," while seemingly being somewhat minor, is in keeping with much of the androcentric based language Feather used, and indeed most people used, when referring to women, and it is a subject I take up more in depth later in this chapter.

Feather made one last known effort to convince United Artists to release a second album by Redd. His pitch to the label's Erwin Bagley on March 7, 1969 further underscores Feather's acknowledgement of elements, some of which were gendered, that would make a second Redd album a commercial success. For this album Feather suggested they "take a definite r & b

³⁰ Feather, Recording Liner Notes, *Bird Call*, 1969.

direction with gospel overtones featuring as much of her singing as possible with occasional saxophone solos by her." The personnel, which would vary by track, would include "Vi and two other horns (trumpet or trombone and baritone sax); electric piano, two electric guitars, Fender bass, drums and additional percussion." Of the planned eight or nine tracks, six of them would "have arrangements by Ernie Freeman or someone else of that caliber who has a good r & b as well as jazz background" and would be suitable in length for radio airplay. The final two or three tracks would be "slightly longer tracks, without arrangements, which would be more jazz oriented than the rest of the album."³¹ Here again, as in his attempts in 1963 and 1964 to pitch a second Redd album to United Artists, Feather falls into the same trap of trying to improve the status of female jazz musicians by making their music available to the public, but doing so in a way that reinforced dominant gender ideologies. Had the proposed album been made, it would have been dominated by Redd's vocals, making her saxophone playing an afterthought, which again points out that women were more marketable as singers, not instrumentalists. The album would have also taken Redd a bit outside the jazz realm with its "r & b direction with gospel overtones," which suggests that had the album been recorded, Redd would have perhaps been marketed or perceived as an r & b singer first, a jazz saxophonist second. In addition, one can read in Feather's pitch to Bagley that he was positioning the proposed album to be marketed to an African American demographic. That Feather suggested an electric-heavy instrumentation also shows he is trying to put the album in step with popular trends in soul jazz and fusion at that time.

Leonard Feather's work with Vi Redd is representative of his attempts to reduce gender bias in jazz through the production and promotion of albums by female jazz musicians. While he was successful in producing several such albums and taking an aggressive stance against gender

³¹ Leonard Feather to Erwin Bagley, 7 March 1969. Writing files, box 16, folder 7. LGFPC.

discrimination in his writing, I argue that his efforts were compromised by his location within the jazz canon. As a writer it was easier for Feather to challenge the canon's dominant ideology, as he had a great deal of control over his work's content. However, he often fell into the androcentric trap of referring women as girls, discussing and at times emphasizing their physical attractiveness, and accentuating their "femaleness." In his writings he took up views counter to those in the jazz canon, but the method and practice he expressed them in conformed to dominant ideologies, thereby reinforcing the ideology he tried to challenge.

As a record producer Feather was well aware of what would sell, both in terms of the music and the musician's image. In the case of Vi Redd, Feather used her skills as a vocalist and the possibility of a hit vocal single to persuade record label heads to sign her to a recording contract. Note in the letters from Feather to Talmadge and later Bagley that he did not use her abilities on the saxophone as a reason why they should give her a contract. In order to get Redd more exposure, he had to sell her to record executives in a way that would be profitable. Simply put, the jazz marketplace, at least in the case of *Bird Call* and *Lady Soul*, did not find Redd's saxophone playing to be valuable, as Atlantic and United Artists declined to pick up their options for further albums by Redd. Despite Feather's attempts to increase the audience for Redd's playing by producing her albums, it is clear from his correspondence with United Artists that he was acting within the demands and confines of the jazz marketplace. As such, he was unable to change the gender ideologies that shaped it, as he was acting squarely within them.

GENDER IS INAUDIBLE: LEONARD FEATHER'S BLINDFOLD TESTS

In addition to producing albums by female musicians, Feather challenged the dominant gender ideologies of the canon through a regular feature known as the "Blindfold Test." Feather

occasionally used the tests to support his theories and biases, such as attempting to prove that one cannot hear a musician's race. He also used the tests to show that gender is inaudible. The results of the tests indicate that he was correct, and that his test subjects could not determine the gender of the person they were listening to. Just as Feather was simultaneously successful and undermining his work at reducing gender bias as a record producer, he was successful at showing that there was no audible difference between women. However, the ways in which he went about writing the Blindfold Tests undermined his progress.

In November of 1937, a young Leonard Feather was in Paris, hanging out with guitarist Django Reinhardt, French jazz critic Charles Delaunay, saxophonist Benny Carter, and others as well as listening to a lot of live jazz. In a report of his Parisian activities in the British jazz magazine *Melody Maker*, Feather asked his readers: “How would you like to submit to a blindfold test, listen to a typical Fats Waller piano solo of a typical Fats Waller tune such as ‘Honeysuckle Rose’ or ‘Crazy ‘Bout My Baby,’ and then, when the bandage was removed, find that sitting on the piano stool, instead of the two hundred pounds of massive brown-skinned masculinity you expected, was a light, slim, smiling girl?” Feather thought that this hypothetical “blindfold test would fool anyone unfamiliar with the work” of the light, slim and smiling vocalist and pianist Una Mae Carlisle.³²

In the September 1946 issue of *Metronome* magazine, nearly nine years after Feather suggested that his readers would be stunned at their inability to correctly identify Carlisle, he put his blindfold test idea into practice. As a regular feature, the “Blindfold Test” involved Feather playing several selections for a blindfolded jazz musician, so that he or she would be unable to identify who was playing. Feather recorded and then published the blindfolded musician’s responses. Initially, Feather only blindfold-tested jazz musicians. Later he would expand his test

³² Leonard Feather, "Feather Forecast and News: Feminine Counterpart to 'Fats'," *Melody Maker* 1937, 25.

subjects to include record producers, composers, arrangers, recording engineers, actors and others related to the music business. Many jazz musician married couples were tested together, as were musicians who played in the same group or who played the same instrument.³³

Throughout Feather's career, he gave several hundred tests to nearly every major jazz artist or personality representative of all major jazz styles.

The Blindfold Tests' genesis lies in the critical debate in the 1940s between the Modernists and the Moldy Figs. On one side of the debate was what critic Ralph J. Gleason called the "Feather-Miller-Goffin-Ulanov axis," who were also referred to as the "Modernists," whose views were reflected in the poll's results.³⁴ The Modernists were generally supportive of bebop, while the other camp, who became known as "Moldy Figs," included critics who were supportive of artists who played the older New Orleans style.³⁵ This aesthetic war-of-words between the Moldy Figs and the Modernists, which included Leonard Feather among their ranks, argued the relative merits of traditional jazz versus swing and bebop. The Moldy Figs supporting the former, while the Modernists supporting the latter.³⁶ While the debate raged on Feather concocted a weapon for his arsenal to be used against the Moldy Figs: the Blindfold Test. Feather felt that none of the critics or fans were able to adequately express the feelings about the music from a musician's point of view. It had occurred to Feather that "the public wasn't getting a chance to see how great was the gulf between the critics' views and those of the

³³ For an example of a two musician test, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Dizzy Gillespie & Louie Bellson," *Downbeat*, March 23, 1967, 40. For a married couple test, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Andre Previn & Betty Bennet," *Downbeat*, July 29, 1953, 17; for a test with an entire ensemble, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Hi-Lo's," *Downbeat*, August 8, 1957, 29, or for full length separate tests published in different issues in which Feather played the same selections for each artist, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Paul Desmond," *Downbeat*, October 3, 1956, 33; Feather, "Blindfold Test: Julian Adderley," *Downbeat*, November 28, 1956, 31.

³⁴ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 82.

³⁵ *Metronome* reader Sam Platt sent a letter which appeared in the June 1945 issue in which he used the term "moldy fig" to describe those in support of the New Orleans style musicians. This term was picked up by Feather and others and it was used often by those on both sides of the debate. *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁶ Gendron, "Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," 137-59.

persons who know this music from the inside, by creating it and living it."³⁷ Feather thought that "the best way to show what musicians really felt about music would be to subject them to an experience where they listened to what they were hearing, and then expressed their opinions. Obviously, they couldn't be accused of prejudice if they didn't know who it was they were listening to."³⁸ Feather felt that musicians were more qualified to comment on music than critics, Moldy Figs and Modernists alike, and that the unbiased opinions on the music given by the Blindfold Test subjects would be able to end the debate between the Moldy Figs and the Modernists, as the debate created a "pervasive bitterness in the jazz community."³⁹

The Blindfold Test was meant to show the readers how musicians really felt, and while Feather could argue that the musicians' comments were objective, the Test's intended purpose, motivation, and structure allowed Feather to subtly exercise his biases and socio-musical motives under the guise of objectivity. This was especially the case in regards to gender. It is also that Feather disagreed with the tastes of the Moldy Figs, whose ranks included jazz critics and journalists. Based on his views and statements, it is clear to see that the Blindfold Test began as tool to support his critical viewpoints.⁴⁰ As he was able to choose his test subjects he could test those musicians who supported his views on bebop, countering the viewpoints of the Moldy Figs, all under the premise that the Blindfold Tests were objective. Since its initial appearance in *Metronome* in 1946, the Blindfold Tests have appeared in *Downbeat* and *Record Whirl*

³⁷ Leonard Feather, "90 Months Behind a Blindfold," *Downbeat*, June 30, 1954, 61.

³⁸ Ted Fox, "A Life in Jazz," *Audio*, September, 1988, 69.

³⁹ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 89.

⁴⁰ The Blindfold Tests were also a venue for Feather to cross promote his various projects. For example, in alto saxophonist Frank Strozier's test from 1969 Feather chose "Now's the Time" from Vi Redd's *Bird Call* album, which had recently been reissued. It was a subtle example of promoting Redd, especially when Strozier said that "it sounded like Vi Redd to me; I enjoy her very much." LF, BT: Frank Strozier, *DB*, May 29, 1969, 27.

magazines, as a slightly different version in *JazzTimes*.⁴¹ They continue to appear to this day in *Downbeat* and *JazzTimes* almost twenty years after Feather's death. The tests' longevity is a testament to their popularity and value as jazz journalism; in fact a 1961 press release from *Downbeat* claimed that the tests "have become the magazine's most popular feature."⁴² They almost always provide an entertaining read, in part because Feather's main objective was to elicit honest and frank opinions from the test subject. Quite often a test subject is very negative, and even insulting, about another musician's performance.⁴³ There are also many tests that provide a

⁴¹ When Feather took the Blindfold Test to *Downbeat* in 1951, he did not change its format or its name, which seemed to cause some irritation at *Metronome*. *Metronome's* editor, George T. Simon, wrote to Ned Williams at *Downbeat* in March of 1951. "I've just seen your latest issue with The Blindfold Test, as conducted by Leonard Feather. Apparently something has slipped up somewhere because we told Leonard, when he asked us about doing the Test for you, that our feeling was that we did not want him to do it in the same form in which he had done it for us but that naturally we couldn't, and didn't want to stand in his way of making an extra buck, and so it would be perfectly o.k. with us for him to conduct a similar sort of test, which he would not call The Blindfold Test and which would differ somewhat from those that he had conducted for us. I don't know just where the slip-up is, but I think that you can understand that we don't want to give up a feature that has been closely associated with our magazine for years. I haven't gone into the legal aspect of the thing as to who retains rights to what, because I feel that a matter of this sort can easily be settled on a man-to-man basis between us. This is not so much an official protest as it is a letter from one guy to another with a request or a suggestion (whichever way you want to put it) that you respect our disinclination to part with a feature that has been associated with *Metronome* for such a long time. I'm sure Leonard can work out another sort of test as well as a different name for his series." George T. Simon to Ned Williams, 8 March 1951, writing files, box 9, folder 72, LGFPC. The last test Feather wrote for *Metronome* appeared in the March 1951 issue and the first *Downbeat* test, which Simon was probably alluding to, appeared in the March 23, 1951 issue of *Downbeat*. Despite Simon's protest, it seems there was nothing he could do to prevent Feather from taking the test to *Downbeat*.

There are very few Blindfold Tests for *Record Whirl*. The existing copies, were found in Feather's scrapbooks, which contain magazine and newspaper clippings of his published writing, are few and were sporadically published in 1955 and 1956. It is unknown how many he wrote for the magazine. See Feather, 1955 scrapbook, writing files, box 31, LGFPC; Feather, 1956 scrapbook, writing files, box 31, LGFPC.

Downbeat, in a wise business decision that *Metronome* failed to make, trademarked the term "Blindfold Test," and thus Feather had to modify the column when he left to write for *JazzTimes* in 1989. The *JazzTimes* "Before and After" columns modified the Tests' format by including the test subjects' comments after Feather revealed who was playing.

⁴² *Downbeat*, "The Blindfold Test," press release, writing files, box 9, folder 72, LGFPC. The press release is undated, but it is probably from 1961 because it announces that Feather will conduct live tests on a local radio station, which he did in 1961.

⁴³ For example, in his Blindfold Test in which he commented on Floyd Marvin's trombone playing on Red Holt's recording "Ghost Riders in the Sky," Lou Blackburn thought that "the trombone player had something going for himself - he *mutilates* the trombone, but beautifully. He did everything as badly as possible." Pianist and radio personality Marian McPartland called "Java," by Al Hirt and Arthur Fielder, "Chinese water torture," while Bernard Peiffer felt that Don Shirley would be "better off planting carrots than playing the piano." Feather, "Blindfold Test: Lou Blackburn", *Downbeat*, May 7, 1964, 36; Feather, "Blindfold Test: Marian McPartland," *Downbeat*, December 31, 1964, 39; Feather, "Blindfold Test: Bernard Peiffer," *Downbeat*, June 29, 1955, 17.

glimpse of the personality and lives of the musicians.⁴⁴ Other test subjects tell anecdotes about childhood or other events in their life as they relate to the test selections.⁴⁵ Not only are the tests entertaining, but they often stimulated discussion and debate within the pages of *Downbeat* among readers, musicians and critics.⁴⁶ Because of their entertainment value, the occasional glimpses into the lives and personalities of the subjects they provide, and their ability to foster debate, the “Blindfold Tests” have become an instantly recognizable term to jazz critics, fans, and musicians: they have permeated the jazz culture and are now an institution in jazz journalism.

Feather began each test with a written introduction to the reader of the current issue’s test subject. In common to almost all the introductions was a disclaimer that said the test subject was given no information about the selections before or during the test.⁴⁷ The introductions also

⁴⁴ The several tests of trumpeter Miles Davis, who often said things for the “sense of shocking people,” and those of bassist and composer Charles Mingus, show off their affinity for making outrageous comments. Gene Lees, interview with Chris Robinson, May 5, 2006; For Mingus’ tests, see the *Downbeat* issues from June 15, 1955, pg. 25; April 28, 1960, pg. 49 and May 12, 1960, pg. 39. For Davis’ tests see the *Downbeat* issues from September 21, 1955, pg. 33; August 7, 1958, pg 29; June 18, 1964, pg 31; June 13, 1968, pg. 34; and June 27, 1968, pg. 33.

⁴⁵ Comedian Bill Cosby remembered that as a boy his father tricked him into seeing Duke Ellington by telling him he was going to see the Lone Ranger. Feather, “Blindfold Test: Bill Cosby,” *Downbeat*, December 1, 1966, 38. See Feather, “Blindfold Test: Helen Humes,” *Downbeat*, May 11, 1961, 35, selection nine for another example of a childhood anecdote. While Charlie Parker’s, Lester Young’s, and Coleman Hawkins’ nicknames were widely known (Bird, Pres, and Bean, respectively), other tests informed readers of other artists’ lesser known nicknames. Baritone saxophonist Charlie Fowlkes was known as “Poopsie.” See Feather, “Blindfold Test: Richard Boone,” *Downbeat*, September 17, 1970, 26; Tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon was known as “Vice.” See Feather, “Blindfold Test: Gene Ammons,” *Downbeat*, August 6, 1970, 28; Tenor saxophonist Ben Webster was known as “Frog.” See Feather, “Blindfold Test: Illinois Jacquet,” *Downbeat*, February 11, 1953, 16s.

⁴⁶ A response to the Dave Brubeck Quartet by trumpeter Shorty Rogers in the winter of 1955, in which he stated his preference for the Modern Jazz Quartet over Brubeck’s group, caused one such discussion in the magazine. Feather used Rogers’ comments for a topic in his “Feather’s Nest” column and over the next four months, exchanges based on Rogers’ comments took place among Feather, fellow critic Nat Hentoff, and some *Downbeat* readers. These exchanges show that many of those involved in jazz read the tests, formed strong opinions based on the test subjects’ comments, and felt the need to share them. Feather, “Blindfold Test: Shorty Rogers,” *Downbeat*, February 9, 1955, 13; Leonard Feather, “Feathers Nest,” *Downbeat*, February 23, 1955, 7. Nat Hentoff, “Counterpoint,” *Downbeat*, March 9, 1955, 4. Feather, “Feathers Nest,” 24. For a less structured exchange in which Charlie Mingus and Miles Davis refer to each others’ Blindfold Tests, see Feather, “Blindfold Test, Charles Mingus,” *Downbeat*, June 15, 1955, 25; Feather, “Blindfold Test: Miles Davis,” *Downbeat*, September 21, 1955, 33; Charlie Mingus, “An Open Letter to Miles Davis,” *Downbeat*, November 30, 1955, 12.

⁴⁷ For an example of a test in which Feather gave the test subject prior information about the recordings, see Feather, “Blindfold Test: Archie Shepp,” *Downbeat*, May 5, 1966, 35 and Feather, “Blindfold Test: Archie Shepp,” *Downbeat*, May 19, 1966, 40.

provided the reader with basic background information on the test subject, often including descriptions of their musical work and history, which bands they had played with, albums they had appeared on, and other noteworthy information. The test's introductions, as will be shown below, were key in the way that Feather helped to unintentionally reinforce the nature of jazz as an androcentric space.

While Feather was involved in creating the particulars of the test, such as the introduction and the selections, the tests' meat were in the test subject's responses. Feather would often use the musical background stated in the tests' introductions as a source of inspiration for picking its selections, which often aided in eliciting honest and direct responses.⁴⁸ Feather describes the test's process: "The first thing I always said when I gave the tests...was that this is not a

⁴⁸ One of his common methods was to play selections by musicians who played the same instrument as the test subject. One of the numerous examples of this is flutist Bud Shank's test from 1956 in which all the selections were by flute players. Of course, he had many perceptive comments to make on the flute technique and playing style. Feather, "Blindfold Test: Bud Shank," *Downbeat*, November 11, 1956, 35.

Other tests would relate to a test subject's current interest in music or different types of projects in which he or she was involved. For instance, Percy Faith, who had recently made many records with a Latin jazz influence, responded to selections that all had a Latin rhythm or feel. Feather played all show tunes for André Previn's 1959 test because Previn had recently released an album comprised of show tunes. Feather played albums from all over the world for reed player Yusef Lateef because of his interest in world music and instruments. Feather, "Blindfold Test: Percy Faith," *Downbeat*, November 19, 1952, 12; Feather, "Blindfold Test: Andre Previn," *Downbeat*, January 8, 1959, 35; Feather, "Blindfold Test: Yusef Lateef," *Downbeat*, September 10, 1964, 34.

While a significant number of tests with selections associated with the test subject exist, Feather also picked records that were a reflection of the current trends in jazz. For example, in the early-and mid-1950s during the popular use of Latin rhythms, especially the mambo, Feather played many selections in the Latin vein. A decade later during the bossa nova craze, Feather played several bossa based selections. And during the late-1960s and in 1970 Feather included tracks featuring either rock musicians or those playing in the new fusion style or playing electronic instruments, especially electric keyboards. All throughout the 1960s Feather included avant-garde selections, in particular those by saxophonist Ornette Coleman. For Latin tests of the mid 1950s, see the aforementioned Faith test as well as Feather, "Blindfold Test: Chico O' Farrill," *Downbeat*, December 1, 1954, 13; for a bossa nova based test see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Lalo Schiffrin," *Downbeat*, December 20, 1962, 38. Bill Evans responds to selections with electric keyboards in Feather, "Blindfold Test: Bill Evans," *Downbeat*, May 28, 1970, 26. Tests featuring selections by Coleman are numerous and can be found in many tests from the 1960s.

There were other means by which Feather picked the selections. Tenor saxophonist Flip Phillips told Feather that he would like everything that Feather would play for him so Feather then intentionally played selections that he felt were mediocre to see if Phillips would make negative remarks. Feather, "Blindfold Test: Flip Phillips," *Downbeat*, June 15, 1951, 12.

There were many instances when Feather played the same selections in different tests for two artists who play the same instrument such as alto saxophonists Paul Desmond and Julian "Cannonball" Adderley and pianists George Shearing and Erroll Garner. For Desmond's test, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Paul Desmond," *Downbeat*, October 3, 1956, 33; for Adderley's test, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Julian Adderley," *Downbeat*, November 28, 1956, 43; for Shearing's test, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: George Shearing," *Downbeat*, December 11, 1958, 47; for Garner's test, see Feather, "Blindfold Test: Erroll Garner," *Downbeat*, December 25, 1958, 39.

guessing game. Who you think it is is secondary. What you really think of the music is the primary subject under discussion. And, on that basis, we'd go ahead. I did get them to venture a guess if they wanted to, and also to give the music a rating."⁴⁹

One finds many candid responses from the test subjects. Feather's relationships with musicians allowed him to get them to open up and speak candidly about a record. When former *Downbeat* editor Gene Lees was asked if he thought whether or not Feather's friendships with artists helped elicit candid responses in the tests he said that "Oh, I'm sure, I would think there's no question of it."⁵⁰ By being aware of and sensitive to the interests and the personal and work histories of his test subjects, Feather knew what kind of selections would most likely interest listeners and cause them to speak their mind. Morgenstern said that like "any clever journalist," Feather would pick a song that he knew would cause a controversial response. But he also said that that was one of the reasons why the tests were interesting to read.⁵¹

After interviewing the artists and recording their responses on tape, Feather transcribed the interview tape and edited it to fit into a one-page or sometimes a page-and-a-half column. During the editing process, "except for a general tightening up, elimination of repetition, and an

⁴⁹ Fox, "A Life in Jazz," 69.

⁵⁰ Gene Lees, Interview by Chris Robinson, May 5, 2006. Former *Downbeat* editor Dan Morgenstern said that although there were a lot of musicians who did not trust Feather, or any critic for that matter, he thinks what when the musicians felt comfortable with him, suggesting that what Lees said is probably true. Morgenstern, interview.

⁵¹ Dan Morgenstern, Interview by Chris Robinson, July 14, 2006. For example, Feather knew that Louis Armstrong did not like bebop, and so it would have been no surprise when Armstrong reacted negatively to trumpeter Clifford Brown's version of "Cherokee." Armstrong said that "I don't know what they're playing. . . . It reminds me of a guy with a mouth full of hot rice; got to have hot lips to blow that stuff – like he put it to his lips then pulled away, a fever blister or sump'n. . . . But if he'd put it right there and hold it there and let about four good notes come out, with a beautiful tone, it would be much nicer." He did not think Brown could "keep that damn roller derby up all night, and nobody would want to hear that all night." Feather, "Blindfold Test: Louis Armstrong," *Downbeat*, August 25, 1954, 17. Armstrong gave Brown a four star rating, "because a trumpet player's got to get ratings, regardless . . . that's the toughest of all instruments." Morgenstern said that he told Feather that if he would have played a Clifford Brown ballad, instead of "Cherokee" for Armstrong, that he probably would have liked it, but Feather already knew what Armstrong's feelings on bebop were. Morgenstern, interview. By knowing what kind of response he would receive, it is obvious that Feather was able to engineer Armstrong's test to obtain his desired results: a candid and frank opinion expressed by one of the foremost jazz figures.

occasional expansion of references that might have been too esoteric for the average reader,” Feather “never edited the subjects’ views regardless of their divergence from [his].”⁵²

The finished Blindfold Tests were nearly completely under Feather's control, in that they were rarely edited by his editors at *Downbeat*. Former editor Gene Lees said that “I almost didn’t touch his copy, it didn’t need it” and that “Leonard turned in something close to perfect copy.” When Feather turned it in, Lees said he “had maybe no reason to touch it” and that “it was clear, it was clean, it was professional, and he knew what he was doing.”⁵³ Dan Morgenstern called Feather an “absolute pro,” and said that the Blindfold Test copy was almost always perfect. He said that *Downbeat*’s publisher sometimes had a problem with four letter words, which were edited out, but for the most part that was the extent of the editing.⁵⁴

Given that the Blindfold Tests were created as a rhetorical tool for Feather it is not surprising that he used them on occasion to further his social agendas. This should not be taken to mean that Feather was out to prove something in each test or that he rigged them all to create a certain response. In fact, he was accused of this on at least one occasion. In 1960, *Downbeat* reader Alan Wilson wrote that “when I first encountered the *Blindfold Test*, I considered it an interesting, harmless parlor game. Now I see it for what it is; a tool in the hands of Leonard Feather to gain support for his own critical opinions as expressed in his many books. For it is perfectly clear that Feather can elicit any comment at any time about any musician, merely by playing one track out of hundreds available in which the musician displays the characteristics

⁵² Feather, “90 Months Behind a Blindfold,” 61. To assure the reader of his honest editing practice, he wrote in the introduction to the first Blindfold Test that “her [Mary Lou Williams’] signed statement, attesting to the complete accuracy of this article, is in our possession.” Feather, “Blindfold Test: Mary Lou Williams, *Metronome*, September, 1946, 24. Feather described how soon after the first test appeared “the rumors increased: ‘That’s not what he really said,’ or ‘Of course, Feather’s misquoting him.’ This problem was solved when a tape recorder was brought into court.” He went on to say that “the measure of the Blindfold Test’s honesty and accuracy can be gathered from the fact that not a single artist ever has claimed to have been misquoted.” Ibid.

⁵³ Lees, interview.

⁵⁴ Morgenstern, interview. For an example of the editing of four letter words during Morgenstern’s tenure as editor, see Feather, “Blindfold Test: Miles Davis,” *Downbeat*, June 27, 1968, 33.

that Mr. Feather ascribes to him.” He also said that it was “unforgivable for Feather to overlook eight four star LPs by George Lewis and play only his worst recordings and call this anything but misleading, unfair, and a flagrant misuse of position.”⁵⁵

Feather shot back two issues later. He “was amused by the terribly intense letter from a reader who . . . accused me of some dark plot to use *The Blindfold Tests* [sic] for propaganda.” Responding to the accusation that he purposely played one of Lewis’s worst recordings, Feather said “the fact is that I had neither heard the record before nor read reviews of it, nor would I know how to distinguish between allegedly ‘good’ and ‘bad’ records by such artists.” He went on to say that “not only is it impossible for me to manipulate people’s tape-recorded reaction; it is also undesirable from every point of view. Nobody who has seen the violently conflicting views expressed in the tests through the years could seriously suspect that I only print opinions I endorse. On the contrary, I get a kick out of the blindfoldees’ friendly but often forceful disagreement with my views.”⁵⁶

While there may be some truth to Mr. Wilson’s accusations (which I hope to demonstrate), most of the tests seem to be honest, non-biased attempts on Feather’s part to find out how an artist felt about a particular recording. Even though some of his beliefs about the nature of the music and those who make it may have been upheld in the tests, the subjective nature of music does not provide the reader any kind of metaphysical certitude which would end debate about the quality of any given musician or about any particular issue in jazz. The tests as a whole reveal the subjective nature of jazz and demonstrate the conflicting views and opinions

⁵⁵ Alan Wilson, "Letter to the Editor," *Downbeat*, August 4, 1960, 7. Wilson was referring to critic John Hammond’s response to “Smiles” by the clarinetist George Lewis. Hammond asked Feather to “please take it off! . . . Thanks. Well, I listened to 3 1/2, nearly four choruses of that, and you know – it’s torture . . . The tune is written by Lee Roberts, and the only important thing about the tune is that Lee Roberts was the president of the QRS piano roll company. I think the tune came out in 1920, and it offended me then, and it offends me still. I see no point in this. No stars for the record at all – and as far as guessing who it is, why bother?” Feather, "Blindfold Test: John Hammond, Part I," *Downbeat*, June 23, 1960, 39.

⁵⁶ Feather, "Blindfold Test: June Christy & Bob Cooper," *Downbeat*, September 1, 1960, 39.

held by musicians, critics, and other public figures of different genders, ethnicities and nationalities. What is particularly salient about the tests for the purposes of this chapter is how Leonard Feather used them in an attempt to reduce gender bias in jazz and how he unintentionally undermined those attempts.

The very first Blindfold Test is a testament to Feather's belief in female jazz artists as capable of being "top personalities in the music business" and as well as musicians who are just as skillful and knowledgeable as their male counterparts. Not only did including Mary Lou Williams as the first test subject give her credibility, but the way Feather introduced her did as well. In the introduction to her Blindfold Test in *Metronome* magazine from September 1946, Feather wrote that "Mary Lou Williams, first musician to be Blindfold Tested, is a great pianist, arranger and composer. She is also a great person, one who is genuinely alarmed by the ignorance that prevails in the dissemination of jazz knowledge."⁵⁷

Although Feather discontinued blindfolding his test subjects quite early on, the image of Feather and Williams taken during the first Blindfold Test is worth analyzing, as it shows a little bit of the power dynamics at play in the tests. Perhaps most obvious is the fact that a white man has a black woman blindfolded, which puts Williams in a subjugated position thrice, by her race, by her sex, and by being blindfolded. As I will argue in more detail below, one of the outcomes of Feather's Blindfold Tests, especially those with women, was introducing the participants as subjects. In the photo Feather introduces Williams as a subject, but as one who is not on equal footing as Feather. Ignoring the photo, the structure of the Blindfold Tests featuring Feather created uneven power structures: he chose who to test, what music to play for them, transcribed and edited their responses and published them. In the entire process there was very little chance

⁵⁷ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Mary Lou Williams," *Metronome*, September, 1946, 24.

for women to exercise their agency, and the power relations were heavily tilted in Feather's favor.

Feather also used his introductions to other tests in a similar manner to Williams' to testify to their artistry and abilities. He called Jutta Hipp a "brilliant and talented pianist" and that she is "conscientious as she is sensitive."⁵⁸ Singer Dinah Washington is "an honest and competent listener whose uninhibited comments and musical approach (she is an excellent pianist) were made evident in her previous blindfold test in these pages."⁵⁹ These comments and others like them, more than likely helped give these women credibility to artists who were widely known, such as Washington, and those who were not, as was the case with Hipp.

Feather also gave credibility to new female artists as soon as they arrived on the American jazz scene. In the mid 1950s there were two female pianists who immigrated to the United States and Feather was quick to blindfold them to announce to his readers that there were new female artists worth knowing about. One of these pianists would eventually become a top jazz personality; one would not. Feather met the aforementioned German pianist Jutta Hipp while on tour with Billie Holiday and Beryl Booker's trio in 1954, and almost immediately upon her arrival he blindfolded her and her test was published in the December 28, 1955 issue of *Downbeat*.⁶⁰ A year and a half after Hipp arrived in New York, the Japanese pianist Toshiko Akiyoshi moved to the United States. Feather had been familiar with a few of her albums made

⁵⁸ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Utta Hipp," *Downbeat*, December 28, 1955, 23.

⁵⁹ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Dinah Washington," *Downbeat*, April 30, 1959, 39.

⁶⁰ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 135-36. Feather, "Blindfold Test: Jutta Hipp," 23. While it seems that Feather was not aware of Hipp's playing until the Holiday tour in 1954, he had played tracks led by German saxophonist Hans Koller with her on piano for Blindfold Tests in 1953. See: Feather, "Blindfold Test: Illinois Jacquet," *Downbeat*, February 11, 1953, 16s, selection number nine; Feather, "Blindfold Test: Charlie Shavers," *Downbeat*, July 1, 1953, 19, selection number five. In addition to legitimizing Hipp by blindfold testing her Feather helped her in other ways. He introduced Hipp to Blue Note records producer Alfred Lion who signed her to a recording contract. In addition, as was the case with other female artists whose careers Feather supported, he played recordings by Hipp as part of other Blindfold Tests. See: Feather, "Blindfold Test: George Wallington," *Downbeat*, February 23, 1955, 15, selection number four.

in Japan, and almost immediately after her arrival, Feather published her Blindfold Test. Since that first test in April of 1956, Feather blindfolded Akiyoshi six more times and included her in two "Before and After" columns for *JazzTimes*. Unlike Hipp, who faded away into obscurity, Akiyoshi continues to be a major composer, performer and bandleader in the jazz scene.⁶¹

Feather also introduced female musicians to his readers by playing their music as selection in many Blindfold Tests. When Feather tested Barbara Carroll in 1954, he chose nothing but selections by female artists. In the test's introduction, Feather said that "this was a unique *Blindfold Test* – all girl records, reviewed by an all-girl listener." Carroll heard selections by Hazel Scott, Marian McPartland, Vivien Garry, Mary Lou Williams, Beryl Booker and others.⁶² Carroll's responses were mixed. She thought that Hazel Scott "sounded unsure of himself" and gave "him" one star. She also thought that violinist Ginger Smock "sounded a little bit like he might be Stuff Smith." Marian McPartland, who Carroll recognized, was given three stars. Both Mary Lou Williams and Beryl Booker were given two star ratings. Her most enthusiastic response was to "Mamblues" by Terry Pollard. She thought it "is a very good recording. I love anything that swings . . . I liked just about everything about it. I'd say four stars." At the end of the test, Feather asked her if "now what would you say if I told you that every solo you've heard on this blindfold test – piano, vibes, everything else, has been by a girl?" She responded with "well, I'd say great! You mean *every one* was by a girl?" After being asked if she was surprised, she said that "I certainly am! That's what you get for working with male musicians, you don't know what the girls can do . . . Well all I can say is, I'm proud of them!"⁶³

Carroll's Blindfold Test served three intended, positive purposes. First, Feather legitimized

⁶¹ Ibid., 152-53. Feather, "Blindfold Test: Toshiko Akiyoshi," *Downbeat*, April 18, 1956, 41. For a more detailed description of their relationship, see pages 152-158 of *The Jazz Years*.

⁶² It should be noted that Feather produced records for many of these artists, so this test not only promotes female musicians, but it also promotes his own recordings as well.

⁶³ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Barbara Carroll," *Downbeat*, December 15, 1954, 13. Italics in original.

Carroll by testing her; second, it legitimized the female musicians whose music Feather played in the test; and third, it demonstrated to some degree that gender is inaudible. However, it also provides a subtle example of the self-defeating nature of some of the Blindfold Tests. Feather's use of the word "girl" in Carroll's test is one clue as to how he was counterproductive in his attempts to reduce gender bias in jazz.

There were two primary ways Feather was counterproductive: through his word choice and the focus he placed on a woman's looks. As can be seen in the excerpts from Carroll's Blindfold Test the term "girl" was used throughout by Feather and Carroll when describing the musicians. While "boy" was never used to describe male musicians, "girl" was used almost exclusively by men and women to describe a female musician in the Blindfold Test, even though the musicians were never young enough to be considered girls. For example, when Feather introduced the 28-year-old singer Yolande Bavan in her Blindfold Test he called her "a tiny, eloquent girl" who he said "surprised herself and the rest of the music community in the 1962 by replacing another British girl, Annie Ross, in the most popular jazz vocal group, Lambert-Hendricks-Ross."⁶⁴

Feather further emphasized the importance of a woman's sex appeal in a Blindfold Test he conducted with actress and singer Jane Russell. In the test's introduction, Feather described her as an "ideal" test subject because of her "lack of Hollywood affectations, her emergence as a recording star on Coral and her awareness of our world (she reads music and follows jazz)."⁶⁵ He then explains his reasons for not blindfolding her for the test: "Since no red-blooded American would dream of obscuring the Russell features with a blindfold, I merely kept her out of range of the record labels." Feather then prefaces Russell's responses to the songs by saying

⁶⁴ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Yolande Bavan," *Downbeat*, February 13, 1964, 36.

⁶⁵ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Jane Russell," *Downbeat*, June 2 1954, 13.

“the following were Jane’s observations while your reporter was observing Jane.”⁶⁶ Not only are his comments laced with overtones of patriotism and heteronormativity, but they serve to make Russell’s physical attractiveness a point of emphasis. They also reinforce the view that one of a woman’s roles is to be looked at.

The results of the Blindfold Tests demonstrate that the test subjects were unable to hear gender, thus suggesting that Feather was indirectly proving to his readers that there should be no musical reason in which female jazz musicians should be discriminated against. By showing the Blindfold Test's readers that gender was inaudible, Feather made a strong challenge to the jazz canon's dominant gender ideologies, which implies that the tests were a positive force at undoing gender bias. Yet, the style of Feather's writing and his rhetorical strategy, as I have outlined above, worked against him. How can one reconcile Feather's obvious attempts at reducing gender bias with his writing that was complicit in maintaining the status quo? How can we understand how Feather constructed the participants in the Blindfold Tests as subjects? The short answer is that as one who existed within dominant gender ideology, Leonard Feather was unable to fully break away from the ideology which guided the creation of jazz as an androcentric space. The longer answer is to look at two theories of subjectivation as outlined by Louis Althusser and Frantz Fanon.

Using Althusser's framework: whenever Leonard Feather wrote about a musician he was doing what Althusser calls in his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" essay interpellation, which is the process in which a subject comes to exist within a given ideology. For Althusser, one way in which ideology acts is through the recruiting and transformation of individuals into subjects who then exist in that ideology.⁶⁷ In the introduction to his Blindfold

⁶⁶ Feather, “Blindfold Test: Jane Russell,” *Downbeat*, June 2 1954, 13.

⁶⁷ Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*, 118.

Tests interpellated his test subjects into the dominant ideology of the androcentric ideology of jazz. By blindfold testing female musicians Feather attempted to legitimize women musicians as performers in the hopes of reducing gender bias. However, the ways in which Feather interpellated them served to reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. For the most part, and as long as the subjects were willing, Feather could blindfold whomever he wanted. By including women as test subjects, he gave them instant credibility. When *Downbeat* informed its readers in April of 1952 that the Blindfold Test would become a weekly feature, the note told readers that “Leonard Feather will continue to blindfold top personalities in the music business and all its kindred fields.”⁶⁸ By including them as test subjects, Feather interpellated women musicians, suggesting to his readers that they should be considered “top personalities” in the eyes of the magazine and its readers, just as male musicians were, and not just as novelties.

If we adopt Althusser's theories we can see how Feather's Blindfold Tests, in which he interpellated female musicians by testing them and playing their selections for other test subjects, helped to perpetuate androcentrism in jazz, even though his goal was to reduce gender bias. Althusser's example of interpellation describes how a police officer interpellates a subject by saying "Hey, you there!"⁶⁹ In this example when the addressee of the police officer's "Hey, you there!" turns to the officer he or she becomes a subject in the dominant ideology, which operates through the officer. Feather's efforts were counter-productive, I argue, because his use of the term "girl" to describe female musicians and the focus he placed at times on emphasizing the

⁶⁸ Feather, "Blindfold Test: Jimmy and Marian McPartland," *Downbeat*, April 18, 1952, 12. Feather did have at least one criterion that a potential test subject had to meet. In 1961, vocalist Nancy Wilson took a Blindfold Test with pianist George Shearing, as they had recently collaborated on a new album. But it was not until 1965 that she took her first solo test because according to Feather “her name value was not considered strong enough to justify her taking one alone.” Whether or not the opinion regarding Wilson’s name value was Feather’s or Don DeMichael’s, who was *Downbeat*’s editor during this time, is unknown. But regardless of whose opinion it was, it shows that the magazine did have some kind of fame, or popularity litmus test which a potential interviewee must pass to be considered. Feather, "Blindfold Test: Nancy Wilson," *Downbeat*, June 3, 1965, 36.

⁶⁹ Althusser, *Lenin and philosophy, and other essays*, 118.

importance of a woman's sexual attractiveness were typical for the time in which he was writing. According to Althusser "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects," which means in Althusser's theory of subjectivation that Leonard Feather, by virtue of his being interpellated by the dominant gender ideology and the nature of jazz as an androcentric space, was acting as an "always-already subject" who, despite his intentions, was acting within the dominant gender ideology. For Feather, there was nothing outside dominant gender ideology, because he was an "always-already subject" who was acting within dominant gender ideology.⁷⁰

Pierre Macherey critiques Althusser's concept of interpellation in his 2012 article "Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon." Macherey finds Althusser's treatment of ideology - that it is a-historical, not specific and existing on the level of the unconscious - to be highly problematic, in that it hides the real problems of experience and the subjectivation process. He also critiques the idea that nobody is exempt from interpellation, one cannot resist interpellation, and that the addresser of the "Hey, you there!" is person-less. Althusser's concept of interpellation and ideology, in Macherey's reading, strips both the addresser and the addressee of any agency.⁷¹ In other words, there is no relationship between the addresser and addressee. Applying this critique to the Blindfold Tests one sees how Feather and his test subjects were stripped of their agency and were operating out of historical context. In addition, because ideology is a-historical, the singling out of gender ideology is incorrect in Althusser's model.

Frantz Fanon's work in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which appeared nearly twenty years before Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" provides an alternative view of the process of subjectivation, and as such, can help better explain the ways in which Feather created his female test subjects as female subjects. At the beginning of chapter five Fanon

⁷⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁷¹ Pierre Macherey, "Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 173 (2012): 9-13.

outlines a situation in which a child cried out to him "Look, a Negro!" While this is similar to Althusser's "Hey, you there!" the process of Fanon's becoming a Negro happened historically in an interaction between people who existed in a system of norms. Fanon explains that under colonialism blacks were defined in their relation to whites and goes on to explain how he became a subject.⁷²

In his analysis of Fanon's example, Macherey wonders whether the child is actually saying "Look, a negro!" and that what is really doing the speaking is the hidden, impersonal and unconscious voice of ideology conveying "the thoughts and words to be expressed, submitting them to prefabricated stereotypes that are destined to be rehashed in an automatic fashion."⁷³ If this were the case, then it would be an example of Althusser's interpellation at work. Fanon solves this problem, Macherey explains, by in part drawing from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*, and by describing how he came to exercise his own agency. Macherey calls the process of subjectivation whereby Fanon "took up my negritude"⁷⁴ as a situation, which he defines as "a complex ensemble of relations that confront people with one another in a context in which their manner of relating to one another is predetermined, or called upon to take place according to a certain order or responding to certain norms."⁷⁵ Macherey argues that being a subject is situation based, that it is "on the plane that is at once that of being for itself and that of being for the other, in a certain historical context."⁷⁶ Whereas Althusser's interpellation operates in an a-historical fashion and is removed from context and lived experience, Fanon became a Negro in a "situation" in which real people interacted within a real context, responding to real norms.

⁷² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82-106.

⁷³ Macherey, "Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon," 17.

⁷⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 106. Fanon's full quote reads "So I took up my negritude, and with tears in my eyes I put its machinery together again. What had been broken to pieces was rebuilt, reconstructed by the intuitive lianas of my hands. My cry grew more violent: I am a Negro, I am a Negro, I am a Negro. . . ."

⁷⁵ Macherey, "Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon," 18.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

I suggest that using Fanon's example of subjectivation and the characterization of it as a "situation" is a more accurate way to understand how Feather's actions worked to create the female participants in the Blindfold Tests as female subjects. The Blindfold Tests can be seen as a "situation" in which Feather and Uta Hopp, for example, interacted within a certain historical context and according to a set of gender norms. The result of this situation was Hopp being created as a "female jazz pianist subject" as opposed to a "jazz pianist subject." Hopp, like Fanon, was defined as being a female pianist in relation to male pianists. Although we do not have Hopp's account on how she may have created her own subjectivity after the Test. The power dynamic between Feather and Hopp, or Mary Lou Williams, or any other female musician was similar to the one between the whites and colonized blacks that Fanon describes. Using Fanon's framework we see Feather in the Blindfold Tests in effect saying "Look, a woman!" as opposed to "Look, a pianist!" And as such, Feather reinforced the notion that jazz is androcentric, and that women do not fit into androcentric norms.

Considering the examples from the Tests I discussed above, I argue that the way Feather went about trying to reduce gender bias in his Blindfold Tests by using the common, and ultimately sexist language, as well as emphasizing the attractiveness of the female body, was counter-productive because he was acting in a way consistent with the androcentric dominant gender ideology. Even if Feather never used the term "girl," or never wrote about the female body in sexualized terms, his stated goal of proving that female musicians were just as good as male musicians still shows he existed within an ideological space which privileged men; i.e., he both existed in and perpetuated the nature of jazz as an androcentric space.

Sandra Bem's theory of how men create an androcentric society sheds light on Feather's inability to escape and critique the dominant ideology he existed in. Androcentrism, Bem explains,

occurs because as males in an androcentric society, they look "out at reality from behind their own eyes and describing what they see from an egocentric – or androcentric – point of view. They define reality into self and other and define everything categorized as other – including women – in relation to themselves.” Bem says that when a man defines a woman “they define everything they see in terms of its similarity to, or its dissimilarity from, themselves. They take their own being and experience to be the reference point or the standard for the culture – or the species – as a whole, and they take everyone else’s being and experience to be merely an inferior departure or deviation from the standard that they themselves set.”⁷⁷ This can explain the logic behind Feather's desire to show that female musicians are just as good as male musicians, as the aesthetic standards in jazz - an androcentric space - are male.

It is understandable why these test subjects would assume that the musicians heard in their tests were men; it is because jazz is, and continues to be, an androcentric space. Most of the unidentified artists in the tests, either men or women, are assumed to be men because it is more than likely that they are men. Despite the androcentric standards of jazz, the Blindfold Tests show that an inherently "male" or "female" sound does not exist and that gender is inaudible. Jazz critic Nat Hentoff, writing in 1952, described some Blindfold Tests, presumably unpublished, in which he challenged listeners to determine the sex of the musician on the record. He wrote: “I have long heard from musicians the manufactured axiom, ‘I can always tell when a woman’s playing.’ I tried a version of the blindfold test on several of these listeners with genderized ears and it was embarrassing to see how wrong they were.” Hentoff maintains that “there is no difference between a woman’s and a man’s approach to music.” Because a girl’s experiences are different from a boy’s when growing up, Hentoff says that pianist “Barbara Carroll is apt to feel some songs differently than Hank Jones” but that even if it were possible to

⁷⁷ Bem, *The lenses of gender: transforming the debate on sexual inequality*, 42.

“draw them in a graph, they still would have to be judged by the same standards of musical quality.”⁷⁸ Although it was meant to support the efforts and abilities of female musicians, Hentoff's final statement regarding the necessity of judging male and female music by the same standards suggests why Leonard Feather was counter-productive: the act of judging female musicians by the standards associated with male musicians is an action that exists within androcentrism, which by its very nature limits and marginalizes the experiences and contributions of women.

LEONARD FEATHER, *PLAYBOY*, AND THE MASCULINIZATION OF JAZZ

*Jazz is the music of my dreams, the music of my travelers and it continues to play in the background of everything I do. - Hugh Hefner*⁷⁹

In January of 1957 Feather became *Playboy* magazine's Jazz Editor, or as he referred to his position there in his autobiography, he was the magazine's "nominal jazz consultant."⁸⁰ On October 2, 1956, Feather received a letter from *Playboy* founder and editor Hugh Hefner that "constitute[d] an informal but binding agreement" between Feather and *Playboy* that initiated Feather's tenure there. The agreement stipulated that Feather would write four feature pieces per year, that he would not write for a competing magazine, that he would write both bylined and unbylined reviews of recordings and live concerts, and that he would be listed on the magazine's masthead as its Jazz Editor.⁸¹ He was the Jazz Editor until the February, 1961 issue, when he was no longer listed on the magazine's masthead, although he did conduct the magazine's annual

⁷⁸ Hentoff, "Cherchez Les Femmes," 5. Even though Hentoff denounces male chauvinists in his article, he often refers to female musicians as "girls" or "chicks" and thinks that "It'll take a while but I expect in 10 years to see ads in the *Beat* for lipstick-proof reeds, trumpets designed by Jacques Fath and in the classified section, something like: 'Musicians. All instruments. Replacements for established commercial territory band. Steady employment, guaranteed salary, kitchen privileges.'"

⁷⁹ Sarah Burbank-Douglas, "Interview with Playboy creator, Hugh Hefner," *TheCelebrityCafe.com*, June 21, 2012, <http://thecelebritycafe.com/feature/2012/06/interview-playboy-creator-hugh-hefner>, accessed January 23, 2014.

⁸⁰ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 212.

⁸¹ Hugh M. Hefner to Leonard Feather, 2 October 1956, Writing files, box 15, folder 17. LGFPC.

readers jazz poll for the February, 1962 issue. Although *Playboy* no longer included the position of Jazz Editor on its masthead after Feather's departure, its jazz coverage continued. Jazz critic Nat Hentoff, as well as other less well known writers, contributed numerous pieces in the early and mid-sixties on jazz.

I am interested in Feather's writing for *Playboy* because of the role the magazine played in linking jazz with gender. Regardless of the content of his writing for *Playboy*, I argue that it functions as a gender project that served to reinforce the bonds between jazz and masculinity by sheer virtue of the location it was published. Assuming that Feather wrote the unsigned reviews of new jazz albums in each issue his style and writing voice is slightly different than in other venues such as *Downbeat* or *Metronome* - his writing in these reviews is at times more conversational and informal. His feature pieces, such as his lengthy article on Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald in the November 1957 issue, or his feature on Lester Young from September of 1959, read as if they could have been published in any number of venues.⁸² These pieces in particular provide large overviews of each artist, giving a potentially uninformed *Playboy* reader a primer on some of the music's heavyweights. As was often the case in his writing for other outlets, Feather's writing was at times quite androcentric. He describes Ella Fitzgerald as "a heavily-built girl" (she was 39 at the time),⁸³ introduces his readers to the "22-year-old, 5'9" beauty from Stockholm, Monica Zetterlund, a soulful singer in the Christy tradition," and uses the common "chirpers" to refer to female singers.⁸⁴ As the style and material of his writing did not vary too much from his work for other publications I am mostly interested in how by writing for *Playboy*, Feather helped to cement jazz with masculine consumer culture. His writing in the

⁸² Leonard Feather, "Ella Meets the Duke," *Playboy*, November, 1957. Leonard Feather, "Prez," *Playboy*, September, 1959.

⁸³ Feather, "Ella Meets the Duke," *Playboy*, November, 1957, 39.

⁸⁴ Feather, "The 1960 Playboy All-Stars," *Playboy*, February, 1960, 38-40, 109.

magazine, androcentric or not, was a gender project that constructed jazz as masculine. As I argue was the case with his work on the Blindfold Tests and with Vi Redd, while writing for *Playboy* Feather unintentionally reinforced jazz as a male preserve while attempting to open jazz up to women.

From *Playboy's* start in December, 1953 through the 1960s jazz was a regular topic and played an important role for the magazine. The magazine's inaugural issue included a story on the Dorsey brothers, and before Feather took over as jazz editor in 1957 *Playboy* published numerous pieces on jazz.⁸⁵ In addition to publishing jazz album reviews and interviews with jazz artists (the interviews with Miles Davis in the early 1960s are quite famous), *Playboy* conducted round table discussions on various topics in jazz, the magazine conducted annual jazz readers polls, released compilation LPs of the poll winners, established its own record label, and produced an annual jazz festival. There is even a Playboy Jazz Cruise. The Playboy Jazz Festival, which first took place in 1959, will run for the thirty-sixth time in June, 2014 at the Hollywood Bowl. Although the magazine's jazz coverage has greatly declined over time, it's founder Hugh Hefner has always identified with jazz. He was a fan of early jazz, especially Bix Beiderbecke, and for Hefner, jazz "represented a more sophisticated way of living." The magazine, he explains, was not "a sex magazine but a lifestyle magazine, the music was a part of that."⁸⁶ As an important element to the lifestyle Hefner and *Playboy* were constructing, it is no wonder that it is has played a prominent role in the magazine. Or as 2010 press release

⁸⁵ Arthur Silver, "The Dorsey Brothers," *Playboy*, December, 1953, 31-31. Also see: Julien Dedman, "The Metronome All Stars," *Playboy*, April, 1954, 10-12; Bob Perlongo, "West Coast Jazz is Nowhere," *Playboy*, January, 1955, 9, 43, 48.

⁸⁶ "Feature Interview with Hugh Hefner," *ChicagoJazz.com*, September 2, 2009, <http://www.chicagojazz.com/thescene/feature-interview-with-hugh-hefner-399.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

published on *AllAboutJazz.com* put it: "*Playboy* has had an equally long and mutually beneficial relationship with jazz."⁸⁷

However relatively small Feather's contributions were to *Playboy* in terms of the number of his feature pieces and recording reviews, Feather played a part in the magazine's cultivation of the post World War II playboy masculine archetype. The rise in post war hedonistic consumption by male youths helped give rise to the playboy masculine archetype, which Bill Osgerby suggests was representative in part of emblems of the success of post war America. Osgerby describes the playboy archetype as sexually virile, suave, smooth talking and one an icon of vitality and modernity.⁸⁸ On the inside cover of the magazine's first issue read an explanation as to who *Playboy* is for:

If you're a man between the ages of 18 and 80, PLAYBOY is meant for you. If you like your entertainment served up with humor, sophistication and spice, PLAYBOY will become a very special favorite. . . . Within the pages of PLAYBOY you will find articles, fiction, picture stories, cartoons, humor and special features culled from many sources, past and present, to form a pleasure-primer styled to the masculine taste. . . . We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an *hors d'oeuvre* or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph, and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.⁸⁹

As a pitch to potential subscribers, the magazine explained that the playboy may be many things, but what all playboys have is a common point of view. "He must see life not as a vale of tears, but as a happy time, he must take joy in his work, without regarding it as the end to all living, he must be an alert man, a man of taste, a man sensitive to pleasure, a man who - without acquiring the stigma of the voluptuary or dilettante - can live life to the hilt."⁹⁰ In more concrete terms, the *Playboy* reader, as described in a brief article from 1957 which discussed the results of a survey

⁸⁷ "Playboy and Jazz: A History," Press release published on *AllAboutJazz.com*, February 26, 2010, <http://news.allaboutjazz.com/news.php?id=50626#.UuFVVrTnaUk>, accessed January 23, 2014.

⁸⁸ Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: masculinity, youth and leisure-style in modern america* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 4-5, 201.

⁸⁹ *Playboy*, December, 1953, n.p.

⁹⁰ "Subscription Pitch," *Playboy*, April, 1956, n.p.

of the magazine's readership, was likely in his mid-twenties, college educated, and earned over 30% more than the national average. In addition, about half of *Playboy's* readers were married and more likely to spend money on clothing and travel than most, if not all, readers of other magazines surveyed. He drinks and smokes more than the readers of other magazines, was likely to have had recently purchased a new car, and recently purchased more housewares and other consumer goods than the readers of any other magazine.⁹¹

Playboy made it painfully obvious to potential advertisers the kinds of products its readers would be interested in. For example, on the back cover of three issues from 1958 *Playboy* rhetorically asks: "What sort of man reads *Playboy*?" The October issue shows a young man and his date buying a movie ticket, with text addressed to potential advertisers that "the *Playboy* reader is very big at the box office." He attends more movies than the readers of any other magazine. Likewise, the July issue's back cover features a young man handing a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer to a young woman on the beach, while another young woman looks on. The text below the picture reads: "A young man who is interested in beer busts, too, the *Playboy* reader is very apt to include the golden brew in a fun-filled afternoon at the beach. . . . Underscoring the popularity of beer and other beverages with *Playboy's* audience is the remarkable success of one mail order advertiser who sold over 27,000 'drinking team' sweaters in the first for months that his ad appeared in *Playboy*." The *Playboy* reader is also a car connoisseur, being more likely than any other magazine reader to have purchased a car within the last twelve months.⁹² Clearly, the average *Playboy* reader was a full participant in Cold War consumer culture. And as Carrie Pitzulo points out, consumerism was key to the construction of

⁹¹ "Meet the Playboy Reader: a survey of the man who reads the magazine," *Playboy*, April 1957, 63, 76-77.

⁹² *Playboy*, back covers of the March, July, and October of 1958 issues.

the playboy's masculine identity and that consumerism was one path to happiness for its readers.⁹³

In addition to cars, beer and movies, jazz was an important product that *Playboy's* readers consumed. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the magazine ran numerous jazz related ads, including those for hi-fi systems, record buying clubs, and as such, the "playboy" was a jazz connoisseur and jazz was an ingredient in his masculinity. In addition to being Hefner's favorite musical genre, Osgerby writes that jazz fit with *Playboy's* ethos because "its associations with spicy night-life and underground creativity made jazz an idiom that fitted perfectly with the intellectual hedonism cultivated by *Playboy*."⁹⁴ Similarly, Elizabeth Fraterrigo attributes the significance of jazz to *Playboy* because it signified the moral and cultural climate of the "roaring twenties" and provided a space in which its participants could challenge social mores just as the magazine itself challenged them.⁹⁵

Leonard Feather played a part in emphasizing the connection between jazz and the playboy lifestyle. In his article "Six Records in Search of a Penthouse" Feather creates the following hypothetical situation:

It's Friday night, about 7:25. Suppose you live in a 31st-floor penthouse in Gramercy Park, and you're due at Le Pavillon for cocktails and dinner in 20 minutes. You bonk the elevator button but the little red light doesn't come on, nor do you hear the rumble of machinery like you usually do. You step over to the phone, ring up the building manager and ask him what in blazes is up, because it certainly isn't the elevator. He says, good god, didn't my secretary call and tell you it's on the fritz and the repairmen can't possibly get over until Monday morning? So you're stuck. You make your beg out phone call and realize that for company, you've nothing save a case of Veuve Cliquot, 1947, a fridge full of *Noix de Boeuf a la Gelee*, and a half-dozen phonograph records - along with, of course, a \$3000 rig to play them on. Anthroposociodiaphysiogenetically speaking, it's not

⁹³ Carrie Pitzulo, *Bachelors and bunnies: the sexual politics of Playboy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 71-103.

⁹⁴ Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: masculinity, youth and leisure-style in modern america*, 138.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Fraterrigo, *Playboy and the making of the good life in modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66.

the ideal setup. But for our purpose, it makes a good hypothetical situation, one that will enable us to examine the musical tastes of several friends on the jazz and pop scene, posing as our reluctant recluses. Which six discs, I wondered, would Gerry Mulligan choose for such a pent-up penthouse weekend? What about Dave Garroway? Or Frank Sinatra?⁹⁶

In this situation, the playboy is an exaggerated amalgamation of the average *Playboy* magazine reader. He is wealthy and appreciates the finer things in life like good wine, and he isn't afraid to spend a large sum of money on top of the line consumer goods such as a hi fi system.

Addressing his readers in with the second person "you," Feather implicitly argues that a key part to the playboy lifestyle and masculinity is an appreciation for jazz. The article almost reads like a buyer's guide, with the albums chosen by Count Basie, Peggy Lee, Frank Sinatra and Gerry Mulligan representing a cross-section of mainstream jazz styles, artists and periods. For the reader who may not know about or listen to jazz but would like to start, "Six Records in Search of a Penthouse" provides a good starting point.

The playboy's appreciation of jazz and the incorporation of jazz into his lifestyle, an appreciation and incorporation Feather helped to cultivate, helped to reinforce the notion that jazz is masculine. Pierre Bourdieu argues that expressions of taste not only help create lifestyles, but that they reflect the social location of the those expressing that taste.⁹⁷ The playboy's cultivation of taste for jazz and the expressions of that taste help shape his lifestyle and reflect the values and practices that guide that lifestyle. This linkage of jazz with the playboy lifestyle, a lifestyle that is strongly centered around masculinity, reinforces the notions that jazz reflects masculine values and the social structures that support those values. By writing for *Playboy*, a publication which so strongly linked jazz with masculinity, Leonard Feather reaffirmed the

⁹⁶ Leonard Feather, "Six Records in Search of a Penthouse," *Playboy*, July 1958, 42-43.

⁹⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, 175.

bonds between masculinity and jazz, an outcome counter to his goals of creating a gender neutral insularity.

Before rendering Feather as someone only half-heartedly interested in reducing gender bias (what current day gender warrior would write for a magazine such as *Playboy*?), it is important to consider the economic realities of the jazz critic. It is the very rare jazz critic who could make a living writing for a single publication. The vast majority of jazz critics, Feather included, had to write for multiple outlets to secure an income. In addition, many critics such as Feather wrote recording liner notes, appeared on television and radio, produced records, did publicity, and any number of other jazz related activities. Feather notes in his autobiography that after his move to Los Angeles in 1960 that he needed extra income.⁹⁸ *Playboy* was one source of income for Feather among many others. His datebooks indicate that most months from 1957 to 1959 *Playboy* paid him fifty dollars a month, presumably for his unsigned album reviews. He was paid between \$750 and \$1500 for each feature story, which he published every few months.⁹⁹ Unless a jazz critic is independently wealthy, the realities of making a living as a jazz critic involve finding as many paying outlets as possible in which to write for, and during his tenure there *Playboy* provided Feather with a source of steady income.

Looking back over fifty years ago it is easy to criticize Feather for his work at *Playboy*, especially considering his stated goals of reducing gender discrimination in jazz. When Feather worked there feminist critiques of the magazine and its objectification of women were still years away. As a publication with a wide readership and a desire to cover jazz, it is not surprising that Feather would want to write for it, especially given the freelance nature of writing jazz criticism. What his time at *Playboy* demonstrates is how he helped to interconnect ideas of

⁹⁸ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 213.

⁹⁹ Feather, Daily Books for 1957, 1958, 1959, Writing files, box 4. LGFPC.

heteronormative masculinity, especially white masculinity, and conspicuous consumption with jazz. Feather and *Playboy* read and framed jazz as a masculine symbol and practice, which served to reinforce it as androcentric and heteronormative space. Signifying masculinity, and the male gender generally, jazz, as constructed by Feather and others in the pages of *Playboy*, could not be gender neutral. As such, by contributing to *Playboy*, whose treatment of jazz was a large and multi-faceted gender project, Feather worked against his goal of building a gender neutral insularity.

CONCLUSION

What makes Feather's writing for *Playboy*, and later for similar magazines such as *Rogue* and *Penthouse*, so interesting is that he was writing for these magazines while simultaneously producing albums for female musicians such as Vi Redd, writing positive reviews of their work, and Blindfold Testing them.¹⁰⁰ It is an example of his complexity and the often contradictory aspects of his work. Making a living in the jazz art world required Feather to work within the ideologies that shaped what would be economically feasible. As a record producer he could not buck the trends that dictated a female jazz musician to sing and expect to get a recording contract, let alone make a hit record. It should be noted that scoring a hit record by Redd or another female instrumentalist not only benefitted the artist, as Feather stood to make royalties on record sales.¹⁰¹ While Feather chose to write for *Playboy*, he was extremely well paid to do

¹⁰⁰ For example, see Feather, "Jazz on Campus," *Rogue*, June, 1965, 19-22, 77-78. Feather, "Penthouse Interview: Redd Foxx," *Penthouse*, March, 1971, 60-63.

¹⁰¹ The contract between United Artist and Feather for Redd's *Bird Call* stipulated that after recouping the \$1600 advance from United Artists to Feather, Feather would make 5% royalties on all copies sold in the United States and up to 2 1/2% on copies sold abroad. "Exhibit A contract between Leonard Feather and United Artists," April 13, 1962," 3, Writing files, box16, f7, LGFPC. As opposed to Feather, Redd does not appear to have been paid royalties. The extant contracts show that she was paid union scale as the leader of the recording, which was \$308.16. It is possible there was an addendum to the contract which stated that Redd would receive royalties, but there was no mention of that in the extant contracts. "Contract between Leonard Feather, Vi Redd and United

so, adding some financial stability to his freelancer's income. Although, according to Feather's personal income ledgers in the late 1950s he was grossing more than a quarter-of-a-million dollars per year in today's money, so it is reasonable to assume that he did not need the income from *Playboy* to survive.¹⁰² Had he chosen to argue against marrying jazz with masculinity and for gender neutrality, Hugh Hefner and the other editors at *Playboy* would have gone with another writer who could write about jazz in a way that matched their targeted demographic. Feather's *Blindfold Tests* and other writing in *Downbeat*, in regards to the self-defeating work it did, is more difficult to analyze. He openly decried gender discrimination, but wrote in a gendered style that matched the rest of the writing in *Downbeat*. As was the case with *Playboy*, the magazine market demanded that each publication reach its targeted demographic in order to sell advertising space. In all of the areas of activity I have discussed in this chapter, Feather worked within economic models that not only privileged androcentrism and masculinity, but linked jazz with masculinity.

Trine Annfelt reminds us that “jazz first and foremost gets its meaning from particular discourses of masculinity.”¹⁰³ Thus, the only way to unmake jazz as an androcentric space, thereby creating gender equality, is to remove all gendered notions, gendered language, application of gendered musical descriptions, focusing on a performer’s gender, and any other way of denoting gender, in jazz discourse. To do so would require jazz critics to reject the dominant ideologies they exist in, step outside of them, and to create an alternative strategy of

Artists," April 13, 1962, 1-2, Writing files, box16, f7, LGFPC; "Breakdown of expenses for Vi Redd sessions, May 21-22," July 20, 1962, Writing files, box16, f7, LGFPC.

¹⁰² For example, the \$1000 he was paid for his feature stories in *Playboy* in 1959 would, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, have the same purchasing power in 2013 as \$8005.40. CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm, Accessed January 24, 2014.

For example, according to the "Summary of Cash Acc't" from Feather's 1959 date books, he grossed \$32,665.02. Feather, Daily Books for 1959, Writing files, box 4. LGFPC. Feather's income from 1959 would have the same buying power as \$261,496.39 in 2013 dollars. CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm, Accessed January 28, 2014.

¹⁰³ Annfelt, *Jazz as Masculine Space*.

challenging the jazz canon. This is something Feather was unable to do. While producing the albums of female jazz musicians such as Vi Redd helped out the careers of those women, Feather's adoption of androcentric language in writing about them and his acceptance of the gendered rules which governed the jazz marketplace, his efforts were not effective as they could have been. His *Blindfold Tests* showed time and again that gender could not be heard, which directly challenged the views of the canon. However, the premise of Feather's argument was always an androcentric one, in that the standard of female success in jazz was playing as well as a man. His interpellation of female musicians into the dominant discourse in the *Blindfold Tests* again worked against his goals, as he used the same androcentric language and continued to accentuate his female test subjects' femaleness. While there is nothing more overtly sexist in his *Playboy* writing than the writing in other publications, that he contributed to a publication that consciously strove to connect jazz with masculinity further reinforced jazz as a male space. Audre Lorde's argument that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" are particularly relevant to Feather's work on behalf of female jazz musicians: despite his best efforts, Feather used - however subconsciously - the master's tools in a futile attempt to challenge the jazz canon's gender bias, and in doing so he helped maintain and perpetuate jazz as an androcentric space.

Feather's work on Vi Redd's albums, his *Blindfold Tests* of female musicians, and writing for *Playboy* tells us several things about the concept of insularity. First, and perhaps most importantly, it shows that critics are not exempt from the influences of the ideologies within which they operate. To be successful within a jazz market and economy which privileged androcentric views meant that he had to yield to some of that market's demands. This does not however mean that he was completely subject to the market, but it did mean he made

compromises. To his credit, producing albums by female instrumentalists was not something often achieved, yet Feather managed to produce many of them. Had Feather not produced Redd's only two recordings as a leader, she may not have ever been recorded. If he had taken a harder core position against androcentrism he would have had a much harder time making a living. His experience was a push and pull, with, and against, the ideologies that governed how women should be recorded, written about and portrayed. Second, there are many things that can shape an insularity: the ways in which one uses language, the content of both published pieces and private correspondence, and the actions one takes, such as producing an album, among other things. This in turn exemplifies the messiness of the idea of the "jazz critic." What is limited to the activity of criticism? How does it interact with related, but non-critical activities? Third, the construction of an insularity is a complex and dynamic one. Feather made progress, yet at times he was counterproductive in the construction of his gender neutral insularity. The process of his insularity construction was not one way, but rather two ways, simultaneously. And fourth, insularities are multi-layered, in that they consist of musical and social elements. As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, Feather's musical insularity was quite conservative, yet he opened up who had access to create the music within that insularity. The next chapter on Val Wilmer takes up this idea of access, yet in a different manner.

Chapter 3: "A Living Entity Rather Than a Piece of Plastic Stuck in a Sleeve": Val Wilmer's Standpoint Insularity

The only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within.
- Dorothy E. Smith¹

Val Wilmer has been a significant figure in British jazz since the 50s. She first started taking pictures as a teenager and fan of the music, but by the mid-60s had developed both a deeper sense of purpose in her photography and a deeper understanding of jazz. Since that time, as a journalist working in both words and pictures, she has striven to highlight the radical cultural politics woven into so much Black jazz, and also to undercut the false glamour periodically associated with musicians struggling to express themselves creatively in the hardest circumstances.
- *The Wire*²

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Sayers Ellis writes in his poem "Crank Shaped Notes" about the sub-genre of funk known as Go Go, which is specific to Washington, D.C. Throughout the poem he discusses and celebrates the cultural significance of Go Go. In it he writes: "So what if you can't read "their" music in "their" way; they can't play "your" pocket in "your" way. Everyone is illiterate when they are away from home but literate inside of themselves. Music comes from within. It is not an external act of dictation. It ain't signs and symbols."³ For Ellis, Go Go is social practice, it is culturally contingent, and it is not a universal form available to anyone who wants to play it. There are differences between the ways groups of people express themselves, differences which cannot be easily breached. Ellis' views on Go Go compliment the work and ideologies of the British jazz critic and photographer Val Wilmer.

Although it may appear odd to introduce a chapter on the work of Wilmer with a poem about Go Go, there are several similarities between Ellis' and Wilmer's beliefs about the links

¹ Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology," 28.

² "Val Wilmer," *The Wire*, June 1993, 10.

³ Thomas Sayers Ellis, "Crank Shaped Notes," *American Studies* 52, no. 4 (2013): 237.

between culture and music. Whereas Feather supported the idea that jazz was a universal art form which could be mastered and performed by anybody and that transcended social differences, Wilmer believes that one cannot separate the social from the musical. This chapter describes how Wilmer challenges any insularity that treats jazz music separate from the musicians who make it. Such insularities espouse the notion that jazz transcends social divisions and can be judged on universal criteria. In addition to Feather, these views were held by critics such as Martin Williams and others who were influenced by the tenets of New Criticism. This chapter also shows how Wilmer argues for an insularity based on treating musicians as people, seeing the music as a cultural and social practice that is the result of lived experience, and that evaluates the music on its own terms. Using feminist standpoint theory as a lens through which to view Wilmer's insularity, I argue that Wilmer's writing and photography provides a standpoint that simultaneously critiques insularities which divorces the music from its social contexts and provides a basis for social critique. Wilmer's "standpoint insularity" outlines through a series of race and gender projects the lived conditions of the musicians as well as the oppression many of them face. In this way, her standpoint insularity is similar to what Nancy Hartsock calls a "feminist standpoint," which is an "epistemological tool for understanding and opposing all forms of domination."⁴ Wilmer, whose goal is to show musicians as real people, provides her audience with a tool to understand and oppose the domination, subjugation and marginalization suffered by musicians.

To outline and analyze the cultural work of Wilmer's standpoint insularity, this chapter answers several questions: What is the role of her writing and photography in the construction of the insularity? What is the relationship between her writing and photography, and what

⁴ Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," 35.

conclusions can be drawn regarding that relationship? What does including or emphasizing the social lives and lived experiences of musicians do to the concept of canon and insularity? What roles do race and gender play in both her critique and her own insularity? Wilmer is not the only person to write about the lives of musicians, but how are the stories she's telling different or unexpected from those by other critics, and what does this say about what kinds of personal stories are acceptable or not acceptable in a particular insularity?

To answer these questions I draw heavily from Wilmer's autobiography, her books on music, nearly 200 pieces written for publications such as *Melody Maker*, *Downbeat*, *The Guardian*, *The Wire*, and others. In addition, I conducted a telephone interview with Wilmer that provided several insights not available in her published writing. After providing a biographical sketch of Wilmer, this chapter further outlines her critique of insularities and her own insularity and explains her logic, which stems from her experiences and relationships with musicians and their families. Race and gender play important roles in shaping Wilmer's views and work. To explain how she constructs her insularity I examine two aspects of her work. First, I look at her writing on women jazz musicians and women who shared their lives with male musicians. Second, I examine her jazz photography and show how her approach to photography represented and worked toward her desire to photograph who people were as opposed to what they did. I frame her standpoint insularity using the work of feminist scholars such as Nancy Hartsock, Dorothy E. Smith, Alison M. Jaggar, and others.

Despite her huge body of work, written and photographic, there is very little scholarship on Wilmer, which is a hole this chapter hopes to fill. As mentioned in the Introduction, John Gennari mentions her as a female critic who deserves more study. He describes part of Wilmer's importance by saying that she is "trying to give us a clear and truthful account of jazz lives in all

of their wonderful and terrible messiness," which is something "even the most perceptive male jazz writers" fail to do.⁵ Some major studies that discuss the role of criticism in the ways in which jazz was constructed and understood in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Iain Anderson's *This is Our Music* and Scott Saul's *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't*, do not discuss Wilmer's work in relation to other prominent jazz critics of the period.⁶ Wilmer's work is also absent from Benjamin Cawthra's book on jazz photography entitled *Blue Notes in Black and White: Photography in Jazz*.⁷ Wilmer does however, get a passing inclusion in a list of "great jazz photographers" in Heather Pinson's book on jazz photographer Herman Leonard.⁸

It is hard to speculate as to why someone as prolific as Wilmer has been relatively left out of scholarly discussions of jazz criticism and photography. It is entirely possible that she is left out purely because of her gender. Wilmer is not the only female jazz critic, and other prominent female writers such as Kitty Grime, Barbara Gardner, Marian McPartland, and Helen Oakley have also been ignored. That Wilmer and other female writers would have been excluded from jazz historiography on the basis of their gender makes sense, given how male dominated jazz is. A second possible reason could be that as a writer and a photographer, scholars find it difficult to group her with critics whose work was limited to prose. This difficulty to pigeon hole Wilmer is made more so when one considers that she has written extensively on subjects beyond music, which writers such as Leonard Feather did not do. A third possible reason may have to do with her autobiography, *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This*. As opposed to Feather's autobiography, which almost entirely deals with his professional life, Wilmer's autobiography is

⁵ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 17.

⁶ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*. Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*.

⁷ Benjamin Cawthra, *Blue notes in black and white: photography and jazz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁸ K. Heather Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 33.

full of intimate details about her personal life. It could very well be that scholars have been reluctant to study her work, as her personal life is often intertwined, and as I will discuss below, essential to the ways in which she shaped her writing and photography. That Wilmer's work is highly political, which she outlines in the autobiography, makes it impossible to divorce her work from her politics, which makes any discussion of her musical work difficult. In other words, because of Wilmer's full disclosure of her life, she is a difficult person to write about. Regardless of the reasons for Wilmer's omission from jazz scholarship, there is no doubt as to her importance in documenting the music and musicians.

VALERIE WILMER'S STANDPOINT INSULARITY

Valerie Wilmer writes that "always in the background for me there's been music."⁹ She was born on December 7, 1941 in Yorkshire, England and grew up in London, where she currently lives. After her father died when she was a girl her mom took in boarders, and it was this experience which first exposed her to people from varying countries and cultures. As soon as she purchased her first jazz record, which she points out was by a white imitator, she was hooked on black music. Early on she knew the value of jazz and black music when she tried to convince her school teacher that jazz was "classic music." She was very interested in getting to know the people who boarded at her house, many of which were African students. She was also interested in knowing more about black culture, which she points out was not encouraged in 1960s London. From the 1960s through the 1980s Wilmer traveled extensively, making multiple trips to West Africa, New York City and the American deep south. These trips were highly influential in building her worldview and shaping her philosophies and approach to writing and photography. In the 1970s and 1980s Wilmer became more politically active, getting involved in

⁹ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, xiii.

feminist and lesbian causes, working for the journalism labor union in London, and covering the UK coal miners labor dispute in the early 1980s.¹⁰ During this time her writing became increasingly polemic, as she felt she "had a duty to make political points."¹¹

Wilmer published her first writing on music as a teenager. Since then her music writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Melody Maker*, *Jazz News*, *Jazz Monthly*, *Crescendo*, *Jazz Beat*, *Hit Parader*, *Swing Journal*, *Jazz Magazine*, *Spare Rib*, *Playboy* and others. She was *Downbeat's* Great Britain correspondent in the 1960s and contributed several pieces for the magazine during that time.¹² Wilmer currently writes for *The Wire* and publishes obituaries of musicians in *The Guardian*.¹³

Wilmer is the author of several books on music. Her first book, *Jazz People*, published in 1970, is a collection of essays on fourteen musicians, including Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Cecil Taylor, Thelonious Monk, and Jackie McLean. As is typical throughout her writing, she focused on providing the social and historical context of each musician. *As Serious As Your Life*, from 1977, is one of the major works on avant-garde jazz, which she refers to as New Music, of the late 1960s and 1970s. In addition to writing about the musicians, issues of race and gender run throughout. Her deeply personal autobiography, *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This*, published in 1990, is in the words of Robyn Archer, "a social history of music like no other."¹⁴ It is an incredibly candid and detailed narrative of her personal and professional life which includes detailed descriptions of personal relationships, both platonic and romantic; discussions of her sexuality as well as the difficulty she faced coming out as a lesbian; anecdotes from the many

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 292.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Val Wilmer, "Val Wilmer in Conversation with Dave Laing" (paper presented at the Rhythm Changes Conference: "Rethinking Jazz Cultures", Media City, United Kingdom, April 14, 2013).

¹⁴ Robyn Archer, "Review," *Feminist Review*, no. 35 (1990): 124.

musicians she has known and written about; her descriptions and analyses of music; and explanations of her methodological philosophies, among other things. Wilmer is currently working on five separate book projects dealing with the history of black musicians in the UK.¹⁵

For the purposes of my dissertation, I refer to the Wilmer's work on music to be jazz criticism, because her music writing fits my broad definition of jazz criticism I outlined in chapter one. However, she never considered herself to be a jazz critic. She currently considers herself a historian, and is less concerned with the music. In her earlier work in the 1960s and 1970s she saw the work she was doing as journalism. As she explained to me over the phone:¹⁶

Val Wilmer: Other people called me a critic but that's a lazy term. If you write about something they consider you a critic. Of course I was a critic inasmuch as I wrote concert reviews, and club reviews. And sometimes record reviews, and book reviews, and so on. But, um, I'm, I feel that I did better [inaudible] anybody could do, really, who liked the subject, and was interested in it. So I wouldn't call myself a critic to be. I don't know who would be a critic. Who would you think of as a critic then?

CR: Well, yeah, it's. I guess if there was somebody who just all they did was write CD reviews, but that's, you know, you know, that's not all that everyone does. You know?

VW: That's right. Um. Yeah. I mean there are people like that, and they do, they have a knowledge of music which I don't have. You know, my knowledge of music is from listening, and a I, uh, I mean you know, one time, um, musicians would get very, um, agitated. Some musicians would get agitated and say "These people don't know what they're writing about, they're not musicians." And I used to worry about that, because I felt perhaps you should be. But, a lot of, a lot of people also said to me "the more you know about it on a technical level, that makes you more inhibited about the way you respond to things." And I'm, I'm inclined to agree with that. So, although, sometimes, I mean, I feel my musical knowledge is fairly limited, and when I see - sometimes I see people who write things and I think "what the hell are they on about?"

CR: [laughs]

¹⁵ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*. Wilmer, "Val Wilmer in Conversation with Dave Laing."

¹⁶ I have lightly edited the transcript of the telephone interview to remove instances of "uh huh," "um," etc.

VW: ..."They've got it all wrong here, you know?" That's quite, that's quite obvious, some people just, they really don't know anything about music at all. And you think "bloody hell, how did that happen?"

CR: Yeah. No, I see that a lot, you know?

VW: Yeah, well, it's extraordinary. But there you are.¹⁷

This exchange illuminates several things: first, the way she viewed the work she was doing; second, how other peoples' characterizations of her work as different from her thoughts; third, the difficulty of defining who a critic is; and fourth, what are some of the requirements or qualifications one should have before writing criticism. Wilmer's comments reveal how she thought about her work, as well as her anxieties about whether or not her writing could do justice to the music and its creators. In addition, they show that affixing the label of "critic" to someone is problematic, because writing criticism is never the total sum of one's experience. Rather, this exchange shows that it is perhaps better to refer to people who write what may be considered criticism as people who write criticism - as an activity they engage in, whether or not they may agree with that assessment, as opposed to a term that describes one's identity. As Wilmer points out, "critic" can be a lazy term.

Although much of Wilmer's writing is about jazz and black music, it would be a mistake to characterize her as a "jazz critic" or "jazz journalist," as she has published numerous pieces on non-musical subjects. Her trips to Africa led her to write about West African intellectuals and political issue in the early 1960s for the London based publication *Flamingo*. As there were very few black journalists in London in the 1960s, she became very useful to black publications. As a result, her pieces appeared throughout Anglophone Africa. She also worked as a newsroom

¹⁷ Val Wilmer, Telephone interview with author, December 17, 2013.

reporter for the London publication *Time Out*, and contributed to the *Observer* and the *Guardian*.¹⁸

In addition to her significant work as a journalist and critic, Wilmer has had a successful career as a photographer. She included many of her photographs of blues and jazz musicians in her books and articles, they have been shown in art galleries, and have appeared in numerous other publications. She published *The Face of Black Music* in 1976 and provided the vast majority of the photographs in *The Harmony Illustrated Encyclopedia of Jazz*, edited by Brian Case and Stan Britt.¹⁹ The majority of the photographs in *Jazz at Ronnie Scott's*, edited by Kitty Grime, are also by Wilmer.²⁰ She has also illustrated *The Jazz Scene*, and *Black Talk*. Wilmer has worked extensively as a freelance photographer, photographing a wide variety of events that have nothing to do with music. In the beginning of her career she photographed weddings and other social events, as well as many African intellectuals during her trips to the continent. Wilmer is a founding member of Format, London's all-female and feminist photographic agency, which was established in 1983. She has also written pieces on photography in *Amateur Photographer* and *The British Journal of Photography*.²¹

In both journalism and photography Wilmer was operating as an outsider, in that both realms were, and continue to be, male dominated. In addition, Wilmer faced difficulty as a white woman writing about black music. She recalls that "writing about music was something that men did. There was a penalty for being a woman in a man's world, and there were many who made sure to exact it. . . .But for a white woman to be concerned with something that Black

¹⁸ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*.

¹⁹ Brian Case et al., *The Harmony illustrated encyclopedia of jazz*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 1987); Val Wilmer, *The face of Black music: photographs* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976).

²⁰ Kitty Grime and Valerie Wilmer, *Jazz at Ronnie Scott's* (London: Robert Hale, 1979).

²¹ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*. Sheila Gray et al., "Format Photographers," *Feminist Review*, no. 18 (1984).

people did meant to experience additional pressure." She notes that "journalists were invariably male, and they carried themselves with an air of importance that left me standing on the sidelines."²² In the early 1960s it was still not conceivable for Wilmer, or any woman, to be accepted as a journalist, and during this time there were "few visible women photographers."²³ One reason for this, Wilmer suggests, is that "no woman was allowed to exist in her own right as an autonomous individual, if she was there, it had to be for the benefit of some man."²⁴

Using feminist standpoint theory is extremely helpful in understanding and framing Wilmer's insularity. The theory, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, explored the relationships between the production of knowledge and power. Informed by Marx's concept of historical materialism, it argues that men's and women's lives are structurally different. Examining the lived experiences of women provides a standpoint from which to view male domination. In addition, this standpoint provides a foundation from which a critique of patriarchy can be built. A standpoint allows one to gain a more complex and dynamic view and understanding of the world, making the structures of domination visible. Or as Nancy Hartsock writes, "the adoption of a standpoint exposes the real relations among human beings as inhuman, points beyond that present, and carries a historically liberatory role." A standpoint "posits a duality of levels of reality, of which the deeper level or essence both includes and explains the 'surface' or appearance, and indicates the logic by means of which the appearance invents and distorts the deeper reality."²⁵ "Standpoint theory's emphasis," Sandra Harding writes, "on the historical and social locatedness of knowledge projects on the way collective political and

²² Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, xii-xiv.

²³ *Ibid.*, 58, 67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁵ Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," 35-49. Quote on 37

intellectual work can transform a source of oppression into a source of knowledge and potential liberation.”²⁶ As I will outline below, Wilmer’s descriptions and depictions of musicians as real people living complex lives provides her audience with a deeper reality of the musicians’ lived experiences. This reveals a contrast with the surface level ways in which jazz musicians are depicted and described.

Alison M. Jaggar argues in “Feminist Politics and Epistemology” that as opposed to liberal epistemology, which says the best standpoint is neutral, no standpoint is neutral. The best standpoint is biased on the side of the oppressed, which gives a more diverse and complex view of the world, representing more interests than those of the dominant groups. This is especially true given the dominant group’s distortion and marginalization of subjugated peoples.²⁷

Recalling chapter two, the jazz canon represents the values of the dominant group. As such, alternative insularities, such as Wilmer’s, provide a contrasting view. In this way, the relationship between the canon and alternative insularities is similar to that between “official,” state-sanctioned, or patriarchal narratives and a feminist standpoint. “Women’s experience of subordination,” Jaggar writes, “puts them in a uniquely advantageous position for reinterpreting reality.”²⁸ Similarly, Wilmer’s standpoint insularity, by virtue of its focus on the lived experiences of musicians, reinterprets the dominant presentations of musicians’ reality. This allows for the opportunity for social change, further demonstrating the connections between jazz criticism and its ability to help shape social structure I outlined in chapter one.

Politics, prejudice, power inequities, oppression, and discrimination, such as what Wilmer has experienced being a female photographer and journalist working in male dominated fields, and as a lesbian, are central themes in her work. Following the feminist tenet that “the

²⁶ Harding, "Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophic, and Scientific Debate," 10.

²⁷ Jaggar, "Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women," 55-57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

personal is political," it makes sense that Wilmer's standpoint insularity privileges the individual in her approach to writing about and photographing jazz. Her interest in politics and being politically active goes back to her adolescence. She joined the youth Communist League and as a young adult read a lot of political and sociological literature and met with the Battersea socialist group to discuss politics.²⁹ Her several trips to Africa taught her what it was like to be "the other." Going to Africa, she recalls, "taught me there was more than one way of looking at any given situation."³⁰ As time went on she realized that her gender, sexuality and race played important roles in her life. Spending more time with musicians led her to be caught up in racial politics, and reading black scholarship, literature and poetry by authors such as Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka helped her to better understand the music.³¹ In her 1997 obituary letter of Iris Bentley, whose brother was murdered in London when Wilmer was eleven years old, Wilmer wrote that Bentley's work towards clearing her brother's name "increased my own determination to continue fighting for the rights of the dispossessed in the face of criticism and disbelief."³² Wilmer's work towards "fighting for the rights of the dispossessed" can be seen throughout her writing. She has always given musicians, most of whom occupied marginalized subject positions, a voice. At the same time, she connects the musicians' sociological and historical contexts with the music in a way that illuminates and critiques social inequities and relations.

Wilmer rejects the insularity that some critics create in which the music is treated as having universal qualities, that it belongs to everybody, and that can be judged on universal principles. To the contrary, she believes that music is a social practice, that it belongs to the

²⁹ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 28, 91.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129. Somewhat echoing the tenets of standpoint theory, this statement shows that Wilmer is aware that there are multiple ways of looking at the world and multiple standpoints one can take.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 170, 88, 236-37. Wilmer discusses the importance Baraka's book *Blues People* had on her: Baraka, then known as LeRoi Jones, "placed the music in a social context, explaining how it had changed as the people changed, and although a number of white critics rejected his theories and belittled the work, the way he wrote was beginning to make sense to me." *ibid.*, 89.

³² Val Wilmer, "Letter: Iris Bentley," *The Guardian*, 1997 Jan 31 1997, 17.

people who developed it, and that it needs to be judged on its own terms. In her autobiography, she acknowledges the importance that discographers and jazz fans who are concerned with documenting details of the music play. However, "the music itself was always the important thing, a living entity rather than a piece of plastic stuck in a sleeve." Discography was much more than a science dedicated to memorizing recording dates, personnel and matrix numbers. One can see in discography "the music as a cultural repository."³³ For Wilmer, music is a social practice and the result of lived experience, it is culturally contingent, and the documentation of it cannot ignore those facts; i.e., discography and other methods that only focus on the music are unable to explore the depths of meanings and cultural significance of the music. Or in her words: "the music was about much more than the notes."³⁴ Wilmer's insularity combines the musical with the social and the personal, as one cannot discuss one without the other.

Whereas some jazz critics such as Feather limit their insularities to music is defined as "jazz," Wilmer's umbrella covers more musicians and styles than many other critics do. Throughout her work she uses a multiplicity of terms to describe the music she writes about and photographs, which serve to give her reader a somewhat ambiguous sense of what musical genres or sub genres fit into her insularity. Her book *Jazz People* includes pieces on a diverse group of musicians, some of whom may not be considered to be jazz musicians at all. For example she writes about blues singer Big Joe Turner and saxophonist Archie Shepp, both of whom may not fit into other peoples' "jazz" insularity. But for Wilmer they are all "jazz people." Throughout *As Serious As Your Life*, which is subtitled *The Story of the New Jazz*, Wilmer refers to the music as "New Music." She defines New Music as "a term of convenience that embraces many approaches" and as a "free-thinking contemporary approach from one that is rooted in

³³ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

bebop."³⁵ The New Music she writes about is more commonly referred to as avant garde jazz, or free jazz, although some critics, such as John Tynan, would not include the music of people like Milford Graves, Albert Ayler or Cecil Taylor to be jazz.

While Wilmer is sympathetic to musicians such as trumpeter Leo Smith who feel constrained by terms meant to define and limit a musical style, one may characterize the music that fits into her insularity, at least in an American context, as music of the black diaspora.³⁶ In short, Wilmer's insularity encompasses black music. This can be seen in her book *The Face of Black Music*, which includes photographs of musicians who play blues, jazz, gospel, New Orleans brass band music, and R&B. Wilmer's conception of black music coincides with that of several leading black music scholars. Samuel Floyd provides several definitions of black music, which can be divided into roughly two ways: musically and culturally. In strictly musical terms, Floyd defines black music as any music that includes any of the following genres: blues, jazz, spirituals, gospel, and ragtime.³⁷ Culturally, Floyd defines black music as any music that is derived from, or expresses the black experience. Black music is also music anywhere that "expresses the essentials of the black experience of any culture." All black musicians produce black music. Black music can also be made by those outside the African American community, Floyd argues, as long as that music "sincerely and effectively expresses the essentials of black culture."³⁸ Wilmer adds a crucial element to Floyd's definition of black music: freedom, which

³⁵ Val Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992), 24.

³⁶ Wilmer quotes trumpeter Leo Smith, who "sees the critics making rules for the music in order to limit it," which is a view she also expresses. *Ibid.*, 114, 22.

³⁷ Samuel A. Floyd, "Toward a Philosophy of Black Music Scholarship," *Black Music Research Journal* 2(1981): 83. Where I think Wilmer diverges with Floyd is in his views that classical music from the Western art music tradition can be black music if it has black music incorporated into it. Examples of these would include *Porgy and Bess* or one of William Grant Still's symphonies. Wilmer does not write about or address music stemming from the Western art music tradition.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 84. Olly Wilson provides a similar definition of black music. He writes that "black music is, of course, music which comprises the musical tradition of peoples of African descent." Olly Wilson, "Black Music as an Art Form," *Black Music Research Journal* 3(1983): 1.

she defines as a "refusal to conform to any preconceived (i.e. European) patterns or rules."³⁹ Her view of black music also reflects Amiri Baraka's notion of the "changing same," in that both styles exist within the same continuum of black music as expression of black culture.⁴⁰

For Wilmer, those of African descent created black music, they own it, and are the main innovators. In the introduction to *Jazz People* she justifies her decision to exclusively write about black musicians: "My assembled fourteen are all black because however good, however great, however emotionally moving or aesthetically stimulating the individual white musician *can* be, his role is usually only that of an imitator."⁴¹ This view undergirds her critique of the "jazz is universal" thinking, as in her view, the music is anything but universal.

Wilmer's critique "jazz is universal" insularities are mostly couched in racial terms. She often sets her sights on the press and critical establishment for what she sees as their misdirected and misinformed views and often racist practices. Wilmer outlines the main themes in her critique in a 1984 opinion column in the *Wire* magazine. She argues that audience members and critics often are unaware, ignorant or unwilling to acknowledge the connection between the music and the social situation that produced the music. She rhetorically asks "But how often do the 'jazz critics' consider *why* the music exists? Or familiarise themselves with the social

³⁹ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 9.

⁴⁰ Wilmer notes that it is important "to see jazz and blues as part of the changing same." Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 209. Baraka, *Black music*, 205-41. At the conclusion of his seminal 1966 essay, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)," Baraka concludes that "That what will come will be a *Unity Music*. The Black Music which is jazz and blues, religious and secular. Which is New Thing and Rhythm and Blues. The consciousness of social reevaluation and rise, a social spiritualism. A mystical walk up the street to a new neighborhood where all the risen live. Indian-African anti-Western-Western (as geography) Nigger-sharp Black and strong. The separations, artificial oppositions in Black Music resolved, are the ditty strong classic. (Ditty bop.) That is, the New Black Music and R&B are the same family looking at different things. Or looking at things differently. The collection of wills is a simple unity like on the street. A bigger music, and muscle, for the move necessary. The swell of a music, of action and reaction, a seeing, thrown in swift slick tone along the entire muscle of a people. The Rhythm and Blues mind blowing evolution of James-Ra and Sun-Brown. That growth to include all the resources, all the rhythms, all the yells and cries, all that information about the world, the Black ommmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm, opening and entering." *ibid.*, 240-41.

⁴¹ Val Wilmer, *Jazz People* (New York: Da Capo, 1977), 3. Italics in original

movements taking place alongside its innovations or the politics that influence its direction?"⁴² The lack of critics to consider why the music exists or examine its social and historical context stems, Wilmer argues, from "cultural arrogance." With regards to the "jazz is universal" philosophy, Wilmer writes: Curious, isn't it, this overwhelming need to attract attention to the music's *universality*, the 'Look, we can do it, too!' syndrome. It is as if white people cannot bear to admit that there is anything Blacks have achieved alone."⁴³ She sums up her general critique in *As Serious As Your Life*: "the music itself describes the political position of Blacks in America. . . . To ignore the realities and continue to listen to the music is, to my mind, not only insulting but ignorant."⁴⁴ In these comments one sees that Wilmer is writing and photographing a body of work which creates a standpoint focused around the musicians and their cultures, not around the views dominant groups attach onto the music.

One of the strongest critiques Wilmer makes of jazz criticism and journalism is its analyses of the music, which in her view "tended to depend on Eurocentric notions of 'quality,' even when the writer himself (and it was generally a man) moved with and around Black musicians."⁴⁵ She finds that the construction of jazz is European oriented, that it is a fiction, and that little written about it "bore much resemblance to any African-American reality."⁴⁶ Again, this critique finds Wilmer advocating for the standpoint of the musicians. In addition, Wilmer feels that "most white analyses of the music have never had much to do with where it is actually going and why."⁴⁷ The mainstream critical establishment's unwillingness to acknowledge the importance of race in jazz is one reason why white critics often miss the mark in their writing.

⁴² Val Wilmer, "On the Wire," *The Wire*, Spring 1984, 30.

⁴³ Ibid., 31. Wilmer presented these views seven years earlier in *As Serious As Your Life*. In that book she argued that many critics are "oblivious to the social situation responsible for African-American music and unconcerned with its true significance." Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 12.

⁴⁴ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 14.

⁴⁵ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 115.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 284.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 233.

Critics were often unconcerned, uninterested or reluctant to discuss racial issues and were "oblivious to the social situation responsible for African-American music and unconcerned with its true significance."⁴⁸ This aversion to discussing social and racial issues may be one reason why Wilmer felt that "in general, the white critical establishment was always a half-step behind when it came to recognising the significance of ideas introduced on the Afro-American bandstand."⁴⁹

The "jazz is universal" insularity can explain why Wilmer feels writing about jazz has generally been lacking and poor. The view that jazz is universal allows for a situation where any evaluative criteria or framework can be applied to the music. Given that most writers are of European ethnic and cultural descent, it would follow that they would employ Eurocentric aesthetic standards in their criticism. Their dominant position in social structure allows them to set the evaluative rules and standards of jazz criticism more or less unchallenged, as white writers held a virtual monopoly on the access to publication. Viewing the music as universal, being able to apply an Eurocentric evaluative framework to it unchallenged, and being unwilling to consider the music's social and cultural aspects led to a situation in which "the history of white writing on jazz has been filled with misunderstanding and misapprehension."⁵⁰

Wilmer also notes a prevailing view among some in the media that black people did not have anything valuable to say, and if they were written about, editors encouraged their writers to tone down any political or militant views. She remembers difficulty pitching articles on black musicians to the white press, which turned her down. She also felt that magazines ignored the viewpoint of African American musicians. Wilmer observed in *Downbeat* a resentment towards African American musicians who expressed political views, and referred to the magazine's

⁴⁸ Ibid., 210. Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 12.

⁴⁹ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 53.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 305.

policy as "reactionary."⁵¹ Quite often when a story expressed a black musician's angry or militant views, which are justified due to many of them being abused and exploited, Wilmer notes that "writers were expected to tone down the 'militant' line."⁵² Another manifestation of the press' lack of interest in providing a platform for black voices is in the relative lack of black writers in the 1960s.⁵³ The press' views towards black musicians and writers, along with their preference to ignore or temper racial politics in their pages is one reason why the links between society and the music are not written about, disseminated and therefore known by the wider public.

Wilmer's views on the relationship between society and culture and music, specifically in terms to jazz, fit in with some broader trends during the 1960s and 1970s. Several black musicians, writers and artists argued that black music was itself an independent African American musical institution, separate from white culture and European derived musical styles. As Iain Anderson points out, free jazz was at the center of the black aesthetic in the 1960s. During this time many argued that jazz was a "preserve of African American musicians" and that "free jazz represented both a defiance of Euro aesthetic discipline and a rejection of integrationist ideology."⁵⁴ Scott Saul notes that jazz musicians linked jazz to a "soul aesthetic" and that the new musical practices of free jazz focused on blackness. Saul refers to this focus on blackness as a "project of cultural reclamation."⁵⁵ This focus on musical blackness was not limited to jazz, and was prevalent throughout African American culture. Brian Ward writes that "many blacks sought an antidote to white assumptions of cultural superiority by self-consciously valorizing

⁵¹ Ibid., 85, 186, 210-12.

⁵² Ibid., 243.

⁵³ Wilmer notes that "with the exception of Marc Crawford, Barbara Gardner and LeRoi Jones, all of whom wrote occasionally for *Downbeat*, the only readily accessible writers were white." *ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*, 94-102. Quote on 98.

⁵⁵ Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*, 304, 05, 06.

their own culture and celebrating peculiarly African American experiences and practices as the critical repositories of identity and worth."⁵⁶ One such critic was Baraka, who consistently stressed the relationship between black culture and black music.⁵⁷ The views outlined above by the musicians and critics of the 1960s had a strong influence on Wilmer, which can be seen in her views on the connection between society and music.

Wilmer's views also share much in common with several contemporary black music scholars, and in some ways, her philosophies about writing and photography prefigure those dominant philosophies in black music studies. In his 2004 article "Pot Liquor Principle: Developing a Black Music Criticism," Guthrie Ramsey argues that black music criticism should "explain the cultural work that music performs in the social world."⁵⁸ He suggests that black music scholarship should focus on "the social experiences of race and racism in America."⁵⁹ In addition, Samuel Floyd argues that the analysis of black music should show how the black experience is manifested in the music. The analysis of black music, Floyd argues, by virtue of its "materiality and its solid cultural grounding," requires that black music analysis demands a "cultural-studies approach."⁶⁰ The approach that Ramsey and Floyd argue for almost directly echo Wilmer's philosophy. My pointing out of these similarities is not meant to suggest that Wilmer was the first to urge for the consideration of society in any discussion of black music, or that Wilmer directly influenced Floyd and Ramsey; rather, it is to show how Wilmer's views fit

⁵⁶Ward, *Just my soul responding: rhythm and blues, Black consciousness, and race relations*, 182.

⁵⁷For example, Baraka writes: "Black Music is African in origin, African-American in its totality, and its various forms (especially the vocal) show just how the African impulses were redistributed in its expression." Baraka, *Black music*, 208.

⁵⁸ Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., "The Pot Liquor Principle: Developing a Black Music Criticism in American Music Studies," *Journal of Black Studies* 35, no. 2 (2004): 215.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶⁰ Samuel A. Floyd, "Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry," in *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagele Caponi (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 143-44.

into a larger school of thought concerning the best ways to approach the study and analysis of black music.

One can see in Wilmer's writing and insularity an effort to effect social change. In *As Serious As Your Life*, Wilmer notes that "indeed the music itself threatens the notions of white supremacy and Black subservience."⁶¹ By being a threat to the established social order, one can see why white critics would choose to marginalize the music. As I will discuss in more detail later in this dissertation, the music that is valued and canonized reflects the social values of the dominant culture, which would explain why the white critical establishment has for the most part marginalized black music. A subversive music, the canonization of the black music that Wilmer writes about would require a reordering of social relations, a situation those occupying dominant positions would prefer to avoid. Throughout the body of her musical writing and photography Wilmer promotes and advocates for the value of black music and the marginalized culture which produces it; by doing so, she forces her audience to consider and come to terms with the often racist factors and elements in American society which produced the music.

Much of Wilmer's work and method stems from her deep interactions with her subjects. Her relationship to the musicians she interviewed, photographed and wrote about put her in an ideal position to understand the relationship between culture, the lived experience of her subjects and the music. Likewise, it put her in a good position to create her standpoint insularity. Her personal interactions, she recalls, helped her "build a wider picture of the world in which the musicians lived. . . . It was something that could not be gleaned from listening to records alone."⁶² Whereas a critic may choose not to know musicians very well in order to try and keep

⁶¹ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 45.

⁶² Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 115.

an objective distance from the music, Wilmer took the opposite approach. She feels that it is much harder to write something irresponsible and stupid about a musician that you know personally.⁶³ Her interaction with musicians was important to her worldview, as it helped her "build a wider picture of the world in which the musicians lived. . . . It was something that could not be gleaned from listening to records along."⁶⁴

Wilmer learned a great deal about the world in which the people she wrote about lived. All of her work, and most of her social life, she noted, "revolved around Africans and people of African descent."⁶⁵ Numerous African American musicians taught her about race and its relationship to music. From gospel musician Sister Rosetta Tharpe she learned about the racist mechanisms that helped veil the importance of African American culture. A trumpeter Wilmer refers to as "John Graham" taught her about race relations and the phenomena W.E.B. DuBois termed "two-ness." Clark Terry and Rex Stewart, among others, also contributed to her education on racial politics in the United States.⁶⁶ She also spent numerous times staying with musicians, which furthered her education about the realities of the lives of musicians. For example, she stayed with Ornette Coleman in New York City for five weeks.⁶⁷ In her travels to the deep south in the 1970s she witnessed firsthand the poor living conditions African Americans lived in, as well as the effects of deep racism.⁶⁸ In *As Serious As Your Life* and *Jazz People*, both of which I will discuss below, one sees the manifestation of Wilmer's education in the pages. In her autobiography she eloquently writes that "being involved on a one-to-one basis with so many people of colour, I think I escaped sentimentalising or romanticising individual and collective

⁶³ Ibid., 135.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 184.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 36-39, 82, 148-50.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 218.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 213-25.

needs and demands."⁶⁹ Her guess was correct, as her writing does anything but sentimentalize or romanticize. Much of her success has to do with how she wrote about her subjects.

Wilmer has been quite effective at giving her subjects room for them to express their views. In the introduction to *Jazz People* she explained her method she used in writing the book's fourteen profiles: "I could have translated the musicians' words into my own and thus posed as the great commentator on the psychological makeup of the jazz musician and the sociological structure of the scene, but I prefer to let the musicians do the talking themselves. I never get tired of hearing them speak."⁷⁰ While Feather often gave the opinion that musicians were the most qualified spokespeople for the music, Wilmer seems to put her beliefs into practice more than Feather did. (As I demonstrated in chapter two, Feather was often able to insert his views and biases, especially in the Blindfold Tests, in an innocuous way where the primary focus was on the musician.) This is not to say that Wilmer did not frame her subjects in a certain way. That is certainly not the case, as she makes her personal views and methods clearly known to her readers. The musicians Wilmer wrote about, photographed and had relationships with clearly influenced how she thought about the music and its context, and the opinions of these musicians are immediately apparent in her writing. Throughout her work, Wilmer attributes to her subjects more agency than most critics do by giving them generous room to express their views and situations. Going back to chapter two's discussion of interpellation, Wilmer tends to let her subjects interpellate themselves, as opposed to taking a more active approach in framing her subjects' images as Feather did. In a way, Wilmer is more jazz ethnographer than jazz critic.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 305.

⁷⁰ Wilmer, *Jazz People*, 3.

Key to Wilmer's working method is her desire to present the music, its musicians, its history, and the culture that produced it as accurately as possible. As an outsider to those who make black music, Wilmer is aware of the potential havoc to the musicians and culture a white writer can wreak, as those writing outside the culture have the power to marginalize and misrepresent the music. She acknowledges that as an outsider, she "could never get close to the music the way a person 'of' the culture could."⁷¹ Wilmer feels that those, such as herself, who have been admitted inside the culture have a "responsibility to ensure that history was represented as accurately as possible."⁷² As such, she was "determined to do right by the musicians."⁷³

This section will look at different ways how Wilmer attempted to do right by the musicians in her construction and deployment of her standpoint insularity. First, I look at three racial and three gender projects at work in *As Serious as Your Life* and *Jazz People*. In these books Wilmer not only provides some of the critiques outlined above, but they provide several examples of how she constructs her insularity. The second section examines her photography, comparing it to other trends and approaches to jazz photography. This section analyzes four of her photos from *The Face of Black Music* to show the ways in which she documented musicians as people.

Recalling the discussion of Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial projects in Chapter 1, one can categorize Wilmer's framing of musicians as intellectuals, describing their financial difficulties and strategies, and her focus on the importance of the drums to be racial projects. To quote Omi and Winant's definition of racial projects again: they "connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday

⁷¹ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 193.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 307.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 244.

experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning."⁷⁴ Wilmer connects intellectualism with black musicians in a way that counteracts other racial projects and stereotypes which would make intellectualism and blackness mutually exclusive. In addition, she connects the economic difficulties of musicians to structural racism which forces her readers to consider the economic aspects of race. And with her focus on an instrument she considers to be overlooked by other jazz writers, and the ways in which she connects the drums to racial politics, Wilmer's writing about drummers consists of a racial project.

As Serious as Your Life includes numerous racial and gender projects, and one of its main goals is to "show that the musicians are flesh-and-blood people, not just names on a piece of plastic playing their hearts out for the benefit of anyone with the price of a record album."⁷⁵ It contains a mix of biographical pieces on more famous artists such as John Coltrane, Sun Ra, Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman, as well as lesser known musicians like Earl Cross, Art Shaki Lewis and others. The book is also somewhat ahead of its time, as it also covers many of the same subjects - such as musicians collectives, the economics of the recording industry, and musicians' move towards the academy and arts organizations - that recent jazz studies scholarship do.⁷⁶ Wilmer recognizes the book's importance and status as an innovative work:

If anybody tries to put it down and say that it's not um, important, or influential in any way, then I would disagree with them, because obviously it was important at the time, because nobody had ever done it before. . . .And I feel that for just that reason alone it was important. It, anyway, it annoyed enough people. I can remember, I won't name names, but I can remember some people who are quite friendly towards me now, but they were very annoyed at the time that I dared to do this, you know?⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Omi and Winant, *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 56. Italics in original.

⁷⁵ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 13.

⁷⁶ For example, see Saul, *Freedom is, freedom ain't: jazz and the making of the sixties*. Monson, *Freedom sounds: civil rights call out to jazz and Africa*. Anderson, *This is our music: free jazz, the Sixties, and American culture*.

⁷⁷ Wilmer. Telephone interview with author.

To further flesh out the lives of the musicians Wilmer includes dozens of biographies of musicians. Wilmer also takes a somewhat sociological approach in her examination of gender, which I will discuss below. *Jazz People* provides a composite look at a group of jazz musicians from different eras, geographic locations and stylistic approaches. Each artist profile gives the reader a look into the professional and personal lives of the musician, discussing their difficulties and successes. Quite common issues of race and economics occur, demonstrating the importance of both issues to musicians. Together with *As Serious As Your Life*, *Jazz People* works to bring the seemingly extra-musical aspects of musicians' lives into relief, all while demonstrating the effect these aspects have on the music.

Three of Wilmer's racial projects include her framing of black musicians as intellectuals, discussions of the economic difficulties and financial realities confronting musicians, and connecting the drums to the musical cultures of the African diaspora. One of the common strands throughout both books is Wilmer's emphasis on showing the musicians as intellectuals. As I will also discuss in the next chapter on Nathaniel Mackey, African American jazz musicians were often stereotyped as natural and emotional musicians who relied on innate racial abilities and characteristics as opposed to well-educated and highly trained musicians who thought about their craft. Early on in her career, Wilmer observed that rock and roll was a term used to "relegate the music to the realm of 'natural' sensuality rather than intellectual creativity."⁷⁸ Similar to Nathaniel Mackey, Wilmer countered these stereotypes by not only emphasizing the musicians' intellectual approach to their music, but their non-musical intellectual and cosmopolitan interests as well.

Several of Wilmer's profiles in *Jazz People* highlight aspects of the musicians' intellectualism. For example, she describes trumpeter Art Farmer's non-jazz interests, noting his

⁷⁸ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 26.

appreciation for painting, interest politics and sociological issues. He is well read and listens to many kinds of music, counting classical singer Mario Lanza among one of his favorites.⁷⁹

Wilmer provides saxophonist Archie Shepp, one of the most outspoken avant-garde jazz musicians, ample room to express his observations on race, both in the context of jazz and larger American culture. She points out his college education, experience as a playwright and as an occasional critic. Of his many insightful observations, he elaborates on Wilmer's critique of the stereotypes of the jazz musicians as non-intellectuals: "Not only is it a myth that musicians are inarticulate, it's systematically enforced because there is no journal for me to answer those who say that we couldn't draw flies. . . . There's no voice for you, no journal of jazz opinion. . . . Most people think we're inarticulate and we certainly don't have the money to sponsor a magazine whereby we could disprove them."⁸⁰ Here Shepp points out not only the persistence of stereotype, but provides one reason why it endures. Having the privilege of access to publishers, Wilmer is able to help counter that stereotype.

In addition to the examples of Farmer and Shepp from *Jazz People*, she frames the musicians she writes about in *As Serious As Your Life* as intellectuals who put a great deal of thought into their craft. Among others, this can be seen in the chapters on pianist Cecil Taylor and on bandleader, composer, philosopher and keyboardist Sun Ra. She describes Taylor as an uncompromising genius who has encountered resistance to his difficult music. Similar to Shepp, Taylor, a graduate of the New England Conservatory, discusses the disadvantages the black artist has in trying to be creative and survive in a white dominated society. Concluding the chapter, Wilmer writes: "At the keyboard itself, Taylor is unrelenting. His music, likewise, continues to surge forth with an almost desperate intensity, a formidable expression of Black genius at its

⁷⁹ Wilmer, *Jazz People*, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 155-62. Quote on 160.

greatest."⁸¹ While it may be easy to discount Sun Ra's music, clothing and philosophies as the workings of an eccentric and kooky person, as Wilmer discusses in the chapter on him, he is a deliberate thinker who grounds his approach and behavior on a multitude of philosophies. Or as Wilmer puts it, he "develops involved philosophies and explanations for everything."⁸² He proselytizes the importance of discipline and professionalism to his musicians, and his poetry and philosophical writings had positively changed the lives of musicians who encountered them.⁸³ In different ways, Wilmer presents Farmer, Shepp, Taylor and Sun Ra as intellectuals, who not only apply personal and intentional approaches to their music, but have interests and opinions on a wide range of subjects and social issues outside of jazz.

The second example of some of Wilmer's racial projects include her discussions of economics. A recurrent theme in *As Serious As Your Life* is the focus on the financial difficulties faced by black jazz musicians and the structure and dynamics of the music industry.⁸⁴ In the opening of Chapter 8 Wilmer briefly profiles trumpeter Earl Cross, and drummers Art "Shaki" Lewis and Rashied Ali, who in Wilmer's view "form a composite picture of what it is like to be a Black Musician involved with an uncommercial ideal in America today."⁸⁵ All three men felt the need to play music, and made sacrifices to be able to do so. Despite having the ability to play more commercial music, and having had done so, Cross, Lewis and Ali faced many hardships, especially economic, in their goal to playing an individual music.⁸⁶ Several musicians, including violinist Leroy Jenkins and saxophonists Dewey Redman and Frank Lowe stressed the difficulty

⁸¹ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 45-59. Quote on 59.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 74-92.

⁸⁴ Economics and the financial realities black musicians faced appeared often in her pieces for *Melody Maker* in the late 1960s and 1970s. For example, trumpeter Charles Tolliver described how even though he and the musicians in his co-operative band Music Incorporated could make money playing more popular music, they chose to be truer to their artistic selves. Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Music Inc - Making it Alone," *Melody Maker*, October 10, 1970, 18.

⁸⁵ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 132.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-33.

to support themselves with their music as well as acknowledging the realities of having to make a living. As Redman put it, "the ultimate achievement . . . is not to play in New York, but to *survive* in New York."⁸⁷ That these musicians had to face structural racism made surviving even more difficult. Wilmer did not go out of her way to ask her interview subjects about their financial situation, and said that most of the musicians were "all in the same boat, I think. I understood them because it was my problem as well."⁸⁸ As such, Wilmer pointing out the financial hardships these musicians faced was not an overt effort to uncover or to specifically write about it; rather, it was a theme that came up because it was a common occurrence.

Another significant problem black musicians faced was getting their music recorded, especially since having an album out could not only provide them with income, but could help legitimize their work as well. Because there was a very little market for the music they played, musicians were willing to put up with shady record companies, such as ESP Disk, that were willing to record their music, even if it meant accepting or suffering a level of exploitation. Racial attitudes also played an important role in whether or not one could get a recording contract. As Rashied Ali relayed to Wilmer, he was essentially blocked from getting a recording deal because he was seen as having an attitude, which Ali felt was due to record executives not wanting to deal with an assertive black man. To circumvent racist practices, or even the potential for or perceived existence of such practices, musicians turned toward forming collectives and their own record labels, and doing their own promotion in an attempt to maintain artistic and financial control of their product. For many black artists, the need to earn money hindered their creative process. As Wilmer describes, the tension, or conflict, between the need to support themselves and the need to play music, put musicians in a precarious position; to stay

⁸⁷ Ibid., 150.

⁸⁸ Wilmer. Telephone interview with author.

true to their artistic ideologies often required making strong sacrifices and often involved a life of poverty.⁸⁹ By connecting the financial hardships of black musicians to an industry that often operated on racist principles, Wilmer engages in a racial project that brings to light the ways in which race and capitalism impact the black musician.⁹⁰ The portrait Wilmer paints of these musicians is far from the glamorous, mythic or idealized image of the performing jazz musician divorced from all context.

One of the less obvious racial projects in both books is her focus on drummers and the importance of the drums in the music. After getting to know drummer Ed Blackwell, Wilmer realized that drummers' "contribution to the music had been underplayed by Western-oriented critics."⁹¹ She elaborates this position in a review of a live performance by saxophone Noah Howard's group.

Those of us who have been listening to the music for a while have been so indoctrinated by so-called jazz critics . . . that even at this stage of the game we tend to expect the drummer to stay pretty much in the background. We have been taught by people who found it hard to relate to the drums to conveniently overlook the fact that the drummer can dictate the feeling and style of a piece, no matter what the leader or the soloists may have in mind. Even now, when the drummer plays up front, he is still the last man to be weighed in the analytical balance.⁹²

⁸⁹ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 217-55. In a telling passage, Wilmer provides greater detail on the dynamic black musicians are forced to deal with: "But the record companies are not prepared to put up the money to promote new Black music, they are only interested in records that stand to sell a million. This, combined with the racist system that apparently influences many decisions in the industry, has convinced many musicians that self-reliance projects are the best solution to the problem of achieving exposure. What is more, the musicians have never owned their own product . . . Even [record producer Bob] Thiele has said that one of the reasons why so few Black musicians are recording today is due, in part, to their distrust, their 'belief that the company is screwing them.' Such beliefs, engendered by the conditioning of four hundred years of slavery, are understandable but, dealing specifically with the record industry, they arise from actually proven instances of companies cheating the artist." *ibid.*, 236.

⁹⁰ The chapter on tenor saxophonist Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis in *Jazz People* provides a somewhat alternative or complimentary view of the economic realities of the music business. Davis, who played with the Count Basie orchestra, took two years off from playing to work as a booking agent for Shaw Artists Corporation. He describes some of the intricacies and inner workings of how clubs book artists, the difficulties for clubs and artists to make money in an art form that was declining in popularity. Davis does not describe things in racial terms, but that there are inherent difficulties in making money demonstrates how hard it is for a musician facing a tough business and racism to be able to perform creative music and support themselves. Wilmer, *Jazz People*, 31-40.

⁹¹ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 179.

⁹² Val Wilmer, "Caught In the Act: Noah Howard," *Downbeat*, December 21 1972, 37-38.

This slight may have to do with the drums' relationship to Africa and some critics' reluctance to view the music as belonging to a particular people, time and place. Drummer Andrew Cyrille connects the drum's meaning in African culture and describes the instrument's importance to black music: "And you know, in our music the drum is like the mother of the music, it's like the heartbeat. It transmits the pulse, the energy, the basic feeling of the music, so this is something that is like very, very close. If you take the drum out of most Black music it would probably almost be lifeless - even down to rock, because the whole thing people relate to in rock or rhythm-and-blues is the drum and the other things are just embellishments."⁹³

For Cyrille, the lynch pin of Black music are the drums, and Wilmer emphasizes the connection between the African origins of the drums and their place in black music. To address the relative lack of attention paid to drums, Wilmer wrote often about drummers.⁹⁴ She dedicates Part Three of *As Serious As Your Life* to drummers. In Chapter 9, "The Spirit Behind the Musicians," she writes about many of the prominent drummers of the time: Cyrille, Elvin Jones, Billy Higgins, Ed Blackwell, Tony Williams, Sunny Murray, Milford Graves and Rashied Ali. Chapter 10 focuses on Blackwell, and Wilmer discusses his various difficulties, including his living in poverty, which further connects the black musician to the structural economic and

⁹³ Andrew Cyrille, quoted in Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 155. Wilmer reiterates this point in the review of the Noah Howard performance cited above: "When the drummer gives up in black music, things fall apart. The center cannot hold, for the drums, after all, are there to take care of business." Wilmer, "Caught In the Act: Noah Howard," 37.

⁹⁴ For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Wilmer published stories on drummers in *Melody Maker* for a regular basis. These include pieces on Barry Altschul, Louis Moholo, Rashied Ali, Ed Blackwell, Kenny Clarke, Philly Joe Jones, Clifford Jarvis, Jerome Cooper, Roger Blank, Cie Frazier, Art Lewis, Dennis Charles, and others. Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Altschul in a Nutshell," *Melody Maker*, January 30, 1971, 32; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Hear My Heart's Vibrations," *Melody Maker*, June 20, 1970, 10; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Rashied, the Other Drummer with Trane," *Melody Maker*, April 6, 1968, 8; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Street Parade Fan," *Melody Maker*, March 9, 1968, 10; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Keeping up with Klook," *Melody Maker*, February 17, 1968, 8; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Ode to Philly Joe," *Melody Maker*, January 13, 1968, 6; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: From Ra's Drummer to Cabbie," *Melody Maker*, February 24, 1973, 44; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: The Drummer as Artist," *Melody Maker*, February 3, 1973, 34; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Blank Expression," *Melody Maker*, January 6, 1973, 30; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Cie Frazier Keeps on Driving," *Melody Maker*, September 16, 1972, 30; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Art's Class," *Melody Maker*, September 2, 1972, 26; Wilmer, "Jazzscene: Looking Back with Charles," *Melody Maker*, December 25, 1971, 22.

racial inequities. She also includes a chapter on Higgins in *Jazz People*. Wilmer sees drumming in political terms: "the use of additional percussion as an assertion of Black identity effectively reverses the situation created when the slave owners exerted their control by banning the drum."⁹⁵ For Wilmer, the prominence of the drums in black music is the exercising of African American cultural and racial agency and a critique of the white power structure.

In addition to Wilmer's various racial projects, another of her writing's striking features, especially when one compares it to the work of other jazz critics, is the attention she pays to women. This is especially evident throughout *As Serious as Your Life*, in which two chapters focus on gender. The first, Chapter 11, entitled "It Takes Two People To Confirm the Truth," discuss the relationships and dynamics between male musicians and the various women in their lives. For black women at this time, especially those tied to Black Nationalist politics, there was pressure for them to support their husbands and partners, regardless of how successful they were. As such, women, even those who were artists or musicians, often took on the role of breadwinner so that men could focus on their music without having to find a job. In addition, many women took on the responsibilities of managing the business aspects of their partner's music. This often led to a dynamic where men relied on their female partners.⁹⁶

Wilmer also writes about men as gendered beings, which is rarely done in popular jazz criticism and historiography. In Chapter 11 she describes how with the support of their female partners, men were able, and expected, to put their music first. In fact, men who were unable or unwilling to put their music ahead of their family were looked down upon by other musicians and were often at a disadvantage when trying to make rehearsal or a gig that conflicted with

⁹⁵ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 174.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 191-96. Steve Estes discusses the views on gender roles and masculinity in the teachings of the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers, both of which emphasized that black women should support black men. See chapters four and seven in Steve Estes, *I am a man!: race, manhood, and the civil rights movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

familial responsibilities. Not all black male musicians were interested in prioritizing their music above their families, however, as many musicians such as Milford Graves, Raymond Brown and others valued their family life. Wilmer also discusses the relationship between sex and the music. Many black musicians took advantage of the stereotypical "black stud" image, and in doing so objectified themselves. In addition, many musicians felt that music and sex was connected in several ways: that the music was a kind of conduit for sexuality, that jazz and women are the same thing, that the environment the music is performed in is conducive to sex, and so on.⁹⁷ Throughout this chapter, Wilmer presents myriad views on the social and musical expectations of male musicians, musicians' views about family, sex and women, and the different ways in which male musicians live their lives as men. The chapter highlights the varied experiences, expectations and views of male musicians and shows in several dimensions that they are more complex than the stereotypes about them would suggest.

In Chapter 12, entitled "You Sound Good - for a Woman!," Wilmer moves beyond the relationships between men and women to discuss some of the professional realities of female musicians. In this chapter she makes many of the same observations and critiques that Feather and other critics made in regards to the androcentrism in jazz. She points out that the art form is male dominated, that female musicians are often met with resistance, and the women who are accepted as musicians often had to play a kind of maternal role to their male counterparts. Wilmer notes that jazz is still more biased against female musicians than rock is, and that black female musicians, while they may be viewed marginally better than white women, are still seen as sex objects.⁹⁸ With regards to the status of black women musicians during the 1970s, Wilmer writes that "Her participation in musical endeavours is not only a reflection of the changing role

⁹⁷ Wilmer, *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*, 193-204.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 204-09.

of women in Western society, it is directly connected with the growing acknowledgment by Black men of their failure to respect the contributions that have been made by the women in their lives."⁹⁹ With this quote Wilmer, as is the case throughout the book, demonstrates how societal views on gender affect the lives of musicians.

Wilmer's treatment of the importance of discussing gender issues, sexual politics, and musicians and their partners as gendered beings is a stark departure from most jazz criticism. By writing on these topics Wilmer further brings into relief musicians as real people and helps to outline what gender means in the context of the music and times she writes about. In this way, Wilmer's writing consists of gender projects that challenge common stereotypes and views of musicians and their lives off the band stand which force her writers to rethink what they know about jazz musicians.

Although I divided up the above discussion into three racial projects and three gender projects from *As Serious As Your Life* and *Jazz People*, it is clear that making such a division between race and gender is a bit too tidy. Wilmer's projects, among many other things, demonstrate the intersectionality of race and gender, which is most clearly seen in the gender projects in which black men and black women are the focus. In addition, these projects show additional intersections: between race and capitalism, race and art and intellectualism (which is often denied in stereotypes of black men), women and politics, etc, etc.

These race and gender projects also shape Wilmer's standpoint insularity. Similar to a feminist standpoint, which Hartsock says "exposes the real relations among human beings as inhuman,"¹⁰⁰ Wilmer's writing demonstrates a complex set of relationships in many ways. As outlined above, these include: the relationships between musicians and record labels; ways in

⁹⁹ Ibid., 207.

¹⁰⁰ Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," 37.

which the intellectual work of musicians is discounted; how Eurocentric critics discount the drums because of the instrument's cultural and racial associations; the personal relationships and dynamics between musicians and their partners (which often reflect patriarchal structures); the struggle female musicians face against the androcentric structures in jazz; and, the norms of masculinity a serious musician is expected to live up to. These relationships, although illuminated by a very small and specific population, are often representative of the larger power relations involving race, gender and capitalism at play in American culture. By writing about these relations as manifested in the lives of musicians, Wilmer gives a musicians' standpoint insularity which reveals the complexity of lived experience in a more fleshed out manner than hagiographic or music-focused writing could. In exposing these power inequities, Wilmer helps provide the basis for a re-structuring of social relations. She does similar cultural work in her photography.

Oil paintings leave even the Battle of Britain or Trafalgar strangely silent. Photography, on the other hand, can be as sensitive to sound as it is to light. Good photographs are to be listened to as well as looked at; the better the photograph, the more there is to hear. The best jazz photographs are those saturated in the sound of their subject.

- Geoff Dyer¹⁰¹

Essentially, the jazz greats' fame is widely understood as a consequence of their innate ability or musical genius and not as mediated personae per se. This belief paves the way for jazz icons to be romantically perceived of at one with their instruments, leading inseparable lives from the music they perform and transcending everyday experience through improvised performance.

- Tony Whyton¹⁰²

In her study of the jazz photography of Herman Leonard, K. Heather Pinson describes the general perception people have of the typical jazz musician. He is a "well-dressed African American man playing an instrument, most likely a saxophone or trumpet, with smoke wafting

¹⁰¹ Geoff Dyer, *But beautiful : a book about jazz*, 1st ed. (New York: North Point Press, 1996), ix-x.

¹⁰² Tony Whyton, *Jazz icons: heroes, myths and the jazz tradition* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8-9.

about the stage on which he is playing at a nightclub." Other common images may present the musician with his instrument or playing with a band, shown in profile, "with eyes closed, fully concentrating on the music his is producing. He would exude confidence, individualism, and defiance - the perfect example of the artistic genius."¹⁰³ This common perception of what a jazz musician looks like, is due in part to the impact and influence of jazz photography, and this perception is something that Val Wilmer's photography worked directly against.

In addition to the racial and gender projects in *As Serious As Your Life* and *Jazz People*, photography is another way in which Wilmer set to influence the way people thought about jazz and jazz musicians. It is also a key element to the construction of her standpoint insularity. Wilmer's approach and divergence from many of her peers is immediately apparent in her photograph of trumpeter Lester Bowie, which appeared in the April 29, 1971 issue of *Downbeat*.¹⁰⁴ Whereas many people might hold the image of the typical jazz musician that Pinson describes above, Wilmer provides alternative viewpoints of who jazz musicians are and what they do. The photograph, which accompanies her article on Bowie, shows the trumpeter with his two children. There is nothing in this photo to indicate who the man is or what he does; taken out of the context of a jazz magazine, and unless the viewer recognized Bowie, the photo could be any young African American father with his children. The photograph does not include one of the main signifiers of jazz: an instrument.¹⁰⁵ In addition to lacking any other jazz signifiers, there is nothing in the photo to suggest the family's nationality, language or ethnicity. Wilmer's photograph of the Bowie family, especially when juxtaposed with her article, is representative of Wilmer's overall project: to show musicians as people. Her photo of Bowie

¹⁰³ Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Val Wilmer, "Lester Bowie: Extending the Tradition," *Downbeat*, April 29 1971, 13.

¹⁰⁵ Pinson writes that the instrument in the jazz photograph, especially the saxophone, "narrows the category of music for the viewer" to such an extent that a photograph of a saxophone in a nightclub comes to equal jazz. Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 81.

provides her audience with a more dynamic and complex view of who he is offstage and the relationships in his personal life.¹⁰⁶

Photography has played a crucial role in the ways in which jazz is perceived and the types of images people have in their minds of jazz musicians. Jazz photographs help to not only document the history of the music and the people involved with it, but they help define jazz and shape its narrative.¹⁰⁷ The black and white "man with the horn" photograph, taken in a smoky club, which is typical of the work of Herman Leonard among others, has become an image that "has come to mean jazz."¹⁰⁸ Much of this definition is tied up in social values and racial and gender ideologies. According to Benjamin Cawthra, jazz photography "created a visual rhetoric" about racial ideologies in the United States. Photography was one way in which jazz was constructed as an African American art form, and it has reflected racial values in American society.¹⁰⁹ In addition, Tony Whyton argues that jazz photography helps to make the musicians in them into icons, a process which helps to "support and perpetuate jazz mythologies." As a result of their iconic status, of which photography was crucial in constructing, jazz musicians often become tightly knotted, not only to the dominant social values which they operated in, but to the myths they stand for as well.¹¹⁰ Jazz photography reflects and works through the ideologies that govern social practice and meanings, often creating or perpetuating stereotypes. Having the ability to frame a scene and tell a narrative, jazz photography socially constructs and

¹⁰⁶ *Downbeat* recently republished Wilmer's article on Bowie on its website. In a curious move, the magazine did not include Wilmer's original photograph; rather, they chose what appears to be a press photograph of Bowie where he is dressed in a sharp suit and holding his trumpet. Wilmer, "Lester Bowie: Extending the Tradition," *Downbeat*, http://www.downbeat.com/default.asp?sect=stories&subsect=story_detail&sid=1165, Accessed October 29, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Cawthra, *Blue notes in black and white: photography and jazz*, 7. Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 3-17, 36-43. Whyton, *Jazz icons: heroes, myths and the jazz tradition*, 7-9.

¹⁰⁸ Cawthra, *Blue notes in black and white: photography and jazz*, 103.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-9, 272. Quote on 8.

¹¹⁰ Whyton, *Jazz icons: heroes, myths and the jazz tradition*, 7-12. Quote on 8.

alters reality.¹¹¹ Wilmer's photography provides an alternate narrative and works against the various myths created by jazz photography. In this way, her photography is a key ingredient to her standpoint insularity, as it goes beyond a surface depiction of reality.

In general, jazz photography, especially photography of African American musicians, can be seen as a political act. In an interview from 1991, jazz photographer Herb Snitzer explains that "Jazz photography can be extremely political. . . . When you put a photograph of a black person on a wall, or you put a painting about blacks on a wall, you're making a political as well as an aesthetic statement, especially in this culture, because when we put things on walls, we are, in effect, honoring them, and for anyone to honor a black person, in this culture, is a political statement."¹¹² In her desire to photograph African American musicians, Wilmer makes the same political statement she did by writing about them. By photographing musicians, Wilmer places a high value on the artistic output of a marginalized people playing marginalized and subversive music, and in doing so challenges the established social structure, which is in part based on racism.

Wilmer takes a different approach to jazz photography and has different goals than photographers such as Herman Leonard. She notes how she wanted to "attempt to change consciousness and perception through my pictures."¹¹³ Her influences were the *Life* magazine photographer W. Eugene Smith for his "documentary photography," Snitzer, and Roy de Carava,

¹¹¹ Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 85-86. Whyton notes that photographs do not make their subjects real; rather, they make them "hyper-real." Whyton, *Jazz icons: heroes, myths and the jazz tradition*, 8. Despite all it can do, jazz photography does have its limits. There is much in every photograph that is not shown, and as Cawthra points out, a single photograph often could not capture the shady record business, poor working conditions, and other negative elements that jazz musicians had to face in their daily lives. Cawthra, *Blue notes in black and white: photography and jazz*, 10.

¹¹² Gary Carner, "Jazz Photography: A Conversation with Herb Snitzer," *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 589.

¹¹³ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 136.

who worked with Langston Hughes.¹¹⁴ She is very critical of a lot of jazz photography. "Few photographers, it seemed to me, told you more about the musicians than who they were when they were playing." In addition, Wilmer felt that "the perpetuation of stereotypes that characterises [*sic*] jazz photography was a racist procedure."¹¹⁵ As opposed to other music photographers such as Herman Leonard, who focused on photographing musical performances, Wilmer "wanted to photograph their lives. I knew musicians and I knew there was more to all of them than playing the horn. . . . Musicians had families, interests, concerns, and I wanted to show who they *were* rather than what they did." To that end, she wanted to document musicians' daily lives and daily activities.¹¹⁶ In her photography she wanted "something that told a story as well, and could explain more of the music's mystery."¹¹⁷ Wilmer was more interested in documenting the unfolding of the New Music and avant-garde jazz movement of the 1960s and 1970s as it was happening as opposed to "waiting until it solidified into a safe and unthreatening 'style.'"¹¹⁸ In a review of Wilmer's 1993 photography exhibition at the Special Photographers Company in London, John Fordham describes part of Wilmer's philosophy: "Though this is loosely 'music photography', there's hardly a stage-shot among them. There are musicians practising, hanging out, talking, laughing, contemplating, phoning, elated or exhausted. Some are of stars, but stars off duty - Count Basie playing cards in Bournemouth in 1977, Muddy Waters doing the same in

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 222, 313; John Fordham, "Shots in the dark Laughing, waiting, talking, anything but on stage, is how jazz photographer Val Wilmer has always captured the stars," *The Guardian (pre-1997 Fulltext)*, 1993 Jun 18 1993. In the interview with Snitzer cited above, one sees many parallels between his work and Wilmer's. He is interested in capturing the musicians as people, and like Wilmer, he finds pictures of musicians with horns in their mouths boring. He describes how he likes to present alternative images of musicians, such as his photographs of Duke Ellington, which show Ellington, who is typically depicted as sophisticated and elegant, as very tired. Carner, "Jazz Photography: A Conversation with Herb Snitzer," 561-64, 89. Val Wilmer, "Obituary: Letter: Roy DeCarava," *The Guardian*, 2009 Nov 12 2009.

¹¹⁵ Snitzer also acknowledges the pervasiveness of stereotypes in jazz photography, many of which are race based. Carner, "Jazz Photography: A Conversation with Herb Snitzer," 573-75.

¹¹⁶ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 211. Kalamu ya Salaam, "Herman Leonard: Making Music with Light," *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 242-43.

¹¹⁷ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 245.

Croydon, Cecil Taylor backstage at the Five Spot in a moment of hilarity, Ornette Coleman on the telephone, back to the camera."¹¹⁹ With her approach to photography, one sees her creating personal narratives through pictures, narratives which tell of things far beyond the bandstand.

Wilmer is very aware of the power of photographs. She realized that choosing who and what to shoot was important as it "could have far reaching consequences, depending on the way the subject was viewed in the consuming society." For example, she describes how only taking photographs of black musicians living in poverty could unintentionally reaffirm whites' beliefs and stereotypes that all African Americans lived in poverty. Only showing negative photographs of African Americans, Wilmer believes, can perpetuate racist white beliefs about the place of African Americans and whites in society. To counter these dangers, Wilmer decided in the early 1970s that her photography would be "celebratory." She felt a deep need to be responsible and in control of how her images would be used.¹²⁰ These values extend to Format, the women photography agency Wilmer helped found in 1983. As is the case with her own photography, Format's photographers "focus on people, their everyday lives and the economic and social issues which confront them." They are concerned with how they take their photos, who uses them, where and for what purpose. The agency uses their photos to "document and further the struggles and achievements of under-represented groups."¹²¹ In these ways, Format enacts many of the tenets of feminist standpoint theory.

While Wilmer's photographs appear in all of her books, the most significant collection of them appears in *The Face of Black Music*, which she "intended as a visual celebration of the

¹¹⁹ Fordham, "Shots in the dark Laughing, waiting, talking, anything but on stage, is how jazz photographer Val Wilmer has always captured the stars."

¹²⁰ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 253.

¹²¹ Gray et al., "Format Photographers," 102-03. In addition, Wilmer explained to me that Format "was nothing to do with music, or anything, it was to do with, uh trying to get business going, and getting representation for, for women, both in terms, of, um, the way we were represented in photographs, and also in, um, how we, you know, got work." Wilmer. Telephone interview with author.

various musical strands that existed side by side in Afro-America."¹²² In her introduction, Wilmer writes that "Perhaps few photographers are interested in showing who the musician is when he/she is not actually involved in creativity or in earning a living. My concern is with the individual's inner core rather than the exterior. I hope that as well as capturing the essence of the music, I have managed to explain something about the people, known and unknown, who appear in these pages, as well as letting them speak for themselves. After all, they do it so eloquently."¹²³

Several common strands run throughout *The Face of Black Music*: showing musicians performing, revealing some of the less glamorous aspects of being a professional musician, showing musicians' living conditions, and highlighting their family life. Numerous photographs stand out, but I will highlight four from the book which demonstrate Wilmer's concern with "the individual's inner core" and her wish to "explain something about the people."

Wilmer visited the American south in the early 1970s, photographing numerous blues musicians and their families, New Orleans brass band musicians and second line members, jazz players, and one of a church congregation. Of the many photos Wilmer took of musicians and their families in the Mississippi Delta and the Carolinas, the one of Brother Genie and Sister Hattie Carruthers from Shaw, Mississippi, shown in figure 1, shows some of the pair's living conditions. Wilmer met the pair on one of her trips to the American south in the early 1970s. In *Mama Said There'd Be Days Like This* Wilmer refers to Brother Carruthers, who was known locally as "the elderly fire-and-brimstone guitarist."¹²⁴ The text that accompanies the photo helps provide context. It is a quote from Carruthers: "See that thing yonder [the amplifier]? That cost a mighty lot of money over in Clarksdale. Its purpose is to carry the praising of the Lord for

¹²² Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 272.

¹²³ Wilmer, *The face of Black music; photographs*, no page.

¹²⁴ Wilmer, *Mama said there'd be days like this: my life in the jazz world*, 261.

it says in the Bible, 'Make a loud noise unto the Lord - on the string instruments.' And that's what I'm doing."¹²⁵ The photograph shows Reverend Carruthers in his house, which Wilmer refers to "that rough little house."¹²⁶ One sees its dilapidated condition: the wood floors are worn out, and there are gaps between the boards; the wall covering is coming off from the brick walls; and the lighting is a simple bulb without a fixture. Rev. Carruthers' furniture is basic, and there is nothing to indicate the couple's financial situation is anything but poor. Wilmer's photo, along with the several others she took of blues musicians, is a stark demonstration of the low socioeconomic status that many African Americans in the south occupied.

¹²⁵ Wilmer, *The face of Black music; photographs*, np.

¹²⁶ Wilmer. Telephone interview with author. The story behind the photograph of the Carruthers demonstrates that photography is not just a process of showing up in a club or concert venue and witnessing mythical and timeless performances. Rather, it is a process that deals with real people, in real situations. Wilmer recalled that Rev. Carruthers:

nearly shot me dead, that guy. . . . I was with my friend, we were travelling around together, and we had been invited there by the two ladies we were staying with, and sure, they said "Oh come, come to his, his place," you see. And I, well I wasn't [laughs] aware of what that means, that sign that says "posted," when you have a sign that says "posted" on the, on a field or something. Um, I didn't realize that meant don't trespass. Um, and anyway, so we just walked onto the field, and, you know, right when he got there he got this shotgun in his hand, and he said, you know, actually, I think he's almost blind, that man. And he says oh yeah, he said "Well I, the white man tells me to shoot anybody that walks on this field." I said, "Well you knew we were coming to see you." And he said, "yeah, but that's what he told me." Well I don't know what he was supposed to do. I don't think we could holler from the road, it was too far for that, honestly. But he was waiving his gun around, you know? It was kind of, it was slightly frightening, I wouldn't say I was that frightened. But uh, [chuckles] it could have happened when I look back on it now.



Figure 1 Brother Genie and Sister Hattie Carruthers. Shaw, Mississippi, 1973. Photo courtesy of Val Wilmer.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Wilmer, *The face of Black music; photographs*, np.

Two photographs demonstrate particularly well the less glamorous elements professional musicians face while being on the road. Many of the most famous jazz photographs, such as those by Herman Leonard, capture canonical artists performing the music that would later be canonized; however, photos of musicians off the bandstand are less common. The photos shown below of drummer Sonny Payne and tenor saxophonist Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, figures 2 and 3 respectively, show different experiences a professional touring musician exist on a regular basis. The photo of Payne on the Count Basie Orchestra tour bus is one of four pictures in the book taken on a tour bus - one on the Basie bus, the other two on the B.B. King Orchestra bus. The photo of Payne shows one of the realities of the road: exhaustion. Two men are shown in the background resting, while Payne sleeps in his cramped bus seat. His top button is loosened, as is his tie, and one can only assume that he is catching some sleep while either on his way from or going to the next gig.

The photograph of Davis is one of several photographs in *The Face of Black Music* that show musicians in their dressing or hotel rooms getting ready for a gig or relaxing between gigs. Here Wilmer shows Davis adjusting his tie, or perhaps buttoning his jacket. The trumpet on the counter suggests that Davis, one of the prominent tenor saxophonists of his generation, was sharing the dressing room with at least one other musician. The room has brick and cinder block walls, and is quite basic, far from the type of accommodations one might expect a star to enjoy. Davis, like Payne, looks tired, and his wrinkled jacket suggests he just pulled it out of his suitcase or garment bag. What both photographs demonstrate is that life on the road is difficult, involving sleeping on a full bus, living out of a suitcase and being constantly on the move. In addition, both shots provide a counter narrative to the images of the heroic and almost super-human-like one often sees in jazz photography. The viewer of a typical jazz photograph of a

musician performing on stage or in the recording studio does not get the whole picture of what the musician experiences when they aren't playing. Wilmer's photographs help to fill in these gaps and provide her audience with a fuller depiction.



Figure 2 Sonny Payne, Count Basie Orchestra. London, 1963. Photo courtesy of Val Wilmer.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Ibid.

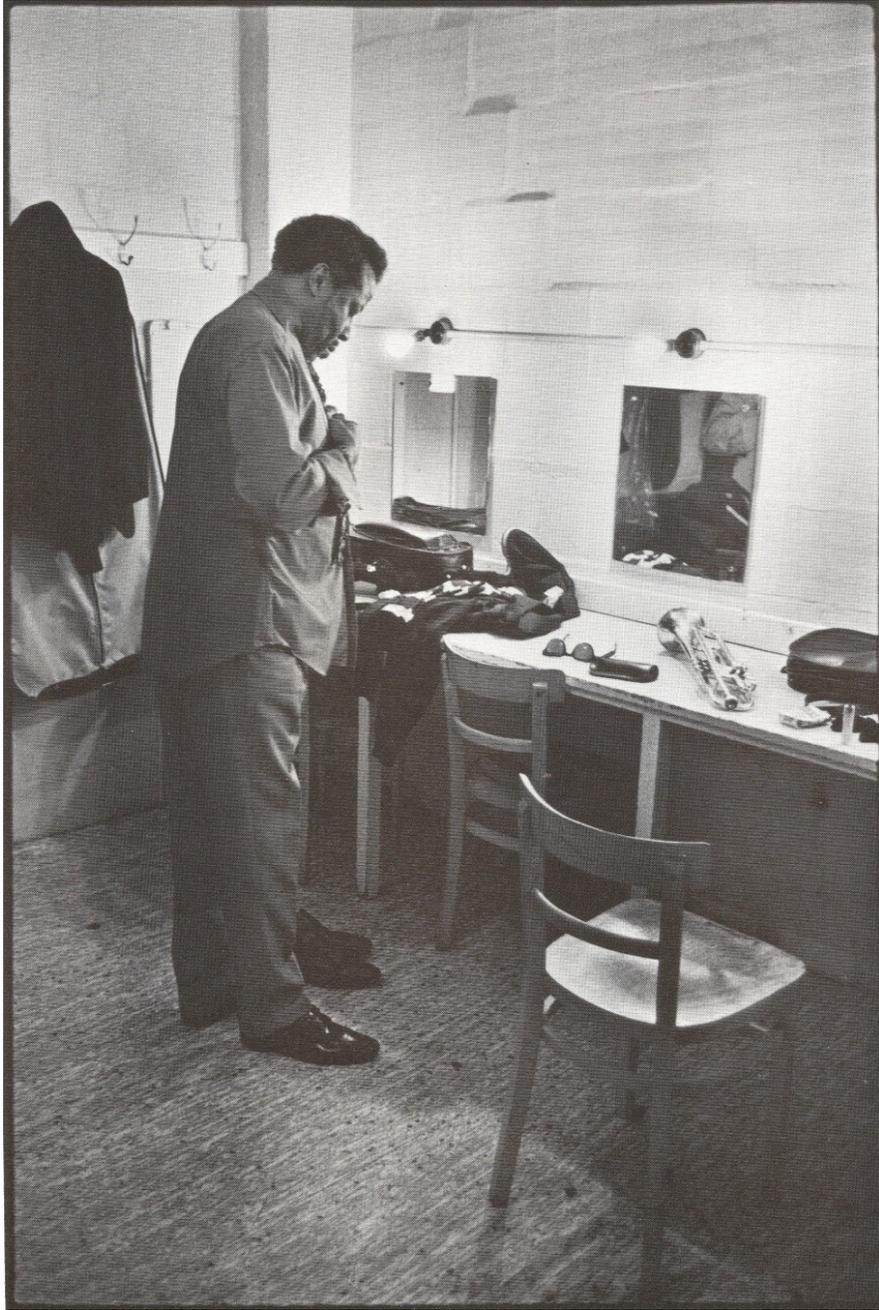


Figure 3 Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis. Colston Hall, Bristol, England, 1974. Photo courtesy of Val Wilmer.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Wilmer included several images of musicians with their families, with or without their instruments. There are blues musicians with their children and grandchildren, which are often taken in a domestic setting. Like the photograph of Lester Bowie and his children, Wilmer's photo of Ray and Kyela Draper has no indication that Mr. Draper is a musician; it looks like it is taken in his home, there are no instruments, sheet music, or any other musical paraphernalia. Had the photo not appeared in a book of musical photography, the picture could be of any family. Her 1972 picture of Frank and Dove Clayton in the BBC radio studios, shown in figure 4, eloquently juxtaposes Clayton's career as a musician with his role as a father. It shows Clayton, who was the original drummer for the Revolutionary Ensemble as a worker, not an entertainer.¹³⁰ In fact, from this picture, it is possible that Clayton is not even a musician; he could have been a janitor, maintenance worker, recording engineer or employee of the studio or record label. By including his son Dove in the picture Wilmer reminds her viewer that musicians have responsibilities and lives outside of their music. In addition, and as is the case with the photo of the Drapers, Wilmer shows her viewers that Clayton's identity cannot be neatly summed up by the term "musician."

¹³⁰ The experience Clayton had with the Revolutionary Ensemble speaks to the gender and sexual politics Wilmer outlines in *As Serious As Your Life* and to the gender projects I discussed above. Clayton and his wife, who was a singer, wanted to have an egalitarian marriage, which meant Clayton often had to watch the children. This choice led to the Revolutionary Ensemble deciding that Clayton was not the best drummer for the group, as "they wanted to be free spirits." This is another example of the ways in which a musician who valued his family life risked being looked down upon by fellow musicians. Wilmer. Telephone interview with author.



Figure 4 Frank and Dove Clayton. BBC Radio Studios, Maida Vale, London, 1972. Photo courtesy of Val Wilmer.¹³¹

¹³¹ Wilmer, *The face of Black music; photographs*, np.

In addition to showing the more human side of these musicians, the above photographs challenge two tropes common in jazz photography: myth and masculinity. Jazz images help to create a myth, and in the context of jazz, the "figure of the black musician creates an exciting story of racial myth." In jazz photography, jazz musicians become mythic heroes. Any myth "supplants the historical account and mundane occurrences that musicians face."¹³² Or as Roland Barthes puts it, "myth abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences."¹³³ A feminist standpoint, then, challenges devices such as myths. Pinson notes that many of Herman Leonard's photographs make us want to be there in the scene with the musicians, thus, "our desire to partake in the moment helps to perpetuate the myth of the jazz musician."¹³⁴ Many of Wilmer's photographs do not have the same effect of making the viewer want to be there. Her viewers may not want to be on a crowded bus traveling for hours with Sonny Payne, getting dressed in an unfamiliar and generic dressing room night after night, or living in poverty. The realities of the existence of these musicians Wilmer shows us help to dissolve the myth, shedding light on the complexity of human existence. Because many jazz myths are based upon or informed by "man with a horn" photography, any work, such as Wilmer's, which operates under a logic that does not support such myths works to undo those myths. By working against these myths, Wilmer's photography challenges the phenomena that Whyton describes whereby musicians are becoming "inseparable from the underlying ideologies of the dominant social order itself" and "from the myths they represent."¹³⁵ In this way, Wilmer's photography divorces musicians from these ideologies and myths. In Wilmer's photographs, jazz musicians cease to be mythic heroes and begin to be real people. Her

¹³² Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 60, 61.

¹³³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 143.

¹³⁴ Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 77.

¹³⁵ Whyton, *Jazz icons: heroes, myths and the jazz tradition*, 12.

photographs work to undo, or at the very least problematize, the common myths created by jazz photography, and in doing so, help to build her standpoint insularity.

Wilmer's photos, especially those of Carruthers, Payne, Davis and Clayton, provide an alternative to the form of black masculinity that is often the standard depicted in photographs by photographers such as Herman Leonard. In the more common jazz photography, Pinson notes, "visual representation of the African American man must project a strong sense of masculinity." This masculinity is demonstrated and depicted through the musician's body, his strength, build and dominance.¹³⁶ Whyton observes that black men and a "masculine ideal" signify and stand for authentic jazz performance. Black musicians, as they are depicted in most jazz photography, become heroic icons who are removed from their context, exhibit ideal masculine values, reach "almost god-like status," and help to perpetuate patriarchy. As a result, the heroic jazz icon helps to shape the historical narrative of jazz.¹³⁷ The four photos above work against these practices in several ways. They do not match up with a masculine ideal which values strength, dominance, youth, etc. Carruthers and Davis are not young men, and although Payne and Clayton are, Wilmer photographed them in a way that does not convey strength or dominance. The viewer almost gets a feeling of vulnerability in the photographs of Carruthers, Davis and Payne. The photographs' settings - home, bus, and dressing room - are not conducive to capturing a mythic image of the musicians. And mythic jazz photography never shows a musician with his son. In these photographs one sees a diverse presentation of black masculinity, none of which match up with the masculinity portrayed in iconic and mythic jazz photographs.

Through her photography Wilmer presents a stark challenge to the dominant ways in which black jazz musicians are typically constructed and perceived. In doing so, she undoes the

¹³⁶ Pinson, *The jazz image: seeing music through Herman Leonard's photography*, 51.

¹³⁷ Whyton, *Jazz icons: heroes, myths and the jazz tradition*, 16, 34-37.

processes which calcify jazz musicians, demystifies them, and shows them as fuller people than other jazz photography might. Just as her writing in *Jazz People* and *As Serious As Your Life* that I discussed above constitutes racial and gender projects, so too does her photography, as it forces her viewers to consider and reconsider what race and gender means in relation to jazz and those who create it. Wilmer's approach to photography shapes her insularity in two ways. First, her approach to photographing musicians and her choice to not frame them as mythic icons may reveal something about the musical boundaries of her insularity. Whyton argues that icons, when removed from context come to stand for authenticity, with their canonical works representing canonical borders.¹³⁸ Following Whyton's argument, by photographing musicians in the context of their lives, Wilmer is not commenting on the authenticity of the music or stating any firm musical boundaries of her insularity. Rather, her refusal to do so compliments her view that jazz and black music cannot be separated by genre lines, that it must be considered part of the changing same.

Second, it reflects her political practice and standpoint insularity. Here again, I turn to myth. Barthes suggests that "*myth is depoliticized speech*" and that myth "purifies" things and "makes them innocent." Myth works to naturalize objects and phenomena, and "organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves." Myth makes things self evident.¹³⁹ One's relationship with a myth is based on the ability to use that myth.¹⁴⁰ By not following the mythologizing practice of photographers like Herman Leonard, Wilmer prevents the subjects of her photographs from being perceived as iconic, mythic heroes. As such, this practice makes it harder for people to use her images, which

¹³⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 143. Italics in original.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 144.

gives her subjects a sense of agency. In addition, Wilmer's abstinence of creating myth through photography reinforces the position that life is complex, and that it cannot be distilled into a purified and innocent narrative. Her photography is an essential element to her standpoint insularity, in that it makes visible a deeper level of reality, exposing the society in which her subjects live and the social structures they are forced to negotiate.

CONCLUSION

A piece from *The Wire* in 1993 helps sum up part of Wilmer's influence and importance. The uncredited author wrote: "Passionate, committed, often angry, always cogent, Wilmer's influence on the British jazz scene is probably incalculable - certainly she has tried to keep it alert to the genesis of this music, in struggle and deprivation, and to the enormous contribution of 20th century thought of Black American musicians, from Armstrong and earlier right up to the present."¹⁴¹ I would add that Wilmer has kept jazz scenes well beyond Britain alert to the intellectual and artistic contribution of African Americans. In her work to relay the genesis of the music and the struggles of those who made it to a wider public, Wilmer has made a substantial critique of the social relations which shape the environment the music is made. She has done this through both her writing and photography, with the latter activity not generally considered to be considered jazz criticism. I would argue, however that her photography should be considered as such.

While it is clear that Wilmer's goals in her music photography and writing are similar - to show musicians as real people - she thinks of writing and photography as separate endeavors. For example, throughout her career she has often put one activity aside and focused on the other. She explains:

¹⁴¹ "Val Wilmer," 10.

Well the thing is, it's very hard to do two things at the same time. What I've found lately is, you know there periods in my life where I wanted people to think of me as a photographer, and I put my writing aside. Now, I choose not to take photographs for a variety of reasons, some of which are physical. Also, as I said before, you know, you get tired of doing things. . . . Now I really cannot see how anybody can do the same thing all their lives, I just don't understand it. There is some very intelligent people who do. They're not people who just, you know, can only do one thing, but, I just think it's, it's good to keep changing.

As far as her current focus on writing, she says that "and I'm now doing what I feel that I have to do, which is to, document the lives of uh, the people who lived in this country, and made lives themselves here."¹⁴² For Wilmer, although she is considering buying a digital camera to start taking photographs again, the best ways to achieve her goals now is through writing. This may have to do with her current focus on working as a historian. When dealing with history, it is impossible to go back in time and take photographs. Whereas when she was a journalist, photography was one way to document what she was writing about as it was happening. However, I would argue that regardless of when, how or why she privileged one activity above the other - whether she needed to change what she was doing, or felt that writing is the best way to document the lives of people in the U.K. - that her music photography and writing both had similar goals. And as such, both activities contribute to her overall project of showing musicians as real people. In this way, photography and writing play key roles in the construction of her standpoint insularity.

At the end of *As Serious As Your Life* Wilmer quotes feminist historian Sheila

Rowbotham, who writes:

In order to create an alternative an oppressed group must at once shatter the self-reflecting world which encircles it and, at the same time, project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor it has to become visible to itself. All revolutionary movements create their own ways of seeing. But this is a result of great labour. People who are without names, who do not know themselves, who have no culture, experience a

¹⁴² Wilmer. Telephone interview with author.

kind of paralysis of consciousness. The first step is to connect and learn to trust one another.¹⁴³

In this quote we see some of the elements of standpoint theory - namely that an oppressed group must "project its own image onto history" and that it must "become visible to itself." This is precisely the work that Wilmer's music writing and photography does - examining and portraying the lived experiences of black musicians helps to make these experiences visible, removing the "paralysis of consciousness," making action possible.

Despite quoting Rowbotham, Wilmer does not feel that feminist or socialist writers influenced her work. She does not consider herself to be a feminist writer, but she does consider herself to be a feminist in her personal life. She explained to me that

I don't think there's anything much in my writing that's particularly feminist. . . . I don't think it [*As Serious As Your Life*] can be regarded as a particularly feminist, critique of anything. . . . And the only reason I quoted from Sheila Rowbotham was because I just, something in one of her books that sort of hit me, you know, and then it had a parallel with something I was writing about music. But, I didn't sort of go through - I've read a share of books, but I didn't go through her books looking for ideas that coincided with mine where music was concerned. . . . I haven't read any sort of feminist treatises of any kind for quite a while, so it's just a state of mind really.¹⁴⁴

Here it is clear that Wilmer does not see her work, *As Serious As Your Life*, in this case, as being particularly feminist, or being inspired or influenced by feminist work. However, as I have argued, her writing and photography can be read as being feminist and doing much of the work of feminism, especially as related to standpoint theory.

This has several implications for how we view or understand the concept of canon and insularities. First, it serves as an example of the construction of an insularity as a way to reorder social relations, which I discussed in more theoretical terms in chapter one. Wilmer's states her

¹⁴³ Sheila Rowbotham, quoted in *As Serious As Your Life*, 257 (Woman's Consciousness, Man's World, London, 1973, no page given).

¹⁴⁴ Wilmer. Telephone interview with author.

politics and outlines her goals in clear terms. As I will further discuss in the conclusion, Wilmer's insularity is a reactive maneuver and strategy to counter the negative effects of the jazz canon. Second, as her photography was a large part of the construction of her standpoint insularity, I argue that insularities do not have to be created through words alone. Words are not the only signifiers through which one can communicate a message. This point in and of itself has implications for the study of jazz criticism. Namely, that photography and other forms of wordless iteration can be considered jazz criticism, and therefore should be studied to examine the role they play in canon and insularity construction. Third, as demonstrated in Wilmer's work, race and gender projects, as well as discussions of economics and other themes are essential parts of much of jazz criticism and the construction of insularities. Fourth, insularities are not created solely on evaluating the sounds coming out of one's speakers. While judging music only on its sonic manifestation is in and of itself a way to deal, or to not deal, with discourses of gender, race, etc., Wilmer's standpoint insularity forces one to recognize and accept the importance of how these discourses shape the music. Despite the fact that much of Wilmer's work does not deal specifically, or only with music, she reminds us that music is a social practice. Therefore, even though the canon or a particular insularity may not explicitly engage with, or acknowledge the importance of social discourses, they are there, under the surface, influencing the way people draw the borders around music. Wilmer's standpoint insularity reminds us of this fact, and in doing so, offers not only a critique of social and musical inequities the canon helps to perpetuate, but it provides the basis of further critique.

Chapter 4: "Jazz Paracriticism" and the Anti-Insularity Project of Nathaniel Mackey's *Bedouin Hornbook*

Language is symbolic action, frequently compensatory action, addressing deprivations that it helps its users to overcome.

- Nathaniel Mackey¹

INTRODUCTION

Whereas Leonard Feather and Val Wilmer provided challenges to the jazz canon through various reformulations and constructions of alternative insularities, Nathaniel Mackey rejects the idea and value of insularities and the ideologies which lead to their construction. In contrast to Feather and Wilmer, Mackey deconstructs insularities. Through his epistolary novel *Bedouin Hornbook*, which is the first volume of the ongoing *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate* series, Mackey does four things. First, he rejects divisions and boundaries between genre lines and the values that drive insularities, preferring an unbounded conception of music. Second, throughout the work Mackey portrays music as a process, reflecting his attempt to transform jazz from noun back to verb, which is partially an anti-canonical and anti-insularity project. As I will discuss below, Mackey's conception of jazz as a noun or verb is built from Amiri Baraka's. Third, through Mackey's construction of narratives and his treatment of music as a process, he gives his characters agency to create their own subjectivity and music. Fourth, the book challenges common notions of what constitutes jazz criticism and the work that it does. As I will outline below, *Bedouin Hornbook* is a political novel and work of jazz criticism designed to enact social change, by way of a process that relies on rupturing genre insularities.

¹ Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Raleigh, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 79.

In challenging and rupturing insularities, Mackey engages with multiple insularities, using them for different ends than those who constructed them.

Bedouin Hornbook is experimental in form, and as J. Edward Mallot notes, it "rejects easy classification, despite the temptation to screw the text into preexisting sets of literary acceptance." "Ultimately," Mallot writes, "the text seems to reject classification of any order, preferring to revel in the possibilities - more than in the full realizations - of a text that offers letters, song lyrics, convoluted diagrams, and accounts of dreams that rattle and hum meanings, a cacophony that somehow sounds correct."² The novel is born of the process that Mackey calls "discrepant engagement," which entails grouping together elements that seemingly do not fit together. *Bedouin Hornbook's* multitude of disparate musical references and its protagonist, N.'s vivid and complex musical descriptions represent the author's views that lines drawn around genre are irrelevant and constraining. N. and his band are influenced by music from a diversity of genres and cultures, and for them jazz and improvised music communicate and resonate with cultural meaning.

This chapter shows how *Bedouin Hornbook* functions as what Mackey calls elsewhere a "paracritical hinge," in that its writing, which transcends genre and style, is a literary representation of the musical and cultural values it espouses. Mackey defines a paracritical hinge as "a type of fiction that wants to be a door or to support a door or to open a door permitting flow between disparate orders of articulation." It is meant to permit "flow between statement and metastatement, analysis and expressivity, criticism and performance, music and literature, and so forth."³ I argue that *Bedouin Hornbook* is a significant work of jazz criticism

² J. Edward Mallot, "Sacrificial Limbs, Lambs, Iambs, and I Ams: Nathaniel Mackey's Mythology of Loss," *Contemporary Literature* 45, no. 1 (2004): 135, 36.

³ Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 211.

that attempts to permit flow in many dimensions. First, for the reader who places the novel's musical references into genres, the novel permits flow across, among and between different insularities. Second, for the characters in the book, flow occurs across, among and between different musical styles and cultural practices. In the world of the novel's characters, definable genres of music do not exist, singular or multiple. As such, without the calcifying influence of genre lines, flow occurs between dynamic processes as opposed to fixed lines around genre and/or insularity.

The "para" prefix in the term "paracritical" refers to "an auxiliary, accessory relationship to criticism, a near equation with or a close resemblance to criticism." The term, Mackey explains, "wants to suggest that improvisation, the pursuit of new expressivity, whether musical or literary, is an operation best characterized by the prefix *para* - an activity supplemental to more firmly established disciplines and dispositions, an activity that hinges on a near but divergent identity with given disciplines and dispositions."⁴ Influenced by a practice that actively seeks to challenge boundaries, categories, identity descriptions, etc., and working as a device that allows conversation between different genres and modes of communication, *Bedouin Hornbook* is designed to do cultural work. Unlike a traditional piece of jazz criticism such as an album or concert review, think piece or artist profile, its form as a postmodern epistolary novel that discusses and evaluates jazz and improvised music gives it its "para" quality. Although it is not quite jazz criticism in the traditional sense, as I will discuss below it does much of the same work as such criticism. By challenging the jazz canon's values through a new form of writing, I argue that the novel's cultural work is performative, meant to challenge and remake the social relations dictated by the writing that creates and supports the jazz canon. Informed by Mackey's concept of discrepant engagement, and working as a paracritical hinge, *Bedouin Hornbook* is a

⁴ Ibid., 212.

piece of jazz criticism, or rather what I call "jazz paracriticism," which can be read as a work meant to challenge the jazz canon's values and the social structure that the canon supports.

This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: what is the insularity or insularities that Mackey challenges? Why does he challenge these insularities? How does he engage in these challenges? What are the results, i.e., what cultural work does the novel do? Are his challenges effective, and if so, in what ways? And perhaps most importantly, how can we understand the cultural work of *Bedouin Hornbook* in relation to other types of jazz criticism? The answer to some of these questions has to do with my characterization of the novel engaging in an anti-insularity project, which is of course, different from the contributions of Leonard Feather and Val Wilmer.

After providing a brief overview of Nathaniel Mackey's works and his intellectual background and influences, this chapter discusses Mackey's anti-insularity project as manifested in *Bedouin Hornbook*. The first section outlines the ideological and philosophical reasons why Mackey eschews the creation and maintenance of boundary lines, such as those that lead to the creation of insularities. Key to this section is a discussion of Mackey's critique of the change in the word jazz from verb to noun, in which he builds off of Amiri Baraka. I also outline Mackey's concept of discrepant engagement, which is guiding process practice *Bedouin Hornbook*. The second section shows how *Bedouin Hornbook* executes Mackey's critique of the values that lead to the creation and maintenance of insularities. This section includes a brief overview of the novel and puts it into conversation with the practice jazz fiction and with specific texts by Geoff Dyer and Michael Ondaatje. It is here where I discuss "jazz paracriticism" in more depth. The bulk of this section provides and analyzes four examples from *Bedouin Hornbook* to show how the novel executes Mackey's critique. The third section analyzes the novel's cultural work in

terms of it as a post-modern novel, and related to art, aesthetics in politics. This final section employs the theoretical work of Brian McHale, Jean Francois Lyotard, David Harvey, Frederic Jameson and Jacques Ranciere to help explain and identify the cultural work that *Bedouin Hornbook* does. I discuss how as a piece of post-modern fiction, *Bedouin Hornbook* works to create narratives, subjectivity and agency for its characters. In addition, I outline the ways in which the novel navigates the discursive terrain of jazz criticism in its work to break down, not construct, insularities and to permit flow between insularities.

There is a significant amount of scholarship on Mackey's work, especially his poetry. There is less work addressing *Bedouin Hornbook* specifically, and this chapter is the first to study Mackey's novel as jazz criticism in relation to its work in regards to the jazz canon. There is some work on the musical references in *Bedouin Hornbook*. A. Sarah Hreha and Scott Hreha's annotated discography of the novel's references provides a valuable contextualization and analysis of the novel's musical references, which is a subject I discuss below. Aldon Lynn Nielsen, J. Edward Mallot, Fritz Gysin, Paul Hoover, and David Kress among others both explore the vast number of meanings that Mackey's poetics allows and discuss the problems interpreting the novel.⁵ These authors are concerned with, among other things, the grammatical and narrative structures and organizing principles of the work, and hermeneutic strategies. I am most interested in the novel's function as a work of jazz criticism in the similar ways we think about articles, essays and reviews published in venues such as *Downbeat* or *The New York Times* to be jazz criticism.

⁵ Aldon Lynn Nielsen, "N + 1: Before-the Fact Reading in Nathaniel Mackey's Postcontemporary Music," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000). Mallot, "Sacrificial Limbs, Lambs, Iams, and I Ams: Nathaniel Mackey's Mythology of Loss." Fritz Gysin, "Double-Jointed Time in Nathaniel Mackey's Jazz Fiction," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000). Paul Hoover, "Pair of Figures for Eshu: Doubling of Consciousness in the Work of Kerry James Marshall and Nathaniel Mackey," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000). David C. Kress, "Middle Voice Moves in Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run", " *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000).

This chapter follows the work of Farah Griffin, Sherrie Tucker and Meta DuEwa Jones who conceptualize poetry and fiction as jazz criticism. Including fiction and poetry under the umbrella of jazz criticism along with more traditional jazz criticism allows scholars to examine a large amount of work that represents, evaluates and shapes the ways in which they think about jazz. Griffin argues that African American authors, specifically Sherley Ann Williams and Toni Cade Bambara, "use fiction as a vehicle that allows them to respond to discourses surrounding the music." Their writing is important because they highlight "aspects of jazz communities often unseen in writings about the music."⁶ Tucker argues that jazz fiction can function in a way most jazz criticism cannot, in that it can render visible previously unseen participants in jazz.⁷ Acknowledging, as Tucker and Jones do, that much of the mainstream criticism and chronicling of jazz has excluded the voices of marginalized subjects, it is important to look at other sources of jazz criticism, such as fiction and poetry. This allows us to widen, challenge and complicate our understanding of what jazz means, and to give a voice to those who may have been silenced by mainstream jazz criticism.⁸

Although the word "jazz" almost never appears in *Bedouin Hornbook*, I conceptualize, rather than categorize, *Bedouin Hornbook* as jazz criticism in two main ways. First, while Mackey does not label the music (either fictional or real) "jazz," most of the novel's music has at one time been considered as such by the critical establishment. In fact much of the music Mackey addresses resides well inside the jazz canon. Although one may label most of the novel's music which comes from the African diaspora to be "black music," or other names, I

⁶ Farah Jasmine Griffin, "It Takes Two People to Confirm the Truth: The Jazz Fiction of Sherley Ann Williams and Toni Cade Bambara," in *Big Ears: Listening for Gender in Jazz Studies*, ed. Nichole T. Rustin and Sherrie Tucker (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), 349-50.

⁷ Sherrie Tucker, "'Where the Blues and the Truth Lay Hiding': Rememory of Jazz in Black Women's Fiction," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 13, no. 2 (1993): 27-28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26. Meta DuEwa Jones, *The muse is music: jazz poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to spoken word* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 129-30.

consider *Bedouin Hornbook* to be jazz criticism because it deals with music which has been categorized as "jazz." Second, and perhaps most importantly, the novel meets the definition of jazz criticism I laid out in Chapter One. As I discussed, jazz criticism does many things: it describes the music, it educates readers, it historicizes the music, and it provides a value judgment. There are brief sections in N.'s letters to the Angel of Dust, which if pulled out of a fictional context and placed into a non-fiction one, that read like jazz criticism and engages in jazz criticism's tasks. About tenor saxophonist Pharoah Sanders' solo on "My Favorite Things" from John Coltrane's *Coltrane Live at the Village Vanguard Again!* album, N. writes: "what gets me about Pharoah's solo is the way he treats the melody toward the end of it, coming on to it with a stuttering, jittery, tongue-tied articulation which appears to say that the simple amenities or naive consolations of so innocuous a tune have long since broken down."⁹ When relaying a performance by the fictional Boneyard Brass Octet, N. describes how the group's trumpeter Dewey

came on with the sputtering eloquence (if not opulence) of a Bill Dixon, while Tyrone nicked one's ears with a knifelike pointedness worthy of muted Miles. The self-predicating ordeal of Dewey's Dixonian approach rubbed against the slickness of what Tyrone proposed, the result of which was a splintered voice which came off like an elapsed or elusive aspect of itself. . . .It was some of the most heartfelt trumpet work I've ever heard. . . .All while this went on Dilip laid down a repeated bass drum to snare drum to sock cymbal figure which managed to be dirgelike, militaristic and funky at the same time. Rashid pumped away on tuba while Shango drifted in and out on organ in a way which had a definite 'dub' quality to it.¹⁰

In these two examples one finds Mackey's narrator engaging in many of the practices of jazz criticism: he describes the music to his reader, relays to his reader his positive impressions, and attempts to convince his audience that what he heard was valuable. These activities are required of the jazz critic, and Mackey's narrator succeeds at them. Throughout *Bedouin Hornbook*

⁹ Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, 75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

Mackey's narrator and characters address and evaluate jazz, and in doing so, this book can be considered jazz criticism.

MACKEY'S ANTI-INSULARITY PROJECT IN *BEDOUIH HORNBOOK*

Nathaniel Mackey, born in 1947, is one of the most prolific American poets, novelists, editors and critics of his generation. In addition to the *From a Broken Bottle* series, Mackey is the author of nine books of poetry, two books of literary criticism, co-editor of two collections of poetry, and the editor of the literary magazine *Hambone*. He also recorded an album of his poetry, entitled *Strick: Song of the Andoumboulou 16-25*. He was the longtime host of the jazz, improvisation and world music radio show entitled Tanganyika Strut on the Santa Cruz, California radio station KUSP. Mackey is currently the Reynolds Price Professor of Creative Writing at Duke University.¹¹

Mackey is influenced by a wide variety of writers from disparate literary traditions and cultures. In addition to poets such as Langston Hughes, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot and Amiri Baraka, Mackey is influenced by the Black Mountain poets, such as Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov. Caribbean writers such as Wilson Harris, Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Aime Cesair, the French novelists Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarrointe, and Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz also inform Mackey's work.¹² Given the

¹¹ Mackey's poetry includes: *Four for Trane* (1978); *Septet for the End of Time* (1983); *Eroding Witness* (1985); *Outlantish* (1992); *School of Udhra* (1993); *Song of the Andoumboulou: 18-20* (1994); *Whatsaid Serif* (1998); *Splay Anthem* (2006); and *Nod House* (2011). His books of literary criticism are entitled *Discrepant Engagement: Dissonance, Cross-Culturality, and Experimental Writing*, and *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews*. He co edited, with Art Lange *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose*, and with Carolyn Kizer, John Hollander, Robert Hass, and Marjorie Perloff *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century*. "Nathaniel Mackey," www.poets.org, <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/468>, accessed 4 June, 2013; "Tanganykia Strut," www.kusp.org/playlists/strut, accessed 6 September, 2013; Paul Naylor, "Introduction," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000): 500.

¹² Nathaniel Mackey, "Interview by Christopher Funkhouser," in *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 251-53. Nathaniel Mackey, "Interview by

influences of such a diverse group of writers it is no surprise that Mackey is influenced and inspired by the various cultures and histories these authors come from and address. Paul Naylor notes that "the cultural mix in [Mackey's] work is astonishing: West African cosmology, Andalusian music, Arabic poetry, Caribbean fiction, and African-American music, to name a few of the most prominent stops on Mackey's cross-cultural journey." According to Naylor, Mackey's engagement with multi- and cross-cultural subjects set him "apart from his predecessors and peers."¹³ This interest in and engagement with "multi- and cross-cultural subjects" is one of the most telling aspects of Mackey's writing and criticism.

Music plays an important role in much of Mackey's work, so much so that Brent Hayes Edwards argues that Mackey's work "inheres most insistently in its engagement with music."¹⁴ Music has always been important to Mackey, and he recalls that "music was pretty close to and bound up with the religious with me." He is interested in states of trance, possession, dance as a form of worship and how those coincide with musical experiences. For Mackey, "music includes so much: it's social, it's religious, it's metaphysical, it's aesthetic, it's expressive, it's creative, it's destructive. It just covers so much. It's the biggest, most inclusive thing that I could put forth if I were to choose one single thing."¹⁵

The relationship between the musical and the verbal plays a key role in *From a Broken Bottle*. Throughout Mackey's work readers find "examples of music straining towards speech."¹⁶ The series, Mackey states, "builds in large part on the sense of correspondences between music and verbal discourse that has long had a good deal of currency among African American

Peter O'Leary," in *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 287. Mackey, "Interview by Charles H. Rowell," 302.

¹³ Naylor, "Introduction," 501.

¹⁴ Brent Hayes Edwards, "Notes on Poetics regarding Mackey's "Song"," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000): 572.

¹⁵ Mackey, "Interview by Christopher Funkhouser," 252.

¹⁶ Edwards, "Notes on Poetics regarding Mackey's "Song"," 573.

musicians and audiences."¹⁷ As I will outline below, Mackey's exploration of the ability of music to communicate is one of the more striking elements in *From a Broken Bottle*. Mackey explains the motivations behind his engagement with music

[it] has partly to do with trying to free the sense of what language does and what writing does by invoking the example of music, where, especially in instrumental music, what we're listening to are by no means denotative sounds yet we have the sense that something very meaningful is being conveyed nonetheless. That fact serves as a provocation for language uses that cultivate apprehensions of meaning which are not carried at the denotative level, uses of language which get into areas of resonance and gesture that can be as meaningful and as expressive as the denotative functions of language. We hear a word and it denotes something, but in addition to that there are communicative and expressive properties that have to do with the tone of voice with which the word is uttered, the connection of that word to other words, rhythmically, phonologically, and syntactically, and so forth. Different grammatical arrangements, for example, elicit different responses. Music has been and continues to be a teacher and a case in point for me of such nondenotative possibilities.¹⁸

The communicative potential of music and its ability to signify via non-verbal means is one of the more prominent elements of *Bedouin Hornbook*. As I will outline later in greater detail, the stories the members of the Mystic Horn Society tell through their instruments complicates and challenges common conceptions of the meanings of jazz music.

In addition to music, mythology plays an important aspect in Mackey's work. For example, in his first book of poetry, *Eroding Witness*, Mackey incorporates the diverse traditions, myths, cultural artifacts and rituals from Cuban Santería, Dogon mythology, North African petroglyphs, Haitian voodoo, the Koran and the Egyptian Book of the Dead.¹⁹ As I will discuss later, mythology, traditions and non-Western belief systems often inform much of the music in *Bedouin Hornbook*. Much of Mackey's interest in drawing from mythology in his

¹⁷ Mackey, "Interview by Paul Naylor," 329.

¹⁸ Mackey, "Interview by Charles H. Rowell," 314.

¹⁹ Nathaniel Mackey, *Eroding witness: poems* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). Andrew Mossin, "Unveiling Expectancy: Nathaniel Mackey, Robert Duncan, and the Formation of Discrepant Subjectivity," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000): 547-48.

writing is related to his desire to explore processes and change. He explains that "these traditions - the mythology, the lore - are not being gone to as some kind of fixed, given entity that one then has to have a subservient relationship to. They are active and unfinished; they are subject to change; they are themselves in the process of transformation and transition. They speak to an open and open-ended possibility that the poetics that I've been involved in very much speaks to as well."²⁰ His embrace of transformation and dynamism, as I will discuss later, is very much a part of Mackey's approach in *Bedouin Hornbook* and his cultural critique of those ideologies which serve to calcify cultural practices. When Paul Naylor asked Mackey about his "commitment to 'mystical' traditions and experiences," Mackey explained that he likes to juxtapose, or combine the mystical to reason, "to keep head and heart together, to have them, if not exactly connect, at least correspond."²¹ This interest of Mackey's in resisting a Cartesian dualism between mind and body, or between reason and emotion, is representative of his overall interest in resisting binaries, combining seemingly disparate elements and challenging boundary lines. Andrew Mossin sees Mackey's incorporating myths and rituals from several cultures as calling "attention to the ways in which multiple mythologies and belief systems can inflect our daily perceptions and activities."²² In addition for Mackey disparate elements and difference do not require resolution and can in fact inform our lives.

Many of Mackey's artistic philosophies and approach to writing have to do with social change. In an interview from 1991 Mackey described his views on how challenging boundaries is one way in which to engage in social change: "But certainly to the extent that categories and the way things are defined - the boundaries among things, people, areas of experience, areas of

²⁰ Mackey, "Interview by Peter O'Leary," 289.

²¹ Mackey, "Interview by Paul Naylor," 326-27.

²² Mossin, "Unveiling Expectancy: Nathaniel Mackey, Robert Duncan, and the Formation of Discrepant Subjectivity," 545.

endeavor - to the extent that those categories and definitions are rooted in social and political realities, anything one does that challenges them, that transgresses those boundaries and offers new definitions, is to some extent contributing to social change."²³ Any effort to create things "that defy and redefine boundary lines," Mackey argues, "are very important in the literary politics, cultural politics, and marginalized social politics of the time we're living in."²⁴ For Mackey, challenging boundaries in the context of jazz criticism and multiple insularities would entail challenging the social relationships and structures that multiple insularities create. Challenging these boundaries by offering new definitions would then actively seek to unmake and reorder the social relationships and structures imposed upon those who were unable to take part in the creation of those relationships and structures. Challenging boundaries is one way in which marginalized subjects can create agency, their own subjectivity, and (re)order the social structures they exist in.

An example of why Mackey finds it important to challenge boundaries and definitions is the negative artistic and social effects the brought by the change of jazz from verb to noun. Following Amiri Baraka, Mackey notes that when swing moved from verb to noun, or in other words when white critics appropriated and codified the music, it lost its cultural context, became constrained and lost its ability to grow. On an aesthetic level, the move from verb to noun meant "a less dynamic, less improvisatory, less blues-inflected music and, on the political level, a containment of black mobility, a containment of the economic and social advances that might accrue to black artistic innovation."²⁵ The "economic appropriation of jazz by whites," Jacques

²³ Mackey, "Interview by Christopher Funkhouser," 254.

²⁴ Ibid., 262.

²⁵ Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb." Also see Kress, "Middle Voice Moves in Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run"," 766-67. Also see Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Blues people : Negro music in white America* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 142-65. Also see Kress, "Middle Voice Moves in Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run"," 266-68.

Attali argues, "resulted in the imposition of a very Westernized kind of jazz, molded by white music critics and presented as music 'accessible to the Western musical ear' - in other words, cut off from black jazz, allowing it to reach the white youth market."²⁶ This movement from verb to noun drew boundaries around the music, boundaries around black mobility, and placed limits on black musicians.

Mackey extends Baraka's argument about the effects of the move from verb to noun in his essay "Other: From Noun to Verb."²⁷ In it he focuses on what he calls the "artistic othering" done by those people who have been socially "othered" and marginalized. Artistic othering, Mackey explains, "has to do with innovation, invention, and change, on which cultural health and diversity depend and thrive."²⁸ Whereas the "nounization" of jazz resulted in a static art form, artistic othering of jazz involves creating something new - a process which privileges the verb form of jazz. Akin to the reggae practice of versioning, artistic othering emphasizes "variance" and "variability."²⁹ Artistic othering is, David C. Kress explains, "a way to un-work noun-ing's stasis."³⁰ The artistic othering of black musicians and artists is a reaction to and against the social othering they suffered. The privileging of the verb, Mackey argues, "linguistically accentuates action among a people whose ability to act is curtailed by racist constraints." In writing, artistic othering involves word play and taking liberties with a language's conventions, spellings, syntax and other rules. Musical artistic othering consists of

²⁶ Jacques Attali, *Noise: the political economy of music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 104.

²⁷27 David C. Kress analyzes one main difference between Baraka's and Mackey's conception of the "verb to noun" process by looking at the different ways each writer conceives of the verb. Baraka sees the verb as transitive, meaning that the movement between verb and noun is one way, that any movement back from noun to verb is a reversal. Mackey's conception of the verb is intransitive, meaning that as an intransitive verb does not take a direct object there is more play in the relationship between verb and noun. Kress explains that Mackey's conception of the verb as intransitive "delineates a certain intransitivity of verb-thought, an intransitivity that repeatedly opens to qualification . . . In this way Mackey perhaps refines a concept of the verb and verb-ing to pose a more flexible stance than Baraka." Kress, "Middle Voice Moves in Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run"," 768.

²⁸ Mackey, "Other: From Noun to Verb," 76.

²⁹ Ibid., 77.

³⁰ Kress, "Middle Voice Moves in Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run"," 767.

creating new variations on existing material and reworking and innovating older forms. Mackey argues that jazz musicians who practice artistic othering are largely ignored or marginalized, which is a symptom of the social othering of blacks by whites writ large. Artistic othering, or approaching the production of jazz as a verb and writing about it and acknowledging it as such, is one method of cultural critique. For its practitioners, artistic othering is one way to create and exercise one's own agency, a way to create one's own identity and narrative, and a way to dictate the terms with which one defines one's existence and creative output. In this way, artistic othering is a way to counter social othering. I argue that Mackey engages in artistic othering in *Bedouin Hornbook*, as he experiments with form, language, and the limits of what constitutes jazz criticism. In the novel he creates his own path for writing jazz criticism, his own narrative and identity as a critic, and forces those who engage with his work to do so on his own terms as opposed to the pre-existing terms established by mainstream criticism. As such, he points a way for jazz criticism to engage in artistic othering, a radically different concept than replacing one insularity with another.

Artistic othering exists in *Bedouin Hornbook* in two primary ways: through the Mystic Horn Society's musical othering, and through Mackey's literary othering. Both forms of othering at play in the novel work to challenge the negative effects of social othering. In its treatment of the music, *Bedouin Hornbook* privileges the verb throughout. J. Edward Mallot notes that *Bedouin Hornbook* "present[s] music as a tiered process of becoming - even in repeated performances of the same piece - rather than a fixed, static identity."³¹ By presenting the Mystic Horn Society's music as a process, as opposed a categorizable and static entity, and by experimenting and challenging the conventions of the English language, Mackey challenges the very conventions, values and structures that have served to marginalized African Americans.

³¹ Mallot, "Sacrificial Limbs, Lambs, Iambs, and I Ams: Nathaniel Mackey's Mythology of Loss," 149.

The novel's characters and plot, as well as its form and style, are an effort to create agency and power for a group of people who have been largely denied that ability.

To these ends, Mackey uses a practice he calls "discrepant engagement," of which *Bedouin Hornbook* is a result.³² He defines discrepant engagement as "practices that, in the interest of opening presumably closed orders of identity and signification, accent fissure, fracture, incongruity, the rickety, imperfect fit between word and world. Such practices highlight - indeed inhabit - discrepancy, engage rather than seek to ignore it."³³ Discrepant engagement is based in part on "the creaking of the word," the Dogon peoples' name for their weaving block. The creaking of the word, Mackey describes, "is the noise upon which the word is based, the discrepant foundation of all coherence and articulation, of the purchase upon the world fabrication affords."³⁴ Mackey explains that discrepant engagement "dislodges or seeks to dislodge homogenous models of identity, assumptions of monolithic form, purist expectation, redefining 'the features of original expression.'"³⁵ Discrepant engagement shares values and goals similar to those of postmodern and post-structuralist ideology, in that it challenges grand narratives. The concept comes from Mackey's uneasiness and discontent "with categories and the boundaries they enforce, with the impediment to social and aesthetic mobility such enforcement effects."³⁶ It also shares traits with black expressive culture, which privileges divides, uneasy fits and "foregrounds buzz, shaky ground, troubled voices, through

³² Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews*, 207.

³³ Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant engagement: dissonance, cross-culturality, and experimental writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 19. Paul Hoover's summation of the definition of discrepant engagement reads: it is "therefore the joining of things that don't fit, a concept that contemporary theory gives the name of *aporia*, or rift. The term also relates to the dynamics of cross-culturality: the cry of the social 'misfit.'" Hoover, "Pair of Figures for Eshu: Doubling of Consciousness in the Work of Kerry James Marshall and Nathaniel Mackey," 737.

³⁴ Mackey, *Discrepant engagement: dissonance, cross-culturality, and experimental writing*, 19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁶ Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews*, 208.

'methodologic fissures,' making room for accident and rupture within the system itself."³⁷ The desire to challenge and transcend boundaries and categories is one of *Bedouin Hornbook's* most striking features, and it is one way in which Mackey attempts to undo the negative effects wrought by the creation of canons and insularities.³⁸ Challenging boundaries is also key to the creation of agency, narrative, artistic othering, etc. in the novel. The existence of multiple insularities is crucial to Mackey's project, as it are these insularities that he is discrepantly engaging with.

Mackey discusses at length his interest in discrepant engagement and describes the general process:

the process of bringing things together that are, in the most widely accepted senses of the terms, 'disparate' and 'disengaged,' bringing them into contiguity with one another, is analogous to the roughness you get and the rub you get when you bring things that are not homogenous together. In that sense, there is a kind of raspiness in the discrepant mix of materials that I have been working with, which is also in the discrepant mix and changes of reference and register that one finds in my writing. In some sense, that's to accentuate a certain roughness as against a certain smoothness. What you do is find a certain smoothness in the way you put those materials together. There is a kind of flow and continuity even though you're moving among different domains of discourse and you're going from one realm of the world to another.³⁹

In Mackey's work Paul Hoover finds that "discrepancy becomes moral value, a reminder that 'not fitting' is morally preferable to a too-easy creolization; it also reminds us that truly creative work tends to be done at the artistic and cultural margin, where 'the new' offers resistance to received notions of meaning."⁴⁰ This privileging of things that do not fit is in stark contrast to mainstream criticism, which has worked to create a narrative of jazz history in which styles, musicians and

³⁷ Edwards, "Notes on Poetics regarding Mackey's "Song"," 573.

³⁸ Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews*, 209.

³⁹ Mackey, "Interview by Peter O'Leary," 294.

⁴⁰ Hoover, "Pair of Figures for Eshu: Doubling of Consciousness in the Work of Kerry James Marshall and Nathaniel Mackey," 737.

recordings either fit or do not fit into established definitions, traditions and categories. As I will argue below, Mackey's use of discrepant engagement in *Bedouin Hornbook*, especially in regards to how the book's characters draw on a wide variety of cultural and musical traditions, is the primary mechanism with which the novel uses to do its cultural work.

Bedouin Hornbook has its roots in Mackey's serial poem "Song of the Andoumboulou," in which N.'s first two letters to the Angel of Dust appear. The "Song of the Andoumboulou" first appeared in Mackey's 1985 collection of poems entitled *Eroding Witness*, and have continued in each of his following four collections, *School of Udhra* from 1993, *Whatsaid Serif* from 1998, *Splay Anthem* from 2006, and *Nod House* from 2011. Mackey began writing "Song of the Andoumboulou" in the early 1970s. It is inspired by a 1956 recording of Dogon music of the same name, which is part of the Dogon funeral rights. In Dogon mythology the Andoumboulou are an earlier form of humans who became extinct due to their inability to thrive. Mackey's poem is an address to the spirituality in music, art and poetry of the Dogon people and the Andoumboulou.⁴¹ In an interview Mackey explained how the first two of N.'s letters, which are "Song of the Andoumboulou 6" and the third section of "Song of the Andoumboulou 7," "were statements of poetics, kind of flirting with being prose poems, but delivered in an epistolary form which was invoking a certain audience, a rather spectral audience."⁴² Both letters are stark departures in form from the prior poems. They interrupt the poems that came before, providing a kind of commentary on those poems.

⁴¹ Nathaniel Mackey, *Splay anthem* (New York: New Directions Book, 2006), ix. Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews*, 259-60, 92-94, 347. Mackey introduces the "Song of the Andoumboulou" with an epigraph taken from François Di Dio's liner notes for the recording of Dogon music that influenced Mackey to write the poems. Di Dio explains that "the song of the Andoumboulou is addressed to the spirits. For this reason the initiates, crouching in a circle, sing it in a whisper in the deserted village, and only the howling of dogs and the wind disturb the silence of the night." Mackey, *Eroding witness: poems*, 31.

⁴² Mackey, "Interview by Peter O'Leary," 298.

It was in N.'s third letter, Mackey writes in *From a Broken Bottle*, "that the epistolary series detached from the poem and lit out into fiction, remaining related to the poem, however, something of a cousin." This third letter set out to pursue "an even more pronounced, multifaceted, prolonged address of music."⁴³ The address of music that Mackey describes is one of the biggest differences between N.'s first two letters and those which follow. In the first two letters there is no indication that N. is a musician, that he plays in a band, or that the letters are meant to serve any kind of narrative function. The bulk of N.'s letters in *Bedouin Hornbook* address the music performed by N.'s band, the Mystic Horn Society (also known as The Deconstructive Woodwind Chorus and the East Bay Dread Society), and other groups N. and his bandmates hear and/or perform with. The Mystic Horn Society consists of N. on reeds, Lambert on saxophones, flute and harmonica, Heidi, who calls herself Aunt Nancy, on violin and percussion, Djamilaa on vocals, oud and harmonium, and Penguin on oboe and baritone saxophone. Many of N.'s letters to the Angel of Dust discuss the multitude of influences on and descriptions of the band's music, and the aesthetic philosophy underpinning the music, all of which in some way reflects Mackey's ideas of discrepant engagement and the paracritical hinge.

Bedouin Hornbook includes instances in which N.'s letters are interrupted by sections of text which are not addressed to the Angel of Dust. The first is part of a score from N.'s composition "Our Lady of the Lifted Skirts." Mackey includes a description of N.'s presentation of his lecture entitled "The Creaking of the Word." The novel concludes with an "after the fact libretto," in which the novel's narrative is both continued and complicated. These "after the fact

⁴³ Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, viii.

librettos" appear more often and take on a more significant role in *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, the second novel of the *From a Broken Bottle Series*.⁴⁴

In numerous interviews in which he talks about the *From a Broken Bottle* series Mackey does not list any specific jazz novels as influencing the form and structure of the individual volumes. He cites the form of Rainer Maria Rilke's 1910 novel *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* as influencing the form of the *From a Broken Bottle* series. Mackey was also influenced by Wilson Harris' novel *Palace of the Peacock* because he liked how it experimented with the possibilities of what prose could be and do.⁴⁵ Despite Mackey's stated lack of the influence of jazz fiction on *Bedouin Hornbook*, it is a work of jazz fiction. In the introduction to their anthology of jazz fiction and poetry, Mackey and Art Lange loosely characterize the writing in previous jazz fiction and poetry anthologies as "a unique body of literature inspired by and concerned with jazz."⁴⁶ Michael Jarrett sees jazz writing taking two approaches. First, "in one way it is writing *about* jazz: discourse that represents the culturally assigned, politically privileged signifiers governing the representation of the music."⁴⁷ Included in this approach is one of the most common forms of jazz fiction: the presentation of the lives of jazz musicians. This strategy, which Peter Townsend likens to a biopic movie, is widespread. Vance Bourjaily generally refers to these narratives of jazz figures as "The Story," in which a genius jazz musician suffers a tragic ending. Figures such as Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, Bix Beiderbecke, among others, are often used either as the template for the protagonist, or are the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 32-34, 138-45, 77-93. For an in depth discussion of the role of the "after the fact librettos" in *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, see Dimitri Anastasopoulos, "Resisting the Law: Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run"," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000): 786-89.

⁴⁵ Mackey, "Interview by Paul Naylor," 332, 34.

⁴⁶ Art Lange and Nathaniel Mackey, "Editor's Note," in *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry & Prose*, ed. Art Lange and Nathaniel Mackey (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1993), n.p.

⁴⁷ Michael Jarrett, "Four Choruses on the Tropes of Jazz Writing," *American Literary History* 6, no. 2 (1994): 338. Italics in original.

protagonists themselves.⁴⁸ Also included in this first approach are ways in which authors use jazz to signify extra-musical meanings. This can use jazz to signify various things, such as strangeness or the "other," or how in *Jazz* Toni Morrison attaches jazz to "an ensemble of moods, textures and actions . . . which reflect black urban culture of the 1920s."⁴⁹ Jarrett's second approach sees jazz writing as "writing *with* jazz," meaning "that jazz writing wants to be jazz; it aspires to the condition of improvisation." This approach takes a more experimental tack, addressing the problems of how to transform and represent an improvised sonic art form in a non-improvised and written one.⁵⁰ *Bedouin Hornbook* combines the former and latter approaches, as it addresses music which many call jazz, although the narrative of N. does not follow "The Story" template. As Mackey has himself acknowledged, the novel attempts to transform music into the written word.

While not directly influenced by jazz fiction, *Bedouin Hornbook* has some in common with other post modern jazz novels. Fritz Gysin puts it in conversation with Xam Wilson Cartier's novels *Be-Bop*, *Re-Bop* and *Muse Echo Blues*, Leon Forrest's *The Bloodworth Orphans*, and John Edgar Wideman's *Sent for You Yesterday*. In all of these works, including *Bedouin Hornbook* and *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, Gysin argues that the authors are interested in and address "the anxiety of voice," finding that "some of the most fascinating and artistically challenging texts in Jazz fiction actually tend to address the *problematic* of voice (as a blending of narrative

⁴⁸ Peter Townsend, *Jazz in American culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 106-07. Jarrett, "Four Choruses on the Tropes of Jazz Writing," 337.

⁴⁹ Townsend, *Jazz in American culture*, 109-10, 23.

⁵⁰ Jarrett, "Four Choruses on the Tropes of Jazz Writing," 338-39. Italics in original. In their anthology, Lange and Mackey focused on including works that are informed by the second approach Jarrett mentions. They write: "We have been especially concerned to better represent the experimental end of the spectrum than have previous anthologies, to include a good deal more of the work in which writers, consistent with jazz's emphasis on invention and the 'sound of surprise,' have challenged conventional expectations regarding structure, language, character, voice and other components of literary form. . . . Writers have been moved to inspect, as artists witnessing other artists wrestling with the limits of their particular medium, the possibilities and resistances peculiar to writing." Lange and Mackey, "Editor's Note," n.p.

voice and musical voice)."⁵¹ In the case Mackey's novels, which Gysin describes as "even more radical attempts to turn Jazz into fiction," there is little use of the vernacular in N.'s language, which is more indebted to the written than oral traditions.⁵² Gysin observes that N. "takes the social and racial contexts for granted, implying a process of infinite regress, and betrays a fascination with the distortion, reduction, deferral, or even absence of voice, which to him paradoxically seems necessary to turn the music into language."⁵³ For N., a unified voice gets in the way of turning jazz into fiction.

Since *Bedouin Hornbook* was influenced by works that play with form it is no surprise that Mackey plays with language and form throughout the novel. In his analysis of *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, the sequel to *Bedouin Hornbook*, Dimitri Anastasopoulos emphasizes Mackey's play with language throughout the novel. Anastasopoulos characterizes Mackey's language as "synaesthetic," in that the syntactic scheme "conflates sensory perception" and "is plainly informed by the language of literary theory and is encrusted with poetic figures." This synaesthetic language, Anastasopoulos suggests, "refuses to unravel a snarl between physical sensations and abstract impressions, between the felt and the imagined." In addition, he notes that the members of the Mystic Horn Society are "perfectly at ease speaking and thinking in synaesthetic language. Not one of them blinks or hitches when another embarks on a theoretical rant."⁵⁴ Mallot describes N.'s writing as "a kind of intellectual catharsis."⁵⁵ While Anastasopoulos is describing the language in *Djbot Baghostus's Run*, Mackey's prose style in the sequel does not significantly differ from that in *Bedouin Hornbook*. The "theoretical rants,"

⁵¹ Fritz Gysin, "From "Liberating Voices" to "Metathetic Ventriloquism": Boundaries in Recent African-American Jazz Fiction," *Callaloo* 25, no. 1 (2002): 277. Italics in original.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁵⁴ Anastasopoulos, "Resisting the Law: Nathaniel Mackey's "Djbot Baghostus's Run"," 785.

⁵⁵ Mallot, "Sacrificial Limbs, Lambs, Iambs, and I Ams: Nathaniel Mackey's Mythology of Loss," 138.

which appear often throughout the *From a Broken Bottle* series, contribute to the intellectual character of *Bedouin Hornbook*.

The novel's intellectualism and the experimentation in prose and form comes from "a very deliberate impulse," Mackey explains, "to foreground that intellectuality in a writing which does not try to shed its reflectiveness in the service of a presumed immediacy, instantaneity, or emotionality that black music has in too many instances and for too long been burdened with being the embodiment of or seen as the embodiment of."⁵⁶ At times jazz criticism, especially in its earlier days, has reflected what Mackey calls the "presumed immediacy, instantaneity, or emotionality," in that some authors linked jazz with dominant stereotypes of blackness. Taking cues from African American musicians such as Cecil Taylor and Anthony Braxton, whose work are highly abstract and intellectual, Mackey critiques long standing stereotypes or characterizations of black musicians as natural, embodied, non-intellectual and emotional. He explains that myths about the music, myths that are attached to "what black people have been made to symbolize" have often obscured the "intellectual process that goes on in the music." By highlighting the intellectual aspects of the Mystic Horn Society's members and their music, Mackey presents a direct challenge to jazz historiography that downplays, ignores, or argues against the intellectual aspects of jazz.⁵⁷

Like Cecil Taylor and Anthony Braxton's work, Mackey's novel is highly intellectual, which is apparent when examining the work it does as a paracritical hinge and reading it as a work of jazz paracriticism. Recalling part of how Mackey defines the "para" quality - as "an activity supplemental to more firmly established disciplines and dispositions" - I argue that *Bedouin Hornbook* is not the only work that engages in jazz paracriticism. One such work is

⁵⁶ Mackey, "Interview by Edward Foster," 279.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

Geoff Dyer's 1996 book *But Beautiful*, which consists of several fictional vignettes based on actual occurrences in the lives of jazz musicians. Dyer calls his approach "imaginative criticism." Describing his method, he writes

Before long I found I had moved away from anything like conventional criticism. The metaphors and similes on which I relied to evoke what I thought was happening in the music came to seem increasingly inadequate. Moreover, since even the briefest simile introduces a hint of the fictive, it wasn't long before these metaphors were expanding themselves into episodes and scenes. As I invented dialogue and action, so what was emerging came more and more to resemble fiction. At the same time, though, these scenes were still intended as commentary either on a piece of music or on the particular qualities of a musician. What follows, then, is as much *imaginative criticism* as fiction.⁵⁸

Dyer's method is similar to the one Mackey takes in *Bedouin Hornbook*, as, like Mackey, he uses fiction, or at least fictional elements, to comment on music. In *But Beautiful* one also sees Dyer engaging in a type of "artistic othering," in that in writing about somewhat well known anecdotes, he does his "own versions of them, stating the identifying facts more or less briefly and then improvising around them, departing from them completely in some cases. . . .

Throughout, my purpose was to present the musicians not as they were but as they appear to me."⁵⁹ In his versions of Lester Young wasting away in a hotel room, Harry Carney and Duke Ellington hurtling down the road in Carney's car on the way to their next gig, and Art Pepper practicing in his San Quentin jail cell, among others, Dyer re-imagines and offers up a dub side of the lived experiences of real musicians. His desire to present the musicians as how they appear to him is worth noting, as he gives his readers his perceptions of them, which are, presumably unique. However, as John Gennari notes, "his imaginative criticism is crucially dependent on anecdotes, notions, images, and arguments that have come from the trench work of

⁵⁸ Dyer, *But beautiful : a book about jazz*, vii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, viii.

jazz critics."⁶⁰ Dyer's portraits and re-presentations of events from the lives of jazz's canonical titans (unlike Mackey, Dyer draws a firm genre line about what constitutes jazz), often reinforce negative stereotypes of jazz musicians: Ben Webster as an alcoholic, or Art Pepper obsessed with his next cop. In doing so, Dyer denies agency to his subjects and frames his characters within the trope of "The Story." However, despite this critique, Dyer's writing is engaging, and a stark departure from mainstream jazz criticism. Wherever Dyer drew his inspiration from, his using fiction as a way to both comment on music and offering a new take on events and anecdotes, *But Beautiful* works as jazz paracriticism.

Dyer is quite critical, almost unfairly so, of the bulk of jazz criticism, finding that critics have contributed very little to jazz, having failed to "convey any sense of the animating dynamics of the music."⁶¹ Dyer points to Michael Ondaatje's 1976 post-modern novel *Coming Through Slaughter* as one of the only works on jazz not written by a musician to be of worth. The novel, based on Buddy Bolden and following "The Story" pattern, is a second example of jazz paracriticism. Experimenting with form, style and grammar, the novel describes the events centering around Bolden's two year disappearance from his home and wife in New Orleans. In a slightly similar fashion to Dyer's approach in *But Beautiful*, most of the text outlines fictional events and dialogue, but there are several instances where Ondaatje addresses Bolden's music. Given that a recording of Bolden does not exist, Ondaatje's description of Bolden's playing is not based, like most jazz criticism, on album or concert reviews, but on what has been said and passed down about it. The narrator describes Bolden's music as

a music that had so little wisdom you wanted to clean nearly every note he passed, passed it seemed along the way is if travelling in a car, passed before he even approached it and saw it properly. There was no control except the *mood* of his power . . . and it is for this reason it is good you never heard him play on

⁶⁰ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 7.

⁶¹ Dyer, *But beautiful : a book about jazz*, 191.

recordings. If you never heard him play some place where the weather for instance could change the next series of notes - then you *should* never have heard him at all. He was never recorded. He stayed away while others moved into wax history, electronic history, those who said later that Bolden broke the path. . . . He tore apart the plot - see his music was immediately on top of his own life. Echoing. As if, when he was playing he was lost and hunting for the right accidental notes. Listening to him was like talking to Coleman. You were both changing direction with every sentence, sometimes in the middle, using each other as a springboard through the dark. You were moving so fast it was unimportant to finish and clear everything. He would be describing something in 27 ways. There was pain and gentleness everything jammed into each number.⁶²

The description of Bolden's playing has a very "para" quality about it when comparing it to mainstream jazz criticism. It's more about the impact, the feeling, the experience, the process, and the dynamic character of Bolden's music, as opposed to criticism that would attempt to employ rubrics to categorize and evaluate it. The description of Bolden's music is abstract, focusing more on affect than factual or musicological details. The method and approach to *Coming Through Slaughter* is supplemental to the established practice of jazz criticism, and considering the "para" quality in the ways Bolden's music is portrayed, I argue that the novel should be considered as a piece of jazz paracriticism.

In addition to *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Bedouin Hornbook* both functioning as jazz paracriticism, they share formal characteristics and employ a trope common in jazz fiction which Michael Jarrett calls a "satura." The satura, which can also be thought of as a collage, is a way in which to represent the diverse mix of elements that constitute jazz. The perception of jazz as an amalgam, Jarrett says, represent the ways it is written about, both in terms of theme and form. Jarrett defines saturas as "texts comparable to multivocal medleys or series of solos."⁶³ *Coming Through Slaughter* is built on numerous sections (some of which are less than half a page in length) which jump around in the plot's chronology, alternate between first and

⁶² Michael Ondaatje, *Coming through slaughter* (New York: Norton, 1976), 37.

⁶³ Jarrett, "Four Choruses on the Tropes of Jazz Writing," 342-45. Quote on 344.

third person, focus on different characters, etc. Likewise, N.'s letters to the Angel of Dust and the "after the fact librettos" in *Bedouin Hornbook* read like a series of solos, which are both related and individual. Like a jazz song comprised of a collage of several solos, both novels employ the satura trope. By working to represent some of the structures of jazz in their novels, Ondaatje and Mackey are in a way, writing with jazz, an activity that is "para" to the established norms of mainstream jazz criticism.

The jazz paracriticism in *Bedouin Hornbook* works by functioning as a paracritical hinge. There are four main examples of the *Bedouin Hornbook* functioning as a paracritical hinge, especially as related to jazz criticism. First is the fuzzy relationship between Mackey the author and N. the narrator, which challenges the notion that the critic should be an observer removed from the music he or she writes about. Second, I will show how the wide variety of musical influences on the Mystical Horn Society and the musical references throughout the novel, along with N.'s descriptions of the meanings of the music, reflects Mackey's anti-insularity critique based jazz criticism. The third example looks at the wide variety of cultural and musical references which influence N.'s compositions. Fourth, much of the music performed by the Mystic Horn Society fulfills a narrative function, in that it tells lengthy and detailed stories through non-verbal signification.

Throughout *Bedouin Hornbook* Mackey blurs the line between himself as the author/critic and N. the narrator. Or as Mallot observes, the "question of distance" between Mackey and N. "is constantly up for reexamination."⁶⁴ This begs the question: who exactly is the critic, Mackey, or N.? Peter O'Leary observes in an interview with Mackey that in "Song of the Andoumboulou 6" N. "refers to himself as the author of "Song of the Andoumbolou 3." Mackey explains that N. is "not so much writing my poetry – well, I guess N. *is* writing the

⁶⁴ Mallot, "Sacrificial Limbs, Lambs, Iambs, and I Ams: Nathaniel Mackey's Mythology of Loss," 136.

poetry, because he does, as you note, answer for it. Yes, N. is writing the poetry. I was going to say N. is *intruding* on the poetry, but he could be doing both.”⁶⁵ In the interview with O’Leary, Mackey describes how he and N. have things in common, that they “overlap” and have shared experiences and proclivities. For example, Mackey, like N., had bits of glass embedded in their forehead - Mackey from a car accident, N. while attending a performance by the Crossroads Choir, although N. suggests that the glass came from a car accident he experienced as a child.⁶⁶

Another example in the way in which Mackey and N. overlap is a talk N. gives at a music symposium at Cal Arts which he calls "The Creaking of the Word." The overlapping nature is further complicated in that N.'s alter-ego Jarred Bottle, who is also known as JB, J&B, Djarred Bottle, DB, and Flaunted Fifth, delivers the lecture, the text of which is not given. N., as N., not Jarred Bottle, writes about "the creaking of the word" in several letters to the Angel of Death, and in one describes the origin in the phrase in nearly the same terms as Mackey does in the introduction to his book *Discrepant Engagement*.⁶⁷ That Mackey and N., and/or, his/their, alter-ego Jarred Bottle are all concerned with the aesthetic and philosophical implications of "the creaking of the word" underscores the foggy nature of the relationship among them. This blurring of the line between author and the book’s fictional narrator, between the non-musician-critic who is external to the story and the musician-critic who is the story, between cultural authority writing criticism and a fictional character living with, discussing and creating music, is representative of the ways in which discrepant engagement seeks to break down barriers. This overlap challenges the music/critic divide that is pervasive in jazz discourse.

⁶⁵ Mackey, "Interview by Peter O’Leary," 299.

⁶⁶ Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge: essays, talks, notes, interviews*, 299. Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, 94.

⁶⁷ Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, 108. Mackey, *Discrepant engagement: dissonance, cross-culturality, and experimental writing*, 19.

This blurring of the line between author and narrator in *Bedouin Hornbook*, may stem from Mackey's critique of the subjective "I" in Western thought and poetry, which he feels leads to a wish of the Western subject to dominate the world. In an interview with Edward Foster, Mackey explains that "yes, it's the Cartesian separation of the ego from the rest of the world in order to achieve knowledge of and power over the rest of the world - knowledge of and power of nature and knowledge of and power over non-European people, who are seen as being closer to nature than Europeans are. The subjugation of nature and the subjugation of those people identified with nature, viewed as being more natural, native, etcetera, have gone hand in hand. That's one of the things that is troubling with the tradition of the Western 'I.'"⁶⁸ While Mackey's critique here is aimed at the Western philosophical tradition as well as poetry, I suggest it can inform his approach to jazz criticism in *Bedouin Hornbook* and his critique of the jazz criticism which seeks to construct and maintain insularities. If we think of the process of insularity and canon construction as one that attempts to classify music, to create knowledge about music, to create the rules in which the music is thought about and discussed, to order the jazz art world and the social relations within it, and to use that knowledge to main power hierarchies, then we can see how Mackey's discomfort with the Western "I" directly applies to jazz criticism. Jazz critics who take part in insularity construction do so from a position where they are removed from the music they are criticizing. By maintaining an "objective distance" from their subject, jazz critics are able to classify and rule over their subject. The relationship between jazz critic and jazz music, along with the social power the critic wields, has led to a situation in which white critics have created the knowledge, established the rules of discussing the music and ordered many of the social structures of an art form created mainly by non-whites. Mackey critiques the form of subjugation of non-Europeans who the West have often classified as "more natural, native,

⁶⁸ Mackey, "Interview by Edward Foster," 269.

etcetera." This critique is directly applicable to some jazz criticism, especially early jazz criticism, which supported, either directly or tacitly, stereotypes or notions of black musicians as natural. This is one example of the "social othering" that Mackey talks about.

When considering Mackey's critique of the Western "I," it is possible to view Mackey's blurring of the line between himself and N., as well as the lines between N. and his alter egos, as one way in which to write criticism that does not allow for the existence of a firm critic/musician or colonizer/colonized dynamic, thereby preventing the negative effects wrought by such a dynamic. Mackey's refusal to delineate a clear border between himself and N. is discrepant engagement put to practice, as it combines elements that in traditional criticism are often seen as not being compatible. In addition, this blurring of the border between Mackey and N. is an example of the novel working as jazz paracriticism. As the author, Mackey's criticism is being expressed by N. the narrator, who is the one describing and evaluating the music. In this way, the novel's criticism is exists on a level once removed from its author.

The second main example of *Bedouin Hornbook* functioning as a paracritical hinge is the sheer diversity of genres and musical and cultural traditions that appear. The novel is loaded with musical references and descriptions that one would not often think of as fitting together - that is if one was using a fairly rigid conception of what two things can "fit." Musical descriptions by the book's characters such as a piece expressing "a certain Egypto-Mayan, Meso-Haitian air," another composition being "part burial song but a boat-hauling shanty," or another being an "Indo-Haitian Sufi nocturne based on a line from the *Upanishads*," abound throughout the text.⁶⁹ As suggested by the musical descriptions in the novel, the Mystic Horn Society's music often expresses a wide variety of musical and cultural references, blending West with East, African with European, black with brown with white, North with South. These

⁶⁹ Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, 6, 63, 92.

combinations are an example of flow between and among diverse musical styles and cultures and show that all traditions can be used to inform any given practice. By no means is the Mystic Horn Society unique in its cross-pollination of musical styles, as musicians such as John and Alice Coltrane incorporated elements of Indian classical music into their work. The early 1970s multi/cross-genre work of Don Cherry is another example of music that combines traditions from several continents.⁷⁰ I compare the Mystic Horn Society to the Coltranes and Cherry to show that the Mystic Horn Society's discrepant engagement is not an isolated or fictional phenomena; rather, it is an example of a long standing practice of musicians drawing on music of other cultures. It is also an example of showing the difficulties of drawing boxes and categorizing musical practices.

One explanation of the function of the diverse musical references, influences and traditions in the novel considers them to be "an externalization of the music being produced by the Mystic Horn Society."⁷¹ I would add that the specific references that members of the Mystic Horn Society make to artists, songs and albums serve a second function, one that I consider closer to the function of more traditional jazz criticism. I argue that the music that is important to N. and his band, especially that which could be called jazz or more broadly black music,

⁷⁰ This blending of musical styles that the Mystic Horn Society is not completely unique, as the broad genre of "world music" is often used to signify music that is either of non-Western origin, or that incorporates styles from diverse musical cultures. In the commercial realm in the mid twentieth century, world music often referred to ethnomusicological field recordings released by labels such as American Folkways and Nonesuch. In 1987 the term "world music" was employed by numerous labels. As Carole Pegg now defines the term, "world music refers to local musics that combine often indigenous musical characteristics with those of mainstream genres in the contemporary transnational music industry but, though distributed worldwide, are associated with minority groups and small or industrially developing countries." Carole Pegg, "World Music." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press,, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e7391>, accessed February 1, 2014. The music of the Mystic Horn Society could be, in a way, considered to be "world music" in the commercial sense defined by Pegg, but where the group departs from this model is in their relative lack of incorporating mainstream genres. In addition, having began *Bedouin Hornbook* in the 1970s, and publishing it before the genre "world music" became codified by the recording industry, the term may not be useful in describing the Mystic Horn Society's approach to combining styles and genres.

⁷¹ A. Sarah Hreha and Scott Hreha, "Nathaniel Mackey's "Bedouin Hornbook": An Annotated Discography of Specific Musical References," *Callaloo* 25, no. 1 (2002): 337.

functions as a direct challenge to the jazz canon. This can be easily seen in the discography that Mackey provides at the end of the book. While many of the recordings in the list by artists such as Coltrane, Monk, Rollins, Mingus, etc. exist well inside the jazz canon, many more reside far outside the realm of jazz. These include recordings by James Brown, Bob Marley, Fela Kuti, field recordings from India, the Gap Band, the Toupouri Wind Ensemble, Muddy Waters and Olivier Messiaen. The value that N. places on such stylistically, culturally, and geographically diverse artists and recordings reflects Mackey's rejection of genre lines, the relevance of a canon, or divides between art and vernacular music, etc.

A third example of the paracritical hinge at work can be found in the variety of cultural and musical influences the Mystic Horn Society draws from. This can be seen in two of N.'s compositions: "Meat of My Brother's Thigh," and "Dog-Eared Anacrusis." The former composition is a duet between N. on bass clarinet and Lambert on tenor saxophone, which is inspired by the African myth about Dieli, who was the ancestor of the griots. In the myth two brothers, the youngest being Dieli, were walking through the forest, when Dieli became so hungry he stopped and told his brother to continue without him. The older brother pretended to continue, but hid behind a bush, cut a piece of flesh from his thigh and cooked it. He then took the meat from his thigh back to Dieli, saving his younger brother from starvation.⁷² Upon coming across a Yoruba proverb N. revised the piece. Translated, the proverb reads "kinship does not mean that, because we are entwined, we thereby rip off each other's thigh." The proverb, N. tells the Angel of Dust, "seemed to be the tacit, contradictory motor" to his composition.⁷³ He explains to the Angel of Dust that "throughout the piece one finds the music actively and unremittingly heterospecific. You'll notice, for example, that one of the additions

⁷² Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, 84-85.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 87.

I've made is a quotation from [Archie] Shepp's tune 'Hambone.' My appropriation of these licks, however, reaches *thru* Shepp's piece to take hold of a recollection from when I was about six."⁷⁴

In "Meat of My Brother's Thigh," N. is not only combining two contradictory West African myths as basis for his composition, but he incorporates Shepp's "Hambone," the title of which brings to mind Dieli eating part of his brother's thigh. In addition, he used Shepp's composition as a medium through which he explored an event from his childhood, when his brother sang the street song of the same name at a talent show. N.'s revision of "Meat of My Brother's Thigh" to reflect the proverb, which runs contrary to the story of Dieli and his brother, further indicates Mackey's/N.'s interest at combining disparate elements, accepting and using a both/and logic, rejecting having to choose one side of an either/or binary.

"Dog-Eared Anacrusis," featuring N. on saxello, Aunt Nancy on congas, Djamilaa on oud, Penguin on cuica and Lambert on harmonica, like "Meat of My Brother's Thigh," is also based upon a diverse set of myths and legends. The piece is based upon Sirius, the star of Isis. On the tape from the rehearsal, N. tells the Angel of Dust that for the piece the band was "in an Egyptian mood . . . which partly has to do with the two 'outside' or unaccented notes with which the piece begins corresponding to the 'outside' or epagomenal days on which Isis and Osiris were born." N. relays the story of Isis, who every summer solstice wept for Osiris, flooding the Nile River, giving water to the corn, which led to Osiris' rebirth. N. explains that "this ambiguous or amphibious vacillation between life-giving lamentation on the one hand and death-dealing lamentation on the other led me to incorporate an analogous commingling of, respectively, major and minor keys into 'Dog-Eared Anacrusis.'"⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., 88. Italics in original.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 130.

Here N. specifically describes how the opposites in the story - life-giving versus death-dealing lamentation - became manifest in the music, by way of his harmonic choices. N. provides the Angel of Dust with various interpretations of Sirius in relation to the other stars, which adds to and complicate the life-giving/death-dealing dynamic. The Sumerians and the Persians both saw Sirius as the tip of an arrow, while in India Sirius was part of the constellation of an archer. In China and Egypt Sirius was seen as a target. This arrow tip/target discrepancy N. posits, may be "a transitive identification of tip with target, a celestial union of subject and object by virtue of a taut, symbolically highstrung bow. A foregone conclusiveness bordering on tautology arbitrates the rift between aim and object." N. assures that the Angel of Dust that he is not trying to bridge the rift or chasm between aim and object, as "healing" or "bridging" such chasm has no "lasting application."⁷⁶ In "Dog Eared Anacrusis" there is flow between "life giving" and "death-dealing," between Sirius as the tip and Sirius as archer.

N.'s use of myths, proverbs and other cultural artifacts in the construction of "Meat of My Brother's Thigh" and "Dog-Eared Anacrusis," and embracing and incorporating contradictory elements into the same work, does two main things. First, it is an example of Mackey putting his idea of discrepant engagement into practice to create a paracritical hinge. By virtue of its basis on diverse cultural influences N.'s music allows for "flow between disparate orders of articulation," - between the story of Dieli and the contradictory Yoruban proverb, flow between different views on what role Sirius filled in the night sky, and Sirius' importance to the Isis/Osiris story. Second, and related to my discussion below about the compositions "Prometheus" and "Opposable Thumb at Waters Edge," N.'s music, like that of the AACM, Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton and others, challenges common assumptions as to the cultural influences that shape jazz and black music. While many explain that jazz, especially in the United States, is influenced by

⁷⁶ Ibid., 132-33.

the African American experience, or by black culture in general, N. does not limit his music to those influences. Yes, his music is often based on influences from West-African cultures, such as on "Meat of My Brother's Thigh," but, especially in the case of "Dog-Eared Anacrusis," N. allows for non-African diasporic cultures to inform the undergirding logic of his music.

The fourth example of *Bedouin Hornbook* acting as a paracritical hinge is the ways in which Mackey and the novel explores the communicative power of jazz and its ability to create narrative through non-verbal means. One striking example of this is Lambert's solo piece entitled "Prometheus," which he performs for his bandmates. Through his saxophone, Lambert tells the story of Prometheus, using a wide array of musical references from jazz and beyond. Playing a riff reminiscent of the Charlie Parker composition "Confirmation," Lambert described "the grudge Prometheus nursed against the Olympians for destroying the Titans and of how he revenged himself by favoring humans at the gods' expense."⁷⁷ Later, Lambert employed "Trane inspired" sixteenth notes, a quote from Gershwin's "It Ain't Necessarily So," and a Bobby Womack style delivery, to clarify the story. Lambert then mined a vein similar to the tenor sax and drums duet recordings by Coltrane and Rashied Ali, and Archie Shepp and Ali. "In this case," N. noted, "the conspicuously absent drums conveyed a theme of contraband or confiscated fire, a dream of stolen thunder come true. Lambert sputtered, growled, spat, split notes, ranted, railed, bellowed and shrieked - all by way of maintaining that the Prometheus myth in the form in which we know it represents a classic case of 'blaming the victim.'"⁷⁸ All Lambert had to do to remind his listeners that "it was Zeus who stole fire from Prometheus and not the other way around" was to play an inverted C-sharp seventh."⁷⁹ As Lambert continues, N. interprets Lambert's performance as connecting the theft of fire with the banning of slaves' drums and the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 119.

theft of black labor. N. described how "this palpable percussive absence accorded especially well with the slave-narrativity of this part of the composition (as, in retrospect, the 'academic thoroughness' to which I referred earlier as 'almost slavish' also did) - inserting or availing itself of a rhyme, so to speak, between, on the one hand, Greek-mythological stolen and/or outlawed fire, and on the other, Black-historical stolen and/or outlawed drums, Black-historical labor."⁸⁰

In this one piece, Lambert was able to not only narrate the story of Prometheus through his saxophone by using and making references to several styles, he was able to connect it across time, geography, and culture to use it to comment upon the social and political dynamic in slavery-era American history. "Prometheus" works as a paracritical hinge, in that it not only allows for an exchange between music and language, but between myth and histories of different epochs and people.

The aftermath of N.'s performance of his composition "Opposable Thumb At Water's Edge" in a rehearsal of the Mystic Horn Society is a second great example of music's ability to communicate, stimulate discussion, and to construct narrative.⁸¹ N. tells the Angel of Dust of how after he finished his solo performance of "Opposable Thumb" Penguin took out his oboe and began to play what Penguin described as "a shadowy congress" - or perhaps a flow - between N.'s composition and the Egyptian God Temu. "Opposable Thumb" had reminded Penguin of the story of Temu. Through a sequence of sixteenth and thirty-second notes, Penguin told of how Temu "made union with himself," creating Shu, the God of Air, and Tefnut, the God of Moisture.⁸² Penguin then described the various accounts of how Temu created Shu and Tefnut.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁸¹ Paul Hoover sees N.'s description of the performance of "Opposable Thumb" as an example of circularity at work in the novel, which he says is one of the novel's two main structural patterns, the other being coaxiality. Hoover, "Pair of Figures for Eshu: Doubling of Consciousness in the Work of Kerry James Marshall and Nathaniel Mackey," 740.

⁸² Mackey, *From a broken bottle traces of perfume still emanate. Volumes 1-3*, 43.

Describing the effectiveness of Penguin's playing, N. wrote the Angel of Dust, saying "I can't tell you how moved I was by the oddly denotative, almost pedantic articulacy of Penguin's playing, the amount of information he managed to convey with no loss of immediacy or lack of emotional address."⁸³ As Penguin wrapped up his solo, Lambert took out his tenor, and began to trade with Penguin before launching into his own solo, which described a trick he'd play as a child on his friends in which he managed to get his friends to admit to having masturbated.⁸⁴ Djamilaa and Aunt Nancy took issue with what they felt was the men's juvenile humor and both began to play. Aunt Nancy "resented the phallogentricity of what had been played to that point," and as such used her violin to critique what Lambert had just played.⁸⁵ Djamilaa, on harmonium, added her own contribution to the group's discussion, describing a Brazilian carved amulet which was African in origin. Lambert then responded to Aunt Nancy's critique of his phallogentrism by making "reference to a Haitian handclasp in which the fingers of one hand, encircling the thumb of the other, represented a vulva encircling a penis."⁸⁶ Djamilaa then began to sing, but strangely enough given the voice's ability to narrate, N. did not indicate to the Angel of Dust any contribution to the discussion from Djamilaa. Shortly after Djamilaa's singing N. found himself waking up after having passed out and seeing that the other band members had passed out as well.⁸⁷ Among other things, the conversation between the band members in "Opposable Thumb" is an example of discrepant engagement at play, with the piece working as a paracritical hinge allowing flow between vast differences in cultural artifacts and traditions.

The follow up to N.'s description of the rehearsal is telling in terms of Mackey's philosophy as to the communicative potential of music and his embrace of multiple readings of

⁸³ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 48.

phenomena and signs. Two letters after that which N. described the "Opposable Thumb" rehearsal, N. makes reference to the Angel of Dust's reading of "Opposable Thumb," who suggested that the character was a "projection of proletarian unrest." N. responded by writing "I've long argued against strict adherences to one-dimensional meaning, so my hope is that such a figure as Opposable Thumb retains the power not only to point but to correspond - to unsettle, if you will, an otherwise flat referentiality."⁸⁸ N's response demonstrates his awareness that "significance is almost defiantly relational, verb-al, stubbornly refusing to hold the same meaning for the all people all the time."⁸⁹ N.'s hope that "Opposable Thumb" could unsettle "an otherwise flat referentiality" is similar to the goals of discrepant engagement. That each member of the Mystic Horn Society was able to craft his or her own commentary on what had been played before, and could express such detailed commentary through sound, shows Mackey's view that the signifying potential of music, in this case jazz, cannot be limited

In "Prometheus," the music played after "Opposable Thumb at Water's Edge," and throughout *Bedouin Hornbook's* soundscape, music speaks and signifies with great detail; every utterance resonates with meaning. Or as Harryette Mullen observes, "words and music become interchangeable."⁹⁰ By having Lambert use jazz and black music to retell an ancient Western myth, Mackey questions common explanations or assumptions about the possible meanings of black music and jazz in American culture. "Prometheus" is discrepant engagement put into practice, manifested as a sonic paracritical hinge. As N. described, the music that followed "Opposable Thumb" described in detail a wide range of subjects, from Egyptian mythology, to games that boys play on each other, to critiques of phallogentricity, to Brazilian cultural artifacts.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁹ Mallot, "Sacrificial Limbs, Lambs, Iambs, and I Ams: Nathaniel Mackey's Mythology of Loss," 162.

⁹⁰ Harryette Mullen, "Phantom Pain: Nathaniel Mackey's *Bedouin Hornbook*," *Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 9, no. 1 (1992): 39.

While at first glance these subjects do not seem related, the members of the Mystic Horn Society linked them together. Like "Prometheus," this music combined disparate elements to signify a complex message that acted as a paracritical hinge, thereby challenging common assumptions as to the meanings of jazz.

These four examples of *Bedouin Hornbook* acting as a paracritical hinge demonstrate two main things. First: Mackey's characters' rejection of the false choice inherent in ideologies that value either/or binaries, which Harryette Mullen identifies as a trend in Mackey's work.⁹¹ Instead of presenting a clear divide between the critic and the musician, between "disinterested" and "objective" criticism and more subjective evaluation, N. rejects this, as does Mackey in his scholarship and interviews. Instead of separating music into what Scott DeVeaux calls a "core" and "boundaries," N. in the novel, and Mackey as an author, again, rejects this.⁹² This can be seen where the Mystic Horn Society draws their musical influences from, how they combine those influences into new music, and how they use that music to tell stories. These activities all involve transgressing boundaries, allow for the combination of disparate traditions, and allowing for a general flow of expression and information. Second: the novel reflects many of Mackey's strategies for enacting social change. By presenting music as a process, Mackey reaffirms his belief that music should be thought of as a verb, not as a noun. Through the process of discrepant engagement, Mackey challenges the borders which separate music from, or keep it insulated against, ideologies which maintain it as a noun. His challenging these nounification borders is key to countering social othering and to creating social change through artistic othering including, I argue, jazz paracriticism.

⁹¹ Ibid., 42.

⁹² DeVeaux, "Core and boundaries."

One way to understand and analyze the cultural work of *Bedouin Hornbook* is to look at it through the lenses of theories of postmodernism, post-modern narrative, as well as examining it as a piece of political art. Like other postmodern fiction, its driving force is ontological, as opposed to modernist fiction's epistemological focus.⁹³ Brian McHale argues that postmodern fiction creates a literary ontology, which is defined as "a theoretical description of a universe."⁹⁴ Or in other words, "postmodernism looks to project or construct a world - or a world-within-a-world - a zone of imaginative constructions which supports, for a moment, a play of suppositions."⁹⁵ In general, postmodern fiction asks the following questions: "What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured?"⁹⁶ *Bedouin Hornbook* is a literary ontology, in that Mackey provides a theoretical description of a universe. In this universe music signifies and communicates with more preciseness and detail than it does in the real world. In N.'s universe, notes, rhythms, timbres, etc. have the same signifying potential and power as words. Mackey creates a world in which music and other cultural artifacts are more viscous than in the real world, given their ability to flow between, among and through boundary lines. *Bedouin Hornbook* can be read as a critique of the values which inform jazz criticism and those which create insularities, but it is also more than that. It is a construction of a world in which the power and capabilities of music are theorized about. Central to this construction are the novel's many narratives.

⁹³ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 9-10.

⁹⁴ Thomas Pavel, quoted in *ibid.*, 27.

⁹⁵ Adalaide Morris, "Angles of Incidence/Angels of Dust: Operatic Tilt in the Poetics of H.D. and Nathaniel Mackey," *Callaloo* 23, no. 2 (2000): 752.

⁹⁶ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 10.

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Frederic Jameson outlines two types of what he calls "postmodern historiographic narrative." The first type presents a narrative of generations and genealogies which contain fabulation and fantasy, wherein "unrealistic personnel, ironic and melodramatic destinies, and heartrending (and virtually cinematographic) missed opportunities mime real ones. . . . Here, a semblance of historical verisimilitude is vibrated into multiple alternate patterns, as though the form or genre of historiography was retained (at least in its archaic versions) but now for some reason, far from projecting the constraints of the formulaic, seems to offer postmodern writers the most remarkable and untrammelled movement of invention."⁹⁷ The second narrative incorporates and juxtaposes real characters and events with fictional ones.⁹⁸

As a postmodern narrative, and as a work that helps to create a narrative of jazz and black music, *Bedouin Hornbook* works in several ways. While *Bedouin Hornbook* does not fit squarely into either of Jameson's types, it contains enough elements, especially of the first type, where his analysis of postmodern narrative is helpful. Although the novel does not present a generational narrative with stories of kingdoms and genealogies and so forth as its foundational base - N.'s letters only stretch out over a period of three years and three days - there are several instances where generation and genealogy is implied. While the members of the Mystic Horn Society are not part of a generation in a familial sense, they are definitely part of a musical lineage. In addition, the group's music, especially in some of the pieces I discussed above, tells of generations and genealogies. Like Jameson's first type of narrative, the novel's epistolary form is historiographic, as N.'s letters document the history of events surrounding the Mystic Horn Society. Or as Fritz Gysin describes N.'s letters, they provide the reader with a "written

⁹⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism*, 368.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 369-70.

report."⁹⁹ The music is itself in a way historiographic in its recitation of historical events - fictional, mythic or realistic. N.'s letters have what Jameson calls a "semblance of historical verisimilitude" in that most of the events are fairly realistic - the letters discuss many of the real world situations and events a band experiences, such as rehearsals, performances and interpersonal relationships and dynamics. However, other events are surreal, hard to believe, and N.'s numerous alter egos would fall into Jameson's description of "unrealistic personnel."

In a lengthy quote, Jameson describes the relationship the first type of narrative has to praxis, which I suggest relates to Mackey's project in *Bedouin Hornbook*. Jameson writes:

here the making up of unreal history is a substitute for the making of the real kind. It mimetically expresses the attempt to recover that power and praxis by way of the past and what must be called fancy rather than imagination. Fabulation - or if you prefer, mythomania and outright tall tales - is no doubt the symptom of social and historical impotence, of the blocking of possibilities that leaves little option but the imaginary. Yet its very invention and inventiveness endorses a creative freedom with respect to events it cannot control, by the sheer act of multiplying them; agency here steps out of the historical record itself into the process of devising it; and new multiple or alternate strings of events rattle constraints and necessities their parodic force indicts. Narrative invention here thus by way of its very implausibility becomes the figure of a larger possibility of praxis, its compensation but also its affirmation in the form of projection and mimetic reenactment.¹⁰⁰

In this quote Jameson implies and abstractly discusses the results of social othering and the move from verb to noun that Mackey writes about. In *Bedouin Hornbook* Mackey presents the unreal history of an unreal group of musicians, who, but other than in a few instances where the unbelievable and the fantastic become manifest on the page, could exist. Had they existed in real life and been written about by jazz critics, no doubt they would have been placed either inside or outside the canon into some fairly restrictive insularity. Their music and their experience would have likely been codified in some manner, and on some level the social structure in the jazz art

⁹⁹ Gysin, "From "Liberating Voices" to "Metathetic Ventriloquism": Boundaries in Recent African-American Jazz Fiction," 283.

¹⁰⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism*, 369.

world they existed in would have been shaped for them. But as fictional characters living in a non-fictional musical and cultural world performing music which could very well be real, Mackey allows them to make their own history, their own music, to create their own narrative, values and meanings free of the constrictions that would have been placed on them had they been real. The novel's characters exercise their own agency, and in Jameson's words, the book's events "rattle constraints," which is one of the goals of discrepant engagement and the work of the paracritical hinge.

In *Bedouin Hornbook* Mackey gave his characters the ability to form their own complex and multi-faceted identities, identities which had they existed in real life would have challenged the common assumptions and conventions of identities attached to those who are pegged as "jazz" musicians. In these ways, through its focus on the characters creating their own identities and music, *Bedouin Hornbook's* narrative, in Jameson's words, "becomes the figure of a larger possibility of praxis, its compensation but also its affirmation in the form of projection and mimetic reenactment." It does so by showing how musicians, albeit fictional, used disparate elements and influences to create their own identities. This is by no means a unique practice to the Mystic Horn Society - real musicians pull from diverse and seemingly incongruent influences all the time, yet as can be seen in the writing about real musicians their influences and identities are often shoehorned into existing categories, which serve to marginalize or downplay those elements which do not fit into those categories. Occupying their own world, the members of the Mystic Horn Society are able to create their identities free of the possibility of marginalization by the critical establishment.

The novel's narrative, both in terms of what happens to N. and his bandmates as well as the narratives of the Mystic Horn Society's pieces, is central to Mackey's artistic othering and his

challenge to social othering. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Jean-François Lyotard discusses the importance of narrative in the creation of knowledge. Narration and narrative knowledge, as opposed to scientific knowledge, does several things. Perhaps most importantly, "narratives allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand to define its criteria of competence, and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed within it."¹⁰¹ "Knowledge," Lyotard posits, "is what makes someone capable of forming 'good' denotative utterances, but also 'good' prescriptive and 'good' evaluative utterances."¹⁰² Furthermore, narratives "determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do."¹⁰³ In addition, "fictional narratives," McHale writes, "are subject to certain *global semantic constraints*: all the sentences of a text are governed by the same logical modality, something like its logical key signature."¹⁰⁴ The narratives in *Bedouin Hornbook* which N. gives the reader in his letters to the Angel of Dust and the narratives embedded within the compositions and performances of the Mystic Horn Society, create a world in which its characters actively define and set the terms for what can be said and what consists of "good" and knowledgeable judgments and statements. In this way, the novel's narratives create the rules for engagement (a topic I discussed in Chapter 1) which governs the ways in which their music is talked about. The results of this is that they have agency and control over their identities and music, which is part of the goal of Mackey's anti-insularity project.

¹⁰¹ Lyotard, *The postmodern condition : a report on knowledge*, 20.

¹⁰² Ibid., 18.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁴ McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 33. Italics in original.

One way in which to further understand the work of *Bedouin Hornbook's* narratives in terms of its political function and work, is to understand it as creating what Jacques Rancière calls a dissensus. Rancière defines dissensus as a "conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or 'bodies.'" In other words, dissensus is "a conflict between *sense* and *sense*."¹⁰⁵ It is a rupture between the object which is sensed and the body doing the sensing. Dissensus challenges common accepted notions of what is real. It is the opposite of consensus, which is "an agreement between sense and sense." Consensus, "as a mode of government, says: it is perfectly fine for people to have different interests, values and aspirations, nevertheless there is one unique reality to which everything must be related, a reality that is experienceable as a sense datum and which only has one possible signification."¹⁰⁶ Whereas consensus privileges signifiers with clear meanings which exist in one reality, the dissensual conflict prioritizes multiple readings, the challenging of given relationships, the creation of new relationships and identities and so forth. Whereas in consensus "the sensory is given as univocal,"¹⁰⁷ dissensus embraces the sensory given as multivocal.

Bedouin Hornbook, I suggest, can be understood as a work of critical and political art that creates dissensus. Dissensus lies, "at the heart of politics," which Rancière defines as an "activity that redraws the frame within which common objects are determined."¹⁰⁸ The practice of discrepant engagement's elements - the challenging of borders, making connections between seemingly incompatible ideas or objects, putting things together which do not fit, etc. - are well suited to the creation of dissensus. The novel works as a piece of fiction in the sense in which Rancière reconceives of and uses the term "fiction." As opposed to fiction consisting of a

¹⁰⁵ Rancière, *Dissensus: on politics and aesthetics*, 139. Italics in original.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

completely fictional world, Rancière suggests we think about fiction as "a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and collective."¹⁰⁹ Related to the work the paracritical hinge does, fiction "undoes, and then rearticulates, connections between signs and images, images and times, and signs and spaces, framing a given sense of reality, a given 'common sense'. It is a practice that invents new trajectories between what can be seen, what can be said and what can be done. It is a practice that shakes up the distribution of places and competences, and which thereby works to blur the borders defining its own activity."¹¹⁰ In a way, Rancière's definition of what fiction does is similar to Mackey's "artistic othering," in that it reframes or reconfigures a previously existing item. Fiction as Rancière conceives it, creates dissensus, leading to political work. As an example of this type of fiction which creates dissensus, *Bedouin Hornbook* works to reframe the ways in which jazz and jazz musicians are thought, written and spoken about.

Considering the above discussions of the post modern novel's creation of literary ontologies, the work of narrative in post modern fiction, and dissensus, *Bedouin Hornbook* can be seen as engaging in politics. Politics, Mackey says, involves "laying claim to one's own authority."¹¹¹ This is similar in some ways to Rancière's definition of politics, in that by laying claim to one's own authority and becoming an active agent, one can act politically to reorder the ways in which relations are structured. I believe that for Mackey, part of laying claim to one's own authority, involves the construction of genealogies, something he and N. do throughout *Bedouin Hornbook*. Mackey explains that

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 141.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 149.

¹¹¹ Mackey, "Interview by Christopher Funkhouser," 261.

We create our genealogies as much as they are given to us and fixed for us. We find the traditions that feed us; we make them up in part, we invent the traditions and the senses of the past, the genealogies, that allow us to follow certain dispositions that we have, to be certain things we want to be, to do certain things we want to do. But it's a complicated process. It's not like we decide what we want to do and then we go find a genealogy to justify it. We're looking for what we want to do and what we want to be and we're looking for a disposition as we go through things. Some things speak to you and some things open doors for you while other things don't.¹¹²

One sees in this quote some of the logic that informs *Bedouin Hornbook*, and recalls my discussion in Chapter 1 of Appiah's scripts and their importance for creating identities and agency. By living in a certain time and place, and being born to certain parents, N. and his cohorts inherit certain cultural genealogies. They came across a multitude of musical styles which spoke to them, which opened doors for them, which allowed them to create their own musical and cultural genealogies. Their discrepant engagement with diverse cultural traditions, myths and music allowed them to create their own narrative and to lay claim to their own authority. Through their musical and written narratives, they reframed the given of what jazz can be, do and communicate. Mackey's creation of the theoretical world inhabited by the Mystic Horn Society provides an example in which boundaries in the world can be transgressed and challenged. By giving this alternative possibility, Mackey is reframing the possible in this world, which is an overtly political act, and one that moves to jazz from noun to verb and to counter the negative effects of social othering.

CONCLUSION

To answer this chapter's final driving question (How can we understand the cultural work of *Bedouin Hornbook* in relation to other types of jazz criticism?) I find it helpful to go back to the map metaphor in relation to insularities that I laid out in this dissertation's Introduction. As I

¹¹² Mackey, "Interview by Peter O'Leary," 292.

suggested, all jazz critics are forced to make choices on how to navigate the discursive terrain of jazz, and the path they take constitutes their insularity, which serves as the border between "jazz" and "not jazz." Whereas critics like Leonard Feather took a path that encircled the established canon fairly closely and dealt with race only as far to say that jazz was universal and available to people of all races and ethnicities, Mackey navigates jazz's discursive terrain in a marauding fashion. Instead of using *Bedouin Hornbook* to draw borders, Mackey aims to build networks of spur trails and rogue pathways between, through and across established paths in order to connect insularities. In doing so, he builds bridges, canals and other connective technologies to permit flow between and among insularities. Working as a paracritical hinge to permit flow, *Bedouin Hornbook* disrupts borders between insularities, forcing them to deal with the flow of information from the other destabilized insularities. Whereas mainstream jazz criticism works to create insularities, Mackey's jazz paracriticism uses insularities for different purposes than those who created them. Whereas insularities are created to be distinct, Mackey sees them as spaces to bring together in a creaking fashion, to discrepantly engage with. In this case, the prefix "para" refers to not only the different style, voice and form of *Bedouin Hornbook*, but to the fact that it is doing slightly different work. Mackey maps the same discursive terrain as mainstream jazz criticism, in that he deals with race, gender and other discourses, but he does so in a divergent, anti-insular way, which is demonstrated by the spur trails, canals and other connective technologies.

If one accepts, as I do, Gennari's assertion that one of the main goals and thrusts of jazz criticism has been the canonization of jazz as high art, then how is it possible to reconcile one of jazz criticism's main goals with my conceptualization of Mackey's anti-insularity paracriticism in *Bedouin Hornbook*? Whereas canon and insularity builders see the recognition of jazz as a high

art to be beneficial to jazz and those associated with it, Mackey sees the opposite. Thus, one finds Mackey writing with a very different goal and set of strategies than other insularity builders. Through his use of discrepant engagement to create a complex, living and incredibly rich and multilayered text, Mackey attempts to dismantle the fixed nature of the jazz canon and its implications. That Mackey works to dismantle the jazz canon is not surprising, given his postmodern ideology and approach. In the end, functioning as a paracritical hinge, *Bedouin Hornbook* is a work of jazz paracriticism that works to unmake one of the primary accomplishments of jazz criticism - that is the canonization of the music itself. But his project is more than that: by writing a work that is based on challenging borders, assumptions, views that are accepted as self-evident, etc., he creates, practices and privileges a means through which marginalized people can create their own agency and can reframe their reality. In this way, his project is similar to the ways how jazz criticism works to shape social relations that I outlined in Chapter 1.

Reading *Bedouin Hornbook* as I have has two large implications for the concept of insularities and the practice of jazz criticism. First, that the struggle between insularities is not a war fought about defining a musical genre; rather, it is a war with multiple fronts that engage in numerous discourses. Using *Bedouin Hornbook* as a paracritical hinge, Mackey not only forces the insularities he challenges to deal with the varied, numerous and diverse musical styles and traditions employed by the Mystic Horn Society, but he adds extra-musical traditions, cultures, histories, myths, ethnicities, races, genders, etc. to the mix. In addition, *Bedouin Hornbook* demonstrates that the struggles between insularities can take place on a grammared front. As a paracritical hinge, the novel treats music as a verb, working to counter what Mackey feels are the negative consequences of those whose insularities are noun-based. Reading *Bedouin Hornbook*

as jazz paracriticism illuminates the messiness and inherently problematic nature of the process of trying to define a genre and tradition. Reading it as such should inform the ways and places in which both insular and anti-insular projects as laid out in other jazz criticism work.

Second, that there is a potential for the existence of a large body of artistic creation, such as *Bedouin Hornbook*, to be read as jazz criticism. This has to do with the relationship between jazz paracriticism as a form of jazz criticism and the kinds of anti-insular work that a piece of art engages in. What does this relationship tell us about the potential for a wide variety of artistic production (literature, painting, photography, etc.) working as jazz criticism? Does all jazz paracriticism work against insularities in a similar way to Mackey's? Or put another way, is all anti-insularity criticism jazz paracriticism? No: the criticism's form is independent of its goal. Although I characterize Dyer's *But Beautiful* as a work of jazz paracriticism, I do so based on its style and approach to writing about jazz as opposed to how it engages with the canon. A writer can take an anti-insular approach with similar goals to Mackey, but do so in a traditional and non-"para" manner; i.e., by writing record and concert reviews, artist profiles, etc. in mainstream publications. Understanding the relationship between a piece of (para)criticism's form and method and its goals forces us to reevaluate what we consider jazz criticism to be, what work it does, and what iterative forms it comes in. Just because a piece of work, such as *Bedouin Hornbook*, eschews insularity construction or does not appear in a venue one would expect to see jazz criticism appearing in does not preclude it from taking part in the process of negotiating the boundaries of insularities. As such, this suggests the existence of a large number of works heretofore acknowledged or read as jazz criticism, "para" or otherwise, which may have much to say about the process and implications of both insularity construction and deconstruction.¹¹³

¹¹³ One such work is Fred Moten's collection of poetry entitled *B Jenkins*, which is a great example of discrepant engagement. Moten not only writes about black music, but also dedicates poems to scholars and cultural critics such

Reading *Bedouin Hornbook* as a piece of jazz paracriticism requires us to rethink what we know about the practice of jazz criticism and to look out for the paracritical work being done by other artistic and critical endeavors.

as Walter Benjamin and Jose Munoz, writes on rock bands such as Sleater-Kinney, visual artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Piet Mondrian, and actresses such as Pam Grier. That the book is part of Duke University Press's Refiguring American Music series speaks to the ways in which boundaries between not only musical genres are, but art forms and other methods of cultural criticism and production are porous. Treating and analyzing *B Jenkins* as a not only a work of jazz paracriticism, but of juxtaposing such criticism with other forms of criticism, may yield new insights into the cultural work of the practice of jazz criticism. Fred Moten, *B Jenkins* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010).

Conclusion: Why Multiple Insularities?: Mapping the Terrain and Political Advocacy Via Insularity

This dissertation has many goals: first, to argue for the existence of multiple insularities; second, to characterize jazz criticism as cultural work which influences social order and social relations; third, to understand that this cultural work is done through the deployment of a wide array of race, gender and nation projects; and fourth, to expand the ways in which we think of who counts as a jazz critic and what can be considered jazz criticism. Perhaps the most important aspect after having asserted that multiple insularities in jazz criticism exist is the question of why. Why do multiple insularities exist? Why did Feather, Wilmer and Mackey undertake their various projects? Outside of their critiques, what were they protecting and fighting for? To answer the "why" question I will put Feather, Wilmer and Mackey into conversation with each other, as well as place them within the larger context and history of jazz criticism. I argue that multiple insularities in jazz criticism exist as a byproduct of the complexity of jazz's cultural space, the problems which exist in that space, and the multitude of ways in which critics attempt to address these problems.

I have argued throughout that part of the work of jazz critics has been to (re)order social relations through language. But this is rather abstract. As a concept, an insularity does not mean much on its own. It only gains its significance in practice, in how and why critics actually create their insularities. The important thing is identifying what exists on either side of an insularity's borders, understanding what is being insulated from what, and determining the logic informing these relationships. Based upon my analyses of Feather, Wilmer and Mackey, what do each of their insularities look like when drawn on the map of jazz's discursive terrain? Furthermore, how

does their work fit in with what and how other critics have insulated certain music, styles, values, groups of people, etc?

An example of the tradition of jazz criticism in which Feather, Wilmer and Mackey inherited can be seen the battle between the Modernists and the Moldy Figs of the 1930s and 1940s. This battle demonstrates the competition between different insularities and illuminates the kinds of values and ideas critics insulate which they use to create their own definitions of jazz. In fact, Feather, Wilmer and Mackey engage with many of the same discourses critics had done decades before. In the 1930s and 1940s jazz critics, fans and musicians first argued the relative merits of older style New Orleans jazz, which the Moldy Figs supported, and newer swing, supported by the Modernists. When bebop appeared in the mid 1940s the modernist position moved to supporting bebop while supporters of swing became the Moldy Figs. Bernard Gendron places the debates of both wars into several common themes and binaries: "(1) genres and brand names; (2) art and commerce; (3) folklore and European high culture; (3) [sic] progress and the new; (4) technique and schooling; (5) affect and antics; (6) fascists and communists; (7) black and white."¹

Gendron notes that in the Moldy Fig/Modernist debates did not invent these binaries, as they had been part of the larger tradition of aesthetic modernism; rather, these jazz critics engaged with these binaries in new ways in their bid to canonize jazz and to define the art form. These critics engaged with discourses of race, musical standards, politics, art and the marketplace, etc. in an either/or fashion which helped to establish that jazz criticism would be undergirded by binary logic.² Choosing a side of each binary in essence draws a line - or the route, to use the map metaphor I outlined in the Introduction. These lines and routes can be

¹ Gendron, "Moldy Figs and Modernists: Jazz at War (1942-1946)," 35.

² Ibid., 50.

thought of working as protection: protection from the perceived dilutive and corruptive influences on commercial success and mass culture; protection from racial or gender discrimination; protection from the threat of European culture, and so on. However, the process of mapping routes around a series of individual binaries is not as tidy as it might appear to be. Gendron rightly points out that these binaries were highly interconnected. "For example, the anticommercial stance of the revivalists played into, and reinforced, their promotion of authenticity, folklorism, tradition, and affect, set against a vaguely left-wing antifascist background."³ This messy, intersectional and complex relationship between these discourses, and the ways critics engaged with them in a heterodox manner, is why the concept of multiple insularities is so helpful to understanding the tradition of jazz criticism. Even critics on the same side of an issue, such as Feather and Wilmer working against gender discrimination, may approach other issues in wildly divergent manners, as Feather and Wilmer did. With the hundreds, and perhaps more like thousands, of jazz critics mapping the discursive terrain of jazz in their own, if at times only slightly divergent ways, in the past 100 years, it is hard to see how a "core and boundaries" model provides the means with which to understand the complexities, mechanisms and processes at work in the creation of multiple insularities. The "core and boundaries" model speaks to canon creation, but does not account for the work of critics, such as Feather, Wilmer and Mackey, who attempt to break with the canon. Acknowledging the existence of multiple insularities in the field of jazz criticism is one task. Determining why critics create insularities in the first place to achieve their goals is another.

In short, I argue that the move to canonize jazz as an art form, to create it as a defined and insular musical practice, is partially a reactive move to counter the effects of marginalization.

³ Ibid.

This can be seen in the efforts and motivations of the early jazz critics and other participants in the early jazz art world, who Paul Lopes describes as acting with a "missionary zeal," to canonize jazz.⁴ That the bulk of early jazz critics were primarily privileged white men had profound effect on the practice of criticism and how criticism shaped the social relations and values in the jazz art worlds. The critic of the 1930s, Ron Welburn describes, "was likely to be an opinionated young Ivy League college graduate who collected jazz records, attended nightclubs and ballrooms to hear his favorite bands and musicians, and wrote good enough prose for it to be published." The early critic was not a professional musician and did not come from a musical family.⁵ Most early critics during this time were in their mid-twenties and lived in New York, Chicago and Boston and were motivated by what they felt was the poor level of writing about jazz.⁶ In addition, these critics "were anxious to see an art form blossom divorced from the dance and comparable to nineteenth century concert music."⁷ At this time, John Gennari points out that the "emerging field of U.S. jazz criticism appeared to be something of an Ivy League cottage industry."⁸ As privileged white men, these early jazz critics worked towards establishing the rules of engagement for jazz criticism, inevitably reflecting and espousing the social dynamics and ideologies of their time, especially in terms of gender and race. Given that, the backgrounds and positions of privilege of the early jazz critics helped to structure the practice of

⁴ Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 157-73.

⁵ Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 14. Likewise, Lopes describes the "righteous elite of a rising jazz art world" to be "mostly white, male, college educated, and middle to upper class enthusiasts, many who pursued the sacred mission of jazz appreciation and jazz criticism." Lopes, *The rise of a jazz art world*, 174. In his 1939 essay entitled "Consider the Critics" Robert Pryor Dodge, one of the early jazz critics of significance, noted that "as soon as jazz became disturbingly identifiable as something more than 'our popular music,' countless uninformed commentators sprang up with something to say about it. In what the era might have called 'the spirit of the thing,' they made a jocose offering of a great part of the early recognition of jazz." Dodge considered this early criticism as "premature white-collar meddling" and felt that knowledgeable critics and good jazz criticism did not emerge until the 1930s. Robert Pryor Dodge, quoted in Frederic Ramsey and Charles Edward Smith, *Jazzmen*, reprint ed. (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 301, 28.

⁶ Welburn, "American Jazz Criticism, 1914-1940," 140-44.

⁷ Robert Pryor Dodge, quoted in Ramsey and Smith, *Jazzmen*, 301.

⁸ Gennari, *Blowin' hot and cool: jazz and its critics*, 84.

mainstream jazz criticism and its construction of the canon in such a way that it became a practice of privilege and exclusion.

Although these early jazz critics supported a music that large swaths of American society held in low esteem, and occupied lower a marginalized in relation to classical music critics, I argue that the bulk of these critics, by virtue of the social location they came from, created new forms of marginalization. In their efforts to move against the prevailing views of jazz, they excluded other populations, which is due to the simple fact that an insularity must exclude in order to exist. The work of Pierre Bourdieu, Barbara Hernstein Smith and Alex Ross helps to demonstrate how these early critics created an insularity that worked, even if unintentionally, to exclude. Bourdieu, Smith and Ross argue that the processes involved in making value judgments, establishing a canon of works, and exercising and advocating categories of taste, are indicative of the dominant social and economic class's desire to maintain cultural and social power. As Ross and Bourdieu point out, categories of taste classify the world.⁹ "What is at stake in every struggle over art," Bourdieu argues, "is also the imposition of an art of living . . . which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness."¹⁰ Having the ability and power to dictate taste is the power to classify the world and to marginalize the "other" who does not fit into the dominant worldview.

In the case of the early jazz critics, having the music they loved denigrated by the art establishment cast their "way of living into arbitrariness," and they were "othered" as a result. By arguing that jazz was art, they attempted to show that their pursuits and way of life were not arbitrary. Once these critics canonized jazz and gained the power to define it, their insularities classified the world into that which did and did not fit into their insularity. For example, the

⁹ Ross, *No respect: intellectuals & popular culture*, 211. Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, 6.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, 57.

Moldy Figs of the 1930s "othered" and discarded swing music because they felt it was corrupted by capital and therefore did not fit their definition of jazz, which had a strong linkage to ideas of art. Having once been marginalized themselves, the Moldy Figs and other early jazz critics marginalized others by constructing and defending their insularities.

I do not wish to suggest that the first jazz critics wanted to be critics because it was a place where they could exercise their social power. With a few exceptions, there has never been much money in jazz criticism, and especially at its beginning the music was marginalized and seen as lowbrow. This view is exemplified by critics such as Daniel Gregory Mason, who I discussed in Chapter 1. By many, jazz was not considered a respectable music, and one of the driving forces motivating early critics was the belief that the music was art, and that it should be considered as such. The path to wielding social and cultural power did not venture anywhere near jazz criticism. In fact, the insularities of the first jazz critics, which were in part anchored by the tenet that jazz was a high art, demonstrate that these critics were engaging in a reactionary move themselves, which meant in part to counter the values and social power of those who marginalized jazz. As John Gennari, Ronald Welburn, Paul Lopes and many others note, the first jazz critics were people who loved the music, who wanted to write about it, and who felt that it deserved wider recognition and appropriation and argued that it was a high art. I am not arguing that the first jazz critics were intending to create a system of power enforcement and regulation. Rather, I suggest that the social background and position of these early critics shaped their values, values which reflected the interests of the dominant society from where they came.

As I have discussed, the men who came to their craft from the highly masculine record collecting culture positioned themselves as masculine authorities. These early critics embedded masculine values in the ways in which they discussed jazz, serving to reinforce existing systems

of patriarchy. As educated and economically privileged white men with access to publishing, these critics defined the musical practices of those who often occupied subordinate social locations. These critics' backgrounds and the ideologies they worked within helped to create a practice of jazz criticism and a canon that was exclusionary, especially in terms of gender, race, class and American cultural identity. It is this exclusionary nature that leads critics to create alternative insularities. Each insularity's definition of jazz reflects the ideologies that informed that insularity; thus, each insularity expresses its values. Bourdieu, Smith and Ross echo this last point when they suggest that expressions of taste by those in dominant social positions reinforce structures of power. Considering that the development of mainstream jazz criticism was borne of an environment in which white men held social power, it is no wonder that other critics who felt marginalized challenged the canon through the construction of alternative insularities. And it was some of these values, especially in regards to gender, race, economics and class, which Feather, Wilmer and Mackey responded to in their own work.

Throughout his career Leonard Feather responded to and worked against the patriarchal values and ideologies that discriminated against women musicians and prevented them from reaching the same success as their male peers. These values in part dictated women should become singers, or if they were to be instrumentalists, pianists. He became repulsed by patriarchy early in his life. He recalled that in the upper-middle-class synagogue he attended in England he was turned off by "the sight of women all seated in the balcony, like some lesser breed not fit to associate with men."¹¹ In the androcentric and heteronormative world of jazz, Val Wilmer struggled against not only the patriarchal views which questioned her motives, qualifications and abilities as a female critic, but those which silenced and ignored the contributions of women as well. Wilmer also moved against those who would define jazz in

¹¹ Feather, *The jazz years: earwitness to an era*, 5.

such ways which discounted the important role of social and cultural context, which in effect was a way to erase the lived experience of the musicians from the picture. Race and the process of defining jazz as art are central to Mackey's critique, which he makes as a reaction against the calcifying and racist effects the naming and limiting of an artistic production has. The nouning of jazz has served to deny agency and to socially "other" the musicians who make it. Mackey's solution then, is to work toward re-verbing jazz. What the projects of these three critics have in common is in their work against the patriarchy and racism that permeated through the dominant society, from which many of the early privileged, white male jazz critics came from.

One way to understand why Feather, Wilmer, and other critics take up insularity construction (or deconstruction in the case of Mackey) is to categorize the practice as one way of engaging in politics. Again, I return to Jacques Rancière, who defines politics as consisting

in an activity that redraws the frame within which common objects are determined. Politics breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the 'natural' order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled, assigning them to private or public lives, pinning them down to a certain time and space, to specific 'bodies', that is to specific ways of being, seeing and saying. . . . Politics invents new forms of collective enunciation; it reframes the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time - in short, new bodily capacities.¹²

Using Rancière's definition of politics, I see insularity construction or deconstruction as a highly political act that can be used to challenge the canon and its structures of power. The act of challenging the jazz canon through the creation of alternative insularities by jazz critics is a "collective enunciation" from those who fundamentally disagree with the canon or who are excluded from it. A political act, the creation of alternative insularities "reframes the given" of the jazz canon by attempting to tear it down and replace it. Put differently, jazz criticism's

¹² Rancière, *Dissensus: on politics and aesthetics*, 139.

creation of alternative insularities is one way to challenge those who hold power in an effort to disrupt social hierarchies.

Criticism can be used to reinforce or challenge, in Rancière's words, "the 'natural' order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled." This idea of the "natural" Rancière speaks of is crucial in the ways in which the categorizing of tastes and the construction of insularities creates and reinforces social difference. "Cultural power," Ross writes, "is exercised through the capacity to draw the line between and around categories of taste."¹³ Bourdieu suggests that "tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference."¹⁴ Those in power, having the ability to define taste and what is of value, work to naturalize these tastes, which has the effect of naturalizing "real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature."¹⁵ Ross concludes that social differences are expressed by what people consume and that taste "legitimizes social inequalities because it presents social differences between people as if they were differences of nature."¹⁶

Challenging the canon by creating alternative insularities is a way to counter the effects that Bourdieu, Ross and Smith discuss, such as the naturalizing and justification of difference and social inequalities, when dominant groups exercise their power by categorizing taste and drawing boundaries. Because those who are in a position to make value judgments often reside in a place of privilege, the texts that become canonized "will tend to be those," Smith posits, "that appear to reflect and reinforce establishment ideologies." In this way, an art work is

¹³ Ross, *No respect: intellectuals & popular culture*, 61.

¹⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, 56.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁶ Ross, *No respect: intellectuals & popular culture*, 58, 59.

canonized because it reaffirms and reproduces the ideologies of those who canonized it.¹⁷ This speaks to the ways in which the early white male jazz critics represented and reinforced the values from the social location in which they came - namely patriarchy and aesthetic and evaluative values and methods steeped in the discourses of the Western art music tradition. As I discussed in Chapter 1, two of the most important early jazz critics, R. D. Darrell and Constant Lambert, began their careers as classical music critics. Thus, it makes sense that they would apply the approaches and tools used in classical music criticism in their jazz criticism.

The political work of insularities takes place within very specific cultural contexts and exist in interactions among people, ideologies and discourses. In the case of Feather, he attempted to reframe the given, and to break with the "natural" order which dictated how, when and in what ways female musicians could participate in jazz. On the other hand, in his work for *Playboy* he operated within a context that reasserted not only patriarchy but sold a particular masculinity to consumers. Both Wilmer and Mackey engage in political work, as defined by Rancière, by inventing "new forms of collective enunciation," and by "inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible." Wilmer's standpoint insularity, as created through her music writing and photography, brings to light the social and cultural contexts behind the music and provides a space for a group of people to be heard and seen. Or in other words, she helps to frame a collective enunciation. *Bedouin Hornbook* is a new way of making sense of the creation and experience of music, especially when juxtaposed with mainstream jazz criticism. Via the paracritical hinge technology - which if nothing else offers "new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible" - Mackey challenged long held assumptions and beliefs about how music can be judged, thought and written about. Operating in a very different space from those like Feather allows Mackey to act in ways and

¹⁷ Smith, *Contingencies of value: alternative perspectives for critical theory*, 51.

employ methods which would not be acceptable in a mainstream jazz publication like *Downbeat*. His work reframes the given about what constitutes jazz criticism and what work it can do. Feather, Wilmer and Mackey all moved in different spheres and contexts with different goals, yet they all constructed insularities, or in the case of Mackey attacked insularities altogether, as political means to redressing what they saw as the ills of patriarchy, racism, and other mechanisms of subjugation. Feather and Wilmer's insularities, as well as Mackey's anti-insular project, were all political maneuvers designed to counteract the negative effects they perceived.

Although I have characterized the construction and existence of multiple insularities as a set of reactive maneuvers, insularities work in proactive ways as well, namely as advocacy strategies. This advocacy as manifested in insularity construction works in several ways. First, the canonization of jazz was an act of advocacy on the part of early jazz critics, who worked in support of validating the worth of the music they loved. Second, as I discussed in Chapter 1, the creation of any insularity is one method to create and advocate for a group identity and narrative as a way that allows people to actively construct themselves as subjects. In addition, insularity construction is a way to structure the social relations within that group. Creating a group identity allows the group to assert its identity and defend itself from other groups. For these reasons, choosing to create an alternative insularity is one way for a group of people to advocate on its own behalf. Related to this point: using insularities to advocate for a particular group of people is a path to remaking social hierarchies. Or in the case of Mackey, challenging all insularities is the means to redressing social inequalities. Either way, insularity construction or deconstruction are ways to advocate for improved social conditions. The creation or destruction of insularities is a counter-hegemonic and political move to advocate for people marginalized by the canon.

So what specifically were Feather, Wilmer and Mackey advocating for? What were they protecting? This can be answered in both musical and social terms. Feather defined jazz rather conservatively, excluding free jazz, fusion, smooth jazz and anything which demonstrated the corrective influence of commercialism from his definition. This last point is curious, given that Feather was always on the lookout for scoring a hit record. Or put differently, Feather defined jazz as a noun, canonized with firm genre boundaries. Jazz was a universal art form, available to all, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, etc. This equal opportunity view required that jazz be judged by universal standards. In Feather's ideal world, jazz would be a meritocracy. But he was well aware that issues such as racism and gender bias too often prevented those who had the ability to succeed from doing that. Holding firm to his convictions that jazz was a high art form, he advocated on behalf of musicians, who he felt were artists, intellectuals, and who had important contributions to make.

The view that a universal art form which can be judged on clear standards has racial overtones, which Wilmer was especially keen to. In contrast to Feather, Wilmer took a wide view of what counted as jazz, going so far as to see jazz as existing within the continuum of black music. For Wilmer, the music was anything but universal; it belonged to African Americans who created it and were its major innovators. As such, the notion that jazz could be judged with criteria applicable to all styles of music was not only fundamentally flawed, but represented a Eurocentric bias that worked to marginalize African Americans. Like Feather, Wilmer fought against racism and sexism, but did so using much different tools. Wilmer advocates for the view that jazz and all of black music is a social practice, and defends that view against those who would separate the music from its cultural context. The logic of separation informs the jazz as meritocracy idea. Through the construction of her standpoint insularity,

Wilmer fought off the idea of jazz as meritocracy, as she found it to be a way to subjugate the music's participants, especially musicians of color.

Although Feather and Mackey both worked against racism, the two could not be more different. Defining music as a verb, Mackey, as exemplified by his practice of discrepant engagement, finds every musical expression, style and form valid and worthy, regardless of where it came from or how it had been used in the past. For Mackey, the key to redressing the ills caused by the canonization, or rather the nounification of jazz, is to break down insularities and to allow an exchange and flow of information between them, not to draw walls and borders. He advocates for the idea that music is an evolving practice, which he demonstrates so dynamically throughout *Bedouin Hornbook* and beyond. Like Wilmer, Mackey is concerned with musicians and artists being able exercise their own agency and to create their own identity and narrative.

In the work of all three critics we see how issues of race, gender, art, musical standards, ownership, etc. all intersect. In their criticism, Feather, Wilmer and Mackey engaged with these issues, mapping jazz's discursive terrain in various ways and for different reasons. They did so through a variety of race and gender projects, each of which was laced with numerous other discourses. At the risk of distilling things down too far, I see all three of these critics advocating for people, but doing so in the context of music. Where on the surface it may appear that jazz criticism consists of saying whether or not a particular piece of music is or is not jazz, is or is not of value, etc., criticism's deeper work involves advocating for not only a particular music, but for the people who are involved in the production and participation in that music. The cultural work of jazz criticism, then, consists of identifying problems in a musical art world and trying to solve them. Multiple insularities exist as a way to address perceived problems, many of which result

from the canon's exclusionary effects. Throughout its history, jazz's participants have identified an abundantly diverse number of problems affecting different kinds of people in different kinds of ways. As a result, numerous critics have presented solutions, and the criticism of Feather, Wilmer and Mackey demonstrate this. A heterodox practice involving innumerable methods and strategies to address problems - be it the marginalization of jazz by the high art crowd, gender discrimination, the social othering of African American artists - jazz criticism, itself a diverse practice involving people of many social backgrounds and experiences, manifests itself in the construction and challenging of multiple insularities. Through the construction or deconstruction of multiple insularities, critics use the canon for their own ends. In either case, the construction and deployment of multiple insularities consists of "firing the canon."

Postscript

To say that I have undergone a rather significant transition while writing this dissertation is an understatement. Intellectually, I have grown; my writing improved (I hope); my thinking about my - for lack of a better word - "jazz criticism" has come to be more complex, contradictory, and at times confused. Much of my work on Leonard Feather in these pages began in the middle of my MA program, nearly ten years ago, before I began my side-career as a jazz critic. Upon starting my PhD work I had around two dozen CD reviews and a couple longer pieces under my belt, but I was still pretty green, and more or less happy to be paid, however insignificantly, to write about music and see my name in print. However, I was not so star-eyed to be unaware of some of the implications of what I was doing.

My first CD review for *Downbeat* in 2007 was of an album featuring saxophonist Joshua Redman. As I made mention of in the Introduction, I remember thinking, worrying, fretting: "who the hell am I to say whether or not what Joshua Redman is doing is good or not?" Luckily, I liked the record.

But, on many occasions I haven't liked a particular album and wrote as such (I'm still working on the tortured relationship between "like" and "good"). I've been in trouble with a reader or three of *Downbeat* who didn't find my conclusions palatable and told my editor so, at which point my editor ran the letter, because it made for good copy. I've heard that a critic has made it when he or she gets raked over the coals from readers. I guess I've made it.

Since beginning my life as a part-time freelance jazz writer I've published over a combined 100 CD reviews and a handful of concert and event reviews for *Earshot Jazz* and *Downbeat*. I've voted in numerous critics polls, and on my blog I've written scores of CD

reviews, think pieces, and a few interviews. I mention this not to brag on myself, but rather, to try and show that in a way, I am one of the "critics" - in the generic sense - that I just devoted this dissertation to. If I follow the criteria I set out in Chapter 1, I am, in some way, a cultural authority. Now how much power I have is certainly up for debate; it's probably pretty limited, especially since the high point of jazz's popularity has long since passed. Although the label of a CD I gave a 5 star, or "masterpiece" rating in *Downbeat* told me that my review gave the musician more exposure and attention and just about any other press the label had received before. I know first-hand that my writing has helped moved product across the scanner.

Through the process of writing this dissertation - a recurring question: as a "jazz critic," am I really participating in the sorts of work I say that jazz critics do?

For a while, I really wasn't sure. I couldn't decide if what I was doing was different from the other "critics" I was talking about. Or whether I do cultural work in the way I say critics do. I've often even wondered whether or not what I'm arguing about the practice of jazz criticism is just a collection of theories thrown into a cauldron at the top of an ivory tower for the sole purpose of getting a degree. In other words, do I even believe my own arguments as they relate to my own criticism?

Now, at the end of the dissertation process, I have come to believe and stand behind my argument, but with some caveats or conditions as related to my experiences. Much of this stems from what I've learned from Leonard Feather, Val Wilmer and Nathaniel Mackey.

Looking at the ways in which Feather operated within the norms and expectations of the jazz media and recording industries has helped me to understand my position in relation to the jazz industry. The dictates of what it takes to be published in a publication like *Downbeat* more or less influence how I've dealt with, or rather not dealt with, discourses of race, gender, nation,

and the ways in which language can (re)order social relations. There's not much room for deviation from the ways in which the magazine publishes its reviews. This is the case both in terms of word count (some of my reviews have been cut to less than 100 words, and they've never gone over 300) and in terms of standards.

Once I figured out the general template, writing reviews for *Downbeat* got considerably easier - handy when facing a tough deadline. Listen to the album a bunch of times, take lots of notes, introduce the particulars of the recording, describe the music as best as possible, compare it to what I know of the artist's prior work, give it a star rating, send it to my editor, wait for my check. Lather, Rinse, Repeat . . .

In the magazine CD review genre there's no room to play with language, to address weighty issues, at least not in a substantial way. I am careful, however, to not use any hint of androcentrism in my reviews; it's subtle, and important, and it's my most common gender project in the pages of *Downbeat*.

Researching and writing about Val Wilmer, and having the great fortune to meet and interview her, has greatly influenced my approach to my jazz criticism. Examining her work has kind of pushed me closer to a tipping point where I no longer feel comfortable or even interested in scoring or ranking records and musicians. The primacy she places on framing musicians as real people greatly speaks to me, especially since I am a musician and have numerous friends who are professional jazz musicians.

One of the things that most impresses me about Mackey's writing, especially *Bedouin Hornbook*, is the ways in which he is able to take his ideologies and translate them so profoundly into his criticism. This is striking to me in two ways: first, that he was able to formulate his

philosophy, and second, that he executed it. His writing pushes me to keep honing and refining my viewpoints and to figure out how to put them into practice.

Mackey's ability to bring music to life on the page, to chart the constellation of meanings in the music and to do it in a surreal manner which gets to the transcendental qualities in music is highly appealing. I'm now more interested in the affect of music - I partially blame my professor Ben Chappell, who assigned Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affect* for this move, although I suspect the interest and inclination was always there. Capturing the feeling of music and tackling the ways it is experienced is increasingly becoming more important to me. To publish in *Downbeat* requires I write within a pre-established system in which one of the main goals has been to judge the worth of a performance; this system does not allow for addressing affect in much depth. Of late, my inclination is to move towards affect based criticism, as music is to be felt, to be experienced, not to be scored.

My insularity, or the way I engage with insularities, what I feel is important about criticism, has changed in some significant ways since beginning my dissertation and my freelance writing career. Now, I'm less enthused by the prospect of being published in one of the leading English language jazz magazines, although I will never get tired of getting free CDs, even when those CDs aren't "good." I'm now less enamored with the idea of creating annual Top 10 lists, giving albums a star ranking (I often suffer from a condition I call "post star-ranking regret syndrome"), deciding who I think the top three tenor saxophone players of the year are, the best "beyond" album of the year, etc. It's a tiresome activity.

However, voting in annual critics polls is a way for me to bring my own views on what is of value. In this year's NPR Music jazz critics poll I was one of over 130 critics who submitted

ballots. Only two of the albums in my top ten list made it into the top fifty.¹ Several albums in my list received no other votes. Perhaps they weren't "jazz" enough for other critics to consider. My ballot in no way matched up with the rest of the voters. Reflecting my growing unease with ranking albums, I did not order them one through ten, instead preferring to list them alphabetically and having the points divided up among them equally.

Although my annual ballots rarely line up with the results, that does not make me the only critic whose ballots did not reflect the majority, as many albums reflected on the 2013 NPR Music Jazz Critics Poll received votes from one critic. Of the 700 albums receiving votes, only about the top 175 appeared on more than one ballot. Wayne Shorter's *Without A Net* appeared on 46 of 136 ballots (33%), which was enough for him to win. No album in the top ten appeared on less than ten percent of all ballots, and no album outside the top sixteen appeared on more than ten percent of all ballots. Clearly, the results were quite divergent, with few ballots lining up with the top ten albums.²

If I was to describe my insularity I would say that to loosely qualify as "jazz," an album must have an identifiable grounding in one element of the jazz tradition. I do not go so far as to say jazz is universal as Feather does, but I feel that it is available to all who learn the tradition. Although I must say, as a saxophonist, I have never been able, and will likely never be able, to play the blues convincingly. That's not where I come from, that's not what I hear when I play. Like Wilmer and Mackey I see music as social practice, culturally contingent, and impossible to

¹ My top ten jazz albums of 2013, in alphabetical order, were as follows: Alaturka, *Yalniz*; CACAW, *Stellar Power*; Christian Wallumrod, *Outstairs*; Dawn of Midi, *Dysnomia*; Derrick Hodge, *Live Today*; Kaze, *Tornado*; Matana Roberts, *Coin Coin Chapter Two: Mississippi Moonchile*; Matt Parker, *Worlds Put Together*; Scottish National Jazz Orchestra, *In the Spirit of Duke*; Steve Owen, *Stand Up Eight*. Chris Robinson, "OutsideInsideOut's Top 10 of 2013," *Outside-Inside-Out*, <http://outsideinsideout.wordpress.com/2013/12/31/outsideinsideouts-top-10-of-2013/>, December 31, 2013, Accessed February 20, 2014.

² Francis Davis, "The 2013 NPR Music Jazz Critics Poll," *NPR Music*, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/bestmusic2013/2013/12/16/251761858/the-2013-npr-music-jazz-critics-poll>, Accessed February 20, 2014. "8th Annual Jazz Critics Poll: 2013," <http://hullworks.net/jazzpoll/13/totals-new.php>, Accessed February 20, 2014.

apply universal standards to. And like all three critics, I see problems which I try to address with my criticism. For example, and like many other critics, I find that rigid genre lines work to marginalize musicians in various ways. In this way, I am like Mackey in my belief that nothing should be off limits, which perhaps explains why my annual critics polls almost never line up with the results. Like Mackey, I value difference and diversity, and while my values were shaped long before I had ever heard his name, his work has only reaffirmed and strengthened my convictions in the importance of diversity and the lack of importance in boundary lines.

I began this dissertation by pondering what it meant that my 2012 critics poll ballot prominently featured musicians of a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, especially acknowledging that the major innovators have all been African American. Upon much consideration, I believe that that year's ballot, as well as my other critics poll ballots, reflect my own insularity, which values a diversity of influences, styles, new combinations, and above all, a belief that the music is a process. I am not the only critic to share these views, but when combined with my background, which is unique to me, I can safely and confidently say that my insularity is one of many, that it is one of multiple insularities.

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