

In the Break

The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition

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“premature post-expectancy,” otherwise known as mourning. To record this insight is an Ellisonian imperative: not just an impossible and impolitic staving off of invisibility, which after all has hypervisibility at its heart; rather, in the hope of an ensemble of the senses and, after the fact of its ongoing deferral, an emergence of radical orchestration. You descend into the depths of the music and linger there, dancing in the hoped-for shadow of a bridge, unfathomable ocean song, uncrossable river suite, sentimental avant-garde, subjunctive-sentimental mood. This is an Ellingtonian imperative.

CHAPTER 2

In the Break**Tragedy, Elegy**

Amiri Baraka's work is in the break, in the scene, in the music.¹ This location, at once internal and interstitial, determines the character of Baraka's political and aesthetic intervention. Syncopation, performance, and the anarchic organization of phonic substance delineate an ontological field wherein black radicalism is set to work, and in the early sixties Baraka is situated—ambivalently, shiftingly, reticently—at the opening of that field. His work is also situated *as* the opening of that field, as part of a critique immanent to the black radical tradition that constitutes its radicalism as a cutting and abundant refusal of closure. This refusal of closure is not a rejection but an ongoing and reconstructive improvisation of ensemble; this reconstruction's motive is the sexual differentiation of sexual difference. The trajectory of Baraka's work in this period moves from the resistant embrace to the repressive transfer of this motive, and that trajectory is often discernible within individual works that emerge all along that trajectory. I want to trace this movement in the interest of amplifying the work's radical force while recognizing that this desire goes against the grain of Baraka's own assessment of the period I describe. What he sees as a transitional phase of his development—ground simply to have been covered or passed through—is a very definite seizure and advent, a musical caesura that demands precisely that immersive lingering that, according to Ralph Ellison, is a necessary preface to action.

As in Ellison, the occasion for such lingering is the entrance into that scene where the question of being and the question of blackness converge. As in Ellison, they converge as sexual questions. As in Ellison, they require a politico-economic response. This convergence is, of course, a point of divergence between Ellison and Baraka. They diverge precisely by way of the figure of transition, development. Baraka would say that Ellison moves through nationalism and Marxism to a devolutionary aesthetic individualism. Ellison would decry Baraka's migration from precisely that aesthetic individualism to nationalist and Marxist vulgarity. The extremity of both positions is, of course, problematic, but the positions remain instructive to the extent that their crossing marks a spot. That spot is the location of the interplay between nationalism and Marxism wherein the two are continually cut and abounded by the sexual differentiation of sexual difference. For Baraka, this spot exists between 1962 and 1966 even though neither he nor his commentators would characterize this moment as occurring within either his black nationalist or Marxist-Leninist "phases." Baraka's lingering in the broken rhythms of the field where blackness and black radicalism are given in and as black (musical) performance, in and as the improvisation of ensemble, amounts to a massive intervention in and contribution to the prophetic description—a kind of anticipatory rewriting or phonography—of communism that is, as Cedric Robinson has written, the essence of black radicalism. Such prophetic description is the project of a sentimental, criminal, proletarian, (homo)erotic, impossibly maternal avant-garde that works by way of a disruptive doubling of certain other theoretical hallmarks of "our modernity" as well. Attunement to the placement of these forces, of this vicious modernity, in Baraka's body of work, even if he would reject or disavow them, is the opening onto an understanding of the placement of these forces in the black radical tradition in general. This work is meant to contribute to the aesthetic genealogy of that tradition.

Of course, such a genealogy could never be simple, and the complexity of Baraka's out modernity is always on the verge of a lyrical scandal:

The wide open ensembles, the working friezes . . . the attempts at total definition are exciting and beautiful. It all works. The whole music seems less "bound" (by charts, by reading, by contracts, by spurious attentions) than before.²

The richness of this passage lies in the fact that the "wide open ensembles" it invokes and extends are shadowed by the threat of closures both internally and externally determined. It is not a coincidence that the very specific concerns with the animative object, with performative totality, that drive this passage are asserted at around the same time that Martin Heidegger was moving toward the end of a long techno-anxiety over the fact of everything functioning;³ that Derrida and others were moving in the beginning of an extended assault—driven by and in avoidance of Heidegger, among others—on the very idea of total definition that, according to Philippe Sollers, for instance (updating and diagnosing another nausea), was shaped and plotted, as if a piece of Black Art, against a backdrop of sound: a horn, a trumpet, whatever voice there was or body animating it from the open music of vernacular, sentimental avant-garde and appositional encounter. Now these can be seen as detached Euro-intellectual echoes unheard underneath the shattered upheaval of fucked-up, funk-ed-up, post-'65 Newark, itself called into being by the actively forgetful description of a returning exile, prophetic descriptions of destruction and rebuilding, *destruktion* and reconstruction, *deconstruire* and (urban) renewal, removal, foreshadowing descriptions of some out improvisations. But I will try to amplify them while plotting the course of a particular trajectory of transfer between certain musical performances and various modes of their reproduction, and between different moments and strains in the history of that reproduction, and toward the future of that history and what it might engender, whatever liberatory possibility it might hold and activate, the drives by which it's animated and punctuated. Part of what I'd like to get to is whatever generative forces there are in the asymptotic, syncopated nonconvergence of event, text, and tradition. That convergence emerges in and as a certain glancing confrontation—of Africa,

Europe, and America, of outness, labor, and sentiment—that is both before and a part of the material preface to the theoretical and practical formulation of a black public sphere.

Baraka thinks the possibility of such a public montagically, musically, and at the locus of the overlapping of these fields—mechanical reproduction. At a certain moment in the trajectory of his career he found the work of Wittgenstein useful to his meditations. Here is a small collection of Wittgenstein's formulations by way of which we might proceed.

4.014 The gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation, which holds between language and the world. To all of them the logical structure is common.

(Like the two youths, their two horses and their lilies in the story. They are all in a certain sense one.)

4.0141 In the fact that there is a general rule by which the musician is able to read the symphony out of the score, and that there is a rule by which one could reconstruct the symphony from the line on the gramophone record and from this again—by means of the first rule—construct the score, herein lies the internal similarity between these things which at first sight seem to be entirely different. And the rule is the law of projection which projects the symphony into the language of the musical score. It is the rule of the translation of this language into the language of the gramophone record.⁴

5. “But doesn't one *experience* meaning?” “But doesn't one hear the piano?” Each of these questions can be meant, i.e. used, factually or conceptually. (Temporally or timelessly.)

494. Doesn't it take imagination to hear something as a variation on a particular theme? And yet one is perceiving something in so hearing it.⁵

22. Think, for example of certain involuntary interpretations that we give to one or another passage in a piece of music. We say: This

interpretation forces itself upon us. (That is surely an experience.) And the interpretation can be explained by purely musical relationships:—Very well, but *our* purpose is not to explain, but to describe.⁶

I contemplate a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I *see* that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience “noticing an aspect.”⁷

783. We can say that someone doesn't have a “musical ear,” and “aspect-blindness” is (in a way) comparable to this sort of inability to hear.

784. The importance of the concept “aspect-blindness” lies in the kinship of seeing an aspect and experiencing the meaning of a word. For we want to ask: “What are you missing if you do not *experience* the meaning of a word?”—If you cannot utter the word “bank” by itself, now with one meaning, then with the other, or if you do not find that when you utter a word ten times in a row it loses its meaning, as it were, and becomes a mere sound.⁸

Montage renders inoperative any simple opposition of totality to singularity. It makes you linger in the cut between them, a generative space that fills and erases itself. That space is, is the site of, *ensemble*: the improvisation of singularity and totality and *through* their opposition. For now that space will manifest itself somewhere between the first lines of tragedy and the last lines of elegy. Lingering in that space is not but is of deconstruction, the oscillation between ghostly poles. We can begin, perhaps; perhaps not begin but move on; now, we can linger in and over a formulation of Derrida's: “what is happily and tragically *universal* is *absolute singularity*.”⁹ There, here, the “not but of” that haunts here and there, the resonant sound and flashing light, the emergence of the ensemble of the senses, dawns on us iconically, but in a way that is always touched by, or bears the trace of, the fullness of the sign.

We could think of this dawning in many ways, by way of many questions. What is the use or structure of iconicity? What's the relation between iconicity and that fullness of the sign (the richness that Peirce

located at the intersection of the symbolic, the iconic, and the indexical) that we might call *semioticity*?¹⁰ What is the relation between iconicity, semioticity, and the experience that exceeds normal conceptions of temporality and ontology and that is, according to Stephen Mulhall, “characterized by the observer’s felt need to employ a representation which might otherwise refer to subjective . . . experience—to one way of seeing the figure—as if it were the report of a new perception” and that we call (after Wittgenstein) *noticing an aspect* or aspect-dawning or aspect-seeing or (my favorites) hearing or having a musical ear or phrasing?¹¹ What is the relation between this experience and the experience of the poem? What are the internal relations within that experience between the intellection of the poem’s meaning and the sensing of its visuality and/or aurality? What are the relations between versions of or variations on the poem, manifestations of the eye and ear that raise the too deep question of the ontological status of the poem itself? What has this constellation to do with the phenomena of singularity and totality and their improvisation? What has this constellation to do with tragedy and/or elegy and/or (their) improvisation? And what have all of these to do with utopian aspiration and political despair?

Part of what I’m interested in, part of what I’d like to use in order to orient myself, is what could be called the (or, more precisely, Wittgenstein’s) way to (or around or against) phenomenology. More specifically, I’m after the way concern with perception and cognition (of the things themselves) leads to the deconstruction of ontology; the way deconstruction generates riffs and rifts, odds and ends, of philosophy and of the intersection in philosophy of semiotics and phenomenology; the way we move beyond such productive cuts and eccentric arrivals to something more intense—like an “active forgetting” embedded in *the improvisation of the things themselves* whose broadest sense and implications deconstruction spurns and craves. What I’m after depends upon thinking through the question of the relation between semiotics and phenomenology *by way of the phenomenon or experience of noticing an aspect* (which is, I think we can say, again after Wittgenstein, the

experience of meaning or of an insistent interpretation). It will be well, here, to remember a (para)phrase (‘cause every phrase is a paraphrase) of Wittgenstein’s—there is no phenomenology, only phenomenological problems—and to notice in passing that noticing an aspect—a phenomenological problem that, as we shall see, demands *description* in light of its exceeding of *explanation*—is in the aftermath or wake of this formulation: not but of not but of not but of

So another big part of what drives these fragments is interest in what is given in or emanates from the movement from the harmony of thinking and being, thought and reality (formations from the musics of Parmenides and Wittgenstein), to that harmony’s figuration in signs. We could think this also as the movement from “logical structure” to iconicity and beyond. Think about logical structure or its variations, “pictorial internal relation” and/or “internal similarity”: these formulations of the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* have an almost Peircean ring, coming as close as they do to Peirce’s notion of iconicity. In Wittgenstein “logical structure” is shared between two objects (one a proposition about the other) in much the same way that for Peirce a “diagrammatic sign or *icon* . . . exhibits a similarity or analogy to the subject of discourse.”¹² We must keep in mind two things: (1) this similarity occurs in the context of a struggle between sight and sound or, more precisely, in an insistence of music in Wittgenstein’s visual/spatial metaphors; (2) Wittgenstein became increasingly dissatisfied with the nature and implications of this notion of logical structure perhaps in part because of a certain restrictiveness embedded in the philosophical conceptualization of the phenomenon of likeness. Indeed, *phenomenon* is probably a misleading word since the strictures of likeness are bound to the insistence of its noumenality, a noumenality marked by the resistance of likeness to explanation or to, more precisely, employment in the task of explanation. Something slips through the cracks or cuts of iconicity, likeness, metaphor, such that thinking operates in the absence of any real correspondent and translational manipulation of the concept of internal similarity or pictorial internal relation. In that absence

or cut, in the space between expression and meaning or between meaning and reference, remains an experience of meaning that Peircean or what I'll call *first* iconicity doesn't get to and to which Wittgenstein would get.

The question, then, is how to describe that experience, and bound up in this question is the assumption (pointed to above, bitten off Wittgenstein) that description, rather than explanation, is the task with which we must now be concerned. More precisely, we must attempt a description of an experience whose provenance or emergence is not reducible to logical structure, pictorial internal relation or internal similarity; it is an experience of the passage or cut that cannot be explained because those formulations upon which our explanations must be grounded—spooky actions at a distance; communication between space-time separated entities; rigid, naturalized, but anti-phenomenal samenesses—are themselves so profoundly without ground. Like the strange correspondence between distant particles, like the mysteries of communication with the dead (or with tradition), the paradoxically elective and imperative affinities of and within ensemble are to be described within a radical improvisation of the very idea of description (in and through its relation to explanation), one that would move us from hidden and ontologically fixed likeness to the anarchization of variation, variation not (on) but of—and thus with(out[-from-the-outside])—a theme. At the constellation of meaning, understanding, music, phrase, feeling, variation, and imagination, we might speak again of iconicity, a *second* iconicity, not as the signification of shared logical structure but as a kind of noticing of an aspect, one that allows a temporal as well as ontological sense, a sense outside the temporal and the ontological, where we see—both factually and conceptually, statically and transitionally—entity and variation, each without theme. Perhaps this second iconicity, this semioticity or fullness of the sign, is the mechanism through which ensemble is made available to us as phenomena. Perhaps it is the supplement of description that allows description; for description of the phenomenon or experience of ensemble is only adequate if it is also itself the phenomenon or experience of ensemble.

Now, if you allow me to present some axioms *in the context of an imprecise but necessary conflation of the philosophy of the end of philosophy (of which phenomenology is not just one element among others) with modernism and with Enlightenment*; and if you allow me to suggest the shadow of a parallel declension, trajectories whose essential points are passed through in a silence only the occasion justifies; then I'd trace the genealogy of iconicity from Plato through Peirce through Wittgenstein: from a representational formulation of eikon as likeness or image—the spectral, phantomic emanation of some absent essence that places us in the systemic epistemological and ontological oscillation between sameness and difference; through the semiotic structuration of a system of likenesses that subsumes questions of difference and absence in a pragmatic consideration of our absolute remoteness from the noumenal; through, finally, the reconsideration of the spooky dynamism of objects that attempts to validate what could be called “the changes” that an object (for instance, the jazz ensemble and its sound or the poem and its sound or their interanimation and political implications) enacts and demands. By paying particular attention to the “grammar” and metaphors of Wittgenstein's formulations on noticing aspects, keeping always in mind the necessary and, if you will, cinematically holistic logical form of his texts (the interplay of the aphorism and its collection), we might begin to experience and describe the organization of things: (1) there's something tragic about the end (of philosophy); (2) Baraka is in the tradition of that end continually played out, played outside like a “vicious (rather than post-) modernism”; (3) the tragic in Baraka is political despair.

Have you ever suffered from political despair, from despair about the organization of things? What does it mean to suffer from political despair when your identity is bound up with utopian political aspirations and desires? How is identity reconfigured in the absence or betrayal of those aspirations? What's the relation between political despair and mourning? In the face of the problem this constellation of questions forms, what is required is an anarchization of certain principles so that an improvisation of Enlightenment might become possible. The unsayable claims of black utopian political desire, an unrequited love imaged after the fact, its sexuality violently reconfigured (and this is in and

shapes the tradition, the phantasmagoric image/desire/fear on both sides of the raping of the daughter) is posited: what happens to that desire—and the identity that goes along with it—when faith is lost, when prayer is no longer possible or is unheard over the beautiful, screaming, fractured music that precedes it? What happens when the improvisation of Enlightenment or modernism or (the philosophy of) (the end of) philosophy—as predicated on the eradication of a certain obsession with differentiated, representative, and representational identity—is lost? What chance does music, the music of the poem, the music that prompts the poem, the music that is prompted by the poem, give us to arrive at such an improvisation? How is such an improvisation to be recalled if its source grows more and more remote, separated from us by the death, by the distance, of Miles?¹³

The tragic in any tradition, especially the black radical tradition, is never wholly abstract. It is always in relation to quite particular and material loss. This is what “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” is about: the absence, the irrecoverability of an originary and constitutive event; the impossibility of a return to an African, the impossibility of an arrival at an American, home. “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” is a response to political homelessness and this is the sense in which it is tragic; and this is also why Baraka, between 1962 and 1966, became America’s great tragic poet by way of an improvisation through the opposition of the existential and the political, which extends and improves, say, the formulations of “Sartre, a white man.”¹⁴

The tragic political despair of “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” is a function of the weakness of its relation to ensemble and to ensemble’s condition of possibility, improvisation. Perhaps we’ll come to understand tragedy as an absence of light (*Lichtt ung* or *Aufkl rung*) and breath (*Geist*, *anima*), the nothing that does not come to stand against them (or, more precisely, their effigies). If so, that understanding will have only been possible by way of the activation of the trace of improvisation and ensemble that, though dormant, is in the poem always and everywhere like the spirit of elegy, like every bit of what “the spirit of elegy” means.

Here are the first lines of tragedy.

Against what light
is false what breath
sucked, for deadness.¹⁵

Slippage from question to assertion: question concerning absence, nothing, the hope or trace of what is not there that would stand against, that could never fully stand against, light and breath and the constellation of their meanings and associations, most especially, Enlightenment, revelation, spirit, song, and the vast and paradoxical network of liberatory and oppressive political implications they contain, reduced here, despairingly, in negative assertion, to the false and the dead. The intellect demands an analog—in the absence of symmetry between form and content, in the absence of what might be called a kind of iconicity (what I’ve referred to as first iconicity, a conflation of likeness and pictorial internal relation: perhaps that absence of symmetry or iconicity is what I referred to earlier as a kind of dormancy)—to the visual and aural tools a poetic reading can bring to bear on the changes Baraka plays: from question to assertion, from line to line (spatial reorientations), from sight to sound.¹⁶ The recording, as such and here, brings a whole other ensemble of changes, versions and their slippages, noticings of aspects or improvisations, through the opposition or conflation of objective and subjective experience by way of modes of variation that are organized within another understanding of poem or theme and without ground such that “the paradoxical air definitive of aspect-dawning experiences—the paradox manifest in our saying of a figure we know to be unchanged: ‘Before I saw something else, but now I see a [rabbit].’”—must be heard again in the light, if you will, of a description of a phenomenon that philosophy will have not quite been ready for: the improvisation through the opposition of stasis and dynamism, object and experience of the object.¹⁷ This is the paradoxical and definitive air of an accompaniment and it allows us to say that the poem—which is to say the music, the ensemble marked by the interinanimation of poem

and music among everything else in Baraka's work—"refreshes life" so that this phenomenon (something akin to but more than what Wallace Stevens calls "the first idea") is given us.

Perhaps all we know is that in the absence of what stands against, in the absence that is the dead and false, a poem is generated. It represents these absences, projecting into the future of their structures and effects from which, it would appear, only a god can save us.¹⁸ But a poem is generated, like a transcendental clue for that in which faith has been lost. Think of Baraka's sound as the sound of a belief in the dialectic: that sound extends a powerful strain in the African American tradition that desperately holds to utopian (re)visions of Enlightenment formulations of universality and freedom. But in and after the fact of the realization that these things are not for us comes the chance of a tragedy. When that hold is loosened, under the pressure of catastrophic and durative loss, a hard critique like a multiphonic scream or "slide away from the proposed"—from the propositions encoded in the philosophical instrument that sounds your death and birth and death and birth—is opened.¹⁹ At the point where and when all you can do is appeal to "a lost god damballah" to "rest or save us against the murders we intend," something else kicks in against all the determinations of freedom; a lived, *sounded* philosophical lingering in the cut between the dangers and saving powers of (the refusals of) totality and singularity; an improvisation of (the) ensemble. Then, here, we ask: what if we let the music (no reduction to the aural, no mere addition of the visual but a radical nonexclusion of the ensemble of the senses such that music becomes a mode of organization in which principles dawn) take us?

And don't let any artificial hierarchy of the senses keep you from the mysterious holoesthetic experience of ensemble Baraka's poems approach. One must have an ear and eye, skin and tongue, to perceive the poems' publication, aural reproduction, and their effects. We see the poem, read it, hear it, feel it—is it, in the midst of these various experiences, the same? Does it change? Where is the poem? Is the entirety of the poem ever present to us in any of its manifestations?

The relation between a musical score and the music is like the relation between the page and the poem. That which appears on the

page is not the poem but a visual-spatial representation of the poem that would approximate or indicate its sound and meaning, form and content, and the particular sculpted manifestation of language as their interanimations, the orchestration or arrangement of the body: voice and eye, the instrument upon which that music is played, the locus of the senses that must, in the face of all pressure, not allow itself to be reduced either to eye or voice and that must not allow the occlusion of the other senses and the correspondent exclusions that would follow.

So the spatial representation, the visual-ritual embodiment of the poem on the page, is supposed to indicate how it sounds, *how you sound*. But does it? Can it? Do the visual/spatial/ritual enactment or positioning or dance on the page of "BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS" adequately indicate how it's supposed to sound, thus sanctioning the commerce between eye and ear through which we must go in order to arrive at a description of the poem and that broader understanding of music to which I just referred and that notion of politics for which music is a transcendental clue?

But it's wrong to speak here of the poem as if it were the function of relation, of some determined mode of interaction between elements—rather, we might want to think of the poem as the entire field or saturation, flood or plain, within which the page, sound and meaning, the live, the original, the recording, the score exist as icons or singular aspects of a totality that is, itself, iconic of totality as such. Would this happily tragic formation, the mark, for Derrida, of "this strange institution called literature" of which nothing can be said, be adequate to the music that emanates from that peculiar institution whereof everything, all, the whole, ensemble, remains to be said and whose trace is the object of an unnamed seer/singer/sayer's deepest political desire?

Let's return for a minute to Wittgenstein's metaphors. Noticing an aspect was, for Wittgenstein, a holoesthetic phenomenon or experience: not to be described by way of a exclusive reference to the visual-spatial but by reference to the aural as well. Thus the ability to notice aspects is (like) having a musical ear. Thus noticing an aspect is what I have been calling second iconicity, though semioticity, again,

might be a better term because a kind of holism is implied, one that would correspond to that fullness or richness of the semiotic in which Peirce was interested and to which I earlier referred. Wittgenstein's work gets us to the point at which it is no longer possible to deny that semioticity is an object of the philosophy of psychology; he also gets us past that point to the extent that his work, part of the philosophy of philosophy's end, must also think the end of the philosophy of psychology. Finally, semioticity is nothing more than the ability to experience, understand, describe, generate, imagine, improvise, ensemble. It is not a kind of totalistic substitute or cipher for individuality or singularity; it is rather the mechanism by way of which we understand singularity and totality to be phenomena within the larger phenomenon of ensemble.

I want to think of this in much the same way Bakhtin thinks of the novel: as a force that reveals the limits of a systemic mode of thought, namely, that thinking in the spirit of system that has heretofore been called metaphysics, that thinking of the whole that is continually interrupted by temporal and ontological differentiation.²⁰ I want to show the novel, the new, the improvisational, at work in ensemble—which is to say in music, in utopian desire, in institutions strange and peculiar, and in their echoes and aftermaths, deconstructions and reconstructions—through both the despair of tragedy and the joy of (elegiac) resurrection.

Elegy is related to tragedy to the extent that it mourns for that which is the condition of possibility of the tragic: (a desire for) home. But what is the relation between tragedy, elegy, and improvisation? Perhaps this: that what animates the tragic-elegiac is something more than home(lessness) and (the absence of) singularity and totality: perhaps also there is a certain constellation that exceeds them, that exceeds the structure of their oscillation between happiness and despair, resurrection and mourning. What I'm talking about is ensemble and the improvisation that allows us to experience and describe it. It is our access to "the sexual cut," that "insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion," and it allows us to move beyond either the simple

evasion of the abyss or the spatio-temporal discontinuity that impedes our direction (home) or the narcotic belief in some spectral reemergence from its depths: rather we might look at that temporal-spatial discontinuity as a generative break, one wherein action becomes possible, one in which it is our duty to linger in the name of ensemble and its performance. That break allows, indeed demands, a fundamental reorientation that we might call novelty, that always exists at the heart of tragedy and elegy, which is there in Baraka's poetry and is there as that poetry would enact—through the opposition of description and explanation—the free music and politics, the free mode of organization it moves within and points to and whose logical structure it shares. Such enactment occurs by way of an improvisation through the very idea of logical structure in a way that is way past any normal ontology or time: so that what I'm into here is the anachronic improvisation of ensemble that exists in the tragic and elegiac Baraka. Part of what one might say, then, about singularity is that it is tragic and that it always points to a kind of despair or inevitability or to an endless dialectical struggle with despair as inevitability; to remain within its grasp requires a powerful faith in resurrection, ghosts, spirits, specters, a powerful faith in the possibility of some mystical and therefore totalizing force rising from the abyss that blocks any notion of continuity, fate, destiny, any notion, more specifically, of progress or perfectibility. You must have faith, in short, in some animus that allows the continual projection of discontinuity, the persistence of a certain structure of life in which final judgment—in which justice—is always deferred, to come, up ahead. Thus we can say that totality is elegiac; that in some sense elegy is the necessary reaction to the tragic state of affairs that singularity imposes: singularity always implies an end, a break, a radical interruption. Elegy is the response to that interruption, it is the mechanism by which hopelessly fragile singularity, after the fact of the inevitable end it is and brings, is regenerated in the form of a call to the spirit of a totality that is no longer, that has perhaps never been, one. The elegiac response to the end that is of singularity is the invocation of totality's ghost.

If *first* iconicity is the idea of logical structure that grounds the

relations between tragedy and elegy, singularity and totality—and is that which keeps the time of their rhythmic, deconstructive, timeless oscillation—then *second* iconicity offers an improvisation of that structure and through its effects. That second iconicity—noticing an aspect—that we must transform first into a less exclusionary semioticity and finally into a more radical, out-from-the-outside improvisation, is all throughout Baraka and resides especially in the cut between the beginning of “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” and the end of a piece we’ll arrive at momentarily, “The Dark Lady of the Sonnets,” a cut that is filled, erased, by our lingering in what animates it. That lingering, of course, would be musical. The passage I’d like to take you to is music. “So What?” you might ask . . .

“So What,” the most famous tune from Miles Davis’s most celebrated album, *Kind of Blue*, is in that it changes both from the point of view of the observer/listener and by way of the actions of the ensembles that generate it. Its paradoxical, anti-ontological status is a function of a form that de-emphasizes harmonic variation—the dominant “grammar” of jazz improvisation from Armstrong to bebop—by focusing on movement between tonalities, thereby allowing music to be generated out of the heretofore unthought locus of a multiply centered or decentered structure, namely, modal composition/improvisation. Though “Milestones,” a 1958 cut from Miles Davis’s album of the same name, and Eddie Harris’s “Freedom Jazz Dance,” a tune recorded by Davis for his 1966 album *Miles Smiles*, are most often cited as the first experiments in this new form of jazz composition, “So What” (1959) marks the full emergence of the era of modal improvisation in jazz and is considered “the modal composition par excellence,” the bridge linking and separating the severe stricture’s of bebop’s harmonically based improvisational model to the more melodic, even anarchic, reconstructions of or improvisations through the song form itself that the music known as free jazz enacts.²¹

“So What” defies the opposition between object and experience upon which Wittgenstein relies both in his first and second reconfigurations of iconicity. Neither the kind of likeness that would be explained

by way of the idea of logical structure or pictorial internal relation nor the kind of likeness that would be described by way of reference to noticing aspects are evident in “So What” (i.e., in the “internal relations” that exist between the theme- or song-as-object and its variations, either as perceived by an observer, enacted by a participant in its making or interpreted by some reverentially reconstructive artist or critic). Indeed, and as I have tried to point out earlier with regard to some of the other things we’ve examined here, the opposition between theme and variation is no longer operative after the fact of the music’s organization and the residual effects of that organization, across various disciplinary and/or cultural boundaries marking domains that were never, in their own right, devoid of the improvisational motion which The Music celebrates and philosophy represses. We can see Wittgenstein’s second iconicity, his noticing of aspects and valorization of description, as an attempt to repress that improvisational motion even as it also would embrace it, even as the aphoristic and deeply improvisational form of Wittgenstein’s work embodies it (as any reading of his work suggests; as Monk’s—Ray’s not Thelonius’s [though you know that “Light Blue” was the story of both their lives, Thelonius Sphere’s and Ludwig’s I mean]—biography of him moves to confirm).²²

“So What” is reducible neither to its near nonexistent score nor to some imaginarily definitive initial recording nor to any other of the myriad renditions of this improvisation that Miles’s ensembles played almost every night, coincidentally, during the years of what I temporarily call Baraka’s tragic period.²³ So that “So What” is the unheard music that is the background (and here I mean something like a Searlean background—[a production of] the ensemble or “set of nonrepresentational . . . capacities that enable all representing to take place”) of tragedy returning by way of the rough echo of its name in elegy.²⁴ It is an object whose objectivity *is* in that it transforms; it is what Stevens would call, if he could ever have recognized it, in a phrase more precise than the one (“the first idea”) I echo above, “a supreme fiction”: abstract, pleasure-giving, changing, yet material enough to bear the exultant mournfulness of the blues, the high and essential pleasure of repetition

encoded in all the possible experiences of meaning that the sound and title offer us, the infinity of whatever follows the absent loss that the title implies, absent loss paralleling the absence that would stand against that other manifestation of itself with which “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” begins, echoing what comes in the aftermath of loss in an ending in which Baraka’s voice becomes Miles’s, in which voice becomes metavoice, shadowed and deepened by mourning, moaning, growl,²⁵ at which the textual citation only gestures:

I know the last few years I heard you and saw you dressed up all purple and shit. It did scare me. All that loud ass rock and roll I wasn’t into most of it, but look brother, I heard *Tutu* and *Human Nature* and *D Train*. I heard you one night behind the Apollo for Q, and you was bashin like the you we knew, when you used to stand coiled like a blue note and play everything the world meant, and be in charge of the shit too. I’ll always remember you like that Miles, and yr million children will too. With that messed up poppa stoppa voice, I know you looken up right now and say (growl) So What?²⁶

That growl bears the trace of what I would imagine of each manifestation in these poems of joy and pain. Don’t describe. Don’t explain.

The Dark Lady and the Sexual Cut

Leon Forrest refers (soon after the cutting auto-interruption of his own text’s beginning, the one in which he calls himself out for being unfaithful to the literary muse, seduced by Lady, by music, by what abounds the literary in the sounded word, by what he then would deny by surrendering to the lyric, by having Lady so surrender, by invoking the literary as a category for her work) to the story in *Lady Sings the Blues* regarding Billie Holiday’s one-time husband Jimmy Monroe and the origins of the song “Don’t Explain.”²⁷

One of the songs I wrote and recorded has my marriage to Jimmy Monroe written all over it. I guess I always knew what I was letting myself

in for when he married me. I knew this beautiful white English girl was still in town. He didn’t admit it, of course. But I knew. One night he came in with lipstick on his collar. Mom had moved to the Bronx then, and we were staying there when we were in New York.

I saw the lipstick. He saw I saw it and he started explaining and explaining. I could stand anything but that. Lying to me was worse than anything he could have done with any bitch. I cut him off, just like that. “Take a bath, man,” I said. “Don’t explain.”

That should have been the end of it. But that night stuck in my crop. I couldn’t forget it. The words “don’t explain, don’t explain,” kept going through my damn head. I had to get it out of my system some way, I guess. The more I thought about it, it changed from an ugly scene to a sad song.²⁸

There’s a record in which Gilbert Millstein recites these ghost-written, haunted words before “Don’t Explain” is performed by Lady Day.²⁹ What’s the status of such reading? Forrest might try to claim that he has all along thought Billie’s singing as a reading, of romance, let’s say, or romance’s distantiation, and that what she reveals at the microphone is revealed in just such a reading of “Don’t Explain.” On the other hand, here Forrest offers a reading of her writing as a kind of reading since somebody tells the story of the song’s provenance in the autobiography. In this case another augmentation interrupts when Millstein delivers this celebrated passage from the downstage shadows at Carnegie Hall. Was Forrest listening to this reading, a reading both by Billie and of her and neither of these? Did he work in the midst of such a free, incalculable transfer?

What’s it mean to speak of her “wisdom-cutting literature”?³⁰ The laugh ain’t funny. She cuts literature like St. Theresa, with muteness and grain. Is muteness an attribute of wordlessness or of the word? To mute, to distort, augment or abound, divide or add to the sound, to the instrument’s range, breaking the signifier’s logic, very softly right up against the microphone. What does it mean to surrender to the lyric? It’s not only an abstract reaching, this going for, this willingness to fail.

Something is reached for, an unprecedented communication (cuts literature, literature is cut and cuts) possible only when language is not reducible to a means of communication, when the sounded word is not reducible to linguistic meaning. “Billie just mesmerizes the English language, that’s how exacting she was.”³¹ What about this intoxication? Who’s afraid? Whose suffocated desire? They act out arrestment. Such held breathing, abrupt cancellation. Billie Holiday sings at the locus of a massive transference; the (literary) interpretation of Billie Holiday operates as a massive acting out. She resists such interpretation, is constantly reversing and interrupting such analytic situations, offering and taking back that mastery, finally reaching radically around it. Therefore, motherfuckers are scared. Got to domesticate or explain the grained voice. Got to keep that strange—keeping shit under wraps even though it always echoes. But why is her lipstick ingrained on your temple?³² She wrote on it, “know your self!” Check yourself in the midst of an explanation that could only reveal the trace of what can’t be explained—both in the actions of a dark lady and in her grained voice. Don’t explain what they already know. She didn’t seduce you. You played yourself. The grained voice engrains, the sign of the mouth, which is the birth, the sign of a kiss, reading you like an analyst reads the signs; here that reversal, where the listener oscillates between the analytic positions, is now such that the listener is without knowledge and waiting on Lady to lecture, to free-associate. So Lady interprets. She reads. But what she reads exceeds and undermines any coercive anticipatory idea; it’s not all about the regime of love within which Forrest operates, reanimating his authorship to a large ensemble. He imagines her reading what he already knows, but her wisdom, as he knows and would actively repress, cuts that wisdom. She’s on another thing, another register of desire. And that grained voice elsewhere resists the interpretation of the audience when the analytic positions are exchanged. This imaginary kiss marks a voice that resists reading and writing when the audible is forgotten in the interest of a repetition of suffocated desire and lost object, of transference and drive, that would tell the audience what they want to hear and what they already know. But this is the site of a self-analysis in Cecil

Taylor’s sense of the term: an improvisation, an abundant internal transference, a drunken, doubly sexual cut. When the narrator and the interpreter enter the text and when the ghostwriter haunts it, the conditions for such transference, such unprecedented analysis and communication, are optimal. These interventions or mediations allow her replicative, inaugurative power. Muted, mutated, bent; muting, mutating, bending these words that are hers and before her

like now, as Billie reads, at the microphone

she comes in a bit too quickly after Millstein’s strange recitation before his beat, in interruption or too-quick cessation of his rhythm, established in the opening phrases of the text, establishing an implied narrative timing, that of the *Bildungsroman* and its way to tragedy. We are prepared for the sorrows of young Billie by caesurae that are meant to be hers but the rhythm they instantiate is interrupted by the poverty and richness of the one who lies before this instant, now at stage center, riding and bursting the gramophone right now.

Mom and Pop were just a couple of kids when they got married. He was eighteen, she was sixteen, and I was three.³³

This is the ghostwritten anacrusis of an anti-slave narrative, a narrative after slavery, narration of the ante-slave. Carry it and start it, initiate it, an ongoing or too-long-running tale she cuts and cuts off, cutting off “her” words and their recitation by a musical abundance. “Lady Sings the Blues” cuts *Lady Sings the Blues*. Beginning dissonantly, anachronically, in the interruption of a narrative we already know, in abundance of a tragedy foretold, seen, her phrasing abounds.

Two phonographies: the violence she does to words when singing is duplicated in her writing. A letter, for instance, or her book, the letter to Dufty that is without punctuation. In anticipation of some beat, she will have sent that letter on up ahead so that it can be read, so that she can read it, phrase it, deform it, recollect it:

When I get to New York I will read this letter for you I am at the St Clair Hotel please write or call me Miss you love you

Billie Holiday

PS . . . Now you know why I don't write i can't³⁴

One wishes for the tapes, that she would hurry up and come to New York so she could read this book to me, but then Millstein reads downstage, the location of the text is downstage, the location of the text is in the phonograph. She has come to read this book to me, only someone else stands in. The voice is present but off to the side, augmented and divided or differed by the presence of someone else. The presence implied by the voice is a haunted, ghostly striation, repeating lies that turn out to be true when they get phrased like that. The presence is a performance starting now, resistance in transference on stage.

Resistance to imposed and repressive racial/sexual regimes and to specific events of repression, but further: these events, regimes, institutions to which she replies are not originary; nor is this resistance interminable, nor can we simply say that the reply is paradoxically inaugurative. Sometimes this resistance comes in the form of a laugh that serves to resist both the saddest interpretation and the more differentiated reading of an oscillation between tragic heroine and macho slut, the turn to Miss Brown from My Man. There's a barely suppressed laugh in "My Man," a laugh resistant in both political and psychoanalytic terms. It's an abundant laugh that opens up by disturbing another convergence of Millstein's and (her ghostwriter, William) Dufty's rephrasing. The very line that ends the text, that seems to solidify her position within a tragic and falsely hopeful economy of dependence upon a man. Note these transfers: the performer of someone else's lyrics and of her own becomes the composer whose intentions are rendered unavailable by others' rephrasing; but at the point at which they would incorporate lyrics she reads, and Millstein would incorporate her own reconfigured lyric about the way she reads the lyric, the way she says "hunger" and "love," into the always already constructed narrative of the tragic woman,

at the point of a condensation in Millstein's reading that would rework the very occasion of that reading as the echo of a trauma, the only time she ever fainted was at Carnegie, some laughter lets you know that there's another story before that one: "Tired? You bet. But all that I'll soon forget with my man."³⁵ Millstein's conclusion, converging with the conclusion of the autobiography, is opened by her, just like she interrupts what is initiated by the Millstein/Dufty ghosted and reghosted beginning. She cuts Millstein and Dufty, cuts her own words by dividing and fulfilling and abounding them. Reading them a lecture she reads everything just like that.

Lady in Satin is the record of a wonderfully articulate body in pain. It works in the way, or in the field, of a new ethics, perhaps even a new morality. The ancient tension between product and process, technologized into a new strife between the live and the recording, is smoothed by sound that emerges from, among other things, massive loss and massive resistance, only in order to reproduce agony as pleasure differently with every listening. That tension is smoothed by a sound that is anything but, however, so that what the sound carries has itself been roughened, so that an irreducible pattern of wear, a disruptive and augmentative pattern of content, alters the surface of meaning. So that "You've Changed" is an iterable event of joy and pain, the extension of an event whose instantiation ruptures origin every time.

The lady in satin uses the crack in the voice, extremity of the instrument, willingness to fail reconfigured as a willingness to go past, though the achievement or arrival at the object is neither undermined by partiality or incompleteness nor burdened by the soft, heavy romance of a simple fullness. The crack in the voice is an abundant loss, the strings a romance with what she don't need and already has. The crack is like that laugh in the voice of "My Man"—trace of some impossible initial version or inaugurative incident and effect of the resistance and excess of every intervening narrative and interpretation. Those last records, when leaned into, into the depth of the grain, grain become crack or cut (you can lay your pen in there; upon what is this writing

before writing inscribed? what temple?), undermine any narrative of life and art that would smoothly move from a light business (busyness) to spare tragedy. Willingness to fail goes past; new coefficients of freedom.

The lady in satin says come, she announces herself, before the suppression of that call—as it coincides with the transformation of the name—in a text, by Baraka, called “The Dark Lady of the Sonnets.” The call arrives like a response to some earlier cry in Baltimore, in the echo of some traveling song on the Eastern Shore, through recordings, Armstrong and Bessie Smith redoubling the echo of the work songs from upstairs at the house where Eleanor Fagan started listening. In turn, Baraka responds—an open response that carries with it a trace he’ll never lose even when response begins to turn away toward some smooth, false interanimations of manhood, nation, race.

And I’m interested in the concept of race. I’m interested in the opening of its differentiation and in the differentiation of its categorization. I’m interested in the frame, in framing, in the frame’s rupture, and in the invention of the frame’s hidden internal corners. Such reconstructions would mark the full ensemble of the determinations and indeterminations of race and the frame, their interanimations and interruptive encounters. Then we might step outside and laugh at a surprising range of things: an identification of the sonnet’s subjectivity that exceeds all methodological transformation by way of a marked racialization (Shakespeare offers a critique of the arrest of the frame and its durative yet artifactual by-product in the course of an iconic framing practice, a technical reinvention of the frame, a restructuring of the sonnet/stanza, and its sequencing and a reformation of the subjectivity that the form and content of his sonnets demand and imply); the held line of another absolute alterity, the singularity of breath’s serrated edge (in Baraka the frame is spirit—a deep, paradoxically artifactual valorization of elemental and durative breath—the ongoing held within a fundamental, local, even national *anima*); a reduction of film to an effect of an effect of the photographic apparatus, a reduction that will also have been understood as a kind of racialization (Eisenstein gives us the spirit of the frame,

which would have been outside, the originary dynamics of relation). At the place where Shakespeare, Baraka, and Eisenstein do not meet, not in between but outside and home, race cuts race and frame cuts frame. In order to understand how such cuts are sexual cuts, we’ll need to deal with what marks and forms that place, a sensuality represented by textured satin, the Dark Lady Day. The sonnet-as-frame and the montagic sequencing of sonnets appear in conjunction with Shakespeare’s enactment of a technicistic subjectivity. Here I would both extend and contradict Joel Fineman’s *Shakespeare’s Perjured Eye* on the “new” subjectivity Shakespeare constructs in his sonnets: if Shakespeare instantiates a new subjectivity, it is both the opening of a quintessentially technicistic poetical subjectivity and the beginning of the end of that subjectivity, formed, allowed, and endowed by the double encounter (discovery and expulsion, desire and revulsion) with the epideictic other.

Fineman argues that Shakespeare’s sonnets rewrite epideictic poetry—a form whose name joins a root that means to show, bring to light, reveal, point or point out to a prefix that signals both the supplemental and the self-reflexive thereby marking epideictic poetry as that which is directed toward the description and exaltation of another while also containing surplus effects that are self-directed.³⁶ Fineman begins his reading of Shakespeare’s sonnets indirectly, by way of the opening sonnet from Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, in order to provide a background against which we can see this Shakespearean rewriting and the revelatory event at which it arrives.

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That the dear she might take some pleasure of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe:
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention’s stay;

Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,
 And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
 Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
 Biting my trewand pen, beating myself for spite,
 "Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

Fineman reads Sidney's sonnet as a fairly straightforward mode of epideixis in spite of the struggle to praise that the poem represents: for when all is said and done, all the poet need do is look at the engraving or framing of the object of praise and desire on his heart and, in an imaginary ecphrastic reversal, turn that picture into words. This implies the possibility of a direct correspondence between the visual and the verbal that empowers one simply to write what one sees; it also implies that one has easy access to a language that adequately represents what one sees; indeed, it suggests that what one sees seems almost to generate that language. What Sidney speaks of and prefaces is a kind of automatic writing, a revelatory writing, one in which "the dear she" who both prompts and receives the dual passion of vision and love is easily and directly revealed, uncovered, disclosed; no impediment is admitted to the marriage of what is seen, loved, or esteemed and what is said about what is seen, loved, or esteemed. For Sidney the language of the sonnet is, in fact, a pure physical language and, to the extent that it is epideictic and thus reflects both the process of praise and the passions that allow it, a pure phenomenological language as well, one descriptive of both the object and event of sight and desire.

What is new and both cool and scary about Shakespeare, according to Fineman, is precisely his admission of impediments to the marriage of the visual and the verbal. Shakespeare shows that the visual object of praise cannot be praised directly since language and the visual are unheld by any absolute convergence. Immediately, however, there's a deepening of this problematic because Shakespeare's revelation regarding the impossibility of praise occurs in and as praise and because his opposition of language and vision is always doubled by their relation to the extent that the language that reveals its opposition to vision is also

about vision. This paradox is thematized, according to Fineman, by way of the (dis)connection of the primary objects of praise in the sonnet sequence, the fair young man and the dark lady to whom the young man's revelatory truth and beauty is opposed—not because of any absolute verbal falsity and ugliness but because she is both true and false, both beautiful and ugly.³⁷ What Fineman observes, in short, is "a poetics of a double tongue rather than a poetics of a unified and unifying eye, a language of suspicious word rather than a language of true vision" that comes about as a function of "a genuinely new poetic subjectivity that I call, using the themes of Shakespeare's sonnets, the subject of a 'perjur'd eye.'"³⁸ Fineman thereby provides a myth of origin for the anxious affect and effect of modern subjectivity through a differential calculation of the subject. What I'd like to move toward, however, is a representation of the incalculable that stems not from any judgment on the etiolated verbal force of the subject but results, rather, from and in an improvisation through the interanimation of singularity and subjectivity that Fineman's reading assumes and that the form and the content of the sonnets both affirm and deny. Such a representation would work in the interest of a new and complex understanding of the *present* and presence of the object.

The work of Stephen Booth, particularly his extended note on the greatness of Shakespeare's sonnets, is here both instructive and revelatory.³⁹ Booth clearly places himself in the position of the epideictic poet by supplementing his praise of the sonnets with a self-reflexive discourse on the praising of the sonnets. Not surprisingly, the gist of his argument is that they're so great because they exceed calculation, because they give us a visionary, revelatory experience that cannot be accounted for when we break the poem down into component parts in order to attempt a calculation or a reaggregation—i.e., a reading—of it. Yes, Shakespeare's poems show the impossibility of a truthful declaration—of a real poetic fidelity—in the midst of a declaration of truth, and yes, they thus exhibit what appears as a strikingly divided subjectivity: this is made evident to us as we break the poem down. Nevertheless, the truth of the poem, its fidelity to its object, is what is revealed to us in

our experience of the poem. There are, then, a couple of things going on: we understand the poem and we do not understand the poem; we know something in spite of the convoluted and contradictory evidence that is the poem and, at the same time, we are required to try and figure out what that contradictory and convoluted evidence means and what it means seems to be precisely the opposite of what it is that we know.

Shakespeare produces certain effects, then: a continual figuring of the position of the reader and the dynamics of reading along with a foreclosure of the possibility of pure epideictic response that simultaneously produces that response and reproduces the demand for that response by demanding that we respond to him and allowing us to do so. He continually does that which upon closer analysis he proves he cannot do. And in so doing he forces us to accomplish the same feat. These sonnets are all intelligible to us in their general direction and thematics yet they become less intelligible the more we look at them, the more we know about them, the more we know. For the myriad of effects contained in a given sonnet, its multiple facets, when counted, added, collected in literary analysis, never add up to the sonnet itself. But the effect here is more than just the cliché of the whole as more than the sum of its parts. Here, rather, we have the following paradox: that the whole is undermined as an idea by the fact that it is not the sum of its parts and that in spite of this when we experience the sonnet we experience it as (an icon of) the whole. “Everything is in Shakespeare”⁴⁰ is, for example, precisely that epideictic response that reproduces the Shakespeare effect—the extension of that effect that I would here affect, implied by the corollary formulation “Shakespeare is improvisation,” would be: Shakespeare is ensemble, ensemble referring to the generative—divided, dividing, and abundant—totality out of which and against which (Shakespearean or post-Shakespearean) subjectivity appears.⁴¹

The haphazard conditions of their production and reproduction help to maintain the sonnets’ status as ideationally and bibliographically problematic. I am thinking here of the publishing of what are generally perceived as lexical or diacritical incorrectnesses that have had a material effect on the meaning that is produced in/from the work and, more

importantly, of the magnification of that effect by a sequential ordering of the sonnets that carries the illusion of a narrative but cannot be traced to the singularly ordering subjectivity of an author. This superimposed narrative works in conjunction with the altogether untraditional structures of address around which the sonnets are built to maintain and disseminate the in/determinations of reading. We can then trace, for example, that “sub-sequence/plot” addressed to a male beloved in which sexual favor is sought for someone who both is and is necessarily other than the male sonneteer and in which sexuality and procreativity as such are given as the (not necessarily linked) epideictic object; or we can analyze the “sub-sequence/plot” that is addressed to a person of the “appropriate”—which is to say opposite—sex who is in every other way unworthy precisely by exemplifying the paradoxically worthy and unworthy essence of woman and in which sexuality and procreativity are described in a “dark” imagery correspondent to a wholly critical scrutiny of their necessary linkage. This second group of sonnets and the protocols of reading they lay out are both addressed to the one who has come to be called the dark lady; they are what I’m most interested in here—partly because I think they allow for a return to the questions of race and spirit in their own right and partly because, even if they didn’t, Baraka has constructed from the echoed sound of Billie Holiday a bridge that spans the distance from the trace of Shakespeare’s sonnets to the question of these questions. This implied return requires attention to some minute deformations of the texts at hand—birth defects in some cases, in others simply the effects of a new technology. Can I kick it with a missing apostrophe or the typography of the “s” or the accidental duplication of a pair of eyes? What happens in the transition from the fair youth to the dark lady? What is the significance of the truncation of that transition, the absence of the couplet, the change in form from the celebration of the impossible procreation of the sonnet to the fear of a procreative blackness/beauty that has undermined all previous standards? The undermining of standards is both an effect of language and of Shakespeare’s intent in the sonnets—to explore the problematics of the object of love and the frame of desire.

The falsity of painting—of the devotion of the eye and its engraving on the heart—is a prominent motif that runs throughout the whole of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence but is reintroduced with redoubled intensity in the dark lady sonnets. There such falsity is ontologically determined in the seen rather than phenomenologically determined in the act, which is to say passion, of seeing. There is no slippage in the process of seeing/writing/engraving/framing or, rather, the slippage inherent there has not been contained, has wrested from beauty its ontological endowment, its name and local habitation. Painting now has a double edge, at the level of the object as such as well as at the level of the seeing/representation of the object. And whereas the possibility of the truth in painting remained in spite of the displacements of representation, that truth seems more problematic when the object to be represented is always already given as painted, its fairness either mere show or absolute absence. This falsity or doubleness—a kind of strange, if not deadly, life or animation—that inheres in the object itself renders the procreativity the sonnets mark and represent problematic: they are gotten in the dark place of an illicit—and not “simply” impossible—verbal-visual concord, one that has its basis in a procreative structure that is lustful and debilitating.

Sonnet 129 ends the transition in a sense: the effect of painting becomes “th'expense of spirit” wholly unmediated by that ethereal and true representation of the object of desire that the earlier sonnets impossibly attain.

Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action lust
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,

Had, having, and in quest to have extreme
A bliss in proof, and proved a very woe,
Before, a joy proposed, behind a dream.

All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heav'n that leads men to this hell.

Still, a narrative is discerned in this transition from an ethereal, idealized, nongenerative, male, homoerotic, literary sexuality to a visceral, heteroerotic, and necessarily illegitimate procreativity that exists as such only as a function of the racialization of sexual difference. Either way Sonnet 129 is an icon of the whole of the sonnets, one that contains allusions to the illusions of plot that take the form of a diagrammatically iconic, internal, temporal constituency that corresponds to a similar effect produced by the unnatural or, more precisely, naturalized sequencing of the sonnets.⁴² “Had, having, and in quest to have extreme,” perhaps the sonnet's most analyzed line, is iconic of the sonnet's iconicity. Thus numbers 1 through 126 could be read as those sonnets that are in quest to have (the violent and unreasonable quest for the formation of an interiority, a differential integrity, a singular subjectivity that would somehow emerge in an impossible homoerotic procreativity), and numbers 127 through 154 mark fulfilled desire with all the customarily feminized and racialized metaphors of death and decay, from whence nothing comes except the impossible, tainted residue of art, while somewhere in a gap that fails to show itself, unless we take the “missing” final couplet of number 126 to offer the impossible representation of having, resides the action of which there is no view and whose absence produces the need for a retrospective illusion of “itself.”⁴³ Sonnet 129 would be, in a sense, the embodiment of the extreme experience of the sonnets, the singular framing of their phenomenality, the clearest moment of the Shakespearean difference in poetic subjectivity. That sonnet, that frame, would contain a picture of the arrested or eternally deferred action of the sonnets and would thus also hold within it an image, if you will, of the arrested subjectivity that engenders that action. The doubleness inherent in the phrases' arrested subjectivity or deferred

action is figured in the poem by "th'expense of spirit" and by the duality—the dark desirability or Monkish "ugly beauty"—upon which or within whom that spirit is expended. Again, I'm interested in the model of poetic subjectivity that the workings of this poem produce and exemplify and in the provenance of that model—the (hetero)sexualized and racialized encounter with the object of praise, revulsion, desire and the simultaneously enabling and debilitating waste of spirit.

*a rush, onset; rapid action; the space or distance between two points;
a natural or inherited disposition; a particular class of wine or the characteristic flavour supposedly due to the soil;
a set of children or group of descendants; a generation; a tribe, nation or people or groups thereof; a class—one of the great divisions of mankind; one of the sexes;
to cut, tear (with regard to weaving), channel, course, line: a row or series;
a peculiar or characteristic style or manner [of writing]: liveliness, sprightliness, piquancy—"I think the epistles of Phalaris to have more Race, more spirit, more force of wit and genius . . ."*⁴⁴

NOTHING WAS more perfect than what she was. Nor more willing to fail. (If we call failure something light can realize. Once you have seen it, or felt whatever thing she conjured growing in your flesh.)

At the point where what she did left singing, you were on your own. At the point where what she was was in her voice, you listen and make your own promises.

More than I have felt to say, she says always. More than she has ever felt is what we mean by fantasy. Emotion, is wherever you are. She stayed in the street.

The myth of the blues is dragged from people. Though some others make categories no one understands. A man told me Billie Holiday wasn't singing the blues, and he knew. O.K., but what I ask myself is what had she seen to shape her singing so? What, in her life, proposed such tragedy, such final hopeless agony? Or flip the coin and she is singing, "Miss

Brown to You." And none of you cats would dare cross her. One eye closed, and her arms held in such balance, as if all women were so aloof. Or could laugh so.

And even in the laughter, something other than brightness, completed the sound. A voice that grew from a singer's instrument into a woman's. And from that (those last records critics say are weak) to a black landscape of need, and perhaps, suffocated desire.

Sometimes you are afraid to listen to this lady.⁴⁵

This piece by Baraka, entitled "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," is an elegy for one whose perfection was of the perfect, of its peculiar temporality, of the valorization durativity invites. Baraka's Billie Holiday exceeds in the way that the perfect exceeds any idea of succession or caesura, precisely in the willingness to move out, in voice, from any prior restraint or rule, to expand the range of the instrument, to move through any shadow of a separation of the voice-as-instrument from the body.

Baraka's sonnet would enact an epideixis of auralty, a move away from the occularcentrism of the discourse of praise. We only see her obliquely, obliquely seeing, "one eye closed, and her arms held in such balance, as if all women were so aloof." Nevertheless, a presence is felt, one that troubles the distinction between transmission and the sensation transmitted, one that reopens the question of sound in writing and the question of fear. Fear because, as Baraka writes, "Sometimes you are afraid to listen to this lady." Sometimes, the ghostly emanation of her sound from his writing instantiates a shuddering affect, a fascination or interruption that is frightening not only in the emotional effect it produces but also in the cognitive disjunction it opens, a disjunction between the perfection of the Lady and the rupture of a dead, recorded voice, between the insistence and the absence her sound marks. Sometimes you are afraid to listen to the voice of the dead, to its palpable, material sound. Sometimes you are afraid to listen to the perfect failure of voice. That perfect failure is not just a function of the cessation—the "dying fall"—that the rhythmic manipulation of the durative voice

enacts; it is, too, the phantasm that the mechanical reproduction of the silenced voice emits, the artifact of the recording, the necessary reduction of process to product, the containment and replication of the sense of excess. This is the paradoxical phenomenon that the musical recording, the sonnet and montage demand that we address and improvise.

“The Dark Lady of the Sonnets” (re)writes the music. It is more than a recording in the way that recordings are; not merely an artifact, it transmits, through an improvisational writing, the music as a kind of abstraction directed toward ensemble. “The Dark Lady of the Sonnets” is representation that moves in the absence of representation: not as any simple valorization of process—though such happens in the words—and not just in the ideology and metaphysics of spirit and nation (the expressive manifestation of the blackness Baraka loves, needs, and desires, the blackness whose overdetermined history of [negative] reference he both extends and overturns). It is, rather, an improvisation through the opposition of valorized process (coupled with the loss of sound, air, breath, or “th’expense of spirit”) and valorized product (as the artifactual, the presence of the recorded and etiolated sound, another inadequate compensation like the orgiastic and orgasmic screaming associated with the deadly concord of music and audience). It is an improvisation through the complex interrelations of shame, song, and prostitution and their connection to madness, intoxication, bewitchment, and infatuation: formulations past reason, of an apocalyptic tone, held within the expense of a sigh or the frightening, arresting sound a horn or a voice makes in its extension, bound up in the metaphysical connection between jazz, death, race, and spirit.

Something problematic is at stake, though, in what above I called Baraka’s “oblique” visual representation of Holiday, in the overdetermined visualization of woman as oblique, vague, malleable, interpretable, assignable in the process of more fixed signification. The vague particularity of woman marks a mystery that signifies origin, the unfathomable site of an imaginary return—to the mother, to Africa—with which Baraka’s writing in the 1960s was intimately concerned. Here elegy is

determined by the constitutive absence that surrounds it, namely race. What we have in Baraka’s text (in the apparent elision of the visual) is yet another “scopic hybridity” in which the music is reduced to something gestured toward in an etymological reduction of “jazz” (one paralleled by a similar reduction of spirit; a bridge connects “th’expense of spirit” and the dissemination of jazz; that same bridge connects sexual and aesthetic procreativity: spirit, sperm, jism, jazz): the fundamental element of another illicit procreativity indexed to and determined by either the literal or figural dissemination of a singular, originary, male substance. The sexualization of racial difference that is thereby enacted is a reversal of Shakespeare’s production of the dark lady of the sonnets; but that reversal is nothing more than a highly determined movement within the very structural economy that allows Shakespeare’s formulation in the first place.

Nevertheless, a certain phenomenon remains: one parallel to the undifferentiated, nonsingular generativity Shakespeare’s sonnets exhibit, one that is perhaps best described precisely as the phenomenon of the remainder as such or, better yet, as the mark of the totality that “everything” (that which is in Shakespeare and Baraka and their “objects”) can never capture. This phenomenon raises certain questions that trouble the distinctions between the object of sight and the event of seeing, the heard voice and the event of hearing. Here the question might best be formed thus: what is the relation between the determinate form of the blues (and the particular mode of subjectivity that form implies), the record (as the determined manifestation of a particular technical apparatus) and improvisation? Perhaps it is this: that the recording is a determination that is also an improvisation, one that extends, emanates, holds a trace that moves out of the tragedy the blues holds. Perhaps it is this: that the dark lady improvises through the blues and all that it implies from within its form and in the fixity of the recording. Perhaps it is this: that the tragic-erotic end that the blues seems always to foreshadow is supplemented not only by the transformative effect of improvisation but the ghostly emanation of those last records, the sound that extends beyond the end of which it tells. Perhaps it is this: that the sonic

image of a death foretold contains not only the trace of an early and generative beauty but the promise of a new beauty—song coming out of, song for . . .

The blues is what Lady sings and—in singing and in the excess of singing, by way of an improvisation through the overdetermination of the recording and the determination of the blues as tragedy, in the more than illuminative, undertonal expense and expanse of her dark, fantastic laughter—exceeds. The record is the sonnet, (re)written in Baraka's elegiac address to the one of desperate music. The sonnet is the analog of the frame. Sonnet, record, and frame are their own improvisations; this is to say that something held within these forms also exceeds them, that there is a remainder that is not reducible to the technical apparatus that produces them or the technicity that grounds them. That technicity resides in the idea of singularity through which sonnet, record, and frame are constituted and in their origin in a particular kind of technological apparatus, namely, the subjectivity structure to which Shakespeare is given and which Shakespeare writes and rewrites. That structure's essence is a technicity apparent in the oscillation between singularity and difference, singularity and totality. I do not think it would be unfair to think of this principle, this novel subjectivity of the sequence or, deeper still, of the interval, as montagic. And, as Baraka teaches us, "The question of montage is impossible without Eisenstein, whether they know it or not."⁴⁶ "[T]hey" refers, let's say, to Shakespeare and Lady Day, both of whom were aware—always and everywhere in their work—of the centrality of the question that Eisenstein (did "they" know him?) makes possible by questioning.

Eisenstein is essential here because of his theoretical exposition of ideas and practices already at work in the forms of things determined by technicistic, proto-mechanical origins. (These forms are no less technical, for all their relative earliness, than those that determine much of contemporary aesthetic production—I'm thinking here of the sonnet sequence—and no less subversive of the technical in spite of their position within the age of mechanical reproduction—I'm thinking here of

Holiday's *recordings* of her improvisations of the blues.) Most important is his pursuit of a theory of montage as nonexclusive totality: thus his movement from the polyphonic to the overtone and all in the interest (according to Annette Michelson),⁴⁷ of a whole art, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which would offer, represent, and enact what Trinh T. Minh-Ha calls "the multiple oneness of life."⁴⁸ That pursuit is restricted by singularity (the cognitive model or structure of subjectivity or principle of technicity or technical apparatus that produces forms such as the sonnet, the blues, or the frame) in/and its dialectical relation to totality (the synthesis of process and artifact that occurs in and as montage), and by the interval as the structure of that relation, the motive force and form or dynamism that infuses and animates "the ensemble of social relations." Yet Eisenstein begins to put some pressure on that idea of singularity in a critique of the static frame: Michelson argues that in this theorization, in "The Filmic Fourth Dimension,"⁴⁹ a radicalizing of montage is brought into effect such that it enters its utmost possibility; but it does so, I would argue, at precisely the moment of the foreclosure of that possibility. For montage comes into its own by way of the deconstruction of the elemental status, which is to say staticity, of the frame. Such a deconstruction cannot not include an improvisation through the idea of the frame as pure singularity: this means not only a theorization of movement in/of the frame but an iconization that acts as an affirmation against the very idea of the frame. When montage comes into its own, it comes into the deconstruction of its singular element and that element's intervalic relation to the set of which it is a member. What remains is a totality or ensemble that is structured neither by relation nor singularity but by the internal differentiation—the sexual cut—of singularity and the new relations, the everything, that differentiation allows.

Montage is the bridge that suspends or denies its transportive function: it's the internal suspension or translation of the syntagmic or, better yet, the phrasal supersession of the sentence. It enacts a dissemination of polyphony and pantonality within its heretofore univocal (time)line: the bridge collapses to an aporetic enduring, though, as I've said, there is already present a movement through these in/determinations of

singularity. This dissemination of ensemble, this new animation of the object, this animative improvisation of the old-new thing, is for the cinema to come: it is a pluri-dimensionality, heretofore repressed, of the instant, of the clearing, of the trace of Heideggerian *Lichtung* or *ekstasis* at work in Eisenstein's formulations, in the context of an appeal to affectivity or to the fact of the film having to be felt. And all we've been thinking of here is feeling—an ephemeral and paradoxical generativity, an expressive procreativity improvising through opposition and relation of cut and suture, the image and the sound of love. This is just to say that there is always something more than what is just to say, an abundance that accrues especially at moments such as these when things sound “edgy, maybe garbled at points,” when “ears literally burn with what the words don't manage to say.” This is to say + more that the lectural apparatus gives the word, in their inadequacy, something to say + more to and for the cinematic apparatus, performative force deforming and reforming the categories of the audio-visual field. Lady writes this knowledge onto Baraka's heart and writing.

How long can he remember?

German Inversion

What's gained by his dis(re)membering?

Here's the opening of Baraka's essay “The Burton Greene Affair”:

THE QUALITY of Being is what soul is, or what a soul is. What is the quality of your Being? Quality here meaning, what does it possess? What a Being doesn't possess, by default, also determines the quality of the Being—what its soul actually is.

And let us think of soul, as *anima*: spirit (*spiritus*, breath) as that which carries breath or the living wind. We are animate because we breathe. And the spirit which breathes in us, which animates us, which drives us, makes the paths by which we go along our way and is the final characterization of our lives. Essence/Spirit. The final sum of what we call Being, and the most elemental. There is no life without spirit. the human Being cannot exist without a soul, unless the thing be from

evil-smelling freezing caves breathing high-valence poison gases now internalized into the argon-blue eyes.

What your spirit is is what you are, what you breathe upon your fellows. Your internal and elemental volition.

At the *Jazz Art Music Society* in Newark, one night, pianist Burton Greene performed in a group made up of Marion Brown, alto saxophone and Pharoah Sanders, tenor saxophone.⁵⁰

“The Burton Greene Affair” is a recording of that ensemble. The music that was heard by Baraka that night in Newark resonates through his words even as it is denigrated, idealized, and distorted in the reading, hearing, and composing that forms the essay as name and description. Writing is marked by the possibility of variation; what you sing, read, improvise, *moves* you. Baraka's writing is no exception. The question is whether such movement must be a return. Baraka's affair veers toward a provisional return to the primordial and the question of its meaning. The aim of this return is twofold: being and blackness. Baraka talks about being by way of the music and within what he comes to figure as an “other” tradition (one that values a certain understanding and embodiment of improvisation, one that respects and theorizes totality in the work of art and in the artwork's self-deconstructive relation to the everyday). By the same token, the problem of blackness emerges only by way of an ontological questioning that might be the very essence of the tradition of the “same.” This conflict at the heart of Baraka's text demands precisely what it produces: deep sound. Such sound, in turn, requires the kind of listening that activates rather than fragments the whole of the sensorium. One must, therefore, look at the music Baraka makes with his own vicious eye. Adrian Piper might understand this as a parable about the interplay of visual pathology and racist categorization, but she also knows how hard it is—within a certain continuum of intensity, of aesthetic, political, even libidinal, saturation that black folks call everyday life—to look at what seems only to emerge as the occlusion of blackness, the deferral and destruction of another ensemble. In

the face of such violent seizure, the temptation to return to an imagined primordially is massive. We'll have to see whether or not being and blackness are approachable by way of this originary, fragmentary drive. On the one hand, Baraka moves down the broken line of an appositional choreography, a (phono/video) graphic sidestep. On the other hand, Baraka translates the old-new thing's improvisational theory of ensemble into an ontological language whose exclusionary totalizations would shut the gathering down. His translations cross over but only in the sense that would obtain if the design and engineering of the bridge were done in some disruptively excessive hard way (as if the architect were Hardaway). This is the old-new language—tragic, hopeful, fallen—of the broken ensemble, the phenomenal object. Baraka discovers the improvisational, ensemblic nature of the language of ontology in his use of it. He comes upon it by playing it. He invents it in a performance that will not just represent. He improvises, thereby bringing to bear on ontology the tradition of another inscription that renders "the tradition" meaningless or too meaningful, that opens us continually to the value of improvisation even as that value is thought in the spirit of system, even as improvisation renders that spirit meaningless. His improvisation is consumed by the very force upon which it would act. The fantasy of return turns to cold oscillation. The only remaining question concerns what it was that the music that was played that night recorded. Perhaps what was recorded was this: the fantasy of what hadn't happened yet. The questions demand that we turn obliquely, up ahead, to the recording, to what seems and doesn't seem to be there, to what it is (to seem) to be. This is what it is to activate the foresight that is not prophecy but description. This is what it is to improvise.

"The Burton Greene Affair" is a network of desires, a constellation of nonconvergences, the erasure and re-enracure—repetition and variation, passive and active forgetting—of some of modernity's foundational figures (Wittgenstein, Holiday, Eisenstein, Du Bois, Heidegger, Derrida) and of what they resist and repress in the sensing of the temporal and ontological, racial and sexual, other. This resistance and repression is embodied and silently sounded in the music's knowing echo of

shriek and prayer, its reproduction of the out-thematics of the trans-ferential ensemble of a known, unknowable origin.

The ensemble of performance that is called "The Burton Greene Affair" is neither the disappearance of the event nor the disappearance of any possible product or trace (the record is neither definitive nor unapparent) nor the dark consciousness—disappearing consciousness or consciousness of the unapparent or invisible—of the ones who witness the event: it is, rather, that which disappears the conceptual apparatuses of identity and difference, singularity and totality. (The *destruktion* of) that conceptual apparatus is what "The Burton Greene Affair" is after and is where "The Burton Greene Affair" is at: the turbulent convergence of a deconstruction of the machinery of exclusion and the emergence of a r/evolutionary shift away from that machinery and toward a radical materialization of spirit whose forces carry Baraka but never allow in him a divestiture of the exclusionary thinking that he carries. That thinking is manifest precisely where Baraka establishes an ethos of violent differentiation by way of essentializing differences—between east and west, spirit and body, elevation and descent, ecstasy and stasis—that replicates the (oscillational form of the) ethos and thinking he would abjure. He does this even while his writing is driven by the shattering tremble of the improvising ensemble's music. How do we linger in the ruptural, impossible junction of this reconstructive music and the *destruktive* lens through which Baraka views it, a ruptural, unbridgeable, asymptotic distance between sight and sound that text always suspends.⁵¹ Not in the interest of an understanding or adequate representation of the action whose performance would occur in this lingering, but in the interest of an enactive invocation, a material prayer, the dissemination of the conditions of possibility of the action Baraka's text carries (on and over) by lingering, we need to think a little bit about improvisation.

Such thinking is opened by an opening movement in Baraka's work. He has moved on (from here, through that opening), but I want to call into question the valorization of movement and process, to think through some of that valorization's more problematic affinities, to

demythologize the durative, to debunk a certain set of transformational wishes, to separate the fact of transition from whatever supposed liberatory significance it is given, to trouble while also pointing out the Euro-philosophical (particularly Heideggerian) parallels to—if not origins of—this valorization of process and to read what will emerge as the valorization of process in the ode to spirit and the ongoing in the blowing of Sanders and Brown with which Baraka's essay concludes.

The critique of the valorization of process is connected to an investigation of the name and author; that critique demands, for instance, that when I refer to the moment and writing and writer of, say, Heidegger's texts, I speak of a particular Heidegger and not of Heidegger in general. Similarly, I must be sure I know whom I mean, which one I mean, when I say, "Roi is dead." I must provisionally honor the Barakan self-portraiture that asserts he was in that place at that time, that particular now, though now he's somewhere else, someplace better, more advanced. I must do so to show that the now and the fact that it is indexed to a particular product and a particular productive persona belie and undermine the valorization of ongoing process. But can we say any more about these moments than we might have said about the trajectory of the career from which they arise? Can I articulate anything about some singular and atomic moment in the history of (what name would I use?) X any more clearly than I give the sense of an ongoing and unfinished project called (again, what name would I use?) X? One could think this all within the context of a certain Wittgensteinian split between phenomenology and physics or an Aristotelian split between *energeia* and *ergon* or a Barakan split between "Hunting" and "Those Heads on the Wall."⁵² Finally the impossibility of accurately pinpointing the name of the author and the moment of authorship renders obsolete the temporal arrangements structured around the opposition of the idea of process and the idea of a determinate moment of production in their relation to any possible discernment of the phenomena of text and author, of the experience of transformation, of our access to that experience or to the individual artifacts we might say are artificially thrown off in that process.

Note that even in invoking the specifics of the proper name as a way of marking the internal difference—and thereby undermining the authority—of the author, and even in moving as gingerly as possible through the epistemic field shaped by the punctuated temporality wherein lie the events that correspond with specific names and authors, my work betrays its embeddedness in methods and discourses it would question. I have to hope it goes somewhere out from that questioning's outside. I must confront the strangeness or estrangement of knowing that the project I'm after, which continually projects itself in every temporal and historical direction (like the review or revisioning or envisioned distortion and transformation and extension of an event problematically named "The Burton Greene Affair"), is the project of Enlightenment, "the unfinished project of [a] modernity" taken out or made vicious in the improvisation of ensemble.

"The Burton Greene Affair" bears a dialectical, dialectal stammer.⁵³ It has a divided articulatory that recalibrates the rhythmic marking of racial difference. We'll note how Baraka sees the ensemble in the interplay of his own representation of Greene's impeded search for materiality (given in the percussiveness of his playing) and Sanders's and Brown's flowing extensions into and of spirit (given in the animation of the horn). The ensemble will have been given in the incompatibilities Baraka projects, in the cut between rhythms, between syntagmic order and eventual break; ensemble will have been heard in the arrhythmia that separates these rhythms. As such it is the entity whose apprehension demands the improvisation through any prior notions of ontology, epistemology, and ethics. That apprehension requires an interest in the nature of improvisation's time and the time of ensemble's organization. These interests have in turn required an attempt to become more aware of the place of ensemble in this very writing, to sustain the desire that you anticipate, that you'll have felt even now, to stop, to look up, to sing the inscription. Something in that desire feels like it might reach the implicate order that holds fragments and ellipses and aphorisms as breaks in a background; that holds things that are neither local nor copresent together so that you don't need to justify any attention—in

the name of justice and freedom—to the ensemble that appears as the juxtaposition of traditions, idioms, authors, genres, grammars, sounds. Another kind of rigorous expression of something like feeling.

First Heidegger, then Baraka, then Heidegger again, 1966:

Everything is functioning. That is precisely what is awesome, that everything functions, that the functioning propels everything more and more toward further functioning, and that technicity increasingly dislodges man and uproots him from the earth. I don't know if you were shocked, but [certainly] I was shocked when a short time ago I saw the pictures of the earth taken from the moon. We do not need atomic bombs at all [to uproot us]—the uprooting of man is already here. All our relationships have become merely technical ones. It is no longer upon an earth that man lives today. . . . As far as my own orientation goes, in any case, I know that, according to our human experience and history, everything essential and of great magnitude has arisen only out of the fact that man had a home and was rooted in a tradition.⁵⁴

In order for the non-white world to assume control, it must transcend the technology that has enslaved it. But the expressive and instinctive (natural) reflection that characterizes black art and culture, listen to these players, transcends any emotional state (human realization) the white man knows. I said elsewhere, "Feeling predicts intelligence."⁵⁵

Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline.⁵⁶

By the time "The Burton Greene Affair" was written, also in 1966, the structural possibilities of jazz improvisation had undergone a revolution. In *Free Jazz* Ekkehard Jost writes,

a new type of group improvisation emerges in which melodic-motivic evolution gives way to the molding of a total sound. For Ornette Coleman the various parts have an intellectual influence on one another, resulting in a collective conversation; for Cecil Taylor the collective is mainly led by one player who acts in accordance with constructivist principles; for the later Coltrane, particularly *Ascension*, the macro-structures of the total sound are more important than the individual microparts.⁵⁷

He adds that

in solos there is a gradual emancipation of timbre from pitch that leads to a-melodic structures delineated by changes in color and register. This kind of playing is more easily connected to a kind of expression of emotionalism.⁵⁸

Jost's final formulation returns, again and again, seemingly eternally, as a critical lens through which black art and thinking have been obscured. For now, it is important to argue again that what occurs in the New Black Music of the sixties—indeed what occurs throughout the short and accelerated history of the music *as the music's historicity*—is the emergence of an art and thinking in which emotion and structure, preparation and spontaneity, individuality and collectivity can no longer be understood in opposition to one another. Rather the art itself resists any interpretation in which these elements are opposed, resists any designation, even those of the artists themselves, that depends upon such oppositions. The primary problems here are that these oppositions can all be indexed to two others that move within a kind of mutual primordially—that between improvisational composition and that between black and white. The question is whether the discourse that surrounds the music gets to the liberatory space the music opens. These oppositions form the conceptual apparatus Baraka uses to represent the music, but there is something in Baraka's language that remains unbounded by that representational-calculative thinking, something that places it

under an immanent critique. That something is improvisation itself. It is, finally, precisely that motion that is free of the systematic oscillation that begins and ends at the illusion of the originary, the primordial—the systematic oscillation that, therefore, never ends.

When Baraka split—from the Village, from the house, from interracial “romance” and (black) “bohemian” lifestyle, from other, former selves (in)to other, new ones—he attempted (by way of a complex “return”) to move away from a particular structure of thought. He did so at a time when Third World national liberation was already being engulfed in the emergent neocolonial formations of global capitalism; engulfed, then, in a certain economic world picture in which the dual motion of fragmentation and homogenization, exclusionary differentiation and metaphysical sameness, are evident in the world and in the ideology that informs Baraka’s text. Baraka’s particular form of nationalism emerges alongside a liberatory consciousness whose decline is already encoded in the particulars of that emergence. Indeed, the nationalism Baraka embraces is, in some fundamental ways, a remnant or trace of the (philosophical) tradition he would abjure. Yet Baraka is not reducible to nationalism and therefore his anachronism is double. He’s after and before nationalism as a nascent revolutionary ethics of response (rather than a politics or even a culturalism that bears political resistance only as a legitimizing trace), though this is what he would have the music enact and signify. What Frantz Fanon theorizes in *Black Skins, White Masks* as the encounter with the other as racially resistant fascination is what Baraka hears and would amplify, transmit, or shape from “The Burton Greene Affair.” He wants to transform the ensemble and its performance into an internally fragmented reenactment of an originary and tragic encounter that would parallel the dramatic content of recordings that animate his trajectory throughout the early sixties as a set of transitions prefatory to an impossible return. Baraka’s black and Heideggerian nationalism comes as response to European technicity’s violent forgetting of spirit and origin. The thing is that the music, which would manifest the interinanimation of race, spirit, origin, and freedom along with the exemplary revolutionary ethics of the objectifying

encounter with otherness (which is supposed to reverse the direction of fit both between lord and bondsman and within the im/possible consciousness of the bondsman alone), obliterates the ethical, ontological, and epistemological conceptual apparatuses upon which the manifestation of these complexes depends. As we’ll see, the music wouldn’t do what Baraka wanted it to do; nevertheless he’s carried along by it, perhaps in that self-same way that Greene is carried along by it, into a whole other thing, a whole other understanding of the cut between and within which freedom and identity might articulate one another, a cut shaped in the interminable constitution and reconstitution of a kind of knowledge to which conventional philosophies of Enlightenment and opposition to Enlightenment have no access.

So what Baraka says about Burton Greene, that he is being driven by forces that he neither understands nor assimilates, is also true of himself. What occurs in “The Burton Greene Affair” occurs not only with but through Baraka—the improvisational force of ensemble occurs through him, in spite of him. More specifically, what occurs moves by way of some operations given at a specific moment in the development of Baraka’s ontology. All the collective and improvisational resources, all the unresolvable contradictions, of modern European ontological language resonate—as the transmission of the sound of the ensemble—in Baraka’s philosophical voice, most clearly in the utterance (of “being”) that would name, describe, formalize, and therefore obfuscate the ensemble in the spirit of an other tradition, one that would read, reflect, and transcend the interinanimation of being, language, race, and (the crisis of European) humanity. “The Burton Greene Affair” arrives at this moment in the world: when the restructuring of capitalism dislocates nation and origin and when such dislocation is sped along by global and globalizing technicity that secures, finally, the literal formulation of a “world picture” that constitutes the final degradation of the illusory prefigurations of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. At this moment, in their appeals to nation and origin and in their relative inability to think an alternative world picture, Baraka and Heidegger sound alike even in the sharp differences of their circumstances, motivations, and utterances.

These utterances are sexual. With and against his invocations, the sexual cut still animates Amiri Baraka's "The Burton Greene Affair." The essay is situated where eros meets ontology, and when Baraka's text resonates with what Derrida calls "the vibration of grammar in the voice," we know that an old attraction to the interplay of division and collection is at work as the animating force of a new symposium, an underground set and brokedown gathering, the ensemble of the black avant-garde disrupted by the racial difference that shapes it.⁵⁹ This vibration, an improvisational movement, resonance of the sound of (the) ensemble, is neither essentialized nor differentiated, determined neither by the vernacular nor its originary other nor the interminable and systematic opposition and oscillation between the two. Charting that grammar requires more attention to the question of sex—where what appears as the absence of the formulation of sex is thought as in relation to what appears as the presence of the formulation of race—and to the particularities of Baraka's comportment toward that question. Baraka's comportment in "The Burton Greene Affair" is Heideggerian. His refracted and repressed address of the question of sex repeats with differences the method of Heidegger's dismissal of that question.

In "*Geschlecht*: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,"⁶⁰ Derrida notes the barely incomplete avoidance of sex in Heidegger's analytic, an avoidance unfinished by the presence of a moment in *Being and Time*⁶¹ when Heidegger argues that *Dasein* (the being to whom understandings of being are given and who is not but nothing other than man) "is neither of the two sexes."⁶² For Derrida, this is the formulation of an "asexuality [that] is not the indifference of an empty nothing, the feeble negativity of an indifferent ontic nothing. In its neutrality *Dasein* is not just anyone no matter who but the originary positivity and power of essence."⁶³ This unsexed mode of being that Heidegger decrees is echoed and translated by the more complete silence of (the question of) sex in "The Burton Greene Affair." For Baraka the mode of being of blackness and its expression in the music is heard in the silence of sex's supposed absence. Of course an abundance of work across a wide array of discourses has shown that any absent or indifferent sexuality,

any mode of being that is before sexual difference, is, in fact, originally and rigorously sexed. In the cases of Baraka and Heidegger the opening of the question of being's meaning, truth, essence, is sexed in a way to which they are practically blind though they see quite clearly that opening's racial, cultural, spiritual, linguistic, and aesthetic determinations. That opening is the location of a mode of being determined by (the thinking of) *Geschlecht* (the locus of differences that is itself differentiated, the structure determined by what it occludes—by an absence, an unrepresentable silence, the unheard voice that utters and is uttered by [the question of] sex).

One could say that sex is what lies secret and unheard in the work of Heidegger. In "The Burton Greene Affair" this unheard secret is a threat of difference at the heart of the music—which is to say the mode of being—of blackness. This threat to itself that black music carries is in Baraka's phonography as well. It is, in fact, the very opening, the very condition of possibility, of Baraka's recording, invocation, and analysis of the ensemble. As ante-analytic resonance it resists the deathly fragmentation of Baraka's analysis even as it animates his nothing-other-than-analytic idiom. This opening of (the) ensemble, of that which is neither represented nor unrepresentable but improvised in and as Baraka's grammar and sound, is precisely what is unheard in the oppositional structure of what is, for Heidegger, philosophical truth, *aletheia*, unconcealment. The music, the sexual cut, is what remains unheard by philosophy—by the mode of attention allowed by the philosophical distinctions between essence and contingency, individuality and collectivity, particularity and universality—but the music is also precisely what is heard and improvised in philosophy. It is that which avoids not sex but what Samuel Beckett calls "the spirit of system."⁶⁴ It is what Derrida attempts to isolate and describe as that which operates, but is uncontained, within a system of determination and indetermination:

What is involved in the phonographic act? Here's an interpretation, one among others. At each syllable, even at each silence, a decision is imposed: it was not always deliberate, nor sometimes even the same from one

repetition to the other. And what it signs is neither the law nor the truth. Other interpretations remain possible—and doubtless necessary. Thus we analyze the resource this double text affords us today: on the one hand, a graphic space opened to multiple readings, in the traditional and protected form of the book—and it is not like a libretto, because each time it gives a different reading, another gift, dealing out a new hand all over again—but on the other hand, simultaneously, and also for the first time, we have the tape recording of a singular interpretation, made one day, by so on and so forth, at a single stroke calculated and by chance.⁶⁵

What we have in “The Burton Greene Affair” is not a mechanical recording—nothing so seemingly determined and nothing in which another voice as singularity in and out of the constellation of *Geschlecht* shows up. In what appears as the absence of the recording—which is to say in the field of its resistance—singularity is given over to a division and abundance whose distillate is the sound of the ensemble.

Meanwhile, in *Cinders* Derrida’s ensemble writes, which is to say speaks, of the impossible possibility of the mark’s copresence with the effacement of the *accent grave* in the letter “a” as it is used in *la*, the “there.”⁶⁶ This im/possibility is, finally, exactly what the improvisation of (the) ensemble gives us: not the Ellisonian oscillation between the establishment and disestablishment of (the) identity (of the soloist) within a systematic tension between individual and group, individual and tradition; and not as an ensemble immediately foreclosed and fragmented as it is submitted to exclusionary determinations of the social. This dual movement is what Derrida desires, though that desire is exceeded: the motion and structure of a truth whose revelation has at its heart an originary concealment, an originary betrayal; a moment where the voice of an absolute other is unheard so that the voices of the others can be heard is not all that is given.

For this motion is always caught within a philosophical in/determination—the voice of the other and the voices of the others are always, ultimately, only the possibilities of abstract singularities and particularities even when they are to provide a necessary antidote to the abstract

generalities of a given Enlightenment. The point, however, is to maintain neither an abstract notion of universal humanity nor the abstract particularity of a racial or gendered other—the point is to develop discursive and practical organizational assaults on the concrete effects of these abstractions. What Baraka’s improvisation on the music offers, despite the determination of race and the indetermination of sex, is both attempted closure and initializing embrace, and Baraka’s sound and grammar, improvising through the attempt to decompose the ensemble through an interpretation of its anarchic time, is the resonance of an iconic totality to be heard only in the direction of a response to the question of sex. Sex, here, is not the mark of a particular exclusion conceived of as woman or the feminine. What is excluded, ultimately, is not the mark of an abstract other but ensemble. What is opened here is not the possibility of an other voice but the question of sex and the sexuality and generativity of philosophical questioning that inheres in the exclusionary fragmentation of totality. And what is opened in the question of sex and interpretation is the possibility of a total, improvisational and anarchic voicing.

We’ll arrive at such voicing by way of an aspectual-ethical paradox:

And these moves, most times unconscious (until, maybe, I’d look over something I’d just written and whistle, “Yow, yeh, I’m way over there, huh?”), seem to me to have been always toward the thing I had coming into the world, with no sweat: my blackness.

To get there, from anywhere, going wherever, always. By the time this book appears, I will be even blacker.⁶⁷

Arrival as end and process is articulated along with and through the distinction between being and having, essence and quality. Baraka writes himself as that which he already had, though what he already had is placed on a differential scale as if he could become more of what he already is, as if that movement—totally determined—had no determinate end. In *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka*, Theodore Hudson quotes

the lines above (from the introduction to *Home*, a collection of essays that chronicle Baraka's non/return to "origins" in writing, through writing) but doesn't dwell on the contradiction they embody. We ought to linger in the cut between the "origin" and "end" that is signified by the nominal poles of Hudson's title; in, more precisely, the German inversion placed between LeRoi Jones and Amiri Baraka—"Johannes Koenig," a pseudonym Baraka uses for some texts of his in *The Floating Bear* (a magazine he coedited for a time in the mid-1960s with Diane di Prima) that has an important suggestiveness.⁶⁸ For one could make an argument that this is the proper name of the author of "The Burton Greene Affair": the name of the imaginary native of an imaginary return, the provisional name of the real native whose real return will have always been deferred, the name that marks a highly localized habitation as the site of a transition to an unreachable home. Note that this structure of deferral is part of what is shown in "The Burton Greene Affair," though, again, it's not reducible to this internal deconstruction. "Johannes Koenig" is, finally, a signpost that marks a certain position in the history of Baraka's understanding of identity—as well as a certain moment in his own oscillation between identities. From that position, in that moment, Baraka enters and transforms a long, historical meditation on the music and its relation to artistic, emotional, and finally political freedom. That's why it's important to have asked: what is the meaning and the implication of freedom in black music, what will have been the implications of the idea of freedom in the music for Jones/Koenig/Baraka as he changes, and what, finally, will freedom have had to do with (black) identity?

There is ambivalence present in the title of *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones by Amiri Baraka* and, in a different way, in *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka*. This ambivalence—rather this nonconvergence of designation—of the name marks a valorization of process, transformation, and motion that signifies much in the political and racial ontologies I want to see ahead of or before; it raises a question—Who is the author of "The Burton Greene Affair"?—that must be placed alongside that which "The Burton Greene Affair" raises and that had been and

continues to be a primary guide: What is the agency that activates the text called "The Burton Greene Affair" and that event/performance/ritual that we know only by the name "The Burton Green Affair"? So much of what the essay does is in the interest of denying authority for, in and/or over the event to the one known that night in Newark as Burton Greene, the one in whom authority is paradoxically vested by the essay's act of naming.

So the author of "The Burton Greene Affair" might very well be (named) Johannes Koenig, an identification in between or off to the side of LeRoi Jones and Amiri Baraka under which appears some dense and intense phenomenologico-lyric investigations into the nature of being and its manifestation in poetic language. That name carries the trace of the German in the way that "The Burton Greene Affair" carries the trace of the particular Heideggerian brand of German philosophical nationalism that animates Koenig's brief texts. Perhaps then one could say that Johannes Koenig is the name that marks a cut between names and is the structure that would but doesn't bridge the space between identities. It is not a point of intersection or one-to-one transfer but a generative nonsuspension. It's the mark of an improvisation shaped by the field of nonconvergence that we might call the Amiri Baraka Ensemble, featuring LeRoi Jones. It's the sound heard in the descent into that immeasurable and impossible distance between affairs. If Johannes Koenig were the eponymous recording, echo, or backward sound of an otherwise unavailable Burton Greene experience, then we could place him in another tradition, of the self-analytic improvisation of philosophical nationalism, of a philosophical nationalist auto-critique or self-deconstruction infused with the desire for another freedom. (This is the tradition—wherein certain animative shrieks and moans echo everywhere, in the sound of horns, just as masterful percussive beating marks Greene's time; and Baraka, in a powerful tradition, cannot keep them distinct; the vibrating grammar in the voice is a sexual grammar, a sexual cut, a sexual differentiation of sexual, which is to say racial and national, difference—of the otherwise excluded racial/sexual other shattering the imago of an incomplete and static "universality" given as Universality.)

This is where these explanatory and exploratory identities keep missing each other. But there is something in and where they miss each other. Nevertheless, how do we account for the name change and the change that change would signify? Is it objective or a projection of the subjective experience of a reader (even Baraka as the most privileged reader, the one who looks upon “his” own work retrospectively and with surprise, with both attachment and detachment, always after the fact of the work or the process that engenders or produces it)? Are LeRoi Jones, Johannes Koenig, Amiri Baraka three separate entities or personae or is there an essence or essential mode of being that exists as the condition of possibility of these beings, that gives them to us and to each other? (Note that these are only three of the names by which this phenomenon—interaction of man and work or text—is called.) When I read Baraka, am I *reading* an aspect in a way that is similar to Wittgenstein’s noticing an aspect? Is the logical structure of one name, in another Wittgensteinian phenomenon, identical to the others and to that to which they refer? Even if I say that the name of the author doesn’t matter, that the author’s persona doesn’t matter, I still remain intensely and primarily interested in the agency that generates the text; and, of course, the name of the text itself refers to another questionable naming or name. Why “The Burton Greene Affair”? The point is that the importance of the name persists and is unavoidable especially since I am, in the end, deeply concerned not only with the agency that generates but with the author of “The Burton Greene Affair.” I’ve got to improvise through all the names in the ensemble (this is part of the preface, the cut between, the transition from LeRoi Jones to Johannes Koenig to Amiri Baraka and marks, would bridge, that cut; but just like the way home seems to go through Germany, like the way back to the ground of metaphysics is a middle passage, like the way back to Afro-spirit is through *Geist* and *anima* in spite of the invocations of the east, the way back to Euro-spirit is scored with the boom of an other rhythm).

Ensemble is and requires attunement not only to the name but to the phrase.⁶⁹ The task of developing that attunement is given to us by “The

Burton Greene Affair”; by the illusion of singularity and the illusion of its plurals’ intersections and divergences; by the myth of the crossroads at which would be played the drama of the negative, of differentiation and relation, of an impulse to name and represent. That which would be named—the sound of the structure and agency that is improvisation—is that which the crossroads only figures: the ensemble. Ensemble.

Such attunement requires concern with the uses of a few words and the structures and effects of a few practices in “The Burton Greene Affair.” Such concern is shaped by the fact that in attempts to name and describe reality through a particular naming and description of a part of reality, the structure of philosophical thinking intervenes and leads inevitably toward a conceptualization of the interplay of what is and what is not contained in the word “being.” To read “The Burton Greene Affair” is to be struck by that intervention and its errancy: description and naming become something wholly other—an effect heightened by the concern with being that marks the work, a concern that carries with it not only something of the history of such concern but something also of the enduring inability to *activate* a forgetfulness of being. Baraka’s language prompts that concern, a concern that is of and for language, of and for the proper placement in sound and breath of fundamental questions.

“The Burton Greene Affair” strains toward what Wittgenstein calls “ostensive gestures.” Such gestures would perform a showing that—in the very interstices of the verbal naming and description of (an) ensemble and its music—get at what is essential. But this performance gestures toward a performance that its medium—language—cannot capture and therefore improvisationally records. It thereby joins—which is not to say completes but is, rather, to say rupturally augments—this performance of (the) ensemble that is (the) ensemble. This complex, compound performance is not simple though it is unanalyzable; Baraka’s corrosive analysis cannot perform the breakdown it intends. It only scars its object, thereby renewing the demand to think again about what kind of object (the) ensemble is. In the meantime, Baraka’s performance (phono)graphs what had seemed impossible to say: that the ostensive

gesture is not a simple pointing to what is simply present, that it implies no simple relation between word and world. It is, rather, a resonance in language of what is essential to its object. In such a gesture, through its performance, the name and the description disseminate what Baraka sees and hears as the essence of the ensemble. The dissemination occurs by way of open analytic failure (the breakdown of the breakdown) and by way of a kind of recapitulative improvisation (a lingering in the iconic break of this double breakdown). *This resistance to analysis that is carried out in and by the complexity of the object is everything.* It occurs in the break, the sexual cut, between simple naming and complex description, both of which are rendered impossible by the object in its complexity. The distinction between the object that would be named and the musical—which is to say organized—compound no longer performs. This performatively induced nonperformance occurs within and as a chain of differences and modalities—totalizing systems and exclusionary singularities—that are embedded in “The Burton Greene Affair” as both name and description.⁷⁰

In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein makes the following formulation regarding ostensive gestures:

The correlation of an object and a name is generated by nothing but a table, by ostensive gestures at the same time as the name is uttered, or by something familiar.⁷¹

This formulation, given here in Merrill B. and Jaakko Hintikka’s slight modification of Anthony Kenny’s translation, is quoted just after the following passage in their *Investigating Wittgenstein*:

Wittgenstein’s mysterious-sounding idea of *showing* has to be understood in an almost literal sense. Since the simple objects of the *Tractatus* have to be given to us for our language to make sense, we cannot say in language that some particular simple object exists. Nor can its essence be expressed in language, because that would enable us to get around the impossibility of expressing its existence. For we could then say that it exists by saying

that these essential properties are in fact exemplified. As Wittgenstein puts it in *Philosophical Remarks*, IX, sec. 94:

There is a sense in which an object may not be described. That is, the description may ascribe to it no property whose absence would reduce the existence of the object to nothing, i.e. the description may not express what would be essential to the existence of the object.

How, then, can we introduce a simple object into our discourse? Wittgenstein’s answer is: by showing it.⁷²

In short, according to Wittgenstein, simple objects cannot be named and described in language; they must be, by way of some extralinguistic gesture, shown. And yet this showing must not only be introduced into discourse, but constitutes the very foundation of discourse. As the Hintikkas put it, these objects “have to be given to us for our language to make sense.”

What I’m after here is this: the linguistic problems that the simple objects of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* pose are not wholly unlike those that are posed by complex objects such as Burton Greene, the ensemble that bears his name, and the other members of that ensemble. It is already unorthodox to speak of complex objects by way of Wittgenstein. His later work is, in part, an attempt to diagnose that mental state that seems to be manifest as an engagement with the ontologically and temporally complex object *in its impossibility*. But I do so because Baraka is operating within another political and philosophical tradition, one structured by the exigencies of the complex object. Like the simple objects of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, the complex objects of this other tradition resist naming and description, but by way, naturally, of a more complex orientation. The task of “The Burton Greene Affair” is framed by and within this other tradition in its encounter with the tradition of the same, in its appropriation of the same’s tradition’s terms and conceptual apparatuses. That task—moving before the one who enacts it, as the trace of an

“ontological totality” in excess of this flat description and of any proper or improper name—is to show or record the ensemble by way of failure of language and to encrypt that failure in the text as (the representation of) Greene’s failure. Encryption moves by way of a description that is nothing less than ascription. The ensemble, the complex object, bears a property—Burton Greene—whose absence would, rather than reduce the object to nothing, somehow bring the existence of the object fully to itself in something that is not but nothing other than a kind of (racial, spiritual) simplicity. Ultimately, the difference between the impossibility of bringing simple objects into discourse and the achievement of complex objects’ irruption into discourse is the difference between ostension and improvisation. Ostension is an enactment on the other side of linguistic failure; improvisation is sounding in linguistic failure.

Meanwhile, Baraka’s description of the ensemble and its music oscillates between the languages of the physical and the phenomenal, the punctual and the durative, count and mass; and he falls into the traps of the systemic operations these distinctions delimit. He describes within physical language in order to phenomenalize, differentializes in order to essentialize, systematically reducing the ensemble that it might be atomized. There is at the end of the essay the final abstraction of Burton Greene from the ensemble so that Sanders and Brown will have continued; their sound, become durative in the performance of blackness, will have gone “on and on.” The trouble is that the removal (or, perhaps more precisely, the dematerialization) of the object—embodied and enacted in the artifactual aesthetic manifest for Baraka in the playing of Greene—in the name of the phenomenal is part of a designation only to be made in the language of the physical object, a language inadequate to Baraka’s own construction of (black) “being’s” phenomenality.⁷³ Meanwhile, the ensemble—the complex phenomenal object—is what asserts itself at the moment when phenomenon and object each appear in and as the eclipse of the other.

Heidegger’s determination of “being” comes within the thinking of race, nation, spirit, and tradition and in a language that is echoed with

difference throughout Baraka’s work of the 1960s. But Baraka’s work is much more than either a repetition or an overturning of Heidegger’s. Baraka moves along a more than philosophical trajectory “The Burton Greene Affair” precisely because the sound of the ensemble is still to be heard, improvising *through* the motion of ontology, through the same of Heidegger and the repetition and difference of Baraka. That I can call the sound of the music a movement through ontological questioning brings us to an other and overwhelming question: what is the nature of ontology, its structures and effects, in the black radical traditions Baraka inhabits and extends? First, there is the largely unacknowledged fact that the traditions speak ontologically, that is to say, metaphysically. Heidegger’s words about what he calls “Occidental-European thought” might easily be applied to Baraka’s text and to all of the tradition(s) it voices and pierces:

But if we recall once again the history of Occidental-European thought, then we see that the question about Being, taken as a question about the Being of the existent, is double in form. It asks on the one hand: What is the existent, in general, as existent? Considerations within the province of this question come, in the course of the history of philosophy, under the heading of ontology. The question “What is the existent?” includes also the question, “Which existent is the highest and how does it exist?” The question is about the divine and God. The province of this question is called theology. The duality of the question about the Being of the existent can be brought together in the title “onto-theo-logy.” The twofold question, What is the existent? asks on the one hand, What is (in general) the existent? The question asks on the other hand, What (which one) is the (absolute) existent?⁷⁴

Baraka’s dual question in “The Burton Greene Affair” is this: What is the being of the music? What is the highest being of the music? Here we shift again, back to Heidegger, but with this dual realization: that question of black ontology can’t be asked as if it were located in the course of a particular or “vernacular” separate from that of the “Occident”;

that the question of the nature of Occidental ontology cannot be asked as if that nature were located in a realm in which the sound of the music—of Algeria, say, or Harlem or Tutwiler—is inaudible. Baraka begins by moving in the direction from being to (a mode of) being. How does that move work, what does its motion signify? What is its status with regard to what is seen as a difference in traditions? This is a problematic described clearly by Edmund Husserl:

[The mathematical disciplines] are “deductive” sciences and that means that in their scientifically theoretical mode of development mediate deductive knowledge plays an incomparably greater part than the immediate axiomatic knowledge upon which all the deductions are based. An infinitude of deductions rests on a very few axioms.

But in the transcendental sphere we have an infinitude of knowledge previous to all deduction, knowledge whose mediated connexions (those of intentional implication) have nothing to do with deduction, and Being entirely intuitive prove refractory to every methodically devised scheme of constructive symbolism.⁷⁵

What does Baraka have to do with these questions? “What is the quality of your Being?” Baraka begins within a certain ontological commitment and within a certain ontological questioning. What is the status, within this commitment and questioning, of Burton Greene? Baraka would use “being” to name something that cannot be named. As Derrida says, “There is no unique word for being.”⁷⁶ There is, rather, the complex origin of quantification, differences, formalizations. Heidegger and Baraka, however, search for the unique word, the essence, the meaning, the essential quality of “being.” What lies between the desire for and the absence of the unique word for being? Does the absence of the unique word for being mean that being is not? The space between the word and what that word would signify is the space of a deferral. In that deferral, Baraka reinfuses being with *anima* and spirit, thus reversing the distinction between *animalitas* and *Geist* that Heidegger deploys. Can we align *anima*, as differentiated from spirit, with improvisation without

that differentiation *within the human* of the human from the animal that seems to inhabit Heidegger’s and Baraka’s particular understandings of spirit? What, then, is the connection between *animalitas* and rhythm? Baraka improvises a holistic understanding of the nondifference of *humanitas* and *animalitas*, but follows, in a Heideggerian vein, with an infusion of *Geist* into *humanitas* that banishes *anima/litas* and differentiates, all in the quest for being’s proper name. Baraka uses the discourse of animality to dehumanize Greene, a discourse marked by race and rhythm, though he criticizes that discourse as it applies to blacks in the very same essay.

The performance, for Baraka, is therefore not simply (or even primarily) the existence of the sound, of what he hears as sound; it is rather the unmediated performance of essential blackness (and whiteness) that is made apparent in the difference between sounds (here lies its “meaning” in the semiotic frame). That difference is spiritual, racial, temporal: it is the different silence that occurs when one sound goes on and the other does not go on. Foucault writes that “Mallarmé taught us that the word is the manifest non-existence of what it designates; we now know that the Being of language is the visible effacement of the one who speaks.”⁷⁷ Baraka would have the being—that is to say the highest being—of the music efface the player who, in his view, is the voice of an outside, an other tradition. But his text does not *do*, his text does not *be*, the effacement of the sound of (any necessarily necessary member of) the ensemble. It would not designate in a way that effaces any aspect of its materiality. What Baraka *would* do is turn the sound of music into meaning and the sound of Burton Greene’s playing into absence.

Can Burton Greene—in the reconfigured space between being and beings, Being and its word—be effaced without the effacement of the ensemble in general? Can Burton Greene be abstracted from the music? Perhaps, finally, and to return to the beginning yet again, the answer to these questions is to be found in the question of the name: “The Burton Greene Affair.” In that name is the mark of the governance of the empty center, the thought of Baraka’s outside. These are questions of history—in the language (of ensemble) and in the music. These are questions of

tradition to be sounded and collected within the aurality of a radical vision, as the improvisation *of* Enlightenment and *through* its other.

As trembling, hear the speed of Baraka's narrative, the rhythm—barely regulated by the comma, the bar line, the pause—free most especially at the moment of the most severe quantification, atomizing, and differentialization of “being,” that which is done in the name of the phenomenon of “being.” What is the motion of our breathing through this passage? How are its rhythms determined and undetermined by the metaphysics of breath, of spirit—note that sound and content here are combined and divergent, for the rhythm frees as the meaning restricts; the rhythm frees what the rhythm would contradict:

In the beautiful writhe of the black spirit-energy sound the whole cellar was possessed and animated. Things flew through the air.

Burton Greene, at one point, began to bang aimlessly at the keyboard. He was writhing, too, pushed by forces he could not use or properly assimilate. He kept running his fingers compulsively through his hair.

Finally he stood above the piano . . . the music around him flying . . . and began to strike the piano strings with his fingers and knock on the wood of the instrument. He got a drumstick to make it louder. (Green's “style” is pointed, I would presume, in the direction of Cecil Taylor, and I would also suppose, with Taylor the Euro-American Tudor-Cage, Stockhausen-Wolf-Cowell-Feldman interpretations.)

But the sound he made would not do, was not where the other sound was. He beat the piano, began to slam it open and shut slapping the front and side and top of the box. The sound would not do, would not be what the other sound was.

He sat again and doodled, he slumped his head. He ran his fingers desultorily across the keys. Pharoah and Marion still surged; they still went on screaming us into spirit.

Burton Greene got up again. A sudden burst like at an offending organism he struck out again at the piano. . . . he beat and slammed and pummeled it. (The wood.) He hit it with his fist.

Finally he sprawled on the floor, under the piano, shadow knocking

on the piano bottom, on his elbows he tapped, tapped furiously then subsided to a soft flap, bap bap then to silence, he slumped to quiet his head under his arm and the shadow of the piano.

Pharoah and Marion were still blowing. The beautiful sound went on and on.⁷⁸

Here is the absolute reification of the difference between breath and pulse, figured in the end of an affair whose beginning cannot be read but through that end. Greene's percussion signifies the fall from spirit to time, from aspect to tense, from duration to punctuation, in “the degradation of an original temporalization into a temporality that is separated into different levels, inauthentic, improper.”⁷⁹ That sound is overwhelmed by the emergence and endurance of the primordial aspiration, “the beautiful sound.” Is this Heidegger or Baraka? Baraka, though the sound of “the east” is given its value within a Heideggerian appropriation of the idea of the primordial and within a Heidegger-like integration of aestheticism, nationalism, spirit, and primordially that reduces the phenomenon of being to a mode, a case, an object, *a* being. Sound, as the emanation of the highest form of being, is given its value through the replication of Heidegger's sense of being's modalities, a sense he sees as bound to the very essence of what it is to be European. So, for Heidegger, to be is to be, finally, and within the inevitable reduction to a singularist, antiphenomenological mode, a thing, a definite thing, a *European* thing, perhaps even, at the end of this declension, European Man. And, for Baraka, caught within the framing power of Heideggerian language, a power that transcends the desire of and for the opposite, to be is (ultimately, and as Paolo Freire might say) to be like. Nevertheless, in Baraka and in Heidegger, there is a remainder, one to be formalized through and beyond the optic of *différance*.

Here we come upon the crucial question concerning designation and representation of and in the music. It must be asked in view of the overwhelming and radical *present* of the performance, its existence within a deictic mark that shapes its otherness in space and time with regard to critico-ontological reflection such that “the beautiful sound,”

the mark of black spirit and phenomenality, is ultimately reduced to European antispirit and objecthood, by the fact that it *has gone* on and on. The music is in the past—as designation, representation, artwork, thing—though what it would designate and represent, for Baraka, is the progressive acting and essencing of black art working and (black—which is to say true) “being.” Still there is that in the music that transcends the bounds of deixis and the ineluctably reductive systematicity of the opposition of phenomenon and object. It is that which gives the present of the music duration in Baraka’s work. These are questions of time—in the language and in the music. These are questions of rhythm that are to be heard and improvised in the percussive aspiration of the very word “being” that animates the music of Baraka and Greene like a buried but radioactive and radiophonic chant.

Imagine that the buried, repressed cantor is Cecil Taylor, who will have emerged as the central—if practically absent—presence of “The Burton Greene Affair” and an indispensable figure in the massively erotic, re-en-gendered and re-en-gendering blackness of the 1960’s New York avant-garde. His name briefly appears in Baraka’s essay as that which Greene either hopes to or actually does arrive at.⁸⁰ Indeed, Baraka’s ambivalence toward Taylor is much of what “The Burton Greene Affair” is about and that ambivalence is not just about whether Taylor, and, for that matter, any European-influenced black artist like, say, Baraka is black enough, a black enough man, a manly enough black man. This is to say that this sexual, racial, national ambivalence is also a political ambivalence, one in which ensemble and its experience continually emerge, in which the sense of the whole comes out precisely in the representation and transmission of a certain transportation. That transportation disrupts the exclusionary totalizations, the murders, that Baraka’s poetic intends. Carrying on, here, is bound up with being carried off, with being carried away by something fundamentally unassimilable. Baraka would represent this transport as a kind of failure. Elsewhere, for instance in the figure of Lady Day, the willingness to fail was held by him as an object of praise. Here, that willingness, in its very dismissal,

becomes the vehicle whose animative force allows a descent at once self-induced and involuntary. So that “The Burton Greene Affair”—which is to say both Baraka’s essay and the event from which that essay claims its name—is an occasion for experimental, if not elemental, volition, for the generative expression of the black outside in all of its dissonant and fantastical sight and sound.

‘Round the Five Spot

The flipside of fetishistic white hipsterism’s recourse to black authenticity is a white avant-gardism whose seriousness requires either an active forgetting of black performances or a relegation of them to mere source material. So the hipsterism that Andrew Ross both critiques and enacts, especially but not exclusively in “Hip, and the Long Front of Color,” is best understood in its relation to a kind of vanguardist counterpoint exemplified by Sally Banes in her *Greenwich Village, 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*.⁸¹ Interest in the history and theory of the avant-garde in black performance demands that one be more concerned with the b-side than the a-side of this now standard recording. This is to say that I’m willing to deal with, to observe, and even to participate in a little hipsterism in the interest of a more accurate account.

This account will emerge not only out of experiences of black performances; but even if it did, it would be something way more than an “earthy corrective” either of the idea of the avant-garde or of some consumptive, bohemian rapture. The opposition between earthiness and rapture is authored by Ross. The ones who stand in for these qualities are Amiri Baraka and Frank O’Hara, respectively. Ross invokes Baraka, then LeRoi Jones, in the interest of correcting what he sees as the anomalously clichéd descent into hipsterism that characterizes O’Hara’s most well-known poem “The Day Lady Died.”⁸² The “earthy corrective” to the clichéd fetishization of blackness is, necessarily, black. This is to say that Baraka’s black earthiness is invoked by Ross to counter O’Hara’s necessarily inauthentic recourse to authenticity. The authentic recourse to authenticity, here, belongs to Ross. But I’m not

here to dismiss what seems to me nothing if not a “new” kind of critical hipsterism. Rather, I’m willing to abide with such hipsterism in the interest of what it affords beyond such regressiveness. However, I do want to mark the distinction between O’Hara’s and Ross’s hipsterism in the interest of invoking both as correctives of the rather less hip Banes, to whom we’ll return. This invocation must question the opposition of earthiness and rapture. That opposition contains the traces of some others: most obviously, black and white; authenticity and commodification is another, perhaps somewhat less obvious; the least obvious, though I guess it’s not all that hidden either, is straight and gay.

Earthiness is given, for Ross, in this line from Baraka’s poem “Jitterbugs”: “though yr mind is somewhere else, your ass ain’t.” Ross claims that

Baraka is addressing himself more to the contradictions of ghetto life than to those of the white bohemian in ritual thrall to the spectacle of jazz performance, but his tone here might serve as an earthy corrective to the rapt mood of O’Hara’s last stanza.⁸³

So earthiness resides here in Baraka’s tone, though not exclusively so. Earthiness or some kind of authentic groundedness—a both literal and figural soiledness—is aligned with “ghetto life” rather than a necessarily antighetto lunch hour happily spending a little money up and down Sixth Avenue before being transported by a headline to some earlier transportation in or from a basement some blocks east, some months before, by Lady Day. Earthiness is what readers encounter in the voice and tone of Baraka’s militant lyric subjectivity. By 1965, this militancy is more fully aligned with a heightened masculinity Baraka refers to as an “American Sexual Reference: Black Male.”⁸⁴ It is opposed to an aestheticized Euro-cultural effeteness that is alienated, commodified, artifactualized, necessarily homosexual, and therefore fatally subject to the dangers of the very ecstatic syncopation that Ross deploys Baraka to correct. Meanwhile, the white (gay, male aesthete’s) encounter with the figure of the black that induces such enrapture, is, according to Ross,

given multiply in “The Day Lady Died”: first, in O’Hara’s “meeting” with what Ross describes as “the probably black shoeshine boy, who may be worried about how he is going to be fed in a way that is different from the poet’s anxiety about his unknown hosts in Easthampton”;⁸⁵ second in the poet’s ecumenical consumption of “the poet’s in Ghana”; third, and most importantly, in the encounter with Billie Holiday that punctuates the poem and brings to an end the ambulatory poet’s frenzied consumption of blackness, among other things. Note that such aestheticism places blackness or black performance in an economy wherein ecstasy is the end of a perverse, interracial consumption, wherein the heterosexual and the homosexual cut and augment one another. It is the job of earthiness, on the other hand, in its authentically black authenticity, to correct such placement by deploying a purely and necessarily heterosexual, socially realistic (if not naturalistic), lyric masculinity.

So I’m differentiating between two hipsterisms here. And if I come out on the side of O’Hara’s it’s not because I want to dispense with Ross’s. As I said, both lend themselves to another project of correction in which I’m interested. Nevertheless, I want to linger with O’Hara precisely at a point where Ross withdraws, leaving behind only this trace in the form of a footnote: “That it is a Lady Day and not a Charlie Parker being commemorated in this way is, of course, O’Hara’s own personal touch. As a gay poet, and one of the most spontaneous of all camp writers, it is no surprise to find that it is a woman singer who shares the billing along with the goddesses of the screen which he celebrates in other of his poems.”⁸⁶ This trace demands a further investigation of O’Hara’s rapture and its sexual content. And this requires just two more brief introductory formulations.

The first is that it turns out that Baraka is a student of rapture as well. More specifically, he also investigates the very specific mode of rapture that Holiday induces or produces in “The Dark Lady of the Sonnets” and that essay’s prose moves, by way of the sonnet’s protocols of caesura or seizure, along a path that is punctuated by that aesthetic fascination whose intensity is all bound up with the fact that it is also *sexual*. That Baraka and O’Hara were friends, that O’Hara records his

encounters with Baraka in his poetic recordings of his midday walkabouts, that various lines of gossip and auto/biographical revelation suggest the possibility of a sexual relationship between the two and/or the possibility of Baraka's sexual ambivalence only adds a little bit to the mix.⁸⁷ And if there is in Baraka's approach to Holiday that which Ross might call earthiness, it operates wholly within that mix, wholly within the context of a lyrical analysis, at once formal as well as social, of the structures and effects—consumption and loss, eroticism and rapture, sight and sound, fascination and aversion, estrangement and desire—of the *event* that we call Billie Holiday and of the relation between that event, blackness as black performance, and the idea and enactment of advance.

The second formulation concerns the excessively simple opposition between Parker and Holiday that Ross invokes as if the alto horn emits only a heterosexual call, as if that sound is separable from the same engendering force that produces Lady and that she reproduces in all of its re-engendering power. The point, however, is that black performance, in improvising through the opposition of earthiness and rapture, immanence and transcendence, enacts a sexual differentiation—a sexual cut in Mackey's words, an invagination in Derrida's—of sexual difference. Indeed, one of the things that is most important and worthy of attention in the moment I'm trying to touch on here, the period between 1955 and 1965 when the avant-garde in black performance (figured in and by the likes of Holiday, Baraka, Thelonius Monk, Cecil Taylor, Audre Lorde, Archie Shepp, Adrian Piper, Adrienne Kennedy, Samuel R. Delany, and a host of others) irrupts into and restructures the downtown New York scene, is precisely this sexual differentiation of sexual difference that occurs at the convergence of fetishized, commodified, racialized consumption and aesthetic rapture, that occurs as militant political and aesthetic objection. Whether in the virile homosexual friendship of the improvising ensemble (which could denote a group of jazz musicians or a group of adolescent boys engaged in high forms of violent verbal/racial/sexual play—I'm thinking here of Baraka's play *The Toilet*, to which I'll return) or in the eroticized field of public

homosexual acts, downtown Manhattan was a fertile ground for this movement. It is, finally, an arrhythmia that I'm describing, a highly localized movement of syncopation, a Village disruption of the space-time continuum whose internal sexual difference marks the assertion, rather than negation, of radical blackness on the one hand, and totality on the other.

So the object is the trace or memory of a certain "libidinal saturation," as Delany puts it, the erotic circuit that embeds aesthesis and consumption in "the black radical tradition." This is about that trace and its eclipse or burial, the surplus and excess, the simultaneously out and rooted sexuality, sentimentality, and spatial politics of the black avant-garde. With fear and desire, Baraka ambivalently moves in such saturation. His recording of Lady's performance is one graph of an ensemble of events Baraka's staging, participation, and observation helped to determine that occurred between 1955 and 1965 in downtown Manhattan, right around the corner of St. Mark's Place and the Bowery. At that corner was located a club called the Five Spot. The music that was played there—most famously that played by Holiday, Monk, and Taylor—is structured by this temporal-affective disorder, displacement, and disjunction that I'll attempt to isolate and transmit. This irregular beat is like a general erotic economy that encompasses some live and musical performances and their phonographic and literary reproduction.

I'm especially interested in thinking the *syncope* that this new music of black performances instantiates in relation to the arresting visions of proto-postmodernist performance in "a secret location on the lower east side" and public sex at the St. Mark's Bathhouse that are both recorded by Samuel R. Delany in his memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water*. I also want to address the conflation of the sexually and aesthetically adventuresome that is contained in the dramatic rendering of a violent public oscillation between approach, reproach, and reapproach of homosexuality in *The Toilet*, which premiered at the St. Mark's Playhouse (located about thirty yards down the street from the club and right across the street from the bathhouse) on 16 December 1964. These events and their recordings circulate around the Five Spot, forming the

ongoing production of a performance that offers some clues concerning the deconstruction and reconstruction of publicity and privacy, objectivity and subjectivity, liveness and reproduction. To be interested in the arresting effect or arrest of affect that the music produced and produces in the light of whatever recourse to authenticity, sentiment, or experience such recordings enact or parody is to ask what happens when the critical finger that points disapprovingly at an invocation of authenticity seems itself to devolve into an accusation of inauthenticity. Another way to put this would be: What will authenticity be after its rehabilitation? What will blackness be when it enters and receives the radical biological indeterminism, the ineradicable historicity, the inveterate transformationality that blackness as it is demands and makes possible?

Here, then, are some passages from Delany's text that will provide some protocols for reading 'round the Five Spot:

When walking somewhere along Eighth Street, on the side of an army-green mail collection box I'd noticed a black-and-white mimeographed poster, stuck up with masking tape, announcing: "Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts, by Allan Kaprow." . . .⁸⁸

There was general silence, general attention: there was much concentration on what was occurring in our own sequestered "part"; and there was much palpable and uneasy curiosity about what was happening in the other spaces, walled off by translucent sheets with only a bit of sound, a bit of light or shadow, coming through to speak of the work's unseen totality.⁸⁹

After a while, a leotarded young woman with a big smile came in and said, "That's it." For a moment, we were unsure if that were part of the work or the signal that it was over. But then Kaprow walked by the door and said, "Okay, it's over now." . . .⁹⁰

And of course, there still remained the question for me over the next few days: how, in our heightened state of attention, could we distinguish what

a single happening was? What constituted the singularity that allowed the eighteen to be enumerable?⁹¹

It was lit only in blue, the distant bulbs appearing to have red centers.

In the gym-sized room were sixteen rows of beds, four to a rank, or sixty-four altogether, I couldn't see any of the beds themselves, though, because there were three times that many people (maybe a hundred twenty-five) in the room. Perhaps a dozen of them were standing. The rest were an undulating mass of naked, male bodies, spread wall to wall.

My first response was a kind of heart-thudding astonishment, very close to fear.

I have written of a space at certain libidinal saturation before. That was not what frightened me. It was rather that the saturation was not only kinesthetic but visible.⁹²

Cecil Taylor and Amiri Baraka make music that looks and sounds like that, and we need to think about what it is they have to learn and repress in order to do so. I mean that their music looks and sounds like both of these performances and both sets of theoretical formulations they imply regarding totality and singularity, visibility and invisibility, event and trajectory, ungending and re(en)gending; and I mean to point out that we already know this little area 'round the Five Spot to be the place where the impossible event of the Dark Lady, in blue audio-visibility, improvises through the distinction between rupture and rapture. In her name, Delany improvises through the gap between the unseen totality of Kaprow's fragmented, singularized, modularized performance and the visible undulation of ungended bodies re-cognized, by way of a prefigurative Spillers operation, enfleshed, *en masse*, the iconic dynamism of a seen totality. Number and mass—and the ontology, epistemology, and ethics they carry—are slain here; singularity and totality are both improvised, yet the arresting, fascinating, abjectively affective experience of the sublime (that which is experienced as a kind of temporal distancing and the out interinanimation of disconnection as it manifests itself in the St. Mark's bathhouse and in an apartment/performance

space on Second Avenue) marks the infusion of a deep sexual energy, brings the experience to a felt and theorized stop, or, more precisely, reveals the internal complication of seen and seeing aspects that is never not to be seen in its formal similarity with the musical ensemble. Cecil's music is an acting out disconnected neither from Kaprow's performance (sharp and weird as in unexpected; way out, even, from the outside of the house, though still bound up within a certain set of inside exclusionary protocols that continue/d to animate the Euro-American avant-garde and mark its determinate relationship with that tradition from which it would break) nor from the performance at St. Mark's (an acting out as the performance of out—as openness and [homo]erotic publicity and the concomitant undermining of the complex that revolves around the juncture of perversion and solitude—though this performance of out is a proscribed revelation, an unconcealment with concealment at its heart and as its frame, hidden and held, a publicity both real and virtual), though both remain, finally, inside, which is to say never fully emergent in or as the public sphere that would reassert the *commons* of experience by enacting the out rationalization of a certain desire for the experience of (an) ensemble. Nevertheless, these performances and their transmission give us a clue that is both manifest (with all its critical and sexual energy intact) as and a refinement of Delany's framing of them. This is variation of not on, not but of, a theme and The Music is an improvisation of the clue. This is held as a possibility of the encounter, of descent and the ascension of dissent, of an action out from the outside of any earthy, bridgelike nostalgia, gratitude, and hope that won't hear what some rapt, airy, dying fall—through the cut, castration, invagination—makes possible.

Delany understands the theoretical force such an experience of performance has in this way:

In the fifties—and it was a fifties model of homosexuality that controlled all that was done, by both we ourselves and the law that persecuted us—homosexuality was a solitary perversion. Before and above all, it isolated you.⁹³

But what this experience said was that there was a population—not of individual homosexuals, some of whom now and then encountered, or that those encounters could be human and fulfilling in their way—not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men, and that history had actively and already created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex.

Institutions such as subway johns or the trucks, while they accommodated sex, cut it, visibly, up into tiny portions. It was like *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts*. No one ever got to see its whole. These institutions cut it up and made it invisible—certainly much less visible to the bourgeois world that claimed the phenomenon deviant and dangerous. But, by the same token, they cut it up and thus made any apprehension of its totality all but impossible to us who pursued it. And any suggestion of that totality, even in such a form as Saturday night at the baths, was frightening to those of us who'd had no suggestion of it before.⁹⁴

See, it's not the fact but the vision (and its attendant sound, its content, that I want to bring out now) of male homoeroticism, of the homoerotic body as totality or the totality of the sexual—the writhing mass that seems to operate beyond any notion of singularity—that is liberatory for Delany. And this is connected to a certain understanding of speculative fiction (the refined, expanded denotation of science fiction that Delany employs and deploys) as a mark of the totality of the discursive, the total range of the possible, the implicit deconstruction of any singularist and set-theoretic conceptions of the total: a wider range of sentence and incident. The future metaphysics of the out, of the “to come,” of the speculative is, instead, what's already given in the descriptive and prescriptive totality present in Delany's work as anarchic institution: the experience of critical enrapture marks the space-time, the externalizing gap and caesura, of an old-new institution: (the jazz) ensemble.

Joan Scott argues against any simple experience of totality, any simple visualization or perception, any unthought rendering of the real or whole; but the moment of Delany's affirmation of totality is

also the moment of his critique of a no less problematic valorization of modularity, the imposed experience of fragmentation that he sees as a framework and opening of the postmodern.⁹⁵ Delany experiences the orgy retrospectively in its oppositional relation to an earlier, no less visualized or experienced sexual tableau that is formally aligned with Kaprow's happening. His is not a simple critique of modularity, no simple or naive desire for a hypersexual plenitude and openness—indeed, elsewhere in his work Delany engages modularity in an encounter governed by something other than the spirit of an absolute, if impossible, negation. Delany attempts, instead, a double distinction between the impossibility of a calculus of the world, the event, art, the happening, subjectivity, objectivity, and their reality and between experience and calculation. This cut, which is the field within which the relation between one and many is improvised, is also the site, or can be the site, of a certain nonexclusionarity, if we let Taylor reemerge in his submergence; it doesn't take much to imagine that he might have been playing too that night, not far from Kaprow's happening, somewhere 'round the Five Spot, his music the heretofore unheard and unheard of sound animating even scenes in and for which it is absent. As we shall see, the (sound of the) said exists. As we shall hear, the seen remains. This is the Cecil Taylor Unit.

Cecil Taylor is out in many respects. He is out of the outside/s that the music constitutes—of narrow and superficial understandings of (the) tradition, of certain harmonic constraints, of certain assumptions regarding tonality, of prior notions of totality and its relation or opposition to singularity, of the solo and the dominant theorization of its emergence from and disappearance within the group, of, therefore, a theorization of disappearance-in-performance that in some ways anticipates dominant contemporary understandings of performance. He is out of the outside/s only in the context of the group, or so it would appear, like that fold or invagination made visible by and in what Derrida calls "the law of genre," the one that extends and deepens the totality it ensures by way of violation, an extending and deepening violation that

is never an erasure or disappearance or is only a disappearance in the partial way that erasure performs, a "foreshadowing description" of the outside that Set—the interinanimation of one and many that is our fate, "this is not prophecy but [foreshadowing] description," that divine Egyptian trace of fixity to which Baraka sometimes negatively and warily refers—takes in. He is out of the unit/s of performance, the song form, the song and its collection, the tune and the normal lineup of tunes, the "standards" (of performance); out of the set, which is to say the party, the jam, the get-together, the gathering, *logos*, outside of the imaginary disappearance of the *logos* in another kind of writing, another composition, another movement through composition and its other, another improvisation of improvisation. But only questions follow here, ones that ought to make you go back and try to cut the sharpness of a chain or run of assertions about the out of the music.

Like: (1) What is the Cecil Taylor Unit? First of all, The unit is present in Taylor's "solo" performances as surely as he "leads" (structures or feeds) the performance of the unit; the subject of ensemble is embodied in the piano, playing as Ellington played, orchestra held in the instrument, instrument become orchestra, each extensions of a single, divided, and abounding body-become-flesh. So is it him alone, a set continually invaded or complicated, divided or abounded, by a dominant singularity around which it is structured and which is violent to or excessive of that structure? Is the unit that which erases singularity in the name of a unity in which the singular reappears undifferentiated? Does Taylor participate without belonging and is that participation encoded in the name "The Cecil Taylor Unit," a unit of which Taylor is (not) a member, a unit dis/allowed by his non/membership? Is Taylor the living principle of invagination or the improvisation of that principle, an anarchization of that principle that would place the whole within the field that emerges between deconstruction and reconstruction? Embedded in these questions is the possibility of an invagination of invagination, the sense of what is out from the outside, the outside that is never brought back in.

And: (2) What is it to be out in The Music? What is the sound of

this “out” and where is the sexuality of Taylor’s music-poetry-dance-performance? Wherein lies the cut that exists within and for a single sex, a sex that is one or, at least, perhaps, the same? How’s that sound and how’s that sound performed or acted? How does out, the outness of the sexual cut within the same sex, sound? This is to ask: What’s it sound like? But it is also to ask: How would it sound if it sounded? Does it sound? Is the out of The Music, The New Black Music, The New Thing, Taylor’s music, the music of the Cecil Taylor Unit, the out of a sexuality that, while out, is not always as overtly referenced as the other elements of his identity or identities? What would an out performance—an acting out—be and what would the (homo)sexuality of Taylor’s music, if there is a (homo)sexuality of this music, sound like? What would it look like?

And: (3) What is the relationship between the music of an outside sexuality, a music in which that sexuality is out, overt, visible as identity, and the music of blackness as another outside identity? What is the sound of a certain misogynistically and hyper-heterosexually politicized black manhood and how is it related to, diluted, changed, silenced, disappeared by, Taylor’s sexuality? Here we can think Taylor as the site of an ambivalence regarding not only the complexities of individual sexuality or the sexuality or procreativity of an aesthetics, but regarding the question concerning the revolutionary potency or impotency of a highly, if impossibly, gendered and heterosexualized black politics and the multiple status and conflicted terrain of the outside as well.

For Baraka, back when people called him Roi, the music is the site of this “American Sexual Reference: Black Male,” an out and visible sexual mark, an out, black heterosexuality indexed immediately to shadowed act, haunted and deferred action, motivated and concealed acting of a black revolutionary politics of which Taylor is outside because of an outside sexuality and what Jones saw/heard/read as the pale cast of a correspondent aesthetics sicklied over with a debilitating—which is to say alienating, feminizing, homosexualizing, whitening—bohemian intellectualism. That which is read as intelligence without feeling is

thought to dilute the native black/straight/male hue of resolution, subjecting the act to the displacements of nomination. But Taylor is a fundamental figure in and prophet of the black musical outside. As such he is the member who disrupts and allows the Black political unit and unity, displacing the “home” Jones would hear in The Music. Out-from-the-outside, Taylor is located at the center of Baraka’s ambivalence. It is apparent in his writing on Taylor, writing filled with so many veiled and submerged distancings, critiques, outings. These writings are the site of a dis/appearance or other appearance or complication of appearance of the outside, an oscillation of im/purity tied to an equally ambivalent rejection of and immersion in the (myth of the) European that also, ironically, characterizes Taylor’s work, whose conceptualization is even today still bound to the notion of a critique of a Euro-aesthetic absence of emotion and the concomitant hegemony of an inauthentic intellectualism disconnected from its home or origin, which is to say from the feeling that would predict—prophesy, determine, foreshadowingly describe—it.

Is jazz a kind of closet, a withdrawal of (homo)sexuality negatively echoed in real and mythical carnal origins in explicit and illicit (hetero)sexuality? But what of the inevitable, always already out and out from the outside, (primarily male homo)erotics of ensemble or of the feminized romanticism of a pianism of the body that is never not racialized, never not coded as the non-European, as the non-European within the European, even as it is coded as effeminate, overemotional, lustful, uncontrolled, animalistic or, at least, infused with too much *anima*, possessed, transportive, out, ecstatic, gay? What about Taylor’s approach to the piano, stabbing at sounds in the form of a seduction, the piano’s body occupied from outside by way of incremental penetrations, gestures emitting light, light, sound in the course of out, out movements? What about the structures of a certain interplay, in the performance of the solo and in the “solo performance,” where ghosts or living spirits return like Jimmy Lyons, saxophonist and longtime member—improviser in and out—of the unit, the love never not sexual that they outwardly express and that is always put in (their) play and in their position

in the improvising ritual of the cut as if acting out in groups were another name for the unit, another name for (the) ensemble?

Is Taylor out? Is there something on the order of an affirmation of his multiple identity (an out Blackness [or, negatively but more precisely, an out non-Europeanness] or an out Queerness) or is there an acting out or performance of it that becomes a kind of disappearance, a free and out negation of identity—lingering emergences in and from the fissure between and outside as well as in groups: the unit, blacks, queers, or whatever other identities operative at this point, here, in the silence of unmade declarations or of unasked questions? Would this redoubled or undoubled outness be the locus not of universals of performance but the performative improvisation of universality and the space or sphere, never not public (for the space of performance, the site of the creation of new models of reality, the rearrangement of the relations and the particularities of representation/resistance/identity is that proletarian, motley reconstitution of the public sphere, the site or precondition of politics, of a politics that improvises resistance) where performance or improvisation or (the) ensemble, the Cecil Taylor Unit, occur as one another's other selves?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that

we must connect with the subaltern presupposition where heterosexual reproduction is a moment in the general normativity of a homosexuality for which the sexual encounter itself is a case of the caress. And this difference between homo- and heterosexuality is as unrecognized as it is underived in that theatre.⁹⁶

This is to say that that difference is in that it is performed, disappeared, or not apparent given the understanding of performance within which or without which we've been operating. Taylor is out in his performance to the extent that he enacts the disappearance of any differentiated identity in the reenactment of the caress, the dis/appearance of the sexual encounter that the musical performance always is. And that encounter is never not fecund, always produces or is generative, is generative

through and in spite of and in the disappearance of whatever commodity might have been produced in or by its enactment such that the record is undone in a certain way by the precise difference, apparent and disappeared, between itself and the performance that it records, even if that recording is marked "live!" thereby signifying the erstwhile capture of a genuine and actual publicity, the transformative, dis/appearing, dis/apparent effects of audition.

The "mechanical reproduction of performance" can also be a rationalization (precisely of the social). And what might be thrown out from this out is not the general normativity of homosexuality but a variation of that theme. The encounter reproduces but its generativity or fecundity, the sexuality and procreativity of the music, the generativity of variation or improvisation, is not a function of difference but of its performance, which is to say its dis/appearance. The outness of blackness is similarly performed and dis/appeared, taken way outside, like the marks and logics of the old-new world order, critiqued in their dis/appearance and resisted in their re-citation, in re-citations that provide for us a transcendental clue about the direction of our own encounters and organizations. This is that out performance of the outness of subalternity, improvising blackness and its others, capitalism and its other, homosexuality and its others, in a subalternity without origin and possible everywhere, a subalternity of universality, a subalternity of ensemble.

Taylor at the Five Spot and the ritual (symposium, gathering, set) Delany records at the St. Mark's Bathhouse are each conditions of the other's possibility. This is the fantasy Baraka engages and cannot abide, distorts and records in *The Toilet*, letting us know, in spite of himself, that the space of the black avant-garde is a sexual underground. Therein he attempts to redraw the distinctions between eros and the sexual act, homosociality and homosexuality. The homoerotic and its radicalness, its performance in the music, are located in these interstices wherein the primary activity is to catch one's breath, to have one's breath caught, to think the syncope in its audiovisual origins also as an effect of

performance, to think the performer catching her breath, Lady or Cecil pausing, pausing in performance and at the sight of what? Now we have to think the pauses of Delany and of O'Hara 'round the Five Spot and the sexual and aesthetic logic of interruption.

Suddenly, time falters.

First, the head spins, overcome with a slight vertigo. It is nothing; but then the spinning goes wild, the ears start to ring, the earth gives way and disappears, one sinks back, goes away. . . . Where does one go?

The subject, says the doctor, is inert, pale, without consciousness. Sensitivity is obliterated. There is no respiration, no pulse can be felt. . . . after a necessarily short time, the pulse reappears, so does the respiration; the skin regains color; the sick person regains consciousness. Otherwise, the ending is fatal; syncope leads to death.

Syncope: an absence of the self. A "cerebral eclipse," so similar to death that it is also called "apparent death"; it resembles its model so closely that there is a risk of never recovering from it. The romantic and clinical scenario has usually, in our society, been allotted to woman: it is she who sinks down, dress spreading out like a flower, fainting, before a public that hurries forward; arms reach out, carry the unresisting body. . . . People slap her, make her sniff salts. When she comes to, her first words will be, "Where am I?" And because she has come to, "come back," no one thinks to ask where she has been. The real question would be, rather, "Where was I?" But no, when one returns from syncope it is the real world that suddenly looks strange.⁹⁷

"Syncope" is a strange word. It pivots from the clinic to the art of dance, tilts toward poetry, finally ends up in music. In each of these fields, syncope takes on a definition. At first there is a shock, a suppression: something gets lost, but no one says what is won.

Suddenly, time falters.

The couple seems to walk rather than dance, briskly, entwined. Who could separate them? But the man takes the woman's waist, and—so quickly that the movement can hardly be seen—bends her at midbody

to touch the floor, and there they are, the two of them, overturned, suspended, as if he had stabbed her, maybe, or kissed her. They stop there, as if frozen for an instant. . . . He raises her, whirls, starts again. Tango. She is called his partner, his "rider" (*cavalière*); in its day the Church prohibited the tango as indecent. Syncope—here syncopation—is evident in the backward dip, inherent in the step itself: three steady steps, at a trot, then nothing. Suspense. It is in the missing beat that one can falter. Obscenity.⁹⁸

This is the anaesthetic of the syncope that Catherine Clément offers. It is anaesthetic by way of synaesthesia, the senses, now theoreticians in their practice, fully emergent in and as their communism. Meanwhile, O'Hara's been shopping; meanwhile, Baraka's hanging with O'Hara, a recurrent character in the consumptive, licentious, lunchtime bohemianism he now disavows. Lady makes people stop breathing at the Five Spot—by her sound and, as Taylor writes, by way of the visible: "As gesture jazz became: Billie's right arm bent at breast moving as light touch." The remembrance of her synoptic power produces fear, terminates lines. Everybody stopped breathing. One emerges from the syncope with a memory, as if one had been on a trip. One comes back from somewhere and it seems to rupture or arrest all previous itineraries.

And there is a racialization as well as a sexualization of syncope. The syncope has an effect of further whitening the white, a loss of color signifying the always already given whiteness of the woman who falters. And it is the woman who falters rather than produces in others the syncope. But we know, between Frederick Douglass and Frank O'Hara, that the syncope is produced by black women, the extremest possibility of their impossibility, a trace effect of scream and whisper, "snicker and whine." Here a certain relation between syncope and orgasm, the little death that is marked for us already in the gesture and dance of shopping, syncope, and jazz. And there the syncope is a homosexual affair. But the dark lady of the sonnets is a writing of and out of syncope and its earthiness is, in this respect, the airy, disconnected earthiness of consumption, of that which Ross would invoke Baraka's earthiness to correct.

And when one thinks of the orgasm (by way of Baldwin at the end of *Just above My Head*, then Kristeva at the opening of *Powers of Horror*) as an impossible ingestion, one can think the relation between syncope and abjection as well, its effects and direction, who produces it, its relation to fascination, its aurality or vocality, the response to its call. All this is indispensable and it is indispensable, finally, to any possible understanding, say, of Douglass's Aunt Hester, or Bessie Smith, or Lady, producers or enactors of syncope, syncopation, sexual cuts, jazz, a certain black avant-guardedness.

This is, for instance, Monk's gestures and the sounds they produce, his movements circling away from and back to the piano in the ecstatic pause of somebody else's solo. Meanwhile, much of what is called post-modern dance, much of what is valorized as the essence of the iconoclastic downtown avant-garde by Banes, will have become the choreography of mass conformity, the Cold War's absence of affect, the postural articulation of the authoritarian personality, its outward forms and inner desolation. Paul Taylor in the gray flannel suit. Perhaps they would critique or break away from mass conformity by way of the movements and gestures of mass conformity. But you could have found some new movements at the Five Spot, where Monk, way beyond simply achieving, reorganizes and reaestheticizes the natural. Where maladjustment converges with the unassimilable, where communism converges with sexual nonconformity, where outward presence—as visual-gestural-aural-locomotive pathology—is given as the extension of just that kind of criminal insanity we call the ongoing resistance to slavery: that's what's at work at the Five Spot. 'Round the Five Spot lies the out internal differentiation of the metropole, an internal imperial maladjustment if not decay, the germ or trace, yet to be more fully disseminated—always in danger of appropriation or commodification since what we're talking here is the ongoing intervention of the commodity, the object—though here we're waiting for it to come around again. It comes around again as memory, memoir, recording. The ongoing refusal of adjustment or assimilation at the same time as a movement emerges, one that seems as if it's all about the desire to adjust and assimilate, the paradoxical

inexorableness of what we now know to have been an impossible inclusion. The avant-garde is always subject to inclusion's injunction to pass. This is what Paul Taylor, businessman, teaches us. (This is a lesson also taught and retaught at various drag balls, as if in contrast to such a scene's other interventions, as if to signify Harlem's ongoing prefigurative recapitulation of the whole downtown scene.) This is the political limit of realness. Yet the movement was not given in the desire for realness but in the desire for the outside, always driven by a happy inability to include it. The critique of inclusion was ongoing 'round the Five Spot: the radical outness of certain movements through subjectivity by objects, by the objections of the ones who have been objects, is what responds to the impossibility of inclusion as desire or philosophy as a function of law or custom but also as the function of a quite particular refusal to adjust. The out gestures of this refusal or objection remain before whatever origin we imagine, passing through each and animating them all. It animates the inclusionary movement and makes it impossible.

The main character in *The Toilet* is named Ray but called Foots. It's not impossible to imagine that this has to do with a certain facility in running, running at the mouth as well as by the foots, the combination of which is the condition of possibility of a leadership that is always potentially undermined by the leader's unwillingness to fight. Foots is always moving in and with and as the shadow of a manhood problem; and the thing about Foots is a recurrent refusal that takes place at the entrance into the scene, a refusal to descend, or maybe ascend, into the ecstasy or rapture of his own initial emotional response. (This is a manhood problem too.) The play is, therefore, replete with a series of highly controlled syncopations that experimentally structure, destructure, and restructure Foots and, in so doing, mark a revealing, if unrevealed, lack of control. Foots exists most fully as this problematic combination of (narrated) gesture and movement. He's a main character given to us primarily in the words, gestures, and movements of others or by way of the stage directions that narrate his gestures and movements. The stage directions time and again show him suspending the suspension that

emotion demands of him within the context of a play whose main action (Foots's fighting the boy, Karolis, who has sent him a letter "telling him he thought he was 'beautiful . . . and that he wanted to blow him'") will never really happen:

FOOTS: Yeh, somebody told him Knowles said he was gonna kick Karolis' ass. [*Seeing KAROLIS [who has already been beaten by Foots's boys] in the corner for the first time. His first reaction is horror and disgust . . . but he keeps it controlled as is his style, and merely half-whistles.*] Goddamn! What the fuck happened to him? [*He goes over to KAROLIS and kneels near him, threatening to stay too long. He controls the impulse and gets up and walks back to where he was. He is talking throughout his action.*] Damn! What's you guys do, kill the cat?⁹⁹

KAROLIS: [*has brought his head up during the preceeding scuffle, and has been staring at FOOTs. As FOOTs and the others look over toward him, he speaks very softly, but firmly*] No. Nobody has to leave. I'll fight you, Ray. [*He begins to pull himself up. He is unsteady on his feet, but determined to get up . . . and to fight.*] I want to fight you.

FOOTS is startled and his eyes widen momentarily, but he suppresses it.¹⁰⁰

KAROLIS: Yes, Ray, I want to fight you, now. I want to kill you. *His voice is soft and terrible. The word "kill" is almost spit out. FOOTs does not move. He turns his head slightly to look KAROLIS in the eye, but he is motionless otherwise.*¹⁰¹

But to say that the play's main action never really happens is imprecise. The fight does occur, it's just that it's most fully itself as dance, as embrace, as a movement of and in rapture that corresponds to nothing so much as what Du Bois terms frenzy, nothing so much as the intense erotics—sometimes hushed, sometimes violent—that prefaces and is the entrance into another scene. The combination of refusal and resolve that marks Foots's fight-as-flight is the aggregate of these halting entrances into the homosexual, interracial seizure Lady Day induces. Baraka's work,

over the course of the early 1960s is, in large part, the struggle to embrace such seizure, to think and renew its political content and force. That embrace is literally and doubly enacted at the end of *The Toilet* when Ray, defeated, as it were, by Karolis's murderous hug, crawls alone back into the scene to cradle the boy's battered head in his arms. Baraka's work is also, at the same time, a massive disavowal of any such embrace, a disavowal continually given in his desire for a purified racial and sexual self-referentiality. This is to say that the condition of possibility of such embrace will become an ever more violent purification of frenzy or rapture, one that always threatens to erase what it is that makes rapture possible in the first place. The imaginary return to an originarily earthy blackness or black heterosexual maleness is the path that Baraka must always take toward this purification and so one must always beware any such invocations of the soil. Nevertheless, by way of a certain illegitimate return of Barakan earthiness, one is given access to that dialectical relation to those complexities of rapture that are, in fact, always the invaginating, propelling force of blackness, which is to say, of black avant-garde.¹⁰²

In the meantime, Banes says that "there were no black underground filmmakers . . . there were no downtown black dancers . . . there were no black Happenings-makers; no black pop-artists. . . . That is, many black artists may not have had a taste for the kind of iconoclastic activity—the product of some measure of educational privilege—in which the white artists reveled."¹⁰³ I guess, in the end, it's not even that crucial to open an argument against her position by saying that she must not have been looking 'round the Five Spot. The downtown scene would have never come together as simply as she seems to imagine, and if it ever did there will have been no place for *anyone* to enter it. Instead, we can draw a broken circle 'round the Five Spot in the way that Mingus plays a broken circle 'round the Music's rhythmic center. This matrical, pulsive stoptime, this ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons, is the black avant-garde, where blackness is given as black performance in that improvisation of authenticity and totality that is the sexual cut of sexual difference.