

Columbia University
Department of Music

SONIC TEXTS OF THE BLACK ATLANTIC

INSTRUCTOR: Professor George E. Lewis

This interdisciplinary undergraduate course, derived in part from the discipline of performance studies, examines the importance of music and improvisation to the arts of the Black Atlantic, proceeding in semi-chronological fashion in exploring creative writing, recorded performances, and visual forms in which music is a central metaphor. Critical/historical texts are used to support topics that include African oral narrative, music during American chattel slavery, minstrelsy, the music of Harlem Renaissance composers, bebop and the world of the Beats, free improvisation, hip-hop, classical music and opera, and contemporary avant-garde digital technologies of text and sound.

The course explores a notion of intertextuality in examining some of the ways in which music serves as a prime site for interdisciplinary exchange across diverse forms of black Atlantic cultural production. Highlighted are the forms and methods through which musicality has been embedded in non-musical black Atlantic artforms, whether in poetry and the novel, dance and movement technologies, visual arts, or architecture. This model of intertextuality is made possible in large measure through improvisation, a critically important and frequently referenced, yet under-theorized practice that stands at the center of the arts of Black Atlantic. Thus, the theorization of improvisation is of paramount importance here.

In addition to written and media-based materials, I expect to leaven the course offerings with visits from artists and writers working across media with whom the class participants will be able to dialogue regarding the methods and histories of black Atlantic intertextuality.

WEEKLY TOPICS AND REQUIRED READINGS

Week 1: Foundations

Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. *The Black Atlantic as Counterculture of Modernity*, 1-40.

Week 2: African Text/Sound

Agawu, Kofi. 2003. *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*. New York: Routledge. *African Music as Text*, 97-115.

Agawu, V. Kofi (Victor Kofi). 1995. *African rhythm: A Northern Ewe perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Conceptualizing the rhythms of the soundscape, 27-30; Epilogue: Representing African Rhythm, 180-185.

Okpewho, Isidore. 1992. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. The Oral Performance, 43-69; Stylistic Qualities, 70-104.

Week 3: Antebellum Sounds

Cruz, Jon. 1999. *Culture On The Margins: The Black Spiritual and the Rise of American Critical Interpretation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Sound Barriers and Sound Management, 43-66.

Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. 1998.. *Digging the Africanist presence in American performance: Dance and other contexts*. Westport, Conn. Praeger. Past Imperfect: Performance, Power, and Politics on the Minstrel Stage, 81-128.

Media: Braxton, Anthony. 1998. *Trillium R: Shala Fears For The Poor*. Composition No. 162 for 9 Singers, 9 Instrumentalists and Orchestra. Braxton House BH-008 (compact disc)

Week 4: Blues Texts

Griffin, Farah Jasmine. 2004. *When Malindy Sings: A meditation on Black Women's Vocality*. In O'Meally, Robert G., Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. 2004. *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 102-125.

Gates, Henry Louis, and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. Dunbar, Paul Laurence, *When Malindy Sings*, 894.

Davis, Angela Y. 1998. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. New York: Vintage. *Here Come My Train: Traveling Themes and Women's Blues*, 66-90.

Media: Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith; Lake, Oliver. 1996. *Matador of 1st and 1st. Passin' Thru 40709* (compact disc); Lincoln, Abbey. 1972. *Straight Ahead*. Barnaby Records KZ 31037 (vinyl disc).

Week 5: Negro Renaissance

Scanlon, Larry. 2000. *Death Is A Drum: Rhythm, Modernity, and the Negro Poet Laureate*. In Radano, Ronald, and Philip V. Bohlman, eds. 2000. *Music and the Racial Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 510-553.

Long, Richard. 1990. Interactions Between Writers and Music during the Harlem Renaissance. In Floyd, Samuel A., ed. 1990. *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 129-137.

Media: Price, Florence. (symphony); Still, William Grant. 1989. *Afro-American Symphony*. Washington: Library of Congress LCM 2134 OMP-106 (compact disc); Hughes, Langston, Charles Mingus, and Leonard Feather. *Weary Blues*. Verve 841 660-2, 1990 (compact disc); Ellington, Duke. *Duke Ellington Carnegie Hall concerts, January 1943*. Berkeley, Ca. : Prestige Records, p1977 (three discs, Black, Brown, and Beige (compact disc).

Week 6: Jazz and the Beats

Feinstein, Sascha. *Jazz poetry: from the 1920s to the present*. Westport, Conn. ; London : Greenwood Press, 1997. *From Obscurity to Fad: Jazz and Poetry in Performance*, 61-88;

Panish, Jon. 1997. *The Color of Jazz: Race and Representation in Postwar American Culture*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press. *Improvising The Text: Euro American and African-American Approaches to Jazz narrative*, 117-140.

Media: Gaillard, Slim. *Laughing In Rhythm: The Best of The Verve Years*. Verve 314 521 651-2, 1994 (compact disc); Various Artists. *The Best of The Beat Generation*. Rhino R2 78302, 2002 (compact disc); Lacy, Steve. 2003. *The Beat Suite*. Universal SSC 3012 (compact disc)

Week 7: Blues Matrix

Baker, Houston A. 1984. *Blues, ideology, and Afro-American literature: a vernacular theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *Introduction*, 1-14;

Powell, Richard J. *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism*. Washington: Washington Project For The Arts. Powell, Richard J. *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism*, 18-36;

Murray, Albert. 1997. *The Blue Devils of Nada: A Contemporary American Approach to Aesthetic Statement*. New York: Vintage International. *Regional Particulars and Universal Implications*, 11-17; *Bearden Plays Bearden*, 117-140;

Media: McLean, Jackie, and Freddie Redd. *The Connection*. EFOR Films; Various Artists. *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like The Rivers: Black Poets Read Their Work*. Rhino Word Beat R2 780112, 2000 (compact disc); Davis, Anthony. 1992. *X, The Life and Times of Malcolm X: An Opera in Three Acts*. Gramavision R2-79470 (compact disc)

Week 8: Text Models Music

Eshun, Kodwo. *More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. London: Quartet Books, 1999, (critical writing as music)

Shange, Ntozake. *For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem*. New York: Bantam, 1980. (recording?)

Edwards, Brent Hayes. 2002. *Louis Armstrong and the Syntax of Scat*. *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Spring 2002), 618-649.

Redmond, Eugene B. ed. *Knees Of A Natural Man: The Selected Poetry of Henry Dumas*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press. *Play Ebony, Play Ivory*, 3-4.

Ellison, Ralph. 1980. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books, 7-14.

Morrison, Toni. 2004. *Jazz*. New York: Vintage Books. Foreword, xv-xix; selected excerpt.

Media: Armstrong, Louis: *Heebie Jeebies*; Ellington, Duke, and Mahalia Jackson. 1999. *Black, Brown, and Beige (Performance of the 23rd Psalm)*. Columbia/Legacy CK 65566 (compact disc); Abrams, Richard. 1967. *The Bird Song. Levels and Degrees of Light*. Delmark DD-413 (LP/CD)

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10: On Improvisation: Music Models Text

Monson, Ingrid. 1996. *Saying something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *Music, Language, and Cultural Styles: Improvisation as Conversation*, 73-96.

Fischlin, Daniel, and Ajay Heble, eds. 2004. *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, Neal, Mark Anthony, "A Way Out Of No Way": *Jazz, Hip-Hop, and Black Social Improvisation*, 195-223.

Media: Fontaine, Dick, dir. 1967. *Sound??* Starring Rahsaan Roland Kirk and John Cage. *Rhapsody Films*; Williams, Saul. 2004. *Saul Williams*. Faderlabel 8904-2 (compact disc);

Week 11: Visual Improvisations 1

Snead, James. 1981. *On Repetition In Black Culture*. *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Winter 1981, 146-154.

Lewis, Samella. 2003. *African American Art and Artists (revised and expanded edition)*. Berkeley: University of California Press. *Mixed-Media Assemblages*, 198-206.

Thompson, Robert Farris. 1983. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy*. New York: Random House. Rhythimized textiles, xx-xx

Lewis, George, "Purposive Patterning: Jeff Donaldson, Muhal Richard Abrams and the Multidominance of Consciousness." *Lenox Avenue*, vol. 5, 1999.

Media: Sundiata, Sekou. Longstory Short. Righteous Babe RBR018-D, 2004; Charlie Parker (various)

Week 12: Visual Improvisations 2

Harris-Kelley, Diedra. 2004. Revisiting Romare Bearden's Art of Improvisation. In O'Meally, Robert G., Brent Hayes Edwards, and Farah Jasmine Griffin. 2004. *Uptown Conversations: The New Jazz Studies*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 249-255.

Rowan, Dean C. Modes and Manifestations of Improvisation in Urban Planning, Design, and Theory. *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, <http://repository.lib.uoguelph.ca/ojs/index.html>, 2004.

Media: Morrison, Toni, and Max Roach. Performance, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA. UCSD-TV;

Week 13: The Black Arts Movement

Gates, Henry Louis, and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. The Black Arts Movement, 1960-1970, 1791-1806; Literature Since 1970, 2011-2020;

Ugwu, Catherine. *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995. bell hooks, *Performance Practice As A Site Of Opposition*, 210-221.

Gabbard, Krin, ed. *Jazz Among The Discourses*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. Thomas, Lorenzo. *Ascension: Music and the Black Arts Movement*, 256-274.

Media: Giovanni, Nikki. 1993. *Truth Is On Its Way*. Collectibles COL-CD-6506 (compact disc); Last Poets, The. *Real Rap*. Recall SMD CD 163, 1999. Run Nigger; Niggers Are Scared of Revolution; Wake Up Niggers; When The Revolution Comes; White Man's Got A God Complex; Baraka, Amiri [videorecording] *Sounds of poetry with Bill Moyers*. Princeton, NJ : Films for the Humanities & Sciences, c1999.

Week 14: Coltrane

Benston, Kimberly W. *Performing blackness: Enactments of African-American modernism*. New York: Routledge, 2000. *Renovating Blackness: Remembrance and revolution in the Coltrane Poem*, 145-186

Porter, Lewis R. *John Coltrane's Music Of 1960 Through 1967: Jazz Improvisation As Composition*. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Brandeis University, 1983, xx-xx

Cortez, Jayne. *Jazz Fan Looks Back*. Brooklyn: Hanging Loose Press, 2002. (*Taking the Blues Back Home*)

Media: Coltrane, John. 1964. *A Love Supreme*. Impulse Records; Cortez, Jayne, and the Firespitters. *Taking The Blues Back Home*. Bolla Press, 1996 (compact disc). *Taking The Blues Back Home; The Guitars I Used To Know; Blues Bop For Diz; Endangered Species List Blues*.

Week 15: Technologies

Nelson, Alondra, ed. 2002. *Afrofuturism*. *Social Text* 71, Volume 20, No. 2, Summer 2002. Alexander G. Weheliye, "Feenin": *Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music*, 21-47

Lewis, George E. 2004. *The Virtual Discourses of Pamela Z*. Forthcoming in the *Catalog of the American Section, Dak'art International Biennale of Contemporary African Art*.

Cox, Christoph, and Daniel Warner, eds. *Audio Culture: Readings In Modern Music*. New York and London: Continuum, 2004. Paul Miller aka DJ Spooky, *Algorithms: Erasure And The Art Of Memory*, 348-354.

Media: Givens, Daniel. *Dayclear & first dark*. *Aesthetics AS132CD* (compact disc); Givens, Daniel. *Age*. *Ast12cd* (compact disc); Lewis, George. 2000. *Endless Shout*. *Tzadik 7054* (compact disc) (North Star Boogaloo); Z, Pamela. *A Delay Is Better*. *Starkland ST-213*, 2004 (compact disc);

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS

Andrews, William L., Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris, eds. 2001. *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bontemps, Arna, ed. 1974. *American Negro Poetry*, revised edition. New York: Hill and Wang.

Chapman, Abraham ed. 1968. *Black Voices: An Anthology of African-American Literature*. New York: Signet Classic.

Feinstein, Sascha, and Yusef Komunyakaa, eds. *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Preface (probably); others

Feinstein, Sascha, and Yusef Komunyakaa, eds. *The Second Set: The Jazz Poetry Anthology, Volume 2*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996. Preface, xi-xiv; various poems

Gabbin, Joanne V, ed. , 2004. *Furious Flower: African-American Poetry From The Black Arts Movement to the Present*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Joans, Ted. 1961. *All of Ted Joans And No More*. New York: Excelsior Press.

Johnson, James Weldon, ed. 1969. *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, revised edition. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.

Lange, Art, and Nathaniel Mackey, eds. 1993. *Moment's Notice: Jazz In Poetry and Prose*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press.

Reed, Ishmael, ed. *From Totems To Hip-Hop: A Multicultural Anthology of Poetry Across The Americas, 1900-2002*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.

Troupe, Quincy, and Rainer Schulte. *Giant Talk: An Anthology of Third World Writings*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

Waldman, Anne. 1999. *The Beat Book: Writings From The Beat Generation*. Boston: Shambala.

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