Anthony Braxton: The Third Millennial Interview
with Mike Heffley

Anyone who's known Anthony Braxton for awhile has heard these words often: "Get ready for the third millennium, people!"

I've known and worked with him closely, off and on, since 1987, first as a musician, then as his graduate teaching assistant at Wesleyan University from 1993-96. I wrote a book about his music, and helped him fund and stage the first full production of the flower of his most recent and mature work as a composer, his opera *Trillium R: Shala Fears for the Poor* in New York in 1996. Most to the point here, I've had numerous conversations with him about our mutual fascinations with ancient prophetic writings, both biblical and more occult, that have come over time to lend the charge of myth and mystery to mundane markers like millennia. We didn't know exactly what sea change or revelation the new one would bring, but we knew we liked the numerological dimensions of the number "three" and the mythico-theological ones of the unit "thousand." The rest would be details.

Without planning it, we ran into each other last December, just before the real millennial shift--and before the Armaggedon-like attack of September 11--and sparked to the idea of an update interview: a comprehensive retrospective of the past, pulse-taking of the present, pipe-dreaming of the future. What unfolded was a series of five weekly sessions over that holiday season, each one as long as it took to fill two 74-minute minidisks, eat two Red Lobster lunches, and down one carafe of white wine. Great fun! We just kept meeting until we felt we had covered it.

Those who haven't grown up with Braxton's public persona and work, as I have, should know this: he was and remains one of the pioneers and giants of the musical terrain this magazine covers. It would surprise me if the lion's share of the artists, young and old, working in the "improvised & experimental music" enounced in the front-page masthead didn't know and acknowledge Braxton's groundbreaking work from the late 1960s on as crucial to the beginnings and developments of their "medium of expression." Let us recount the ways...

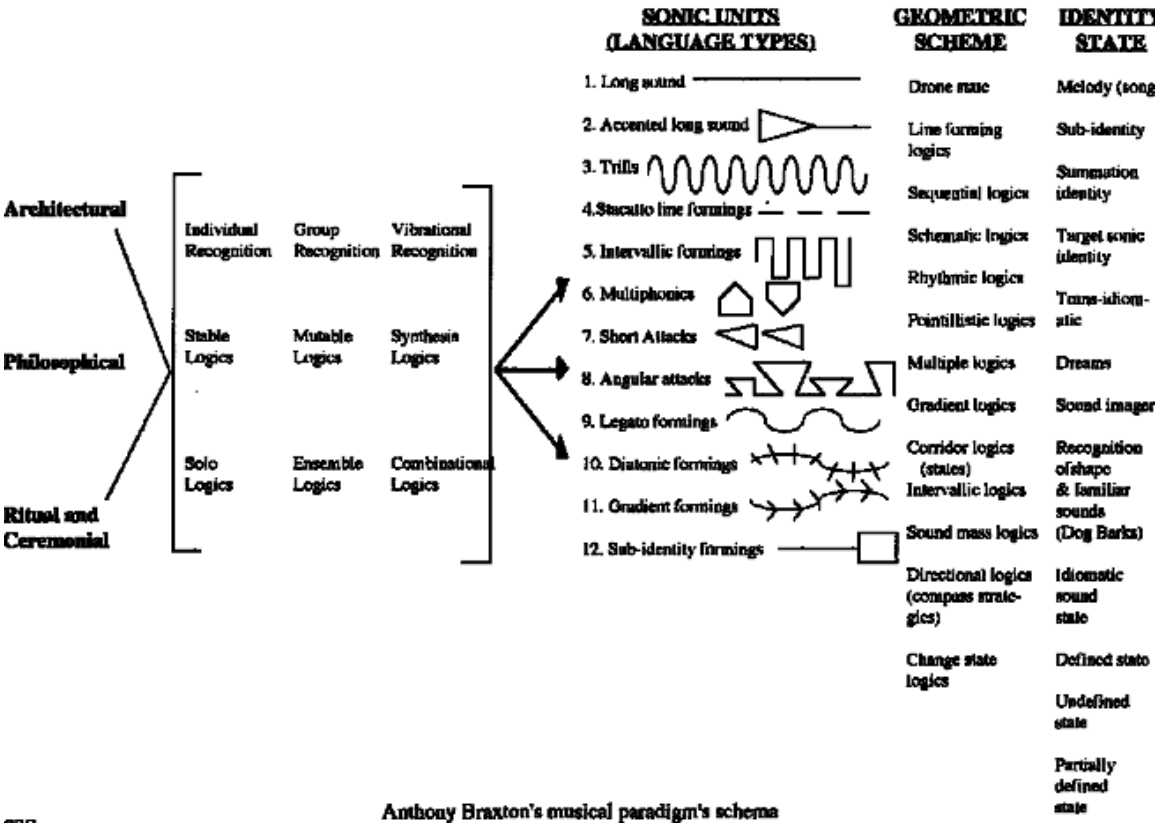
Braxton's 1968 double LP For Alto opened the door onto the single-line instrument as a valid vehicle for solo performances among improvisers; a little later he did the same thing for saxophone quartet, breaking ground for the World Saxophone Quartet and numerous others since. As one of the most popular and successful of the post-'60s (post-Coltrane/Ayler/Coleman/Ra) musicians, Braxton was also the most visible example of multiinstrumentalism as part of the

soundscape, expanding the improviser's voice and the music's timbral pallette. Braxton, as those of us who have played with him know viscerally, has fused the realms of the "free" improvisation and the through-composed piece so systematically and consistently, with such increasing sophistication over the years, that the treasures of each--from the heaviest golden crown to the least little bead, previously locked away from each other not only in traditional practice but for want of effective notational devices and aesthetic parameters--gradually merged, modestly at first, then with a great bursting of the walls of the chests containing them, resulting in a double fortune in one gleaming pile, for all the world to sort and run through its fingers with the treasure-hunter's shout of joy. One of the richest of those treasures was musical time. Braxton opened up that field, building on African America's pulse-rooted stretches beyond meter, and on European America's and Europe's experimental and avant-garde concert music, to devise ways more specific to the improviser striking out further from both traditions for newer, more, and more personal gestures.

More than any single musical innovation, however, Braxton's doggedly uphill and ongoing quest to challenge and change the assumptions underlying the musical-cultural terrain of his times, through his prolific recordings and interviews, is what sets him apart most valuably from most others. He came of age in the days (still going strong in powerful new and high-end quarters) when jazz was jazz, rock was rock, art music was art music, and woe to those who messed around with their well-policed borders; when black was black and white was white, and the border patrols policing them were even more vigilant, yea, vicious; when all these little quadrants had their place in a hierarchy that dictated socioeconomic and personal value--and forget about borders between high and low there, think rather in terms of DMZ zones. Braxton has braved and defied all this, often and largely without peer in the role, taking heat and flack few were able or willing to deal with. His payoff for doing so, far more than fame or fortune or honor due, has been to have produced a body of written and recorded music that is to "jazz," "Western art music," and "African-American composer's tradition" what Einstein was to physics, Picasso to Impressionism, Dylan to folk music. We who enjoy a scene with said borders and zones dissolving like a bad dream do owe him the honor of remembrance, respect, attention, understanding and support.

One aspect of the musical system he's been constructing since the 1960s is the terminology he uses to describe and explain it. Thus, to use the examples in the following, "house of the rectangle" refers most generally to the fixed aspects of nature--product rather than process, position rather than trajectory; "house of the circle" is the polar opposite of that, spontaneous improvisation, that which streams; and "house of the triangle" is synthesis, of those first two houses and in general. The "house of one" refers to the first of twelve musical components, or "sonic languages" on his chart, the long tone; it also has an anthropomorphizing personal name, Shala. "Identity" refers to what an improvised musical gesture ends in being as a finished product standing in time's moment, after its flow. "Tri-centric" has to do with Braxton's sense of the universe as rather a "tri-verse," a

term of Muhal Richard Abrams', stressing trinity rather than unity. His chart of his system will clarify other terms.



Anthony Braxton's musical paradigm's schema

Click here to go to his website.

[**NOTE:** This long transcription is compiled from 9 long interview sessions; I've marked the transitions.

To start, I ask him about his concept of exile, since he's always been on the margins struggling as an outcat, in a way; he pointed out that this exile, the last four years, was like a total isolation...]

session 1
AB It has been an incredible time period for me just because of the depth of the change. The concept of "exile" has been a real experience for me, it hasn't been just a theoretical concept. Since around the performance of Trillium R, my world would turn upside down; and now I'm poised to go into the third millennium in a completely unplanned way. I have no idea of what I'll be looking at in the future, and I'm fortunate--I don't mean to be painting a picture of sadness; I've had a life with many bright moments. To have the kind of complexities I'm having to deal with in this period in some ways makes a lot of sense, or at least in some ways I'm very fortunate. When I think about what's happening in the music world, and looking at my life, I've come to see that it's really correct, for instance, that the

jazz people see me as not being a jazz musician, and it's really correct that the classical people see me as not being a classical composer, that my life, in fact, has been in between the African-American and European-American communities, in between the concepts of conservative and liberal. It's going to be interesting to see the alignment of components in the third millennium; from my perspective, I feel like what looks like the minstrel period is coming back. Did you see the NY Times, with the Al Jolson article?

MH Yeah, I did. Did you see Spike Lee's new movie, *Bamboozled*?

AB I'm going to see this movie; one of my students saw it in New York. I have a feeling this movie is relevant. I'm no fan of Spike Lee's, but the fact that he would have a project dabbling in minstrelsy, on whatever level, is just further proof that the components of the third millennium will be very different from what we came up with in the '60s. For instance, much of the hip-hop music that we're experiencing right now has a minstrel component. More and more, it's the tough guy celebrating vulgarity--which isn't to say this is the only component of hip-hop. I have a feeling hip-hop, like every other form of music, has many different levels, but the one that gets through is the level that the marketplace co-signs. So we're seeing the same thing that has happened to the jazz world. At this point in time for me, it's almost irrelevant what's happening in the jazz world.

MH Because it seems taken over by corporate commercialism and so on?

AB Yes; everything's become generic in a way that the people who are allowed to be successful are those whose experience and perceptual parameters exist within the framework of what the jazz business complex has deemed acceptable.

MH Let me go back to this concept of exile. For those of us who know your work and history and everything, you've always been sort of on the margins in certain ways. You took a lot of flack in the early years for your music, and you've kind of done your own thing all along, regardless of the trends of the times. So have you never felt the exile before in quite this way, or is this a whole new level of exile?

AB By exile in this context, I'm referring to a fresh context of isolation, where say for the past four years I've basically separated myself from everyone. In the end, it was the only thing I could do anyway. Another component of it is my special relationship with the IRS, as I seek to undo the financial complexities of the opera.

MH How would you explain that whole MacArthur Foundation experience in terms of how it turned out to be more of a liability than an asset?

AB I would not characterize the MacArthur Fellowship as a liability in any way; in fact, it was just the opposite. It was a gift from the heavens. Because of it, I was able to realize an opera project, and for a guy like myself, opera projects have

not been an option. Because of my good fortune in this area, and their decision to give me the fellowship, I was able to realize a performance, and for that alone, everything that I'm going through, as far as I'm concerned, I'm lucky to be able to go through this period of exile. That's how much a performance of Trillum R meant to me; that was how badly I needed to get that done. So I will eternally be grateful to the MacArthur Foundation for that opportunity.

MH Was that the first actual full opera production for you?

AB I had a performance of Trillium A that the University of California at San Jose produced in 1985. That was the first actual performance, of a one-act, the first opera written in the opera complex cycle. But Trillium R was the first of the extended four-act operas that I would have the chance to actually produce onstage and record, and it meant everything to me to be able to do that, because I was sinking into depression, looking for a way to get a performance. You can write and compose all you want, but unless you can hear some of the music, there's no closure. And when I think, for instance, what has happened to composite aesthetic assumptions concerning African-American vibrational and creative dynamics in this time period, the gift of the MacArthur Fellowship would make a profound difference in my life.

Two weeks ago, I went into New York City. I'm teaching this semester the History of African American Music. I went to nine different record stores, Mike Heffley, looking for CDs of the music of William Grant Still. I was only able to find three CDs of African American notated music. As far as I'm concerned, the political decisions of the last 15 years have involved what I would call quadrant-specific coalition politics. Quadrant-specific in the sense that, looking back on the last 15 years we see a movement that has sought to move toward idiomatic certainty, as opposed to what my interest has always been, which is responding to composite reality. Idiomatic certainty is a way of talking about the kind of reductionism that has come to characterize present-day notions of what we call the jazz musician. Reductionism, in the sense of where in the beginning, we could look at the continuum of the music and the recorded materials available demonstrating the music as the artifacts, the sonic footprints of the path of evolution and experience of the great creative masters who have brought us to this point in time. Reductionism, then, is my way of looking at how that information has been redefined to where the language and conceptual experiences from the great lineage of mastership of those individuals that we call jazz musicians have been frozen, and have become the sonic artifacts that have been used to reduce the composite conceptual and vibrational implications of what that information originally meant. And so when the term jazz musician is put forth in this time period, it's put forth as part of a grand Southern political strategy. Southern political strategy in the sense that since the 1980s, in my opinion, what we have seen is a continuum of political decision that, one, would reposition the New Orleans experience as a point of definition of this erected concept of canon, at the expense of a composite American creative experience that reflects on

American experiences in a way that transcends the political and ethnic position parameters that have characterized, even historically, how American progressionalism is viewed.

What am I saying? I'm saying that the emergence of the modern era--say from 1880 to 1920--can be viewed on many different levels. The most important level in this example would be the concept of the IQ as a reflection of Darwin's evolution of the species, on the one component; and on the other side of that composition would be the concept of rhythm and blues as a way to establish a thought unit that on one side says the European and trans-European continuum is responsible for all of the intellectual advances of our species; and on the other side, the concept of rhythm and blues as a way of saying that African Americans have this special feeling, and that the Europeans, with all their intellectual advancement, are somehow retarded in the area of natural human feeling. I see this intellectual gambit as profoundly flawed and false; in fact this is a political gambit that is consistent with the original Southern gambit that would involve the concept of 3/5ths of a person as a way to justify a political decision that would enslave non-European, especially African American people.

MH Let me jump in here for a second just to get my bearings. From what you just said, it seems real clear to me how we might compare not only hip-hop but also the jazz industrial complex to minstrelsy. Also, I'm thinking that as you've matured as an artist, and at this period in your life, the genre of opera has become very important to you. Also from what you just said, and from what I know of your work, I see how you incorporate the so-called jazz tradition into whatever goes into use in your opera. I don't see you as someone who has come up in jazz and then decided to cross over to "classical" music tradition, I see you more as someone who's really engaging both traditions in the way they're actually engaged in American culture, and that your argument is with the continued segregation in the marketplace of the cultural categories signaled by genre, based on race to a large degree. So how would you describe your relationship to this genre of opera at this point in your life both as a personal tool for your own creative growth and creativity? Also maybe in comparison with someone like Anthony Davis who may be having an easier time, if you agree with that, in getting across.

AB Before I can deal with your question, I would have to first back up and establish this perspective: part of my problem, or part of the complexity of my creative struggle, has been that there's no category for an African American person who's interested in composite reality and in responding to it. I think in the very beginning, many of the problems that I would experience would come about because, for many sectors, I was an African American who did not know my place; who embraced the trans-European and trans-Asian musics to the same extent that I embraced the trans-African musics because I did not experience a natural opposition to those continuua. Part of the complexity of the ethnic politics that has been the political gambit leading into the modern era would be that the

African-American person has to function within a defined zone, or parameter. I have all this natural feeling, so-called; if I would just behave and use my natural feeling and function as a jazz musician as that concept is being defined by the marketplace, then there could be possibilities. But my problem was--or at least their perception of my problem was--that in looking at a guy like Karlheinz Stockhausen and having an affinity with him, as well as with Cecil Taylor, that in making the decision to even think about an opera, I would suddenly violate the political dimensions of what kind of experiences I would move toward, or what kind of performance dictates would be available for a guy like me. I mean we talk about jazz, and playing at the Village Vanguard as if at a shrine...but the Metropolitan is also a shrine, but they're dealing with another level of financial support to do an opera. It's no mistake that as we move toward 2001, that there's been no performance of a William Grant Still opera. In fact, that domain has been closed off in a way where it's like for a guy like me to even think about opera, it's almost perceived an un-African, or un-African-American, or non-jazz, or--it's something I'm not even supposed to think about.

Let's give a nod of ritual thank you for that small group of people who do exist in America who are trying to promote inclusive and positive participation in various creative spectra. That group has always been there, and that group has been the one that has helped me to stay alive. Were it not for those special individuals, I could not have been fortunate enough to get to 55 years old.

There are many people I could talk about. Colleagues like the great Leo Smith, whose work has never been embraced or commented on in a way that's equal to what he's demonstrated. In fact, part of the beauty of my life was the experience I had with the AACM, and the information that has come out of that experience. The AACM was a restructural and mystical union that was dedicated to advance composite information dynamics. So when I talk of my work in opera, or any interdisciplinary kind of quadrants, I'm really talking of the genesis components which came together in Chicago that affected all of us. My struggle has not been that different from my colleagues; for instance, I would mention the work of the great Leroy Jenkins, whose music has yet to be embraced by the composite media. I would mention the great music of Henry Threadgill, the great music of Joseph Jarman, the great music of Muhal Richard Abrams. These people were and are dedicated Americans, people that we can be proud of. They were seeking to advance a position that would be consistent with what America is all about. Their work has not been interpreted correctly because, again, it goes back, in my opinion, to the axioms that would determine what I call the Southern Strategy 2000. Southern Strategy 2000 is a way to regain an ethnic-centric parameter that would determine what musicians could be successful and from which value systems. Axiom 2 would determine which individuals would be allowed to be successful, and what subject and area focuses those individuals would have to talk about to become successful; and Axiom 3, the nature of what kinds of flexibilities the creative musician would have to entertain: flexibilities involving vulgarity, and input from the A&R people as far as what projects could

be documented and what musicians would be used. As far as I'm concerned, the last 15 years was prepared in the 1980s, and we're seeing a fulfillment of this Southern Strategy, which would also be connected to the African American middle class, and finally the African American upper class.

Also, connected to this strategy would be manipulation of image-logic quadrants; I'm thinking of the work of Hollywood in the last 20 and 30 years, and also image logic manipulation on the television set. I turn on the television set, I look at the political pundits discussing the coming elections; only a couple of TV shows, like the Chris Matthews "Hardball" show, will include the input of African American intellectuals; for the most part, we're seeing 20 or 30 European American intellectuals who are defining the American intellectual schema as it relates to American political and social dynamics. We can look at Hollywood and see the African American sidekick, and invariably the African American sidekick has an iconic function, a contemporary Shadrack or Rufus figure, whether we're talking of Shadrack in space, or Shadrack in the gangster movie. We look at the television set and we see an array of comedy shows, and in every instance we see an African American iconic figure that will be there as part of the concentric group set; group set in this context would be, say, six central characters on a TV show, one being African American--although there's a little flexibility, and every now and then you'll see two African Americans--very rarely do we see a group set that has a composite reflector agent that includes the input of Asian Americans, or Hispanic Americans, where we can gain some sense of the greater American vibrational spectrum. All of these matters, in my opinion, are connected to this Southern strategy that would…

MH Let me ask you about this Southern strategy. I understand totally what you're saying, but is this something you've kind of worked out for yourself as a working concept, or do you actually envision some sort of active cabal here? What I'm thinking is how the young neo-con guys are from New Orleans; are you thinking of a contemporary Southern state of mind that's taken over the mainstream arena?

AB Let me put it like this: what we're talking about transcends individuals, but Southern strategy is a good way of talking about this, in that the concept of a Southern strategy, and its success, in my opinion, has been that in many ways the Southern strategy trumps the composite intellectual strategy. By that I mean that the depth of slavery, and the actualness of slavery, was of such a dimension that everyone has to genuflect, especially in the trans-African American intellectual community, to the profound weight of the slavery experience. So the concept of the Southern strategy in this context is a strategy that sets the parameters for the intellectual dimensions of the music, and trumps any thought unit that goes outside what is considered race-generic, if I can say it like that.

MH What I see going on here is that there's obviously this arena that has always been going on in jazz, where jazz moved out of the national into the international,

and when it actually did engage with European culture, it found a much different kind of vibe and perception of the music, with white Europeanness than it found in America. There was a whole different set of rules and worldviews and so on that were relatively freer of the racial dynamics in America. It seems to me that your body of work and your sensibility and so on has been a prime example of one of the fullest engagements in that arena, not only because you actually worked there because it was the only place you could find most of your work, and so you got familiar with European culture, but because you engaged the European traditions that were also engaged here in America, but in different ways. When you talk about a Southern strategy, I start thinking, well, Jelly Roll Morton, creole, opera, French opera, that whole thing--

AB --and remember, they kicked him out (laughs)--

MH --yeah, all the racial dynamics of lighter skin and darker skin within African America, as well as between whites and blacks. I think of Louis Armstrong coming from the South…

AB The Southern strategy is also a way to understand the exclusion of the contributions of the trans-European creative musician, or in this context the European American contributions to the creative music tradition. I'm convinced more and more that the whole idea of black music, jazz music doesn't really encompass the correct context to talk about the evolution of American creative music. Jazz works because, one, the European American political structure, from the beginning of the modern era, would place a quadrant circle around the black community, because the black community serves several functions in America. The black community would be of a zone where the trans-Victorian component would not be allowed to be dominant. The black community would be the quadrant that would challenge the trans-Christian and especially the trans-Pythagorean component; the black community would be the quadrant that would allow for extended morality, or existentially posited psychologies. So the black community was isolated because, one, the European American power structure needed to have it isolated because of the psychology of racism, first, and also the psychology of financial and economic dynamics. But the evolution of American creative music, and finally the evolution of world music has always been much greater than any territorial experience. In seeking to understand the discipline of creative musics and the phenomenon of vibrational dynamics, more and more I think in terms of territorial experiences into continental experiences into, finally, global experiences. From that paradigm what we call white and black doesn't work in the same kind of way, because the real history of our species and of creative music evolution has been a history of human beings responding to one another, based on coming into contact with one another, and that was the case in the Byzantine period, in the Ottoman Empire period, in pre-classical Greece time period, the period when the classical Greek information would go into the Islamic world, to later be re-translated into the European universe and locale; it was the case in the forming of the American area space, and it was the

case in the time period of colonialism. What we see in this time period, in my opinion, are efforts to undermine continental experiences as a way to continue present-day notions of ethnic politics, of coalition politics, that's what we're really dealing with: ethnic and racial politics, idiomatic politics, and the phrase Southern strategy in this context, in my opinion, involves the latest component of this reconstituted agenda from the 1880s that seeks to put everybody back into their place again. By that I mean put the African Americans back in their place, put the homosexual community back in their place.

We establish a hegemony that involves the parameters of the black experience… well, we're looking at a trans-Christian component, which is interesting, because the time period of the 1960s, and the reemergence of African American nationalism can now be viewed as a continuum that has not been effective. And we see that the young people of the African American community are only able to be successful when aligned with the work of the black church, and Christian component. But of course the Christian component comes with a Catch-22; the whole idea of the image of God being the image of someone other than yourself is inherently not healthy.

MH You're saying there's a revival of the black church in the culture?

AB Oh yes, the black church seems to be…let me put it this way: I think we're seeing a cyclic phenomenon. Part of the progression of emancipation after the Emancipation Proclamation would see the black church as the quadrant that could deliver demonstrated evolution. I see that cycle coming back around, and I see it that way because it has been created politically. The AACM was not able to achieve all it would have hoped for because there were political components that would not allow for certain initiations to go outside the perceived parameters of what African American vibrational creative dynamics should be about.

MH In Chicago. You mean like a local church opposition or something?

AB No, I'm talking about the Democratic Party. This is why I have no use for the Democratic Party or for the liberals, and this is why I've come to see that I can no longer afford to think in terms of having some kind of alignment with the conservatives or the liberals. This is why a guy like Ralph Nader is a person I can support, because of demonstrated commitment, and this is why, in my opinion, both the conservatives and the liberals hate Nader--but actually, I guess the conservatives love Nader, because they know that Nader is taking away from the liberal sector of the Democratic Party.

MH What was it the Democrats did in Chicago that blocked the AACM?

AB The whole jazz platform, everything that's happened since the 1960s in the jazz world, in my opinion, has come about through the liberal sector, and that sector has postulated a concept of "we are with you in communion around trans-

African matters," while at the same time, what they're really saying is "we're with you, but you had better follow our concept of what you should be. We're with you as long as we can say that jazz goes to 1965, and everything after that is not black." By chopping off the restructural component of the music, what we've seen in the last 30 years has been that without the head you start taking from the body, drawing from stylistic influences. From that point, the musicians would start to go further and further back in time; now we're back to the minstrel period, back to Stagger Lee. But it's taken for granted in every other community that evolution is a point of fact.

For instance, the trans-European community, if the subject is the Third Millennium, looks ahead into digital evolution, looks ahead into the Hubble telescope…

MH On the other hand, you must admit that the European classical tradition is the supreme example of cultural chauvinist nostalgia for the past, rather than forward looking into the future. This whole idea of canonizing everyone from Bach on up was really an idea of the last two recent centuries, and the classical canon that exists today is definitely a backward look. So it seems to me that this Southern strategy you're talking about, as I understand it, is like a mirror image of power relations--

AB --they're taking the same concept, a transposition--

MH --so they have a certain backward look over the jazz tradition that mirrors that European gesture toward the composition tradition. But what would you say then, given all that, would contra-distinguish your position? You obviously have this real serious, deep awareness of what we're calling the jazz tradition's connection to European musical traditions, as well as African traditions. You've always proven your concern with both of those aspects, and you've always demonstrated them in your work. So now we have this Southern strategy be a raising up of jazz as America's classical music, modeling its power on the model of the European gesture--

AB As long as they accept the parameters of what they call jazz. What they call jazz is a reductive proposition that takes away the restructural spectra of the music. We can talk about jazz from many different standpoints, but one thing is certain: jazz was the only quadrant where an African American creative person would have the right of definition, to seal a definition; but that has now changed. All of the musicians who would define a way for themselves based on their understanding of affinity dynamics have been kicked out. In their place we have a concept of jazz that is generic, that is a reductive attempt to create an artificial quadrant that would have the properties of what they call jazz…but in fact jazz was always much more profound than what these people want to deal with anyway. Their problem with the restructuralist tradition has always been that the

Establishment was never prepared to accept that an African American person could have an intellectual thought that would be equal to the Europeans.

MH But consider this. In European tradition and culture, in both Europe and America, if we have this trend of classicizing and canonizing and looking back on the masters of the past, idolizing and putting them on a pedestal, we also have the mavericks that you've liked and identified with so much--Charles Ives and the other American Independent composers, through Cage, and their counterparts in Europe, Stockhausen…

AB And I claim them as part of me.

MH So can't we say that this Southern strategy and this whole jazz industrial complex is kind of the African American community's response to and version of the European power and conservative tradition, but that there is also a European and European American tradition of people like you, who do see the past being fulfilled in their work, but in different ways?

AB I would agree completely. That's the creative music tradition, and--many things. We're talking of the European mystic creative traditions, as well as its technocrat tradition. We're talking of the trans-African mystic creative tradition, and the trans-African technocrat, or…appeaser's tradition. [laughter] And I don't mean that pejoratively, necessarily; I can relate to the desire of every individual to have a good life, to be in the middle class, and aspire to the upper class--but we're really talking about the reality of value systems, the reality of political dynamics and the trade-offs necessary to enter into certain sectors. So I have no problem embracing Derek Bailey, or Evan Parker; when I found those guys… when I went to Europe, I didn't go as the hip African American jazz musician who was going to teach the Europeans how to play the music. I went there curious, and excited about the hope of meeting kindred spirits, who were interested in human creativity and creative evolution. That was my position then and now. The subject of human creativity is not an ethnic-centric, but a composite subject.

MH At this point, what would be interesting to me is, since you've sort of given your views on the unsettling state of the American scene--the African American community, the jazz scene, the Southern strategy, and the commercialism gone global and all that--your views on the European scene of improvisers, and what you think might be the challenge there in terms of what directions that culture and scene have taken since you've been engaged with it and seen it so up close.

AB Wonderful question. After this interview, I will only be able to live in Antarctica. First, I would say that I support creative musicians in every way, regardless of continent. I feel that in the last ten years, we are experiencing so many different levels of coalition politics that it's become very interesting. I'm happy, for instance, that colleagues I've grown up with, like Evan Parker and Derek Bailey, are starting to have opportunities in America, just as, when I was a

young guy, the Europeans saved me. Having the opportunity to go to Paris, to travel in continental Europe would make the difference in my whole life. So I'm very grateful and proud, to see that there's reciprocity, and that over the last 10-15 years we're starting to see more possibilities for great European musicians to have opportunities to perform in America.

At the same time, I find it interesting how the total improvised musician's community is being used in a way that posits Evan Parker's music as the state of the state, but somehow doesn't recognize the great work of Roscoe Mitchell as equal to Evan Parker. We're seeing idiomatic wars, or idiomatic supremacy psychologies, when in fact the dynamic implication of the AACM pointed toward a trans-idiomatic music. Suddenly we find ourselves swinging the pendulum from "if it's totally notated, it's correct, it's the best; now, if it's totally improvised, it's the best." It's another form of idiomatic certainty; it's, again, a form of emphasizing the "ism" at the expense of the "is."

MH You mentioned Roscoe Mitchell as an example. Are you thinking of him as someone who has a fruitful combination of notation or orchestration along with improvisation?

AB Roscoe Mitchell has demonstrated total improvisational musics and music strategies; Roscoe Mitchell has demonstrated restructural multi-instrumentalism; Roscoe Mitchell has demonstrated composition for chamber musics, orchestra musics. How do we find ourselves in the situation where a guy who's done so much is somehow looked at as secondary to Evan Parker?

MH Why do you think people look at him as secondary?

AB I feel that part of the coalition politics that we're dealing with would be the Southern strategy, on one end--but one component of the Southern strategy, in my opinion, is the move to reinstill high European vibrational dynamics as part of a mono-hierarchical thought unit that does not allow for equal respect or celebration of similarities and differences. Rather than acknowledging a spectrum of masters…

MH This is interesting to me because of my recent work in Berlin. Let me ask it this way: all these FMP guys, and those in England, clearly came into their styles as a result of the inspiration they got from African American musicians. So once they came into those styles, and solidified them as, like you say, idiomatic territories, are you saying then that you think maybe the deep subconscious of the European culture is seeping up from the bottom and making them sort of claim that territory as being somehow better than that African American ground?

AB I am saying that quality is present; but even more than that quality, many of the political forces that are manipulating events are doing it from that psychology. Just as many of the young African American bebop guys coming out of the

universities cannot be faulted for suddenly finding themselves pushed up front in a position in which they find that their music represents the state of the state of the music. In fact, many of these young people are fulfilling several doctrines; among those is the understanding of bringing in a group of people that can be defined, and whose opportunity will operate within the constraints of the power center. I see something like that happening also with the European improvised musics, in terms of the political components which are operating to determine how that music is being viewed, as compared to musicians like myself.

MH Also as compared to the actual European musicians themselves, because you're saying…what are you talking about, the media?

AB The media, the festivals, performance outlets, magazines…and I'm talking about the value systems which have been attached to the music. I'm also talking about how many of my colleagues are allowing these misdefinitions to be advanced without challenging them.

MH Because it's in their interests to do so?

AB When I went to Europe, and when I had that period in time when I was the recipient of a lot of publicity, I made sure that everyone understood that if you're dealing with Braxton, you're dealing with Paul Desmond, Warne Marsh, as well as Charlie Parker and John Coltrane. Not only that, you're dealing with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Richard Wagner, and Ahmad Jamal and Dinah Washington, and that you cannot accept me without accepting the family that made me possible. I'm not always getting that from my colleagues; I'm getting more of a revenge of the pendulum. But the pendulum will swing left and right always, because every time period has a pendulum swing that covers the spectrum.

MH So can we say that it's entirely possible that a musician who's one of your colleagues, whom you've performed and recorded with, can be totally in your corner as a human being, and say "I love Anthony, I respect him, etc.," but in the course of their life and the choices they make in the way their body of work evolves, just like anybody, they act in their own immediate interests and needs, and what they have to do, and that is what results?

AB I think that is the case--but it gets even deeper. There is the reality, for instance, of the interview, and what we think we're talking about, as opposed to how that information comes out in the press. That's two different things. My experience in the '70s told me that whatever I would say, they would write about it basically the way they wanted to write about it anyway, because I served a need in that period. That's not to say that everything that was written about me was incorrect, but rather that when the radiant spotlight falls on a person's work for a given period of time, a lot of different forces come with that spotlight, and not all of those forces are thinking of advancing a person's work on every partial with respect for how that person would hope for it to be advanced. Then add to

that subliminal components, which all of us are dealing with. So the subject of the modern-day creative musics--which, more and more, I even reject that phrase, because there's really only…creative Western music, as opposed to, say, the creative music that's happening in China, or the other non-Western cultures. The psychology of the creative musics and that of the entertainment musics. And the psychology of the entertainment musics has been the aesthetic goal of the Southern strategy; they've moved the creative music that guys like myself were working with, they've changed the aesthetic concept to entertainment being the highest goal again. We're back to the Eisenhower years; I'm waiting for Franklin Delano Roosevelt to come out of his grave and take away Brown vs. the Board of Education.

MH I think I understand what you mean by the Southern strategy, but it's still hard for me to get my head around the idea that it might be occupying the center place in American global capitalism at the moment.

AB You put your finger right on it.

MH You think it is there?

AB I feel that this time period, in many ways is analogous with the dawn of the modern era. That's why I keep going back to the late 1800s to 1920s. The same components are at work; and in this time period, in seeking to understand those components, we can look at the phenomenal success of Wall Street over the last 15 years; the greatest gains in the history of our country. We're seeing mergers on a level that's equal to the early 1900s. We're seeing a new tier of super-rich people, that 1 per cent Al Gore liked to talk about; and on the other side, the gap between rich and poor is widening. The Southern strategy, in my opinion, is part of this greater component that really reflects on multinational reductionism, and multinational reductionism in this context has kicked out 3/4 of the recording companies and merged them into one; controlling the performing outlets, bringing in a group of guys who are working all over the planet because they play ball. This is political, and part of a political strategy: if you play ball, you can be successful, because the ball has never…there's never been greater abundance, because we are again at this cycle of dynamic technology that has resulted in new possibilities for making money. Jazz is a part of that; the jazz business complex is that zone that controls the music; the motion picture industry is the zone that controls image logics in the film; television has its domain; so we're talking of political and aesthetic domain parameters.

MH The thing I'm trying to get my mind around here is that the whole idea of the Southern culture as being a paradigm, or worldview, was kind of knocked out of the picture in the Civil War. So I'm trying to figure out how exactly you mean the term. I know that the history of Southern culture is basically colonial, the plantation, the master-slave domain, etc.; but when we think of modern global

capitalism, including the music industry, we think of it coming out of New York, or West Coast entrepreneurialism and so on…

AB It is coming out of New York; they brought the South to New York. By Southern strategy in this context, take the blues, for instance. The blues is being posited as the legitimate projection for African Americans to function inside of. More and more, the blues is being defined as an idiomatic generic state as opposed to an infinite affinity state, which is what it really is. The blues, in my opinion, is being used as a way to marshal and limit, or define the parameters, of African American intellectual and vibrational dynamics. With the blues, they can say "this is black music." If it's not the blues, if you write an opera, they can say, "oh, this is not black music." If it's blues, it can be received and appreciated as consistent with what African Americans are supposed to be involved with.

MH Given that the jazz musician has been redefined in this way to be an idiomatically correct version of blackness, and that they're really succeeding in the record companies because of that, and there are actually people out there making good livings at it, and are in the highest American cultural spaces now too...how would you characterize their relationship to those African American composers of notated music that you mentioned? Are they ashamed of them or something?

AB That's one of the sacrifice zones, because the thrust-continuum of the trans-African composer's tradition is a tradition that challenges the intellectual domain of ideas, and this has been one of the sacrificed components. This is why, I believe, my music has met with such intense reactions, because one component of my tradition, that being the composer's notated tradition, is a tradition that's never been respected, but that disrespect is not separate from the components of the modern era's psychology. That's why in the beginning when we first started to talk about this I mentioned Darwin's Origin of Species as a point of definition for the understanding of a hierarchy of intelligence. Europeans at the top--

MH Social Darwinism.

AB Yes, thank you. And on the other side, rhythm and blues, or this natural feeling, as the domain African Americans can operate in--

MH So that they can then say "we're at the top of emotional/natural intelligence, and you Europeans are at the bottom."

AB Meanwhile, the African American composer's tradition, going back to people like Frank Johnson, was one that had no slot, as a category that could be accommodated and respected. In fact, it was a continuum that shouldn't have existed if African Americans had no intellectual weight, and so it would be a sacrifice continuum, even in that early period from the 1880s to 1920s. The African American notated tradition is connected to the emergence of Broadway,

it's connected to the development of modern dance, and to active existential rhythm. Active rhythm is one of the main components that would define the poetic dynamics of the modern era, but we don't talk about active rhythm; it doesn't even exist as a category.

MH What exactly do you mean, active existential rhythm?

AB Generally, the European tradition likes to talk of Stravinsky as a point of--

MH Oh, you mean as opposed to metered rhythm?

AB Yes.

session 2
[technical problems lost the next hour or so of the interview; it picks up with an attempt to recap what was lost]

M We've covered a lot of things that you've discussed in print over the years that are still timely, because the scene remains much the same and changes slowly and so on; I'd like this article to remind everybody that you're someone who's been thinking and talking about these things for a long time, and that this is part of that continuum, but is also something of an update, with new things covered--very much an observation of now as well as the past. To review a bit…we didn't get into your own work too much yet, which I want to do; and we didn't talk much about the future, which we'll get to too. But when we were talking about the past, what emerged--mainly from your talk about the Southern strategy--is this picture of the history of the music as being something uniquely of the 20th century. You were referring to the late 1800s a lot, and to the 1920s, and you painted a good picture of how the music emerged at first from this European paradigm that defined it and presented it to the world at first, in a lot of ways. The course of the music's development was one of getting outside of that framework--being outside of it all along, from the beginning, on its own terms, but in the terms of the larger world framing it, constantly reaching to get beyond it, to varying degrees successfully, up until the 1960s, when you and your peers came along. The trend of the times then was very much a quantum leap outside of the Western/American framework and a reach to the global roots and potential and possibilities. After that little window of the '60s and '70s, we saw a regression in the '80s back to the old co-optation game of the Southern strategy. So that was very much the thrust of our last session.

What I'd like to do at this point before we go on to the other things is explore what you introduced as ethnic and racial coalitions and politics, the concept of those things, to get our bearings and situate ourselves in terms of your work and what you've been active in. I'm thinking here of, as you mentioned before, your constant involvement from the beginning with not only the African American tradition, but also what you called trans-Germanic--Wagnerian, Stockhausen;

also you mentioned a Jewish presence in terms of Schoenberg. Obviously that's been an important element in your work. You also mentioned trans-Asian, and I want to get into that a little bit. Tell me how you see this big paradigm of racial-ethnic identity politics, and cultural politics, where the Europeans have been on top, and then challenged by African Americans, and where the black middle class has turned that challenge into sort of a mirror game, by claiming the one-up position on the hierarchy rather than getting out of the power-political game altogether. I'm interested in the two sides of the coin here. First, re: Wagner, you're well aware of how Wagner's reputation has suffered as being tainted by Nazism; all your colleagues in Germany dismiss him for that--yet you embrace him in spite of the problematic repercussions, the flack you've taken for your similar embrace of European American musicians. I think it would help readers understand how you've managed to keep this position if we talk about the light side and the dark side a little bit.

A Okay. For me, then, what we're really talking about is some attempt to understand this time period, the concept of the modern era and all of what that concept implied, as far as what tenet components would comprise the variables that all of us as human being would find ourselves dealing with in the last 100, 120 years. By the term "Southern strategy," I want to be clear with this; I'm not only talking about the "New Orleans phenomenon," I'm talking of the political psychologies and strategies that have dominated the domain of information and vibrational dynamics in American culture, and what that domination would pose for the erection of quadrant politics, coalition politics, ethnic politics, intellectual dynamics, and the resulting decisions that would come out of that alignment, and how that phenomenon would set up the constructs of the modern era.

For myself, I see my position as consistent with African Americans after the Emancipation Proclamation. I have from the beginning sought to find a viewpoint that would allow me as a human being to participate in composite reality, in the sense that I wanted to have an experience that would reflect my interests, those things that I've discovered in life, and to have the possibility to integrate that information, and hopefully to evolve in a way that would be consistent with my beliefs. The concept of the modern era would also of course have a spiritual component, and that spiritual component--especially the trans-Christian aspect of it--would also fuse on the tri-plane the various axiomatic tendencies that have become the accepted norm in this time period as far as general perceptions of reality. It is from that point that I'll try to respond to your question.

In seeking to explore and learn about history, I think the most basic focus that I can come up with at this point would be that period of exploratory recording that we generally associate with Alan Lomax and, later, John Hammond. It would be in that period when we would see the manipulations to contain idiomatic and vibrational quadrant spaces concerning African American affinity postulates, and the gradual move to create alternative quadrant spaces for African American experiences as opposed to integrating those experiences into a composite

platform that reflected American vibrational dynamics. It would be with those quadrant political strategies that the first echelon of idiomatic parameters--i.e., "African American music"--would be undertaken.

I read this morning in a magazine that some basketball player who's making multimillions--who, of course, is angry, since all African Americans are angry, whether it's justified or not, since anger has become one of the qualities that our young people seem to embrace, which is to say it's become almost a minstrel tenet, what has happened with anger in this time period. This young man is doing his hip-hop CD, and the article talked about how foul this CD is in terms of language. For me, it triggered the early notions of how the African American community would gravitate toward blues, how in the initial gambit of what we now call race recordings was to present the African American community as being more fascinated with "blues" than with composite initiations. I disagree with that viewpoint. I think of the American master Abner Jay, who spoke of his work and himself as the last of the minstrel musicians. I recall that when talking with Mr. Jay, he talked about his struggle, and finally his rejection, or the rejection of his music, by the African American community. For me, Mr. Jay's experience and the conversation I had with him was indicative of the profound forces at work.

M Let's just say that he was a man you met in the South…

A I met Mr. Jay in Tennessee, when I had the opportunity to go perform there.

M And he was an itinerant musician who worked out of his car…

A Yes, and sold CDs of his music; I have about 20 of them. Incredible music.

M If he's the last of the minstrel musicians, you obviously mean that in a praising kind of way…

A That's right.

M But you were critiquing this period as being like a regression to minstrelsy, so what's the distinction?

A The distinction is that what we call minstrel music is complex. There are at least three or four different levels. There's the first level of European Americans recognizing the creativity in the slave quarters as a component for attraction and assimilation; two, there would be the response from the African American community that would mimic the mimicers; and three, there would be a contingent of African American creative musicians who would seek to parlay that polarity--that is to say, to take the original and dynamic components of that experience, and attempt to do something with that.

M Where does Abner Jay fall in that?

A Abner Jay would fall into that group. The fourth level would be minstrelsy as an "ism," that being a parameter that would become part of the idiomatic character components that would be used to define the identity state of what is "correct" for African Americans--i.e., translating into Amos and Andy, translating into those components and ideas that would form the early attempts to frame African American vibrational dynamics and identity.

M Now while we're in this period of--you know, Abner Jay being very old and going back to the minstrelsy period in a way that reflects the natural human complexity of it in the way that you like and identify with, and since you also identify with the opposite end of the spectrum, of post-Emancipation African American culture embodied in people like Frank Johnson and other composers…

A In fact, this is where I was going with this. Part of this gambit, and this idea that through the race records the marketplace manipulators would frame this viewpoint that the African American community was only interested in blues… part of that gambit would involve sacrificing the composite creative spectrum, especially the creative experiences taking place in the North. It would be in that context that the thrust continuum of experiences from the African American composers like Frank Johnson, William Grant Still, James Reese Europe, Will Marion Cook--this continuum would be sacrificed in terms of the significance of their input as conceptualists and composers. What we would have instead would be glorification of folk music into blues, with the solidification of race recordings taking the position that the African American community was really an outgrowth of the blues psychologies exclusively. This is my point.

M Do you see, then, Abner Jay and the black composers, especially the opera composers--we had opera composers in the 1800s too…

A That's right.

M Do you see these opposite poles on the same spectrum in a composite reality sense?

A Yes. If we were to look at the emergence of the great American musics, we would be forced to look at the fusion solidification of Irish and African American music moving into the country string-band continuum, which would later set up propositions for active rhythmic-logic folk musics, moving into country music and rhythm and blues, all as one unit, as opposed to how it was segregated by the marketplace because of social reality, political reality, ethnic reality, and finally racialist/racist psychologies. That would be one tenet component of the modern era.

M And we might add too that the thing that came to define whiteness, which is country-and-western music, had a lot of black input all along too…

A In every period, until it was impossible because of the African American community and musicians' community backing away from it. By 1920, 1930, the string band tradition would become Europeanized, exclusively, and it would be at this point that the historiography would define that continuum as a European American one. So again we find ourselves looking at the dynamic implications of the reductionism that has played a role, at the beginning, even, in the entry of the modern era psychologies.

M Okay, now let me move from there to Wagner, because he was in this time period too, late 1800s.

A Yes.

M So whatever was going on in America with the African American community, composite reality, Frank Johnson and the other composers who went to Europe themselves, Wagner was establishing this poetic-logic mythology of the Northern European, Nordic mythology in his operas…

A Yes.

M …and also establishing his musical innovations. How, staying with the composite reality framework, what is there of interest in Wagner to an African American post-Emancipation guy who's interested in composite reality?

A For me, your question is complex and dynamic, as of course you know it is. Wagner would signify the next juncture in trans-European progressionalism, a juncture that would redefine the components of the trans-Christian movement that solidified in Rome. In fact, Wagner would solidify the axiomatic tendencies, the tenet components of the trans-Pythagorean information continuum--

M As opposed to the trans-Christian?…

A …in the sense that his music would accept a composite aesthetic viewpoint that existentially would fulfill--well, I mean, one, total integration of the trans-European experience coming to Glastonbury, infusing the European mystic tradition with the Northern European mythic components.

M What do you mean by Glastonbury?

A Glastonbury was the last mystical center, coming from Rome, extending through continental experiences, tracking the experiences of the great European peoples moving from the southern part of the continent and expanding all the way up to the north. Historians talk of the gap in European mysticism that occurred in the Dark Ages and was found again in the Middle Ages; that gap would be the break in the acceptance of the great classical information that came

out of Greece, that information went into the Islamic nations; it would be in the Islamic cycle that the phenomenon of belief would posit another echelon of information related to affinity dynamics permeating and affecting the science of music--i.e., the Sufi movement--and it would be only later that the Europeans would re-adopt that information. In that time period, for instance, the Council of Trent, when it came together, that meeting would be a point of definition for reintegration of the mechanics of Aristotle--the faulty mechanics of Aristotle--and concepts such as the infallibility position would be reinforced and assumed again. But the European mystic information that Wagner tapped would also involve, like the idea of Parsifal as connected to the brotherhood of believers who would assume the philosophical position of "redeem the redeemer," and that phrase was a code phrase. Christ died and gave his life for us; we can redeem that act by fulfilling the tenet structure of Christianity. But it was more complex than that; "redeem the redeemer" was also another way of describing the profound experiences of Parsifal and his legion of men, those being that they would cohabit with non-Europeans, and in doing so would become weaker. Suddenly, the story of Parsifal would be the story of the European man finding his way back into the pure tenet structure of trans-European spiritual dynamics.

Of course, the implications of this idea would establish the basis for a concept of a pure Aryan continuum. Wagner in this mythic structure was subtly commenting upon the continental infusion of the trans-Jewish people; he was also commenting on the dynamic implications of the colonial experiences. The Europeans were traveling now outside of the continent, and they're coming back with stories from China, from America; they're coming back with the kind of stories that, however one chooses to look at them, made clear that other mythologies and psychologies did exist on the planet. Those experiences would challenge the information order of the trans-European experience, as well as its spiritual dynamic. On one end we would have, in the Middle Ages, the Protestant oppositions; so all of these factors were challenging the Catholic, principle psychological-spiritual position. So Wagner used the occasion to reinforce the principle spiritual disposition that emphasized the importance of adhering to the fundamental spiritual component. Glastonbury, then, would be the last European mystical school…for instance, the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, resulting in the concept of light and darkness as polarities, light as positive and black as negative, non-positive. The European mystic tradition in Glastonbury would be the fulfillment of those spiritual tenets that sought to clarify the principle spiritual line as opposed to the polarity of the Protestant challenge, as opposed to the intellectual complexity that the new Jewish intellectuals would bring into continental Europe, and Russia. Wagner, then, would go to the Northern European myth structures--Parsifal, and his son Lohengrin--as mythic characters that could be used to portray the fall from the "correct" spiritual stance that the king represented. Parsifal was like a guy who was basically stupid, and he had to be stupid. Glastonbury makes that connection: King Arthur pulling the sword from the stone. All of this involves not an intellectual stance, it involved an understanding of the importance of belief, and also of love and union. So Parsifal

would reject the lady who wanted to bring him down--this again would be another Christian iconic axiom, the women having this negative role. That negative role was installed in the classical Greek period, because all of these motherfuckers in the classical period had a negative disposition toward the women, because the women for them were related to the trans-European goddess continuum, which was overthrown, and the problem with the women was that the women were interested in composite reality, and in balance and holistic philosophies. The women had to be put in a quadrant, because the classical Greek scholars had started to understand the value of dialectical models that could be used to…like Gaelen, to explore medical science…

M Rationalism.

A The rationalistic mode. So were talking about Plato and Aristotle, as guys who would take the world culture information, especially from Egypt, and politicize that information. And also rationalize it, which also carried an ethnic psychological component. Remember, Pythagoras, as great as he was, was also open for the political gambit of that time period; Pythagoras would establish an occult position on one end, and on the other end, he had the kind of flexibility that would allow for his system to be integrated. He would reduce composite phenomena into acoustic phenomena, so Plato's Timaeus set up the propositions for that transfer. That's why the Timaeus is so respected in this period; it would, on one hand, talk of the shining city on the hill that Reagan would later appropriate; and, on the other hand, the Timaeus and Pythagoras would say when something happens, the "it" of the happening could be explained by its acoustic relationships. A very subtle change, but a profound one. So suddenly we're at the point of the sacrifice of composite pitch dynamics into rationally related pitch schemes.

M This is the beginning of Western modalism and tonality, isn't it?

A Thank you. And meanwhile, the ladies, someone like Sappho, for instance. Sappho, and the reason her work was imported, in terms of the oral history that came down…Sappho was the restructural master who, rather than singing only of the god, which was the historical myth position of the ancient Greek music… Sappho started to include her life in her music. Self-realization. That was a mystic position that was also Egyptian. This was another reason why Sappho, the trans-feminine continuum, was not necessarily falling within the new dynamics that were coming, because they were including individual experience as part of the aesthetic. That had to be quadranted off, and later not built upon.

M Now while we've gotten to there, let me digress. One of the areas we talked about off tape the last time was this issue of the tradition of hermaphroditism, or homosexuality, and also feminism in the music, that is sort of coming to the fore now. When I was a kid, and coming up in jazz, it was a real macho kind of area; but now we get information about Miles Davis and Sun Ra, Cecil, stuff about their sexuality being more open than it would have been in the past. I'm thinking of this

ancient tradition in the West and all over the world of this blurred boundary between genders, the image of the hermaphrodite, as being sort of a fertility image, and very involved in culture and the blurring of borders. And this is what we're talking about, the drawing of borders and the blurring of them here.

A So homosexuality would be one of the quadrants that would be sacrificed in the modern era.

M And yet the Greeks were a homosexual society, and part of their misogyny was tied up with that.

A Well, nowadays the contemporary conservatives, in the past 20 and 30 years, have tried to posit a viewpoint that homosexuality was something that was invented in 1960 or something. It's obscene. And part of the struggle for homosexuals in the last 2000 years has been to overcome the trans-Christian gambit that would be the spiritual and mystical fulfillment of those postulates that would come out of the Dark Ages. This, for me, is a European, and trans-European affair that is part of the complexities, the trade-offs that Europeans would find themselves dealing with. This phenomenon is a component that emerges and re-emerges and is suppressed. We can talk of Allen Turin, for instance, the great mathematician/computer visionary who was never given credit for his work because he was a homosexual. So we're talking of the continental European experience that would be transposed in America, but then in America the African Americans, by becoming the Other, the homosexual would be situated as the other Other on the tri-plane; and only now has assumed the position where there would be the hope in the next time cycle of our culture finding a healthy balance where human beings could have a right to live their lives. So all of these components have to be included to understand the axiomatic tenet components that comprise what we call the modern era.

M Moving from Sappho, then, up to one of your next big metaphysical feminine influences, and back into the Northern European mythology, Hildegard of Bingen is a woman in German history who really helped, along with Meister Eckhart, bring to the fore the German language and cultural identity…you know, the Germans were the barbarians for awhile in Europe, coming out of the savage North. What I'm trying to get at here is your affinity for the German culture in your music, in Wagner, and his myth. What I hear when you talk is that just as African Americans came into America from outside the Christian continuum and from a whole different history in Africa, including a lot of concourse with Islamic influences, and indigenous Egyptian and African traditions and religions, so too did the Northern Europeans come in as barbarians to Christianity rather late in Europe; and when we get into Wagner, we see them getting back in touch with the mythology that…like you said, sort of a return to the roots. Is part of your affinity, as who you are and what you're dealing with from the '60s on…you know, in the '60s a lot of African Americans were concerned with getting back in touch with pre-Western roots in Africa, even if in a mythic sense, just to get out of

the whole slavery experience and get back in touch with whatever was before that, including outside of and before Christianity. Is part of your affinity for Wagner and his move to do the same thing for Northern European identity a recognition of a similar kind of experience?

A I would say yes. But to respond to your question, I would have to put it another way. In the '60s, I was interested in trying to understand composite reality, and Africa was a component of composite reality; but I was never interested solely in Africa, or in Europe, or in any one projection as much as just wanting the right to be interested in whatever I was interested in at the time.

Now there are several parts to your question. Hildegard von Bingen, for me, is significant, because like Sappho, and Wagner, she adopted a first-person relationship with her work. She felt empowered through a mystical connection in the same way that Sappho would have an aesthetic that included her life, moving toward self-realization. Hildegard would receive her information through her relationship with the heavens, and from that point would define her own understanding of the sequence, with a more intervallic component of sequential logics, that would distinguish her from her colleagues.

M You're referring to Sequentia?

A Not just that, but the methodologies of that time period in terms of Gregorian chant, and the components of it. I think Hildegard would make much broader jumps in her material than what was the norm. Hildegard von Bingen would be a point of definition for composite aesthetic mystic narratives, moving toward Wagner. It was Hildegard who would compose the first of the spiritual musics and narrative dramas, allegorical good and evil experiences on the earth and mystical plane. From that point, Wagner would, centuries later, decide to create a composite aesthetic music, to integrate composite information, linking him to Hildegard, who linked back to Sappho. That continuum, as far as I'm concerned, is not always understood, but it was a heavy continuum. That is my link to Hildegard, Sappho, and Wagner.

M So is Wagner also someone who is part of that link because, in some way, his project of digging into Northern European myth, in the way that you've described, is also a process of self-realization?

A Yes. Not only that: on the technical plane, Wagner is not a guy who wrote the string quartets in the same way as his colleagues; his music does not affirm the formal mechanics that he inherited from the great Italian tradition. His music would create new formal states; his music would explore tonality based on his own value systems, and his music would provide a context to demonstrate the state of the state information, whether we're talking of the state of the new brass instruments, or of the new notation that had been clarified by the great Dutch restructuralists in the Ars Nova movement earlier; Wagner would create his own

rules and build a music so awesome that not only could it not be denied, but that everything that would come after his music would have to define itself in terms of his music, either building on it or rejecting it.

M So this kind of brings us to this trans-historical group of people that you call restructuralists.

A But let me add another guy: Scriabin. Scriabin would be the Russian equivalent who would respond to Wagner. After Wagner, the challenge would be to create a composite aesthetic holistic psychology and fantasy state; that's what the Mysterium was going to be, had Scriabin lived to complete his platform, but that platform was responding to what Scriabin had learned from Wagner. So the tentacles of this holistic music, and the great Ring Cycle, would bring in the animals again, with the humans; would deal with incest, with the dynamics of the relationship between men and women. Tristan and Isolde--

M You mean things that had been undermined by Christianity?

A All of the things that Christianity could not solidify and stamp out; Wagner would take the Christian experience and the greater experience from composite reality and, again, bring them back together. Again, animals, dragons that talked, father and son, mother and daughter, and the adventures of lineages: Parsifal into Lohengrin…The dynamic implications of Wagner's work touched on everything.

Even the great trans-Jewish mystic component could not undermine the great Wagnerian aesthetic--but in the work of Schoenberg, the seeds of linear development would evolve, in the concept of existential pitch sets. So my connection with Wagner is complete. He was not afraid to talk of love--not just Christian love but love and Christian love. He would explore propositions that later would lend themselves to interpretations that could be called racist, but in fact the dynamic actualness of his music transcends modern era psychologies that would have to take into account the dark side of Europe and what resulted from the Nazi experience; Wagner was way before any of that came together.

M But he did publish a lot of polemics against Jews…

A And in those polemics, he was consistent with the trans-European continuum, and with the trans-Asian continuum, and with the trans-African continuum, and with the Native American continuum later. What we're really talking about is how human beings relate to the Other.

M Well, what is it about the Jewish--

A --and Wagner has to be separated from Hegel. We tend to, in many cases, take formulizations from Hegel and put those speculations on Wagner. Wagner

was not perfect; he was looking at a changing Germany and a changing cultural dynamic, and, yes, his viewpoint was a racialist viewpoint, that's for sure, but does that mean the dynamics of his viewpoint necessarily would result in this Holocaust? I think that's a leap that is not necessarily a correct reading, because if that's the case we can look at every--

M Jesus.

A --we can look at Jesus, at every continuum with respect to that proposition.

M Would you describe what happened with the way the Nazis appropriated Wagner, and Nietzche, as something like the German version of the Southern strategy in America?

A Oh, I would most certainly make that connection. Not only that--and this is the importance of Glastonbury, and Ouspensky and this whole northern corridor of European mysticism--when we talk of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, we're really talking of a trans-continental adaptation of Trismegistus' concepts and psychologies. Now Trismegistus, of course, was Egyptian; we can call him a racist if we want, in the same way we can call Wagner a racist, but how was Trismegistus to foresee the Ku Klux Klan? The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan are related to the evolution of this viewpoint of Aryan purity, and lightness representing purity, and blackness evil, and later, with the social darwinist psychology, as applied to humanity, with the African peoples being given the lower positions. The KKK would come out of those psychologies, and would base their aesthetics on the Northern mystical tenet components, applying them to social dynamics in America. Would I make a connection between the Holocaust and the Southern experience? I most certainly would, but the Southern experience came first, so I would rather say it the other way around.

Yes, the Southern experience would be the first of the modern era's social reality experiences, as applied to the political-psychological domain. The World War II experience would be connected to the Glastonbury summation components, but that experience would happen after slavery.

M And also we could point out that in Nazism there's this big component of occultism too, in the way Hitler and his circles used it to get around the Christian morality structure.

A The Christian false morality structure.

M But still in a way that…like you say with Wagner, it is a leap to move from Wagner the composer, who was just getting in touch with composite reality through this glue that we're starting to see of putting yourself, your own life, into the--

A Center of the mix.

M --yeah, and having that be the engine of innovation.

A That would make the difference between the great Italian tradition, from Monteverdi on. Wagner's decision to reject the formal components of the trans-Italian musics would represent the fulfillment of the vertical harmonic position. We usually say Stravinsky represents the fulfillment of the vertical rhythmic position in terms of complexity; but in terms of harmonic evolution, suddenly this one guy would fulfill the harmonic spectra of the music. Rhythmically, his music would set the psychologies that would be fulfilled by Stravinsky; whether Stravinsky is more or less complex is, in a way, irrelevant. The genesis psychologies--that being opening doors to the exploration and fulfillment of propositions--we can look at Wagner's music as a point of definition for that.

M With Schoenberg, if we move into him as some part of a Jewish tradition as well as a German tradition…how do you explain the musical mechanics that you've adopted yourself in your own music as much as anything else, the twelve-tone thing, as being a manifestation of these ethnic European, longstanding ethnic politics and identity politics that you see incarnate in America's Southern strategy? Because Schoenberg was reviled by the Nazis as decadent…

A For me, the great Jewish "trans"-diaspora has been profound and dynamic. That experience would alter composite intellectual dynamics on the European continent; and Schoenberg for me, like Scriabin for the great Russian peoples… by making the decision to reject the vertical models, and establish his own existential models--and by the way, my work is not twelve-tone; what I took from Schoenberg, what I took from John Cage, what I took from Wagner and Sappho, and from Monteverdi--was the right to define the terms of my music system, and build the kind of structural and conceptual models that respected and reflected my experience; that's what I took from them. When I came to understand that many of my heroes were my heroes because they found something fresh, because they accepted their lives and found their own way, and defined their own methodologies; it was at that point that I said, okay, I got it, and I want now to start building my own models.

M I want to get into that when we get into your work, but first I want to spend some more time in this background stuff. You mentioned Stravinsky, and it seems to me that your influence has been a lot heavier on the Schoenberg side than the Stravinsky side; yet, as I saw in my book, I saw a lot of connections between you and the other Gemini, Stravinsky. Since we're talking about these strains of ethnic European identity politics and so on, how do you relate to that big debate early in 20th century, that Adorno generated, in terms of whether Schoenberg or Stravinsky was the way to go? What have you taken from Stravinsky?

A I have nothing but love for and identify totally with the great trans-Russian tradition, period. As far as I'm concerned, the historians have not included Prokofiev enough; Prokofiev is the Andrew Hill of that time period, and his work has been thrown out of the mix, because of politics…but I support Prokofiev.

session 3

A We're talking about the reaction to Wagner, and we're talking about composite trans-European progressionalism. For me, looking at the northern end of the continent, at Russia, Scriabin is the point of definition for holistic synthesis; and from that point, looking at Prokofiev…I like Prokofiev because he covers the dark end. I like Stravinsky because he has that airy Gemini music, and that airy Gemini complexity; and I like his correspondences, especially in dance. And I like his active rhythmic strategies, whether we're talking of Firebird or the Symphony of Psalms. But it was Schoenberg who had the fresh vibration, and for me--and the reason I consider myself post-Schoenbergian as well as post-Wagner, is that Schoenberg would be a point of definition for existential propositions, not just vertical propositions, which of course are actually existential too, but we tend to think of vertical as fundamental. The concept of existential propositions would lend itself to multi-hierarchical model-building, which is what I'm interested in.

M Vertical being from the bottom up on roots, and linear…

A Existential pitch sets.

M And why do you call pitch sets existential, because they define themselves as a row, just the way diatonic music defines itself?…

A Yes. And that, for me, is a point of definition in model building. So I agree with Schoenberg when he stood up at the Firebird Suite in Berlin, I think it was, and said, "I cast myself against the wind; I am alone, and I am right!" (laughs)

M That was his response to Stravinsky, huh?

A Yes.

M Because Stravinsky was all about the vertical?

A Stravinsky would exploit the vertical to the extremes, but Schoenberg would recast the model, and that's why he's a restructuralist, and Stravinsky is a stylist.

M Let's move back for a second…

A But let me add this; I want to be clear with this, because this is very important, what we're talking about. I support the great trans-Jewish continuum, I want that to be clear. The trans-Jewish continuum, in European continental experiences,

would provide the Other for information dynamics in Europe. And would balance the thrust of the great trans-Germanic musics.

M Let's move from there, then, in the way that the Jewish community came about in America, in a couple of ways. First of all, Schoenberg came and worked in Hollywood and the films and all that, and lived there and taught there. Then, in the course of this century, twelve-tone music, serialism, post-serialism, all found its home in academia…

A …to become the "ism" in America…

M …yeah, and it became sort of like a little reified ghetto, in the sense that it dominated academia, and led into the position of being sort of an ivory-tower music that most people couldn't relate to; then we had Milton Babbit come along and say "I don't care what you think," and all this…so obviously, if you take that on, that's part of the problem that's going to be attached to you as baggage, just like when you take on the European-American jazz players, or the European composers, how all of that stuff has been problematic for you.

A Yes, but in fact I have transposed that information, just as I've transposed all the information I've dealt with, into my own terms. With regard to serialism, in the hands of Stockhausen and Boulez, serialism would not be more important than the results. In America, serialism would be more important than the results. There's a big difference, and that difference is the academic psychology.

M But can we agree that earlier in our first session you made a distinction between your problem, in your work, and the world's problem with you; in other words, it's not your problem, it's theirs.

A It's theirs, but also it's the African American community's problem as well, when they look at my music, and can't recognize its legitimacy as a component of my experience as an African American, and as my right as an African American to build a music that respects my vibrational experiences, my conceptual experiences, and my intuitive experiences. The African American political quadrant has been as dogmatic as the trans-European component with regard to my work.

M So just to kind of clarify the contours of the baggage, then…you've made your decision to pursue composite reality; you've found your way through the dark side and the light side, the evil and the good in terms of how you relate to them… but one part of the problem has been your embrace of European American cool jazz musicians, and of the composer tradition in Europe, and your embrace of Schoenberg in the sense that Schoenberg's music became this academic ghetto in America, and only recently has that been changed…

A But my connection to Schoenberg had nothing to do with that. I was never drawn to the academic composers; I was drawn to music, and if something pushed my button, then I sought to investigate that. Invariably, I would discover that in most cases many of the people I was drawn to were state of the state people, who were doing the music with the "ism" in the secondary position.

M Let's say also that the other colleagues you mentioned last time are in this with you. Muhal played the piano with that in the mix, for instance; and the records you've made with Leroy Jenkins and Leo Smith…it's all in the mix.

A For me, what you're saying, which is correct, is that by the term composite information, composite reality, I most certainly have been influenced by the great American blues tradition, by the great American folk tradition, by the great trans-African American musics. My music system was not built in rejecton to anything; it was built as an affirmation of my experiences. And yet I was not interested as a young man, nor am I interested now, in adopting an intellectual cloak that's not mine, nor an idiomatic perspective that's not mine, that's outside of what is real for me.

M Just to also kind of further map the terrain here, can we also say that as we talk about Old World history spanning over thousands of years, and including a whole lot of concourse between African cultures from the time of Egypt on, and European cultures, and Arab cultures…and only recently, in the last couple of centuries, have they reconvened, in America, under this rubric, because of slavery, of white and black, so that all of the white tribes that had been feuding--the "barbarians" of Germany and Ireland and so on, as opposed to the civilized people of England, Italy, and France, and the Jews, all come together in their past feuds as kind of an undercurrent…but basically they have this new umbrella in America called "whiteness" and that's when it gets complex in terms of what we see in Louis Farrakhan, talking about--you mentioned in the last session that even though you wouldn't agree with him in any kind of grossly racist statements, still, you did see the reality of the Jewish presence in the American music scene as being part of the whiteness spectrum.

A But let me reflect on this, because when I think of Jewish-American political dynamics in this time period, I don't separate that from composite European-American information and political dynamics. In seeking to understand that phenomenon, I also include the African American middle and upper class, because I don't have any choice. But there is a distinction, that being that European Americans, Jewish Americans, German Americans, French Americans, are connected with the upper strata of political dynamics and economic dynamics. So if we find ourselves now talking about continental experiences in the United States moving into the modern era, the divisions I would make at that point would be the European American community in opposition to the non-European elements of the culture, especially African Americans. But also, if our conversation is to be comprehensive, the effect of that

continuum as it relates to the Native American, Asian American and African American communities, to the homosexual community…all of those communities, on one level or another, can be looked at as "the Other" in relationship to the new hierarchy based on the American experience.

M How do you fit the emergence in the commercial arena of this genre known as "world music," then, how from the mid-80s on the music industry really became globalized, and we started seeing a lot of--well, the emergence of the genre itself as a marketing genre.

A Before responding to that question, there's still another contingent progression of the European experience that we haven't talked about, which is important, because if Schoenberg represented a point of definition for existential model-building, there is still the need to mention the work of John Cage as another restructural component that would re-solidify the great trans-European musics, in the sense of establishing restructural propositions. Cage is at that same point of Schoenberg; Schoenberg comes to America, Cage studies with him in Los Angeles, and the dynamic implications of Cage's music would challenge the propositional disposition of the European American musics in a way that would be very different from Schoenberg. This would be another attempt to erect a composite aesthetic based on existential propositions that would not be linear.

M One thing I've wondered about over the years is the way you've talked about trans-Asian musics. Can we say that John Cage is an entry point for you into trans-Asian influences, because he was obviously influenced by them?

A I would say yes, but the period of the 1960s was such a dynamic period. Suddenly I'm learning about Ravi Shankar, Ali-Akbar Khan, exposing me to the great Asian musics. I had the experience of being in the army in Seoul, Korea, and an opportunity to study Korean music. When I came back to America I had 30 or 40 records of Korean music.

M I've been getting into Jin hi Kim lately, because she's a composer trying to synthesize the West and Korea. This Korean traditional music is…

A It's out!

M …slow, metaphysical.

A And the folk music is totally incredible.

M Here we have a zone that was defined by occupation, war, and the clashing of cultures through that.

A Thank you.

M Just like in Berlin.

A Not to mention, more and more, because I was fortunate enough to come of age in the '60s, there was a whole category of recordings I would be exposed to…for instance, when I got out of the army, I found myself studying gagaku, the Japanese court music. Looking more and more into the trans-Asian musics to try and understand what that was, and of course I'm still a student of them. There's much more for me to learn.

M I remember from your Composition Notes that there were some definite pieces that you wrote in response to that information--but probably not so many, right?

A A small part of my work compared to the experiences I've had with trans-Africa and trans-Europe, and trans-Indian. I'd like to hope that over the next time cycle, if I'm fortunate enough to be able to live another 20-30 years, to better experience and assimilate the trans-Spanish music, the trans-Asian musics, because I'm interested in earth. I came to understand that in the '60s, that earth was quite a place.

M Interesting you mention India. When we talk about this long deep history of migrations and so on. The first place the Aryans got to when they came down from the Caucasus Mountains from the north around 3000 BC or so, was India. So you see a lot of connections between Medieval European modal music systems and Indian raga systems…

A Thank you.

M So in my mind it's a little different than trans-Asian when you think of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, because they basically stayed put there for a long time and built that thing up. How do you account for the fact that you haven't really gotten so much into trans-Latin American music. Just something you haven't gotten to yet?

A Just something that I haven't been able to move deeper into because of the law of circumstances. I was doing what I was doing, trying to do my best, and the way I've chosen to take has presented me with a kind of struggle in which I still find myself trying to penetrate deeper into areas that I haven't been able to learn about. As a professional student of music, I'm trying to grow and learn as much as I can. But the great Hispanic musics are just something I haven't been able to learn about in a way that I need to; it's on the agenda of things I need to learn about.

M And in the context of the way we've been talking too, we might mention the big African Moorish influence in Spain that redefined this European culture by Africanizing it in a certain way; and that comes to America and merges with the

native cultures in a way that was much more intimate and integrated together than was what happened in North America.

A Let's go back to the purges. That period of the Inquisition was a component in Portugal and Spain mainly because of the interracial components taking place. In that period, there were many African creative people who had assumed positions of prominence. The Inquisition was an edict attempting to respond to the liberated feminine psychology; women were wiped out all over the continent. A guy would come in from the Church, and women who were "misbehaving," or might have been misbehaving, or might misbehave tomorrow would be wiped out. And that was happening all over Europe as well as Spain, and in America. The Inquisition was a mechanism to remove the opposition, and the opposition would be the free-thinking woman and non-Europeans, especially the Africans, who had a profound effect on the solidification of the modern European classical musics, but that's not talked about.

M Then we had Miles come out with Sketches of Spain in the '50s, which was a nice statement about that direction.

A Right.

M Let's talk about your Ghost Trance music for a second then.

A Before going there, I'd rather talk about the genesis of the system and how that has evolved, because the Ghost Trance music is just a component of that.

M Before we do that, then…off tape you also started talking about your work in terms of the square and the circle and triangle, and the opera and what you've managed to integrate and what you haven't yet…so I want to get to that in a second. But now that we've kind of mapped out this terrain of the Old World politics moving to the New World and reconfiguring there in the way that you had to deal with in the 20th century, let's pick up where we left off before taping on the subject of academia. It was about the mid-80s that we started seeing the shift in the music to a neoconservative, retro reconfiguring of jazz that took place and became so prominent, to the point of the jazz-industrial networks we see today, and the parameters defined by the Lincoln Center and so on. It was in that period when you first started working at Mills College as an academic. You mentioned that as you've started to work in academia, some of your most problematic students were the African American ones because they had this anti-intellectual association of learning and knowledge with European norms that fell outside the prescribed realm of blackness in the culture.

A The prescribed realm of idiomatic qualities, all of which goes back again to the period between 1880 and 1920. We're talking about the slave master looking at the Emancipation Proclamation to set the image logic parameters of African Americans in terms of how they would be perceived. At the same time, with the

new technologies developing--i.e., the movie industry--Birth of a Nation would be a vehicle to posit idiomatic qualities as regarding the image characteristics of the African American. The recording industry would create "race records," separating African Americans from composite realities, creating the special circle for the black community. Some would say--I think Max Roach said it beautifully--that the music was able to evolve because nobody would accept African Americans in the composite space, so the black community, turning in to itself, had no choice but to do the business of living and creating within this sanctioned sphere. And yet, on the one hand, the positive implications of that experience would bring forth a whole new category of invention dynamics and exploratory musics; on the other hand, the principle axiom of the modern era would involve an overseer quality by the European American community, which would determine what components of the African American experience could be viewed as valuable, and on what terms that overseer position would also define the vibrational synergies of the black community. And in every case, their definitions would always function with respect to what was in the interests of the European American community.

M And you mentioned John Hammond as an arrogant motherfucker.

A Well, I mean, you know, this was the guy who would later be a part of Columbia Records; he was the guy who provided the final components that helped Columbia to be a great company, and get it off the ground.

M But you made a distinction between Alan Lomax and someone like Hammond…

A Lomax didn't form any companies, or any alliances with companies to profit from and define what is good and what is bad in the music, he was trying to capture and document the music because of his love for American culture, and for the music.

M Getting back to the question about "world music," I noticed when I went to Germany that when I listened to all the FMP [a Berlin record label] recordings, I thought I was going to be studying this bid for European/German assertion of identity against American jazz, because that's kind of how they emerged.

A But you found that they were actually separate from one another.

M Yeah, that too, but I found something else. It's interesting to me that you've been talking about this period of post-Emancipation and going back to it a lot and identifying with it and all, because the music that came over in the '60s to Europe was exactly the music that the Germans used to go off into their own reconnection with original roots, in the free jazz movement there that they call the Emanzipation.

A Is that right?

M Yeah, in German. Because for the first time they were no longer just imitating Americans, but coming up with something of their own. But, paradoxically, they got that through the African American influx, which was itself a gesture of coming into something of your own.

A But this has been, what you're describing, in my opinion, one of the axiomatic tenets of the modern era as far as the imposition of quadrant experiences and ethnic experiences. In that context, African American creativity is used as a stimulant for American culture; for the Europeans, it would also function as a triggering mechanism that would provide vibrational stimulus through the parameter of the Other, to reactivate dynamic European creativity and curiosity. And we're talking about the 1880s when that started.

M What I was going to say is that a lot of these improvisers whom you've played a lot with in Europe are having these collaborations with traditional Mongolian musicians, traditional Japanese musicians--not second-generation ersatz jazz musicians, but traditional taiko drummers and shakuhachi flute players, traditional Tuvan throat singers…

A And it makes sense, because the concept of composite reality in this time period is a concept that has to take into account where we're at technologically. We're at a point where we can turn on the television, we can read about the tragedy of the Russian sub that sank and see it immediately, we can see what is happening in Indonesia, China. Any healthy viewpoint, in my opinion, is one that takes into account the state of the state, in terms of what the possibilities are in a given time quadrant. For the European improvisers to find themselves attracted to global creative music makes sense.

And yet, a guy like me--somehow, I'm hard to figure out, for the jazz people. Because I've been interested in the world, just like Evan Parker and Derek Bailey, but there's no slot in the ethnic quadrant of what is now called black music for an African American person who is interested in composite reality. At the same time, show me a moment in your day--you hear this music [referring to background restaurant radio]--anything could be on that radio. It could be Indian music; we could be driving in a car, a guy pulls up next to us, it could be Turkish music. You turn on the TV, you don't know what's going to come on. Different kinds of information of a global nature is the norm in this period; to not respond to it is interesting or not interesting, but it is certainly a different concept of reality based on what the fundamental concepts used to be. The fundamental concepts are that people are naturally attracted by something that's different. When the Europeans came into Africa, the Africans were interested in the Europeans as much as the Europeans were interested in them. When the Europeans came into China, they were totally curious on both sides of the meeting. That has been an axiomatic quality about our species; people are interested in the experiences happening in their space.

Going back to 1880, at the beginning of the modern era, the information spectrum had already started changing. Remember, not only did the early British voyagers who went into Africa bring back Africans when they came back, they also brought back native Americans from here. In the beginning, the British celebrated them, and everybody started dressing up like Indians, smoking tobacco, getting into corn. Later, as Shakespeare would document, it became necessary to look at them as savages, animals. Why? The political component entered the space, and the Europeans started to value the actual land; and of course the native Americans weren't even into that concept, so they were at a disadvantage. The Africans would not experience the brunt of the new technology, as far as firepower, tank power, but the native American community would. Talk about Holocaust. We don't like to compare what we call the Holocaust to other movements and experiences in history, and there's a reason; if we did, then the Holocaust would have to be placed in the context of human experiences, and in that context what happened to the native American community was outrageous, on a scale we don't even know how to integrate, we don't even have the numbers for.

This is also true for the slave trade; we don't have the actual numbers to compare with what we call the Jewish Holocaust, but the experiences and the documentation suggests that it was so far out--genocide against the native Americans on a level where by 1880, the emergence of the modern era, they had basically lost all of their culture. What they called the Ghost Dance movement was a reconfiguration of all the different groups, each one trying to remember some part of their culture, two generations removed from the genocide. Trying to remember, "oh yeah, we did do this," so they made a composite. Because the genocide was so profound that they lost everything. So, I mean you know--hooray for life.

M Have you ever, in your strategies as a player, been drawn to seek out collaborations with traditional Japanese musicians, traditional Indian, whatever player from a tradition that interested you?

A I have been interested since the mid-60s in trying to explore composite possibilites. When I was in Korea, I played with the Korean folk musicians. When I went to Japan, for the little moment I was there I studied with the Japanese musicians. I think the jazz guys there hated me; they were dedicated to the blues, and Braxton doesn't play the blues correctly. But to respond to your question, I've always, as a component of my aesthetic, looked for kindred spirits, but I have not tried to approach the idea of kindred spirits in a way that did not feel healthy. My hope in the future is to have more experiences with human beings of different experiences, because there's always something fresh to learn from people thinking in a different way. My first opportunity to play with Native Americans, ironically, occurred at Wesleyan, when I used to go there to follow

John Cage like a little puppy dog. I played with Richard Teitelbaum here, and did a duo with an Indian chief.

M That brings me to the next question. Since the mid-80s spread of the music industry globally, "world music" as a marketing genre has emerged. There've been many ethnomusicological papers written about how all this influx of new voices onto the world market, from Arab and Indian and African traditional and pop sources, is coming into that scene through the world music genre, but critics have sometimes seen them as sellout gestures to the business, basically fodder for marketplace music--which is the kind of criticism you've often leveled against the jazz-industrial complex: taking a sort of traditional expression and making it conform to the pop scene. Like Paul Simon, for example. He's taken heat for the dynamic of his relationship with South African and Brazilian musicians as being exploitive in some way.

A But in fact he is functioning in a way that's consistent with the modern era. And the modern era says that everything has to be redefined from a Eurocentric perspective, and it's at that point where it gains value. Now let me be clear about this. I have no problems with whatever Paul Simon decides to do; I'm a Paul Simon fan, so Mr. Simon's not what I'm really talking about. What I'm talking about is the position of European Americans in this time period, and their ability to appropriate whatever they want and be able to define it in whatever way they want to define it. At the same time, if I go and try to have an experience and seek to define it, I'm looked at like I'm a fool. Plus, the same opportunities are never available in reverse, like for the African musicians to be able to use Paul Simon, or musicians from that ilk, and have their work respected based on its fulfilling some aspect of their experience. My problem is not with Paul Simon. As far as I'm concerned, he understood in his own way the dynamic implications of globalization, and the fact that the creative person has to, if he wants to keep growing, find fresh parameters. Not only that: just as I hope to have more experiences with the great Latin musics, the great Asian musics, it would make sense for Paul Simon to look towards Africa, and Latin America. I have no problem with that. My problem is that the Metropolitan Opera won't give me a performance, because somehow it's outside the natural order for me to write an opera; but it's not out of the natural order for André Previn to go and do a trio record of My Fair Lady tunes with Leroy Vinnegar and Shelley Manne, and have everybody say, "wow, this is great jazz, it's jazzy jazz;" then he can go and conduct and do his opera.

M Is that what you meant when you said you've been careful not to get into situations where collaborating with a kindred spirit might be unhealthy? you've avoided situations like that?

A Well, it's not for me to have any kind of stipulations about what another person should do with their creativity. In fact, the more I explore myself, the more I find that the axiom tenet that says it's impossible to judge anybody but myself is the

only position that makes sense to me. The problem, as far as the spectrum of experiences and humanity…the problem is that the modern era defines African Americans as a people that can only function in an idiomatic quadrant, one that contains an ethnic mechanism that has not been understood. So when I use the phrase "Southern strategy," I'm talking of a political coalition that is functioning under a particular psychology, and that psychology is connected to what the modern era is, and it manipulates quadrants, manipulates who is going to be successful and under what terms--and invariably that quadrant is concerned with the elevation of trans-Eurocentric definitions and value systems and political proclivities.

M So we get a picture of the music industry as being totally willing to welcome the whole world in, only on its capitalist terms.

A And to undermine world culture dictates; to undermine the great Japanese musics, the great Turkish musics, because most European and European American peoples are brought up to view themselves as superior to non-Europeans. It's sometimes very subtle, but the superior psychology is at the heart, in my opinion, of the European gambit toward incorporating information.

M You know, when I've thought about this, I've seen it in terms of the superiority complex of the new over the old, because when you go back as far as the origins of the humans here today, as far as we can tell they started in Africa and moved north from there…

A Yes. Africans are full of ethnic tensions based on one group feeling superior to the other group; that's still not ironed out.

M And one of the reasons for that, if you think about genetics, might have something to do with the fact that they've been kicking around on that continent the longest, and have developed the most diverse gene pool because of that long time. If you compare them with Europeans, the latter have a much narrower range of genetic diversity than do Africans.

A That's interesting, I didn't know that.

M So what I'm thinking is you get this group of Africans who move north. Because of Darwin's selection process, what happens is your skin gets lighter simply because the northern climates dictate that for survival…

A Not to mention the fusion of so-called miscegenation.

M Even before that, if you think of dark-skinned Africans leaving the continent and moving north…the way the climate works is that the people with less melanin in their skin survive better, because they don't need it as a sunblock, and they do need all the sun they can get for Vitamin D. So all the light-skinned tendencies

would come to the fore. So as far as anybody can tell scientifically, white people are just mutated Africans.

A I firmly believe in the unity of humanity, and I came to that belief through myself, looking at myself. I came to understand that my attraction to Schoenberg was as natural as my attraction to Frankie Lymon; thus would my struggle in the black community commence, because I was not about to give up Bill Haley and the Comets.

M And when you see something in the black community that responds to this idea of whiteness in an exclusionary sense, in the same sense that they do on the continent with each other because of the genetic differences, the internal feuding and so on… you get a mythology such as Elijah Muhammad's, with the mad scientist Dr. Yakub and his mutant race of whites: you get a demonization of your brother Africans who went up north and got light.

A We're laughing at Farrakhan's mythology, but we're on the threshold of seeing a new breed of people genetically engineered, who will be the fulfillment of our strengths, with the possibility of being stronger through genetic manipulation. These concepts are interesting concepts, I don't dismiss any of them; but whatever, I still see the unity of opposites. Remember, even in Farrakhan's mythology, the affinity destinies of opposites still come together.

M Because he loves to play Mendelssohn on his violin.

A He can't help it. Opposites attract, that's another mystical law.

M So the superiority complex that we've seen in the human race, which we've talked about in terms of Europeans over the rest of the world…

A Exists in every group.

M …but also, on this global scale, it seems like it's a superiority gambit of the new people over the old people, because they went north and were able to survive in these icy conditions, which honed skills that eventually led to the atom bomb. Having to deal with certain challenges by the environment, they developed skills they never would have had to develop in Africa, so then they look back on their original home sort of like we look back on our home towns as the parochial little place we came from before making our big splash in the big world.

A And Christianity is the fulfillment of those propositions--but the Islamic world understood that very quickly and immediately erected their own godhead.

M Then if we take it down a notch to Western European civilization over the last 2000 years…if you look at the whole of Eurasia, there was a continuous migration west. By the time Europe solidified as a culture, it was a polyglot mix of

a whole lot of influences in from the East, and also from Africa. So they get that same kind of superiority over the old peoples that Americans have about their various "old worlds" too.

A The classical Greek period was the first of the filters, and the next filter would be the experience of colonial exploration. The colonial experience would start to bring back world culture information to the Europeans, including reconnecting the Europeans with the classical Greek information, as filtered through Islam, and the great Turkish, Ottoman Empire period.

M And then when you get the Age of Exploration, moving into America, again you get this movement west by a lot of different people leaving old worlds behind, you get the superiority Americans feel over those old worlds--over Europe, and over the other places. So thinking about progressionalism, and evolution, as concepts, I tend to think of this superiority complex that emerges in the human race as being as much a variation on the theme of "kill the father" as on "kill the other." But now, what you're talking about in the terms of composite reality, and the unity that's necessary, is that we're all continually being reborn on the planet, and there's no room for that psychology in the ideal state of affairs.

A This planet has been mapped in terms of continental experiences, there's nowhere else to go, except into space. And you can believe that once we discover another species in space, suddenly it will be human beings versus the aliens.

M This little riff of the young versus the old gets me to my next question. I've noticed that since you've been an academic, especially at Wesleyan, you've made a lot of records and done a lot of bands with students. It's interesting to me that it's actually worked well musically; and it is part of a tradition of elders mentoring the young, both in the music and in academia. How has your career, in terms of your body of work, fared with that? Do you see it as sort of the optimum strategy that you could take in the circumstance that you find yourself in?

A Good question, Mike Heffley, good question. At this point in my life, I have arrived at a juncture that's very interesting. That juncture is that, as much as I enjoy exploring traditional repertoire, and as much as I enjoy, on occasion, collaborating with colleagues or a particular person, at this point, what I really need to advance my work is a group of people who know the system of my music, not just someone who can learn a head, and then we improvise. So academia for me has been a way to meet young people who are interested in my work, whom I then teach my system to. That way, I can advance my work in a way that is more complex outside of academia. Also, at 55 years old, with the experiences that I've had, and with the amount of material that I have in my music system, I need people who can start to build on the connecting concepts of the system. So academia has been a way to find kindred spirits, young men and some young women, who are interested in going through some aspect of my

work in a way that my colleagues, the guys I've grown up with, couldn't possibly entertain, because they have their own way of working. At this point, my real interests--except, of course, for the solo musics, which I do alone--can only be carried out with ensembles of various sizes that can achieve an experience through the system of my music. That's been the positive part of being an academic...

cut to chat about the news of the day, late 2000...

session 4
A ...geographical and spatial significance is looking at the map of America and seeing which candidates won what. We talked about this in the car, the states Bush has won and the states Gore has won. For me, watching the television this week and reading the newspapers and seeing the various maps, I think what has most struck me about this is that you have 3/4ths of the land mass was won by Bush, and the areas that Gore won in terms of land mass is not even a quarter; California, Oregon, and Washington states combine into the biggest part, but otherwise…

M Didn't the states he won include the most populous and diverse?

A Which is why Gore is in the race. But what dawned on me in looking at the maps, is that, one, the African American community is stuffed in little quadrant spaces, whereas in the Western and Southern states you have all this area of landmass that makes for another kind of existence. What we call the urban areas are really compressed areas, with people in high rises, so you have greater population in these small areas…but the actual living experience and the psychology related to those experiences is much more claustrophobic, much less healthy, and it says a lot about demographics, and the kinds of existences available in America and what's resulted from it. George W. has his ranch in Texas; I don't begrudge him anything. I'm only realizing again all the different kinds of lives that are possible to have on the planet and in America.

As a young guy growing up on the South Side of Chicago, in the black community, I remember when I first went into Evanston, Illinois, and saw all of the trees, and walked through some of the neighborhoods, and I was totally struck by the amount of space, and the green grass. It was so alien to me. And later, when I joined the army and was stationed with the 5th Army Band in Highland Park, Illinois, thirty minutes or so outside Chicago, I was struck by how different the environment was, walking through Highland Park, and the realization of this reality and how close it was to the area space that I grew up in was always very far out to me. It was one of those kinds of epiphanies where it was like a realization that there were other realities happening.

M One thing that comes to mind to me about this in terms of the music history is that you see a lot of the innovations coming from the heartland--like Charlie

Parker from Kansas, and you and the AACM from Chicago…even though Chicago is a big city, the AACM and the whole tradition seems to be more connected to the South, because everybody migrated from the South…

A And had a broader area space than say in New York and Manhattan or Brooklyn.

M Right. And even like Louis Armstrong coming up from New Orleans, you have this influx of the South up to the middle of the country; you have Ornette out of Texas; you have Count Basie with Lester Young. It's almost like the aesthetic is about wide-open spaces in the music.

A Thank you. This is what I was trying to move toward. For instance, I think one of the things that surprised me, which I was starting to intuit in Chicago, when seeking to understand the African American community in New York City, for instance, and the Black Power movement and the music itself that was evolving, the post-free jazz musics, how narrow this music was as compared to the great work of Roscoe Mitchell, and the broader concept space that these guys were working with; the great work of Julius Hemphill, out of St. Louis, and his connection with theater, and broader strategies. The New York platform and the jazz business complex would, in effect, be co-signing this reductionism that was taking place in New York. I think of Amiri Baraka and the Black Power movement, and the viewpoint of Africanisms that would evolve in that period. As a young guy, even in the middle '60s, I was very much aware that there was a reductionism taking place in their psychologies as well. More and more, I would come to look at this phenomenon as part of what for me, even in the 60s and 70s, was the strangeness of the East Coast and its politics, and how that strangeness would allow for a special reductionism in the black community and in their understanding of what they called free jazz and the political associations they attached to it. It was a kind of a pro-Garveyism.

By the way, last week I got the Sunday New York Times, and there was a review of a new book on W.E.B. DuBois; I'm going to buy this in the next couple of days, both volumes. Suddenly I crave more information about DuBois. In fact DuBois, in this book review, seemed to arrive at some of the concepts we've covered so far, about how the liberals and the conservatives are both irrelevant to the kind of healthy balance that he had hoped for, and later went to Africa and died in bitterness over. The article hinted at the Harlem Renaissance as a trade-off that DuBois backed away from in the same way that I find myself backing away, from the hip-hop culture and the new Third Millennial propositions of blackness that are forming in this period.

M If you look at the history of New York in the music, you sort of get this picture of the grassroots of the country being like all roads that lead to Rome, and that there's a hierarchy such that you start out by developing your local idiom, but only to use it as a currency to get you into the game in the heights--whereas

obviously, in the '60s, everybody was thinking about establishing and cultivating their own locales away from the heights and hierarchies and New York--record deals, that stuff--turning instead to "think global, act local," and start your own little labels. But there's always been this picture, from Louis Armstrong on, of getting your act together and taking it down the road to eventually come into your own in New York, and whatever trade-offs you have to make along the way in terms of record deals are just part of the game.

I read this really interesting German-language piece about the first records made by Kid Ory and the other players in the Hot Five and Hot Seven sessions. These guys from New Orleans were talking about how what they put together for these studio dates was more like little orchestrations of what they used to experience in New Orleans…

A An encapsulation.

M Right. We always think of the hot players' recordings as the raw stuff from the real deal out from down South, but in fact they were very cosmopolitan guys putting together this little musical package that would be their ticket into the big time rather than anything else.

A I think you put your finger on something that's very real. Not only was it a re-enactment, but--I have to be very careful how I say this. I have nothing but the utmost respect for the great music and experience of Louis Armstrong; and yet at the same time, I think there are complexities in looking at Mr. Armstrong that will again have to come to the foreground on some level, or be included in our viewpoint of him.

For instance, I played this Gary Giddins movie, Satchmo, for my class. It's an interesting movie on a lot of different levels, both for giving a perspective of the great man's life, and for being insightful about the components they decided to include--like pictures of Louis Armstrong on the toilet. It was kind of a smoothing of the minstrel components of Mr. Armstrong, and an attempt to come to terms with them while in another way not coming to terms with them. What am I saying? That in seeking to understand the great man's experiences, I think it's very important to place that experience in terms of its geographical-psychological components, those being his experiences in New Orleans and the decision of King Oliver to bring him to Chicago; and the experience he had with Lil Hardin, who helped to shape him up to the components of the modern era in terms of reading ability, in his encounter with Fletcher Henderson and the northern musicians and their psychology, such as Earl Hines; the connection with the Chicago underworld and gangster community…

M Which kind of goes back to what you said about John Hammond and others presenting the African American identity in their framework, in the Joe Glaser form of it.

A Jo Glaser dying with multimillions, Armstrong without even a million when he died, but was content to say that Joe Glaser was the most honest man he ever met, this kind of thing. All of that fits in with what we talk about when we talk of the Southern strategy, which is dedicated to second place.

M This begs the question of what the Northern strategy is. When we talked about the Southern strategy, you said it came to New York, and was indeed prevailing, not only in America but abroad.

A Oh yes.

M It has relevance now to this hung-up presidential election, because we see how evenly divided the country is, and how closely contested, and how geographically blocked off between the red and the blue states; and yet your point was that the Southern strategy of those red states is in fact kind of dominating the tenor of the Northern states somehow.

A Oh yes. There was an article about the Confederate flag on the South Carolina state house I read recently. It was in the Times, and very important to me. He talked about the Southern strategy, how the South lost the war but won the fight. He talked about the flag being an anachronism that should be taken down, and people in the South know it, but, he says, if you really examine what has happened, the South has won--the food of the South has become the nation's most desired cuisine, it really sells.

M The tobacco industry…

A He talked about different aspects of this experience, and I felt that he had put his finger on something: that the South lost the war, but the value systems and political mechanisms of the South have come into prominence. And he mentioned jazz as one of the components, from New Orleans, right now permeating the scene, and drawing on the New Orleans period, and I felt he was right. The New Orleans strategy then, in this period, has culminated in the successful blockage of the restructural musics and the re-installation of the New Orleans psychologies: those being, of course, ethnic quadrants, idiomatic quadrants. The black man is back in place, in other words.

M Really, what you're saying was no secret during Armstrong's whole career; I mean he took a lot of flack from the younger generations for being an Uncle Tom, from Miles Davis on through to your generation, along with all the respect due to him. Still, it was conflicted.

A No one wants to talk about that in this time period. But in fact Mr. Armstrong, whose connection with the minstrel tradition, no matter how honorable it was--who was cited as his hero, Steppin Fetchit, or Bill Bojangles? I'm not sure, I'll

check that--that connection is usually cited as the source of his interest in minstrelsy, and in the Satchmo film it's spoken of as a noble attraction, as indeed I have no reason to question. However, whatever his connection to the minstrel tradition, as we know, minstrel tradition meant a lot of different things to a lot of different people. For the political powers that control information dynamics and image logic manipulation, the minstrel tradition was a reductionism that was effective as a psychological manipulating component. So that has come back again in this time period as well.

M Now that we talk about these things, it gets back to what we were talking about before, about minstrelsy in a problematic way, but also in a healthy way, when you were talking about Abner Jay. Can we at this point resume the discussion of the African American identity experience in the way that we discussed Wagner and all the Europeans who were also problematic because of racial-ethnic aspects? These were people that you nonetheless incorporate into your music system because of their aesthetic value and their power as artists. How do you relate to the African American tradition past its problems as well?

A Okay, but before going there I want to go back to talking about what we talked about in the car, this trade-off that happened in the late 1800s, that resulted in the Congress electing a president who agreed to serve only one term, and part of the axiomatic tenets involved the lifting of federal supervision in the South after the Emancipation Proclamation. I think that's important. Federal enforcement of what we would now call Civil Rights guarantees for African Americans after Emancipation would come to an end with this new political gambit. I think it's important because here we find ourselves coming into the Third Millennium with a cosmic series of coincidences which have resulted in this close election. Whoever wins is in a compromised position. And all of this is eerily reminiscent of a hundred years ago. We've been talking about this hundred-year cycle, of entering into the modern era between 1880 and 1920, when everything started to happen.

M Now that you mention it, I read some articles in the Times about the parallels between the late 1800s and the late 1900s in terms of technology and industry changing in such a way that there was rampant capitalism as a result of new technologies and industries opening up. Of course we had this brief period after the Civil War, when African Americans were involved in the political process for awhile, and that's parallel to the 1960s, when African Americans, including the movements you were involved with musically, generated a new assertion of identity that got squelched just in kind of the same way, didn't it?

A Mike Heffley, this is a comparison that is serious. We're talking about our entrée into new eras, and we're talking about cyclic qualities that are eerie. So once again we see African Americans in the political process. Suddenly we're hearing about the close call in Florida, and Haitian and African Americans being shaken down. Things can change very quickly. We've gone in the last 30 years

from the emergence of a composite aesthetic music and intellectualism in the black community that suddenly has been squelched, and in its place idiomatic, ethnocentric psychologies and successes have been allowed to dominate. Hip-hop is celebrating vulgarity…but 50 years from now the scholars will maintain that hip-hop was the music of African Americans and represented its intellectual ideals and conceptual input. That is to say, IRRELEVANT--and that is the word that came out in the Du Bois book review, that Du Bois found himself looking at the liberals and conservatives and understanding that, at best, the input of African American experiences, intellectually, creatively, scientifically, would always be viewed as irrelevant. Not we like this or we don't like this, but irrelevant, in a corridor where it's not integrated into composite information. It was with that understanding that DuBois lost it and decided to get out of America. That's why I need to go back and study this guy all over again.

So these comparisons are frightening to me.

M In terms of our earlier talks, I really do see a parallel between the designation of African American musical activity to a problematic zone in the same way that we talked about Schoenberg and Wagner being so relegated: Wagner because of his racism and Schoenberg because of his work's place in the bourgeois elite culture of the ivory tower. We might add even the white European American jazz musicians as being sort of second-rate black musicians who never get past that…I mean we're talking about clouds over every single component, and yet we're looking at the ray of sunshine we want to get to, right?

A I disagree. Schoenberg has his enemies and his allies; his music is a part of the modern music debate. The New York Times hates him, but not everybody hates him. Wagner: the New York Times loves to corrupt Wagner's music, but Wagner's music is part of the debate of modern music, in the universities, but, more importantly, in the trans-Western intellectual domain. Wagner's music is a component that is loved or hated, but it is a part of the quadrant circle of vibrant intellectualism of trans-European discussion. As far as the European improvisers, they have been the "Other" in Europe, that's for sure, but we're seeing in America that the European improviser is being used to crush out the Sixth Restructual cycle (AACM, St. Louis) musics, and THEN they will be discarded.

M As irrelevant. As irrelevant in what sense?

A Let me put it a different way. In fact, I'm not sure if the position I've stated is correct, in terms of what I believe. The European improviser's continuum has a position that is very similar to 100 years ago, and that position is what distinguishes me again from Wagner and Hildegard and Schoenberg. It's a composite aesthetic in the house of the rectangle--that being the unified, notated music--and putting the triangle inside of the rectangle, in the case of Wagner, with mythology. But there was no attempt to deal with improvisation. A hundred years from the first of the so-called "modern era" sequences, we see a European

continuum that says it's only about improvisation, and you can't have any notation. That's the same position as 100 years ago too, only in the house of the circle [free improvisation--MH].

M When we talk in terms of the Southern strategy being interested in making idiomatic boxes as the strategic move politically in terms of power and so on, what are we going to talk of in Europe? What kind of strategy is it in European culture that first reifies composition, and then reifies improvisation as it came down to them through the legacy of jazz?

A I think we're dealing with a different set of parameters, if we're trying to understand the profound dimensions of trans-European progressionalism. I don't know what that means, but I imagine whatever it means it has something to do with the balance of European tendencies--and I'm thinking, inside of that, fear and awe at the same time, of Germany; the competitive state between the various nations in Europe; European mysticism and what that has posed in respect to the Ralph Nader position of American politics, where you have Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Gnostic position of trans-mysticism separate from the controls of Rome, or of the Protestants. So however the composite European theater is viewed, it would be different than what we have in America, where however the Europeans separated themselves in terms of the struggles in Europe, in America, the African Americans would become a convenient "Other," and would serve to unify the Europeans here.

M When I interviewed [manager of Berlin-based Free Music Production (FMP) label] Jost Gebers, who's got his own idiosyncratic relationship with African American music, he expressed hostility toward European American culture because for him it was nothing more than a transplant of Southern German culture, which is generally true in terms of the emigration of Germans to America--and German Americans make up about a third of the ethnic white components here. His point was that they all came from Bavaria, this fascist part of Germany where all the redneck-type fascists live and come from…

A Very interesting.

M And, you know, he's a cosmopolitan northerner in Berlin, who looks with disdain on the Bavarians and the southern Germans who came here--and his one visit to America brought home to him that historical trend in a way he intuited personally.

A Very interesting. I tend to, when I think of Germany, think of the great mystic tradition that produced Bach, Beethoven, all of that incredible information, and somehow I never put it together with the racism of Bavaria, which in my experiences in the '70s I came to know as real, that the southern German states have a different vibrational complexity. So I think we're tapping into something that goes outside of what I understand, but this is interesting, because we're

talking about the meta-reality of the trans-European mystic experience, and that of the trans-American mystic experience…and I have a feeling something's happening there. I mean Germany re-unified, but in fact it hasn't; there's still this profound difference that hasn't been able to work itself out. We tend in this time period to look on the racist attacks on non-Germans in the Eastern sector as indicative of the ingrown racism kept in check by the communist regimes. But historically, that doesn't gibe with the real picture; so maybe communism was obscuring the fact that the mystic German component was in the East.

M That's true even now, because they weren't Westernized, and they weren't all that influenced by Russia; Russia occupied and oversaw them, but didn't impose their culture in the way American culture took over in the West. In good and bad ways, because all the West German musicians I talked to were most influenced by American GIs, who were mostly black. That's how they got into their jazz and all their formative-years hero worship. But I don't want to get too far into that direction, because we've kind of covered that in terms of your work. But one thing I would add is that after the Civil War, one of the most dominant European influences on African American music culture was the Germans, due to the influx of '48ers fleeing from the repression going on over there then. A lot of itinerant German music teachers were teaching newly emancipated slaves on the German instruments left over from Civil War bands, out of German music books.

A So it's interesting in the Satchmo film that much is made of Louis Armstrong's Jewish music teachers in New Orleans. I'm just trying to understand America's racial political decisions, because Louis Armstrong, for me, was like a summation master whose work took the language of the region, of King Oliver, and just did it better, fast, higher. It wasn't like he put together a new language. Plus, coming to the north, it would be in the northern regions where Mr. Armstrong as a soloist started to evolve, and the concept of the soloist in the music has always involved the concept of self-realization and extension--and in the North, that phenomenon cannot be separated from the vibrational psychologies that evolved in the North. And African-American middle class and upper class in Chicago, in the early period, was not on a second plane to the European American community; there was a healthier interaction.

So this is another aspect of that first wave of migration of African Americans, and Louis Armstrong's music would be a part of that; his travels to come up and play with King Oliver would be a part of that. This is another aspect of creative music progressionalism that I'm seeking to understand.

M Let me ask you this: as a Chicago guy, did you come up with an awareness of this whole Chicago school of white musicians like Bix Beiderbecke and Eddie Condon?…

A No, but I came up with a concept that I could do anything I wanted to do, that I was equal to anybody, that Julian Dawson, the young man who lived about two

blocks away from me, was probably going to be president, that we were not inferior to anybody, Howard Freeman and I; we'd have our dreams, build our clubhouses, do our soapbox derby cars. We never had an innate feeling that we were inferior to anything.

M You attribute this to the Chicago culture?

A Well, to Betsy Ross Grammar School; the teachers we had made us feel that we could compete with anybody. We never thought of ourselves as being programmed to be in second place. I think that's important: the psychology of thinking we could change the world was a psychology that was bathed inside of the vibrational quadrant of the northern geographical experiences in a way that was the norm for me. Only later would I start to see the different psychologies, the different geographical realities, and have a greater sense of what that was.

For instance, it was always clear to me that in a crunch, the southern experience would trump the northern experience, and that has been what has happened. And by trump, I mean when times get tough, the southern guys can say, "you know, the experience of slavery was a real experience, and people really suffered, and if you don't go for our agenda, it means that you're not black. If you don't play the blues, if you don't have allegiance to the southern experience, you're a traitor." And by positing that viewpoint, it would always trump a guy like me, because I could be held in suspicion of not being black enough.

M But it sounds like you were shaped by your Chicago environment in a way that maybe you also wouldn't have been had you been brought up in, say, New York?

A Yes. I'm saying that the experience in Chicago, in my opinion, was much more healthy than the experience in New York. And that the experiences in Chicago and New York were both much healthier, in some respects, than the experiences in the South. But then it gets complex. Because one component of our conversations have been inside what I have called the Southern experience. In many ways, the Southern experience has been a more honest experience, to gain insight into the composite American psychology, than the Northern experience. Because the Southern experience, as we're seeing now--if you function within the Southern parameters of their concept and quadrant of what is ethnically correct, you can be appreciated and you can be advanced. The Northern experience, where everybody talks about how they're "liberal," has always been more complex, and more insidious. And in the northern geographical centers, I have come to feel that the concepts of liberal and conservative--and this is why I want to go back to DuBois--in the end, the African American experience is marginalized, and whatever happens in the African American experience, at best it's irrelevant to determining the real information dynamics of the culture, the real documentation of the culture. Because in the north, they don't even respect you second place or third place, not to mention

first place; they can't even relate to an African American as equal. The South can relate to an African American not as equal, but as a second-place good boy.

M When you talk about your healthy childhood, and your feeling that you could do anything, are you attributing that to being anchored in the Southern or the Northern paradigm more?

A The Northern. But I grew up in a black community, it wasn't an integrated community, it was the South Side of Chicago. I did not know any European Americans when I was growing up, so it was me, Howard Freeman and Michael Carter, and a handful of other guys. We did our little projects, had our little baseball games, watched the television. We didn't even know about anything outside our neighborhood, but we had all the dreams of every other American. Having a TV set, one of my heroes would be Roy Rogers. Not only did he have two guns, unlike Gene Autrey, but even in a fight his hat wouldn't fall off, and he wouldn't even get dirty. This was the kind of guy I could use. My hero was Werner von Braun, the V2 rocket scientist, and I had all kinds of charts in my room of different stages of the V-1, and finally the V-2, the White Sands testing grounds and all this kind of stuff. By not having any contact with European Americans while I was growing up, I did not experience any kind of hurt feelings or rejections; instead, I just kind of felt like I could take over the planet, as did my friends.

Although we also noticed that there was a sector of African Americans that we could not relate to. This was the gang sector, toughie-tough guys, who weren't interested in any intellectual anything, they were just tough guys, athletic guys; I liked them, but at some point I would have to back away from that community, because we were interested in the world of ideas. But what was far out was that there was a beautiful kind of synergy where all of the qualities of the community could work. For instance, it was taken for granted that the girls were the smartest; I mean there was no doubt, we all knew these young girls could run us into the ground intellectually. They were the ones who did the homework, they were the ones who got the good grades, they were the ones we had to go to for help…

M Even the idea guys like you, huh?

A Oh, it wasn't even close, there was no question but that the girls were the smartest.

M Why do you think that is?

A I don't know, they just were.

M That kind of goes back to Lil Hardin's role with Louis Armstrong, Mamie Smith with Coleman Hawkins. What the hell is that about? [much laughter throughout all this]

A My suspicion is that part of the complexity that women have been dealing with has been because of having qualities of superiority in a lot of different spaces that the guys have not been able to reconcile themselves to. But growing up in the South Side of Chicago, I was fortunate to have had the experience through the 1950s up to 1962 or 3, somewhere around there--'63 I joined the army--but that period of growing up, I didn't realize then that it would be the last time period where I would have the chance to experience a dynamic African American community that had a very vibrant synergy, where the toughy-tough guys, and even the gang guys, there was a synergy and an ability to flow together and to separate that is very different than what we have now.

M In other words, you felt a connection, even being who you are?

A A deep connection, even being who I am. I was accepted. For instance, in Washington Square Park, when I was growing up, there were debates every weekend, guys on their boxes having a lecture, whether it was Nation of Islam or some guy who had a theory; there was an intellectual vibrancy that it's hard to talk to the young people about in this time period, because they don't know anything about this.

When I had the chance to read John Szwed's book on Sun Ra, it started to reawaken in me the exciting intellectual spectrum that I grew up in that, that I had kind of forgotten about. Even Howard Freeman and I, we had our own little publication, called The Joke Book. Every week we'd publish around 50 of these books, sell about three of them, throw the rest away, then start the next press run. So actually, I'm used to not making money from my projects; I didn't even realize the connection!

And there's another thing. In Washington Square Park, which was like in the heart of the South Side, stretching from 33rd Street in Hyde Park and going all the way to 59th St. You could go to sleep in the park without worrying that somebody was going to rob you or harm you. Now that's a very different dynamic than what we have as we get ready to move into the third millennium. What am I saying? There was not a natural built-in fear of one another between African Americans when I was growing up. And there was a synergy in the community, with its radical factions, that at the same time was vibrant in a dynamic intellectual tradition.

So when I grew up, I kind of felt like I could be whatever I was able to work toward, and that if I applied myself, I could do my best. Later when I fell in love with Karlheinz Stockhausen, it never occurred to me that I couldn't want to build on Stockhausen, and do my operas and my pieces for four orchestras;

Stockhausen did it, I wanted to be able to do it. He's one of my heroes. I didn't know I was crossing into quadrant spaces that were outside what was acceptable for me, not only by the European American community, but by the newly modulated African American community of the '60s. Black Power, which in the beginning started with a broader agenda, would in fact by 1966 be exhibiting a reductionism that more and more would form along the lines of Garvey versus DuBois.

M DuBois representing an international cosmopolitanism and Garvey an ethnocentric kind of reaction against white oppression?…

A Starting with Stokely Carmichael, moving into H. Rap Brown, moving into Amiri Baraka, and then the Black Panthers. More and more, an intellectual position would be advanced, but rather than butttressed with intellectual arguments, it would be instead buttressed by "if you don't accept this, your butt's going to be kicked:" toughie-tough arguments. And that toughy-tough psychology would parlay through Gil-Scott Heron's beautifully intellectual dynamic, creative work, into the Last Poets, whose hopeful inspired work would translate finally into Niggaz with Attitude, toughy-tough psychologies that would merge into post-Baraka Black Panther psychological experiences, and Huey Newton--two positions that could be expressed more or less as "Either/Or:" either you're with me or against me, everything is politics, everything is everything…no more room for gradations; follow my agenda or you're the enemy.

M Let's look at it this way. We have to realize too that Anthony Braxton has established himself as a presence and a voice, and has not been totally a cry in the wilderness. I mean, you're one of the people who've been written about the most--maybe you think written about in a distorted way--but also you're one of the people who have been paid most attention to along the way, even though your viewpoint hasn't represented the larger cultural agenda or anything.

A And my position is a position of impotence. I control nothing.

M But since we're focusing on your story and your work, maybe this would be the entry point into how you did relate as a composer and musician and even musical philosopher, system-builder and so on, to that African American component.

A Okay, so we go back to 1880 again. Because to better understand my position in trans-African progressionalism, we again have to pick up what was sacrificed in the modern era. What was sacrificed was Will Marion Cook, Frank Johnson, Jim Europe, Florence Price, William Grant Still: the intellectual component of the music as made real through the experiences of…James Europe was conceiving of musical concepts and logics that integrated notation and improvisation. Now remember, earlier you asked me what my connection with Hildegard von Bingen, Wagner, and Schoenberg was, and I talked about the fact that they evolved

holistic composite strategies; but their strategies were solidifications within one quadrant, because of the dynamic implications of the decisions that would underlie Christianity, and the whole idea of the holy man who doesn't have sex.

M And woman…

A Yes, and the separation and non-recognition of the mystic Goddess; those were important sacrifices that the Christians made, and they're still dealing with them in this time period.

M Does this tie into your reaction to the figure of Marie Laveau as a mixed-race voodoo priestess in New Orleans who was so important in that culture in terms of the Goddess?

A Yes, but I would also say that it has become fashionable to talk of Congo Square as an experience where the transplanted Africans who became African Americans would have a free space moment of information dynamics. Those experiences were important, to be sure, but I would only add that the first and second Great Awakenings, in the Northern states, would also be a component that would contain the same kinds of experiences. Remember, the European transplanted settlers were always frightened whenever the slaves got together without supervision, especially if they had a drum, especially if they had the opportunity to start making their music. It was because of that fear that finally they started trying to bring the slaves into the church, under the banner of civilizing the heathens, in hopes of reducing the intensity of their experiences, because to the European settlers, these guys looked like wild savages, and they could not be trusted after having these quadrant-communal cycles; so it would be at that point that the first Great Awakening would come together, not just for African Americans, but as a point of definition for the Pentecostal American Protestant groupings that would emphasize self-realization and emotion. Before that, in Europe, if you were in church and started shaking your butt to Wagner, they would kick your ass. And the Pilgrims and the Puritans, they were some toughy-tough guys: enjoy the music, but don't have a mind-body connection, they could not handle that. And that of course is all they were seeing with the African slaves. So the First Awakening--which, by the way, if it's on target, it should be coming back in the next 10 or 20 years to America [laughs].

M Yeah, because I'm thinking of the First and Second Great Awakenings as being in large part really influenced by the emotionalism of non-Christian peoples.

A Thank you. The Africans, and the Native Americans.

M Yeah, both were very important. Richard Allen was the founder of the first Pentecostal church, a black guy in Los Angeles, and poor whites were in on it from the beginning. It was the poor whites, not the others…

A Yes, yes.

M And when you talk about the Southern strategy, you're talking about a culture that is two or three generations down the road from this poor white experience that got Africanized in a real way.

A In the same way that we talk of this connection, which your work has advanced on the deepest possible level, between Africa and Germany. Again, we're talking about peoples who are not contained by modern-era psychologies. We tend to use that term "modern era" in referring to America; when I say modern era psychology in this context, I'm talking about after the reaction to Christianity, moving into continental European experiences, with the German people having a profound reaction to Christianity and the Roman Empire, because they were dealing with a more composite experience than what Christianity would usher in. So there are conjunctions here as far as the preceding steps into what I'll call for America the modern era, and what I'll call for Europe the Middle Ages, and Enlightenment periods.

So we're coming back to the composer's tradition, which is interesting. Frank Johnson, unifying abstract and physicalness, music and dance.

M Let me ask you this: when exactly did you get exposed to these African American composers?

A Frank Johnson only once I got into academia, at Mills College [mid-1980s]. Will Marion Cook, William Grant Still, I was aware of them in the '60s.

M So you kind of started out with an exposure, first, to cool white jazz, Paul Desmond and all that; you got into bebop a little later…

A I started out with doo-wop; in my neighborhood, everybody had their own doo-wop group. Frankie Lymon, the Dell Vikings, the Dells, the Coasters, moving to Smokey Robinson; Bill Haley and the Comets were very important to me; Ahmad Jamal, and then moving into Dave Brubeck, when I became very interested in what was called cool jazz. I had heard Charlie Parker's music at the same time, but it frightened me; it was rawer. Desmond and Brubeck were more restrained, vibrationally, in a way that I could hear; it was closer to Ahmad Jamal's structure space initiatives.

M Does this have something to do with your growing up apart from the black psychology of…I mean, why would Charlie Parker seem so raw, because he was like the New York kind of expression or something?

A No, it was just more than what I could handle. Desmond was more melodic…

M Does this also go for people like Thelonious Monk and everyone else connected with the New York bebop scene?

A My stepfather brought home Miles Davis with John Coltrane, "Round 'Bout Midnight," and "Cookin'", with the Miles Davis Quintet. I would hear that music at about the same time I heard Brubeck. I remember saying very clearly, "this John Coltrane fellow, he's not playing the music. This is not jazz, it doesn't swing!" [laughs] I was convinced! Why can't he play more like Desmond? I don't get it…

M So you grew up in the South Side, with no white people around you; but you also had icons on the TV set…

A Plus, my father and my stepfather were both light-complexioned African Americans, and I did have an inferiority complex as a young man, being the darkest in my family; and African Americans are most cruel, just in their own quadrant with each other, when the question of skin complexion comes up.

M So this was maybe a young boy and teenager's reach for something that seemed more refined?…

A Yes, but it was all subconscious. Consciously, I related then as now to Desmond's sound; I like Johnny Hodges' sound too; I like the more melodic players. And there was just something about the Brubeck quartet that just pushed my buttons; I loved them, I had every record they ever did.

M Of course, there's a real intellectualism there that kind of goes beyond, is more detached, than what you hear in Coltrane, or even Monk.

A And it appealed to me; it connected to me.

M That sounds like something that's just sort of beyond race and into the realm of personality types.

A Yes. But whatever it was, I connected deeply with their music, and then later, Tristano; I would connect very deeply with Tristano and Konitz and Marsh.

M So when you moved through this white expression in the jazz milieu into Charlie Parker and Coltrane and Ornette, maybe…I mean I remember when you first came out, the feeling about what you were doing among my jazz-buff circles in San Francisco, and I think in general, was that "man, this guy is really pushing blackness out there all the way."

A Yes! [we laugh]

M That's how I remember you in the '60s.

A Well, the '60s was a profound period for me, where my proclivities would change, where finally I was able to connect with the composite partials of trans-Africanisms, in a way I was not able to as a young man. For instance, Brubeck: I went through all the European American saxophonists, Bud Shank, Konitz, Marsh; Hal McCusak, I'm the only guy on the planet who has all of Hal McCusak's records. Dave Pell's octet. My teacher, Jack Gell, was a European American at the Chicago Musical College, who was a racist--yes, he was a racist who wasn't always aware of his racism; it was a northern kind of a racism. He didn't even like Desmond; he was a complex guy. When he talked of Desmond, he would say, "what do you want, sugar in your coffee, or coffee in your sugar?" That's how he dismissed Desmond, very quickly. Then I discovered Gigi Gryce, in the jazz lab quintet; I was taken aback by Gigi Gryce and his compositional abilities, with Donald Byrd, and Cedar Walton, I think. It was presented as kind of an intellectual hard bop music. It appealed to me, so I became a Gigi Gryce guy.

M Do you remember a time in your development when you actually felt a big surge of liberation into this kind of idea of black identity as a reaction against all this whiteness that you had steeped yourself in?

A It was coming into the '60s, when the music started to change. First I heard Eric Dolphy; well actually no, I heard Ornette Coleman…

session 5
A So we're talking about a transition period for me, and the transition would come about through Pierre and Tommy Evans and meeting their father, who was like a jazz guy. Mr. Evans would start giving me records to listen to; it would be through him that I would have my first opportunity to experience Cecil Taylor's music: Cecil Taylor with Earl Griffin on vibes…

M Was this before you got into Charlie Parker and bebop and all that?

A Yes.

M So you got into the "new thing" first.

A Yes. Cecil Taylor's music for me was a revelation. Here was an African American man with a super intellectual music that was also emotional, that actually set me up--and I didn't realize it at the time--to be able to hear Schoenberg. Mr. Evans also gave me The Shape of Jazz To Come, by Ornette Coleman, which I kept taking back and then two, three weeks later going back to get it. This was like a cycle of three, four, five months.

M You didn't like it much at first?

A First time I heard Ornette Coleman, I almost died; I thought this was the worst thing I ever heard in my life; I couldn't even sleep.

M You should have gotten a magazine quote out there, like Phil Woods did about you. "There are a lot of primitives out there with big egos…" [laughter]

A That's what I would have said when I first heard Ornette Coleman. But I couldn't shake it, it was clear there was something happening, and between Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman, it was as if they were shaking me upside down. Finally, I graduated from high school, went to Wilson Junior College…and actually, even in high school I was listening to Claude Willie, who now calls himself Claude Lawrence. Played tenor saxophone back then, and I'm telling you, in my junior and senior years in high school, Claude Lawrence was so bad, he was such a great musician; he had his own sound…and of course back in that period bebop was the thing, especially Benny Golson compositions. And Claude Lawrence was dealing with it.

M Did you like Benny Golson? He was pretty interesting.

A In that period, Benny Golson was new to me, so this was the beginning of learning about the African American masters' tradition, the hard bop tradition, which was something that I didn't know that much about.

M Did you kind of go through a young man's psychological revamping in the '60s where you thought, "man, I've just been formed and steeped in all this white stuff, and now I'm going to get to move into this distinctly African American stuff?

A No. I was attracted…when I discovered that this music did exist, and that there was this continuum of African American masters that I did not know, I definitely became curious, but I saw no reason to let go of the guys whose music touched my heart; I have never been interested in disrespecting something that's come to me that's helped me.

M Well, what exactly did it speak to in you?

A It just opened up my world. And so Cecil Taylor and Ornette Coleman, and Claude Lawrence would set me up for after graduating from high school, I'd got to Woodrow Wilson College. Now CVS, Chicago Vocational School, was where I went to high school. It was an integrated school, but it was really mostly Polish American and Russian American, and African Americans made up maybe one eighth of the student body; it was my first opportunity to meet European Americans, and I discovered of course that they were human beings, just like me. I also discovered that there were European Americans who were much more brilliant than I could ever hope for: guys like Richard Begeysky; seems like this guy couldn't do anything wrong. I think he got A's all the way through high school. Not to mention I discovered girls, which became a major diversion.

M Did you get good grades?

A Oh, okay; I'd say I got a B average.

M But I remember reading that you were a philosophy major at Wilson ?

A Yes.

M You weren't into the music department so much there?

A Yes I was. Going to Wilson Junior College would be the first experience for me of going to an all African American educational institution. And it was dynamic and vibrant, and I went to, I think, one session, but before going to that session I was in the band, and there was this guy next to me. He had an interesting sound, but I was a very good reader, and I thought I was really hot stuff. But I noticed that wherever I went in the school, when the name Roscoe Mitchell came up, fear struck into the hearts of men. I just couldn't get it; I said, I'm a very good reader, I had my little Olds Opera alto saxophone; I was the only African American in the United States who would go to a jam session and call "Take Five." And of course, everyone looked at me like I was crazy. But I couldn't figure out why everybody talked about Roscoe.

M What did he play like then?

A Well, we were playing in the marching band and the classical orchestra, and he played pretty nice, but I was stronger as a reader, I thought; I was in fact, I'll be honest, I was stronger. So I went to this session, and I found what all the talk was all about. The experience was another epiphany in my life. Now before hearing Roscoe, I was aware that Henry Threadgill, who studied with Jack Gell, was advancing in a very deep way; Henry was playing like Sonny Rollins by the time he was 13; he was a good musician, and competent in bebop, but the depth that I was only starting to sense, he already had. At Wilson Jr. College, it was Henry who signed me into my classes. English 101, Henry pulled out the slips; "oh, thank you, Henry." He had glasses like this [points to his wire-rimmed specs] in 1963. At that session, I sat in--this was before Roscoe showed up. I think I got lost on "Milestones…" [laughter] I think it was maybe the first time I'd played with a rhythm section. I was so nervous and excited. Anyway, when Roscoe came in, everyone did the equivalent of backing to the walls, sweating with fear. And by the way, Roscoe had a sound that was like forte to the 26th power. He was playing something like seven reeds; the guy was out. He came up to the bandstand, called up his guys, a tenor player, trumpet player, saxophonist, maybe Jack DeJohnette on drums; they started playing "By By Blackbird." Mike Heffley, I can not begin to describe it; all I can say is they played the head; he took the first chorus. I said, well, you know, it's okay. He took the second chorus; hmm, fairly interesting; third chorus: whoa, this is kind of interesting; fourth chorus: goddamn, what the fuck; fifth chorus: GODDAMN; sixth chorus: MAMMA, HELP! seventh chorus: KILL ME, FUCK IT; eighth chorus: I'LL JUMP OUT THE

MOTHERFUCKING WINDOW, I'M GIVING UP MUSIC AND LIFE!! I'LL BE A MOTHERFUCKING SHOE SALESMAN!!! When Roscoe Mitchell finished his solo on "By By, Blackbird," my life had changed. I joined the army a week later.

M Was he mainly just playing changes and did it very well, or what?

A He started off playing the changes, and then it started going into sound; and Roscoe, by the way, had his own sound on the alto, even then.

M Because like now he's so minimalist.

A He was completely different back then. He wasn't circle-breathing or honking and beeping back then, it was just a young Roscoe Mitchell language, but it had different components. But even then, it was awesome. I tell you, with the exception of Paul Desmond, who as a young guy I used to go see when they came to Chicago; I'd be sitting there crying while he was playing, I loved it so much. But hearing Roscoe Mitchell was like getting hit with an H-bomb. When he finished his solo on this one song, I never even heard him play another song after that. I'm talking about one solo, it was so awesome that by the time it was over, I had seen God. There was no comparison. Suddenly I understood how I was a little chumpy-wumpy-tumpy motherfucker. [laughter]

M So did the effect it had on you send you into thinking that you wanted to be a better saxophonist?

A After hearing Roscoe, I think the thing that had dawned on me was, what the fuck was happening. There was something happening in music that I knew nothing about, that had the most awesome pull on me. I had already discovered that I couldn't get away from music, because it was all I could think about. After hearing Roscoe, it was a confirmation. It's kind of like you're looking at the moon, and starting to see it; and suddenly you get a better telescope, and then you see the whole sky; for the first time in your life, you notice that it's not just the moon, there's a whole motherfucking sky. And then not only is there a sky, but my whole understanding of reality is that there was an earth and there was a moon, and now suddenly I'm seeing there's a whole sky, a whole galaxy--and when I left Wilson Junior College after Roscoe's solo, it was like, what the fuck; what the motherfucking shit…

M Well, it sounds like a big leap from Paul Desmond to Roscoe Mitchell. You didn't catch any of the in-between points?…

A Well, I had been listening to Ornette Coleman, I was starting to get used to the Ornette Coleman records, I started to buy more of them; I discovered Eric Dolphy…

M Did you process Ornette in the sense of saying, like, okay, I know Desmond and these guys, and I know the paradigm of playing changes and so on, and so now I see that Ornette is doing away with the changes. I mean, were you thinking in terms of breaking it down in terms of the components like that?

A Ornette Coleman's music, for me, was this new universe, and Cecil Taylor, and it was a new compositional universe, it had a different feeling to it, and the kind of ideas he played were so exciting, and there was this intellectual component in his music that affected me, and sent me reeling; it was the beginning of reconsidering everything. Then Eric Dolphy; Outward Bound would be the record that was just coming out. I went out and bought that record; I almost died! I didn't even know it was possible to play the saxophone that fast, with those kind of skips. And so before I heard Roscoe Mitchell, I was starting to make inroads into this strange universe; I couldn't figure out what it was, but I was drawn to it. And then hearing Roscoe was kind of a culmination of the fact that, one, something is happening that I don't know about; I was just starting to appreciate Coltrane. The records I was hearing were just moving into "Giant Steps"…

M So you thought maybe there was more to Coltrane than before?…

A I hadn't gotten that far with thinking, I was only thinking "boy, these are strange chord changes, and he might not play like Desmond, but he's coming…" I mean, you know, I was kind of confused about what was happening; it was like more and more I was starting to…so many things were happening to me between, say, 1960 and 1963; that's what we're really talking about, that time period. So we're talking like something at an increased rate, and it was turning my life upside down. Because basically I was moving toward marrying, and working in the post office, and playing a little music on the side. And then I'm buying these records, starting to move away from the European American saxophonists. Also, I had started really getting into Jackie McLean in the hard bop period. So that period from '59 to '63 was a heavy period for me, because suddenly new information was coming in. I even got a record of Alban Berg's chamber music, and I was attracted to it, but I didn't know why I was attracted to it; I guess it was the composition, because I had a hard time with the notated music space. It didn't interest me that much. But there was something about Berg…so I'm discovering a lot of different things. And then after hearing Roscoe, I tell you, after this H-bomb exploded in front of me, I joined the army, said fuck it, I had to get away from everything I knew about, and try to make some sense out of what was happening, because no longer, by 1963, was music something that I enjoyed or something that was fascinating: it became something that totally dominated my whole psyche, all-encompassing; and it was so powerful that it was basically like someone turning you upside down and shaking you.

So then I'm in the army, and the first matter of business for me was to go back and re-examine the hard bop tradition. I met Sonny Seals, a tenor saxophone

player from Detroit. He was a little older than me, a good player, in the blues tradition, also an organist…

M Did you feel like there was something there that was at the foundation of what you were hearing in Roscoe and everybody, or?…

A Yes, but I also felt that my education wasn't complete, and that more and more I had opened up to where I could hear this music. For instance, I was a big fan of the Modern Jazz Quartet in the mid-50's and early '60s. I liked the composed reality of their music, and I think that helped me go to Berg, for instance: John Lewis with his fugue-like Bach stuff…

M So you're saying you really got into European masters through Cecil Taylor, and the MJQ, and maybe through Ornette somehow too?…

A Yes, and Dave Brubeck. Brubeck would talk about Milhaud as his teacher; there was that crazy composition of Milhaud's, Creation of the World or whatever it was called…

M Did you like the time signature stuff?

A Of Brubeck's? Yes, I mean…you don't understand; once I hook onto a guy, I hook onto a guy. I mean I get every record, and I don't think in terms of do I like it or not, I just want to know it; I love it because I love them, and I want to know what they're doing. So my first year and second year in the army I had to go back to John Coltrane. Even by, say, 1959 I was starting to be able to hear Charlie Parker, and that would be the beginning then of re-educating myself, especially with respect to the contributions of the great African American musicians.

M So you kind of came to terms with the rawness that you first heard in Bird? What, did you think, okay, I didn't like it before because I was younger and now I'm more of a man, so I can handle the rawness, maybe?

A I don't think it was on that plane; suddenly it opened up where I could hear it, and feel it. And whereas I found myself as a young guy thinking "this John Coltrane, why does he have to play so many notes?" suddenly I was able to hear it. And then I remember kicking myself: "how could I not hear it?!" [laughs] But I couldn't hear it as a young guy. So it would be in the army that I would frantically go back and try to educate myself about what was happening. And that period, say between 1963 and 1966 was maybe one of the heaviest periods of my life. I mean, one, our country would have maybe two assasinations--three, including Malcolm X--the Civil Rights Movement. I'm in the army but I'm buying records; that's all I did, when I wasn't doing army duty: buying records and listening to music and practicing. I'd go to Korea after being stationed at Highland Park, outside of Chicago for a year and a half; in that period, after meeting Sonny Seals, he would help me to know which records to buy by Coltrane, which by

Sonny Rollins; so I was devouring these records, learning the repertoire, going into sessions. And then I went to Seoul, Korea, and my mother mailed me Albert Ayler's "Bells" and Coltrane's "Ascensions," at my request. That music…I cannot begin to tell you; that was IT for me. I was ready for it when it came out.

M What was it you liked about it? Starting from Roscoe on, did it sort of wake up something?…

A I liked the ideas! Suddenly I hear the ideas in the music. I wasn't interested then or now in, oh, I like the rawness of the music…

M What were the ideas, exactly? How would you explain them?

A An increased sonic spectrum; fresh logics, fresh vocabularies.

M All purely musical.

A Purely musical; I didn't know how to…

M You didn't really connect it to the Civil Rights Movement and all that?

A Well, the Civil Rights Movement for me meant a lot of different things. Remember, now, in the '50s, separate but equal…you had to go the the Colored section if you lived in the South. Brown v. the Board of Education. When the Civil Rights Movement burst on the scene, I found myself thinking, as I began to understand what was happening in America, that I could identify in every way with the Movement. Looking back now, how could I not? All they were talking about was equal rights and that every American should have an opportunity to live. As I began to learn of the depth of American social and historical reality, started reading, say, from 1958 to 1963, before going into the army--this would also be the period when I started to venture outside my neighborhood, started hanging out at the University of Chicago, seeing what kind of books people were reading. I met Shoshana Orai, a wonderful Japanese lady who I fell in love with, who looked at me like I was a little kid. She was maybe four years younger than me, and maybe twenty years more advanced than me in terms of literature and things like that. So there I am reading Freud, trying to impress Shoshana, and also trying to increase my information scan, because I didn't realize how little I knew; I was just buying my Brubeck records.

M What's interesting about that is that we've been talking about all these influences as being both problematic and also promising--Europeans, Africans, etc.--and the feminist component of your persona has developed in the academic realm, and in the creative realm markedly and publicly over the years; so we can say, well, the problem about that, too, is that, obviously, femininity is one of the forces in the world that has had to struggle under a cloud of oppression, just like

the others we've talked about; but the feminist movement itself has turned into a sort of Southern strategy, kind of idiomatic quadrant of its own…

A I agree completely, I'm no longer interested in the feminist movement at all; I'm only interested in humanity. But as a young man, after what I'll call dog days, I came to understand that what I was really looking for was someone I could be with, and be in love with. Plus, since my very first year in high school, I was with Darlene…(…). So that was the other component.

But the army experience for me, being away from home and going to Korea for a year and a half, was very good for me. It gave me a chance to be separate from my brothers, separate from my family, in this period of such profound social upheaval in our country. Meanwhile, I'm learning about so many different musics. It would be in the army that I discovered Schoenberg, in Korea; and that was just as heavy as when I finally started hearing Coltrane. I went to hear Coltrane several times when I was in America, between, say, 1963 and 1965--somewhere around June, 1965, I went to Korea--but in that year-and-a-half period I saw Coltrane play three times. The first time I walked out.

M You didn't like it?

A I went and heard him at McKee's Lounge on 63rd St. on Cottage Grove; I was just starting to warm up to "Giant Steps," felt like I was ready. So of course he's playing like, you know, Elvin, McCoy, and Jimmy, and it was intense, man. And it was crowded and I was heading toward the door; I decided this man is crazy, I want nothing to do with it. And the composition came to an end, and then this is what took me out: he played the ballad, "It's So Easy to Remember and so Hard to Forget." And he played it straight, and it was beautiful, and it was profound, and it took me out, in the same way that Roscoe's music took me out. I found myself with this paradox: how can this guy play so beautifully when he plays this ballad? then he goes back to this other music and it's all sound again? There must be something happening that I don't know about!

M Like Bob Dylan's Mr. Jones. [laughs]

A Dylan was a hero of mine then too. So I was consumed with trying to find out what it is, because it was something that was much more real than what I was looking at, something much more encompassing, let me put it like that, that I had not been able to penetrate.

M It's obvious that first and foremost you've always been a human being interested in humanity, but you also have had a certain path from a certain place, and I'm wondering what you would say distinguishes your relationship to the African American, or trans-African sector that makes it stand out from your relationship to the other sectors, simply by virtue of the fact that you are an African American.

A I don't think at this point, based on the things we've been talking about, that I was any different than anyone else. I think what distinguished me then, as a young man, is part of what I've been fighting for all my life: the right as a human being to be able to learn from experiences and then have hope for doing the best I can do. I think everybody was of that psychological nature. And I think in the time period of the '60s, with the social upheavals, I started to see the problems in my country--like what were we doing in Viet Nam, bombing these people into submission? Suddenly questions about the ethics of my government would come into play in a way that I had never even thought about. I had never even thought about politics. Suddenly, for instance, after the army I would discover, "I guess I am a sexist kind of guy in some ways." I'd never even realized that women had special problems that they had to deal with at all, I'd never considered that. I had never considered that I was connected to Europe; I just liked what I liked. I had never considered the great body of literature as representing the human experience that actually included me whether I wanted to be a part of it or not. I had never considered that there was an African American intellectual tradition that I was the recipient of, whether I understood it or not. I had never considered that the guys from my community would not be able to go out and have fulfilling lives; but I had started to notice, even in high school, that half of my grammar school friends were either dead or in jail, with maybe, say, 10 per cent being able to go to high school. I didn't understand all of that.

So it was a gradual awakening to American social reality, after finally busting out of my neighborhood, starting to see greater Chicago. As a young man, I used to get on the L, which in Chicago means the subway system and elevated train system, at different points. I used to always ride the train all around the city. As I started going further into the north side, in the white communities, started noticing how different they looked. I didn't understand all that, but I did notice that the world was bigger than my little two blocks in Chicago, where we'd be at the little drug store talking about baseball scores, having a malt, and that was like big time, hanging out with the guys who knew all the baseball statistics, arguing about who was the best pitcher and this kind of stuff.

M Were you not happy with it because it seemed limited to this realm of ethnic identity in any way?

A That was one component, but there was another one. I grew up with my mother and stepfather, but I was always very close to my father, who, at that time, was still alive.

M Let's try to sum up from a distance, then, your mature assimilation of the trans-African thrusts around you.

A From 1961 to 1966, when I got out of the army--that whole period for me was about assimilating and reevaluating the trans-African, especially the bebop

musics. It would also be my introduction to the modern musics, starting, say, with Bartòk. After the army, Cage and Stockhausen, and Albert Ayler, and late Coltrane, and the New York School. But after the army is when I went into the AACM, and met a family of musicians who were totally interested in the kinds of things I was interested in, on some level. We all had our various interests as individuals, but it was an organization of kindred spirits; you could be interested in whatever you wanted to be interested in in the AACM. And I was interested in composition, improvisation, and ideas. By then, I would say, the life of my music and the direction of my life had started coming together.

M When you first made your public debut, it definitely seemed in the press, in Down Beat and so on, to be the voice of the new young generation of African American identity sort of breaking out of the mold. When that started happening for you, getting media attention and everything, I remember you being pretty adamant about all your influences and connections, nodding to the Europeans and European Americans among them; but still, it was in this context the new young black guys from Chicago, with something new to say in the black tradition, of, as some of them said, Great Black Music. I'm wondering how in your own mind you had squared away all of your influences in relation to the African American tradition of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, etc.

A I saw myself as interested in composite reality by the time I joined the AACM; and I would also say that I did not see myself as unique in the sense that I was the only person who had solidified a fresh aesthetic position. In fact, part of the significance of the AACM would be that all of the principal guys would solidify an aesthetic position that would reflect something fresh. By the time the guys had started writing about me, it had become clear to me even then that there was a political-racial component that was distorting our work.

For instance, when I got out of the army, the record Sound, by the Roscoe Mitchell sextet, had already been recorded. That record, for me, was one of the greatest records then and now, from the time period of the '60s. I'd like to hope that when the mature histories are written, that that recording will be reevaluated. Not only that--I feel that the universe that Roscoe Mitchell would put together represents then and now one of the great bodies of music from my generation; I feel that the universe of Leo Smith, the universe of Joseph Jarman, the great work of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, the great music of Muhal Richard Abrams, has been seriously ignored and undermined. There was a guy named Troy Robinson; he didn't survive it, but he was another African American who had a store front, who trained his own people, à la Sun Ra, and was doing a music of total integrity; everybody was postulating positive goals…

M Let me ask you this: we've been talking about long sweeps of history, and how you have taken in your idea of composite reality going all the way back to the beginnings of the West, Northern European mythology, Jewish influences; we've

talked about people from Aristotle on up. So let's talk about the trans-African sector in that picture.

A Thank you.

M And we've also talked about the trans-African sector as being incorrectly framed, and appropriated in a distorted way by the powers that be. So let's leave that aside for a second and say just in the terms of the composite reality that you're engaged with, what role does this long tradition of trans-African musical expression, from Africa into America, what role does it play in your musical universe?

A Thank you for that question. That continuum is the template of my experience; I would come to understand that. It is from that template that my relationship to Europe can be understood. For instance, in the late '50s I started to read James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and this continuum of writers. The work of William Grant Still was very important to me by 1964, because I was always looking for African American equivalents of everything that touched me, as I got older, especially, when I came to see that there was a continuum that I didn't know about. I think the time period of the '60s, for me, would be when I would always look to that continuum to better understand who I was. When I discovered Berg, and as I started to develop a taste for notated music, the next question I would ask myself was, were there any African Americans doing this kind of music?

So what I'm going to talk about now, I'm going to talk about…but I can't talk about it in a sequential order starting from say 1954 or 5 in the way I can talk about discovering Ahmad Jamal or Brubeck, because I didn't like notated music as a young man. But in the end, when I talk of the template of my aesthetic qualities, I'm talking of a continuum of African American men and women who have tried to meet the challenge of existence in every space. Many of them I still don't know about--scientists, agriculturalists, spiritualists--I'm still in need of education.

M Among the ones you do know the best, what would you say they bring to the table of world-historical culture and discourse?

A Let's go back to Frank Johnson. He brought composite interdisciplinary conections, setting the propositions up for multimedia. His work in the Philadelphia area, and his trips to Europe, would produce a music that would clarify active rhythmic logics in a way that would become a point of definition for the modern era experiences that would lead away from the vertical musics.

The work of Jelly Roll Morton--who, while he was from New Orleans, and had experiences in the Western part of the United States, especially Texas--Mr. Morton's music never fit in. He was an example of an African American--or non-European, because he had many different qualities--who would tackle the integration of circle and square…maybe no triangle…well, triangle, as

integration. The early Hot Five, Hot Pepper ensemble musics, would define the nature of integration that accelerated the collective experiences of the New Orleans music, and go outside the entertainment-aesthetic parameters that would be imposed upon the New Orleans music by the political manipulations that would become part of the Southern strategy.

The great work of William Grant Still, for me, would help me as I sought to understand my relationship to Bartok, who was very important to me in the beginning; Bartok and Alban Berg…

M Why Bartok?

A I just liked his music, I liked the melodies of his music, I liked the string quartets.

M Did you get to a point where…first of all, you say, you didn't like notated music; so you got to a point where something about the device of notation opened a door for you into something that at first you didn't like, but now you did come to like?

A Yes. And I think it was a gradual change going through the work of the Modern Jazz Quartet, the dynamics of Ornette Coleman. Ornette Coleman's compositions--very important to me, especially in the early period. Cecil Taylor's composition in the early period was very different than it is now, and I was attracted to the abstract nature of his writing, and his improvisation. But Alban Berg's music had this melodic quality, and Bartok's music for strings, celeste, and percussion, that was a favorite composition for me. Honegger's music: when I was at Wilson Jr. College, I was at the library every single day playing recordings…and I was very affected by Honegger, of all people. And Hindemith.

M So you just got to a point of moving from disliking to liking notated music. I'm thinking of Jost Gebers, the manager of FMP, hates composition tradition; and the reason he doesn't like it, and the reason he doesn't like your work, is because he sees it as too calculated. But it sounds to me like a guy who starts out not liking notated music, and only liking improvised or spontaneous music, begins to like notated music because it offers a way to calculate something and set something up that is only possible through notation?

A I would arrive at understanding that later. I think before understanding that, I just liked what I heard. It wasn't such a big step from the Dave Brubeck Quartet to the Modern Jazz Quartet, just looking at compositional change, to Third Stream music, with Gunther Schuller, which was interesting; then Bartok and Berg. Now I'm playing in the student orchestra, and later the 5th Army Band, and we're playing Prokofiev, The Sound of Music, Bartok; I remember playing Prokofiev and thinking, hmm, this is strange; it didn't feel tonally correct, it felt weird, but I liked it. The Scherzos, which were off balance. So I started going to

the libraries and finding these records. At the time we played Bach, I hated it; I kind of consigned it to this region that was "white people's music…"

M Did you hate it because it was too calculated?…

A No, it was just irrelevant, kind of like the Southern strategy [laughs]. It was like you had to learn this to learn the instrument, so you did it for that reason, but it was irrelevant, it was something white people liked, whoever white people were.

M Like the John Lennon song says, "nothing you can say that can't be said; nothing you can sing that can't be sung…"

A For me, I just couldn't hear it., but I knew, and my teacher made me play in these various ensembles as I sought to learn the instrument, I just kind of consigned it to this region of, well, this is what white people did, and I want to be competitive and play my instrument, but it dind't touch my heart. Only later, when I started listening to Bartok and Berg did the actual music start warming up to me; but even then the ideas of the music were more interesting than the actual music, because the music didn't touch me. It would be after hearing Schönberg's "Three Pieces for the Piano," in the library, with the Kandinsky cover, where I almost died, because it was at that point for the first time in my life that I heard the music.

M And you say Cecil Taylor set you up to be hearing that.

A Yes, the early music.

M Cecil Taylor was influenced by that.

A Of course he was. But at the time--I mean, I didn't put all that together; this was very different "jazz" for me, and it was not tonal in the way I had been thinking of tonality.

M I guess where I'm trying to get to is, like, when we talked about Wagner and the European traditional stuff that influenced you, we're talking about a tradition that hasn't been touched by African America. But when we talk about the trans-African sector in America, we're talking about a whole culture and people who had to find their way in the dominant culture.

A Yes. And we're also talking about different time cycles. When I was growing up, I didn't like Wagner either. When I was growing up, I didn't like Stockhausen; I thought they were all totally irrelevant. And I didn't know about Frank Johnson or William Grant Still, so only later, after Schönberg, when I actually heard the music, in a totally notated space, it was liberating. Suddenly, I was starting to be able to hear Bach, his music. Because before that, it was always, like "what's all the big fuss about?"

M And you heard Ornette and Roscoe and all these people before you heard bebop; so you got to bebop through the really out guys.

A Well, not exactly. I heard Dave Brubeck; that was bebop. Tristano, that was bebop, Gigi Gryce, Jazz Lab Quintet, that was bebop; some Jackie McLean…but I had a narrow experience, and hearing Roscoe and Threadgill would make me go back to broaden my experience.

Let me go back to William Grant Still. In talking about this area of the music, we're not talking about me as a young guy, we're talking about me moving through the late '60s and into the '70s. I'm evolving my own ideas at the same time. It makes a lot of sense, the connection between Bartok and William Grant Still, although I would experience in academia, and I won't name names, a profound disrespect for the African American composers tradition. Again, it was marginalized and basically written off as irrelevant. William Grant Still--do you know his music?

M A little bit.

A I think he was awesome.

M He was kind of influenced by Bartok? He also wrote some twelve-tone stuff, didn't he?

A Some; he studied with Varése and rejected it. Basically, this guy has something like 9 operas.

M What about Ulysses Kay?

A I think he's still alive. T.J. Anderson…this whole tradition; Olly Wilson. This whole tradition, Leo Smith and I, starting in the late '60s, we started to explore this music. We were shocked--I know I was shocked. Leo's always been a much deeper scholar than me, even as a young man, so I was like killing myself trying to keep up with him. He knew more about Ellington, for instance, than me.

M Funny story from Europe. Günter Sommer and Peter Kowald and Leo together in their trio. When Günter first heard Leo, he thought, "I have to be the black guy in this group, because I, Günter Baby Sommer, the East German jazz musician, have to be the black drummer, because this guy is playing like Schönberg or whatever." [laughter] "Was is das, es ist nicht richtig!" [laughter]

A Leo Smith is a great American visionary, and we'll get to him later. William Grant Still, and the continuum of African American composers would not only be the template that I would build upon, but their work would represent a confirmation that there was more to the African American experience than what I

had been taught, even in the African American community. Because I didn't hear their music when I was growing up; no one talked about their music, or even knew about it.

M When we do get into your work…

A We'll get into my work in the next five years, the way we're going, but I love this.

M What I'm noticing, though, is that of all these influences that you've mentioned, none have gone into the territory that you've gone into with your work, your actual body of music in terms of integrating improvisation, out kind of sound spaces, notation.

A It just depends on who you're talking about. W. C. Handy started writing music, published the first notated blues; Scott Joplin was not an improviser, but we have to look at these guys with respect to their time period and what was possible. William Grant Still, for instance, was very interested in the composite tradition but was not an instrumentalist or improviser himself, so you're right, there was a limitation there. But at the same time, this guy would compose across the spectrum from solo piano music all the way to an opera cycle that has never been performed. His work is neoclassic in the same sense as Bartok--taking melodies, ethnic melodies, folk musics, and building a symphonic logic out of them. William Grant Still would do the same with blues, put it in a symphonic context. That was revolutionary in his time period. And the actual music is as unique and as separate as Bartok, but we never talk of it like that. This is my point, that that continuum would just be marginalized; it doesn't matter, it wouldn't be integrated into a Charles Ives--we talk about Charles Ives and his move toward dissonance and complexity, but William Grant Still's music was exploring fresh materials, in his use of blues scales, in his decision to bring it into a symphonic context, but it's just not talked of in that way; it's kind of…

M Because of American cultural politics.

A Because of American cultural politics, this is my point. Florence Price's "Symphony in E" is not even played any more, but it was considered a very important composition in the early '30s.

M Ruth Crawford Seeger, maybe we should mention her too; because what we're talking about now is areas that are really of great interest to ethnomusicologists, like Bartok and Ruth Crawford Seeger, but not William Grant Still.

A Yes. And before talking about Ruth Crawford Seeger, I'd have to go back and say the great Charles Seeger's music has also been kicked out, and this was like a point of definition for world music psychologies. Charles Seeger is very important; we don't celebrate this great American master. It's from Charles

Seeger, and from Henry Cowell, another great master, whose tonal clusters would define and isolate another component, which would set the stage for Ruth Crawford Seeger, who studied with both of them, who was the recipient of both their works.

M How would you explain the prominence of Charles Ives as the American icon he is now, in terms of what we've been saying about coalition politics and the music industry and all that. Why did he get seized upon as the big spokesman?

A He was a New Englander. What kind of American is he, English, German, or what?

M English, I think.

A And what is Mr. Seeger?

M I don't know.

A Charles Ives was a recipient of the East Coast intellectual quadrant that Spiro Agnew talked about; and even though he experienced rejection and hard times, his work was a component of the East Coast intellectual platform, even in rejection and opposition. He would make his fortune in insurance, went to Harvard…that is why we talk of Charles Ives as opposed to Henry Cowell, whose sexual experiences would require sidelining him. But Charles Seeger is the man, and William Grant Still is an African American whose work was awesome on the scale of Wagner. But before William Grant Still, Scott Joplin.

M But how would you explain him in terms of becoming a great American icon too? Was he appropriated in some way?

A Well, his work would come along at a time when the piano would become a part of the salon culture of America, when the piano roll would be introduced. Ragtime would become very popular; but Ragtime, of course, was a composer's music. Joplin was not a leading exponent of the improviser's Ragtime, but he was able to translate it into the notated space and achieve success, but they would not accept the opera or the grand ideas. This is why the man became a depressive and eventually lost it. He was the beginning of the continuum that I'm a part of. But I consider him a great American master. After him, William Grant Still as a dynamic master, kind of like Wagner but not as encompassing in terms of bringing in a mythology. Although the operas--have you ever heard the operas? I have one on videotape. He's dealing with African Americans, placing them in mythological contexts and dealing with the battle of good and evil, a la Wagner. This isn't to say he's a point of definition for that integration, Wagner's the point of definition. I'm only saying that Joplin was a small-time poor guy like myself who had great dreams, and his work would respond to the improvised restructural strategies of Ragtime as well as the dynamics of Chopin. So you

have a Chopin-Ragtime integration that was uniquely American, that he tried to, that he did in fact parlay, transform, expand into the operatic context. He wrote two operas; one was lost.

M Treemonisha and what else?

A I can't remember the name of the other one. But it's lost, it's never been performed. But it would be at that point that we can start talking of the grand African American composer's tradition, Joplin into William Grant Still. The next group would be an academic group that was interesting but also complex, because that group would be a part of the African American middle and upper class that would draw its information mostly from the academy, while at the same time drawing on African American thematic materials. That group was greatly misunderstood, but it was a complex group because in many ways they would accept second-place status. We're going to see them reappear in the next twenty years, now that the Southern strategy is back, guys are graduating from college; they're going to start writing correct African American notated music, papers; some of them will achieve success. But the success is predicated on that second-class status.

session 6
A For me, the importance about talking about that continuum would be healthy for the interview, because my interest in Europe doesn't supersede my interest in myself or in the American and African American masters.

M Where did we get with the last interviews? We talked about the African American composers, and we talked about the jazz masters, and Korea…

A Did we talk about Frank Johnson?

M Yeah.

A Because he's important to me, even though, if I would be honest, I only discovered Frank Johnson when I was in academia. This is part of the problem of the culture, this sector doesn't have musics available; the documentation is so spotty. A record comes about with a print run of 500 copies; then I, listening to "Tristan and Isolde" last night, and the way I've been playing "Treemonisha" again--and I really like "Treemonisha"--and I've been reading about Scott Joplin's life and really identifying with this guy. I'm going to go to Borders maybe tomorrow and buy the two books on W.E.B. DuBois.

M I saw a book review of that on TV. Do you know about the Book TV channel?

A Yes. That's a very nice channel. Guys come and talk about the books that have just come out. So he must have been on it, the guy who the New York Times Book Review…

M No, the guy who wrote the book was on it.

A Yes. This is why I want to get that book. But, for instance…

M Let me ask you this while I'm thinking of it: on the subject of Europe, how do you feel you've been received as a composer over there in the Western tradition?

A I think DuBois, in this book review, put his finger right on my situation, excatly. He said that, basically, African American intellectuals, and people like myself, whatever we do is irrelevant, as far as affecting the debate of ideas.

M You seem to have more of a following in Europe, though, and an understanding; are you saying that they're more concerned with you as a black exotica kind of thing?…

A No, I feel that there's a small group of people in Europe who really are interested in my work, and I thank them. Were it not for their interest, what work I've had in terms of performance in the last 20 years would have been cut 7/9ths…

M Peter Niklaus Wilson seems to admire your compositions.

A Peter's been very supportive, and a real friend; the book he did on me, for example, and the books that Graham Lock did…I thank the Europeans and I thank those individuals who have supported my work in some way.

M The London Composers' Orchestra…

A The London Composers' Orchestra; but to respond to your question about my work in composition, I mean, you know, I don't get performances of my compositions, especially the large pieces; the piece for 4 orchestras has never actually been performed. And I understood that when I embarked on this direction as a young guy; it was always clear to me that, based on reading what happened to William Grant Still, and what was happening in my own life, looking around at performances, it was clear that I was not going to be able to have many performances. Later, that's why I left Paris…

M The ideal situation would be one in which, for instance, say, Stockhausen would be aware of you as a peer, and everyone else would see you in the discourse too?…

A I don't hope for that, nor would I necessarily think that Stockhausen would see me as a peer. I mean he's an older guy, and he is in a different circle, and I don't know how interested a guy like Stockhausen would be in my work, since my understanding of him is that he's basically doing his own music and he's open a

little bit to the colleagues he came up with, but he's not that interested in even the post-Webern or post-Stockhausen guys; he's kind of fighting to do his own work; and I think I learned a lot from him about how important it is to generate your own enthusiasm about your own work and try to push forward. He's had support, and as a European he's been able to take advantage of his position in postwar Europe. There's no reason for me to assume that a guy like Karlheinz Stockhausen would even be open to my work but there's every reason for me to continue to always recognize his work, since he's one of my fathers, whether or not he knows it; he's one of the musical fathers whose work helped me define my life, and part of that for me involves recognizing the responsibility to acknowledge it.

M Getting back to the African American continuum, you did mention Cecil Taylor and the AACM a little bit. Why don't we just start with Tadd Dameron and go through the ones you mentioned.

A Let's start with Duke Ellington, because Tadd comes after. As a young guy, I loved Duke Ellington's music, but I only experienced a very narrow spectrum of it. In fact, I have Leo Smith and Muhal Richard Abrams to thank for encouraging me to explore Mr. Ellington's music more. At 55 years old, I look at Mr. Ellington and have a profound debt to him, that he was able to fight so long for his music, and to achieve so many successes musically in so many different areas. His work has many different levels of inspiration for me, as an African American with integrity; as a composer who has many different periods to his music; as a composer who participated in the challenges of creative music in his time period and met with so many different successes: integration of composition with improvisation. Of course, this subject really isn't complete without acknowledging the great work of Fletcher Henderson, and the success of his compositional musics. I hear there's a new record out with Bob Wilbur playing Fletcher Henderson's arrangements for Benny Goodman, including compositions that were just discovered, and never played. This is a CD I will buy. Bob Wilbur is a virtuoso saxophonist and clarinetist who is kind of a part of the revivalist movement of the '50s; he's a post-Sidney Bechet stylist, but an original one, he has his own music, really a great musician. He's gone about his music with total integrity and respect, and his work is generally pushed to the side and not appreciated; he's an American who lives now, I think, in London. He's a great player, I've heard him play live.

M Pushed aside as being sort of retro?

A Yes, when in fact his music is not retro. For me it's the problem again of definitions, how we talk of past, present and future as being separate units. He's connected with the earlier musics, that's for sure, but it's not a revivalist connection in the sense that he's jumped aboard some band wagon; rather he's following his muse and building upon his real interests, which were based in that period. So he has a new CD out now with Fletcher Henderson arrangements. I

mention it because it triggered in me the importance of Fletcher Henderson's music. Fletcher Henderson has been either ignored or whatever. But, for instance, line-forming logics can be viewed as a point of definition in Fletcher Henderson's work. Imbalanced extended structures; fresh integration of composition and improvisation, not just a little head or riff, but an architectonic compositional perspective that he brought to the music, even before Duke Ellington.

M So what do you see as the link between Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington?

A The link would be that Duke Ellington's work would build upon the propositions of Fletcher Henderson, in the sense of extended orchestration, and continued evolution and exploration and synthesis-conceptual models that would explore that dichotomy between intention composition versus improvisation and targeted improvisatory strategies. Fletcher Henderson would be one of the main composers to open that door. Duke Ellington, then, starting with the "jungle musics," would introduce fresh rhythmic strategies, more extreme conceptual models, building upon individual uniqueness, integrating that into the orchestral context. Mr. Ellington…it's outrageous to look at the spectrum of musics he's contributed. "Black, Brown and Beige" is an example of the beginning of the extended structural models; a sense of Africanisms that, in terms of poetic logics, like William Grant Still and other of my heroes, would start to mine the folk musics and blues musics of the African American experience.

M It seems like in your Composition Notes, a lot of times you write the phrase "fresh timbral possibilities;" and it seems like starting with James Reese Europe we started to get these growling trumpets and vocal sounds in the instruments. Then you think of like Chu Berry with Fletcher Henderson having a distinctive voice; then Duke seems to have really flowered that whole concept in his band.

A Exactly--and there's another person that we need to also include, and that's the great work of Charlie Mingus, which is post-Ellington. But Duke Ellington's various Suites, the Queen Suite, Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue--that music is very important. In saying that, I'm not saying anything fresh on any level; in fact, I'm very happy that we are now in the Ellington period, where serious scholarship is starting to come out on his music, right as we move into the third millennium. In every way, that is right on time and correct.

M When we talked about Louis Armstrong last time, we talked about the two side, the creative side and the appropriated side. How would you talk about Duke Ellington in the history of that double-edged sword? Because obviously now at the Lincoln Center, Duke Ellington is right at the center of that too.

A Yes.

M How would you distinguish your own relationship with Duke Ellington's music from, say, the Lincoln Center's?

A Well, I see Duke Ellington as occupying the same position that we give to JS Bach, that his music is all-encompassing. And yet, his music is politically being used in this period to stifle guys, like myself, when in fact his whole career was a struggle, as an African American person, to have the right to do his music and to have it respected based on his value systems. For instance, there was a period when Duke Ellington's music was put down in the jazz community. It was being undermined by a viewpoint of trans-Africanisms that would say that his extended compositions were somehow not correct for an African American composer, that it was too Eurocentric. So, you know, here I am fifty years later getting the same kind of viewpoint, where parameters are being set that seek to determine what is correct for an African American composer, that seek to reduce the dynamic possibilities of the music as opposed to seek to understand the breakthroughs, the possibly unique possibilities that have come from the African American experience. So Mr. Ellington then had the same objections put on his music.

M I remember reading Stanley Crouch critiquing Ornette Coleman as someone who really couldn't cut it in the African American, so he got into the European paradigm somehow. Do you know where he was coming from with that?

A Stanley has been quite effective in the last 20 years as far as positing a viewpoint about what constitutes the correct aesthetic parameters and alignment for African American music. From the beginning, we've always had a different viewpoint about this subject. When I think about my understanding of Stanley's viewpoint, I find myself feeling that it, again, is a reductionist one, that on the one hand insists on the inclusion of Duke Ellington and Charlie Mingus, and rightfully so--that continuum of composers as equal to anything that has been created by the European or European American composers community. But on the other hand, his viewpoint of Eurocentric in many ways has distorted his understanding of African American creativity. In doing so, Stanley's viewpoint, in my opinion, is involved with those reductionist forces that have historically sought to limit the vibrational spectrum of African American experience. In my view, while on the one hand, Stanley's writing and political decisions have been very important for elevating and exposing people to the work of Ellington and Fletcher Henderson, and the blues tradition; on the other hand, his work is directly connected to the suppression of African American composite vibrational dynamics. For me, this has been the tragedy of his viewpoint.

I would also say that if we were in a more balanced situation in the media, I don't think Stanley Crouch's viewpoint would be so harmful, if other viewpoints were given equal attention and equal treatment in the media. Then his viewpoint would be one among many. But what we're seeing instead is a suppression of perspectives. I don't blame Stanley Crouch for his viewpoint, he has a right to

have it; but for his viewpoint to be the only one that gets out there…this has created a problem, I feel.

M What do you make of his insistence on using the term "Negro?"

A It's fine with me if he wants to use that term. Twenty years ago everyone was saying you had to refer to African Americans as black. I see his use of the term as consistent with his composite attempts to transport the musics back into the 1920s and '30s. All of this, in my opinion, is part of this retrogressive movement. He wants jazz to be jazz, negroes to be negroes, jazz musicians to wear suits; he wants one rhythmic logic, that he calls swing; he wants idiomatic certainty, from a continuum that was based on evolution and responding to the dynamics of real time. Just as, in my opinion, the devices of the bebop language are the sonic bones from that continuum, the use of the word "negro" is only relevant in the sense that psychologically, this is an attempt to pull everything back to the '20s again, and to celebrate the psychology of the '20s and '30s as representing idiomatic and vibrational certainty.

M What do you make of their inclusion of Ornette Coleman into the canon, as sort of the final word?

A I think Ornette Coleman's use of the blues has been a vehicle that has helped him. They include Ornette Coleman, but they don't include, for instance, Cecil Taylor, who Stanley likes to talk of as including too much Oliver Messaien in his music. In saying that, Stanley is really helping us to see how little he really knows about the European art musics, and how little he knows about Messaien's music. I think Ornette Coleman's Texas blues qualities have helped him. I guess I would also say the dynamics of the early quartets; it's kind of hard to deny. But then again, they've been able to deny so much music. I guess they could have simply denied all of Ornette Coleman's music; but I think it's the blues quality…

M How would you distinguish Cecil Taylor from Messaien?

A His language is totally original. Cecil Taylor would be the beginning of the more propositional logics, which is actually the term I use to talk about my own music; but his concept of unit structures, modular structures, modular rhythmic and pitch structural material, could be called the beginning of propositional compositional models. And his actual language on the piano is a kind of a composite language that takes into account everything, a trans-idiomatic language. To reduce it to Oliver Messiaen is in fact to misrepresent his music.

M How would you describe Messiaen's music?

A I'd describe it as a polyharmonic music, image-logic music--i.e. birds--maybe polytonal is better than polyharmonic. Kind of an extension, in a strange kind of way, of Romantic music. It continues with the basic propositions of the post-

Wagner musics, but infuses that tradition with fresh timbre spaces. It explores the extremities of that position, and makes inroads to the linear space, using the same conceptual propositions of the post-Wagner musics, with a more active rhythm, exploring fresh instrumental combinations in conjunction with the response from the great French tradition. In fact, as part of that response period of nationalism that occurred after World War I, and solidified by World War II--not only in France, but I'm thinking Shostakovitch--the whole period from 1900 to 1940 was a period of responding to the post-Germanic musics, and the response basically was a response that included fresh timbre possibilities, i.e. new instruments, even bringing in the saxophone, i.e. Ravel, Debussy, lighter timbres, bringing in the influence from world culture, i.e. whole tone scales, Messiaen looking to the world group, to South America, the great music of Chavez, for example. Messiaen' music would take in a broader concept space, and react from a broader world music perspective than Wagner. Taking that position, his work would fulfill the dynamic implications of the modern Germanic musics that Wagner represents, without changing the principle conceptual components of that continuum, but rather fulfilling it to demonstrate what we call the modern musics.

M Do you have some sense of where Stanley was coming from when he made that comparison between Cecil and Messaien? What was he trying to say?

A I'm not sure…but I recall conversations with Stanley where he would say a solo sounded like Messaien. The only thing I could understand was that he was talking about a particular voicing or rhythmic device…but I didn't agree with him then or now. Certainly the modern vocabulary calls for, or would include, non-tonal-ish devices, or devices which were trans-tonal-ish, but trans-tonalism in itself doesn't necessarily imply anything, since tonality was the big breakthrough for the Europeans; trans-tonality really transports the music back to the world community again, opens up an awareness of possibilities that are multi-hierarchical, in terms of influence, and in terms of possibilities. Mr. Taylor's decision to move from the tonal musics into what I'll call atonality--I don't know how Mr. Taylor would refer to the harmonic or tonal evolution of his music--but that in itself can't necessarily be reduced to any one composer. That is to say, there most certainly could be a connection, or one could make a connection between Cecil's music and Messaien's, but you could also make a connection between Cecil and Stravinsky, Cecil and Bartok, Cecil and Dvorak, Cecil and Ellington, Cecil and Mingus, Cecil and Herbie Nichols--not to mention the great work of Dave Brubeck, who Cecil would listen to as well. What we're really describing is the evolution of harmonic psychologies going outside of tonal music; to simply cast Cecil's music as an attempt to parody Messaien, or forward components of Messaien's music, is a profound distortion. Not to mention the actual music itself is unique, whether we're talking of the early period of Cecil Taylor, the period which, idiomatically and conceptually, had the attributes of a post-bebop music that included phrase cluster configurations, a metric tempo, but extreme harmonic compositions to the point of actually verging on atonality

anyway, including the use of imbalanced compositional and structural realities; that early period of his music is totally unique. Later, the period represented by Live at Montmartre, for instance, the trio with Jimmy Lyons and Sunny Murray--that's a very different music than the musics he would demonstrate on the "Unit Structures" CD, which would be a more propositional--or what I would call a more modular structural logic, as opposed to propositional…Yes, the word "propositional" when referring to Cecil Taylor I would throw out, and in its place I would put "modular structural logics," starting with Unit Structures. From that point, the velocity and energy components of Mr. Taylor's music would be unique, both in the sense of his individual language and the concept space itself, not just as virtuosity. I would recommend that a person go back to Nuits de la Fondation Maeght, with Sam Rivers and Jimmy Lyons and Andrew Cyrille playing with Cecil Taylor. It's a very different kind of concept space, it's not a normal kind of concept space; Cecil's always playing. His playing becomes a kind of generating fabric that everything is kind of put on top of in a way that's really different from John Coltrane or Ornette Coleman. It was not a sequential structure space music as much as this motivic space that expanded and extended with its own unique kind of energy quality. I think he's a great man.

M Tying this up with Duke Ellington, who we know was a big influence on Cecil, we know that Cecil, as a composer, has developed a style of talking his big bands through the charts rather than notating things for them. You mentioned him as a big influence on you and your work. How would you distinguish your path as a composer from his, and how would you describe both of those as part of the Duke Ellington continuum?

A I would say that we can look at Mr. Ellington's music as one that forwarded the propositions of Fletcher Henderson, in terms of composition-improvisation integration; as a music that would establish the broadest possible conceptual space for the creative composer and instrumentalist, the understanding being that as an instrumentalist, Ellington is a great pianist. I've always felt that his piano music was overlooked because of his great successes in composition; as an improviser, he continued that tradition of real-time experience on the instrument, and his work with his creative orchestra would basically set the standard for American creative music, especially that continuum of American creative music. After Mr. Ellington, I would focus on the great work of Charlie Mingus as a logical-unlogical heir to that same tradition. Tadd Dameron fits in that same tradition; it doesn't have the same spectrum as Mr. Ellington's in the sense of completed compositions that demonstrates the total spectrum of the music. Mr. Dameron's music, for me, is interesting in the same way that we talk of…oh, maybe Ralph Shapey…but that might not be the best example…

M Who?

A Ralph Shapey, the American composer whose work is modern music, but it has its own particular qualities. It doesn't challenge the law structure, or the

qualities of concept space that had been demonstrated; at the same time, it is unique in terms of the problems that it tackles. Tadd Dameron's work is connected, in my opinion, to the solidification of what we call bebop and that period. I would also say the great work of Dizzy Gillespie and his creative orchestras in the big band tradition…all of that music--Tadd Dameron, Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Eckstine, Earl Hines a little bit--could be looked at as an area of creative orchestra music that would be important for clarifying the modern platform, what we call the bebop musics, postwar demonstration of extended chromaticism, harmonic complexity, unique integration between composition and improvisation.

The music of Charlie Mingus, and the reason why, for me, it's the next point after Duke Ellington, is because he would take the post-Ellington propositions and extend them to theater musics, to the world music platform in a different way. His work with poetry, in narrative musics, is unique. "The Eye of the Hurricane"…his song form musics, his combination logic musics, putting several different compositions together, to fuse music strategies, would be unique. His intervallic musics--compositions like "Eclipse" and "Weird Nightmare" would fulfill the extremities of the post-Ellington conceptual propositions. For that reason--not to mention that as an instrumentalist, he was a virtuoso, who also, like Cecil Taylor, in the latter part of his career, would adopt oral music strategies, would demonstrate a dynamically unique music universe--including his electronic music, what little he did. "Eye of the Hurricane"'s electronic components would be more image logics, adaptations of electronics as opposed to the work of some of the post-Webern electronic composers. Maybe not as elaborate as the "pure" electronic composers, but in the end it was a unique adaptation of the medium, in the same way that Varèse, who did not have opportunities to have experiences in electronic music that we would have hoped for, created "Poéme Electronique," a unique piece of music as far as I'm concerned. Charlie Mingus, whose efforts in this area were not extensive…even so, the little work he did I value greatly.

M You know, Mingus, I recall, also was pretty keen on oral transmissions of music rather than notation.

A In his later period, not in his earlier period.

M I read this article, an interview with Cecil in German, where he was being real adamant about the superiority of his method of talking people through their parts rather than notation, because he felt they got the music a whole lot more into their systems. You're a guy who's really taken notation far, and who relies on it in a way that puts off a lot of European players, and maybe a lot of players, and draws criticism. So how would you, again, distinguish the path you chose to take, maybe specifically with your use of notation, down that Ellington-Mingus continuum, from Cecil's or Mingus's oral methods?

A I would position my work as such: Duke Ellington's music as a fresh synthesis music demonstrating composition and improvisation; Charlie Mingus's as a post-Ellington music demonstrating the extremes of that position, plus extending into new global music domains; Cecil Taylor is a point of definition for modular structural devices, moving into the oral tradition, but even using that material modularly; and I see my work as a point of definition for propositional logics, in what I've come to call a tri-centric music; propositional logics as a way to talk about the connections in my music--in the house of the circle, the house of the rectangle, the house of the triangle. Tri-centric in the sense of the connection between domains, between the Tri-Centric writings and the actual compositions and the integration of those components. Propositional in the sense of in the house of the circle, a concept of language music as a point of definition for mutable logic syntax geometry as a way to create improvisatory language in the house of the circle. From that point, expanding the same information to the house of the triangle, to the architectonic domain; and from that point to create languages based on syntax and logic; propositional in the sense of defining strategies based on the twelve components of my system; from that point, propositional in the sense of defining language syntax, then architectonic syntax. From that point, defining synthesis integration point of definition with respect to ritual and ceremony and philosophical components.

So how would I distinguish my work from Cecil Taylor's? For me, Cecil Taylor's music demonstrates a modular structural space that would extend into world music vis-à-vis santaria, with an occult component that is holistic; my work, for me, demonstrates a multi-hierarchical thought unit that is tri-centric, and when I talk of it in this time period, I talk of a tri-centric music that demonstrates propositional constructs, syntactical constructs; tri-centric as a thought unit that demonstrates a mechanism, or structural mechanism, or active mechanism; and finally, tri-centric as a thought unit that demonstrates an occult position--which is to say, no wonder I'm broke.

M Actually, I did follow that very well, because I've been through it with you…

A Of course.

M …but we need to come back to it when we actually talk about your work as the sole focus to sort of unpack and decode it. But what I'm wondering about at this point is specifically just the use of notation. Would you say that the use of conventional notation is part of your fulfillment of the house of the rectangle?

A Yes.

M And that its relationship--I mean in other words the uniqueness of your use of conventional notation lies in its relationship to the house of the circle and the house of the triangle?

A The house of the rectangle. But let's look at that. In the house of the rectangle, which in my system is really the house of targeted intention. When we talk of notation in my music, we're not talking of one kind of anything. I have, in the 400-something compositions that I've worked with, I've sought to demonstrate traditional notational models, my own systems of notation, and targeted verbal directives. So my work in the house of the rectangle can't be reduced to one parameter of notation.

M So what would your response be to Cecil's or anyone's decision to be so orally focused, and also maybe Mingus's, and even Ellington's, in the sense that he used to sort of make a composition in a day and then just sort of talk it over to his band?

A I have that component in my music as well; I've tried to--I see my music as a point of definition for the trans-idiomatic musics, and the trans-idiomatic processes, and the trans-vibrational spiritual lane. By that, I'm saying that there has been no one way for me, no one methodology; in fact, the system that I've built has twelve different ways. So as far as your question is concerned, I respect the gentlemen that we've mentioned and their methodologies and the way they've developed their music. When speaking of my own music, I would say that many of those arguments don't apply to my work, because, for one thing, I'm not interested in the "democratic" or "conservative" party; I'm not interested in notation or improvisation; my work, on the occult level, I speak of as navigation through form. By that I just mean that I've put together different components based on whatever the project is. I disagree with the idea that improvisation or oral information is any more advanced than notated or totally fixed information; I think those are the arguments of the twentieth century, and that in the twenty-first century, with the tri-centric thought unit, that those arguments aren't relevant to what I'm trying to do. As far as I'm concerned, the state of freedom, and the experiences in the house of the circle, are only one component of my music, and that's what differentiates me from the great trans-European tradition and the great trans-African tradition, in terms of preferential focus for any one domain.

M Okay. Sun Ra.

A For me, Sun Ra, like Charlie Mingus--and I guess Sun Ra would come before Charlie Mingus; they're really around the same time, but Sun Ra is slightly before him. Sun Ra, again, would be an artist, a great visionary whose work forwards the post-Ellington and world culture implications of the fourth and fifth restructural cycles. Actually, I would even go back and say of the first restructural cycle. In his music is demonstrated extended improvisation, collective improvisation; a composition like "Strange Strings" demonstrates a fresh timbre-logic state, integration of world music instrumentation; Sun Ra's music is a point of definition for composite aesthetics, reconnecting back into Africa, not being afraid of Europe as well; Sun Ra would expand his work into the house of the triangle and create a ritual and ceremonial music, including an occult position. Even more so

than Mingus, Sun Ra's music would demonstrate a unique creative universe that--and when I say even more than Mingus, I only mean that compositionally, this guy tackled problems from every direction. And like Ellington, he kept his same group of people together, had a family music, had a mysticism, reconnected back into Egypt, was not afraid of the world. Sun Ra's music would bring fresh perspectives to percussion music, would be a part of sound mass evolution; as an instrumentalist, even more than Ellington, demonstrated a unique music on the piano that encompassed the total spectrum of the music. He would also be among the first African American visionaries to include electronics; he was a multi-instrumentalist, playing organ and synthesizer. Every parameter, every quadrant of his music would demonstrate some fresh component of radiance, whether it was instrumentation, ritual and ceremony…plus, like a Gemini, he kept changing the name of his ensemble. So his work was the essence of American and African American and trans-African and finally world music: always growing and expanding and changing, and it functioned under his definitions. It was a mystical music. He also included dancers and singers; he was a point of definition for multimedia presentation, and redefining that in a way that encompassed Ellington and went back to before Ellington to the world of Vaudeville musics. Fletcher Henderson…

M And also out to Lex Baxter, this Lawrence Welk kind of easy listening stuff…

A Yes! And he had the insight to include Walt Disney as a part of his components, and a lot of people didn't understand that. I've talked with many musicians who had a very negative reaction to his inclusion of and respect for Walt Disney. As far as I'm concerned, that was a brilliant aesthetic move of Sun Ra's, because of course Walt Disney is an American pioneer and visionary.

M Do you see Sun Ra as part of the continuum of figures shunned by the African American community?

A Exactly, and this is taking place even in this time period. I hear the Ken Burns film coming out doesn't include him. What a tragedy, for a guy that great. Nor does it include George Russell. George Russell, as far as I'm concerned, is in the tradition of the restructuralist African American creative composer visionaries. His work would principally focus on timbre-logic components of the music, and he is responsible for the emphasis of lydian scalar strategies, which connects into the world music community. His decision to systematize his methodologies would be a point of definition for the creative music continuum, and make it possible for guys like me to start thinking in terms of the importance of systematizing their methodologies, and of moving toward a literary parameter as a component of the music work. George Russell would later evolve a rhythmic component from the rhythmic system of his music. His work is essential in seeking to understand the evolution of the trans-African, and trans-African American, and finally the trans-American music continuum.

M So let's polish this off with the AACM.

A Well, Mike, let me first say thank you. The AACM. I think the AACM will one day come to be seen as one of the important junctures in time in American music, especially in the history of trans-African American musics. The AACM comprised a group of African American men and women who were dedicated to responding to the composite challenge of creative music in a way that has historical implications. In this organization, there was never an attempt to define one way for the individual, or one idiom that is correct for the individual. Rather it was a platform that was mutually supportive of the individual and that encouraged research and exploration and fraternalism. I believe that when the true histories are written that the AACM will come to be viewed for what it was, that being the second juncture after Reconstruction, the first being from the 1880s to the 1920s, that would define the fresh perspectives for African American and finally world music dynamics for the third millennium.

About the individuals in the AACM: first, Muhal Richard Abrams. I think he's a great man, and I'm just totally shocked that as we enter into the third millennium that so little of his work is known or understood or appreciated. He's a great composer, a post-Ellington composer whose work is unique; he has theater music, he was doing plays in the '60s. His work has a post-Sun Ra component to it. His work is trans-idiomatic in the sense that he has a body of all-notated musics, all improvisatory musics; he has a music that contains the oral tradition and compositions that mix together in various ways unique to him composition and improvisation. As an instrumentalist, Muhal demonstrates the total history of the music in a way that is connected to Ellington. He was a pivotal figure in bringing musicians together in Chicago, and for that alone he occupies a special place in terms of his understanding of social responsibility and his desire to be a part of the community and to help young guys like myself to go back and study and reevaluate Louis Armstrong's music. My relationship to Armstrong as a young guy was just surface; I couldn't figure out what all the talk was about. It was only after studying with Muhal Richard Abrams and learning from Leo Smith that I would gain an insight into Mr. Ellington and Jelly Roll Morton and composers I had missed as a young guy.

Leo Smith. I think Leo Smith is another of the great restructural masters of this time period whose music has just been pushed aside; there's been no attempt to understand Leo Smith, but, like me, he was interested in building a music system, not just a music. He was the first of the musicians from my generation to write about his music. His concept of sound units would be the first of the methodologies that would be defined in a very clear way. Leo Smith has a body of notated musics that encompasses everything from his own system, like mine. In fact, anything that I could say about myself I could say that Leo Smith has a complimentary music that comes with its own unique qualities. He's demonstrated a body of musics and a universe of perspectives that should be

essential, and will, in the future, be essential, once the information is made available, for creative musicians and composers in the third millennium.

M So maybe what we're saying for academic research is that the information is there, but has yet to be explored.

A Exactly. Roscoe Mitchell. When I got out of the army, Roscoe Mitchell had already found his own music. I mentioned before that we were at Wilson Junior College together. Even then, as a stylist on the alto saxophone, he had his own music, apart from Ornette Coleman. He had already found something special, his own sound, his own rhythm, his own way of playing on changes. When I got out of the army, the record "Sound" had already been recorded, I think. That record alone, had he done nothing else--just as we might say John Coltrane, had he died after "Giant Steps" would be considered a great restructural saxophonist who brought something fresh to the music in terms of harmonic dynamics, compositional dynamics, sheets of sound, just what he did with the instrument in terms of vocabulary syntax--this was also true of Roscoe Mitchell by the time of the record "Sound." Since then, Roscoe Mitchell has gone on to build a unique universe of musics that isolate different conceptual problems, methodological devices; Roscoe Mitchell is a multiinstrumentalist whose work would define contemporary multiinstrumentalism in the '60s; before him, if you played flute, clarinet, and saxophone, that was enough. After Roscoe Mitchell, you had to play the whole spectrum of the woodwind family and then also make your own instruments. Roscoe Mitchell has produced a unique chamber music, body of musics; his orchestral musics are uniquely his own; his improvisatory musics are very different from mine; he works out his improvisations in a very different kind of way. Then when you hear his solo concerts, they're worked out very differently than the language music strategies that I would work out for myself. I just think when the true histories of the music are written, this is another guy who cannot simply be looked at as a good instrumentalist, although he is that and more; or a composer of particular compositions; rather, he has produced a universe of music.

M Borah Bergman was telling me--he's played a lot with Roscoe lately, you know--and he said Roscoe had told him recently "now my star is rising," because of those stories in the New York Times, and Down Beat.

A He's like 58 years old, and finally his star is rising. I only hope his star will keep rising and that they will give him more opportunities. He has vocal musics, theater musics…and, of course, all of that is separate from his work with the Art Ensemble of Chicago, one of the greatest groups in music history. That group is a direct affirmation of Roscoe's input as well.

session 7

M Do you have anything to say about any differences you might have had with the AACM? Did you have an experience there of people growing apart, having clashes, or whatever?

A There are many people who might feel that I've separated from the AACM and that I have some individual complexity, but in fact that's never been the case. Rather, my life has just taken me into a different space, and I've grown up and want to do my own music; and just the events of my life have kind of seen me go into my own space. But in fact when I think about my life, I've basically in the past 30 years built on the information I learned in Chicago from the AACM. If I'm not on a given concert by the Experimental Band in this time period, it's only because I don't work very much, and when I work I want to do my own music. So I can understand how in some quarters my decision to be by myself might be seen as a break with the AACM. There have been different periods in time--say, in the last 15 years where I've heard people express that I've had a problem with the AACM and have disconnected--but that doesn't really describe what has happened. It's more just that I'm not 25, I'm 55, I've evolved my own processes, have had my own experiences, and would like to do my own work. But my feeling about those guys has remained consistently one of love, friendship and respect.

M How about Joseph Jarman? We didn't mention him.

A I think Joseph Jarman, again, is an example of a restructural visionary master whose work has had a direct impact on me on many different levels. It was Joseph Jarman who opened up correspondences into theater musics; his "Non-cognitive Aspects of the City" was very important to me, not to mention the live concerts I went to. He's a great composer, a great multiinstrumentalist; he's evolved a very special music that is particular to him and his interests. And like Leo Smith, Muhal Richard Abrams and Roscoe Mitchell, his work has not been dealt with. He was always very interested in multimedia musics, and many of his works would define, for me, fresh possibilities for the future in terms of interaction dynamics, musical language and syntax. I think Joseph is a very spiritual and mystical person, a difficult guy to understand on one hearing; his work is the kind of effort that requires sustained listening. There are many different levels to it. But I have nothing but respect for this guy, I've learned a lot from him.

Also, Leroy Jenkins. He's another example of a dedicated American master who has done so much but received so little from our country in terms of acknowledgment or work possibilities. Leroy Jenkins is a post-Stuff Smith violinist who has advanced creative violin playing into the modern age. As a composer he has operas…

M His daughter was at Wesleyan. Did you meet her there?

A Oh yes; I saw her only once. We used to be very close, Leroy and I; I used to be very close with his family. In the past 15 years everyone has had to deal with

their particular dynamics, so I don't see him or his family very much any more. But yes, Chantille is her name, she went to Wesleyan.

Finally, I would mention George Lewis as an example of a restructural visionary musician whose work has yet to be talked about. George Lewis is the most incredible virtuoso trombonist that I've ever heard in my life. He can play anything; he's equal to Globokar, he's equal to any trombone player who's ever lived. As a composer, he has a broad spectrum of works that are trans-idiomatic; George Lewis is a point of definition for modern electronic music. In that domain he has demonstrated an interactive electronic music, his "Voyager" musics, which are second to none. He's just a very special composer. Like most of the musicians from the AACM, he's demonstrated and demonstrates a trans-idiomatic music experience, working in different domains. If the subject is chord changes and bebop, George Lewis could demonstrate if he wanted to a music that would make JJ Johnson back up. That's how efficient and proficient he is in that medium, and yet it's only one aspect of what he does. This is a guy who's played with Count Basie, as well as Muhal Richard Abrams and Roscoe Mitchell. As a scholar, George Lewis is equal to Leo Smith, and it doesn't get any better than Leo Smith in terms of scholarship. Leo is awesome, and so is George; they keep abreast of so many different areas. I miss being in their company more, because they would keep me straight with what books to read and what to keep up on, because they're really omnivorous intellectuals.

M This seems like the time to start getting into your music, and also your intellectual interests in books and so on, both together. Maybe the best way for me to do it would be, since we've been through my book on you and a couple of papers over the last decade, to start with what we haven't covered, what you're doing right now, namely the operas and the Ghost Trance musics, and to kind of work back from them into your system.

A I think it would be easier for me to go from the early part to what I'm doing now. I think it was in 1966 when I broke into the fresh space and found a way for myself, because that's what I was looking for: a way where I could contribute to this incredible movement that luck made me a part of. It was in 1966 that I started to build the components of my music. It was after the improvisatory solo concert, when I started to sketch a different way, that I would really enter into the universe of my own music. Starting then, the language musics would become a genesis component of my experiences in the house of the circle. It would be at that point, in seeking to better understand the question of identity, that I would start to isolate the different components of my music. As Leo Smith and I have always talked about and agreed on, the act of defining a methodology and a way of procedure would separate our work from everything, would give us the possibility to define something and walk away from it and go back to it and read it. That was important.

M When you say "identity," do you mean something like the proposition of existential identity, where you start expanding out and defining yourself step-by-step in a new way?

A By "identity" in this context I'm talking about identity for musical materials, for ideas and compositions, identity with respect to "what am I thinking?" So identity in the house of the rectangle; from a tri-centric perspective, in my system, involves taking materials from the house of the circle, the twelve geometric units; and, in the house of the rectangle, using that information to define architectonic possibilities that could give me the possibility to have a creative experience within a defined concept space.

M Did you call it the house of the circle back then?

A No. When I first started to build my system, I just spoke in terms of what I called language music.

M One language being the trill, one the long tone, and so on…

A Yes. With the language musics, it was a way to have improvisatory real-time experiences that would give me the hope of not bumping into the same idea, or using the same devices.It would help me as an improviser have different things to work with.

M And your system chart heading "Identity State" is the last column on the far right, which suggests an end point of definition after the processes of the language units, then the geometric units, finally producing the identity state.

A Yes. The house of the triangle in my music system is the house of synthesis logics. For me, this symbol is about integration, or synthesis. Going back to the house of the rectangle, the house of ideas, or architectonic structures, the Tri-Axium Writings [Braxton's three-volume set of books on his "re-philosophical system," published by Frog Peak Press, 1987] would make the combined information connection tri-centric. The Tri-Axium Writings would be a component of what I would later come to call "tri-centric." By that, I'm only saying that the concept of "tri-centric" would involve more than simply music compositions, and more than simply ideas, but rather a systemic context to apply that information (and those connections). That's why when I talk of my work, and when I use the word "tri-centric," I'm referring to what I call a "thought unit," as opposed to a composition, or one methodology. The idea of a "tri-centric thought unit" is a way of expressing the interconnection between the Tri-Axium Writings--which was an attempt to define a world perspective based on particular focuses--and specific examples of that focus, and then questions and answers, or dialectical extensions of that focus, and the music/architectonic system and symbolic ritual holistic system. The Tri-Axium Writings would give me an opportunity to have a context of ideas and perspectives, which is in the house of the rectangle. This

information would also include schematic modules that reduce the philosophical particular (target) arguments into "transpersonal" logic associations. [These schematics resemble the diagrams students used to parse grammatical elements of sentences, only in this case the circuitry is directed toward abstract social and philosophical/metaphysical concepts, charting their relationships]. The Tri-Axium Writings would also be a context where I would define my own terms, and create my own language. This for me was not a one-dimensional experience, but was rather a chance to establish the philosophical foundation of my music in the sense of given specifics to a general subject area; internal specific subject perspectives related to that subject area; questions and answers on one hand, and then coming back to the integration schematics, which is actually in the next triangle set under that--to define my own set of terms, and to establish my own emotional and feeling perspectives about the information I was writing about.

M As I recall, your first definition of Tri-Axium was drawing from the past in the present to define the future.

A Yes.

M So it had something to do with the tricentric nature of time.

A Thank you. Which is to say, for me, the tricentric musics are a transtemporal thought unit that integrates past, present, and future. The tricentric thought unit is a transtemporal thought unit that brings together fast, medium, and slow. The tricentric thought unit is a mechanism for individual, group, and finally spiritual unification. So three to the third power on its own plane in the third house, or the house of thought…

M It sounds a lot like Plato's ideas, abstract pure forms that all the material stuff comes from.

A What I tried to do, and what I've been trying to do is have a viewpoint that respects navigation through form, through life, and inside of that to build a construct that integrates my experiences on the various planes, so that does connect me to the mystic Europeans, the mystic Africans, and the mystic Africans.

M So the Tri-Axium Writings--and I remember these three components in the writings themselves, where you had the questions and answers, and the other specifics and the generalities, the ideas involved. Did they issue forth directly forth from this concept of time?

A As a young man, I wasn't as aware--I mean I have the perspective now of thirty years to go back and try to understand all that. When I was a young guy, I just wanted to do the best that I could do, and I understood at some point that I needed to integrate my world perspective, to have a better understanding of

where I was coming from, because everything was changing in the '60s. The Tri-Axium Writings came out in the '70s, so I had the vantage point of going back to the '60s, but I knew I needed to integrate that information. The Composition Notes would be the next degree of the thought system, looking only at systemic notions based on the compositions.

M You wrote those after the Tri-Axium Writings?

A Yes.

M So you started in '66 with the language musics, and you weren't really thinking of the house of the circle or anything like that yet, that was later, in retrospect?

A I was thinking of this in the '60s. I wanted to find a way that would help me negotiate a music in real time in the house of the circle. Also, I wanted to find a way that would help me to generate compositions that would be relevant to what I was learning. Needless to say, Stockhausen was a profound influence, and so was the great work of Ornette Coleman, and I felt I needed to find in the late '60s and early '70s some way, some sense of myself that could help me from becoming a clone, and that could help me sort out my own interests. So the Tri-Axium Writings, or the early language musics, would be a way to take in experiences in real time and then parlay that information into the house of the rectangle, as far as ideas--because you're improvising, and while you're improvising you get ideas and you have memory. And memory is in the house of the rectangle. What I wanted to do with those memories is take some of those ideas and use them to fashion an architectonic universe that compositionally could bring me back to some aspect of that original experience (memory)...

M You know this really reminds me of the way, when we talk about Plato and all that, and the whole…you know, I know a lot more about European history than I do African, and the ancient Greek music was categorized as Dionysian and Apollonian. So you had this duality between the improvised, which came from the East, the aulos players and the thinkers, the composers; and the earliest notated Western music is Greek.

A And your book, by the way, put it on me. I thank the creator of the universe that I met you, Mike Heffley, and those days in the snow in Eugene. You have put together so many things for me in your work; I've learned so much from you. But, in fact, in the book you did, you started to define what that was, and I was shocked. We tend to think that this moment in time is unique, and we think what we're dealing with is something nobody else ever dealt with--only to discover that in fact it's all always been there.

M And Greece was kind of the bridge between Africa and Asia and Europe: right in the middle there, with influences from all of them. And it was the cradle of the West, you know. And I'm thinking too that when the Germanic barbarians came

down, they didn't really get literate themselves until about 1000 A.D. At that point, Western chant was not written down, until around then. So we're talking about an oral tradition of material that was embedded in people, and they would improvise on it a little bit too, just like people improvise on notated material. But the whole project of writing down music in notes didn't really take off until around that time, and it too was a way of codifying in a traditional oral, mutable kind of space, and then codifying it to push it up further into new areas.

A Yes.

M And your experience…you started out as an improviser who got into the notational devices to capture something about the improvisation and push it up into a new improvisation, or a new musical experience. So we have the language musics starting, getting into your first codifications of open improvs. What came next?

A First, establishing the house of the circle--which would be the genesis component of my music system on the tri-plane formed by circle language musics; and then, under the circle, two more circles: intuition, and mutable logic transient states (and/or transitory strategies). Looking at the first circle, the circle of experience, and memory, I would take ideas from real-time improvisation and then look for compositions that would demonstrate that same logic. It would be at that point that I would start what I would call the formula musics, integrating components from real time, using numerology, friends' initials, chess moves--all of that would be in the house of the triangle, looking for ways to integrate method. Thus would begin the compositional musics.

I separated myself from the earlier compositions, which were attempts to write bebop compositions, in the army. In that time period I was very excited about finding fresh harmonic sequences à la "Giant Steps," so I would have a body of musics with fresh harmonic connections. Once I got in the AACM, I began to generate compositional paradigms from the improvisatory experiences I had in the language musics, and the formula musics would come out of that. After that, the schematic musics; that being a defined time space, and boxing in language-state directives in a linear single or multiple time space. The piece for four soprano saxophones (37), the piece for four pianos (16) are examples of schematic musics, extracting from improvisation with respect to reducing an improvisation to one of the key twelve languages, and just making schematic structures. And from there, evolving that idea into the dimensional structures, which would start to factor in color. The basic concept was that, more and more, I tried to extend defined components into the compositions. Later I factored in spatial dynamics. Of course, I was so interested in Stockhausen; whatever he did, I tried to find some equivalent that I could do that could be mine. I was in awe then as now of the great man. Thus, in the house of the triangle, I would transpose strategies from the circle to the rectangle involving both conceptual and/or syntactical logics that would later become an architectonic logic, which I

would then start to expand from different premises: formula musics, in this context, being the integration of different compositional and nonmusical elements; and later schematic musics, the positing of timespace and design as formal schemes to be filled with musical ideas.

In that period I tried the "golden section" and different compositional techniques. I discovered that you could get the same results, or that I could achieve a result that was meaningful to me, by evolving different kinds of premises as far as decision-making inside of schematic empty time spaces and positioning different focuses, and from that point adding color as an intuitive mechanism, expressive in the beginning; and then later, synthesis in the sense of dance and movement. Just trying to develop that line and also express it compositionally. So that would be the route of my evolution there.

Then in the house of the triangle, I would start to look for holistic strategies, ways to integrate idea, real-time experiences. Composition 113 would be an example of an attempt to demonstrate a holistic model [it features not only musical performance but a story staged before a visual backdrop].

House of the triangle, ritual and ceremonial musics, the beginning of storytelling.

M Would you say that piece was your first step into the opera space, 113?

A No, I'd say "Composition No. 76," the one called "For Trio," would be the beginning of composite integration. It was the beginning of the synthesis musics, the real house of the triangle established on its own plane.

M I remember all this from the book.

A I'm lucky to be talking to you, because--

M But I would never have connected it to the kernel of the opera; I would have thought it would be 113.

A 76, for me, was the beginning of a composite aesthetic approach, one that integrated vocalization, modular notation, color, with improvisation…

M That was your first modular notation.

A Yes. At the time, I didn't know I was going to go into opera, but I knew I was looking for a broader reality.

M Well, by the time you got to 113, weren't you thinking…well, even before that, what was that composition that Nickie did all the slides for?

A 96. That was an example of the new composite aesthetic attempts to integrate something that would function as something connected to the actual music logic and strategy.

M So it was right around this period then that you really did start thinking in terms of…well, since you always were interested in composite reality, this was the first time it started breaking through into actually representing composite reality.

A Yes, and I was also very influenced by Joseph Jarman, who had by 1970 created a whole poetic universe, a whole ritual and ceremonial universe, that has never been written about. I was starting to see that I could move into that direction as well. So I wanted to integrate color, and movement, and later intention.

M That's when you came up with all the charts of the movements?

A Yes. That whole period for me, the basic focus was on looking for ways to integrate components outside of sound outside the composition.

M But meanwhile all this is also kind of dictated by whatever opportunities are coming up in the real world for projects.

A That's right. And it was also dictated by what I had been learning about the real world. Stockhausen was doing "Inori," John Cage was working with Merce Cunningham; there were many people working in multimedia. Cage was doing happenings. He had been doing happenings in '54 and '55, so by the time I embarked upon this, there were many people I could look to to learn from. I was learning from Harry Partch, one of my heroes then and now; he had already walked this road and gone to another road. i say that to keep an honest perspective. When I embarked on this direction, I was on the shoulders of great masters who had already brought forth compositions and ideas that could help a young guy like me.

M Was the poem you wrote that Jeanne Lee sang the first time you ever wrote words of your own for a piece?

A I had been doing a little writing, dabbling in poetry in that period. So I was very happy to do the piece for Jeanne Lee. Then suddenly no more opportunities came up, and I just kind of stopped. So there's been an imbalance in my catalogue of works. I'd like to hope in this next decade to have more experiences and do more work in the song form tradition. But the composition for Jeanne Lee was an exception to the norm, and that period of writing poetry was a brief one that I'd like to get back to. In fact, I must say, Mike Heffley, in this period I'm starting to have dreams that I even remember. So I'd like to draw on these intuitive things.

M You know how you mentioned that when you improvise you get ideas and memories? I find when I improvise in a practice session for a long time that I specifically recall dreams that I'd totally forgotten. The process of improvising somehow…

A …rejuvenates your memory. Only in the last couple of weeks have I found myself waking up and remembering dreams. And they've been pretty far out lately, for whatever reason.

M The psychic terrain's undergoing a shift?

A That's how it feels; I'm having a lot of dreams about my mother, and my family; far out kind of dreams, actually. And I'm kind of rejoicing in it, although that might not be the right word. But I'm paying attention to it in a different kind of way. Up until the last couple of weeks, I can't say that I've been dealing with dreams in a real kind of way. In the '70s, during the attempts to demonstrate composite aesthetic types of music, like 96, I was only functioning from an intellectual awareness that it was time to start expanding the domain of decisions that I was working with, and to have more inclusive music strategies, and to build a system of movement.

M I notice in your Composition Notes, sometimes you'll have a little poetic way of describing a composition--like, an island where the wind is blowing and there's a storm or something…

A That's another thing about the Composition Notes and the decision to write about the music and, in writing about it, you can separate from it and it's still there. After doing X amount of analysis, I found that I could not really express what I wanted to express using a conventional relationship to what I would call conventional analysis, in that my analysis would have to become more and more poetic if I was going to tap what I was really trying to find.

M You know, this is an evolution that the German philosophers also had. Like Nietszche? They started out in college with the technical jargon of philosophy that they inherited. Heidegger too. At the end of their lives, they started writing stuff that read more like poetry.

A That's far out. It just goes to show, there's nothing new under the sun. I would arrive at a point where, in the Composition Notes--that's why, for me, it was so important to do that--and that's why, when you say poetry, I find myself thinking, "Ah, that's the other part of the three that I haven't evolved." I have Tri-Axium Writings, a philosophical system; I have Composition Notes, a methodological, architectonic system; but I don't have a poetic system. Now my plan is to write the story of Shala, the story of Ashmenton…

M But you've already started that, right? I mean, the libretti?

A But I see that in another category. I see the dialogues of the opera as representing something else. I would like to enter into the world of poetry; I'm not there yet…

M Like the myth of each one of those characters?

A No, for me that would be something separate. Poetry, just in terms of writing poetry, for me, would complete the circle on the tri-plane in the house that we're talking about, because we're really talking of triangle, and then circle three. And the bottom circle would be pure poetry. And that's going to be something that will help me.

M But all those librettos that you've written are not that?

A For me, in terms of my perception of myself, I look at the librettos as part of the tri-plane and, say, schematic composition, and then libretto.

M But don't you, when you actually write these operas, don't you write the libretto first?

A Yes.

M And then you write the music to go on top of it. So do you sort of let the rhythm of the words dictate the music?

A Yes.

M So if we're moving through your system then, up to the present, where would you pick up that thread again? Because I want to get to the operas and the Ghost Trance.

A Okay. Solo experiences, individual experiences, house of the circle; house of the rectangle; duo to orchestral experiences, extending from that point into the house of the triangle as a way of tying up the architectonic logics, which translate for me into structural dynamics on one rectangle; into interaction dynamics--composition as a way of defining interaction dynamics. And composition as a way of defining summation conceptual regions inside the music.

House of the triangle: ritual and ceremonial musics, the beginning of storytelling.

M When did that come in?

A In the time period of the 80s, with the story music works like Composition 165 (for creative orchestra). Composition 123 is an example of a composition where I told a story for solo flute and constructed environment, and then I told the story

and had the music re-enact the story; that was the beginning. And the story involved area spatial components that the soloist would fulfill inside of this constructed environment.

M Did you see any connection between that impulse and the tradition of, say, storytelling by the jali from Africa, or the opera or the Singspiel from Europe? Or the blues?

A I saw it as connected to Stockhausen's Harlequin, for solo clarinet. It's not a story, but it's a clarinetist working and moving, a wonderful piece. I wanted to move into pieces that utilized area space, where the instrumentalist is moving and playing; I had already built a system of movement, so with 113 I had already built a story, and the story and the composition would express the components of the story and utilize the area space.

M Did you draw on experiences you had in the music before, where you had nothing but purely musical experiences, but were having visions inside of that of a story, or scene, or something like that?

A I don't know. At some point, I found myself thinking that it made sense for me to build a mythical story. For instance, Composition 113, for solo sopranino saxophone; I wrote a story for that. The soloist is thinking of this story in the improvisation, and there are all kinds of internal mechanisms, such as targeted phrase constructions that represent parts of the story of Ojuwain on this train.

M Ojuwain is one of your system's twelve characters, too. Was he the first to be expressed in the music?

A Yes. So he's on this train, and I came up with this story, and it gave me spatial dynamics and direction; also, the psychological component of having different phrases to express different parts of the story.

M Did you think of Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf"?

A I didn't think of it, but I should have, because that's one of my favorite compositions; Prokofiev is one of my guys. Anyway, I just tried to evolve that idea. Composition 103, for seven trumpets; it doesn't have a story, but there is a context of narrative and choreography about that composition.

M You know, this idea about having a phrase represent a narrative kind of reminds me of the West African rhythmic cycles, in which each of the rhythms express a different part of the community…

A …and makes something happen. That is connected to Composition 113, the idea of a target signal activation (i.e., talking drums); suddenly a phrase construction has a transcendent component. So I'm really moving toward the

Trillium operas. By the time we get to this point, the idea of the triangle, which is synthesis, would also become the context for transposition. What that would mean, for me, would be the erection of imaginary constructs, more and more. And there were several reasons for it: one, imaginary constructs would give me a way to have definite things to deal with, as opposed to Composition 76, which is like a ritual gesture. I wanted to have specific things to deal with, where I could apply the movement system, and have it work in a specific way, like in Composition 123, for solo flute.

Also, an imaginary context would give me a way to continue evolving my music, since it was clear I wasn't getting any performances, and that it didn't look like I would get any in a normal kind of way. This was late '70s and '80s, after the Arista record deal. So I felt that part of evolving my music would involve creating imaginary schemas that I could hold onto whether I got a performance or not. So the imaginary schemas would give me a possibility to imagine a context and say that Composition 175, or 174, would be a composition where--174 was for a percussion ensemble, and they're climbing this mountain. What the imaginary scheme would mean for me would be that I could create an imaginary context on the tri-plane.

So what am I saying? Local experiences, national or greater experiences, and the largest, or galactic experiences, the largest I could think of. My plan here, then as now--because all of this started to come together in this period--was to imagine a state that I could fit my music system into, where I could have different things for people to do, different compositions to write that would fulfill the multitasks of these imaginary states--all the way from the individual experiences in Composition 113 of Ojuwain on the train to the concept of galactic actualization, where I could imagine rocket ships traveling through space in the largest framework that I could think of. As a result of defining that, I could then start to write not only compositions for those states, but to define works in terms of individual reality properties: the concept of twelve city-states, each state demonstrating the identity of the twelve languages. And then inside of that state, write compositions that demonstrate internal possibilities for, say, language #4, stacatto line logics--and making it even more definite and specific by actually defining the states.

What all that would mean for me as a composer, then, would be that I've got this expanding universe that I could microscope into different focuses, and in the city-state focus, build twelve city-state territories with roads connecting them; the roads would be rectangles, specific roads; the circle would be the ability to just travel in any direction you want, not on a road; and the triangles would be points of connection, large cities or whatever, where different strategies can interconnect and go to somewhere else.

Or transfer; triangle in this context is transfer. So I tried to take that concept and express it in the individual circle and reality experiences of the individual all the

way to the galactic model. So I tried to take that concept and express it in the individual circle and reality experiences of the individual all the way to the galactic model.

M Transfer, from, say, like a city crossroads…to where?

A To the galactic model.

M Like, up?

A Up or down, since it's three to the third power. If you're at the top, you might want to go down. Or, if you're at the point of the triangle, you might want to switch into the Tri-Axium Writings; or, you might want to transfer from the Tri-Axium Writings to the system of movements--or to the Composition Notes [Braxton's five-volume set of his explanations of each of his works, also published by Frog Peak].

M So you mean a transfer from a musical experience to writing?

A From a musical experience to a musical experience; from a musical experience to a correspondence experience, to dance; from a musical experience to a poetic experience.

M So when was your first actual Trillium opera?

A Composition 120, Trillium A, was performed in 1985.

M That was right after 113 then, huh?

A Yeah, seven pieces after.

M Do the Trillium series of operas then represent something of a culmination of your whole system?

A No. The Trillium operas, if we would look at the city-state analogy, would be in the major cities in each state, like a giant castle in each state. On the galactic formal scheme model, the Trillium operas would be in the center of the major galaxies. In the area-state formal scheme model, the Trillium operas would be equivalent to the big tree, in Wagner. The big local store.

M So little things like duo projects, or solo projects, or quartets--those would be just, like, other little stories in the big city?

A Thank you. Composition 37, for four saxophones, the first of the modern saxophone quartet musics, that they don't want to give me credit for, is really a transposition of language # 4 into the house of the rectangle.

M That was a quartet with you, Oliver Lake…

A …Hamiett Bluiett, and Julius Hemphill. And they brought in David Murray when I told Julius I could not be a part of the saxophone quartet on a fulltime basis, that the project for me was a one-time project.

M So that started it, and they took it from there.

A They took it from there, but they've never given me any credit for that, and I don't understand why, because that experience in no way takes away from the greatness of their work and what they would go forth to do. But for some reason, they've never remembered that experience. Unfortunately, it is documented.

M Fortunately.

A Yeah, fortunately, for me.

M So the first opera performance was of 120, in California…

A No, the operas are the dialogues. We're in the house of the triangle: number one, triangle, schematics, for the Tri-Axium Writings. The integration schematics from the Tri-Axium Writings serve as the genesis point for creating the libretto. The integration schematics are reductive diagrams of the ideas and arguments inside the Tri-Axium Writings. The integration schematics weren't conceived to tell anyone what to think on any particular subject; they only establish the context of terms and connections. Each person will come out of them with his or her own understanding of relationships. In my opinion, it's a restructuralist approach to information integration that sets up postulates, but doesn't tell anybody what to think. At the same time, it itself is a reduction of the philosophical writings of the Tri-Axium Writings.

M You mean your librettos?

A No, I mean the actual writings in the Tri-axium book. The arguments of the Tri-Axium Writings are reduced to schematic forms. The opera libretto is a story based on the schematics, so it makes the second triangle; third triangle I guess would be the intuitive implications of the actual fantasy experiences. The libretto of the Tri-Axium Writings is constructed in such a way that the singers have to find out their own meaning of it. I write it, but the actual experience of the stories, since they aren't linear stories…

M …that's part of their interpretive task.

A Yes, and the psychological dimensions that the singers bring to the music, a personal dimension.

M When we did the opera Shala in New York, the part I focused on most was that second act, which I wrote a paper about. Are you saying that when the performers bring their own spins as artists to the performance of the libretto, when they sing it, that they're defining it somehow?

A Yes, because it's not a story in the sense of Wagner, where you become a character that expresses the psychology of the story. In Trillium, the whole concept of a story is very different. It doesn't go from beginning to end, it's just a slice of time. Inside that slice of time there's the ritual of dialogue, and the singers bring their own personal psychologies to it.

M Did you notice that happening much in the performance of Shala?

A Oh yes.

M What sticks in your mind about that, like an example of something that someone brought to the character that was sort of fresh and new to you?

A I don't know how to express what we're talking about on this level, outside of saying it was a revelation to me to have the opportunity to experience the drama come to life, and to actually be able to be separate from it and to experience it. But I don't know if that is a real answer to what you're asking.

M Because it seemed to me, for instance, in the second act with the scene with the family? They were all pretty much enacting what the script put forth, of a family in a kitchen, you know. The words expressing tenderness and things like that…

A Yeah, well, so it's a story, a definite libretto, but it didn't relate to the European mythology, nor the African-American mythology, it was a modern family dealing in real time with the kinds of things families deal with.

M It could have been anyone anywhere.

A Right. You picked up on the chance fact that the couple was interracial in that casting, suggesting that issue was in my story, but the story doesn't have anything to do with race, just with a man and a woman dealing with one another in that situation. My intent as a composer, then and now, is to look for universal kinds of situations, where people can express themselves, within that context.

M And that kind of goes to your actual use of language, the way you express things in sort of general, vague terms rather than have an agenda for what you're trying to have expressed.

A I've tried to create a language that satisfies my understanding of communication, which was three-dimensional. Because as you know, when we express ourselves, many different levels come out, and not everybody can hear every level, because it's not even about that. But some people are able to hear more levels and have more of a connection than others; but even with that, we're all coming from our individual circle, and I wanted Trillium to be open to that in a way that would be very different from, say, Wagner.

By the way, the Trillium operas are post-Wagnerian operas, as opposed to, say, post-Stockhausen, or Schoenberg operas.

M In what sense do you mean?

A I think what turns me on about Wagner is how deeply he gets into human psychology, and he's not afraid of feeling, and men and women. We were talking on the way here, and I mentioned "Tristan and Isolde." It just wiped me out; I was on the ground, laughing, screaming, because he was not afraid to use creative music to demonstrate the emotion and the psychologies that happen between men and women; he portrayed it in his context. "Tristan and Isolde" talks of life and darkness in a polarity. For me it's an incredible opera.

But Trillium is tri-centric; an individual brings his own life to it, because it's not referring to anything, aside from the individual applying himself to that given context. It's not a story that goes anyplace.

session 9

session 8
A …or the first house, which is, on the tri-metric plane, long sounds, recognized on the house of the circle.

M Define tri-metric plane.

A Tri-metric modeling, modeling on the plane of three to the third power. Propositional modeling.

M What does that mean in terms of a long tone?

A Starting from language music, long tone as an idea that happens in experience. Then in the house of the rectangle, long sound as the operating premise in drones, or in some…

M But by tri-metric you mean the directing of the circle?

A Yes, directing a positing, a thought or an idea through that plane, on which there are three different parameters. Finally, long sound as a statement of a continuous state involvement; and from that point, the twelve language models.

M What I notice is that, even though it's down on paper pretty clearly, this system of yours, you seem to always be tinkering with it in your head. I have this image of an inner world always in motion that you're always sort of referring to in the moment when you're talking about it. Like the other day you were talking about this level, and that level, and the other level, as though you were sort of picturing it in your mind. I don't know if all of those things you mentioned always have a strict correspondence with the paper version.

A I agree with what you're saying, but what that means for me is that my work is in continual motion. It's a model that recognizes change from a tri-centric perspective, and integrates recognition on a tri-centric level. Let me give you this information about the Ghost Trance musics.

Okay, long sounds, in the house of the circle, language musics. Long sounds as an idea, the state of drone; long sounds as a state of being; and then inside of that, going now to the house of one, the house of Shala: those transmutants as a continuous state phenomenon; Ghost Trance musics as an expression of infinity. That is, the universe/the expanding "so-called" universe equals Shala.

Let me give you three instances of Ghost Trance musics, each with three subcomponents. Number One, Ghost Trance musics as an expression of infinity: 1, spatial music mapping prototypes; 2, sustained space logics (for example, something that is meditative); 3, continuous processes.

Number two, Ghost Trance musics: 1, transtemporal mechanisms (it doesn't start, it doesn't end); 2, transtemporal mechanisms (fast, medium, and slow, at any point in time); 3, transtemporal mechanisms (use of multi-tempos, use of combination tempos, use of changing tempos).

Number three: Ghost Trance musics: 1, trans-idiomatic, which translates into trans-spiritual (male, female, and child); 2, no theme as such, but twelve multi-hierarchical identities: no theme--redemptive, transformative, and the phenomenon of hope. 3, tri-metric models: personal models, collective models, and models with special interests.

Finally, as an activist component--because I've given you three statements of Ghost Trance musics--three active components: metric processes, pulse target processes, and mutable processes. That is the model I wanted to establish for the house of one, in a system that, more and more, I've started to understand there's a triangulation between the identity of Shala, the identity of Ashmenton, and the identity of Helena. Shala's at the top in a certain period; in another period, Ashmenton or Helena is at the top.

M Sounds like a tangled hierarchy, from physics.

A Okay, then that is the hierarchy.

M Shala is the house of one?

A Yes.

M The expanding universe. So how would you describe the mechanics of Ashmenton and Joreo?

A Ashmenton would be sequential logics, starting with accented long sounds, operating polarity logic.

M But on the cosmic level, since Shala is…

A Oh, oh, I am still exploring that; I don't know that yet. I see it working in the house of one. I have twenty more compositions to go, and then I'll have house of one's bricks in place. For example, going back to, say, Composition 113, which would be a point of definition for the holistic compositions…from that point to, say, 147 for ten percussionists, or 175, that maps the castle, and 174, gradient logics: those compositions are examples of area space formal schemes that were conceived to map area space possibilities, or opportunities. The Ghost Trance musics comprise a prototype conceived to map extended area space domains. For instance, community area spaces; state area spaces; national area spaces; continental area spaces; global area spaces; and solar system area spaces; galactic area spaces--what Muhal Richard Abrams called the Tri-verse, as an area space, or…we move into what I call the imaginary spaces in my music, starting with Composition 113, which has a story that the soloist enacts, with a psychology; there's a pitch logic response for psychology; there's an area space parameter that's defined. Compositions 175 and 174 continue those ideas in an extended parameter.

M What number is your first Ghost Trance composition?

A 185.

M How many have you composed so far?

A We just did 284 and 285, so it's getting around 100, and I still have around twenty more to go, then I'll have the bricks in place?

M Do you have a fixed number of compositions you're shooting for, like 120?

A Not really, but what I wanted was…the plane of the Ghost Trance musics was conceived to fulfill a continuous state logic in all twelve houses, in terms of construction logic.

M What do these references to twelve have to do with the chromatic scale; are you talking about notes?

A No, I'm talking about the twelve language states, the twelve identity states of my system. So long sounds, accented long sounds, trills, which is ornamentation, staccato long sounds, short sounds, high sounds, low sounds, intervallic sounds, gradient sounds--on the chart.

M So you don't have a fixed number, but you just sort of know roughly. How do you know when you've finished?

A There will be three different species of Ghost Trance structures. The first is complete, it's continuous state metric pulses. Second species is metric state plus opposition; that opposition is rhythmic opposition.

M Metric state being the quarter note pattern?

A Bop-bop-bop-bop-bop [sings regular rhythm]--then du-du-du-du [sings irregular rhythm]. Third species is metric pulse into pulse velocity, that being from tempo to pulse. [sings a long sound then regular-rhythm short sounds]

M You're calling the long sound a pulse?

A It's the pulse time, moving from tempo time to target pulse time. In other words, if I just give you a cue, we'll just hold the pitch for as long as we want to hold it, with no tempo.

M But you're calling that pulse?

A Pulse space as opposed to tempo space.

M Oh, because there's something pulsating in that long held tone?

A Pulse space as a way of talking of velocity as opposed to tempo expansion; very fast tempo, very slow tempo, it's still tempo, you still have a metric pulse. Pulse velocity is just a way of talking of nonmetric logics that happen in time, but target time.

M I'm just trying to figure out how pulse works into that.

A Pulse could be point of activation.

M Like when you first hit the long tone?

A Yes. And the duration is pulse, because you're not hitting the whole note, you're not thinking in terms of whole notes, or metric values.

M But your experience of the music is that something's pulsating in the body?

A Let's go back to tempo. We have fast, slow, and medium tempos. Take away the tempo and you can still sing anything you want to sing arhythmically. I talk of the non-tempo space as a pulse space as a way to be able to model variables in that space, based on what's moving faster, what's moving slower. Also, based on the characteristics, the sonic-geometric characteristics of that movement. That is the basis of language music. The third species of Ghost Trance then becomes metric-pitch changes happening in metric time that goes into nonmetric time. And that's what I mean by pulse space. That nonmetric time is a time that can be factored as something as well.

M So it's not just a stretch where you're holding a note, it's a stretch where there's actually pulse happening? I'm still trying to get a grasp of what the pulse is in this. There are things happening…

A Things happening. A target cue happens, and anything can happen [he sings a random phrase]. It's just that there's no tempo there. we're taking out the tempo, but the improvisers are still playing, and what they're playing can still be defined in the parameter; that parameter I talk of as a pulse time-field, where targets--

M Kind of like the pulse tracks [one of his earlier musical devices].

A Kind of like the pulse tracks: target points that activate actions.

M The poetic imagery of the Ghost Trance will suggest to most people the Ghost Dance movement of Native Americans in the last century, which was a time when they were on the way out, defeated; and they went beyond their separate tribal systems and came together as a bunch of different tribes.

A It was deeper than that; they didn't have any choice. All of the culture was wiped out, genocide; each group could remember only a little bit of their experience.

M So how does this historical thing translate into your naming this body of musics Ghost Trance?

A I want to have a direct connection to the great Native American people. In fact, when I first discovered that trans-musics would be the next stage for me, it was at that point that I started to study Native American musics. I took a class at

Wesleyan; they called me bear-boy Braxton in this class. They brought in the bearskin coat, I was running around the class in it.

M I can't help but think of the parallel on the personal level. In a way, it's kind of a perfect expression of a stage of life, around midlife, where, in a way, one whole world comes to an end, and you're stuck with the rest of it like a ghost. Did you ever think of it that way?

A Actually, I'm trying to figure out how to look at things at this point. I see this time cycle as a profound transition, and I'm still in the middle of it, and everything has changed in my life, from the breakup of my marriage, the separation from my children. I refer to this period in time as my exile, and I've been in it for some four years, sometime since a couple of months after the performance of Trillium R. My life would go into kind of a mystical something, so I have referred to it as my exile.

M I can't help but think of the reflection, too, on the history of Africans in America. They had to deal with the loss of their separate tribal identities and come together as one whole people too; a lot of improvisation, mixed with cloudy memories, took over the process of assimilation.

A That has been one of the secrets of American music, that much of it was based on existential, just kind of positing an idea, because you didn't have a tradition that told you you couldn't do whatever you were hearing. So it was a fresh psychology that brought in the new American musics, and that psychology, one would hope, would be part of understanding America, especially what it could mean in the third millennium. But what we're seeing instead of attempts to really understand what we're talking about, we're seeing the components of the modern era come into place, and those components, in my opinion, have axiomatic components that have very clear ideas of which individuals are going to be able to effect culture, which individuals and groups are going to have access to the possibilities of the composite forces and factors shaping change. So in many ways, I find myself that's consistent with this kind of dynamic change that America is going through right now, as we get ready for the real Third Millennium. We have a new president who comes into office with a complex set of components behind him; we have no more illusions about the Supreme Court; we have no more illusions about Democrat and Republican. Meanwhile, the culture is split profoundly, and it will be interesting to see how that plays out. The last time we had a profound split, it was the North and the South. Now we have a kind of a liberal-conservative split that's even deeper.

M Between the coasts and the middle.

A Yes [laughs]. Interesting to see how all this plays out.

M When you mention the seventh restructural cycle, you mean what took off in the '60s, basically?

A Yes.

M What occurred to me is--we were talking about traditional influences, ranging from historical Western music to people like Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. We noticed in talking about the Southern strategy is that what happens is that there are these individuals who are, by your lights, part of the continuum of creative music evolution, but what happens through the Southern strategy--and maybe through the whole project of Western civilization--is that what started out as a creative music gesture, struggling, underrecognized, maybe persecuted, misunderstood--a couple of generations later is suddenly revered and yet at the same time commodified, used and manipulated. What I'm wondering, in that process, to get up as far as, say, the seventh restructural cycle, one of our themes of our talk has been that the masters of that are people who are all still on the outs; we're still in the middle of a kind of a culture war, where even though you see yourself as part of a great long continuum that includes Armstrong and Ellington and those people, you don't see yourself or your work or that of your AACM colleagues, or Cecil Taylor, or whoever is active now as having reached that point where the Southern strategy appropriates that, so that we see a Nike commercial running with a soundtrack by Braxton, or Cecil.

So it seems to me like two possible futures to keep in mind here, once we get into talking about the future of your work. If things go like they've always gone, we could end up at the year 2050, with Braxton's work enshrined at the Lincoln Center just like Duke Ellington's is now, and the whole spirit of it is somehow subverted; or we could end up at a place where at some point creative music gets the upper hand and tips the scales, so that it's no longer possible to appropriate it that way.

A And, for me, what you're describing is something that's outside what I can understand right now. In another twenty years, they're going to be able to appropriate whatever they want. We'll seen John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" on the television set being used to sell cigarettes or something. The marketplace is incredible, their ability to turn something of meaning into fluff is incredible. In fact, I remember laughing yesterday at this crazy TV commercial; it's just another stupid kind of commercial, but it got me. I found myself thinking, yes, for the people who are thinking along these lines, if they can't get you one way, they'll find another way to get you--because they're into this, and actually it's a form of creativity as well.

As far as how my work will be viewed in fifty years, I'm not even worried about that, because the music will fight for its own life, and in the end I think all of these things are cosmic. I think all I can focus on is trying to do my work and to know that, one, it was always first and foremost a personal matter. Second, it was

something that I felt that I could be involved with that would also be bigger than me, so that hopefully I would be a part of something I could believe in, and add to. Finally, it's not about me, or the individual; there's a cosmic component happening. What's fascinating to me, at 55 years old, is seeing the dimensions of change, and how quickly time and space go by in a period of 25 years, where suddenly we have the opportunity to see so much change, and the various levels of manipulation that come into play. This is why I can't wait for the DuBois books, because I feel more and more that his position between Marcus Garvey and Booker T. Washington was a position that set up the propositions that I'm experiencing right now. As his ultimate viewpoint that African-American intellectualism, in America, anyway, is a subject that is basically irrelevant, because the information complex is not set up to include perspectives from non-Eurocentric psychologies, and especially from African Americans. I feel that before we can even get to a point where we can have a healthier intellectual discourse, that our country will have to go through another set of experiences or something; we're not there at this point. So I would not be surprised if my work experiences the fate of Frank Johnson's, and William Grant Still's and the Philadelphia school, whose work will be kicked out of the domain of relevancy at the beginning of the modern era. Suddenly it became all about creative music as a practice perceived within the marketplace's concept of New Orleans, as opposed to experiences taking place all over America. Now we see the primacy of the blues, the primacy of the rhythm in swing, used in a way that actually defeats the evolution of the music in terms of how those propositions were conceived a hundred years ago, or eighty years ago. They're taking definitions of a hundred years ago and trying to apply them to now, and kicking out anything that doesn't fit in neatly. In fact, get ready, Mike Heffley, for another period of Reconstruction.

George Bush has won. When this experience happened after Reconstruction, during the Hayes-Rutherford period, part of the deal involved cutting off the Reconstruction process, and getting the troops out of the South. So now here we are again, and on the television the pundits are talking about how George W. owes the African American community, that it has been the community most disenfranchised because of the manipulations in Florida, and that W. needs to make an effort to leave no willing heart behind--his compassionate conservatism.

M I read a statistic too that he got less of the African American vote than most Republican presidents up to now, including his father--in spite of the show of unity and diversity at the convention they held.

A Is that right? I don't blame George W., I blame the African American community. I think it's stunted, all Democrats, because we don't feel like we have anyplace else to go. But that position is not a healthy one. We're being manipulated by the liberals.

M When you were in Europe, did you get much feedback on the Ghost Trance music?

A Very positive experience. Graham Lock showed up. The people there listen to the music with a different spirit there. It was very positive; but then again, there's a small group of people in Europe who are interested in my work, and since I don't perform very much, maybe the fact that the concert was so positive were aware of the music, and of which area I'm working in. But from my perspective it was a wonderful occasion to play, to a nice reception. They write about the music with more respect and interest; in America right now they don't focus on my work at all. In fact, the machinery is gearing up for the Ken Burns 10-part, 19-hour extended work this guy is doing. And everything I read about it says it goes up to 1965 and jumps to 1985, and--well, we're not surprised by that. But in fact, that period from 1965 to 1980 was a profound period in time in America; whatever one wants to say about the AACM, it's an organization that was unique in the sense that it was a gathering of musician-composers who decided they would respond to creative music in any way they wanted to respond, and support one another. And that the musics and ideas that came out of that group would be viewed as not relevant is a tragedy. Or if it's not a tragedy, I'm surprised that it's not, because the men and women I grew up with and worked with were serious people who were totally dedicated, and functioning from the highest possible intentions, that being giving something back to the community, being the best musicians they could be, and finding something that was personal in the music. All of that now is being wiped out. The African American community is spinning, like the rest of America, from this last thirty-something days of political lawyering. It's going to be interesting to see how all these components congeal on some level as we get to the Third Millennium, and sets the stage for something like…it feels like the Reconstruction era is coming back. It already feels like the Swing era has come back. It feels like entertainment as the highest experience has come back. The psychology of the practical has come back. The cult of ethnicity and racial politics never really left, so it didn't have to come back, it's just taken a new form. And I'm basically in the same position, if not worse, as when I initially made the decision to move out in this direction. Although I have to be careful with how I say that. I've been able to have a whole life, until 55 years old, and to maintain a connection with my work, and play music.

M I want to talk about the opera project in Chicago. Before we go there, do you want to comment on anything you read in the Cecil Taylor interview about the significance of his interest in your work?

A Well, the only thing I would say is that I was surprised to hear Cecil mention my name, and it makes me happy whenever he mentions my name, because he's a great, great man, and I can only wonder what he's thinking in this period as he looks at the threshold of the Third Millennium coming in.

M Because when I first mentioned it to you, your first reaction was to say that it seemed to indicate that the scene was changing. So really what we're talking about here is maybe a sense of being on the brink of something, which is really graphically illustrated by this election stuff, and the Ken Burns film. Do you think things are coming to a head in a way that would radically change your experience of what you're doing?

A No, not really. I have come to see my work more and more in the spirit of the African griots who are outside of everything. Of late, I used the expression "navigation through form" as a way to talk about poetic intent; navigation through form as a way of making the distinction of saying that I'm not liberal or conservative; it's not jazz or classical music; but it recognizes these quadrants. So when I think about the future--Cecil mentioned in one of the articles, I think, that as a composer, it was just going to be continually frustrating, because they weren't going to let me in. Well, he could not have been more correct. I would only say on my behalf that I wanted to have a response based on my understanding of composite reality, and my own attractions, curiosities and balances. There was no way I could avoid the world of composition and extended notated music. But he's right, there's no slot for a guy with my interests, and I don't see that changing in a real sense during my lifetime. Because the central problem is that my work cannot be embraced without on some level acknowledging the thought processes and the value systems relating to how it's come into being. And we're not at a point where the culture is ready to consider information dynamics from a multitude of perspectives. So that's why I've tried to approach my work in a very definite way, and define the components and document the particulars of my experience in a way where it can be studied. Because what I wanted was to have an experience in the house of the circle; I wanted to come out of that experience and have some memory of what took place in that experience, and to extract those memories in the form of ideas, and to build a context of ideas related to that experience that would later transpose into bringing that real-time experience and bringing that idea together in a way that would be transcendent, and symbolic. So I don't see any real attempt to deal with my work in the near future. I would be happy if there would be some attempt to deal with William Grant Still's music. That would serve me just as well, if not better, because it would give young people an opportunity to understand that there's a precedent, a continuum of things happening, and that the opera of Scott Joplin, Treemonisha, is an important opera, an American opera that's very special; and it's also an opera composed by an African-American composer, with a different set of values and propositions to add to the mix, to the body of tradition. But America is not at a point to integrate all of these experiences and propositions, and the best I can hope for is that while I'm alive I can get a performance every now and then of an opera, since the operas are the hardest ones to get a performance of and document. I'd like to evolve my system to the furthest of my ability and have it there as something that can be experienced, studied, and pondered.

M You scoped out the end of the first house of the Ghost Trance music through the next twenty compositions. Earlier you told me that you had reached a certain point with your opera concept, but you still had a very definite image of where you had to go next before something about it could be realized. You said you had realized your opera complex on one level, but hadn't yet integrated it with the coordinate musics or something. Do you see this process of developing your body of work as a composer as being just continuing on the way it always has up to the end, from plateau to plateau, and that you're always going to be motivated and interested enough to hang in there even if you are beating against walls like this?

A I would like to hope so. I see creative music as equal to creative living; music and life are really both the same thing, there's no reason why one should not continue to learn and grow. Maybe it changes when you get older, in terms of the rate of how much can be done in a given time frame. But getting older also brings with it a set of experiences and perspectives that can trump out the extra energy of youth. I'd like to hope that I can continue to evolve myself and move toward a point of self-realization in my spiritual life; I would also like to hope that, as a creative person, I can also continue to evolve my music. I think living involves creative music as part of the basic responses inside of a given time perspective, or day. I think what I call music is not just acoustic sonic actualization, but the whole phenomenon and psychology of living. Finding a positive line, finding a way to evolve, finding a way to keep on going and have hope. Recognizing, or at least keeping curiosity, to value curiosity. I would say for the young people, especially the young people of America, but actually the young people of the planet: stay interested in NASA, and in space travel, and in the new things that are happening right now, because this is an incredible period of time, what these guys can do now. I mean, you know, the cell phones connected to the satellites, signals bouncing all over the place…

M This whole space program is another thing that started in the '60s that got cut off.

A Yes! We landed people on the moon, in one of the greatest moments of documented human experience, and by the next year Americans were, like, not even interested any more. We had an incredible achievement that served to kind of just, in a strange kind of way…the country was not able to integrate that experience and move forward. Then when the Soviet Union collapsed--

M And they were the first ones up there, too.

A --yeah, so then Americans thought, "we've got it made, we're the ones, we're the heroes."

M Seems like we're born into a time when the words "ahead of your time" take on some meaning. I mean if you're stuck in that place in the '60s that you are, and anybody that maybe took LSD--

A Yes.

M --time took on a new significance. You know, the whole space thing happened, and you think of Sun Ra…

A Yes.

M --but you'd think that if you can get this far, and then see how much closer you are to how much farther you could go, that it would be just like a straight shot up from there. But instead it went like this [hand makes a gesture of a winding path in the air]

A Yes.

M And yet anybody that went winding there with it has to keep that in their consciousness.

A Oh yes.

M So, I don't know. I'm thinking about how a long time ago you were talking about knowing full well that you were sort of choosing a life in the cracks, which you have indeed sort of had. It's not like nothing has happened…

A But it's been a life in the cracks.

M I think at this point the logical segue is, whether we do it now or next time, is to use that whole operation of fantasy to overcome the pessimism and realism of the situation to start kicking around the concept of the future that the concept of creative music has envisioned all along, and is yearning for, to be in a society where the dominant tenor and emotional affect of the people involved with it is not one of exile and resignation, but one of total engagement and support, and recognition.

A That's why the use of imaginary models has been very important for me. Imaginary activities that give me a chance to start thinking in terms of the opera, imaginary formations that give me a chance to start thinking in terms of micro/macro formal schemes, for continuous state logics, i.e. Ghost Trance musics; and imaginary states as a way to have specific things to compose for, as opposed to abstraction representing the optimum state of postulation. I don't agree with that. I think that abstractions, the house of the circle, is just one state, and that's why, again, the term Tri-Centric helps me to contextualize zones of propositions, decisions. The question again for me was going to be, which way to

go, would I continue to think of modeling abstract syntaxes together with compositions, or would I look for something that would be greater than that. For me, the discovery of narrative structure, the discovery of holistic formulations, and the decisions that would lead into the declarative imaginary space would give me a whole new field of devices to work with in a specific kind of way.

M So when you experience a story line turning itself into music, is this just a spontaneous thing that happens because you've been involved in music for so long that you get an idea of writing a sentence about one of your characters, and all of the sudden the music just suggests something that is attached to that story line?

A Well, it depends on what piece we're talking about. If it's the opera, I go to the schematic; I make up a story based on the principle schematic subject of each opera. For compositions like 174, for ten percussionists, and 175 for four vocalists and so forth, I create an imaginary space like a castle, or a mountain, and then map different points in it. The idea being that from a tri-centric perspective--that being from the experience of imagination to the ideas that come out of that experience into real time as a third component, the house of the triangle, the realization: my conception is conceived as the same way that we talk of Disneyland: as an area space proposition/project that could have a constructive proponent like Disneyland, where the friendly experiencer, single or group tours, could have an experience in this area space, different kinds of strategies where origin experiences could happen--secondary origins, like an orchestra piece--secondary origins where a friendly experiencer comes and interacts; and genetic experiences, where the friendly experiencer takes part and puts it into some other part. So what I've been trying to do is create a state of music that could would address different kinds of formal states, real and imagined. And so for the real states, as far as an area space, I think in terms of Disneyland, as an example of real area space. I think Walt Disney was one of the great visionary Americans; Sun Ra understood that.

M But you mean the expression of it is like an opera, or imaginary world?

A A sonic amusement experience park, with twelve different lands, each land demonstrating the identity of its corresponding number in the system. Land number one is Shala land; land number two is Ashmenton land. Each land containing x amount of structures, from orchestra, large group musics, to solo musics, chamber musics. So the firendly experiencer can connect into different kinds of sonic experiences. I would also like to have this in the virtual space. The question is, who could help me build it? A virtual imaginary space where the friendly experiencer can come in and go through all these different twelve spaces and have, at this point, 400-something compositions loaded into the computer. Including secret passwords activating pitch sets; magic pitch sets; lineage pitch sets or strings; family codes.

M That's going to take some program. But it sounds technically possible.

A [laughter] Another ridiculous Braxton idea!

M But you know what I'm thinking about is…I heard this lecture on linguistics, about how when you're first learning how to read, you're whole being, as a kid, is completely devoted to the letters and words and to just struggling from word to word until you finally get a sense of the meaning; and it goes like that for several years until finally, when you get it, you're experience of reading is not dealing with letters and words or anything like that, but is rather engaged with some new world that you've got going in your head now. And in fact, the only way to subvert that experience of this new world, this fantasy world of thought, is to start paying attention to what you're doing on the lower levels of the words and the letters. So it seems to me like your process is something that has just kept going down this line, starting with the basics of musicianship. You know, anybody that masters an instrument, like the piano, doesn't know what his hands are doing anymore when he sits down to play; he's just thinking about where he wants to go with the music. Then if the name of your game is not only to do that but also to make up the languages and the techniques yourself, then what gets put down there on that base layer is something else that you made up that you're not even aware of any more.

A Yes.

M And if you looked at it, you'd be blowing it for yourself.

A Yes.

M So I'm just trying to figure out how…if this is, as I believe, the natural process of creating music, and I'm engaged with this role of presenting this information for what it really is to a general readership that needs to know it. I mean what obsesses me is we have people in this society here--you, Cecil, all these other musicians I've met and talked to about their processes, who have developed so far down the lines of their self-creative universes--who are not in the center of the society, of the culture, of the world, where by my lights, and by all rights, I think they should naturally be.

A Well, I think that might be part of this route. [more laughter]

session 10

session 9
M We started out talking about Ken Burns' film. You said it was going to have profoundly negative implications, if it took the road preview press seemed to suggest…

A I think for me, a central point about this whole movement has been how we see the arrival of the same atomic components that led to the modern era in the 1900s. And the atomic components, in the house of poetic logics, we see the trans-African input components narrowed based on a post-Antebellum psychology that mask, in many ways, the real significance of the music. And the real significance of the music can't be understood by looking at ethnic-quadrant perspectives or psychology, the real perspective of the music can only be arrived at by seeing the music as it existed within composite reality. This is another reason why I would guess that present-day attempts to wall off what they call jazz--the whole invention of "jazz," the whole reason "jazz" was necessary was because the idea of composite reality was unacceptable to European Americans. By that I mean the significance of this fresh input, this fresh creative information coming from African Americans was simply something that the European Americans were not able to assimilate within a psychological spirit that was consistent with how they looked at themselves. So it would be at that point, with the establishment of the marketplace component, and accelerated marketplace dynamics--and the multinational structure, and the new technological dynamics that would lead to marketplace sophistication…remember, the '20s and '30s, that was a time period where the new technology was put into service, whether we're talking about the Nazi era and Hitler's use of media, or about radio in America, or the building of the railroads in the middle 1800s, and how important that was: continental experiences. So I can relate to DuBois, who would come to understand that the situation was the same for the African American intellectual or restructuralist, in the sense that whatever they came up with, it was irrelevant. It was irrelevant, one, because there's no natural constituency--and by that I mean there's no natural constituency in the African American community, in the way that existed in the '20s and '30s because of segregation, and the possibility that, with segregation, the African American community was able to have an information spectrum based on its own vibrational balances, which even then had complexities, but still, everything was allowed to happen. And we see that in Birmingham, looking at the earlier experiences that Szwed wrote about, in seeking to understand what Ra came up with. We see it in Chicago; that was what I grew up in, the tail end of that Washington Park experience, where you had composite dynamics happening, guys on soap boxes talking about Islam, concepts of black African Christianity; composite music exploration and investigation. All of those qualities were included in the black community, when suddenly with the Brown versus Board of Education decision, and the deconstruction of segregation, in a composite context, those forces have not been able to be understood as clearly, because in fact the restructural tradition of the music has become gnostic, as it was in the beginning anyway. Individual, and gnostic--that being, the individual's idiosyncratic secrets, and the secrets of the group. That's where my system comes in.

M You mentioned also about the Democrats being the false identity lately…

A That I could no longer relate to the Republicans or the Democrats, that "jazz" has become an instrument of the Democratic Party, that "jazz" has become an instrument of liberal-conservative thinking, connected to the Southern strategy, and that what we see here is a Reconstruction that involves even the reconstruction of celebrated family dynasties, which are being posited in this space, and those dynasties are controlling the composite information lines based on the agreed affinities of that group with the upper political strata forces. Which I don't disagree with, but I do disagree with the fact that only one sector has a connection?

M You're talking about the Bush family?

A I'm talking of the upper hierarchy, whether it's the Bushes, or Kennedys--the real money and the new real money, the new billions, and the multinational networking that's taking place throughout our country; and the defense industry that acts as a shield that serves to spread the money all around the countries inside of this network. Most Americans have nothing to do with it, except those directly involved in it, those who are bidding on contracts representing billions and billions of dollars as a norm, that Congress and the House negotiate. These components that run our country continue to run our country; and "jazz" now is finding its niche within this place, and the nature of this niche involves certain sacrifices. Sacrifices that I can't accept, even though I can understand on some level some of the trade-offs involved. But in the end, the ante-bellum view of transafricanism has always been a view with profound limitations. As we see those views perpetuated and forwarded in this time period, I feel there is profound danger in allowing those variables to go forward. But now it's too late anyway. I think the African American community comes to the Third Millennium in a very complex stage.

For instance, where in the past the African American community functioned as a kind of a pository for profound vibrational and mystical currents, because of the last forty years, and because of the intellectual decline that's taken place in the African American community, we now find ourselves in a position where we see state-of-the-state generations that are actually behind state-of-the-state current qualities in many ways. And we find a reverse problem, Mike Heffley, that's in my opinion very profound. That quality is this: we've seen the neoclassic guys who got into power in the '80s [the Lincoln Center jazz scene] tell the African American young men and women, "Don't listen to Braxton, don't listen to Roscoe Mitchell, don't listen to Lester Bowie, don't listen to Muhal Richard Abrams." So the young people took them at their word and did not listen. At the same time, all over America and all over the planet, European Americans, Europeans, Asian Americans, Asians--composite peoples--have in fact been digesting that music, have in fact been listening to the music of Cecil Taylor, have in fact been listening to the music of Sunny Murray, have in fact been listening to the music of George Russell, or my music, or the great music of Joseph Jarman and Leroy Jenkins or Leo Smith or Henry Threadgill.

My point is this: as we move into the Third Millennium, I'm seeing a generation of European Americans and trans-Europeans who have been reactivated by their ability to study this music and find that not only was the music relevant for them but to find that it also activated components in their life that allowed them to continue their work based on their own situation, having nothing to do with me. That's how creativity functions: that is to say, creativity has always functioned on the tri-plane on many different levels: as a wonderful way to have a dance, creativity is a wonderful way to be motivated, creativity is a wonderful way to understand poetic logics, to look at narrative structures; creativity is a profound factor connected to curiosity, intellectual curiosity and spiritual depth and insight and postulation. So for the last four decades of young African Americans to not have exposure to, for instance, the AACM, or Sun Ra, people who have been totally dedicated…in the case of the AACM, the first organization of African Americans who came together because of their total belief in the music, and total insistence on going their own way and responding to the post-Ayler, post-Coleman, post-Taylor musics based on their own value systems--to have young African Americans not exposed to that music, or those musicians, or the results that came from those experiences was a profound phenomenon that will have profound implications in the next time period.

M As you were saying all that, I was thinking of the scene in Eurasia. I think of it now as Eurasia rather than Europe, because when I was over there I saw more of a connection…I mean you see two things: one, the victory of the American capitalist culture in the Cold War, which has caused a lot of the people in Western Europe, I think, who started out radical in the '60s and '70s, like the FMP people and their peers in France and England and elsewhere, to go back also in the neoconservative direction. But you see too that the fall of the Berlin Wall is kind of analogous to the deconstruction of segregation over here, in that it came with a price. The people from the East were in the one-down position, where they were still in touch with their own ancient culture and negotiating it with the modern world of Communism. So when Communism broke down, a lot of them returned in various interesting ways, and now they have to negotiate those ways within American capitalism, so there's this same foment going on where there's a lot of pressure for them to conform to that, but they're reluctant too for the same reasons you are, or that anyone critical of the directions that integration is taking, and the prices that have had to be paid over here. So it's sort of happening on a worldwide level.

A Yeah, but we're not talking about just the crisis of integration; integration is always happening, people are always coming together in different ways. We're talking of the crisis of composite reality, where some components are controlling the variables of that reality, and some components are becoming the effect of that position of control. That's what we're talking about. I'm for integration, I've always been for it; but what I've tried to focus on is the problem of a composite reality situation where certain sectors are presented with not the full information

spectra of what has come out of their experience. I'm also talking about the challenge of time; more and more, the challenge of time itself is redirecting some of these arguments, where the question of is it jazz or is it not jazz is becoming irrelevant. I'm only interested in creative music; if the jazz people are making a big distinction between their work and creative music, fine. What they're doing is limiting the whole dynamic implications of what that continuum was in its original position, and, in doing so, making it clear to those of interested in composite reality that we should look at creative music happening in other spectra anyway. If it's not happening in bebop, let's look for it in Swedish folk music; I'll take creativity wherever I can find it. I'm no longer deluded.

M So what we've seen of the Ken Burns film seems to place it right in line with the concept of the Southern strategy. One of the things Gary Giddins said in it that stuck in my mind was something like "above all, jazz is a music about time." That reminded me of how your body of work's most important innovations has been expansions of the musical timefield, or this dealing with time in a way that made the jazz police say early on that your problem was you didn't swing. Going along with the Ken Burns, Wyntonian view of jazz, their bottom line seems to include that jazz must swing, jazz has regular metered time; there's a certain philosophy about time that seems to come down to the organic heartbeat and all this. But when we talk about opening up and going into the future, just on sheerly musical terms…do you have anything to say about musical time?

A I have a lot to say about musical time. As far as I'm concerned, these people are talking about the phenomenon of time as a political weapon, as opposed to the phenomenon of time as a way of marking space inside of infinity. All of these matters, in my opinion, go back to the modern gambit (and this is a different polarity gambit than what Ashmenton attempted in Trillium E, and that's another subject) that says, "The Europeans are responsible for all that is intellectual and intelligent and evolved, while the non-Europeans occupy another spectrum, that being called, for our purposes, Rhythm and Blues and Swing. So when someone talks about "swing" in jazz, one gets a sense that they're talking about something that is superior to how the phenomenon of time was perceived and captured by other ethnic groups or in other time periods and in other forms of music. This, to me, is just another example of the concept of the I.Q. as just another mechanism that can be used to proclaim that one person is superior to another person, and that his or her life is more valuable than another person whose I.Q. is less. This way of looking at basic fundamentals is profoundly flawed, in my perspective. The concept of time is important in every music. Time was important to Bach; the classical musics have their own inner life and ways of "swinging." The way of time in gagaku and in gamelan music is very different, but also very important to the great masters of those music traditions, and to the great music systems and compositions themselves.

Time is used in a different way in jazz; it's not superior or less superior, it's just different. Not only that, the phenomenon of time in jazz extends to metric time

and pulse time. A great musician like Sunny Murray, or Milford Graves, would demonstrate a fresh experience of time. What these guys are talking about, in my opinion, is rhythmic motion and action--we use words like "syncopated," but that doesn't really describe the multi-dimensional gravallic rhythmic logic that takes places inside the music we call jazz. That music is a tri-centric rhythmic logic that expresses the real time of individual body conjunctions, vibrational event spark conjunctions, rhythmic line-forming attraction juncture; summation density junctions. There are many different kinds of rhythms, many different kinds of time parameters, strategies, and mechanisms. What they are doing, in my opinion, is, again, participating in reductionism, and reductionism is the key word, in my opinion, that can help us understand what's happening here. Reductionism in terms of the dynamic implications of given Africanisms. When Andrew Cyrille is playing percussion, more than just one level of decision is being made. To have these two-dimensional concepts about blues and swing are false arguments, arguments that make sense to a certain sector of musicology--certainly, to a certain sector of music theorists, and the academy. Arguments that can be used to isolate the vibrational spectra of trans-African invention and mystic dynamics. To strip that information and use it for their own purposes, while at the same time denying the thrust of trans-African, and, finally, American invention, its proper vibrational components--because what I'm talking of is something more profound than Africa. I'm talking of the greatest nation in documented history; I'm talking about our home, Mike Heffley.

Our home is a home that has everybody here, bouncing off one another. Our home, especially as we move into the Third Millennium, is more complex than simply a Christian nation: it's a Muslim nation, it's a Christian nation, it's an Indian nation. It's a nation where women are suddenly not in the same position, and are suddenly able to ask the question, "what do I want for myself?" It's a country where this next generation of African Americans are not going to be able to talk about disadvantages in the old way; but in fact, the components of the old way will apply. Still, I agree with the European American whose family came here twenty or thirty years ago, who says "Fuck the notion of me sacrificing my life for some African American guy because of something some European American guy did two hundred or three hundred years ago. Fuck that notion; I had nothing to do with those crimes, I have a right to my life, and I'm not going to go for any idea that says that I have to sacrifice some component of my life to pay back something that I had nothing to do with." I say hooray for that young person.

M Thank you; I'll go along with that.

A Because this idea of twenty acres and a mule: it's a great idea, but the only problem is nobody wants to give twenty acres and a mule. I would say this much: I am prepared to accept 5.5 billion, for just me; we'll have to sacrifice all those other African Americans. Give me 5.5 billion, and then after that I would like another 800 billion for the military, a special militia that I would want (I'd rather not say any more about that). I would also ask for another 900 billion as part of

what I would call a contingency fund that I would also rather not discuss any further. I would also want 257.3 wishes, just in case anything goes wrong with the coins, I want the wishes, because I have plans, Jack. Also, I claim all of the galactic highways, and there will be a tax increase. I'll bring in the Bush family if they play ball.

With the exception of that, this idea of twenty acres and a mule has established a dangerous psychological component. It seems to me that the African American community might have to give that one up; or the idea of having every member in Congress write a letter of apology to us, to our daughters and children, our grandchildren, and...even a very special letter to our puppies, in which each senator apologizes in writing, and you can see the tear stains on the paper. I think that the African American community should forget about that. This idea of being angry somehow distorts composite reality where, in fact, as Americans, as complex as America is, we have more possibilities in our country than what all of our people seem to want to recognize, whether they're African or European Americans. More and more, the African-American community is going to have to turn around and understand this: not only will the African-American community in the Third Millennium have to compete with European Americans, but also with the Hispanic American community, with the Asian American community…

M With Native American casinos.

A Yes! Because everybody in the world is fighting for their lives, and the qualities of the Third Millennium that this phenomenon is only going to be re-formed, but the same fundamental will be at work: each individual will have a life, and will have to fight to evolve themselves and compete with their generation. I believe that this time period we're going through now could be a healthy time period if the African American community rediscovers the old spark. There was a spark in the African American community that was a dynamic intellectual spark; it didn't come from the academy, it came from the street; it was a spark that was interested in everything, interested in the world. If from that perspective it could continue to evolve its way in time and space. There was a spark that understood that, one, we no longer could accept European fantasies about sexual reality; two, we could no longer afford to accept trans-European generic concepts about spiritual reality and social reality.

I believe that the future is going to be exciting, and that for everybody--but you'll have to keep up.

M There's a lot of Germans who would like to hear what you just had to say about white guilt when it comes to the Holocaust? Young Germans trying to shake off their past.

A I would say this much, not just to those young Germans but to our young people: there is no people on this planet whose documentation is not complex.

That's part of our experience as humans. Now as an African American, of course, I understand, very clearly, that had the continent of Africa discovered gunpowder and put together the modern technologies, that there's no way that the African community would have committed the atrocities that the Europeans would undergo in their experiences in America and Asia. Of course this is the case. For instance, there's never been a war in Africa; there's no documented evidence on the planet of any African person ever even striking another African person. Why, when I think of the great Tutsi and Hutu people, the experiences in Central Africa and Eastern Africa, there's no discord, and if there is, I blame it on the Europeans.

M Also, of course, there's never been slavery in Africa.

A No African would ever enslave another African. So I can imagine an African nation with 25 H-bombs not using any of that material after Pearl Harbor, because the Africans are peace-loving people.

So the history of our species is a history that says that there've been great moments and also complex moments. When I think of the Third Millennium, the question is not whether your ethnic group has had a rough time; the question is, what is the future, what role do you want to have in the future? Look at what's happening in Indonesia right now, or in Africa, India and Pakistan, or in parts of America. The world is changing; if you think you were a slave before, you ain't seen nothing yet.

M Hmm. So let me ask you a couple of things about your own work. [we both laugh uproariously]. We were talking about time [more laughter] and I'm recalling that in your own work, you have a place for putting out records that are "in the tradition," and they swing, they sound like jazz groups, the Tristano, Charlie Parker, Monk tributes you've done along those lines. But you also have these pieces that extend the pulse in the same way that the Korean music does, for instance, where there's a long slow thing where you don't feel the beat so much. And you have other music that have pulse tracks, where the beat shifts from the meter up to the pulses you mark; and you have other musics where the time is sort of like a moment-form experience, where the contours of the music define the rhythmic accents somehow. And you have other musics, like recently, where you are playing…the Ghost Trance has a regular kind of a beat, but it's, as you call it, a trance music. So I'm wondering, since you've given your definition of how the "jazz" purists limit swing, and rhythm and blues and all that politically, do you think of your own body of work as representing different states of mind that are like your own birthright as a person, so that you have a place where you can go where you can just meditate in a way that doesn't have a hectic beat; or you have another place you can go where the hectic beat puts you in a trance. I mean, is that a way to describe these different areas?

A For me, part of what fascinated me about the wonderful discipline of music is that there's so many different kinds of music, and each kind puts you in a different state and gives a different set of components to experience. How wonderful it is to have an opportunity, for instance, to experience the unique qualities of the music of, say, Thelonious Monk, and then to experience, say, the great work of Ralph Schapey. Each music gives a different set of components to experience, and different worlds to experience. This aspect of the discipline I've always loved. Just as, for instance, here we are at Red Lobster: wow it's nice sometimes to have some fish. I don't like to have fish every day, but it's nice sometimes. It's the same with music. There are times I can say for myself, especially, where I like to hear really strong musics. There are times when I want to hear something very spatial, that's not so strong. There are times when I find tonal musics to be kind of interesting, and there are times when only something that contains an active rhythm will do. So everything depends upon how you define it. But the consideration of time, if that's what we're talking about, has to be looked at from a composite perspective.

For instance, when I think about time in the seventh restructural cycle musics, when I had to make a decision about the world of time, I had many things that could help me. One, I had the consideration of time that was evolving out of Cecil Taylor's music. I had the consideration of time that was evolving out of Karlheinz Stockhausen's musics, and the different kinds of logics that he was developing. I had the consideration of time that Charlie Parker had evolved, and his concept of line-forming logics, as well as the response by Lennie Tristano, which was a more chromatic response. All of this was available, it just depended on how you were looking at it and whether or not you chose to deal with it as such. But yes, I would agree with the idea that time would be one of the variables that is exciting about the music; it's just a question of what that American philosopher William Jefferson Clinton said: it all depends on what your definition of the word "is" is. [laughter]

M Yeah, I thought of you when he came up with that line!

A Clinton is the master!

M Keeping with this discussion of musical time, and philosophical time, we've touched on a lot of excitement about the past and tradition, and how it might feed your own work in a lot of different ways--but there was also a tone of pessimism about ever really getting beyond life in the cracks, and getting past the Southern strategy. And yet, the music is all about hope, as is the lie, and in the car on the way over we were talking about actual concrete strategies and plans about hope in the future. So the way I would peg all that direction to a question of time is this: throughout your whole project, you have always referred to macrocosmic time. You tend to say "this time cycle, that time cycle, this time zone, that time zone," and you have a good grasp of history, so you're always talking about this thousand-year cycle, that thousand-year cycle." And you've talked a lot about the

millennium, like the one that's been coming up. And now here we are in that Third Millennium. And I remember in your Tri-Axium Writings you were talking about sort of a millennial kind of time when things would come to a head in history and a better world would emerge, to put it simply. You were talking about women in the Tri-Axium Writings, and about a certain kind of tipping point, where all the world's religions that prophesied about the last days and so on would come about into Utopia. You were speaking in mythological terms. But given that we are actually now in the Third Millennium, and that you have this thing in your consciousness as being a musician, an artist whose medium is sound in time, do you see something special about actually being in the Third Millennium in the sense of having things turn around for the world to give birth to these new directions and realities that we're talking about, in a way that sort of seems like exciting, and "in the hand," rather than some sort of dream that you can't really ever get to?

AB Thank you for your wonderful question, Mike Heffley, as usual. I can relate to your question, and I will have to break it into little components to deal with all of it that I can understand. First of all, yes, I am totally excited about the future, I'm totall grateful that I've even been able to be alive to even see the Third Millennium come in. From my generation--and we've talked about this before--1984 was the future. This is now the post-future. To even be here in the Third Millennium, and to have the opportunity to experience this, I'm elated and grateful. I'm hopeful of the future, and yet, in keeping with your question, I came to understand very early that if I wanted to continue my work, I would have to understand that not only was it not probable that I would have normal possibilities to demonstrate every aspect of my work--especially the notated musics--that the whole proposition would be complex. So in different cycles I've gone into debt to get a piece performed, and then I will recover in five years or so, then go into debt again. That has been the story, say, from "Composition 82 for Four Orchestras." Right now I still have five more years to get out of debt for "Trillium R," yet at the same time, I understood that this was going to be a complex direction. And yet, for me, it would be the only way; it wasn't like I even had a choice. This was what I wanted to do, this is what I still want to do, and I'm still excited about it.

Okay, the next level of your question: what am I thinking about for the future, and how does that relate to my work? Well, I remember the phrase, "for those who are planting seeds, trees will grow." I've been working on my project for 35 years. I remember John Cage commenting that many of his colleagues were angry at him because he was having so much fun with his music. But it was only because he had been working at it for 30, 40, 50 years; and it was only because he had made all the sacrifices that he had to make to work with his music. So he did not have a life of making a lot of money, of being totally successful in the way some of the guys have been. But among the underground, the people who were interested in the future, and trying to evolve, we came to love him and recognize that his work was part of the real mystic tradition of restructural development; that

his work was a part of that effort that led to men being blasted off and landing on the moon. This is what I wanted to be part of--that group, those musics, which were the musics of curiosity, the musics of motivation. When I go back to thinking about Composition 113," that composition was one of the first of the holistic musics.

Let me back up just a little bit before we get into the rest of this question, to set the right backdrop. In the beginning, formula musics, alternative coding musics, taking from people's initials; formula musics, quasi-serial adaptations; schematic musics, looking at the composite time space and then dividing that time-space up. Language musics, twelve identities in the house of the circle that could be used for improvisational strategies, to place with the schematic musics; dimensional drawing constructions, musics that more and more start to factor internal components in terms of designations about factoring real-time pitch logic integration and strategies. Hieroglyphic structures as a means to start factoring in holistic musics, color and sound; Composition 76, factoring in gesture and movement. Finally, Composition 82, spatial trajectory musics, coming after Gruppen and Kari, and Polytrope for Orchestra by Xenakis; trajectoral coding strategies. Composition 113, holistic strategies; Composition 174, gradient logic strategies, and area-space mapping musics; Composition 175, Garthstone Castle, an example of area-space mapping musics. Ghost Trance musics, focusing in on the house of one, the house of Shala; the house of Shala from a tricentric standpoint, fulfilling the poetic dimensions of the Tri-Axium Writings, going from there into the Trillium operas into, now, the house of one, as the mystic identity space of one. Ghost Trance musics into the form-scheme-space models: continental spaces, as in the United States being a continental space. In the context of my system, going through the twelve great lands of my system as akin to Disneyland, a la post-Disneyland constructions that have tri-centric virtual experiences for twelve sonic playlands that demonstrate continental mapping experiences for the friendly experiencer, single or group tours. When I think of the future, I'd like to continue to work with my project, to go through the house of two, the house of three, the house of four, to build a music that's consistent with all of the defined parameters of my system: the galactic parameters, stories about going into space, mapping space. I want a music that equals the human genome project; I want a music that equals the projects of NASA going into space with different trajectories that start to map galactic particulars. I want to fulfill all twleve operas of the Trillium musics, which will also be accompanied by the book of Shala, the book of Ashmenton, the book of Joreo. My project has always been, one, an individual thing; two, it's always been a tri-centric thing; and three, it's always been an occult position.

Now to deal with the next aspect of your question: the heart of the work that I'm trying to do, on the plane of symbolic musics, and ritual and ceremony, is to create a context of experience that will bow to the concept of, one, transcendent realities--and by that I mean gods, goddesses, and mystery children. Two, a concept of transcendence that connects the world of ideas into the world of

apparent reality that finally connects into the world of transcendence, where, one, the ghosts can come back and play; two, it's transtemporal, past present and future is one unit; three, everything is in every tempo and there's a connection into any part of the tri-centric parameter. Three, I wanted to build a context of experience that's tri-centric that maps my experience, including the house of humor--especially the house of humor, with my experience--and also the house of unemployment. So that would be my response to your question.

M That's a great response; I can't even comment on that. In other words, whatever happens, happens in conjunction with reality, rather than a picture of reality.

A And also it happens in conjunction with what I've been building. In the end, we have this all-consuming Now. Speaking only for myself, as a barefoot country boy, I just want to do my little work, get all muddy, get down in there and do the best I can do. That's all one can do: kick it about, roll the motherfucking dice, and let the chips fall where they may.