## 2. Psychic and Moral Contents of Music

**EMBODIED COGNITION**

Embodied cognition, which has been the focus of a multitude of academic articles in recent years, focuses on the connection between musical events and bodily motion, on both sides of the stage – from the perspective of the musician as well as that of the listener. The focus of these studies mostly falls into one of two categories: the first is that of empirical analysis of brain activity in response to musical events, the second is that of critical discussions on the constraints and categorisation of the musical body itself. From a strictly empirical standpoint, one cannot understate the importance of the nexus between motion (and spatial reasoning in general) and musicality. From the work of Lakoff and Lakoff & Johnson on [[Intentionality and Image Schemas - Saslaw|image schemas]], which in music are essentially used as a way to relate auditory phenomena to a spatial conception of sensory as well as cognitive reality, it is evident that physicality is a central part of our way of reasoning around and experiencing music and sound itself. Embodied perception digs even deeper into the matter at hand, exploring the physical reactions of our brains and bodies to sound. Without going into too much detail on the empirical side of the matter, I think the idea that is most central to the understanding of embodied cognition is that of pulse as an imagined motion. Pulse, and rhythm in general, are perceived by our brains and bodies as \_imagined movements\_, in the sense that listening to and performing music involves the same neural processes as physical movement. The actual movement that the body produces in response to a steady beat or repeating rhythmic pattern are thus considerable sympathetic movements that go along with the “actual” \_imagined\_ movement that we perceive in the music itself. On this very rudimentary base knowledge, we can further build a more general concept of metaphysical affiliation of music and physicality: since we perceive, on an empirical level, this connection, it is only natural that we generalise it and think of music as a completely physical phenomenon. Thus, the body of the musician and the music they produce are insolubly tied to one another.

Let us now analyse what this tie between music and the performer’s body truly entails, starting from the point of view of the performer themselves. Following the line of thought of musical embodiment, the musician’s body becomes as important to their music as the notes they decide to play. In non-Western musical conceptions, dance is seen as inseparable from musicianship. For example, in sub-Saharan African cultures, body movement is the ultimate way to experience rhythm, or embodied metre. Someone like Thelonious Monk could be taken as an example of an heir of this tradition. Monk’s experience of rhythm, which famously visibly manifested itself on multiple occasions, was an extremely physical one, one that made him, on occasion, dance along to his group’s music (like in the famous live recording of \_Rhythm-a-Ning\_), or tap his foot together with the music’s accents (see for example the live recording of \_Evidence\_, where Monk keeps stomping his foot along with the head’s accents throughout his comping and solo). The physical approach to piano playing employed by Thelonius Monk is perhaps the greatest example of how musical embodiment reflects on us as listeners. Gibson (1979) would characterise this as listening on an \_ecological\_ level: when listening to a Monk record, one does not simply hear the sounds of the piano, one hears \_Monk playing the piano\_: we hear the physical act of the piano being played (which is particularly easy to do in the case of Monk, given his aforementioned extremely physical approach to pianism and music in general). Another great example of “ecological music” is that of Charlie Parker’s legendary recording of \_Lover Man\_ (1946). There are many stories circulating on the session, and the truth is probably often exaggerated, but the fact remains that (perhaps partly because of the very stories around it) we can’t help but hear the struggle in the notes of the recording, and it is hard to listen to it without envisioning the musician himself, unsteadily wobbling, his skin shining with sweat, his mind wandering away constantly. Around the time of the recording session, Bird was traversing a particularly hard time in his life, he was enduring the symptoms of drug abstinence and alcoholism, and would soon be interned in the Camarillo State Mental Hospital. Ross Russel, the director of Dial Records, allegedly wanted a psychiatrist present in the recording room, who had to intervene by giving Parker his medicine before the recording of the track in question. Somehow, even without knowing the story behind the recording, we can \_hear\_ and \_see\_ Bird and his struggle, and we project what should be strictly musical observations (like the disconnectedness of the lines, or the articulation choices being made) onto the musician’s body (which we make out to be unsure, trembling, tormented), as well as onto their psyche (painting ourselves a picture of great pain and struggle).

Given the importance that we have attributed to timbre as a central element of musical “personality”, and the embodied nature of it, it is imperative that we take another step forward, to interrogate ourselves on the “\_social and cultural forces that construct the concept of the body”\_\_.\_

In seeing bodies as socially constructed entities, like, for example, Butler (1993, 2004) does, one is able to recognise the necessity of the divorce between the \_body\_ itself and the qualities (or, rather, \_Ideals\_) attributed to it – in Butler’s case, the analysed category of oppression forced on the body is that of “sex”, while our focus is on “race”. Because, then, race is a social construction with oppressive aims, and it is forced over the bodies of the oppressed – meaning that Race as an othering construct is not something one is “born with”, but rather something that is pushed on one’s self through one’s body – the bodily aspect of music making, which reflects on timbre, which in turn is used as a means of “identifying” the musician (i.e., attributing to the musician certain \_personal\_ qualities), ties back into the White narrative. In other, more direct words: the Attributes forced on Black bodies determine the musicality of the Black individual (as music is an embodied process), and thus the musical product of the Black individual is not only socially, but also \_ontologically\_ ascribable to the Black class. The physicality of the Black musician is subject to the Attributes that have been pushed onto the Black class by Euorpeans, and thus its music reflects those Attributes. Stefano Bollani (2016) gives an interview about the general consensus on jazz in higher musical education in Italian Conservatories, stating that “\_there was a rumour \[...] among professors and, thus, among students, \[...] that playing jazz would ruin your hands \[...] that it would ruin your technique \[...] that while playing Beethoven \[if you also played jazz music] \[...] your hand would start hurting, because… you studied jazz?\_” (\_ivi\_: 02:40), as well as musical journalism which “\_talked about musicians such as Thelonius Monk as people who couldn’t actually play, and just threw their hands onto the instrument, playing all the wrong notes\_ \_\[...] which is what made his music dissonant and interesting in the first place\_” (\_ivi\_: 03:15). As we can see, the physical nature of music, as can be seen in Black musicians such as Monk, in its distance from the White aesthetic, becomes the perfect candidate for racialised storytelling, as well as an instrument for arguing White (musical) Supremacy, and makes the whole world of Black music dismissible, to the White class, as being the product of uneducated, unrefined and physical beast-musicians. All these factors contribute to the “sound of the Black musician” (both on an ideal and on a sensory level), and since “\_you can’t separate the means \[...] from what he ultimately said\_”, they are part of the elements that act on the conceived and perceived nature of the music itself.

**MUSIC AS LOGOS**

In the realm of neuroscience, the bare building blocks of musical perception are generally understood to be sympathetic nervous responses to auditory stimuli, and particularly to the physical measures of them, namely their frequency (pitch), repetitiveness over time (rhythm) and the ratios present between multiple frequencies (intervals). Interestingly, if one were to construct a definition of “*musical experience*” from these atomic concepts, one would have to recognise the fact that the first instance of a musical experience fitting this definition must have undoubtedly been related to a simple phonic event repeating itself regularly over time (such as the falling of a drop of water, or the shaking of branches in the wind), triggering a sympathetic response in the nervous system of one very lucky human being. Regardless of any of the further implications of this kind, which at this point are outside the scope of this work, the valuable insight, subjectively verifiable, offered by this type of definition is that musicality is an essentially *embodied* process. Like language and art, it deals in stimuli and responses. It is founded on sympathetic bodily responses to the objects of our senses, and on our subsequent employment of such responses as signifiers[[1]](#footnote-1), making them into a physical phenomenon (the act of speaking, drawing, or making music – in other words, the artistic *act*), that in turn appeals to the senses of humans, and possesses a certain content, in that it serves as a vehicle for emotion, intellect and psyche. What is interesting, then, is that through the perception of the products of such a process, what we are left with is *Logos* reflecting on itself. This fact is clear to use from two simple premises, namely the contents of the artistic act itself and the reception of said act by an observer.

The mere existence of the former, which should itself be justified (as what is obvious for language and figurative arts might not be as readily apparent in the case of music), can be justified through a thoroughly historic approach. The earliest written testimonies on musical practice come to us from the Greek civilisation, and they paint a rich and vast picture of the contents of music, as well as their value to man[[2]](#footnote-2). A lot of these sources concern tragedies specifically, or are themselves fragments of tragedies containing musical notation. Most notably, in the first category, we find the works of Aristotle, who, in his *Poetics*, discussed the importance of music in intensifying the catharsis of the audience, and his student Aristoxenus, who in his *Harmonics* discusses how different *modes*[[3]](#footnote-3)were used to evoke certain emotions in the audience during plays. Before proceeding with our investigation, a basic understanding of the concept of modes (*harmoniai*) should be established, as they seem to be the core of the entire Greek theoretical system. Modes are collections of pitches, and their atomic unit is that of the *tetrachord*. A tetrachord is a collection of four pitches, all of which are at a tone’s distance from the last, except for one, which only moves by semitone – so that the sum total of intervals is that of a perfect fourth. The placement of this minor second interval, then, determines the name of such a tetrachord (for example, the tetrachord containing a semitone between the first two pitches receives the name of Dorian). These tetrachords are then used to form larger and larger molecules and are translated in pitch and joined together in different ways in the process. Regardless of any technical detail, then, we can observe that the earliest musical system we have direct knowledge of was founded on melodic material produced by a set of pitched sounds organised through a rational governing principle regulating their distance in pitch. But that is not all we know, for Plato, in his *Republic*[[4]](#footnote-4), discusses the importance of these difference modes for the individual’s ethical life. Indeed, he affirms that certain modes promoted or impeded in the listener certain virtues (Dorian and Phrygian, for example, encouraged courage and temperance respectively, while Lydian and Ionian were considered too indulgent), going as far as designing the use of certain modes as the object of legislation in his *Laws*[[5]](#footnote-5), expressing concern for their technical use as tools to stir immoral emotions in the listener. These sources are the earliest in existence, countless centuries old, and yet they already describe music as an incredibly complex phenomenon, both because of the existence of a vast body of musical theory as well as the implication of music as a tool for stirring emotion and living the good life. Based on the landscape these writings describe, we understand music to have possessed, to the Greek, certain greatly important qualities, in that it was both something instrumental to education and knowledge of the Good and stirring of emotions in others through certain techniques, which themselves relied on a complex theoretical musical system. In other words, through the theorisation of a musical *language* (or, more properly, “system”), man was, already at that time, able to create a response in the listener, through either a shared ethical belief or an established and conventional musical lexicon. The conclusion that can be drawn from this line of investigation, then, is that already in its early manifestation, music worked through the use of an established and conventional framework, mutually understood, if not by all, by most of its practitioners, either intellectually or instinctively[[6]](#footnote-6), to transmit a certain content, either moral or emotional, and was often used to aid narration. Let us ascertain now what can be found out about the functioning of this transmission.

**BODIES THAT MATTER**

***White Pantheorism:*** It is a colonial prerogative that the colonised's language as well as artistic production be redefined through the coloniser's linguistic and artistic models. Musically speaking, the very first efforts of #todo musicology consist precisely in transcribing folk music and forcing it to fit squarely into the then solidly delineated Western theoretical paradigm. If we consider the model for artistic production brought forth by the field of [[Colonial Studies]], we can easily understand the workings of this '\_White pantheorism\_'. This term is meant to indicate the twofold effort of the White class: on the one hand, that of belittling Black musical performance by choosing to analyse it solely through standards of the White musical canon, and on the other that of holding monopoly over the idea of 'music theory' itself, so that the term always implicitly means 'western music theory'. This may sound like an exorbitant accusation, when it is stated like this, but once analyses the situation from the bottom up, it becomes readily apparent that it is so.

Let us observe a series of simple facts. First of all, most musicians and music students are aware of the existence of 'classical music theory', and they understand it to be the set of rules that regulate the inner workings as well as tonal (and non-tonal) relationships present in pieces of music that are part of the tradition of art music as a whole. Secondly, most musicians, since the birth of jazz education, understand jazz music through the same theoretical system. Thirdly, most musically educated people apply the rules of 'classic music theory' in order to understand different kinds of music, regardless of their relationship to the tradition of European art music.

So far, things don't seem quite as bleak as I have initially depicted them to be. From these three facts, it simply seems that musicians are learning 'classical music theory' and using it to analyse and understand different kinds of music. At worst, this reality is short-sighted, in that it completely ignores the fact that different kinds of music might abide different theoretical systems, but this still doesn't imply any of the seemingly disproportionate accusations that were made earlier. Let us state a few more facts.

Most musician and musical aficionados are aware of the existence of a classical [[Canon]], a pantheon of musicians that are considered to be 'classics', artists without time, whose notes will always be perfect and untouchable. The idea of the canon originated during the Classical period, and it is the reason why, today, when one goes to a classical concert, it is probably to listen to music from the past, and not the present. When we take a closer look at the canon, however, we notice a certain common thread - most of the music present in it is composed by White men. "Well - one might say - of course it is! After all, if we are talking about European music, it is natural that most composers should be White men". Regardless of the systemic misogyny that a similar exclamation implies, it is not at all obvious - there have been a great number of female composers, and a great number of BIPOC composers over the centuries, and yet none of them seemed to make the cut. This is to say, of course, that the Canon is the product of a profoundly racialised and genderised society, and that it fully reflects its biases.

The Canon, however, is not simply a list of great composers of the past - it is the instrument through which we decide which music matters and which doesn't. The rules of 'classical music theory' are largely derived and inferred from baroque and classical musical praxis, and, in particular, from the musical praxis connected to the Canon. Therefore it logically follows that 'classical music theory' is apt at describing a fairly narrow scope of music, with a certain tradition and a certain social and racial connotation. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the idea of a specialised theoretical framework aimed at understanding a certain period of musical production in a certain geographical region. That is part of the definition of musicology itself.

The problem arrives when this theoretical system, as well as the Canon, become the only means of judging and analysing music. When this happens, when they are made universal and exclusive, they annihilate every music that is the product of non-Western musical conceptions. In today's day and age especially, where societies are increasingly multicultural, and yet the Western music market remains the most influential one, this reality requires a thoughtful and careful evaluation. The idea of 'White pantheorism', then, is meant to represent exactly this complex relationship: the creation of a universal body of theoretical knowledge, derived from Euro-centric (and, more aptly, White-centric) standards and ideals, used to judge and belittle music created by any out-group (in the case of jazz music, the Black class).

This leads to a profound racialisation of the music itself, since the possibility of music to be reduced down to a model understandable through 'White theoretical tools' dictates, in numerous cases, the value attributed to the piece of music itself.  By turning a narrow subset of music theory (White music theory, or the White class’s understanding of music) into a Universal then, justified the erasure of any other possible understanding of musical phenomena as a matter of fact – there is only one universal Music Theory, which happens to coincide with the theoretical product of the White class. As is the case with colonial cultures, “\_the whole world \[is\] seen as raw material to be adapted to the gnoseological categories of the white man\_”. (Bohemer, E., 1995: \_Colonial and postcolonial literature.\_ Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 81).

The direct consequence of this is, of course, that a classically trained musician will not understand, for example, the music of Barry Harris, (in particular, in terms of voice leading, chord-scale theory and rhythmic approach) because it somewhat differs from what he has been thought to be Music, nor will he care to, because it is far from what he has been thought to be "\_Real\_ Music" (or, in classist terms, White music). The rules that comprise White music theory, which are now being extended, especially through the education system, to Universals, are seen as the only possible consequence of the Universal of Sound (in its physical, vibrational meaning), and thus the way the West has developed its theoretical system of music becomes the only valid one, the only truly Universal one. This example is only applied to jazz, but there are many more fields in which such a dynamic plays out – the White Theory-derived understanding of music fundamentally clashes with the reality of facts (that music, even in the West, is informed by non-White sources, or at least sources not ascribable to the idea of White Music Theory), like is the case with Mali Djembe (Polak 2010) music or compositions based on folk music of most origins (masterfully exemplified in Manuel 2002).

## Consequences

This process entails an extremely important dialectic consequence, which is the inversion between subject and predicate. Music theory is no longer seen as a cultural and artistic product, but as a means of explaining, writing and judging musical compositions. And when this all-powerful critical tool is the intellectual property of a strongly racialised class of individuals - on which holds power and privilege over others, it is bound to permeate musical education and critique. This brings the White musician (or critic) to justify, analyse and, in some particularly infuriating cases, even correct musical phenomena that are clearly derived from different views on music theory (if not from entirely different theoretical frameworks) through the lens of 'Classical Music Theory', thus revendicating these artistic products as their own while imposing a European theoretical lens, and, ultimately, European meters of judgements and of worth. This, it should be pointed out, is in complete conformity with the practices of [[Colonial Studies|colonialism]], in which the colonisers seek to explain colonial reality through a European lens.

Furthermore, we can consider the interaction between these two factors: the fact that Black music does not strictly adhere to the White aesthetic, and the proximity (both physical and sociocultural) of Black and White music in the United States. The latter created the previously discussed sense of fascination, almost visceral attraction (determined by the racial attributes ascribed to the Black class and, thus, its music), that sparked the listening interest of the White musician (excluding the White jazz musician, who on occasion, at least intellectually, stepped outside of the White frame), while the former rendered the music itself worthless from an intellectual and theoretical standpoint, since only the music completely adhering to Universal White Theory was the work of the Genius (in the most Schenkerian sense of the word). Thus, from the White point of view, the Black musician must be creating something of \_some\_ value (albeit not an intellectual or artistic one), but they must also be devoid of any understanding of the inner workings of the music itself, since their music does not conform to the White aesthetic (meaning that it is not the product of intellectual and artistic decisions, but of animalistic instinct[^2], something clearly inferior to the refined Theory of the White class).[^3]

## Examples

This same mindset can be seen in the works of Music Theorists such as Gunther Schuller (\[1958\] 1986), who maintained that the central quality of an improvised solo was its coherence, which could be quantified through the tools of Schenkerian analysis, or public figures such as Ben Shapiro (2019), claiming that “rap is not music” because, according to their “\_music theorist father who went to music school\_” (\_ivi:\_ 00:10), all music has three aspects – melody, harmony, and rhythm – and rap allegedly only possesses the latter, making it “\_rhythmic speaking\_”, and not a form of music, or that “\_rock was an actual degradation of skill for music from jazz, which was actually a degradation of skill from classical \[music\]\_” (\_ivi:\_ 03:38). Even renowned musicians, such as Luciano Berio (????) maintained that improvised music was nothing but the product of amateurish efforts, and that written music was the far intellectually and artistically superior means for musical production – as it aligned with the White Theoretical Musical Aesthetic. In all these cases, we see the use of 'Classical Music Theory[^1]' (or rather its warped image) as a Universal, being used to judge and appropriate products of cultures that are Othered, in the continuous perpetration of the [[Marxist Historical Materialism|class struggle]] between Racialised communities.

Aaron Copland (in Monson):

> Progressive jazz has been freed of harmonic limitations... Now its main trouble is a lack of unity in expressive content, by failing to drive home a unified idea. Progressive jazz composers don't always know, expressively, what they're trying to do. They seem to be distracted by amusing things along the way.

The status of "composer" is reserved to classical (White) composers.

> It is not surprising that in the late forties and early fifties such emphasis \[as that demonstrated by Gunther Schueller, for example] was placed on comparing leading jazz musicians to modern classical composers, for to do so was to claim a right to higher cultural status for jazz and a new uncompromising identity for the jazz musician.

[^1]: It should be pointed out that the use of this term is, in itself, absurd, and that its use, always in single quotes, is meant to only reflect this absurdity

[^2]:  See Henry Martin (????) and Walter Kingsley (1917)

[^3]: appropriations and opinions on jazz in white avant-garde music, Lewis (1996)

^ #todo

***Phonic Blackness:*** Through the process described by [[Class Construction]] the White class identifies the intellectual as well as the physical attributes of the Black class. Of course, because of this, it also attributes characteristics to its music. These can range from the most innocuous classifications (like a critic calling a Black man's voice "soulful" regardless of his actual singing style) to the most harmful. Through the separation of the White and the Black class, the model of the Black Person is born, and so, as a consequence, is that of Black Artistic Production. Thus, the same classifiers imposed upon the Black class apply: Black Artistic Production could never be intellectual, refined, or beautiful, as all of these characteristics strictly pertain to the White class.

In this very same idea, however, lies the reason for the [[Colonialist Fascination]] with the artistic product of the Black class: the very same qualities that were attributed arbitrarily to it by the White class in order to render it clearly and unequivocally inferior to White Artistic Production make it all the more fetishisable and desirable. Through the eyes of the White class, Black music has a visceral, almost animal pull to it (because individuals belonging to the Black class have been made out to be, themselves, visceral and animalistic). This fascination, although made implicit and deeply worked into our subconscious in [[Sigmund Freud|freudian]] manner[^1], still persists today, and is precisely what gives birth to all those 'positive' classifications and racialisations of music by non-European artists[^2]. The black aesthetic, then, is often fetishised by the [[Music Business|music market]], like in the case of Elvis Presley, a White musician playing music in the style of many Black musicians at the time (i.e Little Richard), who was seen as a socially acceptable way for White audiences to enjoy what was, substantially, Black music. If we go further back, we encounter Minstrel Shows, which were born of the same [[Colonialist Fascination]] and permitted White performers to step out of the role that they negatively derived for themselves. Even today, although in somewhat more subtle terms, the same type of fetishisation persists, as a series of musical stereotypes and racialised words bound to racial markers.

 Phonic Blackness uses racial classes and their attributes as departure points, and it serves both as a means of categorisation and as a metre of judgement for the musical prowess of both White and Black jazz musicians. The earliest example of the employment of the Ideal of phonic Blackness can be identified with the designation of rhythm as the most ancient of musical traditions and the equation “drum=primitive=Africa=Black”, which seeks to validate racial Attributes pushed on the Black class for the purposes of domination. Since rhythm is seen as an element strongly bound to the Black reality, then it follows naturally that expressions describing specific microtiming practices (such as swing, groove or pocket) should be also seen as strictly Black prerogatives. It is through similar procedures that many other phonically Black elements are derived. The idea of the existence of “black voices”, for example, derives from the association of the Black musician with a Christian background, and through it with Christian hymns from the baptist and evangelical churches, or even with the rural blues (which is often, in the collective White subconscious, tightly bound to the experience of spirituality and soulfulness – a fact that sounds extremely absurd, if one knew even as little as the lyrics to a single rural blues recording). A further example of phonic Blackness is the stark separation between “Black jazz” and “White jazz”, which will be discussed shortly – the former being associated with the “hot” phrasing style of bebop, and the former being associated with the “cooler” California or West Coast sound.

What all of these examples have in common is their origin. Each one of them stems from a different Attribute of the Black class (like primitivity, soulfulness or viscerality), and they all aim to delineate and categorise the role of the Black musician and of their music. The peculiar thing about them, however, is that they see supporters and objectors in both the White and the Black class. Although it seems superfluous to posit that they were, originally, intellectual categories constructed by the White class, it is nevertheless worth remarking that they were just as promptly embraced by both classes alike. A few Black musicians, without a doubt, interpreted these as points of racial pride, reclaiming the Attributes imposed over them from the White class as their own (in what we could identify as the second fase of the [[Post-Colonial Literature|post-colonial model]]). Many more, however, saw them for what they were –  pointless racialisations of music itself, which, in its purest form, knew no race. Being the class that created these mental categories in the first place, most of the White class agreed (as many still do, to this day) with its prejudices.

> Among the many implications of the stark contrast drawn in sonic stereotypes of black sounds and white sounds are its gendered associations Here African American aesthetics are coded as manly and virile, and the white aesthetic by contrast is coded as feminine or, at least, less virile (Ingrid Monson)

## The role of Harmony in African Music

> The place of harmony in African American aesthetics, I believe, is crucial in moving beyond the excessive stereotyping of black music as primarily characterised by rhythm, as well as the over attribution of the harmonic elements of music as white.

Marshall Sahlins and the "indigenisation of modernity" - the way in which "the incorporation of a borrowed cultural resource becomes a means of articulating difference down the line." (Monson). African American vocal harmony, for example, has been found in late studies (sources in Monson) to be the source of the barbershop quartet, which is now conceptualised as "quintessentially white". In reality, the inevitable contact between African America and Western harmonic practices gave birth to an exquisitely Black harmonic practice, often aurally transmitted in the circles of African American musicians. This practice, then, got borrowed back and once again adopted into Western musical practice, but from a purely genealogical standpoint, it is clear how they evolve from a strongly "Black" conception of music itself.

## "Black Music" Today

Given this problematic history of the concept of \_'Black Music'\_, it is but natural to doubt its place in today's musical and social vocabulary. If it is true (and it is undeniably true) that racial categorisation is born out of the will to belittle and subjugate, and that there is no racial categorisation in a society free from racism itself, why should we (if at all) continue using this term when talking about jazz? Is it not contradictory to point out the nefarious origin of racial categories and, at the same time, ascribe a type of music production to one of those categories we seek to abolish? Why keep using the word “Black”, when it is not a descriptive word (in the sense that there is not, geographically speaking, a Black People, and at the same time it doesn’t refer exclusively to people with black skin), but one born out of the will of Europeans to subdue the colonised and enslaved?

Furthermore, as Zenni (2016[^3]) promptly points out, jazz, while it was indubitably created by African American musicians, received an incredible number of influxes from European and Jewish musical practices, rendering it “\_everyone’s music\_” (\_ivi:\_ 91).

It seems like all we're doing by choosing to continue using this term is picking and choosing which racial stereotypes are pretty enough for us to keep, just as liberal feminists do with their sweet and inadvertently profoundly sexist slogans. It's almost like we are deciding which categories of oppressions we're content with. Members of the White class, in particular, tend to do so because of a sense of guilt towards the nefarious doings of their ancestors, just as many men tend to understand feminist struggle to be simply a request for permission to exist as a woman. I do not think that this is the only way in which one might intend the term 'Black music'.

Both [[Friedrich Nietzsche]] and [[Monique Wittig]], after breaking down the concepts morals and gender respectively, ask this same question - whether it is appropriate, or even necessary, to use terms employed by the system one is seeking to effectively destroy -, and arrive at two conclusions that are, I think, incredibly helpful to this work. The first one is that we cannot simply 'do without' the concept that we are trying to abolish. We are working from within a system, in this case a [[Racial Frame]], and we need to exploit its terms to highlight its fallacies. The second conclusion is that words hold power precisely of their history and their belonging to a certain system.

Black music should be celebrated as such precisely because of the history of oppression that it carries. While it is true that there is no “Black People”, it is at the same time true that systematic oppression and racialisation (and the [[Black Nationalism|Black Nationalist]] responses to such realities) did, somehow, create a sense of identity, both internal and external to the oppressed classes. In response to the wave of hate and discrimination, BIPOC themselves constructed a shared sense of (social) identity, as attested by the numerous inclusive[[Civil Rights Movements]], born out of the will of the entire racial proletariat, which defined itself not because of a shared nationality, but because of a shared history of oppression.

Likewise, Black music is not music created by a certain group of people, but it is music created by an oppressed racialised community, and should thus be acknowledged as such. Influences on the music, in this discourse, are not as relevant as the oppression history of the Black class, and the role that jazz music played in said history.

It is all too easy for the White jazz musician to dismiss the Blackness of the music as a thing of the past, given that they are privileged enough to benefit of the product of the creativity (as is prerogative of the bourgeoisie) of a class whose oppression their ancestors took part in[^4].

Because of this, jazz at its core is, and always should be considered, Black music - not because it is the product of a “racial group”, not because it has intrinsic characteristics that are exclusive to non-Whites (or non-Europeans), but because it carries a cultural, social and political meaning that should not be erased: that of class struggle, order subversion and Civil Rights action.

> By emphasising formal variety Hodeir implicitly places Mulligan's and Evans's arrangements in the company of great modern European composers, such as Stravinsky or Schoenberg, who also shunned the obviousness of logical symmetrical forms.

Or, rather, Hodeir implicitly attributed a greater value to the compositions of Mulligan and Evans precisely because they fit into the narrative of European music.

**TIMBRE**

Despite its severe under-theorisation (derived, most likely, from the very elusive nature of its subject), timbre and timbral qualities play an incredibly important role in the way that we perceive and rationalise music. What makes timbre hard to describe is its extremely multifaceted nature, which includes (but is not limited to) the concepts of overtone composition, sound envelope, pitch to non pitched sound ratio, air pressure and tessitura. Furthermore, to add to this already massive complexity, the concept of \_sound\_, which is arguably what one ultimately seeks to understand through the analysis of timbre, is an even more complex one, as even seemingly irrelevant elements, such as articulation, line construction and intonation contribute to its making. Precisely because of this extremely broad, almost inscrutable connotation, however, sound functions as the primary vehicle for the musician’s identity (Solis, 2015).

On a pragmatic level, the most appropriate tool for timbral analysis consists of a sympathetic approach, aimed at deciphering the very [[Embodied Cognition|physical]] gestures that produce a certain result, so that we may both learn something about the practical act of producing a specific type of 'sound', as well as the physical - that is, most often, vibrational - phenomena that take place. Pianist, composer and scholar Vija Iyer offers us, in his work, great insight into the matter of embodied cognition, as well as what he calls the "\*kinesthetic/spatiomotor approach\*" to improvisation. These observation, which essentially inquiry into the relationship between [[Embodied Cognition]] and music making, are the perfect \*hummus\* for the development of a wider understanding of the concepts of timbre and sound (intended as an extension of the idea of timbre that encompasses the broader practices that have been previously made explicit) themselves. Before any type of reflection about the collective sound of an ensamble, of course, it is only fitting to take on the already seemingly insurmountable task of analysing the individualistic relationship between a single musician and the timbre of their instrument.

This relationship, not unlike the relationship between an individual and their innermost private dimension, is often a tortuous and contradictory one, and in many ways it serves as a mirror to the outlook of a musician on the idea of music making as a whole. In practicality, the timbre that musicians produce is influenced by a wide range of factors, depending on the instrument of their choosing, and it is mostly possible to boil it down to mechanical, muscular actions. The way in which a pianist may choose to strike the keys of the instrument, the peculiar type of dance that a drummer chooses to pursue, or the subtle way in which violin players may use micro-musculature in both the fingering and bowing hand to obtain a certain vibrational response from the strings. In the case of wind players, the range of factors is even wider and more inscrutable, as it involves hidden musculature affecting aspects such as diaphragm support, throat position, tounging and embouchure. The resulting interplay between all the mechanical habits (which are trained with the often subconscious objective of obtaining a specific type of sound out of the instrument) that a musician develops and consolidates over time is what makes timbre their own. Interestingly enough, although through the development of mastery of one's instrument one might be able to "\*bend\*", so to speak, their timbre in a particular direction, every musician still possesses a "\*natural\*" timbre - just the way that a great actor might be able to imitate different voices and accents, but still keep his own, neutral voice as part of his identity. To make matters more complicated, a particular timbre, over time, necessarily evolves into a particular \*sound\*. Meaning that it is no longer only the aspect of vibrational production (the act of making a sound \*come out\* of an instrument) that is part of a musician's identity, but a constellation of other musical techniques, such as articulation, phrasing, and, in the case of improvisational music, the melodic lines that one decides to construct. All of these aspects, in turn, interact with timbre, so that their is a mutual influence between the two aspect, that slowly meld into a single element of musical and personal identity. I would like to once again emphasise the process of '\*melding\*' that is at play here: as an example, it is unthinkable to imagine John Coltrane's or Eric Dolphy's timbre without also picturing their overall sound - the very particular and specific way in which they articulate phrases, as well as the geometric shapes that those phrases embody. In the same way, it is impossible to imagine Glenn Gould's timbre without imagining also the very particular way in which he physically articulates every note.

In the case of music that is not wholly European in extraction, timbre often assumes an even more central role - as can be attested by the fact that we often see transcription of great jazz musicians relying on pseudo-notation that emphasises timbric elements more than strictly melodic or harmonic ones. This more 'soundly', 'textural' notation is often used, for example, when the importance of phonic events and musical textures surpasses that of exact pitches – from the milder instances of glissandos and bends being employed in transcribing fast passages from John Coltrane or Cannonball Adderley to the more extreme example of graphic notation in Westendorff (1995) in the transcription of specific passages of Cecil Taylor’s performances. Furthermore, we see many incredible Black avant-garde musicians, such as Pharoa Sanders, Archie Shepp, and even the late Jackie McLean, subordinating the ideas of pitch and rhythm to their timbric virtuosity, with the result of creating an extremely personal approach to music, and a highly recognisable sound, one that could be used as a synonym for their musical and personal identity. While sympathetic deduction is possibly the greatest tool at our disposal for an in-depth musical analysis, the only way to understand the profound consequences of the unique qualities of timbre is a reflection on the nature of timbre itself, as it relates to sound and musical as well as personal identity. In this regard, the most telling observation of all, then, resides in the fact that musical instrumentation is only of secondary nature to the construction of a musician's personal timbre. Proficient musicians, those who have been acquainted with the practice of playing their instrument for a number of years, are often readily identifiable through their timbre, regardless of the instrument they are playing. Charlie Parker, as an example, famously played many saxophones over the years, often pawning or losing his own instrument, and quickly finding an often cheap replacement for gigs or recording sessions. At one time, notably, he played on a Grafton resin alto saxophone, and yet his sound was, reportedly, unaltered by it. Another remarkable example of a similar happening is John Coltrane, appearing on alto on #todo record, and having a remarkably similar timbre to his unique tenor sound. What we can observe from these phenomena, then, is that even when working with a different instrument, or one built from a completely different material, timbre seems to come from within musicians themselves. It is, in many ways, part of their identity, as it is a unique and distinctive characteristic (or, at least, most people find it desirable for this to be the case) particular to the individual. It is like the sound of a person's voice, a characteristic we immediately associate with a certain individual and, in some case, affects the opinions that are formed about their character. This, of course, holds true for any instrument, regardless of the physical technique required to play it - pianists such as Glenn Gould, Red Garland or McCoy Tyner are immediately recognisable to the trained ear, just like drummers such as Elvin Jones, Jimmy Cobb and Tony Williams are.

The reason for this resides in what Roland Barthes #todo source would identify as the '\*grain of the voice\*', the extremely human and, more specifically, physical component that is embodied by the act of producing sound, either on an instrument or through the vocal chords. That is to say, that when listening to a sound, to the playing of a specific musician, we often and naturally picture the physical act of their playing (as we might picture the act of someone like Jackson Pollock or Fontana painting), and identify the techniques (or, at least, give our best educated guess to what they may be) and the gestures performed by the performer in order to produce a certain result. In doing so, in relying on the idea of embodied musicality, however, we also produce a mental picture, together with all the judgements that are naturally attached to it, of the performer. What happens, then, when this cognitive process, this construction of an imaginary body through the phenomenon of sound is intertwined with the social reality of the racial frame? The answer should be self evident. In the context of White Pantheorism (which, of course, extends to the executive praxis of musical instruments in general, regardless of their origin), the result can only be the enforcement of racialised Attributes onto musicians of non-European extraction. What the idea of White Pantheorism posits as a simply intellectual form of ostracism now becomes a very physical, embodied one - it is no longer only the intellectual product of the subaltern class that is at stake, but the body and physicality of the Black musician themselves. It is no longer only [[Phonic Blackness]] that we are talking about, but the construction of a very physical embodiment of the ideals attributed to the Black man - one that is actuated through Black music itself.

**GEOGRAPHIC/KINETIC MAPPING OF MUSICAL SPACE**

[![NRT-Tonnetz](https://i0.wp.com/musictheorymanual.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/tonnetz-Barb-short-1.png?resize=660%2C217)

Tonnetz, a musical analysis tool appearing originally in Hostinsky, Die Lehre von den musikalischen Klängen (1879), and later in Riemann's Ideen zu einer ‘Lehre von den Tonvorstellungen, serve to visually represent the functional relationships between chords present in a certain key. By weaving together the intervals of perfect fifth (horizontal) and major thirds (diagonal), Hostinsky and, later, Riemann, effectively constructed a spacial mapping of harmonic 'space', highlighting the geometrical element of harmonic practice. Together with other similar diagrams #todo sources in Saffirio notes as well as Cambridge History, the intent of such endeavours is to facilitate musical reasoning through spacial analogy, bringing the purely theoretical and imaginary field of musical pitches (as conceptual objects, not as vibrational physical events) into the realm of bodily experience, effectively (and, perhaps, subconsciously) acting upon the bodily nature of musical cognition and reasoning.

The job of the musician and composer, then, becomes akin to physically navigating through tonal and harmonic space, making a purely conceptual task into an embodied practice.

> Riemann's interest in these transformations appears within the context of his topographical conception of tonality, which in turn arises from Oettingen's topographical conception of pitch relations...

1. Not in the sense that they all covey meaning in the way language does, but that they are a conventional set of physical acts that stem from our sensory experience of reality. It is somewhat similar to the creation of a dictionary, where to each physical act (as in, either intentional act or sympathetic response) a certain phenomenon is associated. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The latter will be treated in Chapter 3.1 – Musical Ethos. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Book III, 398d-400a. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 812d-816d. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. That is to say, in the same way today’s musically illiterate public is able to understand the meaning of a piece of music. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)