

## Free Jazz and the French Critic

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From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s American avant-garde jazz was the subject of considerable interest in France. Initially the province of a tight-knit community of musicians, critics and jazz fans, by the end of the sixties 'free jazz,' or the 'new thing,' as many musicians preferred to call the movement, had won a wide following, particularly among younger, college-aged audiences. Reading through the jazz press from the period one encounters numerous reports describing the sizable crowds drawn to concerts featuring artists such as Frank Wright, Anthony Braxton, Alan Silva, Burton Greene and the Art Ensemble of Chicago.<sup>1</sup> Equally notable is the attention the style began to attract outside the cloistered world of specialist reviews in the later 1960s. Whereas prior to 1968 discussion of the jazz avant-garde had been restricted for the most part to magazines such as *Jazz-Hot* and *Jazz Magazine*, by the end of the decade the movement began to receive extensive coverage in mainstream newspapers and weeklies, among them *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. During the peak years of public interest in free jazz, from about 1968 to 1972, articles on the movement could be found in a bewildering variety of publications, ranging from underground newspapers<sup>2</sup> to glossy, high-end art magazines,<sup>3</sup> from

I would like to thank Ben Givan, Tamara Levitz, Marianne Wheeldon, and the readers for this *Journal* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

1. For a representative sampling of such reports, see Daniel Berger, "Une chaude semaine," *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, no. 2174 (22 May 1969): 12; Patrick Callaghan, "Free Jazz dans les facs: De l'Institut d'Art à la Sorbonne," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 259 (March 1970): 8; Pierre Cressant, "Free à l'O.R.T.F.," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 261 (May 1970): 7 and 26; T. Trombert, "Soirée de soutien au Black Panthers Party, Mutualité le 2-11-70," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 267 (December 1970): 9; and Laurent Goddet, "Alan Silva à l'O.R.T.F.," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 269 (February 1971): 27.

2. See, for instance, the articles on free jazz published in *Actuel*, no. 6 (March 1971); and in *Parapluie*, no. 2 (January–February 1971).

3. Pierre Lere, "Free jazz: Évolution ou révolution," *Revue d'esthétique* 23, no. 3–4 (1970): 313–25; and "Free jazz," *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, no. 12 (July 1970): 30.

communist-sponsored periodicals<sup>4</sup> to bulletins underwritten by the U.S. State Department.<sup>5</sup>

To a certain extent the heightened interest in free jazz was propelled by increased supply, as numerous American musicians moved to France during the late 1960s and early 1970s, spurred by the hope that their music might meet with a warmer reception abroad than it had in the United States. Sunny Murray, Marion Brown, Anthony Braxton, Steve Lacy, Noah Howard, Frank Wright, Alan Silva, Steve Potts and, most famously, the Art Ensemble of Chicago all decamped to Paris for varying lengths of time, lured across the Atlantic by the prospect of steady employment. The downturn in the jazz economy in the United States during the 1960s played a significant role in driving American musicians to France, as did the country's historic reputation as a haven for African American artists. Jazz artists in particular could look to an established history of African American musicians being warmly received in Paris, from the jazz community that flourished in Montmartre during the interwar period to the postwar success of expatriate musicians like Sidney Bechet, Kenny Clarke, and Bill Coleman.<sup>6</sup> Material incentives also drove the transatlantic exodus of musicians from the States. Of signal importance was a series of recordings that the BYG/Actuel record label undertook during the summer of 1969. The individual overseeing the series, the drummer and record producer Claude Delcloo, had contacted a number of musicians earlier in the year, promising them work should they come to France.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Delcloo invited a number of musicians participating in the First Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers at the end of July to stop over in Paris on their way back to the United States and cut records for the label.<sup>8</sup>

The flurry of activity that began in July and August 1969 culminated in October at the Actuel Festival, arguably the high-water mark of the new thing's reception in France. Organized by BYG/Actuel to generate publicity

4. Eric Plaisance, "Jazz: Champ esthétique et idéologique," *La Nouvelle Critique*, n.s., no. 26 (September 1969): 23–27; see also Pierre Lasnier, "L'esthétique du 'Black Power,'" *Droit et liberté*, no. 277 (December 1968): 26–27.

5. Guy Kopelowicz, "La New Thing," *Informations & Documents*, no. 230 (August 1966): 10–15.

6. William A. Shack, *Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story between the Great Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), esp. 163–81.

7. George Lewis, "The AACM in Paris," *Black Renaissance/Renaissance Noire* 5, no. 3 (Spring/Summer 2004): 106.

8. In addition to signing Shepp to record for the series, each of his sidemen—Alan Silva, Clifford Thornton, Grachan Moncur III, Dave Burrell, and Sunny Murray—were given contracts. See "Free Jazz sur Seine," *Jazz Magazine*, no. 169–70 (September 1969): 18–22; and Jacques Renaud, "BYG à l'avant garde," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 253 (September 1969): 16–18. For reports on the music performed at the Pan-African festival, see Daniel Sauvaget, "Le festival culturel panafricain," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 253 (September 1969): 30–33; and Paul Alessandrini, "L'Amérique noire au festival d'Alger," *Jazz Magazine*, no. 169–70 (September 1969): 16–17.

for Delcloo's record series, the event was billed as the first festival of its kind to be held in continental Europe—something of a Francophone equivalent to the Monterey Pop and Isle of Wight Festivals. The entrepreneurs who ran the BYG label, Jean Georgakarakos and Jean-Luc Young, had initially wanted to hold the event at Les Halles in Paris, but were forced to look for another site after French authorities, concerned about the threat the proposed festival presented to public order, refused to grant the necessary permits.<sup>9</sup> After a series of failed attempts to secure an alternative location in France, the organizers settled on the town of Amougies, near the French border in Belgium. Though modeled on Anglo-American rock festivals, what distinguished the Actuel festival from these precedents was the quantity of jazz featured on the program. In between sets by Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, and Yes were performances by Archie Shepp, Don Cherry, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, and Frank Wright, among others (see Fig. 1, which reproduces an advertisement for the festival published in *Jazz-Hot*).<sup>10</sup> The remarkable balance the program struck between rock and free jazz elicited a good deal of commentary in the press, leading some to hope that the event marked the beginning of a “rapprochement” between the two genres.<sup>11</sup> Others were more skeptical, especially considering the tensions that emerged between the jazz musicians and the audience, which by all accounts was composed primarily of rock fans. This was particularly evident during the Art Ensemble of Chicago's set, when Malachi Favors parodied the onstage histrionics of rock guitarists, which, according to a handful of press accounts, elicited catcalls from the audience.<sup>12</sup> But incidents like this did not prevent the majority of commentators from casting the event as a breakthrough in the public acceptance of avant-garde jazz. Writing in the literary magazine *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, Daniel Berger proclaimed that “[t]he hits of the Actuel festival were as much Don Cherry or Sunny Murray as Pink Floyd or the Pretty Things.”<sup>13</sup> In an effort to explain how such ‘difficult’ music might win broad public support, critic Paul Alessandrini pointed to the “immediacy” of avant-garde jazz. Performances deemed to possess this quality

9. Philippe Adler, “Les préfets n'aiment pas le pop,” *L'Express*, no. 954 (20 October 1969): 105.

10. For reports on the Actuel festival, see Paul Alessandrini, “Freepop,” *Jazz Magazine*, no. 173 (December 1969): 26–31; idem, “Les folles nuits d'Amougies,” *Rock & Folk*, no. 35 (December 1969); Daniel Berger, “Les inusables,” *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, no. 2200 (20 November, 1969): 12; Philippe Kœchlin, “Pas de ça chez nous!” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 258 (20 October 1969): 36–37; Claude Fléouter, “Près de vingt mille jeunes au festival de ‘Pop Music,’” *Le Monde*, 28 October 1969, 23; Eric Vincent et al., “Amougies, le festival maudit,” *Salut les copains*, no. 89 (January 1970): 38–45; and Daniel Caux, “Amougies: L'Europe, le ‘free jazz’ et la ‘pop music,’” *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, no. 6 (December 1969): 2–7.

11. Alessandrini, “Freepop,” 27.

12. Caux, “Amougies,” 3; Alessandrini, “Freepop,” 29–30.

13. “Les succès du festival Actuel furent autant Don Cherry ou Sunny Murray que le Pink Floyd et les Pretty Things.” Berger, “Les inusables,” 12.

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Figure 1 Advertisement for the Festival "Actuel," held in October 1969, from the magazine *Jazz-Hot*

were invariably described as explosive, spasmodic, and raw. Alessandrini lauded the performance of the Sunny Murray Quartet as "a long, furious, convulsive scream [. . .]."<sup>14</sup> By his reckoning, the palpable exertions of Murray, Frank Wright, Alan Silva, and Byard Lancaster more than matched the sonic force that the rock acts obtained by means of amplification. Immediacy, it would seem, was a matter of physical intensity.

Alessandrini's comments provide a window onto the beliefs that guided much of the French discourse on free jazz. His emphasis on aggressivity, sonic forcefulness, and the physicality of the music's performance was typical, partaking of what had by the late 1960s become the standard critical lexicon for evaluating avant-garde jazz. In retrospect, it is clear that the prioritization of such traits reflected an essentially blinkered view of the new thing, one that promoted a certain kind of avant-garde jazz—in particular, the rough, extroverted style cultivated by 'second wave' artists like Shepp, Ayler, and Sunny Murray. This vein of free jazz—with its absence of steady pulse, eschewal of tonality, high-energy solos, and expanded repertoire of grunts, growls, bends, honks, and squeaks—thus became the ideal-type against which other artists were judged. Music that did not fit this narrow definition more often than not puzzled critics. Such was the case with the music created by artists such as the Art Ensemble, Anthony Braxton, Leroy Jenkins, Leo Wadada Smith, and other artists affiliated with the AACM (the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians), whose use of extended silence and textural disjunc-

14. Alessandrini, "Freejazz," 28.

tions, in the eyes of some critics, veered too close to the abstraction of avant-garde classical music.<sup>15</sup>

Equally representative was the way in which Alessandrini accounted for the new thing's sonic and expressive intensity. In describing the audience's response to the free jazz acts on the program, he remarks that it was "won over beyond all hope by the power and the cry of these spokesmen of black people in revolt."<sup>16</sup> His effort to link the music's expressive power to political factors was symptomatic of French readings of the new thing. Indeed, by the time of the Actuel festival in 1969, the equation of avant-garde jazz with African American protest movements had become commonplace. Almost from the moment the music first arrived on French shores, critics treated free jazz as a mirror image of the radicalization taking place within certain segments of the African American community, especially as various black power ideologies began to eclipse the integrationist ethos of the civil rights movement after 1966.<sup>17</sup> Claims that free jazz was the "concrete cry of the ghetto,"<sup>18</sup> "a political instrument,"<sup>19</sup> a "pure product of the black American's anger,"<sup>20</sup> or the adaptation of "the principles of black power to the musical universe"<sup>21</sup> abounded in the French press from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, so much so that Philippe Kœchlin, the jazz critic for the *Le Nouvel Observateur*, could quip that French critics were content "to explain everything with [the phrases] 'black power' and 'peace in Vietnam.'" <sup>22</sup>

15. Stephen Lehman, "I Love You with an Asterisk: African-American Experimental Music and the French Jazz Press, 1970–1980," *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, no. 2 (May 2005): esp. 39–41; George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 242; and Ronald Radano, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 146.

16. Alessandrini, "Freepop," 28.

17. The present article builds on the small but invaluable body of work that has dealt with the reception of free jazz in France. The jazz historian Ludovic Tournès situates the politicization of jazz criticism in a broad socio-historical context; see Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine: Histoire du jazz en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), esp. 387–403; and idem, "Amateurs de jazz français et mouvement noir américain," *Les années 68: Événements, cultures politiques et modes de vie*, Lettre d'information no. 22 (February 1997). Vincent Cotro's survey of French free jazz is also extremely informative, especially with respect to the activities of French musicians; see Cotro, *Chants libres: Le free jazz en France, 1960–1975* (Paris: Éditions Outre Mesure, 1999). In addition, there is a rich and growing literature on the experience and reception of AACM artists in Paris. See Lewis, "The AACM in Paris"; idem, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, chap. 7; Lehman, "I Love You with an Asterisk"; and Radano, *New Musical Figurations*, 142–48.

18. "Le cri concret du ghetto." Guy Kopelowicz, "Le nouveau jazz et la réalité américaine," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 231 (May 1967): 23.

19. "La nouvelle musique de jazz sera à la fois instrument politique et instrument de culture." Daniel Berger, "Archie Shepp," *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, no. 2104 (28 December 1967): 12.

20. Kœchlin, "Pas de ça chez nous!" 37.

21. Pierre Lasnier, "L'été torride du Lucernaire," *L'Express*, no. 944 (11 August 1969): 49.

22. Philippe Kœchlin, "Le continent perdu," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 168 (31 January 1968): 35.

Given this robust political coding of free jazz, it is easy to see how the style might have attracted attention in France during late 1960s, especially given the radical politics that students and intellectuals embraced during the uprising of May–June 1968. As cultural historian Pascal Ory has noted, the student insurrection and general strike of May '68 had whetted the public appetite not just for politically engaged art, but for the avant-garde as well. This created an environment that was receptive to free jazz, since its practitioners were viewed as having struck a near-perfect balance between aesthetic transgression and political expression.<sup>23</sup> This set the new thing apart from other musical genres, even those that enjoyed a comparable surge of popularity in the late 1960s. The profile of Iannis Xenakis, Pierre Henry, and other composers of avant-garde classical music may also have risen in the wake of May '68, something suggested by the record attendance at the 1968 *Semaines musicales internationales de Paris*.<sup>24</sup> Yet avant-garde art music had a hard time shaking perceptions that it was a music by and for elites, which curtailed its brief burst of popularity. As for Anglo-American rock music, it assumed an increasingly central place in French youth culture from 1967 on, displacing the “chanson yéyé” that had dominated French popular music since 1962. However, the rejuvenation of left-wing militancy in the years immediately following May '68 fostered a certain suspicion, if not outright hostility, toward rock and other manifestations of the counterculture.<sup>25</sup> As historian Chris Warne has recently observed, “the dominance of *gauchisme* [in France] provided an important resistance to the importation of foreign popular cultures into the milieu of young middle-class revolt,” in that the latter represented “potential diversions from the true goal of revolution [. . .].”<sup>26</sup> By contrast, free jazz appeared to offer a form of cultural opposition that better accorded with the militancy of student radicals. It would be only after 1970, once the dream of imminent social revolution raised by May '68 had dissipated, that a distinctively French counterculture would take root. And even then, the new thing continued to find a place in underground magazines like *Actuel* and *Parapluié* and on the programs of pop festivals well into the early 1970s.

23. Pascal Ory describes this superimposition of political and aesthetic radicalism in “Une ‘Révolution culturelle?’” in *Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation*, ed. Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, Robert Frank, Marie-Françoise Lévy, and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Paris: Éditions Complexe, 2000), 221.

24. Maurice Fleuret, “Bilan et leçon des journées de musique contemporaine,” *La Revue musicale*, no. 265–66 (1969): 7–13.

25. For accounts of the tensions between the nascent French counterculture and the extreme left, see Léon Mercadet, Jean-François Bizot, Michel-Antoine Burnier, Patrick Rambaud, and Jean-Pierre Lentin, *Actuel par Actuel: Chronique d'un journal et de ses lecteurs, 1970–1975* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1977), esp. 30–33 and 41–42. See also Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération 2: Les années de poudre* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 261–62.

26. Chris Warne, “Bringing Counterculture to France: *Actuel* Magazine and the Legacy of May '68,” *Modern & Contemporary France* 15, no. 3 (August 2007): 313.

The present article examines how and why free jazz came to be valorized as engaged music in France during the late 1960s. While the political dimension of this movement was—and often still is—taken to be self-evident, it is vital to recall that this character was both constructed and contested. Constructed, insofar as the association of the new thing with African American social movements of the 1960s was not intrinsic to the music itself, but was a quality ascribed to it—and thus inscribed upon it—through the work of a handful of key intermediaries. In the United States, the dissemination of Amiri Baraka's and Frank Kofsky's writings on the jazz avant-garde was especially critical to the formation of this association of free jazz and black nationalism. Yet as recent scholarly work on the jazz scene of the 1960s has indicated, the links between music and politics during this period were considerably more nuanced than standard narratives admit. As Eric Porter has pointed out, the range of political opinion within the ranks of the jazz avant-garde was remarkably varied. The universalism and spiritual consciousness invoked by figures like John Coltrane or Albert Ayler provided a counterweight to the anticolonialism of an Archie Shepp or the cultural nationalism of an Amiri Baraka.<sup>27</sup> Even individual musicians could give voice to contradictory ideological impulses at different moments. In her recent study of jazz and the civil rights movement, Ingrid Monson persuasively argues that artists' alignment with nationalist or integrationist ideologies was situational, more often than not dependent upon circumstance. This is not to say that their beliefs were incoherent or somehow inconsistent, but that they adapted to the exigencies of a given situation:

It was not uncommon for individuals, both black and white, in the early sixties to express support for aspects of both black nationalism and integration. Moreover, emphasis on one side or the other was often *situational*, with African Americans drawing lines of racial solidarity in response to white power plays or insensitivity and whites charging reverse racism in response to the racial boundaries erected in the interests of self-determination.<sup>28</sup>

It is also critical to bear in mind another point made by Monson—that the avant-garde did not have a monopoly on political activism during the 1960s. Just as many adherents of the new thing participated in concerts to aid African American social movements, so did 'mainstream' jazz artists, a fact that should dispel the simplistic homology that converts an artist's rupture with musical convention into an indexical sign of political commitment.<sup>29</sup>

One of my primary aims, then, is to examine how the reception of free jazz in France obscured such realities by coding the music as a transparent expression of a single, consistent political ideology. While the resulting image of the

27. Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 197–205.

28. Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 171. See also 266–82.

29. *Ibid.*, 160.

new thing may have been reductive, ironing out the movement's complexities and contradictions, the pressures that encouraged such simplification were themselves anything but simple, and they merit attention if only because of the central role critical discourse plays in mediating musical meaning. In order to get at these questions it is necessary to consider the position occupied by French critics, given that their identity as French citizens played no small part in shaping the image they constructed of the new thing. But while my main focus will be on how this image came to be constructed, it is vital to bear in mind that it did not go uncontested. No small number of musicians found the reflexive equation of experimental jazz with African American political radicalism to be limiting and ultimately distorting. Interviews with American musicians that appeared in the French jazz press of the period frequently evinced a push-and-pull between interlocutors, as interviewers sought to elicit statements of political commitment from performers, who in turn refused to be pigeonholed as 'engaged' artists.<sup>30</sup> When critic Daniel Caux asked the members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago about the links connecting the AACM to African American social movements, Joseph Jarman responded bluntly: "We have no affiliation with any political group [. . .]. For our part, all we can say is that the only thing that interests us is: music, music, music."<sup>31</sup> A similar exchange took place during an interview with saxophonist Frank Wright: "We play the music we love, and we don't have anything to do with people who protest, we don't even read the newspapers. The only thing that interests us is music."<sup>32</sup> The desire of French critics to treat avant-garde musicians as the standard bearers of black radicalism—a desire that certain musicians resisted—operated upon the assumption, identified by Stephen Lehman, that "the African American community [was] essentially monolithic."<sup>33</sup> Papered over in the process were social and artistic distinctions among the style's practitioners, to the extent that the style was viewed as a symptom of a generalized—and ultimately undifferentiated—African American experience.

The failure of many French critics to recognize this diverse—and often-times contradictory—range of political opinion can be attributed in part to the cultural and geographic distance that separated them from both the African American community and the epicenter of the avant-garde jazz scene, New York. Whereas their American counterparts—journalists Nat Hentoff, Ira Gitler, Leonard Feather, Frank Kofsky, Martin Williams, and others—often

30. George Lewis underlines this point, describing "the nationalist straitjacket" into which French critics forced American musicians; *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 240.

31. "Nous n'avons d'affiliation avec aucune association politique"; "Pour notre part, tout ce que nous pouvons dire est que la seule chose qui nous intéresse est: la musique, la musique, la musique. . . ." Daniel Caux, "A.A.C.M. Chicago," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 254 (October 1969): 17 and 19.

32. François Postif, "The Noah Howard–Frank Wright Quartet: Une interview de François Postif," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 257 (January 1970): 18–19.

33. Lehman, "I Love You with an Asterisk," 42.



had close personal and professional ties to the musicians they wrote about, the same could not be said of the majority of French critics, whose contact with artists tended to be infrequent and short-lived. At the same time, their reception of the new thing was inflected by the position jazz had historically occupied within the French cultural field, one colored by the fact that African American music has long acted as a powerful object of desire for French audiences. As Jeffrey Jackson and others have observed, the source of this fascination—the perceived alterity of jazz—had traditionally been construed in one of two ways: either in terms of a mythic (African) primitivism or in terms of an equally mythic (American) modernity.<sup>34</sup> While this dialectic continued to shape the reception of jazz through the 1960s,<sup>35</sup> with the advent of free jazz the musical Other assumed a new guise: that of a revolutionary subject identified with various anticolonial liberation movements. The *tiers-mondiste* tendency to view African Americans—and by extension, African American musicians—as the group that, by dint of its historic subjugation, was poised to act as the motor of radical social change became all the more compelling given the persistent failure of the French left to recognize the existence of an equivalent in France. Although the years prior to 1968 had witnessed considerable ferment within left-wing circles, much of the debate during this period was consumed by efforts to identify a social group that could assume the role of Marxian revolutionary subject. The ostensible bourgeoisification of the working class that had taken place since the end of the Second World War, encapsulated by the French Communist Party's disavowal of revolutionary action in favor of electoral politics, reinforced the sense that the industrial proletariat had ceded its claim to the title of "subject of history." In response, militants advanced a number of groups who might assume this historic role: youth, Third-World revolutionaries, the 'new classes' of intellectual workers, and—of course—African Americans.

From this perspective, the embrace of African American political radicalism during the late 1960s and early 1970s offered the French left one way of filling the void that troubled the revolutionary imagination. But at the same time as they fashioned an image of free jazz that would satisfy these ideological demands, French proponents of the music had to negotiate a number of other social forces and discursive traditions. One of these was the continuing legacy of decolonization, which significantly shaped the French understanding of American race relations. Another was the discourse of universalism, which has long occupied a privileged place in French notions of cultural achievement. These intersecting pressures set ideology against autonomy, universalism

34. Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 72.

35. Lewis, for instance, cites a program note for an Art Ensemble performance in 1969 that "could not resist framing the AEC in terms of an updated version of the 'jungle' trope [. . .]." Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 222–23.

against particularism, and class against race. This article explores in turn each of these three main points of friction in the French reception of free jazz.

### The Music of Decolonization

The period from 1968 to 1972 marked the peak of the new thing's popularity in France. In addition to the arrival of a large number of expatriate musicians in Paris, mentioned above, these years witnessed the movement's spread into nontraditional performance venues (universities, art galleries, rock festivals, and political meetings), and the proliferation of small, independent record labels devoted to avant-garde jazz (BYG, Futura, and Shandar). But if these years represented the pinnacle of the new thing's popularity, its ascendance depended on a series of events that took place prior to 1967 and set the stage for the movement's subsequent ascent. The year 1965 stands out as a turning point. Although the controversies generated by Ornette Coleman's early albums and Eric Dolphy's collaborations with John Coltrane had reached French shores in the first half of decade, prior to mid-decade French jazz fans had few opportunities to hear American avant-garde jazz firsthand. That recordings of musicians working outside of the mainstream were also difficult to acquire was a source of frustration for aficionados.<sup>36</sup> In 1965, however, the situation began to change. Tours brought a number of American free jazz musicians to France, including Don Cherry, who had an extended engagement at the Parisian nightclub *Le Chat qui pêche* during June.<sup>37</sup> Others soon followed Cherry to the French capital: Steve Lacy performed at the nightclub *La Bohème* in July, while Ornette Coleman would make a much-anticipated appearance at *La Mutualité* in November. The following year, 1966, witnessed Coleman's return in March; an extended visit by Cecil Taylor in November and December; and a controversial appearance by Albert Ayler at the Paris Jazz Festival in November. A lull in tours by American artists during 1967 and the early part of 1968 gave the indigenous free jazz scene space to flourish. At the core of this local movement was the group of musicians who had backed Cherry during his initial visit to Paris, which included pianist François Tusques, trumpeter Bernard Vitet, bassist Beb Guerin, and drummer Jacques Thollot. As early as October 1965 this group had reconstituted to record an album entitled *Free Jazz*, released early the following year on an independent label run by the Algerian actor/singer Marcel Mouloudji.<sup>38</sup> With

36. The difficulties of keeping up with developments in New York are described in a letter sent to the editor of *Jazz-Hot* in March of 1965. See Alain Lejeune, "Courrier," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 207 (March 1965): 15–16.

37. Jacques Creuzevault, "Don Cherry en Europe," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 205 (January 1965): 11.

38. An account of the recording of the album is given in Paul-Louis Rossi, "Silence on enregistreur," *Jazz Magazine*, no. 124 (November 1965): 20–21.

its dodecaphonic themes and hushed, restrained tone, the music on the album perhaps bore a closer resemblance to 'Third Stream' experiments in bridging jazz and modern European music than it did to Ornette Coleman's album of the same name. Still, the recording represented something of a landmark, as it brought together musicians who would form the nucleus of the native free jazz community during the late 1960s and 1970s (most notably saxophonist Michel Portal).

The Parisian specialist press further amplified the arrival of free jazz by devoting considerable space to the movement beginning in 1965. The oldest jazz review in France, *Jazz-Hot*, published an article on Cecil Taylor in February, the first in a series of profiles on avant-garde musicians that appeared over the course of the next ten months.<sup>39</sup> More notable still was the publication by *Jazz Magazine* (the main rival to *Jazz-Hot*) of two special issues devoted to the avant-garde.<sup>40</sup> This burst of critical interest reflected the renewed attention the new thing was receiving in the United States at the time. The emergence of 'second wave' free musicians like Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler, Marion Brown, and Pharaoh Sanders in New York had garnered a fair amount of press—both positive and negative—in *Downbeat* and *Jazz*. It was perhaps inevitable that French jazz magazines would echo such coverage, given that they relied heavily on their American counterparts for first-hand accounts of the New York music scene.

The most important factor driving the sudden surge in critical interest was the emergence of a new cohort of critics—young intellectuals such as Yves Buin, Michel Le Bris, Guy Kopelowicz, and Jean-Louis Comolli—who took up the cause of experimental jazz.<sup>41</sup> There is little doubt that their advocacy of free jazz was overdetermined, a function not just of their aesthetic proclivities but of professional and generational factors as well. By aligning themselves with the new wave of jazz musicians, these emerging critics carved out a distinct niche within a field dominated by established figures like Lucien Malson, André Hodeir, Michel-Claude Jalard, and Jean Wagner. Just as the promotion of bebop in the years following the Second World War had helped set this older generation of critics apart from their precursors (namely Hugues Panassié and other self-appointed guardians of 'hot jazz'), so too would the advocacy of free jazz allow members of the younger generation of critics to forge a distinct professional identity. In addition, the incomprehension that

39. Francis Paudras, "Cecil Taylor," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 206 (February 1965): 24–26; Gerald Merceron, "Face à la new thing," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 209 (May 1965): 22–24; François Postif and Guy Kopelowicz, "Archie Shepp ou la marée qui monte," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 210 (June 1965): 22–26; idem, "Archie Shepp ou la marée qui monte (II)," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 211 (July–August 1965): 38–41; and François Postif, "Albert Ayler le magicien," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 213 (October 1965): 20–22.

40. *Jazz Magazine*, no. 119 (June 1965); and no. 125 (December 1965).

41. Tournès provides a useful sketch of the new generation of critics in *New Orleans sur Seine*, 387–88.

the music initially met with allowed these critics to make the argument that new criteria needed to be developed to address it adequately—a task for which they were ideally suited and one that justified their professional activities.

But what would these new criteria entail? Or, to turn the question around, what was it about the aesthetic standards that had hitherto guided jazz criticism that made them inadequate to the task of discussing free jazz? To answer this question members of the rising clique of jazz critics looked primarily to the work of author, poet, and playwright Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones), whose writings would play a key role in mediating French efforts to make sense of avant-garde jazz. As George Lewis has put it, Baraka was the only American writer who “really mattered” to the younger generation of jazz critics in France.<sup>42</sup> By the mid-1960s, Baraka had begun to win recognition within French intellectual circles. Antoine Bourseiller’s production of *Dutchman* and *The Slave* at the Théâtre de Poche in the Fall of 1965 had brought Baraka’s work to wider public attention, as had Jean-Luc Godard’s inclusion of an excerpt from *Dutchman* in his 1966 film *Masculin/Féminin*. One sign of Baraka’s growing prominence as an ‘interpreter’ of African American culture for French intellectuals could be seen in an article that Jean-Louis Comolli penned for the April 1966 issue of *Jazz Magazine*.<sup>43</sup> Entitled “Voyage au bout de la new thing”—an allusion to Céline’s 1934 novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and its depiction of the moral bankruptcy of French colonialism—Comolli’s article set out to explain the displeasure that avant-garde jazz had aroused in French listeners. The nub of the problem, as Comolli saw it, was not that avant-garde jazz had forsaken timeless or universal musical values, but that it had repudiated those attributes that appealed to a particular listenership—namely, the (white) European jazz fan. However, while the new thing might stand “at the opposite extreme of what we savor in jazz, that is to say, at the opposite extreme of our canons of taste and beauty,” Comolli contended that the significance of this rupture extended beyond the aesthetic domain, narrowly conceived.<sup>44</sup> It was at this point that the influence of Baraka came into focus. Comolli adopted the basic thesis Baraka had advanced three years earlier in *Blues People*—that black music acts as a mediated expression of African American consciousness, and as this consciousness had changed in response to economic and political forces, so too had the music.<sup>45</sup> With this materialist reading of black music in place, Comolli argued that the break signaled by the new thing must therefore reflect the emergence of a new, oppositional attitude within the African American community: “Free

42. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 235.

43. Jean-Louis Comolli, “Voyage au bout de la New Thing,” *Jazz Magazine*, no. 129 (April 1966): 24–29.

44. “Une musique aux antipodes de ce que nous goûtions dans le jazz, c’est-à-dire aux antipodes de nos canons du goût et de la beauté.” *Ibid.*, 25.

45. Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones], *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: William Morrow, 1963).

music' is not a formal revolution, it is not the upsurge of a new style, but is the fire sign of a radically different [*autre*] sensibility, recalcitrant, out of tune with us."<sup>46</sup>

Despite Comolli's evident debt to the line of argument put forward in *Blues People*, his essay departs from its model at its crux. Whereas Baraka saw the dynamic that played out in jazz as stamped by American race relations, Comolli saw it as a symptom of the broader, transnational process of decolonization. The 'race problem' in the United States, he wrote, "has only recently (thanks to a certain Malcolm X) taken on its true proportions: at the exact moment when, curiously enough, black Americans have understood that they are not so much a racial minority victimized by a racist majority as one of the countless races, one of the civilizations throughout the world victimized by European colonization [. . .]."<sup>47</sup> This recasting of Baraka's narrative undoubtedly reflected the vantage point Comolli occupied as a French citizen writing in the wake of France's collapse as a colonial power. Initiated at the close of the Second World War, the dismantling of 'greater France' by various national liberation movements had accelerated after the French army's humiliating defeat in Vietnam in 1954. By the beginning of the 1960s, most of France's African territories had cast off the yoke of colonial rule. The year 1960 alone saw Togo, Mali, Senegal, Madagascar, Niger, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Benin, Ivory Coast, Congo, Gabon, and Mauritania declare independence from France.<sup>48</sup>

While the rapid decolonization in French West Africa shocked inhabitants of metropolitan France, the ongoing struggle in Algeria against French colonialism eclipsed the comparatively peaceful transfer of power to these newly autonomous nation-states. The impact that the Algerian War of Independence, which lasted from 1954 to 1962, had upon the social and political landscape of France is not to be underestimated.<sup>49</sup> The conflict not only provoked a political crisis that brought down the Fourth Republic in 1958, it opened up deep and abiding rifts within the French polity. Colonial settlers and right-wing extremists rallied to the defense of "l'Algérie française,"

46. "La 'free music' n'est pas une révolution formelle, elle n'est pas l'éruption d'un nouveau style, elle est le signe de feu d'une sensibilité radicalement autre, rétive, désaccordée avec nous." Comolli, "Voyage," 27.

47. "le 'problème racial' aux Etats-Unis n'a pris que très récemment (grâce à un certain Malcolm X) sa véritable dimension: au moment précis où, curieusement, les Noirs américains ont compris qu'ils étaient moins une minorité raciale victime des lois d'une majorité raciste que l'une des innombrables races, l'une des civilisations victimes, de par le monde, de la colonisation européenne [. . .]." Ibid.

48. Marc Tardieu, *Les Africains en France: De 1914 à nos jours* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2006), 93-94.

49. The classic history of the Algerian War is Alastair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (London: Macmillan, 1977). An abbreviated account of the decolonization of North and French West Africa can be found in Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 292-303.

culminating in a failed military putsch by dissident French generals in Algiers in April 1961. The bulk of public opinion, however, had turned against continuing colonial occupation by that point, due in part to disclosures concerning the French army's widespread use of torture against Algerian civilians. Even after the Evian Accords of 1962 officially ended French rule in Algeria, the legacy of colonialism continued to shape social relations in France. Over a million *pièdes-noirs*—ethnically French inhabitants of Algeria who were descended from the original colonial settlers—repatriated to France following Algerian independence. Most of the *pièdes-noirs* had never set foot in mainland France prior to 1962, and their difficulties in adjusting to their new environs were amplified by the sense of resentment many of them felt at the ostensible abandonment of “l'Algérie française” by their fellow citizens.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, immigration from West and North Africa accelerated in the early 1960s, thanks to a strong economy and an open-door policy for former colonial subjects. After arriving in France, however, Arabs and black Africans faced persistent discrimination in terms of employment, housing, and opportunities for social advancement.<sup>51</sup> Despite the relative calm that settled in France in the years following decolonization, the patterns of immigration and social inequality that French colonialism had established set the stage for the breakout of racial tensions both during and after the economic downturn of the 1970s.

Given this context it is not altogether surprising that revolutionary anti-colonialism would occupy a more prominent place in Comolli's interpretation of free jazz than the distant struggles of the civil rights movement in the United States, especially considering that Comolli himself had been born in Algeria in 1941 and grew up there in the 1950s, during the height of the national liberation struggle. In his eyes the true meaning of the new thing was revealed only when one recognized the synecdochal relation that connected the ‘local’ struggles of African Americans and the ‘global’ struggles of anti-colonial national liberation movements. However, the line of argument Comolli developed in “Voyage au bout de la new thing” responded not only to the general experience of decolonization, but can be seen as partaking of a specific ideological reaction to this experience—that of *tiers-mondisme*. The *tiers-mondiste* ideology had developed in France over the course of the 1950s, primarily in response to the failure of the major left-wing parties to take a sufficiently forceful stand on the colonial question. The socialists had overtly supported the colonial system, having led the government under Prime Minister Guy Mollet during the height of the Algerian conflict. The communists were little better, skirting the issue lest they alienate certain segments of the French

50. Horne, *Savage War of Peace*, 533; Aldrich, *Greater France*, 311–14.

51. Mar Fall, *Le destin des Africains noirs en France* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 83ff.; Tardieu, *Les Africains en France*, 99–116; and Jacques Simon et al., *L'immigration algérienne en France de 1962 à nos jours* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002). For a more general overview, see Alec G. Hargreaves, *Immigration, Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (London: Routledge, 1995), chap. 2.

electorate. Given the sins of omission and commission perpetrated by the established left during the early years of the Algerian conflict, a number of disillusioned intellectuals, led by Jean-Paul Sartre, began to look past the Western and Soviet blocs to the anticolonial movements of Africa, Asia, and Latin America for inspiration.<sup>52</sup> The Cuban revolution, the Sino-Soviet split, and, most significantly, the struggle of the North Vietnamese against the military might of the United States signified for a sizable portion of the French left that the subject of history had relocated beyond the ranks of the industrial proletariat of the ‘developed’ world. The title of Frantz Fanon’s *Les damnés de la terre*—the key text of *tiers-mondisme*—made this displacement abundantly clear: by appropriating the opening line of the communist anthem *L’Internationale*, Fanon proclaimed that the ‘wretched of the earth,’ the driving force behind revolutionary change, was henceforth to be found in Europe’s former colonies, not in the factories of the metropole. Or in the words of Kristin Ross: “[I]t was the North Vietnamese peasant, and not the auto worker at Billancourt, who had become, for many French militants, the figure of the working class.”<sup>53</sup> That anticolonial movements had exerted a critical influence on a diverse range of figures associated with the nascent black power movement—from Malcolm X to Stokely Carmichael—only helped to buttress the interpretive leap Comolli had made in linking the new thing to decolonization.

“Voyage au bout de la new thing” quickly became a touchstone for the French criticism of free jazz. Which is not to say that it met with universal approbation. For all those who endorsed his contention that “the new thing is an instrument of decolonization”<sup>54</sup> there were just as many who took issue with his treatment of free jazz as a transparent ideological vessel. Curiously, a fair amount of the criticism directed at Comolli’s essay came from writers sympathetic to its basic premise, that free jazz was as much a political as a musical phenomenon.<sup>55</sup> For these critics, the problem lay in Comolli’s methodology—or lack thereof—which had failed to address how the relation between art and ideology is mediated. In this respect, “Voyage au bout de la new thing,” beyond giving voice to the emerging consensus regarding the political content of free jazz, sparked a more general debate on music’s ability to reflect social conditions or encode political ideologies.

52. Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 160–61; Claude Liauzu, “Le tiersmondisme des intellectuels en accusation: Le sens d’une trajectoire,” *Vingtième Siècle*, no. 12 (October–December 1986): 74.

53. Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 81.

54. “Ce qui est sûr c’est que la new thing est un instrument de décolonisation.” Jacques Laurans, cited in Lucien Malson, “Courrier des lecteurs” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 222 (July–August 1966): 15.

55. For critiques of Comolli’s essay, see Eric Plaisance, “Idéologie et esthétique à propos du free jazz,” *Les Cahiers du jazz*, no. 15 (1967): 6–23 (discussed below); Yves Buin, “La nuit noire (1),” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 236 (November 1967): 20–24; and idem, “La nuit noire (2),” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 237 (December 1967): 51–55.

The years 1966 to 1968 in particular witnessed an intense period of methodological self-examination, as the new generation of jazz critics sought to clarify relationships binding together music, society, and politics. Two changes in the French intellectual field encouraged this reflexive turn—what Yves Buin dubbed the “dark night” of jazz criticism. First and foremost was the intense ferment taking place in *les sciences humaines* during this period, as structuralism gave way to post-structuralism. Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Roland Barthes, and Louis Althusser exerted a strong influence on the new generation of jazz critics, especially for the group of writers affiliated with the magazine *Jazz-Hot*—Michel Le Bris, Bruno Vincent, Yves Buin, and Philippe Constantin. For instance, an essay examining the ideologies governing traditional jazz criticism by Le Bris and Vincent adopted Bourdieu’s notion of the intellectual field to explain how social forces are refracted in cultural production.<sup>56</sup> In his 1968 review of Baraka’s *Blues People*, Le Bris looked to Foucault’s idea of the ‘episteme’ in order to explore the themes of ‘otherness’ and black cultural particularism.<sup>57</sup> In addition to their explanatory value, references to ‘high’ theory imbued *Jazz-Hot* with an aura of quasi-scholarly distinction. By the late 1960s such intellectual posturing had opened up a fissure between the two main specialist reviews: in heated polemics, writers for *Jazz Magazine* and *Jazz-Hot* attacked one another for their pretension (the main charge leveled at *Jazz-Hot*) or for their paternalism (the countercharge leveled at *Jazz Magazine*).<sup>58</sup> The use of academic jargon also alienated a wide swath of the *Jazz-Hot* readership, who felt that the ‘music itself’ had been given short shrift in favor of esoteric philosophical debate. Letters to the editor from the years 1968 and 1969 evince frustration with the new direction assumed by the magazine. One reader mocked the trend in a letter to the editor, asking if “Monsieur Le Bris, Vincent, or Buin would be willing to give me [. . .] two or three saxophone lessons in the structuralist style [. . .]?”<sup>59</sup>

56. Michel Le Bris and Bruno Vincent, “La tête, le cœur et le pied (III),” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 234 (August–September 1967): 23–25, 31.

57. Michel Le Bris, “‘Le peuple du blues’ par LeRoi Jones,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 241 (May–July 1968): 9–13.

58. The most violent polemic took place between Jacques Hess (of *Jazz Magazine*) and Le Bris (then editor of *Jazz-Hot*), who peremptorily stated at the end of his intervention that there would no longer be any “allusion” made to the rival publication in the pages of his review. See Jacques Hess, “Hess-o-Hess,” *Jazz Magazine*, no. 167 (June 1969): 5; and Michel Le Bris, “A propos d’un certain S.O.S.,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 252 (July–August 1969): 7 and 48–49 (the interdiction on *Jazz Magazine* can be found on p. 49). However, derogatory comments about one or the other magazine can be found elsewhere, even in ostensibly ‘objective’ reportage. See, for instance, Comolli’s review of Albert Ayler’s *In Greenwich Village*, where he chides Le Bris for his references to Deleuze and “la thématique nietzschéenne” in discussing Ayler’s music. Comolli, “Disques du mois,” *Jazz Magazine*, no. 162 (January 1969): 38.

59. “. . . [S]i je venais à Paris, M. Le Bris, M. Vincent ou M. Buin pourraient me donner [. . .] deux ou trois petites leçons de saxo en style structurel [. . .]” Cited in Philippe Constantin, “Courrier des lecteurs,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 241 (May–July 1968): 4. The use of critical theory by the writers for *Jazz-Hot* was also criticized by their competitors at *Jazz Magazine*.



The second major development that encouraged the politicization of jazz criticism involved the ongoing destalinization of the *Parti communiste français* (PCF). The repercussions of this process were felt far and wide in French intellectual life, as the Party's evolving platform opened a space where the competing impulses of the new jazz criticism—namely the desire to acknowledge music's social implication without succumbing to a vulgar reductivism—could be negotiated. During the height of the cold war in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the party had adopted a stringently class-based approach to cultural matters. Following the lead furnished by Zhdanov's 1948 antiformalist campaign in the Soviet Union, French party leaders called on intellectuals to reject bourgeois thought in all its manifestations. Although the party's line regarding cultural production had been rather more permissive in the years following Stalin's death in 1953, decisive affirmation of a 'liberal' cultural policy, one which recognized the legitimacy of all forms of artistic and intellectual expression, came only at the 1966 meeting of the party's central committee in Argenteuil.<sup>60</sup> During the course of the meeting, the PCF affirmed a 'humanist' position, which saw all forms of artistic and intellectual production—irrespective of class origin—to be the collective property of humankind. Attention would henceforth turn to democratizing access to art, including works that just a few years earlier had been regarded as irredeemably bourgeois. At the same time, the meeting at Argenteuil marked the temporary downgrading of Louis Althusser's position in the ranks of the party's intelligentsia, as well as the demotion of his 'structuralist' Marxism in favor of the humanism of Roger Garaudy. Yet these internal party struggles did little to diminish the increasing influence that Althusser's writings exerted, both within and outside party circles. And in a sense the growing prominence of Althusser's work was itself a symptom of the Communists' drift away from the ideological rigidity of the Cold War period, given his belief in the autonomy of theory from the prerogatives of political strategy.

The growing influence of Althusserian thought in the French intellectual scene manifested itself in a response to Comolli's essay penned by the philosopher Eric Plaisance, entitled "Ideology and Aesthetics in Free Jazz." Published in the *Cahiers du jazz* just a few months after the appearance of "Voyage au bout de la new thing," Plaisance's rejoinder draws heavily from the work of Althusser's group (including Pierre Macherey) to correct what he deems to be the simplifications of Comolli's "aesthetic leftism."<sup>61</sup> According to Plaisance, Comolli had disregarded the specificity of the various levels comprising the social world (e.g., the economic, legal, cultural, scientific, and political spheres).

60. Speeches given during the course of the meeting at Argenteuil are reprinted in the *Cahiers du Communisme* 42, no. 5–6 (May–June 1966). For discussions of the event, see Sunil Khilnani, *Arguing Revolution: The Intellectual Left in Postwar France* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 107–8; and Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 141–42.

61. Plaisance, "Idéologie et esthétique." The reference to "aesthetic leftism" ("gauchisme esthétique") occurs on p. 7.

Rather than seeing these as marching in lockstep with one another, it was vital to acknowledge what Althusser had dubbed their “relative autonomy”—the fact that each separate sphere possesses specific immanent principles guiding its development, which results in divergences and fissures between them. As Plaisance put it: “There are therefore, as Marx already pointed out, uneven relationships in development that do not allow us to superimpose different levels one on top of the other; discontinuities constantly arise, thanks to which one may rightly envisage art as a relatively autonomous structure that has its own rhythm of development, its own history.”<sup>62</sup> For this reason it would be a gross methodological error to conflate aesthetics and ideology, as Comolli had. By appropriating Althusser’s notion of ‘relative autonomy,’ Plaisance was able to both affirm the determination of music by politics (in the proverbial ‘last instance’) and safeguard a free space for intellectual and artistic production.<sup>63</sup>

Plaisance’s rejection of Comolli’s “aesthetic leftism” points to a broader context against which his remarks need to be read. For even as the communists softened their line on artistic freedom, other parties on the left did not follow suit. For some time already the PCF’s renunciation of revolutionary action and its willingness to play the part of the ‘loyal opposition’ within the Fifth Republic—not to mention its previously cited reticence in the face of the Algerian War—had led to numerous fissures within the ranks of French Communism. One result of this was the proliferation of *gauchiste* groups within the university milieu prior to 1968. Breaking away from the PCF’s student organization, the *Union des Étudiants Communistes*, were a handful of extreme left splinter parties, most notably the ‘pro-Chinese’ *Union des Jeunesses Communistes (marxiste-léninistes)* and the neo-Trotskyist *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire*.<sup>64</sup> While the doctrinal disputes among these ‘groupuscules’ were often quite violent, a shared contempt for the PCF bound them together. Trotskyists and Maoists alike concurred that the Party had grown quiescent, that it was blindly obedient to the dictates of the Soviet

62. “Il y a donc, comme le disait déjà Marx, des rapports inégaux de développement qui ne nous autorisent pas à plaquer l’un sur l’autre des niveaux différents; sans cesse se font jour des discontinuités grâce auxquelles il est légitime d’envisager l’art comme une structure relativement autonome, qui a son propre rythme de développement, sa propre histoire.” Ibid., 12.

63. Plaisance’s Althusserian critique of ‘aesthetic leftism’ gained traction among a number of critics. During a round-table discussion on the subject of “Music and Society,” the moderator, Lucien Malson, commends Plaisance for his adoption of certain key ideas from Althusser’s work, “since Althusser has contributed precisely to the liquidation of Stalinist monism [. . .]” (“Plaisance cite volontiers Althusser et je n’en suis pas chagriné parce qu’Althusser a justement contribué à liquider le monisme stalinien [. . .]”). Lucien Malson, “Musique et société,” *Les Cahiers du jazz*, no. 18 (1970): VII (Supplement to *Jazz Magazine*, no. 176 [March 1970]).

64. While marginal in the years prior to 1968, both the JCR and UJCM would gain notoriety (and adherents) through their involvement in the May ’68 events. For more on their background, see Belden Fields, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 50–60 and 88–94.

Union, that it had succumbed to ‘revisionism’ and other theoretical lapses, and that—generally speaking—it had betrayed the workers’ movement in favor of short-term political advantage. Unlike the post-Argenteuil PCF, such left-wing groups had fewer hesitations in viewing art as an instrument of class struggle.<sup>65</sup> This in turn became a flashpoint between the Communists and *gauchistes*, as the two sides attacked one another either for their reductivism or their revisionism. In this light Plaisance’s charge that Comolli partook of a vulgar “aesthetic leftism” assumed a particular resonance, rehearsing in the sphere of jazz criticism the kind of rhetorical put-down the PCF reserved for its rivals on the left. “Is it not an illusion, this purported transparency of musical forms by means of which one may read without ambiguity their social signification, *a leftist illusion*, this straight line from political action to artistic production?” (emphasis in the original).<sup>66</sup> Plaisance, using Althusser as a theoretical stick to beat back Comolli’s interpretive adventurism, sought to delegitimize the latter by relegating him to a fringe position in the political sphere.

### A Great Universal Art

It was not only adherents of the intellectual left who took issue with Comolli’s line of argument, or who looked to the political sphere in order to frame their objections. In the eyes of Lucien Malson, the resident jazz critic for *Le Monde*, Comolli’s argument on behalf of an “engaged jazz” hearkened back to the bad old days of the Cold War, smacking of “Zhdanovism.”<sup>67</sup> Malson’s reaction to the politicization of discourse surrounding jazz criticism was not atypical. Whereas for the younger generation of jazz critics disputes revolved around issues of methodology—how the art/politics relation was to be articulated—for members of the generation of critics who had come of age toward the end of the Second World War, the problem was more substantive in nature. A common complaint was that partisans of the new thing, in emphasizing the music’s political implications, had disregarded the “specificity of

65. For some examples of left-wing critiques of the PCF’s post-Argenteuil cultural policy, see Patrick Kessel, ed., *Le mouvement “maoïste” en France: Textes et documents* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1972), in particular in the texts entitled “Faut-il réviser la théorie marxiste-léniniste (I)?” (149–61) and “Du révisionnisme en matière de culture (I)” (162–64).

66. “[N]’est-ce point une illusion que cette prétendue transparence des formes musicales, à travers lesquelles on pourrait lire sans ambiguïté leur signification sociale, *une illusion gauchiste* que ce passage en droite ligne de l’action politique à la production artistique?” Plaisance, “Idéologie et esthétique,” 18.

67. “Cette conception d’un jazz engagé respire le jdanovisme [. . .].” Lucien Malson, “De LeRoi Jones à Gunther Schuller,” *Le Monde*, 3 January 1969, I. Malson’s charge of Zhdanovism sparked a number of angry responses. See Jean-Louis Comolli, “Loin de Gunther Schuller, près de LeRoi Jones,” *Jazz Magazine*, no. 163 (February 1969): 47–49; and Bruno Vincent, “De Gunther Schuller ‘à’ Lucien Malson,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 247 (February 1969): 5, 48–49.

music” (“la spécificité musicale”).<sup>68</sup> Worse yet, many critics of Malson’s generation feared that this political turn might function as a censoring mechanism, whereby doubts regarding a work’s artistic validity could be effectively suppressed. Radio announcer and critic Carlos de Radzitsky would complain in a letter to *Jazz-Hot* that “jazz reviews are literally suffering from the gangrene of ‘politics,’ ” adding: “It is no longer a secret for anyone that the motor driving the jazz dubbed ‘free’ (‘free’ from what I ask you?) is politics. Whence the entrenched habit of saying: ‘If you don’t like my music, you are against black people.’ From now on, when one speaks of musicians of the ‘new thing,’ one will no longer judge them except in terms of their convictions [ . . . ].”<sup>69</sup> For others the problem was not that the political meaning imputed to avant-garde jazz forestalled the free exercise of aesthetic judgment. Rather the contention that the music gave voice to a specific ideology was accepted, only to invert the values ascribed to both; as one writer would remark, “The intentional incoherence of saxophonist John Coltrane’s final recordings corresponds perfectly to the political confusion of a Rap Brown [*sic*].”<sup>70</sup> Political shortcomings, according to this logic, reflect and are reflected by aesthetic defects.

Perhaps the most telling exchange between representatives of the two generations of jazz critics came in May 1966, during a broadcast of the weekly radio program “Knowing Jazz” (“Connaitre le jazz”). Malson, the moderator of the program, had invited Comolli to take part in an on-air debate on the significance of the ‘new jazz’ with composer and critic André Hodeir.<sup>71</sup> Hodeir had been a key figure in the postwar rejuvenation of the jazz scene in France. As a composer, he had won plaudits in both the jazz and new music communities for his experiments in blending the rhythmic and harmonic language of bebop with various modernist compositional techniques, most notably those of *musique concrète* in his 1952 tape piece *Jazz et jazz*.<sup>72</sup> In his

68. Malson, “De LeRoi Jones,” I. Many fans were just as unhappy with the politicization of jazz discourse. One reader of *Jazz-Hot* complained in a letter that “[o]n pouvait se demander si ‘Jazz-Hot’ n’était pas devenu tout simplement un manifeste politique.” Cited in “Courrier des lecteurs,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 257 (January 1970): 6. Another called on the magazine to “[p]arlez d’abord de la musique.” Philippe Constantin, “Courrier des lecteurs,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 247 (February 1969): 48.

69. “[L]es revues de jazz [ . . . ] sont littéralement gangrenées par la ‘politique’ [ . . . ]. Ce n’est plus un secret pour personne que le grand moteur du jazz dit ‘free’ (‘free’ de quoi, je vous le demande?) est la politique. D’où l’habitude incrustée de dire: ‘Si tu n’aime pas ma musique, tu es contre les Noirs.’ Désormais, quand on parle de musiciens de la ‘New thing,’ on ne les juge plus guère qu’en fonction de leurs convictions [ . . . ].” Carlos de Radzitsky, cited in Lucien Malson, “Courrier des lecteurs,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 240 (April 1968): 5.

70. “A la confusion politique d’un Rap Brown correspond parfaitement l’incohérence voulue des derniers enregistrements du saxophoniste John Coltrane.” Pierre Lasnier, “L’esthétique du ‘Black Power,’ ” 27.

71. Published in Malson et al., “Neuf entretiens sur le jazz neuf,” *Les Cahiers du jazz*, no. 16–17 (1968): 8–60; the exchange between Hodeir and Comolli is given on pages 22–37.

72. Jean-Louis Pautrot, “Introduction,” in André Hodeir, *The André Hodeir Jazz Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 4.

work for *Jazz Hot*, first as a critic and then, from 1947 to 1952, as editor-in-chief, he had succeeded in elevating the intellectual profile of jazz, replacing the poetic rhapsodizing of his predecessor, Hugues Panassié, with a balance of rigorous analysis and philosophical reflection.<sup>73</sup> Given his penchant for dealing in musical specifics, it is not surprising that Hodeir was skeptical toward claims made concerning the political import of the new thing. What mattered was whether such assertions were supported by the ‘music itself.’ Even if texts, titles, and other discursive accoutrements unambiguously testify to the political beliefs of musicians, in Hodeir’s opinion such intentions remain “anecdotal” to the work they produce. As such they can serve no positive role in determining aesthetic value: “Anybody can take an instrument, anyone can attach the title ‘Ode to Malcolm’ to the sounds that he extracts from his instrument, to the music—good or bad—that he makes.”<sup>74</sup> But while he may have objected to political readings of avant-garde jazz on account of their dubious methodology, Hodeir’s principal concern lay in the potential consequences of this tendency in jazz criticism. Were jazz to be valued henceforth according to its capacity to reveal something of the social conditions under which it was produced or the political beliefs that its producers espoused, then its relevance for those outside the particular community from which it issued would be limited. To accept Comolli’s argument that an unbridgeable ideological gulf separates European listeners from African American artists meant that any possible fusion of their separate aesthetic horizons was precluded from the outset—a possibility that Hodeir despaired of: “[T]hanks to [. . .] free jazz you end up with a sort of condemnation of any sort of exchange between the white Westerner and the black Westerner. There can be no exchange since there exists no form of cultural osmosis. Jazz, therefore, has no chance of one day being a worldwide music.”<sup>75</sup>

To understand fully the stakes involved in Hodeir’s exchange with Comolli, as well as his defense of the idea of intercultural exchange, one must take into consideration the unusual position jazz had come to occupy in the French cultural landscape by the 1960s. Ever since its introduction in the final years of the First World War, jazz held an ambiguous place in French society, marked as it was by a double alterity. That is, its otherness was defined in both national and racial terms, as simultaneously American and, more specifically, African American, the two determinations evolving in complex counterpoint with one another over the decades. In the interwar period it was the latter

73. Ibid., 11–12.

74. “N’importe qui peut prendre un instrument, n’importe qui peut intituler ‘Ode à Malcolm’ les sons qu’il extrait de son instrument, la musique, bonne ou mauvaise, qu’il produit.” Ibid., 24.

75. “[G]râce à cette reconsidération du phénomène nouveau qu’est le ‘free jazz,’ à une sorte de condamnation de tout échange entre l’Occidental blanc et l’Occidental noir. Il ne peut y avoir d’échange puisqu’il n’existe aucune espèce d’osmose culturelle. Le jazz, donc, n’a aucune chance d’être un jour une musique mondiale.” Ibid., 26.

dimension—the music’s perceived racial identity—that explained its appeal to the preponderance of French listeners, as it offered a site where various primitivist and colonialist fantasies might be enacted.<sup>76</sup> In the decades following World War II the relationship between these two terms shifted. In the context of the heightened anti-American sentiments unleashed by the Cold War, the music’s identification with an oppressed minority group in the United States helped to inoculate it against whatever negative connotations its national origins might have carried in tow. Indeed, this identification not only increased the esteem accorded jazz, but brought into focus the prejudices that pervaded mainstream American society. For French audiences, being a jazz fan assumed a moral dimension.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, by valorizing jazz French critics assumed for themselves the mantle of transnational cultural arbiters, invested with a power to decide which cultural products from across the Atlantic were worthy of bearing the honorific title of art.<sup>78</sup> Significantly, this bid for cultural authority coincided with and may have compensated for France’s loss of stature in the face of America’s rise as the dominant economic and cultural force in the West after World War II.

But if jazz was to be valorized in this way—if it was to be given the recognition that it was denied in its country of origin—it had to conform to certain key precepts of legitimate culture as they were defined in France. Above all, French claimants to the title of high culture have long had to demonstrate the prized quality of universality, which was understood as an essential hallmark of civilization. Arguing the universal significance of jazz thus became a key prerogative motivating efforts to legitimize it in France during the 1950s, a line of reasoning that ran parallel to trends in American jazz criticism of the same period. As John Gennari and others have pointed out, the adoption of the language of universalism by critics such as Marshall Stearns during the 1950s aimed at bringing jazz into the mainstream of American culture.<sup>79</sup> But whereas Stearns and his peers would suggest that the ability of jazz to synthe-

76. The role of negrophilia, and the dialectic binding primitivism and modernism in France has been the subject of a number of books, including Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); and Brett Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). For discussions of this dialectic with reference to the reception of jazz in interwar France, see Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, esp. chap. 4; and Andy Fry, “Beyond le Bœuf: Interdisciplinary Rereadings of Jazz in France,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128 (2003): 137–53 (esp. 142–43).

77. See Ludovic Tournès, “La réinterprétation du jazz: Un phénomène de contre-américanisation dans la France d’après-guerre (1945–1960),” in *Play it again Sim . . . : Hommages à Sim Copans*, special issue of *Revue française d’études américaines* (December 2001): 72–83; and Matthew Jordan, “Jazz Changes: A History of French Discourse on Jazz from Ragtime to Bebop” (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 1998), esp. 395–97.

78. Tournès, “La réinterprétation du jazz,” 75.

79. John Gennari, *Blowing Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 152–53. For more on the ‘mainstreaming’ of jazz, see chap. 5.

size, and thereby transcend, racial and national boundaries was something that could have taken place only in the United States—a line of argument that appealed to the U.S. State Department as it enlisted jazz for cultural diplomacy initiatives during the Cold War<sup>80</sup>—for French critics the rhetoric of universalism was a way of dissociating jazz from too close an association with American culture. Representative of this strategy is Michel Dorigné's introduction to his book *Jazz*. Though published in 1968, the text adhered to the universalist consensus forged over the course of the 1940s and 1950s. Dorigné in particular marveled at how “a music of vulgar character, perfected by the black community in the United States” has today become “a quasi-universal form of musical expression [. . .].”<sup>81</sup> According to this account, jazz was no longer tied to a specific ethnic community, nor with a particular geographical location, transformations that Dorigné correlated with its transcendence of “vulgarity.”

The *locus classicus* of this universalist trope appeared in Hodeir's landmark study *Hommes et problèmes du jazz*, published in 1954.<sup>82</sup> The book begins by describing the music's global appeal, as it had succeeded in transcending national, racial, and geographic boundaries in the decades since its advent: “What contemporary observer would have guessed that the folk music of a small group would become the language of an entire people fifteen or twenty years later and, in a few more years, a world-wide phenomenon, with jazz bands existing simultaneously in Melbourne, Tokyo, and Stockholm?”<sup>83</sup> But in spite of its remarkable global reach, jazz had remained a subcultural phenomenon wherever it had sprouted up: “We must not delude ourselves [. . .]. Jazz has found followers everywhere, but these followers are always in the minority.”<sup>84</sup> To explain this paradox, Hodeir acknowledged that prevailing cultural values in the societies where jazz managed to take root presented barriers to appreciation of the music. In Europe, jazz had to contend with a cultural elite to which it seemed repetitive, anti-intellectual, and regressive. And yet the very fact that the music managed to find followers in diverse cultures and climates demonstrated that it had the potential to be meaningful for listeners

80. The employment of jazz in cultural diplomacy initiatives has been most thoroughly treated by Penny von Eschen in *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). See also Iain Anderson, *This Is Our Music: Free Jazz, the Sixties, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), chap. 1.

81. “à l'origine une certaine musique de caractère profane mise au point par le peuple noir des Etats-Unis d'Amérique [. . .]. Aujourd'hui le jazz est une forme d'expression musicale quasi-universelle [. . .].” Michel Dorigné, *Jazz*, vol. 1, *Les origines du jazz, le style Nouvelle Orléans et ses prolongements* (Paris: L'École des loisirs, 1968), 4.

82. See André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, trans. David Noakes (New York: Grove Press, 1956). (Original French publication: *Hommes et problèmes du jazz* [Paris: Portulan, 1954].)

83. *Ibid.*, 8.

84. *Ibid.*

outside its immediate social milieu. For this reason Hodeir struck what he saw as a compromise, an “intermediate position” in which jazz acted as the complement to European high culture. Election to the ranks of the universal, in this reading, was not a zero-sum game: “I am convinced that we have the ability to adopt differing attitudes of receptivity and comprehension as the need arises. This does not necessarily force us to judge jazz in the perspective of European art; instead it invites us to broaden our view in order to make room for the only popularly inspired music of our time which is universal and has not become lost in vulgarity.”<sup>85</sup> Hodeir’s balancing act acknowledged the existence of cultural difference, but sublated it by claiming for jazz the *potential* for universality. Jazz may not have appealed to all French audiences, but it had the capacity to do so, and this is what was important if it was to attain any level of cultural prestige.

Even if the arguments advanced by Hodeir and like-minded critics proved persuasive to French readers, they were but a first step in the process of legitimation, a precondition rather than a guarantee of its cultural valorization. To be ratified, this discursive positioning needed to be backed up by institutional means. In this regard, jazz had not yet attained legitimacy *per se*, but what Bourdieu dubbed the status of the “legitimizable.” By this he designated those forms possessing the potential for official recognition, but whose potential remained unrealized—a category which, circa 1965, included jazz, photography, and cinema. Unlike the traditional high arts, these newer forms, marginalized within the established educational and cultural institutions, were unable to command familiarity from cultivated individuals. As Bourdieu notes:

[J]azz, cinema and photography do not give rise—because they do not claim it with the same urgency—to the attitude of dedication [. . .]. Erudite knowledge of the history of these arts, and familiarity with the technical or theoretical rules that characterize them are only encountered in exceptional cases because people do not feel as forced as they do in other areas to make the effort to acquire, preserve and communicate this body of knowledge [. . .].<sup>86</sup>

Members of the jazz community concurred with Bourdieu’s assessment. Consider the following observation, made by Malson in an editorial published in *Les Cahiers du jazz* in 1968: “As with cinema, jazz has managed to overcome little by little the majority of obstacles that kept it in the realm of cultural illegitimacy [. . .]. It remains only for it to penetrate into the universities and the backrooms of ‘research.’”<sup>87</sup> Despite the upbeat assessment concerning jazz’s prospects for transcending its ‘intermediate’ position in the cultural

85. *Ibid.*, 11.

86. Pierre Bourdieu et al., *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 95–96.

87. “Comme le cinéma, le jazz a pu, en réalité, franchir peu à peu des obstacles qui le maintenaient dans les zones de l’illégitimité culturelle [. . .]. Il lui reste à pénétrer dans les facultés et dans les officines de ‘recherche.’” Malson, “Editorial,” *Les Cahiers du jazz*, no. 16–17 (1968): 5.



field, Malson's comment nonetheless tacitly admits that this status—and the stigma attached—has not been completely overcome.<sup>88</sup> And since the sort of institutional support that would allow jazz to move beyond “the realm of cultural illegitimacy” was erratic up until the 1980s and 1990s, it continued to occupy the same uncertain position in the cultural field.

At the same time, pressure was being exerted on jazz from ‘below,’ in the form of Anglo-American rock and roll and its various French imitations. Through the 1950s jazz had retained a good deal of its interwar stature as a music with broad popular appeal. Or at least this was the case with certain sub-genres of jazz: even as bebop, for instance, clearly staked out a position on the high modernist side of the divide between art and mass culture (expressed in the association of bebop with the Left Bank existentialist scene of the 1940s and 1950s), older prewar styles remained central to the emerging youth culture in postwar France. In particular, the New Orleans style remained at the center of moral panics that accompanied various acts of youthful rebellion during the decade following the end of the Second World War. When a Sidney Bechet concert at the Olympia in Paris in 1955 degenerated into a riot as would-be attendees were turned away at the door, commentators blamed the unrest on “a ‘jazz disease’ that had befallen not only France but also other countries [ . . . ].”<sup>89</sup> However, the arrival of rock and roll in France around 1960 led to the displacement of the New Orleans style—or any kind of jazz for that matter—as the primary musical focus for French youth culture. The agitation that Sidney Bechet once provoked now coalesced around the likes of Johnny Hallyday, Eddy Mitchell, and other pop idols. As Tournès notes, “From now on it was rock and no longer jazz that symbolize the violence of a fraction of the adolescent population,” with the actions of the latter “clearly surpassing those of the most excited jazz fans.”<sup>90</sup> The confluence of these two factors—critics’ efforts to raise the profile of jazz on the one hand, and the music’s ouster from a central position within youth culture on the other—marked the beginning of its journey from popular entertainment to elite subculture.

88. Elsewhere Malson sums up jazz’s position in the mid-1960s by saying that “it occupies in this sense a situation comparable to that of music dubbed ‘classic.’ With the exception that the latter is adorned with the prestige of officialdom, consumes billions in subventions, lets itself be ‘protected’ like a great whore, and has at its disposal two radio stations where it is on display from morning until night.” (“[il] occupe en ce sens une situation comparable à celle de la musique dite ‘classique.’ A ceci près que cette dernière se pare des prestiges de l’officialité, croque des milliards de subventions, se laisse ‘protéger’ comme une grande grue et dispose de deux chaînes de radio où elle s’étale du matin jusqu’au soir.”) Malson, “Courrier des lecteurs,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 209 (May 1965): 13.

89. Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine*, 365.

90. “Désormais, c’est le rock et non plus le jazz qui symbolise la violence d’une partie de la jeunesse [ . . . ]. Les performances de ces derniers dépassent nettement celles des amateurs de jazz les plus excités [ . . . ].” *Ibid.*, 368.

At the turn of the 1960s, then, jazz in France thus found itself entering a strange no-man's-land, not quite popular music, but not quite recognized as high art either. In this respect its situation in France was not dissimilar to that in the United States, where its commercial viability was ebbing away in the face of rock and roll and musicians had not yet found alternative means of financial and institutional support.<sup>91</sup> A key difference, however, lay in the fact that jazz fell outside the purview of the national patrimony in France, which rendered its position all the more tenuous. Understanding this helps to explain why someone like Hodeir was hostile to both free jazz and the claims that left-leaning critics in France had made on its behalf. With a diminishing fan base, the continued viability of the French jazz community was increasingly dependent on the success of arguments that held jazz to be an art form that transcended both national and ethnic divisions. But insofar as partisans of the new thing presented jazz in general and free jazz in particular as expressions of a specifically African American (or anticolonial) attitude, they not only called into question the very possibility that French listeners might comprehend the music adequately, but also cast into jeopardy its bid for legitimation. Free jazz appeared to undermine the work that Hodeir had undertaken to secure the position of jazz in France. There is thus an element of pathos, of youthful ambitions thwarted, that haunts Hodeir's exchange with Comolli: "[I]n our youth, you see, we thought that the value of jazz was precisely that it was not limited to being a manifestation of the ghetto, that it was on the way to becoming a great universal art. That even seemed to us its most distinguished characteristic."<sup>92</sup> Its progress toward the domain of legitimate culture temporarily impeded, the prospects that jazz might win recognition as high culture appeared to have been further endangered by the identity politics of the new thing.

### Free Jazz Black Power

As the foregoing indicates, the cultural particularism ascribed to free jazz went against the grain of French conceptions of universalism; this explains in part the hostility the movement generated in certain quarters. Ironically, this particularism proved equally problematic for advocates of the new thing. The challenge posed by the political turn of jazz criticism was particularly intractable for professional musicians, especially for those performers who had adopted the style when it hit French shores in the mid-1960s—a group that included Tusques, Vitet, Jacques Thollot, Michel Portal, Beb Guérin, and

91. Anderson, *This Is Our Music*, 80–83.

92. “[D]ans notre jeunesse, nous pensions, voyez-vous, que toute la valeur du jazz était précisément qu’il ne se limitait pas à être une manifestation du ghetto, qu’il était en voie de devenir un grand art universel. Cela nous paraissait même sa plus éminente qualité.” Hodeir in Malson et al., “Neuf entretiens sur le jazz neuf,” 26.

Barney Wilen. While the widespread perception of the music's innate connection to black political radicalism—and thus to the specificity of the African American experience—may have threatened to mark it as something irrelevant or incomprehensible to French audiences; for native jazz musicians, what was at stake was not just symbolic questions of identity and difference (however charged these may have been), but their right to partake of this or any other form of African-diasporic music. Michel Portal, for one, articulated a number of these anxieties in an interview conducted just prior to May '68. A principal concern was whether European musicians such as himself, despite their solidarity with African American struggles, were contributing to the sort of white colonization of jazz that the new thing ostensibly rejected: "The trouble for us is that we are playing a stolen music. It's a black music, born in a specific context, in reaction against a specific political and ideological situation. A context and situation which aren't our own."<sup>93</sup> Compounding this problem was the fact that—at least since the end of the Algerian War—France had not experienced the kind of social unrest convulsing the United States. Portal was not persuaded that French musicians operated within a social milieu conducive to the sense of anger or alienation the music requires: "Black people have something that crystallizes everything that they rebel against: the white American and his culture. [. . .] Oh, of course there are causes for revolt here, but everything is vague [. . .]. Of course you can be against Vietnam, but if you are against it then it's no good staying in France, you need to go there yourself. . . ."<sup>94</sup>

Portal's comments on the Vietnam War are telling, insofar as the conflict there had served as the pretext for one of the few attempts by French free musicians to present their music in a political setting prior to 1968. On 29 March 1966 a concert was held at La Mutualité in Paris, organized by a group calling itself the *Comité d'Action du Spectacle*, with the aim of rallying opposition to the war in Vietnam. In addition to an ensemble led by Tusques, the concert

93. "Le drame, pour nous, c'est que nous jouons une musique volée. C'est une musique noire, née dans un contexte précis, en réaction à une situation politique et idéologique précise. Contexte et situation qui ne sont pas nôtres." Portal, in Philippe Constantin, "Entretien: Michel Portal," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 241 (May–July 1968): 15.

94. "Le Noir a quelque chose qui condense tout ce contre quoi on peut se révolter: le blanc américain et sa culture. Nous, contre quoi nous battre? Oh bien sûr il y a des motifs de révolte, mais tout est flou [. . .]. Bien sûr on peut être contre le Vietnam, mais si on est contre, il ne faut pas rester en France, il faut aller là-bas. [. . .]" Portal in *ibid.*, 16. Similar comments can be found in interviews with Barney Wilen and Jean-Louis Chautemps. Wilen remarked that while French artists did have legitimate sources for discontentment, they were "not as serious as the situation [faced by] M. Archie Shepp or Albert Ayler" ("ce n'est pas aussi grave que la situation de Monsieur Archie Shepp ou Monsieur Ayler"). Wilen, quoted in Cotro, *Chants libres*, 62. For Chautemps, the "weakness" of white jazz players can be attributed to the fact that their cause for revolt is "if not absent, at the least negligible" ("la grand faiblesse du jazz blanc serait justement une révolte sinon absente, du moins dégradée"). Chautemps, in Jean-Louis Ginibre, "Le libertaire controversé," *Jazz Magazine*, no. 119 (June 1965): 61.

featured such celebrities as the protest singer Colette Magny and music hall star Claude Nougara. Absent from the program was a contingent of (unnamed) American musicians who had been slated to perform. These artists had decided against participating in the event at the last minute, out of fear that their visas would be revoked by American authorities for having participated in a program critical of U.S. foreign policy. For certain commentators the decision of American musicians to withdraw from the concert pointed to a principal flaw in the entire undertaking. Whereas an expression of protest against “the policy of American interference in the development of the countries of Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia” (as the concert was described by one of the organizers) might have had real repercussions for American musicians, for their French peers such a gesture remained purely symbolic, without risk or consequence. This, coupled with doubts about the tangible effect the concert might have, led to sharp criticism of this sort of undertaking: “It’s one thing to express solidarity with just causes [. . .], another to translate this solidarity into a spectacle (especially a musical one), and another thing to want to join together, in an imaginary synthesis, a political and an artistic action.”<sup>95</sup> Lacking homegrown social movements, attempts of French free musicians to align themselves with American ones only reinforced the perception that there was no real justification for them to put music in the service of politics. Not only had the music been imported, but so too had the injustice against which it railed.

For the younger generation of jazz critics, the very group that had most fervently championed the new thing in the pages of *Jazz-Hot* and *Jazz Magazine*, the identity politics of the new thing presented a different set of challenges. In constructing an image of the African American jazz musician that accorded with their political prerogatives, the younger generation of left-wing critics painted themselves into a corner. When Yves Buin contended that negative reactions to Ayler’s performance at the Paris Jazz Festival in 1966 were a sign of critics’ inability to recognize that the music “doesn’t expect anything from *us*,” that it “has been taken away from *us*” [emphases in original],<sup>96</sup> he preemptorily condemned the music’s proponents as well as its antagonists to inevitable incomprehension: not only did such a stance call into question whether French critics and fans were capable of understanding the new thing, it suggested that attempts to do so might constitute an illegitimate act of cultural appropriation. To avoid this, it was incumbent upon advocates to downplay the music’s perceived association with various forms of black cultural

95. “Une chose est de se solidariser avec les causes justes [. . .], autre chose de traduire cet acte de solidarité sur le plan du spectacle (et plus particulièrement sur celui de la musique), autre chose, enfin, de vouloir que se rejoignent, en une illusoire synthèse, action politique et action artistique.” Jean-Robert Masson, “Jazz Meeting à la Mutualité,” *Jazz Magazine*, no. 130 (May 1966): 16.

96. “Il n’attend rien de *nous* [. . .]. [I]l *nous* a été repris.” Yves Buin, “La musique contre nous,” *Jazz-Hot*, no. 228 (February 1967): 26–27.

nationalism, disassociating it from forms of revolt that were tied to a specifically African American subject position.

One tack had already been advanced, if only implicitly, in Comolli's "Voyage au bout de la New Thing." Recall that Comolli's essay read the political import of the movement as if through a double prism, as both a culturally specific revolt against American society and a single moment within a broader, transnational process of decolonization. This expansion of free jazz's purported message was further fleshed out in a book Comolli coauthored with Philippe Carles, whose title—*Free Jazz Black Power*<sup>97</sup>—announced in no uncertain terms the relationship their work sought to chart. Much had changed in the five years between the appearance of Comolli's initial essay in 1966 and the book's publication in 1971. The events of 1968, both in France and elsewhere around the world, had raised hopes that revolution was imminent in the capitalist West; and this in turn intensified efforts to identify a suitable 'subject of history' who could bring the revolutionary moment to pass. At the same time, the proliferation of various black power organizations across the United States—most notably the Black Panther Party—provided Carles and Comolli with an alternative model of African American political radicalism, one that fit better with their anticolonialist reading of the new thing. The growing split between 'cultural nationalists' like Baraka and 'revolutionary nationalists' like the Black Panthers, in other words, offered Carles and Comolli a way of distinguishing their critique of the political economy of jazz from that of Baraka. Although they credited Baraka for having pointed the way past the 'aesthetic' approach that had hitherto dominated (white) American and European interpretations of jazz, they contended that his work failed to follow its implications to their logical conclusion: "For all that we owe to the theses of [Amiri Baraka], we are compelled to distance ourselves from him on an important point. The totality of the facts and the determinations that he has noted *introduces* the possibility of a *political reading* of jazz's evolution and its forms. [Baraka] refrains from undertaking such a reading" (emphases in original).<sup>98</sup> The fact that Baraka was too caught up in the struggles on the ground in the United States meant that he was unable, in their opinion, to gain the 'objective' view available to outsiders such as themselves. As a result Baraka failed to connect the conflict to the transnational and transethnic struggle against imperialism.<sup>99</sup>

97. Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Comolli, *Free Jazz Black Power* (Paris: Champ libre, 1971; 2nd ed. (without the slash in the title), Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

98. "Tout ce que nous devons aux thèses de LeRoi Jones, cela même nous conduit à nous en écarter sur un point important. L'ensemble des faits et déterminations qu'il relève *met en place* la possibilité d'une *lecture politique* de l'évolution et des formes du jazz. Cette possibilité, LeRoi Jones s'interdit de la pratiquer." Ibid., 39.

99. "[I]l ne voit que les multiples actualisations d'une contradiction unique: entre Noirs et Blancs, africanité (afro-américanité) et occidentalité." Ibid.

In this reading, the efforts undertaken by Baraka and other cultural nationalists to valorize black identity was important only as a stage in a broader process of political awakening: “Black nationalism (‘Black Beauty,’ ‘Black Power,’ etc.) appears as a necessary moment in the development of the struggles of the black community in America [. . .].”<sup>100</sup> For Carles and Comolli, the variety of political opinion within the African American community was not a product of its demographic and social diversity; rather, they chalked it up to the fact that certain elements within the black community—in particular the black middle classes—had fallen into the snare of false consciousness. In creating an evolutionary ladder of political awareness—with integrationism at the lowest rung, passing through cultural nationalism, all the way up to revolutionary nationalism—Carles and Comolli recast ideological and social diversity in quasi-teleological terms, as stages in a journey toward political self-realization. Unlike Baraka, whose conception of a collective African American identity during the mid- and late 1960s was rooted in what Eric Porter has called “a biological and ontological conception of blackness,”<sup>101</sup> Carles and Comolli imagine the fusion of African Americans into a single political bloc in Marxian terms: it is not to be achieved through the collective recognition of ‘blackness,’ but through the collective recognition of exploitation—exploitation that had been enabled and perpetuated by the American racial hierarchy. In this way Carles and Comolli subsumed race into class, which ultimately allowed the monolithic black identity they constructed to be absorbed within an even broader collective identity, that of the colonized subject: “We consider that this contradiction between the value systems of whites and blacks, at work in the colonization of jazz and the resistance to this colonization, is but one moment in the *principal contradiction* between the colonizers and the colonized, exploiters and exploited: between capitalism and its victims” (emphasis in original).<sup>102</sup>

100. “Le nationalisme noir . . . (‘Beauté Noire,’ ‘Pouvoir Noir,’ etc.) apparaît ainsi comme *un moment nécessaire* du développement des luttes noires en Amérique: celui du *combat sur le terrain idéologique*.” Ibid., 58.

101. Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz?* 193.

102. “Nous estimons que cette contradiction entre valeurs blanches et valeurs noires, à l’œuvre dans les colonisations et les résistances à ces colonisations du jazz, n’est que l’un des moments de la *contradiction principale* entre colons et colonisés, exploiters et exploités: le capitalisme et ses proies.” Carles and Comolli, *Free Jazz Black Power*, 39. Elsewhere they state: “The Black is Beautiful [slogan] of the 1960s is thus logically inscribed in the history of black struggles, as an ideological counter-attack at once anchored in and enabled by the state of development of these struggles, and the condition of [their progression] to the following stage: the passage, with Malcolm X, Rap Brown, and above all the Black Panther Party, from black power to ‘all power to the people,’ [. . .] from black nationalism to proletarian internationalism.” (“[L]e *Black is Beautiful* des années 60 s’inscrit donc logiquement dans l’histoire des luttes noires comme contre-attaque idéologique à la fois ancrée et permise par l’état de développement de ces luttes, et condition de leur étape suivante: le passage, avec Malcolm X, Rap Brown et surtout le Black Panther Party, du Black Power au all the Power to the People, . . . du nationalisme noir à l’internationalisme prolétarien”; 60).

A parallel situation obtained in the jazz world. By aestheticizing jazz, stripping the music of its latent social content, European critics, along with their American counterparts, had long participated in the ‘colonization’ of jazz by white middlebrow culture. To fight this cultural colonization it was vital that committed critics like Carles and Comolli promote a correct hearing of jazz, one that restored the music’s ‘proper’ function as a weapon of ideological struggle. But if *Free Jazz Black Power* can thus be seen as an attempt to expiate the sins of French jazz criticism, it may no less be seen as a sublimated reaction to France’s colonial past. This was made all the more urgent given the increasingly visible ‘race problem’ the country confronted as immigrant populations, drawn from France’s former colonies, exploded in the 1960s and 1970s. As noted above, Comolli’s substitution of colonialism for race as the optic through which free jazz was best understood was likely a function of his position as a French intellectual writing in the wake of the Algerian war and his commitment to *tiers-mondiste* principles. In this context jazz became a surrogate by means of which the more immediate, local questions raised by decolonization and immigration could be negotiated. Authors who have written on jazz’s reception in France (especially those authors focusing on the period following World War II) have made similar claims regarding the music’s utility for addressing localized concerns, contending that jazz has oftentimes functioned as a space where issues of race and cultural difference could be broached. According to this interpretation, knowledge of American race relations, made possible through critics’ contact with jazz musicians, afforded French listeners a venue where they could confront certain social dynamics that were perhaps less pronounced (but still present) in French society, dynamics that would come to the fore in the wake of decolonization. “[E]nthusiasm for jazz,” Tournès writes, “constitutes for young readers a footbridge—certainly modest but nonetheless real—towards a recognition of this problem [i.e., racism], as much in the United States as in France.”<sup>103</sup>

It is important, however, not to overrate the impact jazz had in alerting French fans to the growing problem of racism in their native country. One may just as easily read the fascination with racial politics of free jazz as a form of displacement, whereby critical reflection upon French race relations was deflected in favor of a more distant—and therefore less fraught—parallel. Indeed, considering the importance that Carles and Comolli attached to the colonizer/colonized dialectic as an organizing principle in their text, it is

103. “[...] la passion du jazz constitue donc pour les lecteurs les plus jeunes une passerelle, certes modeste, mais réelle, vers la prise de conscience de ce problème, aussi bien aux États-Unis qu’en France.” Tournès, “La réinterprétation du jazz,” 80. A similar argument is put forward by Elizabeth Vihlen, who writes that jazz offered “fans the chance to address the increasing problem of racism in their own country, helping them come to terms with the reality of French prejudices against minority populations.” Elizabeth Vihlen, “Sounding French: Jazz in Postwar France,” (PhD diss., SUNY Stonybrook, 2000), 3.

surprising that there are so few direct references made in the course of their text to recent French history, or to the situation minority groups in France confronted at that time. While taking a stand against colonialism as a general phenomenon, they have little to say about French colonialism (or neocolonialism) in particular. The same evasiveness can be seen in the French reception of free jazz in general, where denunciations of American racism are seldom accompanied by critical reflection upon analogous conditions closer to home. But as the ranks of *travailleurs immigrés* (“immigrant workers”) from France’s former colonies swelled during the 1960s, such parallels became increasingly apparent, at least to African American expatriates. Frank Wright’s memories of his time spent in France are peopled by images of “police patrolling the streets and asking for identification, stopping mostly Algerians and Africans” and “blacks sweeping the streets after the market at Belleville.”<sup>104</sup> Although acutely sensitive to the social and economic marginalization of sub-Saharan Africans—as witnessed by Wright’s allusion to the stereotyped figure of the African *balayeur* (street sweeper)—the violence to which Algerian immigrants in particular were subject both during and after the Algerian War of Independence called to mind the conditions that expatriate artists had left behind in the United States. “One afternoon I attended a demonstration for the Algerian people in the square in front of the Sorbonne,” Angela Davis recalled, describing her year as an exchange student in Paris, “When the *flics* [*cops*] broke it up with their high-power water hoses, they were as vicious as the redneck cops in Birmingham who met the Freedom Riders with their dogs and hoses.”<sup>105</sup> The parallel that Davis and others drew between French and American racism towards minority groups found little echo in the jazz press from this period. Occasionally allusions to racial strife in France did crop up, as when a French author offhandedly described black Americans as being “[a]s alienated as an Algerian in Paris,”<sup>106</sup> or when satirist Delfeil de Ton sardonically explained that the French welcomed African American artists so warmly because they “already had Arabs to despise.”<sup>107</sup> The effect of such remarks is a jolt of recognition, as the repressed subtext of the colonizer/colonized dialectic is disclosed. If, as Tournès puts it, jazz fandom acted as a ‘footbridge’ to antiracist beliefs, then this footbridge seems to have allowed passage in but one direction—away from France and towards America.

104. Frank Wright, cited in Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840–1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 260.

105. Angela Davis, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 122.

106. Pierre Lasnier, “1910–1925: Une diaspora musicale,” *Droit et liberté*, no. 279 (February 1969): 20.

107. “[. . .] on avait déjà les Arabes à mépriser.” Delfeil de Ton, Liner notes to Archie Shepp and the Full Moon Ensemble, *Live in Antibes*, vol. 1, Actuel/BYG 529338.



### The Obscure Subject of Revolutionary Desire

*Free Jazz Black Power* represents the culmination of a certain tradition in the French reception of free jazz. While the movement would continue to occupy a privileged place in left-wing discourse on the arts well into the 1970s, by the time Carles and Comolli's book was published, the high tide of its popularity had already come and gone. As early as 1971 some critics argued the music's moment had passed. Writing in the underground magazine *Actuel* in September of that year, Paul Alessandrini observed that "free jazz has lost its power to provoke and as a result some of its interest. We have come to the hour of its ebbing, the hour of reassessment, which makes us reconsider the real importance of certain works and certain musicians."<sup>108</sup> Likewise Gerard Terronès, writing in *Jazz-Hot*, remarked upon the changing temperament of the jazz scene: "[B]oth young and old musicians seem to be moving toward a more structured music and a less seething language than in the past."<sup>109</sup> As Terronès's comment makes clear, this change in atmosphere was due in no small part to changes within the jazz community itself: the widening stylistic horizons of many practitioners meant that the distinctive profile free jazz once possessed (at least within the public imagination) was losing its definition. The declining stature of free jazz in public discourse also owed to the belated arrival of the counterculture in France, which, once it became established around 1970, eroded the fan base for avant-garde jazz. In this respect, the significance of the *Actuel* festival in Amougies was equivocal. It may very well have marked the high point of the new thing's public exposure, as jazz musicians shared equal billing with rock groups. But it also marked the moment when the counterculture—for so long the object of reports and rumors from abroad—finally arrived in francophone Europe. From this point on avant-garde jazz would have to vie with 'la pop music' in the domain of youth culture as the primary vehicle for expressions of cultural resistance.

At the same time, critical interpretation of free jazz underwent a significant transformation in the early seventies. Although 'macrosocial' issues like identity and ideology remained central to much writing on free jazz, they were complemented by readings that placed 'microsocial' questions of interpersonal interaction and group dynamics at the fore. This tendency was most pronounced in the work of sociologist Alfred Willener, who in his 1970 book

108. "Le free jazz a perdu son pouvoir provocateur et ainsi une partie de son intérêt. On arrive à l'heure du reflux, à celle du bilan, qui nous fait reconsidérer l'importance réelle de certaines œuvres et certains musiciens." Paul Alessandrini, "Free Jazz," *Actuel*, no. 12 (September 1971): 72.

109. "[J]eunes musiciens et plus anciens semblent converger vers une musique plus structurée et un langage moins bouillonnant que par le passé." Gerard Terronès, "Cohelmeq Quintet/François Tusques Quintet," *Jazz-Hot*, no. 270 (March 1971): 25.

*L'image-action de la société, ou la politisation culturelle* (translated as *The Action-Image of Society: On Cultural Politicization*)<sup>110</sup> would treat free jazz as a symptom of a broader transformation, one that signaled the transition from traditional, 'established' societies—in which preexisting institutions and codes constrained the actions of individuals—to 'nonestablished societies'—in which codes are invented in a spontaneous or ad hoc fashion. Within this schema, free jazz functioned as a model for the 'new culture' that was taking shape, insofar as it represented the form that had taken the practice of improvisation to its logical extreme. Willener thus saw free jazz as manifesting the same basic impulse that drove a host of parallel phenomena in culture and society, and—most notably—animating the May '68 events in France. But even though improvisation constituted a practice that was in principle independent of any particular musical style or genre, its increasing prominence in critical discourse did not necessarily translate into sustained interest in free jazz more broadly speaking. Indeed, the opposite appears to have been the case, since these new social critiques showed that that which had made free jazz so singular in the eyes of left intellectuals in the 1960s could now be found in a wide range of musical genres and cultural forms. Thus in Willener's subsequent book (with Paul Beaud), *Musique et vie quotidienne*, published in 1973, free jazz figured alongside avant-garde classical music, rock, and live electronic music as but one setting where the liberatory power of free improvisation might be experienced.<sup>111</sup> As counterintuitive as it may seem, the triumph of improvisation in both theory and practice went hand in hand with the decline of free jazz.

But ultimately it may have been the loss of another source of free jazz's singularity that contributed most to its decline in the public sphere. Though the radicalization of students and intellectuals brought about by the May '68 uprising may have sparked a temporary upsurge of interest in the style, in the long run the rebirth of social activism in France after 1968 meant that the void the African American subject once occupied in the French imagination had, in a sense, ceased to exist. Intellectuals no longer had to look abroad, or to symbolic forms like art and music, to give form to their political commitments. Perhaps the most pronounced manifestation of this turn can be seen in the unusual career of critic Michel Le Bris. One of the most vocal partisans of free jazz in the late 1960s, in December 1969 he was forced out of his position as editor of *Jazz-Hot* on account of his role in politicizing the magazine's cover-

110. Alfred Willener, *The Action-Image of Society: On Cultural Politicization*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

111. Paul Beaud and Alfred Willener, *Musique et vie quotidienne: Essai de sociologie d'une nouvelle culture* (Paris: Mame, 1973). Other texts that privilege improvisation (or some cognate practice) as a vehicle for individual expression or spontaneous play include Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), esp. 138–40; and Denis Levaillant, *L'improvisation musicale: Essai sur la puissance du Jeu* (Paris: Lattès, 1981).

age of contemporary jazz.<sup>112</sup> However, his forced resignation from *Jazz-Hot* gave Le Bris the opportunity to make the transition from the realm of cultural politics to that of politics ‘as such.’ In the Spring of 1970 he became editor of *La Cause du peuple*, the official organ of the Maoist organization *La Gauche prolétarienne*, whose previous editor, Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, had been arrested by French authorities on charges of inciting violence. (Le Bris would be arrested on similar charges shortly after taking over the reins of *La Cause du peuple*, leading to his replacement by Jean-Paul Sartre.)<sup>113</sup> Although the trajectory pursued by Le Bris was extreme, it was nonetheless emblematic of the changing field of political possibility for members of the French intellectual left.

Le Bris was not alone in turning his attention away from African American struggles to France’s own, internal political upheavals. With the advent of the new social movements of the 1970s—the feminist, regionalist, and immigrant rights movements—a variety of social groups imposed themselves on the political stage, groups that had hitherto been excluded or disregarded as agents of radical social change. Where candidates for the role of revolutionary subject had once been lacking in France, there was now a surfeit, obviating the need to look elsewhere for proxies. In particular, the advent of social movements seeking to protect the rights and interests of both regional minorities and immigrant workers in the post-’68 period led to a heightened interest in the cultural and musical traditions of these communities.<sup>114</sup> For French jazz musicians, this development translated into an alternative set of musical identities which they could reclaim and make their own. A number of musicians and ensembles would thus turn increasingly to the country’s regional folk traditions, with allusions to Breton, Basque, Alsatian, and Occitane folk musics populating the work of Michel Portal and the various groups comprising the *Association à la recherche d’un folklore imaginaire* (ARFI).<sup>115</sup> At the same time, the musical traditions of France’s various immigrant communities began to make their presence felt within the French jazz scene. This was most apparent in the work of groups such as François Tusques’s Intercommunal Free Dance Music Ensemble, which was comprised of émigrés from France’s former (African) colonies as well as members of the country’s ‘internal colonies’ (as regional minority groups were beginning to conceive of their

112. Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine*, 397.

113. Hamon and Rotman, *Génération 2: Les années de poudre*, 160–62. See also Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine*, 397.

114. On the connections between the regionalist movements of the 1970s and French colonialism, see Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), esp. chap. 1. For an overview of immigrant rights movements of this period, see Catherine Lloyd, *Discourses of Antiracism in France* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1998).

115. See Cotro, *Chants libres*, 131, 194, and 231–32.

position within the French polity). Neither of these tendencies—the embrace of regional folk traditions on the one hand or what would later come to be known as ‘world music’ on the other—may be separated from the growing force assumed by identity politics within French society itself. In this regard, the changing socio-cultural context of the 1970s did not defuse the problematic that free jazz had brought into focus as much as displace it. As free jazz receded in the French cultural landscape, the dynamic governing its reception persisted—a dynamic that set republican ideals of universality and social integration against postcolonial realities of cultural difference. The threat and promise once identified in free jazz would henceforth be displaced onto other musical genres—rock, folk, rap, and rai—and onto other Others.

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### Abstract

From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, free jazz was the subject of considerable public interest in France. The present article examines the conditions that fueled enthusiasm for American avant-garde jazz, focusing on the politicization of discourse surrounding the 'new thing.' Critics hostile to the movement felt that it undermined jazz's claim to universality, a cornerstone of postwar attempts to valorize the genre in the French cultural sphere. Yet the tendency to identify free jazz with various forms of African American political radicalism presented no less of a challenge for the movement's advocates. By constructing an image of free jazz that stressed its irremediable difference from the norms and values of European culture, writers were compelled to find alternative ways of relating it to contemporary French concerns. A reading of Philippe Carles and Jean-Louis Comolli's text *Free Jazz Black Power* shows how the authors' attempt to reinscribe African American cultural nationalism as an expression of transnational anticolonial struggle not only helped bring free jazz closer to the French experience, but also served as a way of working through the unresolved legacies of colonialism.

Keywords: free jazz, France, reception history, cultural politics, decolonization

