

The philosopher's bass drum

Adorno's jazz and the politics of rhythm

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[Music] itself must act upon time, not lose itself to it; must stem itself against the empty flood.

Theodor W. Adorno¹

Music is our witness, and our ally. The 'beat' is the confession which recognises, changes, and conquers time.

Then, history becomes a garment we can wear, and share, and not a cloak in which to hide; and time becomes a friend.

James Baldwin²

The philosophical significance of rhythm in the United States has been undermined from both sides of what Adorno and Horkheimer called the 'dialectic of enlightenment'.³ When rhythm has not been falsely exalted, promising a fetishised, racialised 'return' to the body, it has been devalued through the tainted associations of rhythmic synchronisation with fascist regimes and the demand for compliance. In this article, I engage these issues as they inflect the politics of musical form. Adorno's notorious critique of jazz – developed across a wide range of essays spanning three decades (1933-1962) – has been rightly disparaged, but his concept of the politics of metric regularity has not been repudiated.⁴ In what follows, I provide an analysis of how metric regularity works for Adorno as a concept – its limitations and presuppositions. Adorno opens up new critical thought about rhythm by taking seriously the problem of the bass drum in jazz and its historical and structural relation to the military march. However, he gets seriously wrong the different implications of marching rhythm for African-American (and therefore American) history, failing to understand its radical difference from the dangers of European fascism for its victims.

In the following article I use the bass drum to cast into metonymic focus the larger question of the ways in which being philosophically and politically attuned to the discourses of German fascism and Nazi race theory both enables perception of racism and artistic form in the United States, and distorts it.⁵ Adorno's famous misapprehension of jazz music ironically gets *right*, in this sense, I argue, the philosophical salience of rhythm and its bearing on collective agency – a musical lesson which jazz musicians know all too well, but which has yet to be internalised in contemporary philosophy, despite the rejection of Adorno's views on the subject.

Transnational rhythmic forms in the black diaspora (including the United States) and the interracial experiences that these forms enable, at least as in-principle possibilities, continually contest the 'the divisions between life and thought' that have been taken for granted by majoritarian philosophy in the West.⁶ From this perspective, the segregation of intellect from *feel* (a technical term among musicians to indicate those normatively *right* aesthetic choices that nevertheless emerge in excess of predetermined rules⁷) is not tenable given the polyrhythmic background that must be presupposed in order for any piece of diasporic music, including and especially in the United States, to be intelligible.

In this way, the music referred to as 'jazz' calls into question Adorno's account, at the same time that the more nuanced aspects of his analysis can lead, I argue, to a new account of rhythm – and perhaps to a form of philosophy that, like the music itself, undoes majoritarian clichés about time and collective agency. For example, rather than taking for granted syncopation as *rhythm manqué*, I show that Adorno's notion of syncopa-

tion makes explicit the bias and distortion that results from the presupposition that 'straight time' is primary. And yet the construct of 'syncopation' – defined by Ted Reed as 'when a temporary displacement of the regular metrical accent occurs, causing the emphasis to shift from a strong accent to a weak accent'⁸ – remains indispensable, both for the transmission of drummer wisdom and for the philosophies made possible by black American music. In this way, the concept of syncopation, like the individual beats that it encompasses within its scope, operates fluidly – even if its rigidification needs to be guarded against. As tenor saxophonist and cultural historian Howard Wiley suggests, the construct of syncopation *itself* is perpetually in the process of being freed by its practitioners, although, by the same token, this generates the ever-present danger and possibility that it can be 'taken back' at any time.⁹

Adorno's critique of rhythmic syncopation, in spite of his conclusions, indirectly calls for a critical reevaluation of syncopation as musicological nomenclature – by laying bare precisely those forms of polyrhythmic (and historical) interracial experience in the United States that are 'in excess' of the concept of syncopation. This is just one way in which theorisations of rhythm that have come from jazz practitioners themselves not only persistently obviate logical impasses that are proper to the dialectic of enlightenment diagnosed by Adorno and Horkheimer, but also offer a critical commentary on the dialectic's binary terms. The analysis I present below concurs in this respect with important recent work by, for example, Fumi Okiji, who in her aptly named *Jazz as Critique*, shows how Adorno's very unwillingness to acknowledge black rhythmic form as radical art can be used to sharpen the critical potential always known by jazz practitioners to inhere in the music.¹⁰

'Blues March'

Adorno argues, infamously, in 'On Jazz' (1936) that 'the basic rhythm of the continuo and the bass drums is completely in sync with march rhythm, and ... jazz could be transformed effortlessly into a march.'¹¹ Later in the same paragraph, Adorno's makes his notorious assertion: 'jazz can be easily adapted for use by fascism.' This assertion follows from two sets of considerations in Adorno's reasoning: his formal understanding of jazz's internal

rhythmic structure and his historical observations that 'not only the saxophone has been borrowed from the military orchestra; the entire arrangement of the jazz orchestra ... is identical to that of a military band.'¹² Adorno's critical engagement with jazz's European, march-like components reflects, in this respect, a form of listening that is attentive to the art form's musical make up, especially as it was conceived by the jazz innovators themselves, even if he was wrong to limit the scope of what that engagement with hegemonic forms meant or could mean. On the one hand, then, a distinction needs to be drawn between what walking in march step meant in the context of European fascism (in keeping with the principle of *Gleichschaltung*, the standardisation of political, economic and social institutions), and what the resignification of the march and marching meant and might continue to mean in the context of the transatlantic history by which jazz became international. On the other hand, however, it is precisely that transatlantic history which already mutually implicates the two forms of marching.

Adorno's formal-historical hypothesis about the relationship between jazz and marching music is oddly truthful: the structural affinity with marching music that jazz musicians sometimes preserved (and ironised) within the music is borne out by jazz's actual historical development in the United States and across the Atlantic. Indeed, as Ben Sidran observes, the marching band is often associated with 'the rise of music as a *profession* in black America'.¹³ The famed 15th Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard, led by the ragtime conductor Lieutenant James 'Jim' Reese Europe, who fought in World War I and also toured widely in Europe, is just one among many salient examples in the history of African American soldiers as members of hugely influential military bands, going back to the Civil War. Indeed, during World War I, 'most of the black combat regiments contained their own bands, some led by professional musicians.' As Chad L. Williams writes in his study of African American Soldiers in the World War I era: 'African American musicians played a significant role in the fetishisation of blackness that emerged during the [first world] war and flourished during the postwar period. Black regimental bands took France by storm and became almost singularly responsible for the international spread of jazz during the war and its immediate aftermath.'¹⁴ Linking this history with the question of musical interpretation,

Sidran claims, somewhat schematically, that ‘the black circus, early marching, and minstrel bands were an organised acceptance of Western forms, whereas the blues idiom and tradition can be seen as a rejection, or at least a reevaluation, of Western forms.’ And yet actual musical-historical moments seem always to contest or jumble the neat divisions produced by such a binary paradigm.¹⁵

One of the most iconic jazz tunes of the late 1950s, ‘Blues March’, is a signature tune written by saxophonist Benny Golson for the Art Blakey band in 1958. In its title, as well as in its musical content, ‘Blues March’ displays on its surface, to an exaggerated effect, these two apparently conflicting traditions of blues idiom and ‘Western’ form. But one ought to be wary of idealising such a self-conscious display of hybridisation. In an interview, Benny Golson recalled:

[When I wrote] ‘Blues March,’ I knew it couldn’t be the kind of march you hear from military bands ... It had to be a funky, Grambling College-type thing. It’s a blues, but just a little different. I figured it was a novelty and would never last, just something to get us over, maybe. I took it in and we rehearsed it. I told Art to pretend he was with the American Legion band, and he did. Until this day, nobody has played ‘Blues March’ the way Art Blakey did, and I’ve played it with some of the best jazz drummers in the world.¹⁶

Or, as Blakey himself, in a separate interview, remembered:

The two most popular numbers that we play are ‘Blues March’ by Benny Golson and ‘Moanin’ by Bobby Timmons. We started playing them both in 1958, and we still have to play them every night. When we first played them, we laughed at them. We laughed at them because they’re so simple. And then they became our biggest hits.¹⁷

Even though these compositions are band originals, Golson and Blakey’s accounts concur: ‘we laughed at them’ almost as a part of ‘playing them.’ Interesting, and probably revealing of the relation of jazz improvisation to commercial forms, *even* when the forms have been furnished by the improvisers themselves, is the fact that the laughter directed at the tune itself is not self-directed laughter.¹⁸ In missing this laughter – which I am taking as a metonymy for a critical posture that is embedded within the musical structure itself, not merely as an ancillary response – Adorno misses the ways in which the music itself parodies the white expectations held for it.

This is related to the important question of what musical forms Adorno actually had in mind by ‘jazz’, and, indeed, whether jazz is even an appropriate designation for what are, arguably, strictly commercial forms – the knockoff, rather than the music itself.¹⁹ But to ask this question of Adorno’s text alone is to miss the entire critical philosophy of naming that is always embedded in the music that speaks an unutterable history, in a country where one cannot hope to even begin to tell the truth using extant majoritarian language. As James Baldwin observed in 1962, ‘We live in a country in which words are mostly used to cover the sleeper, not to wake him up.’²⁰

If European jazz was initially Adorno’s primary point of reference, American music became the basis for the same conclusions after he emigrated to the U.S. in 1938, and it continued to inform his views for the next quarter of a century. And yet the special salience, for Adorno, of the ‘march’ (which, on other accounts, might just be one among jazz’s many heterogeneous inherited musical idioms) must be directly linked to his understanding of the culture of Nazi Germany – the original context in which Adorno sarcastically bid jazz ‘farewell’. Richard Grunberger offers the following description of ‘cumulative subjection to martially disciplined sight of goose-stepping SA columns’:

... the thump of march-rhythms and songs resembled brain-washing ... the associations set up by the rhythm of the march are transmitted to the whole of the body and defection from the marching column appears tantamount to the loss of content of one’s previous existence.²¹

Keeping in mind power’s need to preserve adherence to the rhythm of the march explains the set of Nazi regulations for jazz orchestras, including the edict that ‘so-called jazz compositions may contain at most 10 percent syncopation.’²² But as I show below, the paradoxical projected idea of ‘100% syncopation’ as an untenable limit exposes in some way the incoherence at the heart of the concept of syncopation, or rhythmic ‘dissonance’ itself. In light of these and further materials, Michael Golston makes reference to one fascist preoccupation by asking, ‘Can one alternately shape or disfigure a body or a state or a nation by exposing it to rhythm?’ The Nazi ban on ‘Negerjazz’²³ occurred in October of the same year, 1933, in which ‘Farewell to Jazz’ was written and in which Hitler rose to power in Germany. Later, in ‘On Jazz’ (1936), Adorno suggests that ‘march-like’ jazz escaped



the Nazi ban and continued to be heard on the radio after the ban was issued.²⁴ Indeed, the symbolic work that jazz was made to perform in the racist contexts of the United States and, differently, of Nazi Germany is crucial to an understanding of Adorno's analysis.²⁵ Golston offers several relevant examples from Nazi Germany. As he writes: 'a "scientific" apparatus for justifying the segregation of ethnic groups based on genetically determined racial rhythms is thus firmly in place by the early 1930s.'²⁶ Severus Ziegler, the manager of the Weimar theatre, had this to say, for example, in relation to his 'degenerate music' exhibition: 'We do not reject dissonance per se, or the enrichment of rhythm, but dissonance as a principle, and the irruption of alien rhythm.'²⁷ Goebbels was more decisive: 'Now I speak quite openly on the question of whether German radio should broadcast so-called jazz music. If by jazz we mean music that is based on rhythm and entirely ignores or even shows contempt for melody ... then we can only reply to the question entirely in the negative.'²⁸

The idea that non-white rhythms issue from distinct bodily forms is as fringed with racial violence in the United States as it was in Germany. This did not es-

cape Adorno. And yet, in just these historical contexts, rhythmic periodicity intersects the biological body in important ways. Is moving in rhythm not a real strategy for pain relief, when it comes to backbreaking work? Or, consider a commonplace of jazz pedagogy today, which Adorno would have despised – the idea that rhythmic periodicity is as natural as one's heartbeat. There is thus an urgent need to disentangle, at least partially, rhythmic movement from the shards of fascist and American racist 'immediacy'. Adorno's concerns about the march elements of jazz rhythm touch, in their very specificity, on the most general philosophical and political stakes of metric regularity, or rhythmic periodicity. Those very stakes, however, require us to resist his total equation between keeping a beat and compliance with power. Indeed, this need for alternative theorisation is precisely why musicians have used the term 'groove' (among others) as a placeholder for non-compliant, and yet rigorously structured rhythm. If adhering to traditional forms is a way of repeatedly citing the past, then the problem of repetition is compounded when what is cited is already rhythm, already periodic.

In fact, there are multiple registers of iteration at

play in Adorno's philosophical analysis of metre, which together make the question of rhythm so salient. First, there are the spaces between one beat and another in a musical performance; these distances can be reiterated through time, yielding the temporal dimension of a groove.²⁹ Second, the rhythmic form as a historical entity can *itself* be iterated through time – that is, the mode of repetition itself becomes a musical idiom, gets inhabited, replayed, alluded to, transformed in subsequent performances. This second form of repetition, we might say, by being overtly social, allegorises the first. To test out Adorno's thesis concerning the march is to ask under what conditions the metric rule that governs a first musical bar carries through *beyond* the final bar, bringing also future performances into compliance. The question is, in this sense, whether the march form, like the individual beats that constitute it, lays the framework for future innovation and subversion – iterations with change. In this specific sense, musical time and historical time are as one in the moments of Adorno's account that I discuss here. But this raises the question of whether metric regularity, the hegemony of the 'beat', is *always* an instance of borrowed time, or whether the rubric of the 'groove' is instead one that provides an alternative time in which to live (and act) – a 'garment', as James Baldwin suggested, worn collectively in order to make history more bearable

The threat, for Adorno in the shadow of fascism, is evidently one of an ever-present return to metric regularity. Is the hegemony of the 'beat' always being partially carried *out* by being carried on? Adorno's attentiveness to the political stakes of rhythmic form invites, therefore, a larger question about what happens to rhythmic forms (or rhythmic displacements) as they *themselves* travel over time. On the one hand, of course, commentators have often identified jazz with primitivism, with an irrational 'feeling' and a racialised idea of sexual licentiousness; on the other hand, they have appealed to European or nationalist norms (and continue to do so) in order to secure jazz's status as America's 'classical music'.³⁰ In this context, I would argue that Adorno's critical engagement with jazz's European and march-like elements reflected a form of listening that was in fact attentive to the histories encoded in jazz as a form, even if he was deeply wrong to limit the scope of what such an engagement with hegemonic forms meant or could mean. Suggestive in this context is the statement attrib-

uted to legendary drummer and educator Alan Dawson: 'The difference between jazz and other music is like the difference between marching and dancing.'³¹

'Jazz is not what it "is"'

Adorno's analysis renews with pointed rhythmic inflection the question of how to distinguish between gestures of contestation and gestures of compliance, a risky negotiation similar to what Fred Moten characterises as 'the relation between fugitivity and the musical moment, between escape and the frame.'³² In a strange and grouchy footnote in which Adorno imagines filming some jitterbug dancers, he confesses a somewhat obsessive fantasy about being able to distinguish *empirically* between the two gestural forms of protest and submission:

It would be worthwhile to approach this problem experimentally by taking motion pictures of jitterbugs in action and later examining them in terms of gestural psychology. Such an experiment could also yield valuable results with regard to the question of how musical standards and 'deviations' in popular music are apperceived. If one would take sound tracks simultaneously with the motion pictures one could find out, i.e., how far the jitterbugs react gesturally to the syncopations they pretend to be crazy about and how far they respond simply to the ground beats. If the latter is the case it would furnish another index for the fictitiousness of this whole type of frenzy.³³

Which is the dance scene's reigning rhythmic order: the deviant 'syncopations' or the hammered-out 'ground beats'? Adorno is fantasising about a schema that could chart precise correlations between the dancer's anatomical components and the music's metrical components; he wants to test whether the music's 'true' rhythmic subversions are really audible to the dancers, and if so, to what extent these so-called subversions are registered by the bodies that respond to them. Adorno wants to test, in other words, the audibility of true rhythmic difference and its inhabitation of the body.

The jitterbug example raises a problem of expression in that the dancer represents, at best, radical receptivity, the scintillating insect in the light, to literalise the jitterbug metaphor. At worst, the dancer is only the 'actor of his own enthusiasm', as Adorno puts it in 'On Popular Music'.³⁴ If music represents a special susceptibility to a rhythmic framework, it brings into relief the

extent to which rhythmic expression may be sited outside the subject. On Adorno's account, then, the dancer is in a bind: the accentuation of new spaces in musical time only serves to underscore what Adorno calls the 'ground beats'. It is not clear how rhythmic behaviour – that which must seek collective validation, or in extreme cases functions as an 'agent of occupation'³⁵ – could ever be understood as non-predetermined behaviour on such an account. The rhythmic gesture is neither one's own, nor does it offer a meaningful form of collectivity. The possibility of lyrical expression in jazz is cast in a parodic light by the uncertainty about rhythmic gestures: to whom do they really belong? What Adorno does not consider is the ways in which the parodic element in the scene is generated by the slippage between a musical form and its white appropriation; between a dance and a figment in the white imagination – in ways that are invisible to his analysis, but never to the musicians themselves. Efforts to address Adorno's error in interpreting this dance scene (or in seeking a rubric of interpretation for it) have focused on the fact that he 'conflates a mass dance craze with collective conformity'.³⁶ But what this correction misses is the gaping conflation at the heart of a 'mass dance craze' that cannot distinguish between a black American art form with interracial possibilities, on the one hand, and its instantaneous white appropriation, on the other – or, the imbrication of both modes in the art form itself and its conditions of legibility.

The jitterbug dance scene may be a strange point of entry into Adorno's ongoing perception of jazz. But he will argue over and over again in his essays that jazz only reinforces, in its rhythmic articulations, the very mainstream cultural forces that it purports to subvert. In this sense, Adorno's complaints about 'jazz' are, ironically, exactly in line with those complaints about the term made by the innovators of jazz themselves. A question that is often raised at the outset of any discussion of Adorno and jazz is: what musical forms did Adorno have in mind by 'jazz' and did the music he hear really correspond to that label? But this question ignores the fact that the label 'jazz' itself is inextricably (and indexically) linked to the white markets that have threatened to appropriate black American music from its inception; and it turns a blind eye to the extent to which this has been a central concern of the music itself, both in the implicit and the explicit poetics of musicians. The music has from

the beginning problematised its own relation to white expectations. Oddly enough, then, when Adorno writes 'Jazz is not what it "is"', this expression of non-identity is not in the least enigmatic or paradoxical;³⁷ rather, such a formulation would be completely in line with a tradition of innovators from Duke Ellington to Miles Davis, through Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, who have clearly and programmatically contested the term 'jazz', citing it as an obviously damaging label or more specifically as a label that has never once captured what it purports to capture.³⁸ Indeed, in the context of the United States and its tainted epistemologies, the word 'jazz' would just be one of many majoritarian terms whose sense distorts its reference. The term 'jazz', on this account, would have the distinction of meaning exactly the opposite of that to which it refers. It is a term marking an erasure. This debate has been renewed in the last few years by the New Orleans-born trumpet player, Nicholas Payton, who writes in favor of the music being renamed 'Black American Music': 'Jazz', as he puts it, 'is an oppressive colonialist slave term and I want no parts of it. If Jazz wasn't a slave, why did Ornette try to free it?'³⁹

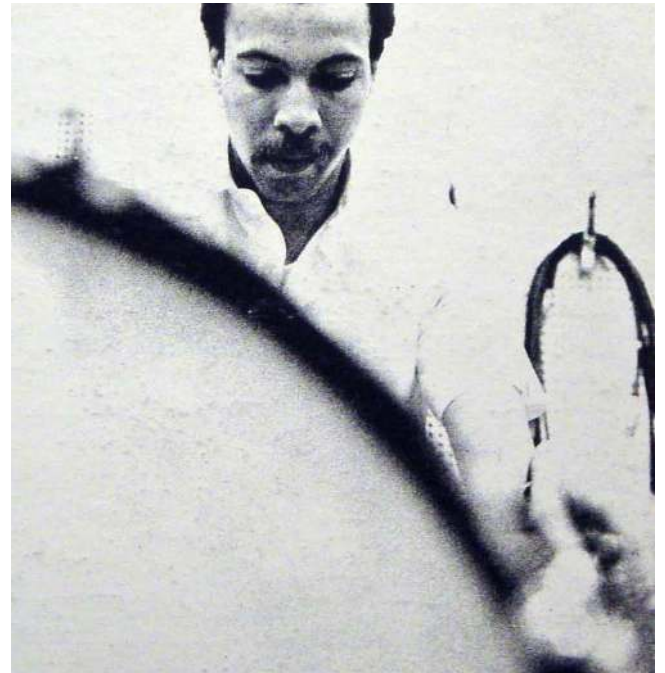
'Free jazz' – a reference to the innovations of Ornette Coleman – may represent something very much like the kind of true 'interference' that Adorno might have imagined for jazz. And yet the clarification that Payton and others routinely make is that 'free jazz' does not represent an effort to break with 'tradition' so much as to break with the *co-optation* of that tradition. Indeed, considering that Ornette Coleman's first major intervention appeared in 1958 (with his first album, *Something Else*), the very same year that 'Blues March' appears on Art Blakey's *Moanin'*, 'free jazz' has to be understood, first of all, as an early form of contestation and dialogue within the music itself, and therefore as simultaneous and synonymous with its development (rather than as the last phase in some kind of evolutionary trajectory). On Payton's definition, 'Jazz is the White caricaturisation of Black American music'.⁴⁰ In other words, jazz is an appropriate term for an actual phenomenon of (linguistic and cultural) displacement; at the same time and for that reason, the term 'jazz' itself calls for an alternative designation that would define the music not in relation to white markets. It is not the term's (often-cited) hopelessly contested and multi-valent etymology (almost like an etymological *métissage*) that provokes the problem of

jazz's 'identity', as is sometimes lamented, but rather the fixity/solidity of its reference.

In all of Adorno's essays on jazz, the potentially subversive but ultimately un-free musical parameter of rhythm is always foregrounded. In his 'Farewell to Jazz' (ironically, his first jazz essay), he exclaims: 'The virtuoso sax or clarinet, or even percussion, who made his audacious leaps in between the marked beats of the measure ... *he*, at least, should have been exempted from industrialisation. His realm was considered to be the realm of freedom.'⁴¹ The question of to what extent a rhythmic (or grooving) subject can be an individual, even as he or she by definition seeks a form of collective acceptance, is one of the *good* questions that Adorno leaves us with. But in 'On Jazz' Adorno links such 'audacious' rhythmic dissidence with the figure of the 'eccentric', whose ambivalent relationship to the underlying rhythmic schema, and hence to the collective, finally results only in an erotic 'virtuosity of adaptation'.⁴² The notion of immediacy implied here plays a complex role: immediate expression is longed for, while simultaneously being flouted by what is *apprehended* immediately. 'The sex appeal of jazz is a command: obey, and then you will be allowed to take part. And the dreamthought, as contradictory as reality, in which it is dreamt: I will only be potent once I have allowed myself to be castrated.'⁴³ The Freudian subtext here clearly requires further investigation. But this much is clear: for Adorno, the march has an erotics of submission that converges, somewhat paradoxically, with the erotics of audacious expression. He thinks this happens when what he calls the 'jazz subject' tests out the limited range of his rhythmic intelligibility. To return to the 1933 essay, the 'farewell' of the essay's title is ironic in that jazz is not bidden farewell to because it is under censorship but rather because of the conditions of its acceptance.⁴⁴ At the same time, what the march means for Adorno cannot be reduced to its perceived residual military character; there has to be an account of what regular, regulated time means as both the agent and the object of directed behaviour (although it is true that such a discussion applies to popular music generally, and not to jazz alone).

Whatever can be made of jazz's march-like aesthetics continues to permeate Adorno's account when he observes that 'rhythmic emancipation is restricted to the sustained quarter notes of the bass drum.'⁴⁵ Continu-

ing to elaborate upon the role played by that element of the drum kit, Adorno now problematises its referent: 'The bass drum, whose previous purpose was the representation of the dance-like primal feelings of colonial peoples, now regulates the march step of local formations.'⁴⁶ Indeed, the bass drum, with its traditional role in the military band, is the instrument through which commands are given.⁴⁷ For Adorno, the directive character of the bass drum, executed 'on and on', is never lost.⁴⁸



This attention to the bass drum is not coincidental; certainly in the second half of the twentieth century, with disco and now electronic dance music, the relation of the bass drum (on all four beats) to commercialisation has been intensified.⁴⁹ In Adorno's critique of the bass drum's four articulated beats, it is as if there has been an evacuation of the space of 'implied' time; the rhythmic schema becomes over-explicit. What could counter such a form of rhythmic articulation?

As a matter of fact, what is often regarded as jazz's first modernist moment, what Amiri Baraka calls 'the anti-assimilationist sound of bebop' in the 1940s, correlates precisely with the drummer's release from his four-beat obligations with regard to the bass drum. As Robert O'Meally writes: 'What evolved in turn was an aesthetic of speed and displacement – ostentatious virtuosity dedicated to reorienting perception even as it rocked the house. Every instrument became immedi-

ately more mobile, everything *moved*. Drummers Kenny Clarke and Max Roach no longer thumped the bass drum four beats per bar, as some other drummers had done.⁵⁰ On the standard historiographical account, the bebop era, with its increasingly fast tempos, was the moment when jazz musicians turned their back on their audiences. It was ‘a form of jazz that was created as a revolt against the restrictions on creative freedom that were typical of the big bands of the swing era.’⁵¹ Thus, a dichotomy between ‘serious’ intellectual activity, on the one hand, and dance-based entertainment, on the other, appears to answer Adorno’s critique of a rhythmic and aesthetic subservience to mass taste. And yet, a 1992 interview with Barry Harris and Billy Higgins, who came of age during the bebop era, suggests that the possibility of a co-occurrence between ‘popular’ and ‘serious’ music may have been overlooked by jazz’s defenders and detractors alike:

Barry Harris: Everybody in the block would sing Charlie Parker’s solos ... Can you imagine a music so sophisticated, and people dancing to sophisticated music? People not dancing to one tempo. You had to know how to dance to about three, four or five different tempos.

Billy Higgins: In fact, you had to dance to the fast tempo and *cut* the time. You could dance to the ballad, and you’d *double* the time! People were really hip, I mean people were hip. Like he’s saying, not *musicians* knew the song, *people* knew the songs. *They* knew.⁵²

Higgins’ and Harris’ emphasis on the *dances* (‘not concerts’) where one went to hear Charlie Parker provocatively counteracts the erasure of black spaces for the enjoyment of art in the conventional historiography of jazz’s ‘popular culture’. In this sense, their account seriously questions the necessity of equating dance as such with mass culture and commercialisation. And yet the perceived mark of ‘sophistication’ in the music is Adornian in that the translation from musical metre to bodily movement is not a matter of automatic procedure but rather must be constructed by the listener herself. Indeed, just as ‘bebop dance’ (still heard as a kind of oxymoron⁵³) is not determined by its Swing era inheritance, the complex story of jazz’s birth in New Orleans is one which centres around the marching or brass so-called ‘second-line band’, which however can hardly be identified with the military marching band from which it emerged, either in terms of its musical content or its

social function. In relation to these politics and aesthetics of motion, one is reminded of a Hegelian lesson that Adorno draws upon in ‘The Relationship of Philosophy and Music’:

[The fact] that what is first and original is not coterminous with the truth is something that can be said of no sphere of life with greater justification than of that art whose most sublime works virtually legitimate themselves by the fact that their truth does not emerge until the last measure ... For music, the nullity of the beginning becomes the motor of its own form.⁵⁴

The same could be said of the ‘first measures’ from which jazz drew its physical and symbolic material. However, as Robert Adlington demonstrates, Adorno’s analysis is also shot through with a vehement critique of an idea of rhythmic totality that can be found in Hegel. In a special section of Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, entitled ‘Time, Bar [*takt*], Rhythm’, Hegel seems to defend metric regularity against the ‘unregulated running riot’ in undifferentiated time, which

contradicts the unity of the self ... and the self can find itself again and be satisfied in this diversified definiteness of duration only if single *quanta* are brought into one unity In this respect the bar has the same function as regularity in architecture where, for example, columns of the same height and thickness are placed alongside one another at equal intervals, or a row of windows of a specific size is regulated by the principle of equality. Here too a fixed definiteness and a wholly uniform repetition of it is present. In this uniformity self-consciousness finds itself again as a unity.⁵⁵

Hegel even discusses ‘syncopation’ as a correlate of poetic enjambment. Rhythmic syncopation, by ‘emphasising some specific beats and subordinating others’, actually ‘animates this abstract rule’ of metric regularity.⁵⁶ This last point is one that Adorno makes differently when he talks about syncopation (and other modes of ‘interference’) as a force that ‘shakes’ the underlying schema in a fashion that does not contest its hegemony but rather enforces it. The subject articulating himself through the rhythmic totality is only further deformed or distorted by the process of articulation. It is as if such ecstatic ‘shaking’ – in some way the sign of rhythmic expression itself – does not trouble or modify something, but rather re-presents something in the mode of exclamation. In a later essay, ‘Music, Language and Composition’

(1956), Adorno writes: 'It is difficult to exaggerate the rage against the musical element: prisoners shaking the bars of their cells or people robbed of language driven by the memory of speech.'⁵⁷ But the idea that interference 'animates' or somehow gives life to the rule suffuses both his account of syncopation and his account of melodic vibrato in the jazz essays.

The implicit analogy between such rhythmic and melodic elements is novel and generates some figural relationships that are worth exploring. Vibrato 'causes a tone which is rigid and objective to tremble as if on its own',⁵⁸ an effect Adorno links – as in the 'On Jazz' essay – to impotent sexuality. Its 'whimpering' sound-motion is not permitted 'to interrupt the fixedness of basic sound pattern', just as syncopation is not permitted to interrupt the basic metre:

The jazz-sound itself ... is determined not through one specific conspicuous instrument, but functionally: it is determined by the possibility of letting the rigid vibrate, or more generally by the opportunity to produce interferences between the rigid and the excessive. The vibrato itself is an interference in the precise physical sense, and the physical model is well suited for representing the historical and social phenomenon of jazz.⁵⁹

In contrast to but also in juxtaposition with the beat, the figure of vibrato is understood as a form of rhythmic oscillation whose periodicity waxes and wanes. Taking the point of view of the listener/consumer as opposed to the performer, Adorno writes: 'The schema can still be heard, even through the most digressive breaks in the arrangement. He who is reproducing the music is permitted to tug at the chains of his boredom, and even to clatter them, but he cannot break them',⁶⁰ where breaking them would probably mean renouncing the pleasure principle which is the correlate of boredom as a social phenomenon. Vibrato is 'inserted into the rigid sound', just as syncopation is 'inserted into the basic metre'.⁶¹

In his essay 'On Popular Music' (1941), Adorno writes that blue notes,⁶² which he also calls 'worried notes, dirty tones, in other words false notes', are 'apperceived as exciting stimuli only because they are connected by the ear to the right note.'⁶³ He continues: 'This however is only an extreme instance of what happens less conspicuously in all individualisation in popular music. Any harmonic boldness, any chord which does not fall strictly within the simplest harmonic scheme demands *being perceived*

as false ... that is, as a stimulus which carries with it the unambiguous prescription to substitute for it the right detail, or rather the naked scheme.'⁶⁴ The listener is implicated in the regulative scheme that appropriates even the performance's 'fugitive' moments into what *might* have been said under a normative framework which the listener imaginatively completes. Indeed, by means of this counterfactual logic, the normative thing *is* eventually said, after all. But what produces the 'falseness' of the tone as intentional object? Is Adorno's notion of 'false' here produced by perception – or by designation? The same analysis applies to the 'false bar' or *Scheintakt* which is his privileged example in 'Farewell to Jazz': 'The false bars [or pseudo-measures], which essentially constituted the supposed rhythmic charm of jazz, have their essence precisely in the fact that rhythmically free, improvisational constructions complement each other in such a way that, taken together, they fit back into the unshaken schema after all.'⁶⁵ There is a startling analogy between the harmonic and the rhythm domain. On Adorno's understanding: the blue note, like the pseudo-measure – *especially in the hands of white commercialism* – only reinforces the rule that is being 'bent'. For Adorno, 'coming back in on the one', *especially* after having completed a circuitous journey, is a way of folding fugitivity back into the governing structure. However, such a metaphors of interpretation also exposes the lack of a polyrhythmic framework as a glaring philosophical absence.

In a much later recapitulation of his earlier views on jazz, Adorno writes somewhat viciously: 'It is not as though scurrilous businessmen have corrupted the voice of nature by attacking it from without; jazz takes care of this all by itself.'⁶⁶ However, I do not believe that this statement could stop at an indictment of jazz specifically, but rather reveals the paradoxical nature of what Adorno calls, in the 'Philosophy and Music' essay, the 'dual nature' of music's 'linguistic character'. On the one hand, an idiom or inherited musical language becomes 'second nature' to the subject, a 'more or less stable system, whose individual moments have a meaning that is at once independent of and open to the subject'. On the other hand, and incommensurable with the previous aspect, 'the legacy of the pre-rational, magical, and mimetic also survives in the aspect of music that resembles language'.⁶⁷

Beyond Syncopation

In his 1932 essay 'On the Social Situation of Music', Adorno summarises the claim which he would repeatedly make with regard to rhythm in jazz, in a series of statements spanning from 1933 to 1962: 'Metrically the eight-bar structure dominates, making use of syncopation and the interpolation of false beats only as ornaments.'⁶⁸ As we have seen, this is not one particular observation but a definite line of analysis that permeates all the jazz essays in which the musical parameter of rhythm is always foregrounded. Adorno identifies rhythm as the one potentially progressive element in jazz music, but somehow the radical potential of rhythm cannot be realised or cannot be enacted in a manner that could be understood as a form of freedom. 'If someone had wanted to take the syncopation and rhythmically improvisational impulses to their logical conclusion', he writes, 'then the old symmetry would have broken apart.'⁶⁹ And yet there is a way in which syncopation is made out, paradoxically, to be a principle whose logical conclusion is not available to it from the very beginning. Indeed, as he polemically puts it, syncopation itself is 'beaten down by [the beat]'.⁷⁰ This arresting formulation disrupts the possibility of conceiving the 'beat' as a free-standing musical element; it is rather a grammatical subject subordinated violently to its object.⁷¹ Rather than syncopation functioning as 'interference' or intervention into the standardised scheme, rhythmic agency and the transitive capacity to 'strike' is accorded to the beat and not to the syncopation.⁷² In the same way, the vibrato is not so much a citation or modification of the root note as itself subjected to that root note.

Adorno's account of syncopation has what may be regarded as a sequel in the influential work of musicologist David Temperley, who, taking examples from rock and soul music, argues that 'syncopated rhythms often seem to reinforce the metre of a song rather than conflicting with it.'⁷³ Temperley offers a model according to which a syncopated melody can be expressed as a 'surface structure' whose underlying 'deep structure representation' is inferred by the hearer. The deep structure is 'similar [to the surface melody], except that the syncopations have been "normalised".'⁷⁴ Yet, I would argue that the 'deep structure' versions of songs yielded by this analysis (for

example, those of Marvin Gaye) are hopelessly squared and rhythmically disfigured. To construe Marvin Gaye's melody as syncopation, as Temperley does, is to presuppose an underlying 'straight' version in which Gaye's melody comes in directly on the downbeat. The idea that a non-syncopated mental representation (for instance, one in which Gaye phrases his melody squarely on the downbeat) functions as the implied basis of the music's intelligibility, or even as an 'idealisation' of the music (which would be a weaker claim), is highly problematic.⁷⁵ Any musician who has played Marvin Gaye's music will tell you that the way he weaves his melody through the spaces between the beats is the rule, not the exception; furthermore, crucially, if he *had* landed on the downbeat, this too would have been syncopation. Notably, Temperley does not consider the possibility that any rhythmic schema inconsistent with European 'strong beats' could constitute such a 'deep structure'. This suggests that the framework of 'syncopation' might be wholly inappropriate for characterising the music in question, even though it is routinely cited as *the* essential feature of black American music.

The framework of polyrhythm, as elaborated by master drummer, educator and theorist C.K. Ladzekpo, implicitly anticipates, and deflects, the same misconceptions that Adorno's deployment of 'syncopation' crystallizes: *the main beat scheme cannot be separated from the secondary beat scheme*.⁷⁶ My point in citing Ladzekpo here is not to collapse the differences between rhythmic subversion in black American music (jazz) and in African music, but rather to point out the limitations for thought that are posed by staying within a white musicological discourse. Polyrhythmic frameworks show that the so-called 'strong beats' depend on syncopation for *their* articulation. This suggests that the 'secondary' beat or syncopation does not merely call into question the 'main beat' but could be used as the grounds for contesting any claim on the part of the 'ground beat' to have an identity independent of that contestation. Unlike the white, dominant power structure, the 'strong beats' that Marvin Gaye's melody dances around are not holding onto the fantasy that their identity is independent of that contestation.

Standard definitions of syncopation all rely on a concept of a measure divisible into a normative hierarchy of accented beats, yielding what Adorno means by the 'good part of the measure [*vom guten Takteil*]'; a hierarchy

which syncopations (the stressing of ‘off-beats’) upend. But the notion of ‘weak’ and ‘strong beats’ derives from a theoretical framework, initially prescriptive and not descriptive, which began to develop in late eighteenth-century Europe, apparently adapted from theories of prosody in poetry.⁷⁷ In no way does the notion of metre itself imply such a hierarchy. And if syncopation is also (in the domain of grammar) the contraction of a word by omission of one or more syllables or letters in the middle, then syncopation will indeed always be understood as an ‘interruption’ of something antecedently given – or an ellipsis, a maiming of something whole. The resulting view is that what is ‘off-beat’ has what is ‘on-beat’ as its ground, and that it is only intelligible by reference to that ground (which, for some reason, it avoids). If syncopation, as Adorno claims, is inefficacious for disrupting the workings of power, then those workings operate as much in the realm of rhythmic nomenclature as in the realm of musical time proper.

While the ‘referent’ of syncopation is normative march time, the polarity of march-syncopation (norm-deviation) eclipses those rhythmic elements of jazz that have their origin elsewhere, elements which are brought into contact with the march but which themselves do *not* refer to the march. As Sidran reminds us, ‘the rhythmic feeling of the earliest marching bands had its “swing” or “syncopation” not from the alteration of Western time signatures but from the imposition of African ... rhythms on these signatures.’⁷⁸ Indeed, the West African and black diasporic framework of polyrhythm (for example, a 12-beat rhythmic period in which the overlay of patterns can simultaneously be felt in 3 and in 4 time) is one which makes systematic ambiguity a vital feature. But whereas gestalt psychology would orient the viewer towards a set of mutually exclusive interpretations, the aspiration of the polyrhythmic listener and player-in-training is always projected towards experiencing more aspects of the ambiguity simultaneously. As one jazz drummer, Charli Persip, explains, in Paul Berliner’s landmark study *Thinking in Jazz*,

See, the triplet feeling in rhythm, ‘dah-dah-dah, dah-dah-dah,’ makes you relax ... It makes you hold back; you can’t rush triplets. But the duple part of the rhythm is like marches, ‘one and two and’ or ‘one and two and three and four and.’ That kind of division of time makes you move ahead, forge ahead, march – ‘boom, boom, boom,

boom.’ That’s the push of the rhythm. And that’s why it is so nice when you combine those two feelings. Then you get a complete rhythm that marches and still relaxes.⁷⁹

The aesthetics of swing (the key rhythmic principle that Adorno does not discuss) do not revolve around a modification of ‘straight’ rhythm but rather rely on a relationship between two distinct polarities. Sidran’s and Persip’s accounts of creolisation describe an integration between West African and European rhythmic schemes, but it is important to note that, on another level, the model of polyrhythm *itself* is West African, and hence the framework in which the integration itself can productively take place is not itself hybridised. Persip’s recourse to polyrhythm here is not about the capitalist West raiding native cultures to refresh its own stale expression – rather, polyrhythm furnishes the *meta*-language of Persip’s example. For Adorno, ‘the burgeoning joy brought on by triple rhythms inserted into a four-beat metre ... seem to loosen all the bonds of upbringing and custom [*Zucht und Sitte*].’⁸⁰ ‘Swung’ time need not primarily operate on or modify straight time, as some kind of pre-existing norm encoded or violently imposed somewhere in its history. Rather, swing can be thought of as the assertion of a polyrhythmic framework under which alone the very negotiation in question becomes possible. Against its assimilation into the framework of syncopation, the background polyrhythmic framework of this music is subject neither to the ‘empty flood’ of time, nor to a prescribed matrix of permissible accents. Indeed, those who choose to come back in on the downbeat may be reconciling themselves with history in any number of ways.⁸¹

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Notes

1. Theodor W. Adorno, ‘On Some Relationships between Music and Painting’, trans. Susan Gillespie, *The Musical Quarterly* 79:1 (1995), 66.
2. James Baldwin, ‘Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption’ [1979], in *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 124. For more on Baldwin and the centrality of black Atlantic music for

the theorisation of 'distinct conceptions of time that have a special political and philosophical significance,' see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 203.

3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* [1944], ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002).

4. Critiques include Nick Nesbitt, 'Sounding Autonomy: Adorno, Coltrane and Jazz', *Telos* 116 (Summer 1999), 81–98; Ulrich Schonherr, 'Adorno and Jazz: Reflections on a Failed Encounter', *Telos* 87 (March 1991), 85–96; Theodore A. Gracyk, 'Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music', *Musical Quarterly*, 76:4 (Winter 1992), 526–42. See a response to Gracyk in Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 19–20. For attempts to grapple with the specific problematics of rhythm in Adorno's discussions of jazz, see Robert Witkin, 'Why Did Adorno "Hate" Jazz?', *Sociological Theory* 18:1 (March 2000), 145–70; J. Bradford Robinson, 'The Jazz Essays of Theodor Adorno: Some Thoughts on Jazz Reception in Weimar Germany', *Popular Music* 13:1 (1994), 1–25; Lee B. Brown, 'Adorno's Critique of Popular Culture: The Case of Jazz Music', *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 26:1 (Spring 1992), 17–31.

5. The difficulty of this comparative task, which I merely gesture at here via the metonymy of the bass drum, is powerfully and cautiously argued in the section 'Children of Israel or Children of the Pharaohs' in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 205–212. With Fredric Jameson, Gilroy elaborates the link between the dialectic of enlightenment and racial terror, glossing the dialectic as 'that scientific domination of nature and the self, which constitutes the infernal machine of western civilisation ... this experience of fear in all its radicality, which cuts across class and gender to the point of touching the bourgeois in the very isolation of his town houses or sumptuous apartments, is surely the very "moment of truth" of ghetto life itself, as the Jews and so many other ethnic groups have had to live it: the helplessness of the village community before the perpetual and unpredictable imminence of the lynching or the pogrom, the race riot.' Fredric Jameson, 'History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project', *Rethinking Marxism* 1:1 (Spring 1988), 70; quoted in Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 206.

6. See Robert Kaufman, 'Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third Critique in Adorno and Jameson', *Critical Inquiry* 26:4 (Summer, 2000), 709: 'The Frankfurt school holds that Kantian antinomies, while not to be regarded as immutable, at the very least reflect accurately the divisions between life and thought (and the divisions present inside each) under actually-existing capitalism and "really-existing socialism" both.'

7. Hannah Ginsborg offers a reading of Kant's Third Critique according to which 'imagination can be "lawful", or "conform to rules", yet without being governed by any rule or concept in particular.' See Hannah Ginsborg, 'Lawfulness without a Law: Kant on the Free Play of Imagination and Understanding', in *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 55. Those (like me) who grapple with the Kantian notion of aesthetic judgment can gain much elucidation from the way jazz musicians theorise their

own practice: At Smalls Jazz Club in New York City I recently overheard a musician describing what happens when jazz improvisation is successful: 'it's not predictable, and yet that sh*t is right.' A philosophically nuanced position in which one must play *correctly* what could never be formulaically prescribed – this is exactly what I argue must be recognised in the domain of *rhythm*.

8. I trust drummers to define rhythmic concepts in the context of their practical application. Rather than quoting musicologists on syncopation, I therefore quote here from a classic drumming exercise book, beloved by jazz drummers: Ted Reed's *Progressive Steps to Syncopation for the Modern Drummer* (Clearwater, Florida: Ted Reed, 1958): 'Syncopation occurs when a temporary displacement of the regular metrical accent occurs, causing the emphasis to shift from a strong accent to a weak accent.' (33). The rest of the book consists in drum exercises, not definitions.

9. Personal conversation with the author, 15 May 2019. For a major musical and ethnographic intervention in the historiography of swing, based on research at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, see Howard Wiley & The Angola Project, *12 Gates to the City*, 2010, compact disc. See also Daniel E. Atkinson, "'Feets Don't Fail Me Now": Navigating an Unpaved, Rocky Road to, through and from the Last Slave Plantation', in *Civic Labours: Scholar Activism and Working-Class Studies*, eds. Dennis A. Deslippe, Eric Fure-Slocum, and John W. McKerley (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

10. Okiji, *Jazz as Critique*. My account is thus in line with scholars and jazz musicians who have in recent years written of their own affinities with a version of Adorno on jazz that sheds light on what Okiji describes as 'the contradiction of music being both of society and set apart from it', while simultaneously heeding Okiji's call for a 'more penetrating, and more difficult, conversation with Adorno' than was 'afford[ed] by the early attacks on his jazz writing.' *Ibid.*, 19, 35.

11. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 485.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Ben Sidran, *Black Talk* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1983), 23.

14. Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 165.

15. For an account of James 'Jimmy' Europe directing his men to strike up 'La Marseillaise' to French soldiers who are subsequently unable to recognise their own national anthem in its 'syncopated' version, see also Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 165–166. See also Paul Gilroy's discussion of Reese, and his regiment's drum major Noble Sissle's own account of the effect of 'syncopation' on the French: 'It is significant that the military was the most important means through which attractive and exciting aspects of black American culture were first introduced into the heart of Europe.' Gilroy, *Against Race*, 290.

16. Alan Goldsher, *Hard Bop Academy: The Sidemen of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers* (Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2002), 56.

17. John S. Wilson, 'Blakey Proud of New Faces in His Latest Messengers' [February 23, 1983], in *The New York Times Guide*

to the Arts of the 20th Century (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002), 2679.

18. The 'Stalinist March' section in the Fourth Movement of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony comes to mind. The problem of interpretation generated by 'Blues March' is not so novel, but rather, as Richard Taruskin writes about Shostakovich's Fifth, the problem of a 'richly coded utterance, but one whose meaning can never be wholly encompassed or definitively paraphrased'—except that it requires 'two categories of ... study: one dealing with the creation of art under conditions of censorship or persecution; the other ... with the question of irony.' Richard Taruskin, 'Public Lies and Unspeakable Truth: Interpreting Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony', in *Shostakovich Studies*, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 29–30. I would like to thank drummer and percussionist Savannah Harris for sharing this comparison.

19. Doing this kind of clarifying work on Adorno's behalf is deeply problematic, precisely because, as Robert Witkin points out, 'Adorno resorts to a number of generalised and negative characterisations of jazz as music, rather than offering, as in the case of the classical composers, analyses of specific works.' On the limits of defending Adorno by appealing to the distinctness of 'real jazz' as opposed to popular music, see Robert Witkin, *Adorno and Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 170–175; Okiji 4.

20. James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 36.

21. Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany, 1933–1945* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 76.

22. Michael Golston, "'Im Anfang War Der Rhythmus": Rhythmic Incubations in Discourses of Mind, Body and Race from 1850–1944', *Stanford Electronic Humanities Review* 5, supplemental: *Cultural and Technological Incubations of Fascism* (1996), last updated 17 December, 1996, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/5-suppl/text/golston.html>

23. See Richard Leppert's commentary in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 359.

24. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 485.

25. See Clarence Lusane's historical research on the assault on jazz in Nazi Germany, which was undoubtedly motivated by anti-blackness, while at the same time 'the ideological attacks on jazz were a necessary correlate in the attempt to build the racial state, and in turn in racialising Jews....On moral, political, and racial grounds, jazz and its black and Jewish practitioners would find themselves at war with the incoming regime. ... Unlike any other cultural expression of the period, jazz was viewed by the Nazis as both black and Jewish.' Clarence Lusane, "'Nigger Music Must Disappear': Jazz and the Disruption of Cultural Purity', in *Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experience of Blacks, Africans and African Americans During the Nazi Era* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 184–186.

26. Golston, "'Im Anfang War Der Rhythmus"."

27. Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich*, 410. See also the discussion in Golston, "'Im Anfang War Der Rhythmus"."

28. S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union, 1917–1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983),

174. See also the discussion in Lusane, *Hitler's Black Victims*, 86.

29. Pieces that alternate between different forms of musical time can also be considered 'regular' in so far as there is a mutually agreed upon relationship between (or pulse underlying) each of the related metres; even in these cases one measure contains within it the 'rule' for the next measure in the form of a plan to be realised jointly.

30. A term which Adorno himself derides as 'informed barbarism'. See *Essays on Music*, 135.

31. *The Drummer's Complete Vocabulary as Taught by Alan Dawson: Book & 2CDS* (Van Nuys, Los Angeles: Alfred Publishing, 1997), ix.

32. Fred Moten, 'TASTE DISSONANCE FLAVOR ESCAPE: Preface for a solo by Miles Davis', *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 17:2 (July 2007), 241.

33. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 467.

34. Ibid..

35. Golston, "'Im Anfang War Der Rhythmus"."

36. Richard Leppert, Commentary in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 345.

37. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 472.

38. See the article by Max Roach, 'What Jazz Means to Me': 'Let us first eliminate the term "jazz" ... What "jazz" means to me is the worst kind of working conditions, the worst in cultural prejudice ... the term "jazz" has come to mean the abuse and exploitation of black musicians; it has come to mean cultural prejudice and condescension.' *The Black Scholar* (Summer, 1972), 3–4. I thank drummer Allison Miller for calling this to my attention. An indispensable resource that details the critique of the term 'jazz' by the jazz greats themselves is Arthur Taylor's *Notes and Tones: Musician to Musician Interviews* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

39. Nicholas Payton, 'An Open Letter to my Dissenters on Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore' (2 December, 2011), quoted in Thomas Zablinger, 'Jazz', in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, ed. Immanuel Ness and Zak Cope (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 502.

40. Nicholas Payton, 'On the European Influence in Black American Music', last modified 2 August, 2012, <https://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2012/08/02/on-the-european-influence-in-black-american-music/>

41. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 497.

42. Ibid., 489.

43. Ibid., 491.

44. For a conflicting interpretation, see Michael H. Kater, who argues that Adorno was opportunistic in 'applauding' the Nazi censorship. 'Forbidden Fruit? Jazz in the Third Reich', *The American Historical Review* 94:1 (February, 1989), 14. For a rebuttal, see Richard Leppert, in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 14.

45. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 430

46. Ibid..

47. 'Bass drum', *New Grove Dictionary of Music*, Grove Music Online, ed. Dean Root, <http://oxfordmusiconline.com>

48. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 497.

49. One can be sure that Adorno would have been alarmed by the now-standard metronomisation of recorded music (where virtually all of popular music is recorded to a metronome or 'click

- track', a massive break in twentieth-century recording practices). Live drummers now imitate and incorporate the aesthetics of hip-hop computerised drum programming, in part in order to remain 'danceable' by contemporary standards and therefore be able to compete with DJs.
50. *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* (New York, Columbia University Press: 1998), 461.
51. Kenneth G. Robinson, "'Everyone's Welcome" at the Ozark Club, Great Falls, Montana's African American Nightclub', *Montana the Magazine of Western History* 62:2 (Summer 2012), 52.
52. 'JazzStories: Barry Harris and Billy Higgins – The Majesty of Tap', *Jazz at Lincoln Centre*, last modified December 2011, <https://beta.prx.org/stories/42053>
53. This oxymoronic effect is finally starting to be undone. Recent work by Christopher J. Wells actively explodes the binary opposition according to which bebop as modernist sensibility would have had to preclude dancing: 'When asked about bebop's "undanceable" nature, dancer and folklorist Mura Dehn replied, "It was very, very danceable – it was magnificent. It was not done by white people. It was mostly done by black people, and it was done in spurts"'. Wells' refreshing counter-history corroborates Higgins and Harris. Here is Wells: 'As a practice, bebop dance exposes the separation of the terms "dancing" and "listening" as a false dichotomy.' Christopher J. Wells, 'You Can't Dance to It', *Daedalus* 148:2 (Spring 2019), 44, 47.
54. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 142.
55. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 914–5. See discussion in Robert Adlington, 'Musical Temporality: Perspectives from Adorno and De Man', *Repercussions* (Spring 1997), 9.
56. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 913.
57. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 120–121.
58. *Ibid.*, 472.
59. *Ibid.*, 471.
60. *Ibid.*, 480.
61. *Ibid.*, 480.
62. Blue notes are errant notes, vibrations and other dissonant possibilities found within the musical scale that characterise the blues as a form or feel, especially at but not limited to the third and seventh degrees of the scale. Blue notes are sometimes thought of as being in excess, for example, of the western musicological distinction between a major third and a minor third, but their conception should not be limited to that categorial failure of fit. For an explication of 'blue notes' that ties blue tonality to the power of 'naming', a 'central function of the blues', see Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Pantheon Books), 33. For 'blue notes' as 'harmonic syncopation', see Nicholas Payton, 'Dissertation on Bebop and Hip-hop', accessed 1 May 2016, <https://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/08/16/dissertation-on-bebop-and-hiphop/>.
63. See Richard Leppert on Adorno's misunderstanding of the *Scheintakt* in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 492fn1. My appeal to the basic fact of polyrhythm as governing rhythmic epistemology goes beyond this correction.
64. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 446.
65. *Ibid.*, 498.
66. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Jazz: Perennial Fashion' in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 121.
67. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 145.
68. *Ibid.*, 430.
69. *Ibid.*, 481.
70. *Ibid.*, 492.
71. While engaging with Adorno, Fred Moten makes clear the epistemological import of 'the rupturally rhythmic, asynchronous suspension better known as syncopation' by linking it to 'the holding off, as it were, of any simple and immediate experience of the object and its story.' Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
72. Okiji emphasises that the erasure of syncopation as radical critique is linked to a failure to acknowledge swing feel as 'a musical manifestation of specific conditions of black modern being.' For Okiji, Adorno 'is right to note that syncopation does nothing to overturn the underlying pulse. What he fails to realise is that jazz emerges from a subject constituted by the holding of contradictory positions.' In Okiji's work, the critical elaboration of syncopation goes hand in hand with a deep reading of Du Bois' 'grand concept' of double consciousness (a reading not confined to 'cultural hybridity'). A reading of syncopation necessitates and is necessitated by a re-reading of double consciousness.
73. David Temperley, 'Syncopation in Rock: A Perceptual Perspective', *Popular Music* 18:1 (1999), 26.
74. *Ibid.*, 27–8.
75. The downbeat is sometimes interpreted as the first beat of a musical measure; this interpretation does not begin to address the myriad structural dimensions of the downbeat as a concept and feeling.
76. C.K. Ladzekpo, Foundation Course in African Dance Drumming, accessed 23 August 2016, <http://www.richardhodges.com/ladzekpo/Foundation.html>
77. William E. Caplin, 'Theories of Musical Rhythm in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory* ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 659.
78. Sidran, *Black Talk*, 48.
79. Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 1994), 153.
80. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 497.
81. Early versions of this article were presented at the 'Improvisation Weekend: Why Do We Improvise?' at the UC Berkeley Department of Music on 17 March 2013, and at the conference on 'Marxism, Musicology and the Frankfurt School' at University College Dublin, Ireland, on 2 July 2014. I am grateful to Nicole Grimes, Max Paddison, Richard Leppert and Shierry Weber for their feedback. I am also grateful to Judith Butler, Robert Kaufman, Bluma Goldstein, Tobin Chodos and Paul Grimstad for their detailed engagements with this project. I also thank Nicholas Payton, Howard Wiley, Raul Perales, Valerie Troutt, among many other musicians and practicing cultural historians whom I consulted. Finally, I thank Ruthie Price, Allison Miller, Savannah Harris, Nikki Glaspie, Tommie Bradford, Thomas Pridgen, Justin Brown, Amichai Kronfeld, and my other treasured drummer collaborators for keeping me honest.