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Towards a Postdramatic Jazz Aesthetic: Per(form)ance and Its Discontents

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TOWARDS A POSTDRAMATIC JAZZ AESTHETIC:
PER(FORM)ANCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

In Karen Jürs-Munby's introduction to her English translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006)*,* she positions a single African American theatre practitioner, Suzan-Lori Parks, within the canon of postdramatic writers in spite of Lehmann's blind spot for the contribution of Black artists to innovations in theatre practice and aesthetics. This thesis draws from critical jazz studies, particularly Parks's "Rep & Rev" and Fred Moten's analysis of jazz improvisation from his seminal work, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003), in order to visibilize Black contributions to theatre innovation through what has often been overlooked as merely popular music. Through a series of theoretical riffings, I deconstruct the terms (jazz aesthetics, performance, text, and the postdramatic) toward an architecture of performance and toward a queer epistemology that mixes diverse relationships of intensities found in both jazz and the postdramatic, namely queer time as jazz syncopation/swing, queer space as jazz improvisation, and queer body as jazz sonority/phrasing. Finally, in two theoretical jam sessions, I analyze Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Water by the Spoonful* (2017) and Christina Anderson's *How to Catch Creation* (2019) through these lenses. I propose that by locating jazz aesthetics and the postdramatic together in a critical topography, we can better recognize not only how POC and queer theatre makes statements by resisting certain hegemonic structures and deconstructing hierarchies of theatrical conventions, but also how Black and queer forms contribute to innovations in theatre and performance practice.

To all my chosen family, to my husband Bryan,

and to the great host of ancestors that guide my path.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: AN (INTRO)DUCTION

With *Hamilton: An American Musical,* we see the inculcation of hip hop into mainstream American theatre as never before. Hip Hop is a continuation of an African American music tradition and its often overlooked influence on the American stage going back to minstrelsy. Jazz is at the heart of this musical evolution. Despite its contribution to the American stage, there has yet to be a comprehensive study of jazz aesthetics as an analytical tool for drama, theatre, and performance. Parallel to the evolution of African American music in the U.S. and its contribution to performance practices around the globe (especially since the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s), there has been the emergence of a phenomenon in contemporary theatre practice described by Hans-Thies Lehmann as *postdramatic.* In the thesis, I will be sampling jazz aesthetics and postdramatic theory into a shared spatial discourse. How do both jazz aesthetics and the postdramatic seek to resist and flatten hierarchical structures? How could this anti-hierarchical proclivity be understood as a liberation technology in Black and queer of color theatre? I propose that jazz is not only a Black aesthetic but queer and in alignment with many of the intentions of European avant-garde practices that are rooted in traditions from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. I propose that by dissecting the jazz aesthetic into its characteristic parts one can parse out a theoretical framework that can help us gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of how queer, jazz aesthetics helps us analyze Black performance.By positioning body, space, and time as equal texts, I begin to explicate how these texts can be read, transposed, and interpreted with spectators in diverse meaning-making.

CHAPTER TWO: RIFFING ON THE TERMS

Consistently, there seems to be a precarious and illusive issue that arises when defining terms. They resist definition or defined borders like nomads and refugees. Much like identity and the roles we take on throughout a day, they are in constant flux and seem to be ever evolving. In this chapter, I seek less to define terms than to undefine them. By illuminating the theoretical conversations around the postdramatic, performance, the nature of texts, and jazz aesthetics, this chapter serves as a literature review and highlights a lineage(s) of thinking passed down or adopted from both cultural theorists and artistic practitioners.

A Postdramatic Riffing: (un)Defining the Postdramatic

In Hans-Thies Lehmann's seminal book, *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), Lehmann argues that postdramatic theatre arose as a major movement in contemporary theatre since the late 1960s. The postdramatic is more easily defined by its opposition to the dramatic. If "dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text," the postdramatic seeks to subvert that hierarchy (Lehmann 21). If the dramatic is a mimetic, totalizing fiction with a closed logic, then postdramatic theory declares that dramatic theatre has failed in its mimesis. Postdramatic theatre rejects simple, causal logic for a real-world logic based on conflicting, contested, unreconcilable, and multiple logics. From Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre*, I deduce five core facets that aid me in this discourse of jazz aesthetics and performance, namely: 1) rejection of the dramatic through poly-logical simultaneity; 2) musicalization not only of written/spoken text but of movement/performance texts as well; 3) the five theatrical aspects

of time, space, body, media, and text within a flattened hierarchical frame; 4) the "performance turn"; and, 5) the viewing of spectators as "active co-writers" of (performance) text" (Lehmann 6). These five core facets of the postdramatic are a poly-logical framework that serve as a guiding structure behind my thinking about jazz performance expressed in theatre and dramatic writing.

The "polylogue" of the new theatre, what I call poly-logical simultaneity, is a core facet of postdramatic theatre that resonates with a long history of poly-logic found in Black aesthetics, particularly jazz (Kristeva in Lehmann 32). Lehmann describes a shift in the mode of perception because the introduction of new technologies called into question the authority of the written text. This "mode of perception" is not linear-successive as in traditional dramatic theatre but is "a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving" (Lehmann 16). Later, in his discussion of 'Energetic theatre,' Lehmann uses Adorno's idea of mimesis "as a presymbolic, affective, becoming-like-something" to argue that postdramatic meaning-making is not governed by a single logic. Rather, this poly-logical simultaneity is represented through "a process of aesthetic rationality and 'construction'" akin to musical organization. Poly-rhythmicality and poly-tonality are both aspects often associated with jazz aesthetics in theatre (i.e. the poly-dramatic theory of Aishah Rahman and Barrios). Like the jazz aesthetic ethos revived by Charlie Parker in the 1940s/50s, the postdramatic is inclined toward abstraction and what Lehmann calls "auto-thematic structure," which allows the audience to create or play out their own corporeal logic within a given framework (32). This poly-logical aesthetic is often leaning toward "modernism's propensity for deconstruction

and montage" and, to that description, I would add collage (Lehmann 88). This is not only in alignment with jazz aesthetics but with Black aesthetics and of (re)mixology in general – where sampling various media into its own logic is a common strategy, regardless of whether it moves toward representation or abstraction. The major distinction here is that the postmodern seeks to deconstruct in order to dismantle or subvert while jazz aesthetics seek to honor a tradition rooted in the "bluesology" of having come through the Middle Passage and Jim Crow. Subversion, in jazz, is thus reserved for a capitalism born of the transatlantic slave trade and a white supremacy that seeks to dehumanize Black bodies, as well as other marginalized bodies of color.

Musicalization and the "turn to performance" connect the postdramatic to Black aesthetics in vital ways as the objectification of Black bodies in jazz performance, or even the erasure of Black bodies from jazz performance, has been central to the discourse of jazz around the world. Since the "performance turn" in theatre, the body has come center stage. As Eleni Varopoulou has said, "for the actor, as much as for the director, music has become an independent structure of theatre" through interdisciplinary studies between performance, theatre, and cognitive science (Varopoulou in Lehmann 91). At the intersection of theatre and body, we recognize the musicality of impulse in and through the body as well as the relationship of the body or bodies to space. One example might be to think of the physical virtuosity of the jazz performer playing an instrument as an embodied act in relationship to a performance object. Musicians who "make love" to their instruments have an understanding, albeit often intuitive, of the performance of the body in relationship to an object they literally

breathe life into. The jazz body's presence is parallel to the presence of the actor in postdramatic theatre (Lehmann 95). Lehmann's musicalization is centered on particular "auditory semiotics" which in theatrical jazz aesthetics look like the Black vernacular of Zora Neale Hurston's ethnographic writing, particularly her plays like *Mule Bone*.

The interexchange between the visual, auditory, and movement arts as a zone of entanglement helps us recognize how the visual arts will speak in the language of movement like with Jackson Pollock or how auditory arts will speak in the language of the visual arts like interdisciplinary jazz artist Jason Moran. Because theatre uses a combination of these artistic practices, it also borrows from all of their languages. Theatre and performance as embodied practices not only rely heavily on musical language but also depend on musicality as both a quality and a structure. All theatre practitioners use their musical and rhythmic sensibilities to create theatrical expressions, dynamics, and tensions. However, Lehmann focuses more on the musicalization of spoken texts in theatre and not so much on the gestic or movement qualities that create dynamic meaning-making on stage through musical sensibilities. Georg Fuchs, conversely, talks about drama as physical movement in musical terms, or for our discussions, musicalization. In *The Revolution of Theatre*, Fuchs says, "Drama in its simplest form is rhythmic movement of the body through space" (Fuchs in Lehmann 47). Here, rhythmic movement is a relationship to musical time while also confirming the performance trifecta (space, time, and body) that I will discuss in the next chapter.

A Performatic/Performative Riffing: (un)Defining Performance

"And there is no event, just as there is no action, without music."

(Moten in Black and Blur 64)

Before I can move on to the other core principles from which I will be theorizing, I think

it is important to offer my lineage of understanding performance: performance is a broad

spectrum of embodied practices which are "restored" or "twice behaved" behaviors

performed in everyday life, on stage, or anywhere in between (Taylor 26, Schechner 28).

Performance is not the amplification of the information of everyday life (or re-presentation),

but the amplification of embodied consciousness we perceive as presence. Performance is not

"in" any thing or object but rather the dynamic, liminal space(s) *between* time, space, and

body. Performance is an object-in-motion, action, interaction, and relationship (Moten 1). It

is the resistance of the object to stasis and therefore is transgressive. Performance is

transgressive in that the act that is performance expresses the subjectivity of the performer

who is not just "an ob-ject, or objectifiable present" (Lehmann 142) but a co-presence with

the witness, spectator, or, in Boalian terms, the "spect-actor" (Taylor 73, Boal 126).

Performance is not only politically transgressive but is also transgressive in historicity,

practice, and aesthetics. Performance both is and is not a form and thus creates a space for

new or anti-forms to arise. D. Soyini Madison in the "Forward" to *Black Performance Theory*

(2014) states:

> If performance constitutes forms of cultural staging – conscious, heightened, reflexive,
>
> framed, contained – within a limited time span of action from plays to carnivals, from

poetry to prose, from weddings to funerals, from jokes to storytelling and more; if

performativity marks identity through the habitus of repetitive enactments, reiterations

or stylized norms, and inherited gestural conventions from the way we sit, stand,

speak, dress, dance, play, eat, hold a pencil and more; if the performative is the

culmination of both in that it does something to make a material, physical, and

situational difference – then Black Performance Theory speaks to why all this matters

to blackness and to contested identities. (DeFrantz and Gonzalez viii)

What I have struggled with in defining performance is similar to how I have struggled to

define jazz below. Performance and jazz are inherently terms of resistance and are often

associated with social activism of the marginalized be it class, race, ability, gender, or

sexuality.

A Textual Riffing: (un)Defining Text

At the heart of Lehmann's discussion of postdramatic theatre is a section he entitles,

"Aspects: text – space – time – body – media" (45). Lehmann argues that postdramatic

theatre strives to make the written text of equal standing with the other elements of theatre

and performance, namely – space, time, body, and media. In this paradigm, these elements

are not made subservient to text like in most traditional theatre but made an equal partner

with the other elements. This ensemble of theatrical aspects, like a jazz ensemble, work

together with a more flattened hierarchy than most traditional theatre models. Borrowing

Lehmann's concept of musicalization, I bring this ensemble of theatrical aspects into

conversation with jazz aesthetics that often work toward a similar goal: to resist hegemonic

forms in art, culture, and meaning-making. Not only is text made equal to the other theatrical

aspects, but through collapsing this hierarchy, I argue that all the theatrical aspects as defined

by Lehmann become text for the spectator to read and co-write meaning with the performers.

Performance then is an intertextuality of space, time, body, media, and written text. Because

of this collapsed hierarchy and the revelation that all theatrical aspects are text, I must be

more specific with what I mean by text. In this thesis, I make a strong distinction between

written text and performance text. Especially for matters dealing with Black and queer

performance, text is related to the word "tech-" of technology. I not only consider these texts

a way of liberation, or liberation technologies, for all marginalized bodies but I also view

them as the architecture of performance. These two areas I will continue to frame and discuss

in the following chapter.

Lehman's *postdramatic theory* talks about theatre in terms of placing the ensemble of

theatrical aspects within a non-hierarchical frame: time, space, body, media, and written text.

Yet, instead of using Lehmann's quintet of theatrical aspects, I reduce this ensemble to a

performance trio: space, time, and body. In this thesis, I am interested in space, time, and

body as the intertextual ensemble of theatrical aspects in performance and I frame this trio

within the paradigm of jazz aesthetics which I define in the next section. I make this

adjustment to Lehmann's model for my performance matrix because I understand media and

written text to be extensions of the body. Written text is an imitation or extension of

embodied speech and media is an extension of the entire body: both what the body uses (such

as objects, props, puppets, etc.) and media technologies (such as video projections, audio recordings, lights, etc. …), which often work as a way to magnify, minimize, multiply, or even replace body entirely. Media, objects, or documentation can be views as a body itself; they have their own bodies. So too does any technological device and any image or sound it may project. When we think of media, we can think of the absence of body, the absence of voice. Perhaps, we could also think of media as an empty shell, or medium, through which something moves, but the media, object, or document is not the performance event.

Performance is a living thing played out in varying intensities among the relationships of what I consider the primary theatrical aspects: space, time, and body. The rest are but ashes of live event, practice, or process already performed. Within this frame, all art is performance. Some artists are choosing to share the ashes, or the remains of their performance, while others share the live event itself, however ephemeral it may be. The recording, documentation, or the concrete products, if you will, of performance (the painting, the photograph, the audio/video recording, the written text of a poem, novel, play, to name a few) are the remains of performances already done. We often eulogize those performances in museums, cinemas, record album selves, and on living room TV sets. In fact, they may even be considered the imitation of performance as they seek to (re)present what was already accomplished or performed in the past but are not the event itself. Some have even theorized writing as the imitation of speech for centuries. I place written text and media squarely within this metaphor of performance ashes, thus justifying my reason to essentialize the postdramatic theatrical aspects to: space, time, and body.

The postdramatic also seeks to make "active co-writers" of its spectators. In Karen

Jürs-Munby's introduction to her translation of Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), she

makes a list of anglophone writers "whose texts could be described as postdramatic"

(Jürs-Munby in Lehmann 6). As a Black artist-scholar who is interested in jazz aesthetics in

theatre and performance practice, I am curious that Jürs-Munby includes Suzan-Lori Parks

(*The American Play, Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*) in this list of

postdramatic writers. Jürs-Munby argues that Parks is part of a literary continuum consistent

with the postdramatic paradigm. Jürs-Munby defends her list, arguing that writers like Parks

produce written texts that are 'open' or 'writerly' versus "readerly" (as described by Roland

Barthes in his 1970 essay, S/Z) because spectators are called upon to become active

co-writers of the (performance) text" (Jürs-Munby in Lehmann 6).

To conclude this discussion of postdramatic theory and its relationship to performance

texts, I must also make a note here to emphasize the postdramatic's use of or relationship

with interdisciplinary arts and of diverse artistic languages borrowed especially from visual

and musical arts what Lehmann describes as "between the arts" (111). Lehmann proposes

that a "between"-ness of postdramatic theatre is about the "interaction of the performers and

not that of the abstract artistic principles; about the 'between' as a mutual reaction of the

different modes of representation, not their addition; not about multi-media sensations but an

experience that cuts across these effects" (112). Here we see that the postdramatic seeks a

dynamic synthesis, a relational interaction, between the arts rather than just the addition of

modes of expression. This can also be understood in terms of Black aesthetics that have

argued the same for decades. From Hughes to Morrison, Black aesthetics have striven in

similar ways to break down these hierarchies through a mutual exchange of self-expression

between the arts often because they had to in order to exist at all, to survive.

A Jazz Riffing: (un)Defining Jazz Aesthetics

In Gunther Huesmann and Joachim-Ernst Berendt's epilogue to *The Jazz Book: From

Ragtime to the 21ˢᵗ Century,* "Toward a Definition of Jazz," they argue that defining jazz is

impossible because the nature of definitions, by definition, is "square," or without quality

(Berendt 664). Berendt says this is why we are left "dissatisfied" by any definition we may

attempt (664). Jazz is and has a quality that eludes us in our attempt to define it. It is this

quality of non-squareness or angularity that sets apart a certain jazz ethos, which continues to

resurface in the jazz tradition throughout its history. Pure stasis (if there is even such a thing)

is the antithesis of jazz. Many "jazz" musicians from Armstrong to Parker and Coltrane to the

present have even rejected the term and its definitions, saying, "I just play music." Both

Steven Coleman (musician and M-Base founder) and Muhal Richard Adams, co-founder of

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), assumed the term

"creative music" in lieu of jazz (Lewis 38). With "creative music," they point to this very

quality of resistance and revolt we find in jazz music in general. Jazz can only be derived by

a particular experience or what we recognize as the "signature sound" infused into the

aesthetic by the individual performer. Many jazz practitioners claim this quality cannot be

rationally comprehended, only felt. As Armstrong has been quoted on numerous occasions to

say: "If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know" (Berendt 664). This embodied (un)knowing, this uncertain fluidity, is a foundational principle not only for jazz performance practice but also in the work we do as theatre-makers, devisers, performers, and as improvisers of everyday life.

If we understand anything from the evolution of jazz music, it is that jazz music is about flux – it is always changing and resisting conventionality and commercialization. Just about the time we place our finger on what it is, jazz says, "Nope, I am something else." When Paul Whiteman, a European-American bandleader (who proclaimed himself "the King of Jazz") sought to "make a lady out of jazz" in the 1920s and 30s, Charlie Parker comes along and reignites jazz with the same "savage," rebellious, and liberatory ethos, of which many European-Americans are both attracted and repelled (Gabbard 2-3). Berendt describes jazz as a "music of revolt" as opposed to the stereotype of the submissive wife, queen, or lady of any self-proclaimed "king of jazz" (Berendt 667). Jazz as a quality of revolt is not only about the U.S. discourse around race (although it was born out of those racial tensions). Jazz as a quality of revolt has been felt "by millions of 'cultured' people in all fields around the world in every country and social system" as a protest against "a domination-oriented society" (Berendt 667). This is why jazz has been danced in the feet, played in the hands, heard in ears, and felt in hearts of people as diverse as: the Nigeratti of the Harlem Renaissance, the Surrealists of France and the Caribbean, the Beatniks of New York and San Francisco, to the painters and artists I have met in Berlin this past year. Jazz resists definition because it is not only a quality of resistance but a dynamic matrix or web of interrelated intensities. This is

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also true of performance.

Fred Moten's definition of performance as the resistance of the object who speaks met with Berendt and Huesmann's definition of jazz as a quality of revolt are expressed through a constant relational exchange of sonic intensities. This relational exchange of sonic intensities is not only in alignment with sonority, or speech, but with silence a quality which can be deafening. Being held in tension, dynamic qualities like jazz create meaning by simple juxtaposition to silence. There would be no music without silence – without "the rest:" be it the silent protest of the young people sitting in a diner during the civil rights movement; the visual sonority of abstract expressionist Norman Lewis's clan meeting screaming from museum walls in the silent pigment of red, white, and blue; or the performance art of Black artists, like William L. Pope, breathlessly crawling his way through the streets of America. This resistance touches all areas of our world especially as it relates to cultural and aesthetic representation.

So then, what is jazz? Or, at least, what are the core characteristics that have continued to find their expression in the jazz tradition? Berendt and Huesmann attempt to define jazz in contrast to European music. They distill three basic elements from jazz performance, namely: swing/syncopation, improvisation, and sound/phrasing. The authors argue that all three of these elements "serve to increase intensity" (Berendt 662). Berendt and Huesmann do not talk about the three jazz characteristics in isolation but in terms of their ever-changing relationship to one another throughout the evolution of jazz music (Berendt 661). When we look at the various movements within jazz historiography, we see the individual elements

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take the lead at different epochal moments. When one element gets dubbed the defining characteristic of jazz, another takes the lead, revealing a new facet of the form and expression of Black artistic innovation in the U.S. Each of these facets or characteristics seem related to some corresponding aspect of the postdramatic paradigm of non-hierarchical performance texts: time, space, and body. Constructing a jazz performance matrix, I use Berendt and Huesmann's suggestion that syncopation is "a special relationship to time" and theoretically riff off this premise using Suzan-Lori Parks's *Rev & Rev* principle. Then, in a later section, I riff on postdramatic theory through Moten, who posits that improvisation is related to space as a "grapho-spatiality," or spatialization. Following Moten's thought, I propose improvisation is both a technology and a structure for the Black body to negotiate power structures and experience freedom even within oppressive topographies. Berendt describes jazz sonority and phrasing as standing in "dialectic[al] opposition" to one another (Berendt 662). Jazz sonority co-mingles the biological physiology of vocal production with nurture and artistic agency while jazz phrasing is more closely related to exposure, influence, and ultimately, one's artistic lineage. This seems directly connected with the history of slavery and Jim Crow in America, particularly from the evolution of the blues and the desire to experience freedom for and mediated through the Black body. Body, space, and time are a common matrix that three-dimensionalize objects in a way that correspond to mutual locations of resistance for both jazz and performance that I intend to contemplate below. With this as an architectural frame, I consider the inter(text)ual ensemble of theatrical aspects as jazz space, jazz time, and jazz body respectively: improvisation, syncopation, and

sound/phrasing. This configures a dynamic way to view jazz performance in contrast to

traditional European models of performance.

CHAPTER THREE: JAZZING FORM - AN ARCHITECTURE OF PER(FORM)ANCE

"Here, the secret love of the theatre belongs to architecture."

– Hans-Thies Lehmann

In conversation with jazz aesthetics and postdramatic theory, I seek to understand the architecture of performance by examining architecture-as-performance. Lehmann argues that "the secret love of the theatre belongs to architecture" (Lehmann 123). The location of the postdramatic is rooted in a "maternally connoted" 'space' that he calls 'chora' (Lehmann 145). Chora is an anti-architectural space that is antagonistic to patriarchal "logos" but embraces the rhythm and sonority that "subsists in all language as its 'poetry'" without fixable meaning or unity (Lehmann 145-146). For Lehmann, postdramatic space is "an autonomous co-player" much like Pina Bausch's danztheatre wherein she uses a particular material in the space that when played upon begins to transform in a way that the space begins to read as an accumulation of time (151). "Spatialized body-time aims to communicate directly to the spectators' nervous system, not to inform them" but to invoke a feeling (Lehmann 152). As opposed to a space of paternal-logos that centers erective structures like phallic architecture in dramatic writing and performance, chora is maternal-poetic space – "the deconstruction of a discourse oriented towards meaning and the invention of a space that eludes the laws of telos and unity" (Lehmann 146). This chora or poetic space has a particular relationship to body that logical space does not – one of "breath, rhythm, and the present actuality of the body's visceral presence" felt by the audience/spectator (Lehmann 145). Here, we see Lehmann describing the architecture of postdramatic performance as the

interrelationship of space, time, and body linked through its own assemblage of a poetic "logic" that is music at its core. This design of architectural structures of performance theory continues a lineage of other interdisciplinary avant-gardists who sought "to replace the static principle of the autonomous art object" with what is called "the dynamic embodied spatio-temporal event" (Hannah and Harsløf 13).

Before I begin my theoretical jam sessions jazzing time and space, I want to subvert ideas around architecture as performance and jazz our understanding of dramatic form. Architecture is often thought of in terms of the physical space(s) in which we perform and rarely architecture as a dynamic embodied spatio-temporal event. Here, I want to discuss the relationship of architecture to other performances of resistance and then describe the jazz performance matrix I will be using to read life into the two dramatic texts hereafter.

Like any definition, as I have discussed before, architecture as performance resists any singular definition. Because the field is varied and interwoven with many voices, it offers a rich space for discussion, inquiry, and curiosity. In *Performative Architecture: Beyond Instrumentality* (2005), editors Branko Kolarevic and Ali Malkawi bring together an array of voices at the intersection of architecture and performance (2005). In an opening discussion, David Leatherbarrow argues that architecture is performing (or doing a thing) on its own. A room, building, or structure's identity is not entirely determined by human utility, perception, and experience. He reminds us that structures or what we call "rooms" have been around long before we walked the earth and will probably exist beyond us. Leatherbarrow challenges us to think about the performance of architecture not in terms of "the work but about the way the

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work works" (Malkawi 9). He asks: "Is there an 'action' in architecture's apparent passivity, in its steady and static permanence…is the building only what we make of it?" (Malkawi 10). Leatherbarrow gives us two main insights about architecture as performance: 1) architecture is character and 2) architecture exists within a context.

<div align="center">Architecture as Character and Identity</div>

Leatherbarrow reminds us that character is not realized through superficial "signs of identity" but rather character has a history and is realized in action. We often do not know a building's pre-history. We usually have no knowledge of the people who designed and built the room or their intentions in building it. Therefore, we have more or less some degree of surprise upon entering a building or structure. Leatherbarrow argues, "we do not so much enter rooms, but rooms (so to speak) happen to us" (Malkawi 10). Anne Bogart and Tina Landau explore what architecture does to or with us in their seminal work, *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* (2005). Borrowing from dancer/choreographer Mary Overlie, Bogart and Landau expanded her idea of viewpoints and divided them into two subgroups: viewpoints of time and viewpoints of space. They encourage us "to learn to dance with the space" in terms of architecture as a viewpoint of space in order to let "movement evolve out of our surroundings" (Bogart and Landau 10). They break architecture down into several aspects: solid mass, texture, light, color, and sound. These aspects are also part of what gives an architecture its "character." We often use this spatial metaphor of "character" when shopping for a new place to live. I'm looking for a

place that has character. Although viewpoints practitioners are having a different

conversation than Leatherbarrow and other performative architects, we can see some

connections between his theory of architectural character and how theatre practitioners and

performers can view architecture as a partner in performance and creative processes.

Leatherbarrow talks about architecture's character in terms of reaction (or

"counteraction") and resistance. He says, "in truth the building must work at staying as it is.

It must work with ambient conditions, such as gravity, winds, sunlight and so on. It must also

work against these forces. And a building must 'suffer their effects' in what he calls an

economy of performance" (Malkawi 13). Moten who is both a performance scholar and poet,

also talks about performance in similar terms particularly in his discussion of Black

performance in his book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2003).

When talking about Black performance, Moten positions resistance at the center of his

definition, claiming performance is "the resistance of the object" (Moten 7). Although Moten

expresses "agony" over this original thought, he continues to wrestle with the role of

resistance as part of the ontology of performance in his most recent series of essays *Black and*

Blur. What Moten seems to express is that Black bodies perform through resisting certain

societal conditions, particularly institutional and individual racism. Moten is arguing that the

Black body as an object of performance resists external conditions in a similar way that

Leatherbarrow proposes. Perhaps, the nature of an object is to *object* in a similar way in

which an architectural work *works*.

Topography: Articulating Structures in an Economy of Performance

Architecture resists the "ambient conditions" surrounding it. Objects, whether animate or

inanimate, human or architecture, resist the conditions of which they are apart in order to

maintain their own structural integrity based on an internal definition, not an external one.

However, the problem with definitions built on qualities of revolt and resistance (as we have

seen above with both performance and jazz aesthetics) is that these definitions are often

defined by what they are not. By being defined by what they are resisting, attention continues

to be given to the very hegemonic forces they seek to subvert. As long as they are defined in

re-active rather than catalytic action, the Black, the queer, and the avant-garde will be defined

by the white, the normative, and the mainstream. Managing and negotiating freedom (which

seems to be a perennial objective among these terms), seem to be caught in this ever-evolving

cycle of homogeneity. Circumventing this paradox between freedom and resistance is part of

the project of performance. Beyond a type of Hegelian dialectic between freedom and

resistance, performance seeks to find some new forms or new syntheses at multiple

intersections at the same time. Therefore, I understand Leatherbarrow's "economy of

performance" as a phenomenology of intercontextuality that rejects any singular set of binary

dialogism for the poly-logical simultaneity of jazz aesthetics in relationship to multi-contexts

that collide at the site of performance.

Leatherbarrow extends his conversation of the economy of performance into a discussion

about how the performance of architecture unfolds within a particular milieu – that is within

its topography. He claims that because those topographies are not static but in continuous

flux, conversation, and even negotiation, a building within its topography is also "acting" to reclaim its own equilibrium with that ecosystem of change. Leatherbarrow states that this very "disequilibrium animates a life and a history of ever-new performances" (Malkawi 17). According to Bogart and Landau, Topography, as a viewpoint of space, is not just the floor pattern of a performer's feet. Topography is a site represented through a series of changing densities a performer may express or signify while traversing the terrain (or landscape) of the performance space. We not only receive a sense of varying densities but also a sense of multidimensional scale or what Leatherbarrow calls, "its wide extensity, its mosaic heterogeneity, and its capacity to disclose previously latent potentials" (Malkawi 16). These latent potentials remind us that Black and queer performance is always happening, always evolving, and always contributing to innovations of theatrical form and per(form)ance whether those contributions are recognized or not by the ambient conditions of the white, the normative, and the mainstream.

Leatherbarrow continues, "If space advances its array all at once (in simultaneity), actual topography gives its locations through time. In any given site, at any given moment, its structure requires that some places be recalled, others anticipated" (Malkawi 16). When we think about performance as architecture, we are also challenged with the past that may or may not be known but is being responded to, performed with, and built upon.

When we think about performance as a site of the object's resistance, we understand how certain objects may object or resist in diverse ways based on the activity of or relationship with the governing or hegemonic topography in which the object is moving, sounding, or

performing. Whether we are talking about institutional racism, misogyny, classism, or ableism, we understand that buildings are often built within a topography that is not only hostile to the structure being built but hostile to the objects, or bodies, that are attempting to be in relationship with them. Those buildings and structures are daily being tested.

In Leatherbarrow's Architecture Oriented Otherwise (2009), he continues his discussion of the performative nature of architecture by bridging the gap between art and life (21). He breathes life into the ontology of architecture by exploring the atmosphere of the Church of San Martín de Porres designed by architect Henry Klumb in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We derive the word atmosphere from the Greek word atmos which means vapor or breath (Leatherbarrow 24). Just like when we animate objects or puppets with breath, Leatherbarrow argues that architecture also expresses breath or the absence of breath by its atmosphere. Through architectural atmosphere, he attempts to show that "a building's performances are the means by which it simultaneously accomplishes practical purposes and gives them legible articulation" (Leatherbarrow 26). Returning to the notion that objects object, I am interested in exploring how performances of architecture, like atmosphere, articulate Black performances of representation, resistance, movement, and function.

Fred Moten, in a conversation with Randy Martin, uses a combination of "practical purposes and legible articulation," in what they call articulated practices. Moten defines performance as "the resistance of the object" in the context of an updated Marxist analysis where articulated practices are at the intersection of a materiality that is both object and subject. Martin in his book Critical Moves (1998) argues from a perspective of practice

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where human activity is no longer able to be inserted into "a fixed landscape of social structure" because what was once seen as a fixed landscape is now seen as perpetual or in perpetual motion (Martin in Moten 206). These landscapes (which include architectural structures) are not seen as fixed but activated, living, and thus always performing. But performing what? With the perpetual problem of gentrification, we understand how landscapes are ever-changing, moving, and performing in ways that displace bodies of color, as well as other marginalized bodies (such as aged, disabled, poor, neurodivergent) because with these ambient, societal conditions, space is not seen as a habitation for humanity but rather as a receptacle for capital. Those who do not have capital are therefore seen as valueless and displaceable. In line with Motenian thought, I not only understand performance as the resistance of the object but also that an object is always an object-in-practice, an object-in-resistance.

Moten argues that the magic of objects is in their "production of surplus" or "race, class, gender, and sexuality as the very materiality of social identity" which is often fetishized, or made into what he calls a "mysterious secret." This fetishization, or mystification, often continues the dehumanization of subjects into objecthood. However, Moten extends a positive ability or "liberatory force" to the magic of objects. That liberatory force is realized through the objects' articulating structures which Moten argues should not be limited to "historicity, politics, and practice but aesthesis as well" (Moten 35). The object articulates desire through an aesthetic of objecting, resisting, and articulating what I also see as a queering of the world toward yet-to-be-realized futures. These futures can only be realized

when the articulating structures of minoritarian performance are recognized beyond their productive, functional value as dictated by the majoritarian.

Concerning the functional value of architecture, Leatherbarrow claims that architecture can be "called productive, because its settings supply what the given location is unable to give on its own" (33). He used the obvious example of a building being able to both reflect the ambient light of the sun while simultaneously casting shadows that cover and cool by the same devices. Architecture provides a landscape or topography with what it is unable to give itself. This is again its functional value, similar to the value of labor given to human bodies as objects. Leatherbarrow speaks about architecture in terms of something foreign being placed in a field or landscape in a way that calls the building to perform or act "as if" it were something it is not – "part of the natural world and social milieu." Architecture, much like the marginalized body, is often not allowed to articulate through metaphor and symbolism. In architecture, Leatherbarrow holds the functionalism of twentieth-century design theory responsible. However, the visible face and outward demonstration of the ways a "building conditions, limits, or resists the energies" of enclosure still exists as performance – a way of showing, articulating itself in a world in which it does not belong (Leatherbarrow 41).

Similarly, the Black body was brought to the U.S. as an object, a fungible material of labor value, and made to function as a real property of enslavement tied to a land in which it did not belong. The Black body was forced to behave or perform in contrast to itself much like architecture resists ambient forces in order to define itself. However, the Black body of enslaved people found ways to articulate a defiance in spite of objecthood. This articulation

of the object-in-resistance found ways to combine subjectivity with objecthood. Some of Moten's writing is in response to Saidiya Hartman. In *Scene of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (1997), she argues that the objecthood of Black bodies is still an everyday reality in freedom as it was in slavery and can be traced through small moments of visible expressions of subjectivity or agency on the plantation to Black performances today (13-14). From these ideas, Moten argues that by making a person an object it must live by that nature, as an object in perpetual motion – an object-in-resistance. In similar ways, we can understand (much like the jazz aesthetics of improvisation, syncopation, and sonority/phrasing) how architectural tensions can help us think about space, time and body whether of blackness, queerness, or the "other" avant-garde, which all work at intersections of process and product, construction and representation, and commodification and objecthood.

Leatherbarrow explains that there are two ways in which "designers and critics view buildings: 1) as objects that result from design and construction techniques, 2) as objects that represent various practices and ideas" (43). Both social construction and representation have been critical issues in the body politics of the U.S. We understand that the objectifying of Black bodies is a construction and capitalist technology that stripped them of subjecthood and that representation has been a critical issue for African American people in American society ever since. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman illuminates performances of enslaved bodies being appropriated by white people in minstrelsy and melodrama as being what she calls "the property of enjoyment" (23). The representation of blackness was highjacked through

clowning and grotesquery for the "innocent" or "(in)sufferable pleasures" of white people yet "evidenced the entanglement of terror and enjoyment" (23). This is but one example of how the objectification of Black bodies has led to performances of blackness by both European American and African American people within ambient topographies of which the object structures of perception and oppression were built.

Upon applying for graduate study at University of Central Florida, I wrote in my application that I had a question about the visibility or presence of Black people in devised work, physical theatre acting training, and academic writing about these two. Perhaps, African American theatre practitioners use these terms less because of their European origins or maybe the scholarship gets lost because of the disproportionate representation of Black academics in the field. Either way, I often wonder if African American students resist devised theatre and many of the forms it employs (such as clowning and grotesquery) in response to how these performance techniques or styles were used in the past to construct racist images of subjugation and performances of enslaved Black people through minstrelsy and melodrama. Postdramatic theatre is a response to such dualist representations of humanity on stage and seeks to complicate or trouble flattened, didactic, two-dimensional representations through the poly-logical simultaneity we discussed above. However, melodrama and realism, in general, have been the primary modes of Black performance and representation in America since the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, there has been a small vanguard of experimental practices of Black abstraction from the Harlem Renaissance period to the present that has called more and more African American artists into the field of non-realistic expression

beyond music and visual arts into stage performance. This has happened especially since the performance turn within theatre and dramatic arts in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960. My biggest criticism of Lehmann's theory is that he does not include the contribution of Black aesthetics to the musicalization and poetics of the postdramatic stage and how Black music was already demonstrating proto-postmodernity coming out of World War II through the music of Parker, Coltrane, and others. Moving forward, I am also interested in how Black performances have expressed this queering of the present through speculation of alternate futures or worlds outside of the European colonial project. The post-modern deconstruction of performance, especially in dance, have led to a "particulation" (or parsing out) of time, space, and body as methods for not only creating drama and performance but analyzing them as well. Many might say that a taxonomy of performance in this way is not useful but in the analysis hereafter I seek to prove that such a taxonomy of jazz performance (as shown in Figure 1) can help us appreciate how Black aesthetics (especially around Black music, in general, but particularly jazz) can help us understand performance and the ashes of performance more deeply.

A Jazz Performance Matrix

Jazz Rhythm as Time
syncopation/swing/off-beat
queer time as future
past/present/future
"the unborn, the living, and the
dead"

TIME

Performance Event

embodied spatio-temporal event
performance as intertextuality
architecture as performance

SPACE

BODY

Jazz Improvisation as Space
architecture & topography
jam session
ritual/communitas

Jazz Sonority & Phrasing as Body
bluesology/blue note
black & blue/queer body
movement/gesture/shape
embodiment/presence
media/technology
object/puppets/material
written text/documentation

A JAZZ PERFORMANCE MATRIX
dynamic embodied spatio-temporal event

Figure 1: A Jazz Performance Matrix

Source: Figure 1 generated and provide by the author, Johann Robert Wood

In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance*, Paul Allain and Jen Harvie

describe how theatre theorists divide space into three categories: the stage space, the theatre

space, and the theatre environment. I am mostly concerned with "the stage space" and "the

theatre environment," what I call, respectively, the performance space and its topography or

atmosphere (249). I am less concerned with the space as literal architecture (such as the

theatre building structure or the physical structure of site-specific performances) and more

concerned with performance space as the site of the doing, or being, and the socio-political

context of which a performance object resists or acts. With that event, context, and embodied

act in mind, we understand space is a fundamental way in which we make meaning in theatre,

performance, and everyday life. Similar to jazz aesthetic theory being understood in terms of

the relationship of intensities, I think it is imperative to this discussion that we also seek to understand the relationship between body, time, and space.

In my theoretical jam sessions, I will attempt to make new readings of two plays from this matrix and the lineage of thinking I have proposed in the previous chapter that offered my own riffing on the terms. Before my jam sessions, allow me to analyze a play from a writer who exemplifies the intersection of the postdramatic and jazz aesthetics via their dramatic form.

Jazzing Form: Structure in a Suzan-Lori Parks Play

"Why does everyone think white artists make art and black artists make statements?

Why doesn't anyone ask me about form?"

– Suzan-Lori Parks, playwright

Following Parks's provocation, I want to take a moment to analyze the form of her play, *Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* through the lens of jazz aesthetics. Although Parks' play is solidly constructed leaving little room for the literal improvisation of speech as words, she offers audiences the opportunity to experience the piece in a way that makes it feel improvisational. I strongly disagree with some jazz theorists who argue improvisation cannot be a defining characteristic of jazz because not all jazz is improvised. Parks's writing, which is within what she calls "the jazz esthetic," serves as an example to my point, which I will demonstrate in a moment. Duke Ellington's work also represents a corresponding example to Parks's work (but of course in a different medium) as he is a

known jazz legend who was notorious for his well-constructed jazz compositions. In the context of our discussion of improvisation so far, "jazz compositions" may seem like an oxymoron but remember the jazz aesthetics of improvisation, syncopation, and sonority/phrasing, as I have defined it, are in relationships of intensities. They are not all equally present in every jazz piece but are in relationships of varying degrees often in response to one another throughout the various eras or subgenre of the form.

In just the way a piece may not use syncopation, it may also not use improvisation but still be considered jazz. A composition can be written in such a way that it expresses the "feeling" that it is being improvised. In an analysis of the "Mother of Theatrical Jazz Aesthetics" Aishah Rahman's playwriting, Alicia Kae Koger explains, "Improvisation is at the core of jazz;" its essence is the spontaneous composition of its players. The ability to improvise successfully rest on the musician's familiarity with the traditions of African American music, her knowledge of music theory and chord progressions, and an indefinable "feel for the music" (Koger 109). This "feel" is similar to what I get when reading from Parks's work. She has offered us a theatrical jazz composition and she tips us off immediately calling the opening section not a prologue in the traditional dramatic sense, rather she borrows language from music calling the opening an "Overture." The entire piece is structured in the pop form of a jazz piece complete with overture, choruses, and what she calls "panels" (which seem to function like duets playing in jazz break). In Figure 2, I have made an image that shows the musical architecture Parks uses in structuring her play.

The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World
aka The Negro Book of the Dead

1. OVERTURE
   - (A bell sounds twice)
   - (A bell sounds once)
   - (A bell sounds three times)
   - (A bell sounds twice)
   - (A bell sounds once)

   WHOLE ENSEMBLE

2. PANEL I: THUH HOLY GHOST
   - (A bell sounds once)

   DUET BWwW & BWwFD

3. PANEL II: FIRST CHORUS
   - (A bell sounds four times)
   - (A bell sound three times)
   - (A bell sounds once)
   - (A bell sounds once)

   WHOLE ENSEMBLE

4. PANEL III: THUH LONESOME 3SOME
   - (A bell sounds twice)

   DUET BWwW & BWwFD

5. PANEL IV: SECOND CHORUS
   - (A bell sounds slowly twice)
   - (A bell sounds twice)
   - (A bell sounds twice)
   - (A bell rings twice)
   - (A bell sounds twice)

   WHOLE ENSEMBLE

6. PANEL V: IN THUH GARDEN OF HOODOO IT
   - (A bell sounds twice)

   DUET BWwW & BWwFD

7. FINAL CHORUS
   - (A bell sounds twice)
   - (A bell sounds three times)
   - (A bell sounds twice)
   - (A bell sounds once)

   WHOLE ENSEMBLE

Figure 2: Jazz Form in Suzan-Lori Parks's play

Source: Figure 2 generated and provide by the author, Johann Robert Wood

The written text of *Death* has an extremely rich texture and sonority. Hearing Parks'

words read aloud, one gets the feeling that the writing is riffing and improving its way into

existence similar to the way in which one listens to Duke Ellington. However, Parks says that

she was not listening to Ellington; she was listening to Ornette Coleman. We can assume she

means recordings of Coleman, which is also documented like written text in a way that is not

longer a live performance. The recording of music sets, or captures, the music in a similar

fixed manner to a written composition. Although improvisation may have been in Coleman's

original performance, it is now just ashes that Parks is listening to. And similar to the jazz compositions Duke Ellington has left to us, Parks has left her performance ashes as well in the form of a play. To be clear, even though playwrighting is a compositional form, it may express a relationship to jazz improvisation in a way that a written text can give us the "feel" that it is being improvised. We will continue the analysis of Parks's play in a later section where we will expound her written text in terms of its relationship to jazz time/syncopation and jazz sonority/phrasing.

David Roesner in his Musicality in Theatre argues that jazz improvisation combines aspects of innovation and invention firmly with practices of collage, montage and assemblage, agreeing with Wynton Marsalis that jazz improvisation is "a very structured thing." This returns us to our earlier discussion of performance and architecture but with a difference, or in Parks' words, "Rep & Rev." Remembering Lehmann's declaration: "the secret love of the theatre belongs to architecture," the architecture of jazz performance space as improvisation is based on "stringing together learned links and references in new and appropriate combinations" (Lehmann 123, Belgrad 180). The learned links and references are from the tradition of artistic ancestors and the ashes they have left behind. Yet, these links and references with the Black tradition do not work to stifle the growth or evolution of the form but rather operate to aid future generations to discover other worlds, other spaces, where freedom my one day be realized for all bodies.

Ajay Heble's Landing on the Wrong Note discusses jazz improvisation as "communal interaction" (66), "as a form of social practice" (94), as "social, dialogic, and constructed

process" (95), as "a process-oriented model of inquiry that radically unsettles traditional assumptions about identity" (96), as "public activity" (219), as "collaborative" (96/219), and as "communicative" (219). However, Heble highlights a type of "collaborative" which diverges from a core aspect of jazz, in which the idealized collaborative improvisation, as defined by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean, "involves the merging of the self with another, so that it may be impossible to tell who has done what" (102). We are living in a time where individual expression and identity are flourishing. The idea of collaboration without individualized performance, where agency, expression, and identity are blurred to unrecognizability, is not central to jazz improvisation. Poly-ology is jazz performance and is emphasized not just in harmonies, but dissonances, augmentations, and even cacophony. When these lines of individuality are blurred, we are moving away from the realm of the jazz ensemble (where every player has their own particular instrument with their own signature sound) to the homogenization often found in western forms, especially the Greek chorus sounding and moving as one. I do not deny that there are some examples of chorus in Black aesthetics. Call and Response has several qualities that relate to the Greek chorus, but response is not done with the negation of the individual subjectivity that is so often denied Black, female, and queer bodies.

If improvisation is both architectural text and the architectural space of jazz performance, then the jam session is the site of the actual embodied spatio-temporal event, the gathering, the ritual. Jam sessions, or jamming, has been used outside of jazz music "to describe any free-flowing creative group interaction" (Berliner 122). This group interaction is not only the

site between performers and the audience-spectator-witnesses but can also be understood in terms of the group interaction of a play to a host of interdisciplinary conversations, both theoretical and practical. Parks structures her play based on how she positions various combos, duets, and solos. It is often difficult to recognize these musical structures when I jump directly to a close reading. When I pull away from the themes of the play, the body politics of Blackness, death, and incarceration in colonial history, when I pull away from the vernacular of the Black body in the *Death of the Last Black Man in the Entire World,* I am able to see spatially how the form, the shape, and the structure of the piece are based on jazz form. The play has a body that I can analyze in ways that I cannot analyze the body of a character in a play. Parks's question, "Why doesn't anyone ask me ever about form?" echoes back to me as I realize the play has a body that creates its own real and imagined space and its own real and imagine time. The play is a body; and Parks's play has a corpse in a way than most plays have a corpse and it is the theatre practitioners' responsibility to resurrect it, to breathe life again into the repertoire.

In the following sections, I seek to investigate the plays not only to produce a new reading but also to read the times we are in and the spaces in which we live and move and have our being. These unconventional readings will begin with "Syncopating Time" as I investigate jazz syncopation as queer time in Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Water by the Spoonful,* and then, I turn to improvisation as queer space in Christina Anderson's *How to Catch Creation*. My absence of contributing an analysis of jazzing the body is due in part because of the large contribution of many scholars who have already published scholarship around

Black and queer bodies. This is not to say that there is not more to explore of the body, but because of a lack of time and space here in this thesis, I choose to limit my focus to the two plays. I will also say that the presence of the body does not get lost in these jam sessions of time and space because as I discuss one aspect it is always in relationship to the other aspects in this ensemble of postdramatic jazz aesthetics.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL JAM SESSION #1 - SYNCOPATED TIME IN SYNCOPATED SPACES

Jazz Syncopation as Queer Space in *Water by the Spoonful*

Pulitzer Prize winner Quiara Alegría Hudes's play *Water by the Spoonful* (2017) is the second part of *The Elliot Trilogy* in which she uses a different form of music as "a point of departure" for each play. The first of the series, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, is based on the Baroque fugue music form while the finale of the trilogy, *Happiest Song Plays Last*, is based on Puerto Rican folk songs. *Water by the Spoonful* is based on jazz, particularly, the music of John Coltrane. In an interview with Kathleen Potts of *Guernica Magazine*, Hudes describes her process of developing *The Elliot Trilogy*, specifically her sense about writing the second installment, saying, "I had a sense that part two would be about recovery…I had already done western classical, so I wanted to do jazz—something very American" (Potts 5). This desire to do a trilogy based on these various musical forms comes from her background and training in music. After studying music growing up, she went to college for music composition at Yale. Her desire to "consciously incorporate music" in her work is based on this rich background. Music organically makes its way into her work not only as content but as form. In this section, I seek to read *Water by the Spoonful* with the new eyes of this contemporary moment (the Trump Administration, #MeToo Movement, Black Lives Matter, and the COVID-19 pandemic) while using the analytical tools I have development so far from my postdramatic jazz aesthetic. For this theoretical jam session, I will center syncopation as queer time in the "virtual" versus "real world" of Hudes's play.

Introducing Hudes's Play

Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Water by the Spoonful* (2017) is a play that centers a Puerto

Rican American family wrestling with the aftermath of a matriarch's death. Ginny who has

just passed is both the adoptive mother and aunt of the now grown siblings, Elliot and Yaz. In

their grief of their adoptive mother's death, Elliot, an Iraq war veteran, struggles with both

the ghosts of war and his own temptation to become like his biological mother, Odessa, who

is also Ginny's sister. Odessa is a broke moderator for an online Narcotics Anonymous chat

room for recovering addicts like herself. Throughout the "real world" of the play, we see Yaz

(who is a professor at a local college) struggle with returning to the family home and finding

her place as the new matriarch. As Elliot wrestles with his own mental health, he resents his

biological mother, who he claims has not changed even though she plays at being a "saint" to

these fellow recovering addicts on her computer. Meanwhile in Odessa's virtual world, a new

member (whose avatar name is Fountainhead) has joined the chat group, making a verbose

introduction full of what is perceived as white, upper class privilege and his denial of being

what he really is: "a crack head." In these virtual scenes, we begin to understand that the

members of the chatroom are really a family with Odessa as its mother and we witness their

struggle to connect beyond the virtual world and create new lives for themselves as well. We

see these multiple worlds syncopate space and collide as the main characters reconcile loss,

resentment, and identity. Finally, this play wrestles with the idea of family stretching it across

virtual, biological, and geographical boundaries. In this chapter, I explore this stretching of

boundaries as syncopated time in syncopated spaces where the "real" and "virtual" collide.

<div style="text-align: center;">Off-Beat: From the Real World</div>

In *Water*, Hudes syncopates the representative "real world" scene with virtual scenes. The opening scene is in a naturalistic, café-like setting at Swarthmore College with Yaz and Elliot talking in a common space, waiting for Professor Aman to come translate an Arabic phrase that has haunted Elliot since his military service in Iraq six years prior. This "real world" space is juxtaposed to the second and subsequent even scenes where it is clear we are in a virtual, abstracted "empty space," what she calls, the "…online world. The space that connects the chairs" (Hudes 6). We recognize this instantly through clear signifiers with the presence of computer screens, dark spaces between chairs, and projected internet personas qualified with "Status: Online." Hudes's "real world" scenes position us clearly in the tradition of a more representative space of dramatic realism, setting up (in musical, or jazz terms) an "on-beat" from which Hudes plays what I am calling the virtual world as an off-beat syncopation to the natural one.

Reading the setting, I am struck with the geographic diversity (and perhaps geographic simultaneity) represented in the play: Philadelphia, San Diego, Japan, and Puerto Rico in 2009. But the author takes care to include the place of Iraq as a phantom of the past in the setting description. Then, Hudes describes the stage, or performance space, as "two worlds." The first world she describes as the "real world." She offers that "the chairs are from many locations – living rooms, an office, a seminar room, a church, a diner, internet cafés, etc." She even adds a directionality for the chairs of various locations: "facing in all different directions." All this is in contrast to the "online world" which she describes as "an empty

space," and what I consider a liminal space that "connects the chairs" (Hudes 6).

<center>Poly-logical Simultaneity: From the Virtual World</center>

To look closely at the virtual world as performance space in the opening of scene two, I

recognize a poly-logical simultaneity where we as the audience are asked to shift, as Kristeva

calls in, our "mode of perception" based on the juxtaposition of the physical performance

space that oscillates between "real" locations and our perception of virtual reality. Kristeva's

concept of polylogue (what I call within the jazz aesthetic, poly-logical simultaneity) is a

"simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving" (Kristeva in Lehmann 32). We

perceive this polylogue in Hudes' setting through the use of space and the presence of media,

which I might add is part of Lehmann's postdramatic aspect of media expressed here as an

extension of the body. The setting describes the syncopated scene as Odessa's living room

containing a computer mixed with the presence of the media in the form of a projection

screen that we the audience see, which signifies not only virtual presence but a locationality

represented and extended by the media. This locationality or specialization of media signifies

two locational presences: 1) one is the relationship of a body to media or the virtual

someplace else, and 2) the screens signify to us whether the body on the other end is online or

not. To be online represents being present in a space, a virtual location, accessible not only to

the other characters on the stage but to us, the audience. We know that we are in Odessa's

living room according to the stage directions, but we also know that she is present online in

the way that she reaches out like a radio host saying, "Rise and Shine, kiddos, the rooster's

<center>39</center>

a-crowin', it's a beautiful day to be sober" (Hudes 12). Without the signifying locationality of

media, we might expect a child in an offstage room to yell back into the physical

performance space, but instead the virtual world "dings" and on another screen we see a

different persona online responding to HAIKUMOM (Hudes 12). I say persona here because

as the audience we are not only confronted not only with live characters on stage but also

with live characters who are also acting out a virtual persona. The poly-logical found in the

simultaneity of persons would not be possible in this way without this improvisational,

syncopated space, what Hudes calls "the virtual world."

 I am also aware of a kind of introduction schema that Hudes is presenting here that feels

more like the introduction of players of a jazz ensemble being introduced at the beginning of

a set. This is in contrast to the more naturalistic "Scene One" at the college. Here, we have

the click sound or "ding" followed by a projection of a persona or avatar name. This virtual,

audiovisual projection preceding the embodied voice of the actor is similar to the

performance of jazz artists. Part of the lure of jazz artists has been their ability to sell an

image or performance of the jazzman or woman, a performance which allowed Black bodies

access to spaces not generally afforded them. In some ways, this is a continuation of Black

minstrelsy performances in which Black bodies could only perform with their faces in black

makeup. However, the performance of the jazz mask actually creates a space of individual

expression that the stereotypes or stock characters of minstrelsy did not allow. Jazz artists

could create their own "signature sound" that was both a retro-reaction to tradition and a

progressive-reaction that allowed for unique expression. The jazz persona opened up an

improvisational space that allowed the Black body to resist, trouble, and often subvert how they were viewed in white, American culture.

Concerning time, this "virtual world" has a different rhythm, than the more naturalistic, "off-line" scene before it. Again, being the off-beat of natural time, virtual time then is syncopated time in this play which alternates odd scenes and even scenes, like the odd and even counts in music. Within the embodied space-time paradigm and in response to the syncopation of the white gaze, Black bodies created improvisational spaces in which Blackness could be expressed in a multidimensionality offering the possibility that white eyes might catch a glimpse of something more human before the gaze collapsed again into a two-dimensionality. This is similar to the dimensionality of virtual space and how it opens up a multidimensionality, an improvisational space, in which bodies, or in this case, characters, can be seen differently than they might usually be perceived visually.

As mentioned above, the virtual space also represents a liminal space that Hudes asks theatre practitioners who produce this play to visually represent as "an empty space," in which the embodied sonic is lost. An example of this lost sonority happens when HAIKUMOM and ORANGUTAN "high-five in the air," and we are immediately reminded that the space between them is not actual (Hudes 13). The logic of this space is different than the real-world scene before. Virtual space is a black hole in physical space that absorbs the sonority of bodily contact. The bodies cannot actually make contact or sound in the physical, empty space representing virtuality.

However, virtual space is also expressed in a ubiquitous way. Virtual space seems

equalizing and neutralizing, in a way that creates the illusion of sameness. The other online

personas do not know that ORANGUTAN has moved geographically until she says so: "I

was going to Japan." And the response of surprise from HAIKUMOM ("The country?") and

CHUTES&LADDERS ("What Happened to Maine?") both expresses the higher stakes of

moving geographically as a "real" event versus some kind of virtual movement that may not

actually be possible (Hudes 13). If virtuality cannot move, then is it performance? Perhaps

only the text can perform in/as this space. Here, virtual space is created by a written rhythmic

exchange of zeros and ones. This media-text performs in/as an extension of physical

body-text.

As we discussed earlier in this thesis, postdramatic theatre as opposed to more traditional,

or representative theatre, "rejects simple, causal logic." In postdramatic terms, Hudes's

off-beat virtuality (as represented in the even-numbered scenes) seems to correspond to the

postdramatic logic of "conflicting, contested, unreconciled, and multiple logics," where in

Hudes's play, multiple times, geographic locations, and diverse signifiers play out in an

abstracted space. The irony here is that Lehmann calls this postdramatic, multiple logic a

"real-world logic." Hudes's syncopated, "virtual reality," being more in alignment with

postdramatic "real-world logic," challenges our notions of the "real."

Global Pandemic: A Syncopation

I am writing this section in May of 2020 in the midst of what feels like an un-real and

syncopated time, during a pandemic the level of which we have not seen in the modern era –

the COVID-19 crisis. There are perhaps instructive parallels I discover here as I analyze

Hudes's text through a postdramatic, jazz aesthetic lens. Those of us with white-collar jobs

are mostly bombarded and compelled to continue our work during this syncopated time in a

virtual "reality" through an exhaustion of Google hangouts, Skype, and, predominately,

Zoom meetings in order to perpetuate this American capitalistic project. This is happening in

spite of the loss of over 250,000 lives at the time of my writing[1]. For many of us, this is our

new reality until we figure out a treatment, a vaccine, or even just the better testing that a

Republican-controlled government refuses to supply for fear that accurate numbers will

reflect their devastatingly senile response and inability to lead. This is our "real world"

politics in collision with our now virtual occupations.

I am struck by the political juxtaposition of Hudes's "real world" scenes that center a

previous Republican-controlled government's response under President George Bush, Jr. to

terrorism and mass-murder with virtual scenes that center addiction recovery to the ironies of

a current, Republican-controlled government under President Donald J. Trump. President

Trump's failure to prevent mass death with an economic climate that has heightened our

involvement in a virtual reality that centers occupational sustainability resonates with the

intercontextuality of Hudes's play. Her "real world" scenes center issues around a

government response to 9/11 that many believed was unnecessary – the Iraq War.

I wonder how Hudes, as a feminist playwright using virtual reality in her syncopated

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[1] By the time of editing this thesis, the number of COVID-19 deaths has doubled to over 500,000 lives in the United States.

scenes, offers us hope now, as we deal with issues of space and body through social distancing. The ability of the coronavirus to cross boundaries of physical space and our improvisational skills in navigating a real world, where we are evading other bodies through the use of virtual technologies, is relative to contemporary feminist discourse. The Covid-19 crisis comes to us on the heels of the #MeToo movement, founded by Black activist Tarana Burke, which emphasized the issues of men invading the physical space and bodies of women who have historically been silenced when they speak out. One would think that these virtual practices have diminished this workspace potential. However, case upon case has arisen where verbal and visual signs evade and transgress the eyes across our computer screens as virtual harassment and assault.

Spatializing Feminism in the Virtual World

Feminist writer and philosopher Elizabeth Grosz seeks to understand performance and feminism in *Architecture from the Outside*, where she offers a cyber-feminist frame through which to think about architecture in terms of performance text. Her analysis helps me understand performance space as improvisation and its ability to provide support for the other aspects of time and body. However, Grosz does this outside of the typical male-centric world of architecture, claiming:

> Cyber-feminists are trying to occupy space, virtual space, differently now, and I think that this is good. But if we're talking about actual buildings, then a really complicated problem is raised: there has never been a space by and for women.

Even women-only spaces (feminist or lesbian spaces) are set up in reaction or

opposition to patriarchal cultural space. Both today and in the recent past, to

produce a women-only space is to produce that space as separatist and thus as

reactive to the dominant male culture. (Grosz 25)

Grosz continues by saying that she no longer sees this reactive position as a "viable strategy"

(25). We can think in similar ways about Black-only spaces or queer-only spaces as well.

How do we think outside the terms of separatist refusal not only in terms of physical structure

(as I have mentioned is not my particular concern) but in terms of how we construct

improvisation as space in drama, theatre, and everyday life? Grosz might offer us a clue. She

talks about architecture and text in ways that challenge our traditional views but align with

our discussion of improvisational space-time within the jazz aesthetic paradigm of

syncopation and the "real world logic" of postdramatic theory as expressed in this

virtual-dependent, pandemic moment in (her)story.

Spatializing the Writer: An Ethnographic Moment

Not only does the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize a new relationship to dark or empty

spaces between bodies, like Hudes's virtual or "online world," it has amplified our awareness

of the inequalities and disparities of Black and Brown bodies especially in our major

Metropolitan areas. At the moment of writing this section, I am geographically situated in

Chicago's area number sixty, a community called Bridgeport, which used to be

predominantly Irish American but has in recent years become one of the most diverse

communities in Chicago. However, many of the streets and homes are still decorated

year-long with patriotic signs, flags, and "Blue Lives Matter" posters. Bridgeport lies just

West of Chicago's historic Chinatown, where we have seen a rise in domestic terrorism

against Asian Americans, as President Trump has continued to blame the Chinese for the

Coronavirus spread in the United States. And to further complicate this dynamic, Bridgeport

and Chinatown exist between the predominantly Black communities of South Side and the

Latinx communities of Westside, or what is now known as Little Village. These two areas are

populated with groups of people that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19

crisis and has again raised national awareness to the issues of racial inequality and disparity

in the United States. The tension has risen higher as Latinx gangs have begun to target Black

individuals that are moving into some of their poorer neighborhoods.

I feel a similar connection to Hudes's project to connect with diverse communities but

my experience between and among these diverse communities is an inversion of what Hudes

proposes. She demonstrates a virtual space where real connection is happening while my own

experience is feeling trapped in the virtual world while the real world around me is vomiting

violence and an ethic division. Her play seems to offer hope in a virtual world that can unite

and connect us. I fear that the virtual world that I experience as social media is tearing us

further apart. Through creating a polarity of "real" world ideologies online, the virtual world

is creating an ever-widening "empty space" between us all.

The Avatar and Representation in the Virtual World

Representation in Hudes's virtual world (re)presents diverse bodies with virtual avatars that may or may not align with the expectations an audience may have of the physical body we see on stage and thus creates the paradox of a "real world logic" in the virtual world space of the play. In post-dramatic theory, the "real world logic" of "conflicting, contested, unreconciled, and multiple logics" offers us a way of thinking about Hudes's "real world" characters versus their online world personas that also reflect the diverse, demographic landscape of which I am currently situated, as described above. The veiled nature of virtuality via our avatars can surprise and subvert expectations of the audience and especially the characters on stage. As one example, CHUTES&LADDERS is surprised that a Japanese body of color was behind the online persona, ORANGUTAN. This emphasizes the choice of representation people are allowed in virtual space versus physical space. Many artists of color, like myself, often walk into auditions and are not allowed access to certain roles or even the landscape of many shows just because of the color of their skin. However, in online chat rooms, instant messaging, and other non-visually dependent media, the color of my skin can become a secondary factor rather than a primary one. Perhaps, one can get to know another personality first and then be introduced to other aspects such as the person's body. However, as Grosz mentioned earlier, this does not change the systemic nature of the virtual world as it is only an extension of the real one. This is similar to the postdramatic discussion I had earlier about the body versus media and is supported here as we recognize in similar ways that media and technology are an extension of the body. Virtual reality (via media and technology)

is an extension of the natural world. However, the virtual world offers the potential to allow us to live multiple lives and multiple logics via our online personas. Hudes uses this potential to subvert and dimensional-ize the perception different characters have of one another.

Hudes also reveals that there is a Black body behind the CHUTES&LADDERS online persona and I begin to think that Hudes has taken various racial stereotypes and shuffled them among the various characters in her play. The personas seem to either hide identity, subvert expectations, or perhaps represent an alternative fantasy of the character using the online persona. HAIKUMOM might have easily been a middle-aged Japanese lady, but instead we have a Latina mother. The name ORANGUTAN could have easily been associated with the racist connotation often put on "big black men," but instead Hudes offers a Japanese American young lady. I am also reminded that in US history, especially during the Japanese internment camp situation during World War II, Japanese or "japs" (like many cartoon depictions of Black Americans) were often depicted as monkeys as well. CHUTES&LADDERS represents an "All-American," (i.e. white American) game historically depicted in commercials with an all-white family playing the game. Instead, CHUTES&LADDERS is a "big black man" who cannot swim or at least says his "body just felt like an anvil" in the water (Hudes 15). This implies a stereotypical notion, or urban legend, that Black people have denser bones and therefore have an aversion to bodies of water, flying over water in an airplane or just merely swimming.

I also want to mention that this "big black man" monologue given by CHITES&LADDERS is the first long speech given by a character in this play and reminds

me of a jazz solo. These jazz players, or characters, have begun to introduce themselves in this jazz set, this play, with their opening speeches revealing a bit of their "signature sound" and the bodies behind each persona. This poly-logical simultaneity is similar to how the logic of each individual plays an instrument and learns to play or improvise together in order to successfully navigate jazz standards or new music. In this virtual chatroom, these diverse bodies playing diverse personas enliven their improvisational, virtual journey toward recovery. This seems to keep both them and us engaged, as Hudes will eventually subvert even this syncopated virtual versus real world dynamic of scenes.

The Real and Virtual Collide

We continue to see the syncopation of real world and virtual world in Hudes's play through to the end of scene seven where we witness something critical to our understanding of the dramatic shift Hudes makes structurally. She is about to trouble the syncopated form she has initially set up. Coming out of the virtual world of scene six into scene seven, for the first time we see two of the virtual world characters (Odessa and John, aka Fountainhead) not as their virtual personas but as themselves meeting in the real-world space of a diner. Yet, I make note that the presence of the virtual is not easily evaded. We realize quickly this "real world" setting is constantly being interrupted by the virtual through the ringing of Odessa's cell phone. We understand John's joke that "You're a popular lady" because the cell phone has interrupted their conversation multiple times. The scene does not go too long until we finally have the intrusion of the previous "real world" characters, Yaz and Elliot, into this

critical scene where the familial drama begins to unravel as the content and characters of the real and virtual worlds collide in the actual world of the play.

Scene eight opens with the stage directions: "Split scene: Odesa's living room and the chat room, CHUTES&LADDERS holds a phone" (Hudes 54). By scene eight, we see CHUTES&LADDERS, still using his online persona but centered in a real world-space in conversation with ORANGUTAN. Scene nine is back to split scene, and this new syncopation continues until the end of the play. Hudes's "real world" has now been split. It no longer plays as a "simple, causal logic." Hudes's "real world" and Lehmann's "real world logic" have met. (I know I am offering a more formalistic analysis here but I think form often informs.) The audience may not realize this dynamic logic, but the shift from syncopated rhythms of the real world to the virtual one and then to virtual and split scenes represents Hudes's use of musicalization.

The split scene further activates visual and sonic poly-logical simultaneity that increases the tension as we approach the climax of the piece. Hudes's split scene comments on our dependence upon an inability to separate our virtual lives from our "real" or natural lives. Odessa's virtual or hidden reality is brought into the light while Elliot's virtual reality is also brought into focus. He too is an addict like his mother. This dynamic posits the discourse about the technological-virtual and the virtuality of human fantasy and thought. In the next chapter, I will go deeper into this "imagined" space. For now, we can appreciate imagination as a type of mental virtuality versus a technological one and how both are extensions of the body. In the Oxford American College Dictionary, the primary definition of *virtual* is:

"almost or nearly as described. But not completely or according to strict definition." This definition of the "virtual" seems to be used by Hudes concerning Elliot's veteran phantasmagoria and addiction secrets. Elliot has not fallen too far from the tree, as ORANGUTAN suggests, but as Odessa and Elliot's virtual realities are coming into focus, the pitch of the drama is reaching its head. The reality as the split scene sensation was always underlying the virtual, syncopated scenes. It was only the "off-beat" of the "real world" because we framed it so.

The virtual space, time, and body are not an alternate reality but an extension of it. We could argue that we are all performing illusions in both real life and virtual reality. Elliot's harsh judgment and sarcasm when he speaks of his mom as a "Saint" on the internet and then proceeds to tell John the evil things she has done is merely projection of his own unsaintliness. Perhaps, he believes calling out his mom's phantoms (be they virtual or real) will free him of his own. In this virtual-centric pandemic moment we find ourselves, Hudes seems to be telling us through her split scenes that all life is now simultaneously split and in-separatable; virtuality cannot be separated from our real world. Both worlds equal our full life now, and we cannot escape it.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL JAM SESSION #2 - IMPROVISING SPACE IN SYNCOPATED TIMES

Jazz Improvisation as Queer Space in *How to Catch Creation*

"Let them go to Heaven / Let them go to Hell / When I die / I want to go to Jazz."

– Ishmael Reed

Ishmael Reed's poem "When I Die, I Will Go to Jazz" establishes jazz not only as a musical aesthetic but as a place, a location, a site beyond earth, beyond creation. For Reed, jazz is not heaven, not hell, not above, nor beneath but rather is related to Edward Soja's "thirdspace." This site of jazz signifies Reed's afterlife desire and continues a lineage of longing, of yearning for the other side of something, for a promised land, to break beyond the border to a site of freedom. There, at the site of jazz, creation is a liberation technology/text, and jazz improvisation creates and is the site from which we can articulate a freedom not yet realized or caught. In Christina Anderson's play *How to Catch Creation,* there is a critical issue of the site of capture – the place, the location, the spatiality of catching creation. *How to Catch Creation* is a queer play, not just in terms of the playwright's identity, but in terms of the queer use of space the playwright employs.

Introducing Anderson's play

Anderson's *How to Catch Creation* (2016) centers three queer relationships living in the San Francisco Bay Area with an all-Black cast of characters. Syncopating space and time, the play oscillates between the drama of the queer relationship between a feminist writer and an aspiring fashion designer from the 1960s, and the interweaving relationships (both friends

and lovers) between Tami, Griffin, Riley, and Stokes in 2014. Tami is an art professor and director at a local arts conservatory and her best friend Griffin is a single Black man, a lecturer who was formerly imprisoned and now struggles with society's infrastructure to find a way to have a child. Riley and Stokes are a young couple who struggle to find and access their own artistry, however latent it may be. When Riley, a queer young woman, goes to the art conservatory to fight for Stokes's acceptance into a painting program, she meets Tami. They have an instant connection as Tami challenges Riley to find her own pleasure and artistry through beat-making and music. This in turn rekindles Tami's own passion for painting. Stokes, discouraged by his failure to get accepted into a painting program, turns to novel writing through the reading of G.K. Marche's work, which ultimately leads to him to meet his newfound idol. In 1960, G.K. Marche and Natalie, who are deeply in love, feel torn apart as their individual dreams seem incompatible. Natalie comes home from a work trip with a male friend and we learn she is pregnant. These various relationships collide as Stokes meets Griffin at a park and through their friendship they discover that G.K. Marche, now in her 80s, is only a couple of hours outside of the city.

This play challenges notions about how humans create a life: be it the one we dream about or live on a daily basis, to the giving of life and the raising of children. The play also speaks of queer lineage and body not only in terms of biological decent but also in terms of one's artistic/intellectual lineage and the spatial lineage of a place – be it San Francisco, Oakland, or the very apartment the characters live in. The question of who occupied a space in the past and who will occupy it in the future comes into view. Without answering too many

questions, our playwright leaves us with hope while provoking more questions through her queer surprises.

In this section, I will explore jazz improvisation spatially as a technology/text of liberation used in the play as we see the characters negotiate "real" and imagined spaces. The title makes use of the active, infinitive verb "to catch." Obviously, plays are structured and built as a series of actions with their accompanying intentions, temporal dynamics, and so forth. Yet, concerning the action of catching, or being "caught in the act," if you will, we understand that the other "ensemble of theatrical aspects," as discussed earlier in this thesis, is superfluous until the issue of proximity is addressed, particularly, a proximity to structures of power.

Hegemonic Architecture

Power amasses itself in spatial structures both geographic and architectural and can be understood in terms of archaeology as well. Since I first began this exploration of performance as an embodied, spatio-temporal event, process, or practice, it has become clearer to me how similar this ensemble of performance aspects (body, space, and time) is to jazz aesthetics, as I have defined them, mainly: jazz sonority/phrasing as body, jazz rhythm as time, and jazz improvisation as space. I find that the relationship dynamic between each of these performance aspects is more important to the generation of new knowledge than to merely examine each as if they existed in a void, but rather, in a liminal space, "betwixt and between," where we witness a queer epistemic come into view (Turner 95).

Concerning spatiality, I begin to recognize that the relationship between space and time is an episteme of an archaeology that digs down beneath the present as critical excavations into layers that represent the past, or history, of a site. However, the relationship between space and body is both an architectural and geographical epistemology. The architectural builds up, creating more dimensions, making walls, borders, and structures while the geographic spreads out. offering us the broader context(s) that situates what I propose a more democratic positionality compared to the architectural. The geographical episteme opens a possibility for the transposition of the theory and praxis of cultural production in poly-logical and simultaneous ways. Of course, this work is a thesis within a thesis, and both informs my following analysis as well as future research. Very quickly, I find that I am not alone in this understanding. Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Edward Soja, among others, offered this broader understanding of space, but their work did not center itself in the interdisciplinary Black queer studies that has more recently established itself in academe. For now, I am more interested in the spatial dynamics than the temporal of these epistemes. I previously discussed the temporal in terms of queer and syncopated time in my analysis of *Water by the Spoonful*. Here, in my analysis of *How to Catch Creation*, I turn to jazz improvisation as a spatial dynamic by which we witness the characters with creative agency negotiate structures of power.

The necessity of improvisation as a liberation technology used by Black and queer bodies to negotiate, or attempt to negotiate, with these structures is the foundation of our survival in everyday life and of our hope at "ascension" to societal equality. Our desire for spatial

movement or mobility is both in horizontal and vertical terms, that is, both geographic and architectural. We recognize this dual mobility is imperative to our sense of liberation and experience of social equity. Movement and flexibility in both planes (ascension/descension, expansion/contraction) are possible to some degree but to be spatially free is to be able to access the spatial in any poly-directional arrangement whether is it perceived as peaks or valleys, plains or plateaus, geographically or musically perceived. We may choose to both augment or diminish the chords, so to speak, in these spatial improvisations of everyday life (morally, economically, politically, socially) and have our body/bodies represent those dynamics in staged performances as well.

Historically, the location of African American's (that is, formerly enslaved Black Americans) spatial freedom has been more of an imagined space versus a real one. Edward Soja's work in critical geography and urban planning offers us some support in this discussion. Soja does not advocate a binary understanding of space, but what I see as a queer epistemology of a "both/and" spatiality, or what he calls (following Lefebvre and Foucault) "a critical thirding-as-Other," or "thirdspace," which is "a product of 'thirding' of spatial imagination, the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning" (Soja 11). When our enslaved ancestors were not physically transgressing colonial space in order to escape to the North or Canada, the enslaved person created from a mostly imagined spatial freedom that which is profoundly exemplified in the Black music aesthetics of jazz improvisation. This itself was born out of a utopian/dystopian

longing represented in the Blues and a yearning for the *promised land* represented in Negro Spirituals.

The notion of a land of promise for which enslaved people could hope to migrate proliferates the Black body-consciousness of America. Time and again, we see migrations across some real-and-imagined border that defined South from North in the hope that a geographical margin could be transgressed for the sake of freedom. This spatial hope to locate freedom in a particular place "Other-than" the Antebellum or Jim Crow South helps us understand the historical tension that arose in Black music and continues in contemporary Black writing and performance as well.

Improvisation or Composition?

As I have laid out before, improvisation is a dynamic in a trifecta, or "relationship of intensities" with syncopation and jazz sonority. I remind us of Fred Moten's question: "What if we consider that improvisation is the unacknowledged grapho-spatiality of material writing – the arrangement of people at the scene as audiovisual condition and effect?" Moten's composition as imagining improvisation helps us understand the imagined and real spaces of the play and how the character-body negotiates through movement in, through, and as space both geographical and gestural. Concerning his transpositional analysis of Theodor Adorno's criticism of jazz and the bodily inscription of gesture, or the pose, in photography, Moten writes:

Improvisation is the animative, electric, hieroglyphic-seismographic tension that

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cuts the pose while also being its condition of possibility, even as the pose is the

condition of possibility of the whole in its unavoidably narrative, unavoidably

fantastic theatricality. (Moten 82)

It is clear that Moten understands improvisation not only in terms of an imagined, spatial

arrangement that happens prior to the moment of inscription, or recording, but as a condition

of possibility. This condition of possibility could be considered the essence and foundation of

liberation. This kind of creative practice, or improvisation as liberation technology, is a

freedom to produce rather than reproduce the commodity/surplus of cultural production for

mass global markets. Opening this space of possibility is the liberational act or process that

improvisation activates both real and imagined. This is an imagined com-position, and I write

com-position to emphasize the positionality inherent in com-position as a spatial arrangement

of possibility in performance (that is, imagined creation as improvisation).

Com-position is devised as, by, or into borders and territories on the page via its scores.

Whether you call the vertical marks, scores, or bar lines, they pinpoint locations on the page

in the music that helps us position or bring together the musical combo, collective, choir, or

ensemble into a common, physical space to play. In Moten's argument, he recognizes the

tension between the (com)posed and the improvised. He seems to use a spatial understanding

of improvisation as a solution to help us dissolve our conflict with this necessary tension.

After composing the music for Michelle Obama's recent documentary, *Becoming*, jazz

master, saxophonist, and collaborator Kamasi Washington says, "I like to keep the music

open and unrestricted." But for what?   He says, "for random acts of genius," or

improvisation (Washington). Concerning (com)posing music as an underscore for a documentary though, Washington understood himself as a precarious guardian, facilitator, and framer of space, saying that one must also "keep space for the dialogue" (2021). This example of living in the tension between composition and improvisation is mirrored in the practice and artistry of playwrights.

Improvisation and the Written Script

The more I have contemplated the relationship of scripts with improvisation, the more I realize that the script serves as a structure on which improvisation (that is the acting of the subtext of the characters) can play out. I think when I first set out to understand something of jazz aesthetics in dramatic texts, I misunderstood improvisation as pure unstructured performance. I thought it might be difficult to use improvisation as a frame to understand dramatic text. Now, I realize that jazz improvisation has always had a structure in music. There are the forms (ABCD, ABAC, and so forth) and there is the tradition, or genealogy, behind the form that often samples, borrows, and remixes – bringing the "new" into existence. I begin to speculate here that, although Black aesthetics come from a long line of oral tradition, we come to appropriate and assimilate the dramatic form into our canon and tradition of composition. Works by playwrights (of color, especially) have used the inner spaces around the actual writing to employ the liberation technology we experienced in music improvisation in the often-subtle improvisation behind, beneath, or between the lines of the script. The script, having been written in the past, in our history, particularly after the

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performers have memorized it, becomes part of the Oral Tradition. We make the written word

our oral tradition and night after night through repetition revive the text in a new moment, in

a new body with a different audience perhaps, and thus it is revised.

Toward an Architecture of Social Change

Anderson in particular uses a unique kind of scoring in her script that looks like little "cat

whiskers" (=.=), or at least that is what I called them when directing a reading of the piece

in UCF's Fall 2020 virtual reading series - Amplify, Empower, Illuminate. Anderson offers

us this description for the symbols used in her text, seeming to have built in moments of

improvisational space: "The =.= symbol represents unspoken moments filled with energy. It

can be a moment when someone decides to do (or not to do) / speak (or not to speak)"

(Anderson 2). Although she describes the use of these symbols in terms of temporality

("moments"), we understand that these symbols are spatially positioned, placed, or located in

the script, like a notation in a musical score, and performed as a temporality for the audience.

For the creative team and cast, these "cat whiskers" seem to be offered in the text as a

spatiality and as a rhythm of syncopated silence. We often transpose this kind of silence as a

space for the physicality of stillness, which is not dead or inactive but full of improvisational

potential. These are liminal/liminoid spaces similar to jazz improvisation as a space between

composition and the spontaneity of everyday life. Viewing Anderson's play (or any play for

that matter) in terms of space allows us to question the very ontology of plays in general, or

at least plays meant to be performed.

The practice of the playwriting is positioned closer to the work of a composer creating a musical (com)position, but like Washington, playwrights often seek to keep a more "open" space for the "random acts of genius" to arise by performers in the live event. In his article "Abstract Mediation and Strategy," avant-garde theorist and architect Bernard Tschumi talks about four ways in which an architect may approach an urbanistic program:

a) Design a masterly construction, an inspired architectural gesture (a composition)

b) Take what exists, fill in the gaps, complete the text, scribble in the margins; (a complement)

c) Deconstruct what exists by critically analyzing the historical layers that preceded it, even adding other layers derived from elsewhere—from other cities, other parks (a palimpsest)

d) Search for an intermediary —an abstract system to mediate between the site (as well as all given constraints) and some other concept, beyond city or program (a mediation) (Tschumi 191-192)

Tschumi's approach to urbanistic programs comes from a core quest to use architecture for social change and is congruent with many theatre practitioners' desire to bring about social change through performance. The first approach Tschumi lays (a) is obviously comparable to the approach taken by playwrights or in the devising of physical moments in the work of the performer as composition. The second (b) is comparable to the collaborative work of design teams, the cast, and directors as they create the production as "a complement" to the composition of the play. The third (c) can be thought of in terms of the critical work done by

a dramaturg to bridge the cast and creative team to history and the original intention of the

playwright and also as a bridge for the audience into the world of the piece. And finally (d) is

comparable to a talk back or press release of the production or even an article about the

original site of the composition/production.

Dramaturg Joni Newman's notes for our production of *How to Catch Creation* not only

deconstructs the play in a similar nature to Tschumi's third approach to urbanistic programs,

but frames *How to Catch Creation* in terms of the palimpsest or, as we have been discussing,

as an archeological excavation of historical layers. In Newman's analysis, the palimpsest is

not only a way of viewing the layering of the 1960s era with the contemporary moment

represented in the play, but of understanding bodily representation in theatre practice in

general. She seems to position herself as a white female collaborator, perhaps even as a

co-conspirator, with us, an all-Black cast and director, to "leverage" her "privilege" (as a

position in a hierarchy) to invite our audience to examine the institutional structures that often

"paint over" or make a palimpsest of Black, queer, female representation in art and academia

(Newman). The positionality of the dramaturg as an archeologist or deconstructive architect

who is both reflective enough to both understand her privilege and yet use that position to

promote issues of representation and intersectionality in the arts is in alignment with

Tschumi's premise to make form and space useful to social change. Dramaturgs like

Newman can keep an "open," "writerly" space, in effect to, like Washington, keep space for

more dialogue. Also, other white writers, critics, and theatre administrators can hold a space

for Black, queer performers, artists and scholars to improvise their own "random acts of

genius" in and around these hierarchical structures. Together, we might bring these hierarchical structures down and promote equality.

From playwriting to production meetings, rehearsals, and performances, these kinds of improvisations can be spatially arranged in collaboration with designers and directors. To whatever degree of "setting" the blocking, gestural life, intonation, or intention with subtextual nuance, we recognize that what actually breathes life and richness into these per(form)ances is the improvisational nature and quality activated by the performers in the "grapho-spatiality of material writing" represented as the thirdspace of live performance unfolding before the audience. This open, geographical quality is similar to Jürs-Munby's introduction to Lehmann's discourse on postdramatic theory in which she describes postdramatic writers, like Suzan-Lori Parks (and I would add writers like Ntozake Shange, Sharon Bridgforth, and others), who "produce what would be called 'open' or 'writerly' texts for performance," where spectators are asked to become "active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making" (Jürs-Munby 6).

As we move into the imagined domain of our playwright, Anderson, I seek to provide a critical, spatial reading as improvisation and the queerness of the "thirdspacing" that Soja begins to mark out for us as margins, borders, or critical frames through which we can view the landscape of the play and how characters improvise their way through the spaces they occupy, transgress, and, ultimately, transform. I must also note that Soja's work is highly situated in a Marxist critique that I will continue to reflect in my own reading in terms of architecture or hierarchical structures of power, primarily the patriarchy, heteronormativity,

and race, and their proximity to catching creation in queer ways. In archeology, there might appear to be a hierarchy that places the present as superior to the past which is overlayed, or superimposed, by the present. However, this overlaying is a passive effect determined by the "law of superposition" described in archeological discourse. This passivity is juxtaposed to the more active, ambitious, or may I say, aggressive, building of the architectural, that is, hierarchical structures from which the most powerful in society dominate. This reminds us of the Biblical fable of mankind's attempt to reach the heavens at Babel, in effect to reach the level of God's via architectural creation. In that tale, God's solution was twofold: linguistic (the diversification of language/signifiers) and spatial (the dispersion, or diaspora, of bodies/the signified).

A Queer Desire in Creation

Returning to the play's title, *Creation*, or more specifically Black queer creation, has often been cast in terms of cultural production. That is for Black bodies in the diaspora, if creation or performance did not make money for hegemonic structures, it is often seen as not valuable, or as a non-value. A Black feminist critique goes beyond the Marxist critique of exchange-value versus use-value and argues for pleasure-value – a feminism that declares, "I wish to create for my own pleasure." Frantz Fanon's postcolonial question of desire and longing, however, is "What does the black man want?" and might have been situated differently in the antebellum South to read as a spatial question, "Where does the Black man want to go?" (Fanon xii). Soja in conversation with bell hooks might even ask a question that

decenters Fanon's male-oriented inquiry to be: "Where does the Black woman want to go?" From the *call* of this question comes the *response*: if we lift up Black women, we lift up everyone.

Lifting is that spatial quality we recognize in alignment with contemporary usage of the architectural phrase from political rhetoric and cultural production --"breaking the glass ceiling," a feminist epistemology not just of difference, but openness. I argue that this openness is juxtaposed to the patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist ideologies that close and seek to explore openness as a queer spatiality, a way of experiencing everyday life, that negotiates (and for our conversation, improvises) social space as social beings/bodies. However, is not this kind of "ascension" thinking (to break the glass ceiling) a continuation of that which is hierarchal, that which builds up? Is it patriarchal to want to ascend, rather than open the plains of discussion allowing diverse voices, bodies, and locations into the discourse? Following Audre Lorde, I must agree that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 41). Whether we are using the "master's tools" to "break the glass ceiling" and destroy the structure or to build higher than any previous structure is yet to be determined. One could look to the epistemological tools of excavation from archeology but maybe it is best to reserve those tools to bury the dead. The diasporic dynamics of spatiality in terms of the geographical episteme, however, may hold some other wisdom for us that is more democratic and positions us all, two-footed, on the same plane, earth. "*From the Land Where Other People Live,*" Audre Lorde cries, "and when I dream I move through a Black Land where the future glows eternal and green" (Lorde 224-225).

A Spatial Summary of *How to Catch Creation*

The play opens in Griffin's apartment condo, which is an architectural palimpsest or superposition. His space is an example of superposition because it is also the previous site of the homeless shelter he resided in with this late mother. We learn that Griffin was a victim of a false accusation that landed him in prison, yet his best friend Tami never gave up on working with lawyers to reverse the charges for her innocent friend. When he is finally released, Griffin receives offers to tell his story through various media outlets and lectures until the owner of the former homeless shelter property hears Griffin's story and gifts him a condo in the multipurpose high-rise that has been built on the very same property. This is the setting of the play, the spatial palimpsest of which Newman, our dramaturg, wrote.

Now, Griffin is a traveling lecturer who wrestles throughout the play with the structures that seem to work against him having a kid. In the opening scene, Tami comments that Griffin has plenty of space and money to have a kid if that is what he really wants. In my spatial analysis of the play, I find multilevel apartments are a primary structure in which the play unfolds and "the apartment" as a living space is syncopated throughout the play with what I will call work/creation spaces (such as the office and the shop), play spaces (such as the park and the bar), and a transitional or liminal space of the highway and the bus stop. Here are a couple examples of my most truncated, spatial readings of the "real" spaces represented in *How to Catch Creation*:

Act I: Apartment(s), Office, Apartment(s), Office, Apartment(s), The Park, The

Shop, Apartment(s), Bar, Apartment(s), Bar

Act: II: Apartment(s), Lecture Hall, Apartment(s), On the Road to Retirement

Home, Apartment(s), Retirement Home, On the Road "back home", Apartment(s),

Shop, The Park, Retirement Home, Bus Stop, Apartment(s), Shop, Apartment(s)

Another reading might show us how the rhythm of living and work/creative spaces are

disrupted by play spaces in the first act and how living and work spaces in the second act are

disrupted by transitional, rest, and play spaces:

Act I: Living, Work/Creation, Living, Work/Creation, Living, Play,

Work/Creation, Living, Play, Living, Play

Act: II: Living, Work/Creation, Living, Transitional, Living, Rest, Transitional,

Living, Work/Creation, Play, Rest, Transitional, Living, Work/Creation, Living

It is obvious, because of the asymmetry of life, how this particular kind of analysis

breaks down rapidly. We know of moments in real life, especially during this syncopated

time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when living spaces are inhabited with work, creation,

procreation, and play. There is an obvious, inherent irony in labeling only some places as a

space in which we live. This analysis questions our desire to categorize spaces in a kind of

hierarchy. This spatial hierarchy has been passed down to us from the Middle Ages in what Foucault calls "medieval space: the space of emplacement" (22). In Foucault's 1986 article, "Of Other Spaces," he argues, in our current epoch we are not interested in the idea of homogenous and empty space, but heterogenous spaces, saying, we do not live in a void but "inside a set of relations…thoroughly imbued with qualities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmatic as well" (22). The way in which the future and past are relentlessly brought into the contemporary in this play is manifested from the beginning through a negotiation of improvisational imaginings between Tami and Griffin of a "kid" not yet born (or at least not present in their current living space) to Riley and Stokes shuffling through a box of the written remains of G.K. Marche's writings from the 1960s.

When looking at this spatial simplification of the play in the analysis above, it is almost as if the play is asking that the living space(s), the apartments are symbolically one space in varying relationships of propinquity/proximity, or time. It's as if Griffin's massive apartment, which is haunted by the spatial memory of being built on the remains of the homeless shelter he once lived in with his deceased mother, nests Riley and Stokes's apartment which may also be haunted, but with the remains of the queer relationship of the novelist and her lover, Natalie. Or at least, it could be staged this way, in which the two couples play out in the same apartment without ever seeing past or present phantoms of the other occupation. The definite article the playwright has given to "the Park" is interesting as it also seems to garner the common space of the "real"/contemporary with the past, memory, or (as Foucault called it), the "fantasmatic."

Anderson's play opens with Fanon's question and ends with bell hooks's in the form of a statement made at the beginning and end of the play: "I think I want to have a kid." The difference between these identical book ends of the play is a question of spatiality and identity: where is this statement and who is it coming from? I might even reverse the order in which I ask these questions: who is the person and where is statement coming from? The dynamics of difference between this order calls into the question the spatiality or the location of the person in a hierarchy or caste system that mostly places Black women in the lowest social spaces. These questions echo bell hooks in her discussion of "margin as a space of radical openness," "a profound edge," where she writes: "I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from…" (hooks 14, 15, 19). I, too, join hooks in her project to spatialize knowledge. It occurs to me that having been property, African Americans, descendants of the enslaved, must have inherited a different and dynamic relationship to the spaces we occupy, inhabit, and navigate on a daily basis. Spaces that are haunted by 400 years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the last hundred and thirty odd years of post-reconstruction dehumanization of Black folks. This "radical openness," this "profound edge" that hooks describes, situates a spatial improvisation and exhibit a liberatory force that expresses itself in culture production, such as Black queer plays and performances like *How to Catch Creation*.

Following Suzan-Lori Parks's Rep & Rev, the play feels positioned between the thing that is to be repeated and the things that are repeated with revision. The "&" of Rep & Rev is

a liminal space of transformation. After all, that is what we seek when we read a play or novel or watch a film. We seek to create a momentary problem between the image we hold of ourselves and the one presented, and we either adopt or assimilate the image or reject it. This can be conscious or subconscious, but no matter. The act of creation constitutes the liminoid space where varying degrees of improvisation take place to realize a product of creation (otherwise known as the painting, the music album, the film, the novel, the play, the script, etc.).

In Anderson's play, "I think I want to have a kid" is first spoken by Griffin (male-identified) and the play ends with Tami (female-identified) speaking the exact line. Between this repetition lies a space of improvisation – that is, the play – where characters wrestle through the questions or problems provoked by the title, *How to Catch Creation* in simultaneously "real" and imagined spaces. This simultaneity of real-and-imagined is an extension of Foucault's theory of heterotopia and what he says is our post-structural present "epoch of space…of simultaneity…of juxtaposition…of the near and far…of the side-by-side…of the dispersed" (22). I think the emergence and proliferation of the current graphic novel genre as an active space of imagining/image-ing liberation exemplifies Foucault's notion of the spatial epoch of which we find ourselves. This imagining/image-ing of liberation is exemplified, particularly, in the *March Trilogy* series authored by the late Civil Rights Leader and Congressman John Lewis. Graphic novels like this serve as a postmodern and postdramatic representation of visual simultaneity that dominates our artistic scene, and is reflective of the virtual, syncopated moment we are living in during the

COVID-19 pandemic with our simultaneous, gallery-view in our Zoom meetings and performances. "Near or far" and "side-by-side," we see juxtaposed the image of our non-presence rather than our actual presence in a common virtual space as we strive to continue our creative processes in spite of our virtual proximity. Foucault argues that in modernity or even post-modernity the anxiety of the era has fundamentally to do with space. "The site" versus the medieval space of "emplacement" is our epochal norm of understanding space, or a "relationship of proximity between points or elements" that are wrestling against hierarchical relationships (Foucault 23). In this epoch, these hierarchical relationships are flattened and spread out in space described as "series, trees, or grids" or what I call, diasporas (Foucault 23). These diasporas spread out geographically but express themselves in spatial genealogies that present not a hierarchical history to be (re)canonized as a succession of white, straight male dominance but as Foucault argues are representative as "its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats" through a descendance (or a lineage/genealogy) inscribed in the body in relationship to chance. This reconstitutes for us another reading of our performance trifecta as inscribed body, disrupted time, and spatial "chance" (Foucault 144).

In our discussion, this "chance" is directly related to improvisation and its ability to spatially situate the body in space as it negotiates, challenges, and defies these hegemonic structures represented in Black queer cultural production and performance. Returning to the bookend repetition in the play: "I think I want to have a kid" and the space occupied between them, I find myself challenged by the "ontological problem" Moten suggests when he says,

"if we imagine a space between repetitions then we imagine something impossible to locate" (69). He argues this in the context of his discussion of Eve Kosofsky's "queer performative" as a discontinuity of heteronormative repetition, or "transcription of previousness" (Kosofsky in Moten 64). We know in terms of the body, transcription/transposition is never exact and contains the flaw or in more positive terms, the revision. If repetition is represented by that which is conventional/traditional, then its revision (Rep & Rev) is the "queer performative" of liminal, or "thirdspaces," in which something else has the possibility to arise. Moten's argument is that this queer performative is "unlocatable," but what if that liminal, non-space, is itself the structure, or anti-structure, the practice of improvisation as a structure that we bring to the unknown or what we thought was unlocatable? Just because something may be invisible does not mean that it is unlocatable. The analysis I attempt here is to yet again (re)visibilize that which has been rendered invisible by the hypervisibility of Blackness, what Moten might call "the doubleness of blackness, the fucked-up whiteness of the essence of blackness" (70).

Beyond wanting to support a Black queer female playwright, I chose *How to Catch Creation* because it offered an opportunity for our creative team to work with visual diasporas. These visual diasporas appear as both simultaneity and juxtaposition on the screen. The playwright had already built this simultaneity and juxtaposition into the script in moments where the scenes are split (either place-based or time-based) and dialogue is intended to be spoken at the same time. In our production, we were using Zoom for rehearsals and recording the show. All the performers had green screens, microphones, and lighting at

their homes supplied by the department design team. Because of the technical nature and the virtual proximity of our cast in our staged reading, we were unable to allow the audience to hear certain dialogue, simultaneously as the playwright has intended. Because of the lack of continuity of internet access, we did not trust that the production would be effective as a live reading. When actors would speak at the same time, the technology would preference one voice over another based on a number of factors out of our control, creating an inconsistent outcome. Therefore, we arranged these intended simultaneous lines in a way that we believed gave the *feeling* of simultaneity and juxtaposition not only through the way the cast delivered the lines but also through the way the design team arranged the actors visually on the screen. This is reminiscent of the discourse in jazz studies around whether a piece or artist is actually jazz if it does not use or center improvisation. Few would argue that musicians like Duke Ellington who created and performed well-composed arrangements are not jazz musicians. I also want to note that Ellington's significant arranger, collaborator, and songwriter was queer musician, Billy Strayhorn, known for composing songs like *Take the A Train*, *Day Dreaming*, and *Lush Life*. Jazz artists like these may centralize composition but, like Kamasi Washington, keep an open space in the composition for improvisation or at least the feeling of improvisation and spontaneity to arise in the performance.

Creation: From Crime and Contested Space to Capital

There is also something playful in the opening of the play. Griffin opens with an anecdote about the improvisational moment he often has with babies in public spaces. Tami

challenges Griffin's improvisational moments, saying they are "social crimes." Although

Griffin is presumably straight or remains unclassified in his sexual orientation, it is still

haunted by a homophobic history that portrays gay men as perverts who want to abduct

children, molest them, and spread the agenda of gay and queer folks and the disease of

homosexuality through society. "Creeps and pervs ruined it for good men," Tami exclaims.

However, this criminal space takes a turn as an imaginary space opens up between the

individuals of the character duet as they improvise an unwritten reality, a life for a child that

does not yet exist. It is an imagined music, a call and response, rooted in a present reality

semantic:

GRIFFIN: Why is my kid a professor?

TAMI: No good?

GRIFFIN: A professor of what?

They even create the life of the child beyond Griffin's death ensuring Tami will have a great

celebration of his PhD or tenure as a professor.

TAMI: Everyone gathered to praise your child.

The illusion of imaginative improvisation comes crashing down with the injection of money

and feelings of financial instability Griffin displays when Tami says he has the money to

bring about the circumstances of having a child in his life.

GRIFFIN: Some money. Not Enough.

The relationship of composition or written text and capital is a topic too vast for this thesis

but I would like to emphasize here the relationship of imagination, improvisation, and the

idea of capital and money as a gatekeeper to creation. This brings into question Black oral

traditions, and the historic denial or sabotage of Black education and economy. If it is not

written down, then capitalism denies economic reciprocity. If a value of Black aesthetic and

performance practice has been oral, then the performance and methods of transmission of

Black performance have had a much less transmissible means for capital production.

Sustainable wealth is generated when value is not in the repetition of performance that

requires the presence of the body, but when repetition become reproduction and products that

can be sold without the presence of the body that created them.

Black performance has often been denied the models of transmission by which Black

performers can profit, while white artists have historically more access to models of

reproduction such as the printing press, audio and film recording studios, and distribution

companies. The script represents the product of performance or improvisation that extends

capital potential. We do not just pay for the performance, but we can pay for the film, the

album, and the script. Live performance and what I have framed as the improvisation the live

performer does with the capitalizable structure is not the only means by which minoritarian

artists can have access to capital.

Queer Heterotopia: Locating la voix de la raison

In scene two, we are introduced to a young, heterosexual couple who brings up a box full

of old books (mostly novels) all written by the same author who we will find out is a Black,

lesbian, feminist writer who became prolific during the 1960s. We laugh with this seemingly

happy couple as they jokingly pick at each other. This scene opens as Stokes brings up a heavy box of G.K. Marche's novels but runs back downstairs to get the mail where he will find yet another rejection letter from an art college. Riley picks up and thumbs through one of the books reading aloud, "A singular voice that explores the revolutionary act of Black intimacy in a climate of Black rage…" and then to herself, "What does that mean?" From another random page, she reads:

> …doubt followed each breath.
>
> She searched her dark skin for the fire that crackled just below the surface,
>
> But discovered only traces of smoke within—no passion, no fight.
>
> She was a young woman filled with smoldering ash. (Anderson 14).

Riley has just read for us the first words we hear from the fictional author. These words reflect back to Riley something of which she is still unconscious: her displaced attention on Stokes's artistic success, while her own is unsearched without a sign of the fire of "passion" and "fight" and only "filled with smoldering ash." Interestingly, Anderson lets this trail for Riley's creativity run cold for now. It is Stokes, the male character, that finds his reflection in G.K. Marche's work attractive. Stokes reads Marche's work as a "singular voice," as a kind of artistic inspiration, a raison d'être. I equate this "singular voice" to another French term: la voix de la raison. In the following section, I am interested in locating the site of that voice of reason through the geography of the play and seek to understand how our characters (especially Stokes) navigate this site.

    At this point in the play, we find out that Stokes has applied to thirteen different arts

school and has received "another one for the rejection pile" (Anderson 13). For the rest of the

first act, we see Stokes, in his discouragement of his craft, turn away from his painting

altogether. This frustrates Riley, as she has been negotiating with the Arts Conservatory

through her relationship with Tami with the initial intention of finding a way to get him into

the school – until she is derailed by her attraction for Tami. After reading Marche, Stokes is

inspired to write a novel himself. For Stokes, Marche's "singular voice" is in a temporal

relationship to the past. The irony is that Stokes, who has been painting the image of his late

father (the sign of his patriarchal inspiration) over and over again, is now located in this

1960s lesbian feminist writer.

The play really turns on a spatial surprise when we find out that G.K. Marche is not only

alive but can be visited in a retirement home in San Alma which is just "a 2-hour drive"

outside of the San Francisco Bay Area (Anderson 106). This is the introduction of a different

kind of "living space," the retirement home, which is particularly interesting to this spatial

analysis. Michel Foucault theorized about such places as heterotopias. Foucault introduces

his understanding of this concept in the preface to his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology*

of the Human Sciences, originally published in 1966. Juxtaposed to Utopias, he argues

heterotopias are "disturbing" because:

> …they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this
>
> *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy
>
> 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but
>
> also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also

opposite one another) to 'hold together'. ("Order of" xviii)

For these aspiring male feminists in the play, this holding together, or entanglement, of the common names "retirement" and "home" collides as the site of ultimate desire and transformation in *How to Catch Creation*. The name "retirement home" is just one example of the many forms of heterotopia Foucault begins to lay out for us but he refuses to define the term in his preface to this broad excavation of human knowledge. No, this great French thinker (who I must remind us is queer identifying) leaves it for a short lecture he gave to some architecture students a year later.

The lecture, not officially released to the public domain until shortly before his death in 1984, was entitled, "Des Espaces Autre (Of Other Spaces)." In this lecture, Foucault lays out six traits of heterotopias and through these traits, or principles, begins to form for us a definition of heterotopias. In the first principle of heterotopia, Foucault describes two subcategories: the "heterotopia of crisis" and the "heterotopia of deviation." Crisis heterotopias, he says, are spaces in our society that are "privileged or sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are…in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc." ("Of Other" 24). He argues that these crisis heterotopias are disappearing in our time and being replaced with heterotopias of deviation which are described as places for those "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" such as "rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons" (25). However, he closes his discussion of the first principle of heterotopias by describing a liminal space that is the center of our discussion here by adding the "retirement

home." He argues that retirement homes are perhaps "on the borderline" between crisis and deviation as "after all, old age is a crisis, but also deviation since, in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation" (25). What I find curious about Anderson's use of this liminal heterotopic space (the retirement home) in the play is that for these characters, it is the heterotopic space that holds the key to their transformation and represents a disruption from the past that the playwright has already allowed us as the audience to witness through the unfolding of the queer relationship from the 1960s timeline. This queer "disruptive" timeline syncopates the contemporary moment of the play. We see the 2014 palimpsest superimposed upon the same sites in which the 1960s drama between Marche and Natalie unfolded, which also ended in the conception of a child.

Interestingly enough, Anderson's use of the heterotopic continues to align with Foucault's analysis. In his fourth and fifth principles, he notes that heterotopias are "often linked to slices in time" that he calls "heterochronies," which represent a sort of "absolute break with their traditional time … organized through a perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place" ("Of Other" 26). We as the audience clearly see and feel the presence of the past through the heterochronies, but the play reaches the moment of enlightenment when Stokes finds out that his current literary obsession is situated in an "immobile place." The fact that Stokes and Griffin must travel to the immobile place (the retirement home), housing the deviant Marche whose Black, queer body represents this "accumulation of time," feels like a disturbance beyond or outside of the "real world" of the city. I think what becomes clear at this point in the play is that San Francisco begins to

represent the real world. This substantiates a kind of congruency between the "real" world of

Anderson's play and Foucault's spatial theory of the real world in which we all live. Foucault

in his fifth principle makes this need for our two male characters to traverse space to

approach the heterotopic even more clear as he argues, "heterotopias always presuppose a

system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable."

Although spaces like "retirement homes" are not as publicly accessible, which is evidenced in

Griffin's skepticism of Stokes's ability to gain access, having only found out about Marche's

living in a retirement home outside of the city via the virtual space of the web.

For Stokes, he has only imagined who Marche is through her novels and Internet

research. Throughout the first act, we see him "nerd out" over the tiny facts he is finding out

about Marche's life. It also feels as if the playwright has been showing us all along the

potential of the heterotopic presence through the syncopation of the contemporary timeline

with the 1960s timeline but we find that this history is embodied in the 80-year-old version of

Marche sitting in the spatial intersection of the crisis of old age and the deviation of idleness

in retirement. More importantly, in order for our male characters, our aspiring male-feminist

to transform, they must have reflected back to them what can only be reflective to a society

via its heterotopia. Foucault argues that the sixth principle of the heterotopic is: "they have a

function in relation to all the space that remains" and this unfolds between two extremes: the

"space of illusion that exposes every real space" or it creates another real space that is as

perfect as our real world is imperfect, "messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" ("Of Other" 27).

In other words, our playwright has sent our two male feminist acolytes to a mirror where they

choose to either go to a similar place that men have historically continued to visit concerning women (especially the avant-garde), namely: exoticism, mystification, and the primitivism of seeing women as only mothers, or they can choose to be transformed by allowing themselves to be exposed to their true nature.

Heterotopia as "the space of illusion that exposes every real space" and spatialized in this play as G.K. Marche's retirement home is curiously the site of Stokes and Griffin's la voix de la raison (the voice of reason). For Stokes, his infatuation with writing has been through his mystification/glorification of the writer as a way to escape his feelings of failure as a painter.

However, when he meets this actual person at the borderline, over in the "thirdspace," his improvisational imaginings are clarified by the reflection of reality and wisdom found in Marche. Anderson may have us realize that it was not Stokes' painting that was bad or being rejected but his narcissism at focusing his creative attention while painting on his patriarchal reflection via his father's image that was failing him access to the hierarchical structures that may be perceived in institutions of higher learning that are changing but ever so slowly. However, concerning the thirdspace as a mirror, heterotopia has the ability to reflect back to society who and what it truly is. We, as a society, are no more than what we are as reflected by our prison systems, in our approaches to mental health, our care and involvement with the elderly, and our relationship to death, whether by our hand (death penalty) or by the condition of nature ("natural" death).

For the play's sake, when G.K. Marche invites Stokes to paint her portrait, we can almost feel the ashes of his artistry reborn into flames. His response says all that we need to hear: "I

would…yes! Absolutely? I would love to," that is, paint the likeness of this queer, feminist writer. I think this kind of action via a change in attention in one's creative work is imperative for the birth of more male-feminist who are not so in name only but in actions that choose to lift up the image and likeness of women of color who have for too long been invisibilized in cultural representation.

Returning to the first principle that Foucault lays out, although heterotopia is the site of the borderline for Marche, for Stokes, heterotopia is the site of crisis, where the adolescent is initiated into an adulthood of artistry and creation. For him, Marche is the high priestess (Anderson 124). Stokes is admitted entrance; he is touched by her; she even reads his hand (or palm, so to speak); and calls him by his true artistry. When she touches his hands (and Anderson uses the catwhiskers twice before letting Marche speak): "=.= / =.= / You paint? / I thought you said you were a writer" (124). This queer high priestess of the heterotopia demands that he claim who he really is before inviting him to paint her portrait. This follows Foucault's analysis that for entrance into heterotopias, an initiate must be purified usually by fire or water. We already see Stoke's purification via the fire of artistic passion being ignited in him, but for Griffin, it is the purification of water as tears.

On the way home, Griffin feels that he needs to apologize for his tears, saying, "I am embarrassed. I didn't come with the intention to weep in GK Marche's arms." He had felt the transmission of his mother's touch through Marche who was once his mother's lover. Stokes and Griffin's transitional scenes, driving on the road, frame this transformative, retirement home visit. This transition home is actually the moment when all the secrets from

the "real world" of the city seep through the cracks and basically set the course for the

unraveling of the rest of the plot: Stokes finding out about Riley's affair with Tami and

Tami's realization that yes: "I think I want to have a kid" too. Although Griffin's connection

to Marche is yet to be fully unveiled, we know his path toward becoming a father is being

made more clear.

CHAPTER FIVE: CODA - A CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have set out to explore the nature of jazz aesthetics and performance in conversation with the postdramatic. I have parsed out a theoretical framework that expands the discourse of postdramatic theory to include Black and queer aesthetics by analyzing two contemporary plays from female writers, one Latina and the other Black and queer identifying. However, I have not centered identity alone but have continued a line of questions I embrace from Suzan-Lori Parks that asks us to begin to approach Black artists and their art by analyzing their contribution to form first rather than prioritize their work as political statements. Having a mandate to read form as text first has led me to unexpected but not surprising territories. Using the term territories here is especially appropriate since my understanding of per(form)ance as spatially constructed has come into clearer focus for me through my writing. Real and imagined spaces have always been with us. That minoritarian artists and thinkers have used imaginary spaces as forms of survival, liberation, and celebration is not lost in this research. It becomes more meaningful now to state that having been property in the US, Black bodies may find healing from this inhumane treatment perhaps only by having greater access to geographical, architectural, and institutional spaces. Having been property, we might heal by owning property ourselves.

This thesis research and writing has taken a wide turn to say the least. After finishing my M.A. coursework only having my thesis to write, I made a decision to undertake and complete an M.F.A. in European Devised Performance Practice that took me to Berlin and London and then to Chicago. When I first got to the Eden studios in Berlin, I quickly found

out that the devised program was in many ways nomadic. It was the duty of the twenty sum odd artists from around the world to set up our studio spaces. Dragging supplies and equipment up two flights of stairs from trailers and vans, creating a lottery of rotating duties, cleaning and restoring the studio spaces after our messy yet creative work were all part of the creative process. This gave us ownership of the studio space, but more importantly, these rituals were a way of preparing the space of the body. The space of the studio was the canvas and our bodies the quill and ink, the brush and paint, the chisel upon the stone of the space. I was challenged to not only do devised practice as an individual but to communally navigate some fourteen different languages and create something beautiful together through the poetics of the body, a high level of transposition of personal material, and the transformation of collective space. Our experience of space extended beyond the space of the Eden Studios as well. We were challenged through a psycho-geographic project to study a neighborhood or a corner store located in the city of Berlin and to take notes, make drawings, extract stories and record sensations. Then, we returned to the studio to create a piece from the richness of that experience by transforming the space. Both my migration there and my return to the States was part of this nomadic learning as I began to understand what it means to be self-exiled from a homeland that too often does not feel like a welcoming place for queer and people of color like myself. However, it was not hard to keep the research I began at UCF at the heart of my practice in Berlin. In a performance manifesto project, I not only wrote a manifesto centering jazz aesthetics, declaring, "theatre is jazz," but I also attempted to embody that manifesto spatially. After testing this manifesto in the space, I quick found that

theatre did not encompass enough room for my manifesto. Another iteration of my manifesto began: "Performance is Jazz; the rest is commentary." What I have learned in the liminal space between these two programs (theatre studies and devised performance) has been that our responsibility, as theatre practitioners, is primarily for the maintenance, care, constructions, and, ultimately, what our audiences bring to experience, the transformation of space. Beyond the spectacle of the space itself, we are gatekeepers to the possibility of change that happens in the inner landscapes of consciousness when love and laughter open the heart through theatre and performance.

Having wrestled with the near absence of Black and queer drama and performance in critical discussions of the postdramatic and innovations in theatre-making, I have come to realize that this erasure has to do with critics often jumping too quickly from the actual work of Black and queer artists to critical discussions like race, gender, sexuality, and class around the work. This is not a slight to critical discourses; I enjoy them very much as you can tell from the writing. But I conclude that by beginning with form, structure, and aesthetic choices, critics and artist-scholars, like myself, can understand queer and POC artistry and construction (i.e. the labor and practice of performance) at the same level as theory. We make richer and more nuanced arguments from the form rather than skipping over the artistic innovation that come from the confluence of artistic lineage with theoretical knowledge. The anti-hierarchical nature of the postdramatic frame helps us flatten not only the aesthetic values we project onto a piece but also helps us flatten our value judgements that often place theory over practice, the critical over construction, administration over creative labor in

theatre production. Theorizing from form first helps us understand more deeply the "statements" Black artists are attempting to make in their work. Analyzing form is another way of listening to the body of the work and work of the body. Rather than distract us from the critical discourses of race, gender, sexuality and class, being critically engaged with the "form" of per(form)ance, actually enhances and emphasizes our relationship to body and other bodies via spatial relationships.

I have turned to form rather than history, space rather than time, to catch a glimpse of the lineages I can see coursing through the work of so many diverse kinds of artists. I hit many walls in my research, architectural structures that were hard to penetrate or just to find stairs to access some other level in the hierarchies of knowledge. My thesis seems to only crack at boundaries I wish to break down between theory and practice. At the same time, I feel the cultural, professional, and intellectual fatigue with identity politics. However, still wanting to pursue a doctoral path in Black queer studies, I want to continue to engage with Suzan-Lori Parks's challenge to not only read minoritarian artists as statement-makers but to read the forms, structures, and innovations to the wide cultural production of performance in the world being done by queer and POC artists. I hope that my work can take up the mantel of so many before who have made such attempts but have so often been palimpsested. We may not be winning all the awards or be founders and directors of the biggest theatres and institutions in proportion to the general population, but I believe this day is coming. What I discover most deeply is that the qualities that made jazz alive and innovative in the musical arts are alive and well in dramatic forms today. We see that the post dramatic is a lens that can help us to

appreciate the contribution of Black and queer artists to theatre and performance not only in terms of gratitude/reward but in terms of economic appreciation.

On a more reflective note, what I struggled with the most in conducting the two theoretical jam sessions was the actual analyzing of plays. I find that analyzing plays alone is not my highest pleasure in research writing. Rather, I love analyzing life and humanity through the hybrid lens of the interdisciplinary artist-scholar. When it comes to form and spatial awareness in theatre-making, the ur-impulse for me is to understand facets of humanity and life that I am attempting to illuminate through the textual analysis. I wonder if in my future research I can center a core theme of humanity and then bring in all the arts (drama not omitted) to accompany the discussion rather than merely conducting a new reading of a play. As my thesis demonstrates, architecture, poetry, music, graffti, film and so much more have been part of my theatre studies and I believe I can learn how to weave these various discourses and interdisciplinary analyses into my future scholarship, practice, and writing with more efficacy and effect. I hope this interdisciplinary quality is also attractive for other artist-scholars who may happen upon this work and the work I have yet to do.

Concerning jazz, I do not know if jazz is my religion as Ted Joans declares in his poem, "Jazz is my religion, surrealism is my point of view," but what I do know is that jazz and Black music influence my practice and my thinking in ways that I do not fully comprehend. Through this research, I became keenly aware that I am not alone in this influence and that diverse lineages intersect in life, practice, and thinking. While many artists and theorist may never give credit to Black music aesthetics as part of their construction of thought and

aesthetics, I intend my practice to grow more and more conscious of my artistic and intellectual ancestors' influence on my work and to give credit as often as I can.

When I first began writing, I realized my ego and naivete wanted this thesis to be some kind of magnum opus. These inner pressures were never put on me by anyone. Wanting to prove myself as an intelligent and creative "somebody" with something important to say has roots that go back to my childhood. This thesis journey has been extended at this point in my scholastic life because of four factors: 1) I am working to overcome perfectionism and the need to know everything right now, 2) I am a multi-modal learner. When my research and writing are overspecialized and in a limited mode or scope, I struggle to keep engaged. My whole body and consciousness want to be involved, 3) I struggle with having the time I need to process while being too impatient to wait. It takes time for me to process. I often write slow and I need a good balance of distraction and boredom (which also can contribute to guilt) with stretches of intense focus and small wins along the way. 4) I need community which was especially difficult during these COVID months but like everything there is a flip side to being in community as I often find it easy to lose myself in the expectations of others who I admire. Learning to appreciate others' work and interest while honoring my own creative and intellectual space has been a huge realization in my journey. Upon reflection, I have much improved in these four areas and still have much work to do. My research over these past four and a half years has helped me embrace more of the unknown and to appreciate how wisdom is gained through failure. I have been introduced to interdisciplinary practices and diverse methodologies mixing theory and practice in a way that keeps me engaged, productive, and

resilient. This extension has not only allowed me time to process and grow in my ideas, but I have also gained the patience and hope to realize there is great work ahead for me. This thesis is a snapshot of my research and writing at this moment. I am so grateful to have found a good stopping point for this work and I trust that my future research will build on the growth I have accomplished in this graduate program.

In conclusion, writing this thesis has taught me that I am always becoming. Doing the work that is actually before me right now in this moment is the only way I can grow. Meeting these moments of accomplishment with reflection is my only way to measure that growth. As both an artist and scholar returning to this writing after a year and a half, I felt that the researcher I was when I wrote the introduction is totally different from the scholar who is writing this conclusion. However, the same through line is present in my work and lends me to believe that I have not only expanded my knowledge but have deepened the thinking that began my graduate journey. In my first interview with Julia Listengarten, we excitedly talked about devising and liminal spaces; I have come full circle. The devising, construction, and nature of space has become my primary concern. Perhaps, it has always been, but I could not see it yet. Getting the bodily sense of how a performance moves is one of the great lessons I learned from Vandy Wood and there is also an important moment in which a work must stop and it is time to just "press send." And so, I "press send" at this slightly arbitrary stopping point with a postscript attributed to my favorite Black queer artist and thinker, James Baldwin: "The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers." May this ever be true in my life and work.

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