

October or Thermidor?

The Jazz Composers Guild Meets New York

In the late afternoon of October 1, 1964, Bill Dixon sat in the home of two friends on West 91st Street after a long week of hard work.¹ The composer and trumpeter had been busy organizing a four-night festival of adventurous music to be called the October Revolution in Jazz and soon to take place across the street at the Cellar Café. Earlier that year, between May and September, Dixon had programmed nearly twenty Sunday afternoon concerts at the café, including performances by the pianists Sun Ra and Paul Bley, saxophonists Pharoah Sanders and Albert Ayler, drummers Rashied Ali, Sunny Murray, and Paul Motian, clarinetist Jimmy Giuffre, bassists Barre Phillips and Lewis Worrell, and the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble (flutist Jon Winter, saxophonist Gary William Friedman, pianist Burton Greene, bassist Alan Silva, and drummer Clarence Walker).² “I had one rule,” Dixon recalled over forty years later. “Anyone could play at the Cellar, as long as they weren’t playing any other place. So right away, we got a reputation for a certain kind of music.”³ The trombonist Roswell Rudd, too, remembers the Cellar’s reputation during this period, remarking of the audiences that frequented these shows, “You know, they could pay their money and take their chances at the commercial . . . clubs. But at least here, they were guaranteed a taste of the unexpected, the unforeseen.”

Although he had been living in New York for many years by 1964, Dixon rarely played the established clubs, which presented nationally established popular acts such as Woody Herman, Dizzy Gillespie, Gerry Mulligan, Nina Simone, Muddy Waters, or the comedian Dick Gregory. Off-night

and afternoon dates at such establishments were hard to get, so up-and-coming players honed their craft in the more open network of cafés and coffeehouses that had sprung up in Greenwich Village—among them the Four Steps, the White Whale, Café Avital, Le Metro, Harout's, and Café Roué and Take 2, where Dixon had established the music policies.⁴

In the weeks leading up to the October Revolution concerts, Dixon selected and contacted the musicians, worked out the schedule, and placed advertisements in the *Village Voice*, the *Villager*, and the *Columbia Daily Spectator*.⁵ By the time the day finally arrived, he deserved a break. Then the phone rang. It was Peter Sabino, the owner of the Cellar Café and Dixon's partner in the enterprise.

[H]e says, "Bill, can you get over here right away?" I said, "Why?" He says, "Just get over here right away." So I went over, and I got downstairs, and there was this huge crowd in the street, between Broadway and West End. So I said, "Gee, I wonder what happened." I got to the Cellar, I walked in, and Peter said, "They're all trying to get in!" That's the way it was, for the entire thing.

The October Revolution was indeed a great success. Dixon credits the low price of admission (\$1), the convivial atmosphere they had created at the Cellar in the earlier concerts, and the enthusiastic word-of-mouth endorsements those concerts had garnered. The number of people who attended the Revolution concerts was generally agreed to have been about seven hundred. The festival presented about forty ensembles and solo acts. Building on the earlier innovations of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, these seventy-five-odd composers were working to extend bebop's experimental ethos by discarding periodic harmonic patterns and the formulaic split between soloist and accompaniment, expanding the basic instrumentations of bop, and composing new pieces instead of reworking old tunes. Along with European American composers such as John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Feldman, and La Monte Young, these musicians of what came to be called the "New Thing" were developing an aesthetics based upon spontaneity and sound over more abstract and computational approaches to form.

With the exceptions of Sun Ra, Paul Bley, and Jimmy Giuffrè, everyone taking part in the festival was relatively unknown; a number of names familiar today were then young performers who had yet to record or play any of the big clubs.⁶ Dixon wanted to insure that the musicians on the series wouldn't be accused of riding on the coattails of such more established players as Aylmer, Taylor, and Coleman. But in spite of the obscurity of most of the performers, and a location far removed from the lively net-

work of cafés in Greenwich Village, the October Revolution drew substantial crowds and several notable figures in the New York scene, including Taylor, Coleman, Archie Shepp, Gil Evans, Andrew Hill, Charlotte Moorman, Tony Williams, the Village Gate owner Art D’Lugoff, and the poet and critic Amiri Baraka (then known as LeRoi Jones). As the writer A. B. Spellman observed at the time, “Almost everybody who’s doing anything at all in the way of *avant-garde* jazz in New York passed through the Cellar during these programs, if not to play, then to participate in the panels or to listen.”⁷ Martin Williams and Dan Morgenstern were present to review the event for *Down Beat*.

In his recollection of the event, Rudd described a mood that combined celebration and intensity in equal measure: “I just remember it . . . [being] very professional. The players were seriously digging in. . . . Serious business. . . . And I don’t mean to make it sound like a funeral. It was anything but. What I mean by the word ‘focused’ is a lot of humor, good feeling, certain amount of good competitiveness. My recollection is very positive.” The feelings of mutual support and goodwill seem to have collided with the equally strong tendency toward disagreement during the panel discussion that closed each concert.⁸ The panel themes were “Jim Crow and Crow Jim,” “The Economics of Jazz,” “The Rise of Folk Music and the Decline of Jazz,” and “Jazz Composition.”⁹ Dixon moderated the panels, which featured prominent members of the New York jazz community.¹⁰ Dixon recalled that the discussion centered on issues of work and work privileges: the New York Musicians’ Union Local 802’s disregard for jazz musicians, the difficulty of landing a recording contract or playing date at one of the major clubs, the exclusion of African American musicians from the lucrative market of television music and commercial jingles, and the white monopoly on well-paying club dates in the Catskills and Broadway and off-Broadway shows.¹¹ Jazz musicians of all colors were constantly having to negotiate unfavorable working conditions, but the panel conversations discussed the fact that black players were at an even larger disadvantage. “[J]azz musician white, if he could read well enough and knew someone like that, he could work with the New York Philharmonic tomorrow, and then play a jazz club. . . . The black one was always black, no matter how you cut the thing.”¹² The subject of race was not restricted to the “Jim Crow and Crow Jim” panel; Dixon remembered that “race later raised its head in all of them.” This was perhaps inevitable in the fall of 1964, after the Harlem and Bed-Stuy riots, Freedom Summer, and the murder of three civil rights workers earlier that year, but race was undoubtedly also a topic because the new music was increasingly identified with black nationalism.

Many years later, Dixon told Ben Young, “I did the October Revolution completely by myself . . . for a simple reason. All these writers . . . were telling me that this music I saw wasn’t worth anything . . . [, but] I knew people could be interested in anything if it was presented to them in the proper way.”¹³ As we shall see, the New Thing never gained much traction in the jazz marketplace, but the October Revolution did launch the careers of several musicians and “formalize[d] . . . a coffee-shop, loft-space, underground, storefront phenomenon,” in the words of Rudd.

The most conspicuous event of this formalization process was the formation, later in October 1964, of the Jazz Composers Guild. In this chapter, I describe and assess the attempt of this organization to reorient the aesthetic, social, and economic networks within which their work was situated. Although the new black music was born and nurtured in downtown cafés and bars in the East Village and the Lower East Side, in 1964 and 1965 the geography of this music had expanded significantly—to midtown, where concerts were held at the Galaxy Arts Center on West 58th Street, Town Hall on West 43rd Street, and Judson Hall on West 57th Street; to the Upper West Side and the Cellar Café; to Harlem, where the Black Arts Repertory Theater and School on 130th Street and Lenox Avenue hosted performances and outdoor events; and to the more upscale West Village, where the Guild produced concerts at the Contemporary Center at West 11th Street and Seventh Avenue. These geographical routes out of the mainstream jazz clubs in the Village mirrored the expansion and transformation of the socio-aesthetic terrain upon which experimental black musicians operated.

In a landscape increasingly defined by the juggernaut of youth culture, even mainstream jazz was struggling to survive financially. New Thing composers did not have the success that Cage and his associates had had at defining alternative sites of musical production (Judson Church, for example) or gaining institutional support for their projects; this was largely due to a set of associations that linked black music with commodification and entertainment, the discursive opposites of “serious” high culture. Morgenstern described the music as “a form of 20th-century ‘art music’ rather than that unique blend of popular and ‘true’ art that has been . . . jazz as we know it,” but that was not how it was generally regarded, and New Thing composers struggled to compete in the jazz marketplace with Brubeck and Adderley, and in the art marketplace with Cage and Moorman.¹⁴ (It would be several years before composers working in the African American tradition began to garner foundation support.)

The journalist Dan Carlinsky wrote of the October Revolution, “The

Cellar is not really a café, but a small concert hall with sandwiches and coffee. It is not really smoke-filled, and the clink of paper coffee-cups cannot be heard too distinctly.”¹⁵ This characterization of the site as a small concert hall goes straight to the issue that Dixon and the other musicians were attempting to address: how to create space outside of the entertainment economy of the jazz club for musicians and composers who had been denied these opportunities by a racial taxonomy of musical traditions. Indeed, Dixon made clear his desire to escape the automatic labeling of this music as “jazz”: an advance notice in the *Village Voice* referred to the October Revolution as “a Festival of Contemporary Music, both jazz and non-jazz, to focus attention on a segment of the ‘creative underground.’”¹⁶

Although racial formation was a key factor in delineating the jazz underground, caught as it was in the space between the entertainment economy of mainstream jazz and the racially policed borders of established and experimental institutions of high culture, different ideologies of race also mediated relationships within the jazz avant-garde. The move toward self-determination always started with self-definition, and attempts at group formation based on particular models of racial or interracial understanding inevitably came into conflict.

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Following the success of the October Revolution, Taylor urged Dixon to consider founding the musicians’ collective they had long discussed. It was certainly an auspicious moment: for the Revolution, Dixon had gathered some of the brightest young players in the jazz underground and presented them as a large, polystylistic movement; critics and established musicians were taking notice; the music had shown itself capable of drawing sizeable audiences; panel discussions had provided the kind of serious and formalized intellectual engagement that musicians in the black avant-garde could not find elsewhere; and the Cellar Café could now serve as a base of operations, removed from the foot traffic of Greenwich Village but within walking distance for the students and intellectuals of Columbia University.¹⁷

Under the headline “The October Revolution Continues,” an October 15 advertisement in the *Village Voice* proclaimed: “Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Sun-Ra [*sic*], Mike Mantler, Burton Green [*sic*], Roswell Rudd, John Tchicai, and Bill Dixon have united as the JAZZ COMPOSERS GUILD with the idea in mind that the music as represented by the above-named and others must and will no longer remain a part of the ‘underground’ scene.”¹⁸ Early Guild members included bassist Alan Silva and flutist Jon Winter (both members of the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble), as well as Paul

and Carla Bley.¹⁹ To qualify for membership, a musician had to lead his or her own group; for this reason, Rudd and Tchicai were both members, but their New York Art Quartet drummer, Milford Graves, because he was a sideman, was not. The pianist Lowell Davidson was an original member, but since he lived in Boston (he was then a graduate student in biochemistry at Harvard), he was unable to commute to meetings. He deputized his trumpet player, Michael Mantler, who had relocated from Boston to New York in 1964, to take his place. Carla Bley did not lead her own group, but because she wrote the music for her husband, Paul Bley, who had already been invited to join, she too was offered membership. In my interview with her, Carla Bley recalled that Giuseppe Logan was asked to join but declined. When Dixon and Taylor visited Coleman in late 1964, while the latter was on hiatus from playing in public, and asked him to endorse the philosophy and activities of the collective, he refused; in a 1965 interview, he indicated concern that organized advocacy might eclipse individual principle.²⁰ Dixon, Taylor, and Shepp also met with John Coltrane at one point during the Guild's existence to ask if he would consider joining an effort to withhold jazz music from New York City clubs for one weekend, but Coltrane, though sympathetic, did not do so.²¹

Choosing a name for the new group was a struggle. Each of the three words in the final name represented the culmination of considerable debate. Silva recalled in 2002, for example, "I had a major problem with the name though: I didn't like the word 'jazz'—I always felt it was a bad word, like 'ghetto'—and I didn't like the word 'composers' either. . . . I joined the Guild because I thought these musicians were some of the most important *improvisers*—not composers."²² Greene's allusion to divergences of opinion was relayed by the *New York Times* reporter John Wilson, who wrote, "The Guild's members have divergent views on as basic a subject as 'What is jazz?' ('We went through that for two meetings,' Greene admitted)."²³ The word *guild* was the most contested component, perhaps because, as Dixon recalled, few of the other musicians knew what a guild was.²⁴ Dixon had researched medieval mercantile organizations and was struck by how they integrated the commercial and the aesthetic into a powerful social structure that regulated labor and distribution for an entire industry. "They were structured in such a way that it brought the art and the artisan closer together in dealing with business contracts with people," he reasoned. "For me, it [also] had a much more aesthetically pleasing sound. 'Union' is too flat, cold." Despite his advocacy for the term, Dixon met considerable resistance from the other musicians, who objected to the European provenance of the organizations and their implied commercialism.²⁵

Dixon talked of the need for an organization like the Guild in a feature interview with Robert Levin in *Down Beat* in May 1965.²⁶ Although the piece ran at the moment when the Guild was dissolving, it remains the most complete public statement of the organization's philosophy and objectives. Jazz musicians, Dixon explained, are treated condescendingly, ignored, or exploited outright, resulting in an environment of such collective anxiety and distrust that the pursuit of group empowerment had lost ground to individual competition. "Many musicians have been made so unstable that if they see their names in print a couple of times, they begin to believe, and try to convince you, that the Establishment isn't really that bad," Dixon told Levin.²⁷ Dixon also voiced a complaint that was increasingly common among jazz musicians, that working conditions in the clubs were unfair and cruel. Owners rarely gave avant-garde musicians anything beyond a Sunday afternoon or Monday night date, when few people could be expected to attend and payment to the musicians was negligible.²⁸

Record companies, Dixon continued, forced musicians to accept minimum scale and often asked the band to cover recording costs. He could also have mentioned that record executives frequently controlled which compositions were to be included on a release. For example, Shepp's first recording date for Impulse!—a financial and artistic decision that would play a prominent role in the dissolution of the Jazz Composers Guild—was contingent upon Shepp's agreeing to include only one of his own compositions. The album that resulted, *Four for Trane*, consists of four works by Coltrane and one by Shepp, "Rufus."

These working conditions had led to the "absence of representation of the most vital elements in the main stream of America's contemporary musical culture," as Dixon said in his interview with Levin, and the time had come for musicians to do it themselves. Dixon went on to outline the Guild's objectives: "[T]o establish the music to its rightful place in the society; to awaken the musical conscience of the masses of people to that music which is essential to their lives; to protect the musicians and composers from the existing forces of exploitation; to provide an opportunity for the audience to hear the music; to provide facilities for the proper creation, rehearsal, performance, and dissemination of the music."²⁹

The goals of the Guild could be summarized as exposure, protection, and support, but the method that Guild members followed was one of disengagement. As Greene told Wilson at the time, "Our idea is to corner the market, to take this music off the market for as long as is necessary to establish the kind of relations with the business people that are needed to give the music its proper outlets. Meanwhile, we'll generate our own

activities.”³⁰ Before attempting to negotiate with club owners or major record labels, the organization planned first to build a core audience of committed listeners through weekly concerts. “I think I was alone in wanting to withdraw the music from the market,” Dixon later recalled, “I was adamant about that. I wasn’t interested in going out and asking people to let us in the door.”³¹ Mantler, however, was quick to point out that the act of pulling their musical labor off the market was less audacious than it might sound today. He remarked, “There was nothing to withdraw from, anyway. There was no market that this music was a part of. . . . There wasn’t anyone giving us gigs. That was the whole point. I think ‘withdrawing it from the market’ is a little grandiose.”

The Guild’s rules of disengagement directed the members to refrain from recording, or from releasing any preexisting recordings, unless the group voted that the project was beneficial to all members. The long-term goal was a major deal with a large label that would benefit all members.³² In November 1964, as the Guild was slowly coming into shape, the New York Art Quartet (Rudd, Tchicai, Worrell, and Graves) recorded an album for Bernard Stollman, the young lawyer who had begun signing up-and-coming players to one- or two-record deals on his label, ESP-Disk. In accordance with Guild rules, Rudd remembered, the recording was held back from production until late spring 1965, by which time the Guild was dissolving.³³

The other primary rule in the organization restricted members from accepting a performing gig until approved by vote. Opportunities that were well publicized, overly commercial, or part of the New York jazz “establishment” were rejected. Carla Bley recalled that when she and Mantler were close to securing the opportunity to write music for the Dave Garroway television talk show, they were initially ecstatic. Garroway, the first host of NBC’s *Today* show, had continued, after leaving NBC in 1961, to host various talk programs. When Bley and Mantler brought the offer before a Guild meeting it was rejected, and Bley recalls being shamed by the other members for even considering such an “establishment” gig (in the end the opportunity never materialized).³⁴ One-time gigs, on the other hand, had a better chance of approval, especially if they were not within New York City limits, where the Guild hoped to be a strong presence. Rudd remembered presenting his case for a one-night playing date as a sideperson somewhere in the South: “I brought it up. I said, ‘I need the money. Please think about that when you vote.’” Rudd’s performance opportunity would not promote the Guild as a whole, but it was approved because it was seen not to undermine the group’s integrity. Moreover, as the Guild’s rules had been

formulated primarily to regulate members' work as performance leaders, the rules were relaxed for sideperson gigs.

In the weeks after the October Revolution, the Guild produced concerts by Sun Ra, the New York Art Quartet (then still billed as the Roswell Rudd-John Tchicai Quartet), the Paul Bley quintet, the Alan Silva quartet, the Archie Shepp septet, and the Cecil Taylor Unit.³⁵ Nearly all of these concerts occurred at the Cellar Café ("rapidly becoming the New York center of avant-garde jazz activity," as *Down Beat* reported), where each leader rehearsed his ensemble during the week before the performance.³⁶ The group also met regularly, about once a week, with the location rotating among members' apartments. On October 30–31, the Guild held a nearly twenty-four-hour marathon concert to raise general funds and money for a new four-day festival at Judson Hall.³⁷ This series of concerts, dubbed Four Days in December, occurred December 28–31 and featured groups led by every member of the Guild.³⁸ The musicians appearing as sidemen, a veritable who's who of young avant-garde jazz players in New York, included the saxophonists Jimmy Lyons, Robin Kenyatta, Marshall Allen, Steve Lacy, Marion Brown, Pharoah Sanders, and Pat Patrick; the bassists Buell Neidlinger, Eddie Gomez, Ronnie Boykins, and Reggie Johnson; and the drummers Andrew Cyrille, Rashied Ali, and Graves. The festival also introduced the Jazz Composers Guild Orchestra, an eleven-piece big band performing the compositions of Carla Bley and Mantler. This group would outlive the Guild by many years as the Jazz Composers Orchestra, led by Bley and Mantler sporadically into the 1970s.

Wilson reported that the first night's concert of ensembles led by Taylor and Dixon attracted a standing-room-only crowd of over three hundred, and that the remaining three concerts drew about half as many.³⁹ Spellman described "capacity or near-capacity audiences which were vocally sympathetic to the great bulk of the music played."⁴⁰ The December 31 issue of *Down Beat*, which presumably reached newsstands the week before the concerts, announced: "According to a Guild spokesman, the festival will be recorded for the organization's own label, and an initial two-LP release will include a track by each of the groups performing at the concerts, with the subsequent releases devoted to the individual group; the records will be available through subscription and at selected stores specializing in jazz."⁴¹

Like the October Revolution, Four Days in December was a major success and represented one of the signal achievements of the Guild. Judson was a sizeable, well-known venue, and members of the Guild cooperated to produce these four concerts without help from managers, agents, or publicists. Although the double-LP of Guild performances never material-

ized, the plan to record and self-release excerpts of the festival was, in the first weeks of 1965, a virtually unprecedented and exciting possibility. Capitalizing on advance stories on the event in *Down Beat* and the *New York Times*, the Guild was able to attract audience members from across the country.⁴² Word of the festival also drew critics from *Down Beat*, the *New York Times*, and the *Nation*, where Spellman presented the first published account of the Guild's history and values and painted a favorable portrait of the four nights' music. This attention led not only to further reviews in those publications but also to longer feature articles in *Down Beat* and the *New York Times* and a review of a Guild performance some weeks later in the *New Yorker*.⁴³

Following the successful October Revolution, the owner of the building that housed the Cellar Café, perhaps sensing that he had a hit on his hands, more than doubled the rent on the basement space. Faced with this staggering increase, the Guild sought a new home. After the Four Days in December concerts, they settled on the studio of the choreographer Edith Stephen, a triangular space at Seventh Avenue and 111th Street called the Contemporary Center.⁴⁴ As it happened, the site was two floors above the Village Vanguard, a center of major-name jazz in Greenwich Village that, during the Guild's existence, hosted groups led by Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, Thelonious Monk, Ornette Coleman, and Charles Mingus. It is unclear how and why this location was chosen, but Dixon recalls having been against it from the start. "My feeling was that this put the Guild and its presentations in a form of 'competition' for audiences that wouldn't be to our advantage."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the Guild remained at the Contemporary Center for the rest of its brief life and produced thirty-three member concerts there—every Friday and Saturday, and by the end of January, every Sunday as well.⁴⁶

During these months, the group also researched other projects. According to Robert Levin, Rudd, who was voted treasurer at a meeting he was unable to attend, corresponded with other performance groups in Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC. Levin also told of a "campaign to get colleges and universities interested in scheduling concerts by the members."⁴⁷ In an interview in 2002, Alan Silva said that he was in charge of "records and music education" in the Guild, and Val Wilmer reported that he "headed a committee researching the record business for the Jazz Composers Guild," but nothing seems to have come of these activities.⁴⁸ At one point, Dixon recalled, he and Taylor looked at a five-story building on East 65th Street that was on the market for \$65,000. Dixon wanted to turn the building into a combined recording studio, rehearsal



FIGURE 6. The Archie Shepp Sextet performs on a Jazz Composers Guild concert at the Contemporary Center, January 1965. From left: Marion Brown (alto saxophone), Reggie Johnson (double bass), Shepp (tenor saxophone), and Clifford Jarvis (drums). Photograph © Steve Schapiro.

space, and lodgings for visiting musicians. To secure money for the down payment, he arranged a meeting with representatives from a few of the major record labels, offering them the opportunity to record all the members of the Guild for a package price (somewhere around \$100,000); the recording companies refused the deal.

During the time of its existence, members of the Jazz Composers Guild developed a charter document outlining the rules they had agreed upon, but Rudd recalls that the document was not finished and distributed until the spring of 1965, when the Guild was on the verge of folding. The charter was the direct result of the chaotic and often heated meetings that the group held: “The constitution was born out of certain needs. It was not a thing that was imposed so much, as it kind of arose out of the need for order, or direction, consensus,” said Rudd. Other participants chafed at the idea of having to “conform” to a formal constitution. Rudd recalls that by mid-April, only he, Dixon, and two or three other people were showing up at meetings. Soon after, the organization ceased to exist.

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The Jazz Composers Guild began with disagreement, continued with dissension, and ended in dispute, anger, and disappointment. Rudd has described the meetings as “verbal jam sessions,” with different members soloing on long digressions and personal histories, augmented with frequent altercations. “We all got dissed. We were all dissing each other, in one way or another. It was unavoidable.” Indeed, Graves described the meeting he attended with a single word, “chaos.” These internal disputes were obliquely referenced in contemporary press coverage; in an interview with Nat Hentoff, Taylor remarked, “It’s hard to get a group of people to trust each other, work together and communicate at the deepest level,” and Dixon told Levin, “To say that the personalities of any group sometimes come into severe conflict with each other even when the participants are in pursuit of the same idealistic goal is a vast understatement.”⁴⁹ Frustrating and draining as the arguments were, many of the members of the Guild recall that they were also productive and cathartic, perhaps inevitable in the case of such a collection of extraordinary individuals. Aside from the obvious, and unsurprising, gender imbalance in the group, the heterogeneity of backgrounds could hardly have been greater. The group included African Americans from the South (Shepp and Ra), New England (Dixon was born in Nantucket), New York City (Taylor), Bermuda (Silva), and Saturn (Ra). John Tchicai was African Danish. Michael Mantler was Austrian. The European Americans hailed from Canada (Paul Bley), the West coast (Carla Bley, Jon Winter), the Ivy League (Rudd attended Yale), and Chicago (Greene, whose Russian Jewish grandparents had been labor organizers in New York’s garment district). Most of the members were heterosexual, but there were some who manifested nonnormative sexual identities (Ra and Taylor).⁵⁰ With the possible exception of Carla Bley, who told me she was still young and impressionable at the time, the Guild was an exceedingly brief articulation of fully formed mature individuals. “We were not teenagers, you know?” Rudd pointed out. “We were in our twenties, thirties. . . . Sun Ra was probably in his forties. Quite a range of age and experience, but all very hard-earned.”

Trust was key to the Guild’s survival, but a number of factors combined to undercut trust before the collective was even properly constituted. The relationship between Dixon and Shepp had soured, and by October 1964 the two men were no longer on speaking terms. Though they had co-led the Archie Shepp–Bill Dixon quartet from late 1961 to the end of 1963, Shepp thereafter began working with Don Cherry on trumpet in the New York Contemporary Five (initially because Dixon had developed problems with his embouchure).⁵¹ Tensions between the two arose when

two Baraka-penned interview features on Shepp, which ran in *Down Beat* and *Jazz* during the height of the Guild's activities, included no mention of the organization or its other members.⁵² Dixon also interpreted Shepp's involvement with black nationalism as careerist, and in a public forum he commented that "certain people wouldn't be quite that willing to identify themselves with certain things if it wasn't timely."⁵³

Sun Ra also clashed with several of his colleagues, criticizing the political stance of Taylor and Shepp, who "were not talking about Space or Intergalactic things. . . . They were talking about Avant Garde and the New Thing."⁵⁴ Tchicai, too, recalled disagreements, adding that Taylor and Sun Ra argued over who had influenced whom.⁵⁵ John Szwed has reported that Sun Ra lost interest in the Guild because he felt that his group was doing all the promotion and that some members were not sincere in their aims. "He also disagreed with the organizing principle of the group," Szwed writes. "For them to be successful, he thought, someone should be serving as the leader."⁵⁶

Trust was further undermined whenever Guild members violated the rule about not taking gigs on the side.⁵⁷ Apart from off-night gigs at the bigger clubs, significant opportunities to play were provided by the major spokesmen of the young jazz underground, who were all in some ways building or defending their influence on the same rapidly expanding field of musical production. There were three poles of organization and support—the Guild, Baraka, and Stollman—and each attempted to frame the emergent discourse of black experimentalism along different lines. The Guild was concerned with presenting music outside of the entertainment economy and without the expectation of traditional jazz signifiers. Baraka and the budding Black Arts Movement attempted to forge a black populist understanding of free jazz, increasingly linked first to Black Power and then to a pan-African cultural nationalism. Given his concert productions and record label, Stollman most resembled the traditional impresario, albeit one devoted to underground and largely unknown artists.

Baraka was the music's most prominent voice in the mainstream jazz press, and his celebrity skyrocketed after the publication of *Blues People* (1963) and the 1964 premiere of *Dutchman* (1963). His work with the New York Art Quartet in November 1964 produced a recording of his poem "Black Dada Nihilismus" over Rudd's composition *Sweet*. A few weeks later, *Down Beat* reported that Baraka was holding "informal sessions" in his East Village apartment, and that Shepp's group had performed there on December 5 and 6.⁵⁸ (Shepp lived in the same building at the time.) As Baraka's first wife, the poet and writer Hettie Jones, wrote in her memoir,

“[I]ncreasingly the racial balance in our house shifted, as a black avant-garde—writers, musicians, painters, dancers—became part of the new East Village.”⁵⁹ The circle around Baraka at this time included his fellow writer Spellman, the saxophonists Shepp, Marzette Watts, and Marion Brown, the drummer Sunny Murray, and the painters William White and Bob Thompson.⁶⁰

Watts, whose 1969 Savoy album *Marzette Watts Ensemble* was produced by Dixon, told an interviewer in 1998 that Baraka’s short-lived, protonationalist political action group, the Organization of Young Men (OYM), had made a conscious decision to promote Ayler as the next “big name” in the music. “Baraka got involved in a move to basically take all of the music off the market, and we would just push one guy; and everybody agreed it should be Albert,” Watts recalled. “[W]hen things began to move, Albert jumped up and went to Denmark. . . . Archie just moved right in that spot.”⁶¹ Described by Baraka as “one fledgling effort at building some political consciousness downtown,” OYM included Spellman, Shepp, writer Steve Cannon, photographer Leroy McLucas, musician Walter Bowe, critic Harold Cruse, writer and activist Calvin Hicks, poet Bobb Hamilton, and others.⁶²

After Baraka’s move uptown to found the Black Arts Repertory Theater and School in March 1965, his musical associates also included Sun Ra, Ayler, Graves, and Hugh Glover.⁶³ During that month of March, Baraka held a few benefits for his new cultural organization. On March 1, groups led by Giuseppi Logan, Pharoah Sanders, and Dionne Warwick performed at the Polish National Hall.⁶⁴ On March 28, a benefit concert at the Village Gate featured Ayler, Shepp, Sun Ra, Coltrane, the trombonist Grachan Moncur, the vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, and the trumpeter Charles Tolliver.⁶⁵ A few months earlier, Baraka had been involved in an art opening at Galaxy Art Center that featured the paintings of Thompson, White, and Michael and Joyce Snow; the poetry of Baraka and others; and the music of the New York Art Quartet. Advertised under the name of the Jazz Composers Guild, the event ran opposite the Guild’s regular Friday night performance at the Contemporary Center, and as Young observes, offered “some of the earliest evidence of a splintering of the Guild’s constituents as the organization lost cohesion.”⁶⁶

Competition over leadership of the jazz avant-garde was exacerbated by the personal animosity between Dixon and Baraka. Baraka’s feelings about Dixon and his music were expressed in his jazz criticism. In a review of Dixon’s and Shepp’s second Savoy album, for example, which featured one composer per side, Baraka wrote, “The Shepp side contains the serious

business.”⁶⁷ In a 1962 essay on trumpeter Bobby Bradford, Baraka omitted Dixon from his long list of prominent young trumpeters.⁶⁸ For his part, already nearly a year earlier, Dixon had written a letter to *Down Beat* criticizing Baraka’s inaccuracies in reporting, specifically the critic’s failure to identify Dixon as the principal composer and arranger for the New York Contemporary Five, which Baraka had described as having a “pretty wild book” of compositions by Shepp, Tchicai, and Cherry. Dixon also attacked Baraka for his “turgid self-conscious ‘in-group’ superiority generally and rightly associated with pseudo-intellectuals.”⁶⁹ Another member of the Baraka circle who had little respect for Dixon’s work was Spellman. In his review of the Four Days in December, he commented bluntly, “Dixon is a far better organizer than musician.”⁷⁰ One year earlier, he had written, “[A]s a space age trumpet player [Dixon is] in trouble. . . . You can hear everybody who’s hip in his playing. His tone is fuzzy and indefinite, varies from track to track. He does not arrive at his style by choice. He rather adapts a melodic line to his own technical limitations.”⁷¹

After graduating from Columbia University Law School, Stollman was involved in artists’ rights, music publishing, and copyright law, at one point serving as attorney and manager for Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor.⁷² Initially called upon to counsel the Guild on obtaining foundation money and perhaps incorporating as a nonprofit organization, his tenure as a legal advisor to the Guild was brief, and the accounts of Stollman and Dixon vary considerably as to how this relationship ended. In our interviews, Dixon recalled that the young lawyer advanced the group money to pay rent on the East Village loft of the vibraphonist Ollie Shearer, where the Guild produced the marathon fund-raising concert of October 30.⁷³ When Stollman demanded that he be permitted to stand at the door and collect the money as it came in, Guild members—primarily Dixon—refused, and instead returned the loan. Dixon later claimed that, after scrambling to borrow money from another source and preparing for the concert, the organization voted to expel Stollman; he was gone by the end of November. Stollman, on the other hand, told me that he had been angrily confronted at a meeting in the first weeks of the Guild’s existence that he had been invited to attend. “They were telling me off. ‘We’re not going to allow this.’ It was like a union meeting—the union steward talking to the employer. ‘We’re going to have this, we’re going to have that, you’re not going to be able to do this and do that.’ It was that kind of exchange.” This memory is consistent with the description Stollman offered in 1966: “[Dixon] regarded me as a spokesman for the so-called ‘jazz business structure’ for he spoke to me with great hostility.”⁷⁴ Members of the Guild—particularly Dixon

and Carla Bley—viewed Stollman’s record company as a danger to the group’s cohesion. Though Stollman had not yet released any recordings of the new music, he had begun to establish a reputation as someone to contend with, appearing as he did at the October Revolution and offering to record most of the artists on the festival. Indeed, he had already recorded the Paul Bley Quintet on October 20, 1964, and the New York Art Quartet soon after.⁷⁵ Stollmann later recalled that this led some Guild members to accuse him of meddling in their business: “I left their meeting, and it was pretty clear to me—Carla couldn’t have made it more plain—that I was the enemy.” For his part, Stollman was not sympathetic to the aims of the Guild. “I wasn’t about to be dictated to,” he remarked. “It was a decision between an individual artist and me. . . . And everyone has to be free to make their own decisions, I think. I wasn’t going to deal with a union, or Guild, or anything of that sort.”

The antipathy between Stollman and the Guild may have contributed to Stollman’s decision to begin booking an after-hours concert series, *Jazz in Repertory*, at Café Au-Go-Go; the series began on December 8 and featured the Guild members Taylor, Sun Ra, and the New York Art Quartet, in addition to Logan and Bud Powell, who had recently returned from France.⁷⁶ In 1966, Stollman told Ralph Berton, “The Jazz Composers Guild had ostracized Giuseppi Logan, Byron Allen . . . for refusing to join the Guild and for being willing to record for ESP. When the Guild started its concerts I was concerned, and so were Logan and Allen, lest the critics and public hear only Guild members—so I produced a few midnight concerts with them at the Go Go. . . . Sun Ra had agreed to play, too.”⁷⁷ Young, on the other hand, reported, “Though technically not ‘bar’ performances [the Café did not serve alcohol], the entire booking constituted second-rate treatment (at the hands of a third-party promoter) and was therefore frowned upon as a breach of the Guild’s principles.”⁷⁸

Stollman continued to organize events. A notice in the February 25, 1965, issue of *Down Beat* announced that he had “formed the American Society for Serious Improvised Music,” an organization that made its debut at Judson Hall on February 1. The concert featured Logan and Graves as leaders (the latter leading a percussion ensemble).⁷⁹ Stollman’s coterie of Ayler, Logan, Byron Allen, and Powell appeared again on May 1 at Town Hall in a concert presented by “producer Norman Seaman and ESP records.”⁸⁰ By November of that year, ESP-Disk had released records by Ayler, Logan, Allen, the New York Art Quartet, and Paul Bley.⁸¹ Despite claims that he “didn’t have the money and wasn’t affluent,” Stollman had resources to launch the recording venture after he requested the funds

from his mother: “She gave me \$105,000 which in those days was a fortune—now, you multiply that by ten. So in eighteen months, I produced 45 records. I wasn’t what you’d describe as an aficionado of the music; it was something I could do that was meaningful.”⁸²

In an early 1966 column in *Down Beat*, Baraka wrote somewhat sardonically of his rival, “All the ESPs I’ve heard are worth having. I hope the musicians are benefiting as much from the recordings as the producer and the consumers. (A likely story.)”⁸³ The critic and journalist Robert Levin, who was certainly in the Guild camp, likewise excoriated Stollman as “a very typical current demonstration of the exploitation of the Negro jazz musicians by the white business man.”⁸⁴

The allegiances of Jazz Composers Guild members were frequently tested in this multipolar scene, and the distrust among certain members never entirely dissipated. This situation was further influenced by the fact that while the organization was scraping together the funds to launch a record label and buy a building, most of the incoming money was spent on rent, first at the Cellar Café and then at Edith Stephen’s dance studio. In this regard, their attempt to reorient the musical field had its limits—itinerant and financially strapped jazz musicians did not usually have wealthy patrons or rent-free performance spaces such as the Judson Church, which was home to so many white experimental artists during these years. Immediately after Stollman offered to record everyone who had taken part in the October Revolution, several Guild musicians had recorded for him. Greene and Sun Ra followed in 1965, after the collective broke up.⁸⁵ On the other side, Baraka was the closest the New Thing had to a Jill Johnston or a Virgil Thomson, critics who championed the work of the Judson Dance Theater artists and Cage and his associates, respectively. Baraka’s long-standing friendship with and promotion of Shepp, and the personal animosity between him and Dixon, surely fostered the young saxophonist’s ambivalent relationship to the Guild. Rudd and Tchicai, too, pursued opportunities with Baraka during their tenure in the Guild, and once Baraka relocated to Harlem, his strident black nationalism was a better fit for the Afrocentric cosmology of Sun Ra than the interracial coalition of the Guild had been.⁸⁶

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The Jazz Composers Guild was an interracial organization, but it was hardly a model of racial harmony. To comprehend fully how various discourses of race were colliding in and around the organization, it is necessary briefly to consider the wider terrain of race in the United States

at this time, particularly in the sphere of jazz discourse, the avant-garde jazz underground of New York City, and finally the Guild itself. The two decades following World War II were a period of transition between two paradigms of understanding race in the United States.⁸⁷ The first paradigm, color blindness, was part of an antiracist response to the discourse of biological essentialism, the dominant theory of race until the 1920s. By evading questions of color and power, this strategy asserts that we are all the same under the skin, that we all have the same chances to succeed materially, and that any explicit marking of race in public discourse is both impolite and evidence of racial “prejudice.” Whereas color blindness willfully turns away from the structural inequalities of race by emphasizing the attitudes of individuals, the competing paradigm, which Ruth Frankenberg terms “race cognizance,” draws attention to racial difference and its cultural, social, and economic constitution as “a fundamentally structuring feature of U.S. society.”⁸⁸ In more historically specific terms, this constituted a transition from melting-pot assimilationism to the nationalist movements of the 1960s, but both discourses continue to frame thinking about race, and despite the increasing presence of race cognizance in the public arena, the dominant racial thinking continues to evade questions of color and power.

The heated debates over race and culture in the jazz world of the early and mid-1960s were in essence a struggle between the discourse of color blindness held by most white musicians, critics, record producers, and club owners, and the paradigm of race cognizance increasingly deployed by African American musicians, artists, and writer/critics.⁸⁹ The frank commentaries on race and power offered by such musicians as Mingus, Roach, Lincoln, Shepp, and Sonny Rollins were met with hostile accusations of “Crow Jim” (or “reverse racism,” in contemporary parlance) from the critical establishment, who had been schooled in evasion of color and power as the proper and appropriate response to discussions about race, a worldview that perceived a black nationalist organization such as the Nation of Islam to be just as racist as the white supremacist group Ku Klux Klan.⁹⁰ At the same time, there were different types of race cognizance in circulation during these years. The racial consciousness of the Black Arts writers, critics, and musicians around Baraka (Lawrence Neal, Spellman, Shepp, Graves, and others) was characterized by a polarization of positions, perhaps best summarized by the title of a panel discussion sponsored by *Liberator* magazine in 1965: “Is Pro-Black Necessarily Anti-White?”⁹¹ Though these separatist and militant impulses are often identified with Stokely Carmichael’s assertion of “Black Power!” in the summer of 1966, this strain of black

nationalism was clearly coming into form several years earlier. Dixon, on the other hand, subscribed to a race-cognizant position that differed in important ways from both the separatism of Baraka and the color blindness of white jazz musicians and critics. As the organizer and leader of the Guild, Dixon's complex perspective on race created points of both agreement and contention with the race-conscious black players and their rather apolitical white comrades.

Dixon was not sympathetic to the aims and rhetoric of Neal, Spellman, and Baraka, doubting above all the genuineness of their commitment: "My problem with the black nationalists as a group . . . was that it was a bunch of rhetoric. It was never going anywhere. . . . Two words of Swahili does not make you a knowing African." Because he believed in basic tenets of the avant-garde—the possibility of musical progress and the need for innovative individuals—Dixon objected to the cultural nationalist search for African origins. "They're going backwards," he later remarked. "They want to beat drums, they want to think that the Africans are doing this."

Dixon also questioned the radical bona fides of Baraka and his comrades in the Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School (BARTS). Referring to the fact that BARTS activities were funded with more than \$200,000 in grants from HARYOU (Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited), a city-level administrator program for federal antipoverty funds, Dixon commented, "Now here's the way I looked at it . . . : they are forming their all-black organizations, and applying to the government for funds to be rebellious. And they don't see the ambiguity there." Jerry G. Watts also points out that BARTS loses its sting as a revolutionary undertaking when one considers that the Johnson administration viewed HARYOU as a means of temporarily pacifying a population that was on the edge of exploding into open rebellion.⁹²

In 1965, Neal, a central figure in the Black Arts Movement (which he referred to as the "spiritual sister" of Black Power), articulated his view of who was—and who was not—the proper audience for black cultural production: "Recognition from dominant white society should not be the *primary* aim of the Black artist. He must decide that his art belongs primarily to his own people."⁹³ It is not difficult to interpret these words in the context of concerts given by the Jazz Composers Guild to preponderately white audiences. Neal and his colleagues were interested in framing the new black experimental music as a continuation of the African American jazz tradition, which they considered a powerful symbol of blackness. There was no room in this perspective of black music for a white audience on the Upper West Side or in the West Village. The preferable alternative



FIGURE 7. A rehearsal of the Jazz Composers Guild Ensemble, likely dating from July 1965. From left: Michael Mantler (trumpet), Roswell Rudd (trombone), Makanda Ken McIntyre (alto saxophone), Milford Graves (drums), John Tchicai (alto saxophone), and Charles Davis (baritone saxophone). Obscured by Mantler is Carla Bley (piano). Photograph by John Hoppy Hopkins, www.hoppy.be.

for advocates of black nationalism was to be found at sites such as BART'S, where “the community and the artist could meet each other in a harmonious and natural setting.”⁹⁴

White audiences were off limits for Baraka and his circle, and white musicians, too, were the targets of their critical attacks. In his review of the Four Days in December festival, Spellman reserved his strongest criticism for the Free Form Improvisation Ensemble—the festival’s only majority-white group.⁹⁵ By observing that the band played “on the conservatory level,” Spellman cast them as the kind of effete dabblers who don’t belong in an authentic jazz setting, a trope that turns on the long-standing equation of black culture with noninstitutional pedagogy and corporate-sponsored mass media (as opposed to noncommercial or academic discourses).⁹⁶ The most interesting part of Spellman’s response to the FFIE is the passage where, echoing Morgenstern’s comments on the October Revolution; he points out that “much of their music has little to do with jazz.”⁹⁷ He continues, “Why were they here? Dixon says he didn’t want the Guild to be thought an all-black organization, which seems to me

an unnecessary hang-up, especially since more than ten white musicians appeared in the series, and since two other groups were led by white musicians.”⁹⁸ In his review, Spellman seemed to be doing two things at once: first, he implied that the Guild should be an all-black organization, and, second, he stated that if it is to be interracial, then it would suffice to have Rudd, Mantler, Carla Bley, and Paul Bley (whose performance Spellman mentioned but did not review) as white representatives.

In this context, Dixon’s invitation to the white musicians of the FFIE to join the Guild, and his interest in creating and presenting “both jazz and non-jazz,” marked him as an enemy of the black nationalist imperative to close down interaction with European history and culture. That imperative was articulated by Graves, one of the musicians who followed Baraka into cultural nationalism, when he told Neal in 1965, “The Black musician must withdraw from the Western concept and economic thing.”⁹⁹ Picking up the thread from Spellman, Graves also criticized the Guild for including white members. “Graves believes that this organization should have been all *Black*,” Neal summarized, “because our musicians face greater problems than white musicians.”¹⁰⁰ As John Gennari points out, Baraka became a “master of incendiary anti-white rhetoric” after the spring of 1965, and his “blacker-than-thou posture not only put a torch to the Martin Luther King–led civil rights movement vision of an interracial beloved community, but also cordoned off black culture as a blacks-only space, a culture whites did not have the biological and mental equipment to feel and perceive.”¹⁰¹

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Black nationalism was also a discourse of gender that turned on tropes of masculinity and patriarchy; in the words of Winifred Breines, “The black male stood center stage, strong, proud, and furious, a crucial building block in the imagery of black nationalism. His rage anchored the movement.”¹⁰² In the jazz milieu, gender patterning prescribed desirable aesthetic qualities based on gendered codes of musical meaning—the qualities most admired were volume, “raw” and extreme emotion, dominating tone, and virtuosic displays of hand and breath control. Baraka vividly expressed these values in his evocative description of Albert Ayler: “He had a sound, alone, unlike anyone else’s. It tore through you, broad, jagged like something out of nature. . . . Like the thunder or the lightning or the ocean storming and mounting, crushing whatever was in its path.”¹⁰³ This discourse of masculinity provided the vocabulary in which Dixon and the Black Arts writers enacted their mutual hostility; when Baraka and Spellman criticized Dixon’s playing, it may well have been in particular because the trumpeter

avoided the tropes of dominant free jazz masculinity in his musical style. (Spellman's observation that Dixon's "lips are too soft because of lack of practice" is one representative swipe.)¹⁰⁴

Whiteness—and thus interracialism—also assumed gendered and sexualized meanings in Baraka's rhetoric of this period. As Fred Moten argues, the stabilized heteronormativity of Baraka's black nationalism was conditioned by the downtown bohemian scene that preceded his 1965 turn toward Black Arts. Ingrid Monson describes the scene: "This hip subculture, comprising black Americans interested in Western artistic nonconformity and white Americans captivated by urban African American styles of music, dress, and speech, fashioned itself as a vanguard cultural force against the 'shoddy cornucopia of popular American culture.'"¹⁰⁵ Downtown bohemianism was nothing if not transgressive, and Moten centers the discussion on homoeroticism. He writes,

[T]he limits of black arts are set by the rejection of a certain revolutionary embrace that is embedded in bohemianism. . . . There are questions here concerning decadence or deviance. The black arts are, in part, the cultural vehicle of return to a certain moral fundamentalism, one based on (the desire for) African tradition rather than white/bourgeois normativity. This is to say that they would enact a return to the former after having enacted the bohemian rejection of the latter. The embrace of the homoerotic is, here, an opening and not an aim.¹⁰⁶

Baraka and his circle of black artists and intellectuals joined white comrades in resisting bourgeois, white normativity; this resistance was linked with nonnormative sexual practices, including same-race and interracial homosexuality and interracial heterosexuality.¹⁰⁷ Baraka recast these transgressive sexualities—particularly homosexuality—as deviant when he moved uptown in 1965. (Interracial heterosexuality, on the other hand—for example, Baraka's marriage to the Jewish Hettie Cohen—produced far more ambivalence: on one hand, it expanded the black man's agency by enlarging his sexual domain; on the other hand, it betrayed a weakness for the forbidden fruit and the potential dilution of strong black bloodlines. Interracial heterosexuality for black women, then as now, was often the object of severe disapproval.)¹⁰⁸ It was *through* his break with Village bohemia that Baraka refigured the Village as a white bohemia, the site of sexually deviant transgressions of weak, effeminate white men. These discursive poles of a strong black male heterosexuality and a soft white male homosexuality animated Baraka's writing in this period. His famous 1965 essay "American Sexual Reference: Black Male" begins with the bracing but representative declaration: "Most American white men are trained to be fags."¹⁰⁹

A few years later, Baraka published the short play *Rockgroup*, which featured “4 boys in whiteface” wearing “Beetle suits” in a band called The Crackers.¹¹⁰ The action of the play is relatively straightforward: a band is introduced, takes the stage, sets up, and performs a song (“White shit white shit white shit/hocuspocus in the clouds allright”). After their brief concert, The Crackers bow to the effusive applause of the crowd, “dainty and faggish and removed from reality swaggering like toygirls.”¹¹¹ As dollars rain down from above, the band collects the money and packs up their instruments; it is revealed that their “geetahs” were plugged into the rear end of a black man who had been slumped underneath a black cloth at the back of the stage during the performance. The man wears tawdry remnants of a showbiz career: “falling down konk and raggidy [*sic*] sequined stage evening clothes.” The Crackers place this secret source of their power into a traveling case, placating him with a little money, some “white powder,” and “then one of the white boys put on a lady outfit, and kiss him on lips, then nigger, he swoon dead away in box, and white boys carry him off with them.”

With this final flourish, Baraka not only criticizes his own past inter-racialism by lumping it in with economic exploitation and drug abuse but also casts white men as “dainty toygirls” who seduce and deceive black men. It is worth pointing out that many, if not most, of the downtown bohemian “whites” whom Baraka rejected were in fact Jewish. Jeffrey Melnick has advanced a persuasive hidden history of black-Jewish male homoeroticism that is pertinent here, yet Baraka continually elided the difference between Jewishness and whiteness, indicating that for him the move uptown effected a certain simplification of racial difference.¹¹² Given the traditional feminization of the male Jewish body, Baraka’s rhetorical strategy effectively minimized the difference between “whiteness” and “effeminacy” by lumping Jewishness and whiteness together.¹¹³ The collapsing distinction between interracial romance and male homoerotic seduction in *Rockgroup* suggests that by 1969, at the height of his cultural nationalist years, Baraka viewed his earlier bohemian period as a blur of cross-racial hetero- and homoerotic sexual energy that required a forceful rejection in his reorientation toward black nationalism.

According to Moten, Cecil Taylor complicated Baraka’s break with downtown, for Taylor avoided a clear presentation of straight, queer, gay, or bisexual identity. His ambivalent sexual presentation, queering him in the eyes of others, was problematic in what Patricia Hill Collins has described as “a hegemonic discourse of *Black sexuality* that has at its core ideas about an assumed promiscuity among heterosexual African Ameri-

can men and women and the impossibility of homosexuality among Black gays and lesbians.”¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, Taylor had by the mid-1960s earned unassailable credentials as a leader of the black avant-garde, even as his problematic sexual ambivalence seemed to cut across and destabilize the moral fundamentalism of Black Arts heterosexuality.

This figuration of Taylor’s ambivalence showed up in Baraka’s 1965 review of a performance by Pharoah Sanders, Marion Brown, and the former Guild member Burton Greene: “Greene’s ‘style’ is pointed, I would presume, in the direction of Cecil Taylor and, I would also suppose, with Taylor, the Euro-American, Tudor-Cage, Stockhausen-Wolf [sic]-Cowell-Feldman interpretations.”¹¹⁵ Within that “certain moral fundamentalism” that grounds Baraka’s analysis in this passage, two liminal figures emerge to mediate musical difference along parallel axes of race and sexuality. Greene’s Jewish identity mediates the racial binarism of strong black jazz and weak white avant-gardism (though Baraka clearly places him closer to the latter), whereas Taylor’s elusive sexuality floats between heteronormative blackness and male homosexual Jewish/whiteness. (As hip to the “Euro-American” scene as anyone, Baraka was undoubtedly aware of the nonnormative sexualities of Cage, Tudor, and Cowell.) Through the doubled inscription of Greene’s style “toward the direction of Cecil Taylor,” Baraka dismisses both whiteness and homosexuality under the cover of musical style.

In a context of material deprivation, marked by nonexistent or limited employment opportunities and unequal wage structures, the discourse of “fundamentalist” black heterosexual masculinity provided a realignment of power toward those to whom it had historically been denied. (Indeed, the status of women as significant wage earners in the African American community contributed to this articulation of black male power.) Jazz was one arena where labor could be reframed as a (black) male activity. Although Dixon was suspicious of the linkages between black nationalism and avant-garde jazz, he shared Spellman’s view of the music as men’s work. In our interview, Dixon explained, “[T]here were very few people who were like Mary Lou Williams and those people, because first of all, the life was so rough, and the men—if you want to look at it, here’s a guy works in the garment center all day, taking all that crap, going through that stuff, but he’s got his horn, comes home, and goes out and plays—it was the *only* thing these guys had!” Dixon went on to clarify, “I can tell you this: it was a male-dominated music, because that’s what the men wanted to do. They wanted to play, and they had no problems playing for hours, rehearsing for hours, doing all this kind of stuff.”



FIGURE 8. Roswell Rudd, Michael Mantler, and Carla Bley rehearse ahead of a July 1965 performance by the Jazz Composers Guild Ensemble. Photograph by John Hoppy Hopkins, www.hoppy.be.

This aggressively masculine social environment characterized jazz in general and the Guild in particular, yet Roswell Rudd's positive memory of a "certain amount of good competitiveness" at the October Revolution in Jazz takes on a different meaning when considered from the perspective of a female instrumentalist or composer who might feel less willing to participate in a such a contest. In fact, Carla Bley's invitation to join the Guild was extended only after debate among the members. Dixon later recalled, "I had to really be very, very severe with the Guild. They didn't want Carla in the group, because of Sun Ra. Sun Ra was against it. My feeling was, first of all, Carla at the time wrote all of the music for Paul Bley, so she was one half of Paul, so she deserved it. He wrote no music at the time, he just played, so that was Carla's thing." Bley's presence apparently did little to alter the belligerent and famously antagonistic mood of Guild meetings, which in her memory were full of shouting and challenges to "put it on the table!" Well known as a misogynist who discouraged women from entering the Arkestra's communal living and rehearsal spaces, Sun Ra was particularly hostile to Carla Bley.¹¹⁶ When things began to sour in the Guild, he is said to have recounted the old seamen's legend according to which taking a woman on a voyage will sink the ship.¹¹⁷ Though painfully shy at the time,

Bley did not take this abuse quietly, and remembers the shouting match that ensued and her angry departure from the meeting.¹¹⁸

Apparently Bley could go toe-to-toe with other Guild members when pressed, but anecdotal evidence suggests the ways in which she was viewed differently from her male colleagues. One musician who was not a member of the collective but played in a group with Guild musicians recalled that he enjoyed frequenting Guild events because he thought Bley was attractive. Another exceedingly polite and helpful (male) member discussed all the sidetracks the group pursued during the course of an ordinary meeting. When asked about the subject of these digressions, he replied, “Oh, anything! It could have been about . . . pussy! Well, if Carla wasn’t there.” This flippant but revealing comment indicates that Bley’s gender was present at meetings even in her absence, and that there was certain “business” that could only be conducted among male members of the Guild.

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The notion of purity was a key element in the discursive repertoire of this milieu, and the theorists of the Black Arts Movement and members of the Guild deployed a rigid rhetoric of purity. Baraka and his associates constructed black nationalism on a foundation of cultural purity; any association with or involvement in what was thought to be “European,” “Western,” or white was condemned. They viewed these types of interactions not as positive instances of hybridity, dialogue, interactivity, or code switching but rather as simple examples of corruption. The Black Arts Movement derived strength and passion from this formulation of a pure African American essence, based as it was on the historical retention of African cultural elements. In his important essay on black music, “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music),” Baraka attempted to chart this mutable essence as it appeared in both rhythm and blues and avant-garde jazz, or “New Black Music,” and he paid particular attention to how the “blues impulse” in both of these musics interacted with the “whitening” influences of commercialism and formal training.

Like the Black Arts theorists, Dixon felt that his radical solution to an oppressive social and economic environment necessitated a theoretically pure position from which he could attempt his transformation of mainstream jazz institutions. He sought to move beyond the exploitation of the jazz industry by cutting off all interaction and withdrawing to a space uncontaminated by compromise. Dixon remembers that his was the most extreme position in the Guild—he was, for example, the only one who wanted to withdraw the music from the market completely. The

commitment to purity also informed his criticism of BARTS for accepting government funds to finance their undertaking; in his view, if one does not separate completely from hegemonic networks, one is colluding with them. Such rigorously pure positions reached their breaking point in the 1960s, when the clarity of past eras dissolved into the complexity of late modernity. One might question the long-term efficacy of any strategy that surrenders or ignores the potentially positive, enabling, and productive aspects of ambivalence, partial participation, multiple allegiances, and polyvalent tactics. Indeed, the “purity-fixation” of Dixon and the Black Arts writers indicates some measure of naiveté about viable tactics for transforming a complex and contradictory social sphere.

Although Dixon used purity to criticize Baraka for accepting federal assistance, he had to explain his own decision to resist the exclusion of white musicians and refuse withdrawing his music from white audiences. As he pointed out to Robert Levin in 1965, white musicians are treated better than black ones, “significantly better, but not much better—that’s why they’re in the guild.”¹¹⁹ The purity of principle with which Dixon sought to transform the jazz establishment did not mean that he would ignore white listeners. “How are you going to function in a predominantly white society and ignore the white musicians who are virtually in the same situation that you’re in . . . ? We never performed before any black audience, for god’s sake. I was desperately trying to get young blacks to come, as much as I could without kowtowing to them,” he recalled in 2006.¹²⁰

Harold Cruse’s description of the early 1960s as a moment of transition between two generations of black political activism suggests another way to interpret the conflict between Dixon’s interracialism and the Black Arts’ separatism. According to Cruse, since the 1920s white communists and liberal organizers had instilled in black leaders the urgent need for interracialism as the only viable political strategy to combat racism, poverty, and imperialism. Cruse was referring specifically to the Popular Front ideology of the national Communist Party in the 1930s and the liberal paternalism of the 1940s and 1950s, which severed any historical continuity between the young black activists of the 1960s and the pan-Africanism of Marcus Garvey in the 1920s. “Every other ethnic group in America, a ‘nation of nations,’ has accepted the fact of its separateness and used it to its own social advantage,” Cruse wrote. “But the Negro’s conditioning has steered him into that perpetual state of suspended tension wherein ninety-five per cent of his time and energy is expended on fighting prejudice in whites.”¹²¹ Younger intellectuals such as Baraka and Neal had swung far to the other side in their rejection of interracialism. Cruse observed, “Negroes had

become so deeply mired in an institutionalized form of political interracialism that they could not break with it unless sufficient hatred were mustered to avoid the necessity of apologizing to whites for excluding them.” Cruse was critical of both moments; though he argued for the assertion of ethnic separateness, he also condemned the Black Arts Movement for claiming a leadership position without first developing a social, economic, political, or cultural analysis of the plight of African Americans.¹²²

Dixon was nearly forty years old at the time of the October Revolution, whereas most of the musicians and intellectuals associated with the Black Arts Movement were in their twenties, among them Shepp (twenty-seven), Graves (twenty-three), Spellman (twenty-nine), Neal (twenty-seven), and Baraka, who turned thirty years old the week of the festival. Generational tension seems to have been in play. Already in his earlier Greenwich Village bohemian period, Baraka had exhibited mild contempt for his elders. In his essay “Cuba Libre,” in which he detailed his trip to Cuba in 1960 as part of a delegation of black writers and intellectuals, Baraka described his disappointment with the “1920’s New Negro type” and “1930’s type” writers in the group, none of whom he considered “important.”¹²³ According to Cruse, this disdain carried over into the writer’s nationalist phase: “[Baraka] once threatened to picket the NAACP, for no other reason than that it represented the old guard, of which [Baraka] was contemptuous.”¹²⁴ It seems that Dixon, however, remained committed to educating whites about the evils of racism, as exemplified by the panel discussions that Dixon moderated at the October Revolution, in which he guided his “almost exclusively white” audience through heated considerations of the structures of inequality that plagued African American musicians in New York. In recalling these panels he articulated his pedagogical aim explicitly: “In hindsight, the panels would not have been a success if . . . everyone wasn’t at least being made aware of something, thinking about it, and wanted to be a part of it. Whether anything was done after they left that room or not—that’s another point. The thing was, I am convinced that certain things were said and done . . . [that] people were stuck with as knowledge for the rest of their lives.” In the eyes of Dixon’s younger colleagues, this concern with educating whites in the evils of racism appeared old-fashioned, futile, and even spineless, especially in a context already conditioned by the association of integration with obeisance and vulnerability.

After forming the Guild, Dixon continued to raise awareness among his white colleagues about the realities of racism. He told Robert Levin in 1965 that the civil rights struggle and the racist structures of the jazz establishment “represent vast problems of which very few people have any

real awareness or even the desire to be aware.”¹²⁵ This position on interracialism and integration—though frowned upon by Cruse as an unhealthy fixation on white society—grew out of what Dixon saw as the social reality of the New Thing. In his review of Spellman’s *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (1967), Dixon pointedly observed that whites are “in effect the only audience that this music has. None of the new music is played in Negro neighborhoods, Negro colleges or universities and neither do black people purchase in any numbers of consequence any of the recordings. So when it is constantly noted that this music has a following, one has to be aware of who the following is.”¹²⁶

Who *did* constitute “the following”? Though he felt that the New Thing spoke for the black community, Baraka left his bohemian life in the Village to cultivate a following for the new jazz (and African American theatre and letters) among the black poor in Harlem. The contradiction that resulted—recycling the Black Arts to the masses who were supposed to have been represented by them in the first place—did not escape Baraka, who later commented, “Really most of the black intellectuals there, even though all of us lived in Harlem, were still not part of the whole organic, dynamics of the community. We were sort of, I think, superficial to the community even with the Black Arts.”¹²⁷ Graves, too, has recalled that neighborhood audiences in Harlem were often quite hostile to the New Thing, on one occasion bombarding his band with boos and even eggs. Asked about the audiences for events in the BARTS building, he replied, “Average folks? No way. People from the neighborhood hardly ever came in there.” The split between Baraka and the community he claimed to speak for cast the writer as a bourgeois nationalist, lecturing the black masses on how to be black and displaying an authoritarian streak that Dixon himself found repellent. “I didn’t want to be controlled and work under people who had to get their finances from a group of people that they claimed were holding them down. All I want is the freedom to be able to do whatever I think I’m able to do. I don’t want some half-ass over here editing me.”

The will to self-actualization that is evident in this comment raises an important point about what type of organization the Guild actually was. Though the aim was to elevate the status of the New Thing as a whole, the Guild was a collection of individuals, banding together because of the strength that accrues in a group. And though Dixon devoted his life to advancing the position of new black music, he undertook this project primarily with the aim of clearing space for himself as an artist to pursue his work without obstacles or editorial oversight. His was a fundamentally different philosophy of commitment and communalism from the one

employed by Baraka and his nationalist circle. For all its somewhat overblown claims to leadership of the black masses, Baraka's movement was for community, strength, and unity through the naturalization of racial difference—a strategic essentialism. Baraka's "The Changing Same" is above all an attempt to find the linkages, despite their many apparent differences, between R&B and new black music. The Guild was undoubtedly a political organization, too, but its politics were derived from the will to self-actualization, not group-actualization. The strength of the group was necessary only as the foundation and stepping-stone toward aesthetic self-making. This is the key difference between the Guild and groups associated with the Black Arts. In pursuing the freedom to develop and present his own aesthetics, Dixon's position was not far removed from that of the white bohemians in the Village from whom Baraka was escaping in the spring of 1965.¹²⁸ For these white experimentalists, "freedom" meant only the freedom to create and publicize their own work.

Dixon's project would always differ from that of European American artists, however. Though he wished to have his work received on the same terms as those applied to other serious avant-garde composers, that reception was denied to him by the racial connotations of the jazz tradition that he was associated with. This fundamental fact insured that he could never push social and political matters to the background; merely by attempting to write music and have it performed under conditions that white composers would have taken for granted brought him into confrontation with a powerful racial discourse of musical creativity. The first obstacle that Dixon had to negotiate as a composer was the automatic relegation of his work to the discursive field of jazz; there in turn it was rejected because it did not "swing" or properly extend "the tradition." Dixon's second obstacle was the "difficulty" that avant-garde music posed to all audiences. This aspect of innovative music—and, consequently, the struggle to create and maintain an audience for avant-garde work—were likewise obstacles for the white players in the New Thing, especially those in the Guild. They, too, identified with his desire to create a "non-jazz" arena for the production and distribution of their work, but they remained racially unmarked and thus free from Dixon's first obstacle. Indeed, because most of the white members in the Guild employed a racial discourse of color blindness, they overlooked the possibility of a society structured in dominance and assumed that the *only* problems facing avant-garde jazz musicians were an unsympathetic critical community, uninterested club owners, and record companies that were too timid to take a chance on the new music.

Mantler, for example, joined the organization because their work—

whether “jazz” or not—wasn’t being performed. “The music was very difficult, and was indeed ‘new,’ and at times, rather unpleasant and non-commercial. So it was obviously limited to a small audience like any avant-garde music normally is.” Mantler recalled that the Guild was initially more concerned with the practical matters of promoting itself and putting on concerts, but gradually some of the African American members began to center on issues of race and politics in their meetings. “I was interested in music. I had no interest in this being a political organization—black/white and stuff. To me, it was political in a social sense that that music could not be performed. People who were in that music could not make a living doing it. So that was the issue. And that’s what I think it started out being, then later, because certain people were more colorful . . . than others, it just got bogged down by endless discussions and screaming matches.”

Although Mantler’s opinion that the political “is never good for music” was perhaps the most extreme position, several of his white colleagues were also confused by or resistant to a focus on race. Comments of Paul Bley, Greene, Gary William Friedman, and Carla Bley on the racial turn of the Guild range from hostile to naive. Paul Bley wrote in his 1999 autobiography, in his typically acerbic tone: “What a bunch of wounded souls there were at these meetings. Talk about group therapy. It was nothing for someone to stand up at a meeting and talk for two or three hours about the pain that they felt, the struggle—inter-group, inter-race, inter-class, inter-family, inter-musical, inter-*everything*. The next night, the working nucleus of the Guild would get together and do all the work.”¹²⁹ Though Greene was the victim of a pointed critique from Baraka in *Down Beat*, where the critic implied that Greene was unable to assimilate the “black spirit-energy sound” of his African American band mates Pharoah Sanders and Marion Brown, the pianist maintained that race was unimportant to the major figures in the music:¹³⁰ “[I] still feel that was a great period,” he later remarked, “and I must say that the innovators of this music—and we all know who they are—don’t have time for this petty, penny-ante shit. They’re color-blind. They’re busy with some much bigger issues.” The comments of Friedman—who was a member of FFIE but not of the Guild—are also representative: “It never occurred to me who was black and who was white, and who was gay and who was straight, and who was a Jew. . . . It didn’t matter to me, the only thing that mattered was the music that I played.”

White musicians, interested as they were in “the music itself,” considered the frequent forays into social and political issues during Guild meetings to distract from the main issue. Rudd commented to Taylor once after

a meeting that he knew that paranoia can be a good thing at times, but that perhaps it was dominating the tone of the discussion and keeping them from dealing with business at hand. Taylor responded that they still had far to go. In Rudd's recollection, "We were in the process of something, and that stuff would have to be worked out. But he [Taylor] agreed with me, that time was getting wasted some of the time." Rudd's recollection indicates that there was a fundamental disagreement about the value of examining racial issues. Though Taylor could recognize that the meetings were not models of efficiency, he continued to believe that matters of race were essential to their conversations about self-determination and the promotion of their work.

Carla Bley has recalled that the white members simply did not understand the anger of some of the black musicians, a failure of empathy and identification that undermined their interest in building an interracial coalition.¹³¹ The white members of the organization thought that all jazz musicians were in the same situation—black and white, they were eking out a living by playing the music they loved. Greene recalled that, for him, black nationalism meant that people who used to be his friends no longer spoke to him. "One black guy at the time said to me, 'Hey man, . . . why are you playing this game, man? Why don't you take it easy, go work in your father's bank?' I said, 'What father's bank? My father struggled for years on the road selling eyeglasses—he was never a banker.'" Greene's point is well taken but also shows an inability to recognize the power of whiteness and his own position in a social hierarchy, that broader level of ethnic privilege implied by the reference to his "father's bank." Whether or not all the members of the Guild were equally poverty-stricken and bereft of work, the notion that they had identical experiences of deprivation disappointed and angered black musicians who felt that some in the group did not recognize their racial oppression. White players may have believed that through jazz they were forging interracial bonds of empathy and cooperation (and, in many ways, they were), but Dixon reminds us of the signal difference that the whites *chose* to play the music, whereas blacks had no other option.¹³²

Though Dixon resisted the polarizing stance of black nationalist writers, he was not therefore incognizant of race. Indeed, he clearly registered the impact of race on the internal dynamics of the Guild: "[E]ven in the Guild, which is comprised of some very intelligent people, there has been a subtle, but apparent, indignation on the part of the white members (and this is something I think nearly all white men have in them) that a black man . . . myself, Cecil . . . could conceive and execute an idea that would be

intelligent and beneficial to all.”¹³³ With such acute racial divisions in the Guild, it was not surprising that—according to Dixon—votes in the organization proceeded along racial lines. Mantler and Rudd have no memory of this, but Graves recalled a palpable racial tension in the meeting he visited in 1964. Referring to something he had heard in private, he commented, “I used to say to myself, ‘I wonder if the white guys are talking about the black cats like the black cats are talking about the white guys when we’re not with each other.’ . . . People didn’t understand that there was suspicion of white people at the time.”

According to Mantler, there were varying degrees of race cognizance in the Guild. Shepp and Sun Ra (the latter in his own intergalactic way) were particularly outspoken, whereas Tchicai adopted a more color-blind position. In a 1966 profile by Morgenstern (with the somewhat patronizing title “John Tchicai: A Calm Member of the Avant-Garde”), Tchicai revealed a position similar to Mantler’s: “Whether you are a black or a white artist, if you are playing the new music that people haven’t been exposed to, it’s obvious that you will meet a lot of resistance, and you can’t fall back and blame it on the black and white thing.”¹³⁴ Silva, too, was critical of nationalism, insisting that, “If I had a band I wanted it *integrated*—I support this great tradition. Free jazz was later thrown in with Black Power and I don’t agree with that.”¹³⁵

Carla Bley interpreted the prolonged discussion of race as a personal rejection, one that would eventually lead to her own growing race consciousness. She told a critic that upon returning from Europe in 1967 “I began to get an overview of myself as a white woman. . . . I realized I had European roots, so why was I trying to find African roots? I’d been like a bastard—if you’re a bastard, you don’t inherit. I decided if they don’t want me, I don’t want them.”¹³⁶ Greene has written that the criticism he received as a white musician contributed to his decision to leave New York for Paris in 1969. “This stuff was symbolic of what a lot of creative, sensitive people who just happened to be White had to put up with in the ’60s from, often Black, writers who put down anything with White origins that happened in America,” he writes.¹³⁷ Though Greene understood why the circle around Baraka wanted to make sure that the white critical establishment recognized the cultural origins of the music, he thought that their attacks on white musicians hurt the music’s prospects by identifying it too readily with political and racial controversies. Echoing Dixon’s comments on the reception of the New Thing, Greene writes that these controversies meant that “the predominantly White, middle class audiences would not support any of us, White or Black.”¹³⁸

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Other incidents undermined trust within the group. In January 1965, Paul Bley's quintet was scheduled to play a concert at the Contemporary Center during Ornette Coleman's stint at the Village Vanguard, two floors below. The nightly performances by Coleman's trio were the first public appearances by Coleman in nearly two years, making them the talk of the town. Apparently unwilling to compete for listeners and attention, Paul Bley did not show up for his engagement and instead absconded to Florida with money from the Guild treasury. Bley repaid the money when he returned, but the Guild held a vote to expel him; the vote was evenly split (and thus unsuccessful).¹³⁹ On another occasion, several members visited a foundation or government agency (accounts vary) in hopes of obtaining a large grant or a donated building; the delegation had suppressed differences of opinion for most of the meeting and were close to securing a deal, when Sun Ra chose an inopportune moment to express doubts about accepting a gift from the institution in question. His speech spooked the institutional representative, and nothing came of the meeting.¹⁴⁰ Such incidents reminded Guild members that the trust necessary to build consensus would never be achieved in this atmosphere of competing interests.

The most serious and painful breach of Guild principles involved the record contract that Shepp signed with Impulse! records in the late summer of 1964. Almost every existing published account of the Guild has erroneously reported that Shepp signed with Impulse! during the brief existence of the collective, and that this act of self-interested careerism outraged his colleagues and compromised the integrity of the organization. In fact, as the record sleeve makes clear, Shepp's *Four for Trane* was recorded in August 1964 by Bob Thiele, who as producer for Impulse! would not have engineered the session without first signing Shepp to a deal; in other words, Shepp had received his contract before the founding of the Guild.¹⁴¹ This fact is corroborated by Stollman, who recalls standing outside the Cellar Café during the October Revolution with Shepp, who cordially turned down Stollman's offer to record for ESP-Disk with the comment "I am an Impulse! artist." The bitter arguments over Shepp's contract were thus not about his surreptitious acquisition of a solo recording gig but rather with his continuing refusal to renegotiate the deal in accordance with Guild principles. In Dixon's opinion, the Impulse! contract garnered an inordinate amount of commentary, when in fact all members of the Guild had their own fruitful contacts and individual opportunities that carried over into the collective (including, for example, the negotiations of Rudd and

Paul Bley with Stollman in the first few weeks of the Guild's existence). But Shepp's reticence over his recording contract was part of a larger pattern of omitting to mention the Guild in his public statements; this became all the more conspicuous when Shepp was the subject or author of six articles in the mainstream jazz press in the year or so following the establishment of the Guild—two in *Jazz* (January and August 1965), two in *Jazz Magazine* (June and December 1965), and two in *Down Beat* (January and December 1965).¹⁴²

Many members of the Guild were outraged, however, about the contract. Greene, who described the contract as “hand to mouth tokenism,” has written, “Of course a lot of us were really hungry, but we're always being tested to see if we're really serious and dedicated, if we can tighten our belts, or hold out for our basic principles.”¹⁴³ In 1966, Taylor told *Jazz Magazine*, “If certain members had shown themselves to be stronger and more faithful to their promises, if there had been agreement between their actions and their values, the Guild would still exist.”¹⁴⁴ Silva, too, was unforgiving: “Archie was bound by the bylaws of the company, and he broke the law. . . . It led to the downfall of the structure we had imposed upon ourselves.”¹⁴⁵

Sun Ra, however, lumped Shepp's indiscretion in with those of all the other members of the Guild: “[E]verybody was vowing they weren't going to get put under the big companies—when everybody did but me. . . . But then, it's possible they were only trying to survive and that's the only way they saw to play the game.”¹⁴⁶ Survival seems to have been the motivating factor for Shepp, who said in 1994, “I wasn't into music simply to continue to be poor. I had a family. . . . I was moved by a different set of references.”¹⁴⁷ Carla Bley bluntly contradicted the protestations of other members of the Guild by noting, “We all would have taken that contract if it had been offered to us.” Tchicai also deflected blame from Shepp, saying, “I think there was envy among some in the group as well as a dissatisfaction with those who got recording contracts and then started pulling away from the Guild's original founding ideals.”¹⁴⁸

The divergent responses to Shepp's Impulse! deal indicate a basic misunderstanding about the goals of the Jazz Composers Guild that seems to have been in place from the group's inception. Dixon pointed out that he was attempting fundamentally to transform an economic structure that had grown up with the jazz tradition but restrictively channeled the creativity of black artists into a set of exploitative relationships. His long-term goals—prestige, respect, and the freedom to pursue musical projects without the oppressive label “jazz”—could only be reached by first seizing

control of the means of production and distribution. Dixon was not simply withdrawing his music from the market but also cultivating his own audience outside the preexisting channels afforded by a racial discourse that continued to frame jazz musicians as socially deviant, irresponsible, or purveyors of mere entertainment. The French cultural theorist Jacques Attali has referred to this process as the creation of a “parallel industry to produce and promote new music,” but Dixon was also concerned with reorienting the flawed but powerful network of jazz production toward new, more equitable arrangements.¹⁴⁹ He believed that creating a counter-public was one way to effect this reorientation.

However, most of the other musicians in the Guild thought of the organization as an effective marketing tool or collective promotional agreement. In this view, withdrawing the music from the market would simply increase demand and drive up the price, and that would in turn lead to better opportunities for all the affiliated artists. As Dixon has pointed out, “Their thinking was, apparently, get as much mileage out of this Guild, get better gigs, and such and such. . . . So you had—from the very beginning—a cleavage there.” In our interview, Greene characterized the group as a “clearinghouse for gigs,” and Paul Bley wrote, “As it turned out, the best thing about the Guild was that it promoted all its members.”¹⁵⁰ Indeed, many of the associated musicians recorded albums for a variety of labels in the years that followed. About a year after the group’s demise, Taylor signed a contract with Blue Note and prepared to take the Unit to Europe to promote his album *¡Conquistador!* Dixon performed on the record, but he refused to join the tour because Taylor was breaking in the group at Slug’s Saloon, an East Village bar that had recently become a center of the new music. “I reminded him, ‘We decided that we weren’t going to be working in these clubs, man!’”

Not everyone was as discriminating in their choice of opportunities: Paul and Carla Bley, Mantler, Shepp, and Taylor all agreed to perform in early July at the 1965 Newport Jazz Festival, which was perhaps the biggest “establishment” gig in the business.¹⁵¹ Details of how this engagement came about remain unknown, but the producer of the Newport festival, George Wein, probably contacted the musicians in April or May, when the Guild was already close to dissolving. In his comments at a *Jazz* panel discussion on “Jazz and Revolutionary Black Nationalism,” Wein referred to a “somebody” (or “this fellow”) who had approached him about presenting the Guild at his festival, but he specified that the only musician he called personally was Cecil Taylor.¹⁵² Dixon was furious that the concert was billed as the Jazz Composers Guild, and he told Wein that he could not

use the name. Wein replied that he had no idea that the organization had dissolved, which led Dixon to conclude that whoever initially spoke to the promoter had misrepresented their situation.¹⁵³ Following on the dissension over Shepp's contract with Impulse! the Newport engagement signaled the end of the Guild—in Mantler's words, "That, in the end, killed it."¹⁵⁴ By the time of the final concert at the Contemporary Center on April 18, the group was already disintegrating.

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In his groundbreaking study of the interactions between popular music and the avant-garde, Bernard Gendron argues for making a key distinction between the nature of high/low engagements in modernism prior to the 1940s and the postmodernism of later decades. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, high/low interactions were defined not only through aesthetic and critical discourse but also along institutional lines (as exemplified by the artistic cabaret and *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*) "and in the slumming and secondary aesthetic practices of artist-bohemians."¹⁵⁵ In the postmodern period that emerged with the bebop movement, the central tool through which jazz appropriated the techniques and rhetoric of modernism was the critical discourse of magazines, books, and radio shows. Gendron notes, "Discourse's crucial role in the postmodern turn is further amplified by the fact that none of the other traditional options of contact between high and low were easily available to popular musics in their initial excursions across the divide."¹⁵⁶ Discourse was indeed the only avenue available to jazz in its transformation from entertainment to "art," for it did not enjoy an extended web of patronage, institutional support, formalized educational system, or access to venues that were coded as non-commercial and serious. Furthermore, as a practice of aesthetic boundary crossing, slumming only works in one direction; as Gendron points out, "[W]hat could it have meant for bebop musicians to generate secondary aesthetic practices by 'slumming' in high-cultural haunts?"¹⁵⁷

But it was precisely because of their subordinate social position that jazz musicians were forced to limit their incursions into high culture to the level of discourse, and this is where I hope to add to Gendron's many insights. Although jazz struggled to make discursive connections to prestigious cultural networks, the musicians of the bebop revolution (and those who followed them) lived and acted in a world where discourse was bound to material realities. My examination of the Jazz Composers Guild is a case study of what happened when the post-Ornette generation of New Thing composers, armed as they were with a modernist aesthetic discourse, came

face to face with the economic reality of exploitative jazz clubs and record companies.

This example demonstrates that networks mobilize connections of different kinds and different strengths. At the level of aesthetics and personal relationships, the jazz underground overlapped significantly with Cagean experimentalism, yet durative and institutionalized patterns of race, commerce, and education severely restricted the ability of musicians to solidify and build on these overlaps in a lasting way. The Guild did achieve material gains—in the creation of alternative performance settings at the Cellar Café and the Contemporary Center, in the occasional concerts at larger halls in midtown, in the small amount of press attention that Guild members began to attract, and in the single-artist recordings that would eventually be issued—but these partial gains were only a fraction of what Dixon had originally envisioned. Perhaps the most important repercussion of the Guild was the entrance some years later of several New Thing musicians into institutions of higher learning; Dixon, Shepp, Graves, Roach, Taylor, Brown, and others all entered academia as professors or graduate students in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The Jazz Composers Guild's brief history was marked by breaks and conflicts of all kinds. This chapter has lingered on those having to do with cultural politics, gender, and sexuality, but the salience of race in each of these discourses is noteworthy. Compared to the ignorance displayed by Henry Flynt's interlocutors in matters of race and power during this period (and after), the example of the Guild provides a stark contrast. Color was not an avoidable issue for the black avant-garde, and the color line marked a sharp edge for experimentalism. Although aesthetic and personal sympathies created connections across this edge, observing the network of the jazz avant-garde shows a social topography quite distinct from that of the European American avant-garde, and investigating the area beyond this edge reveals an experimentalism otherwise. The questions that arise—those of politics, commerce, institutions, audiences, and community—indicate that thinking about experimentalism otherwise requires not only new critical approaches but an awareness of the areas beyond the limits of accepted experimental music history.