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On a Reception of Jazz in France

Laurent Cugny

In 2010 I wrote a paper titled “About a Culturalist Drift in Jazz Studies” following a talk given at Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR) in Curitiba, Brazil. A North American Journal first rejected the article but it was then published in France in *Les Cahiers du Jazz*¹. As the title clearly indicates, the paper focused on describing the misconceptions that, in my opinion, the cultural approach dominating anglophone jazz musicology at that time had let to.

Besides, since *Making Jazz French* by Jeffrey H. Jackson was published in 2003², several books have appeared about Jazz in France, as a manifestation of a more general movement and growing interest in jazz practices outside and beyond its country of origin. As I have worked on this subject myself I would like to show how the flaws that I pointed to in 2010 can still be observed, about the reception of Jazz in France for example, with the aim of drawing guidelines for jazz musicology in the future.

This paper discusses the intentions behind discourses about jazz and the place of the actual sound and musical object in them. The first part of the article will show how a meta-musical object (discourses on jazz by interwar francophone specialists) can be turned into a means to an end by marginalizing the musical features present in these discourses. The second part will focus on the film *Paris Blues* as a case study for the discussions of these matters and, more generally, reviewing the conditions for a common type of approach.

André, Robert, Hugues and the others

The way that Jeremy F. Lane treated the start of jazz critique in France in the interwar period in his book *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism - Music, “Race” and Intellectuals in France- 1918-1945*³ gives an opportunity to think about what may appear as the instrumentalization of the musical (and para-musical) object to serve purposes outside of music.

To write about jazz was hence frequently also to reflect upon one or all of the defining characteristics of machine-age imperialism. The circumstances of its importation into France meant jazz became closely associated with the terrible destructive force of mechanized total war and with questions as to the significance for an older European civilization of such horrific destruction. Its disconcerting rhythms, which seemed to echo the rhythms of the machine age, sparked reflections on the nature of the relationship between old Europe and a newly ascendant, machine-age America. Under such circumstances, to elaborate an aesthetics of jazz was often to do more than simply seek to identify and codify the characteristics of a new musical form. The accounts of Duhamel, Le Corbusier, Vuillermoz, and Leiris all suggest that adapting oneself to the era of machine-age imperialism involved not simply coming to terms with its shocks and dislocations at the level of the rational understanding but also accommodating one’s body, sensibilities, and affects to its strange new rhythms and cadences.

¹ Laurent Cugny, « À propos d’une dérive culturaliste dans les études jazzistiques », *Les Cahiers du jazz*, nouvelle série, n° 7, 2010, p. 93-117.

² Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French – Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2003.

³ Jeremy Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism – Music, “Race”, and Intellectuals in France, 1918-1945*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2013.

Another way of putting this would be to say that adapting to the machine age or responding to the “heterogeneity of cultural forms” brought to Europe through imperial expansion were properly aesthetic processes relating to the realm of perception, of embodied sensibility, and affect. The “volupté” both Le Corbusier and Vuillermoz attributed to the jazz rhythms of the machine age was surely an expression of the almost erotic pleasure, the libidinal investment this process of affective or aesthetic adaptation could elicit. The ambivalent mix of fear and fascination underpinning Dubamel’s apparent revulsion in the face of those rhythms suggested that even he was not entirely insensitive to such affective pleasures and libidinal investments. Once the properly aesthetic nature of adapting to the disruptive transformations of machine-age imperialism is acknowledged, it becomes easier to understand how a musical or aesthetic form such as jazz could come to serve as a powerful figure, a synecdoche, for those disruptions. (p. 16-17)

In this quote Jeremy Lane distinguishes between two levels: a “historic and cultural” level and another that he calls “aesthetic” and which actually deals with the type of reception, referring to its sensual side, to the type of (possibly libidinal) sensations that people experienced when listening to jazz that had just arrived. Michel Leiris indeed spoke in these terms, which are very different from those of musicologists. Louis Aragon or Pierre Mac Orlan could also have been mentioned alongside Leiris as conveying a similar kind of discourse, one that highlights sensuality whilst putting aside cultural as well as properly musical stakes.⁴ But what does the end of the second paragraph mean? “Once the properly aesthetic nature of adapting to the disruptive transformations of machine-age imperialism is acknowledged, it becomes easier to understand how a musical or aesthetic form such as jazz could come to serve as a powerful figure, a synecdoche, for those disruptions”.

It is worth noting that the aesthetic discussion of the music is seen as a momentary prelude leading to the main purpose. In any case, only the reception of jazz is being considered. The other side of music, that of its production with its own compositional and national implications (ardently debated at the time) amongst others, is absent. The author quickly sweeps over the concern consisting of “simply seeking to identify and codify the characteristics of a new musical form”. It does not seem to be worth taking time over it (it must be so simple to do). This lack of interest for the production of the music also lies in the comparison made between the first three francophone commentators on jazz: André Schaeffner, Robert Goffin and Hughes Panassié through their books, respectively *Le Jazz* (1926⁵), *Aux Frontières du jazz* (1932⁶) and *Le Jazz hot* (1934⁷).

André Schaeffner is the first to get accused of primitivism through an evolutionist lens:

*Schaeffner’s evolutionary account of the genesis of jazz thus rested on some profoundly demeaning, primitivist assumptions about black African peoples and cultural forms. Indeed, his theory of the evolutionary “detours” undergone by jazz, as its apparent evolution was revealed ultimately to lead inexorably back to the realm of primitive African nature, seemed to represent merely a more intellectualized form of the assumptions behind Paul Morand’s best-selling collection of short stories, *Magie noire* (1928). [...] Schaeffner’s analysis of jazz was thus profoundly ambiguous. As we have seen, on the one hand, his contention that the machine age, understood as the end product of Western rationalism, had provoked a return to a more primitive state seemed to undermine and invert conventional hierarchies between the West and Africa. On the other hand, his emphasis on the irredeemably primitive nature of jazz music and musicians appeared to reinforce those very racial hierarchies. (p. 50-51)*

Then comes Robert Goffin's turn:

⁴ Cf. Laurent Cugny, *Une histoire du jazz en France – Tome 1: du début du XIX^e siècle à 1929*, Paris, Outre Mesure, 2014, p. 404-520.

⁵ André, Schaeffner, *Le jazz*, Paris, Claude Aveline, 1926.

⁶ Robert Goffin, *Aux frontières du jazz*, Paris, Sagittaire, 1932.

⁷ Hugues, Panassié, *Le jazz hot*, Paris, Corrêa, 1934.

[...] Although it was fundamentally a matter of aesthetic categorization, the distinction between hot and straight jazz also had a political significance. For it was this distinction that allowed Goffin to articulate jazz to the broad surrealist anticolonial project, by suggesting that where straight jazz might indeed merit the accusations of degraded exoticism leveled at it by the French surrealists, hot jazz was an authentic expression of African-American identity and antiracist struggle. However, as we have seen, for all his attempts to champion jazz as the expression of a progressive, antiracist impulse, Goffin's own analyses of the music were not themselves devoid of exoticism and primitivism. Goffin's efforts to distinguish between hot and straight jazz, to identify an authentic core distinct from the music's commodified derivatives, thus epitomized the ambivalence of his approach to jazz. For, ironically, the very terms in which he sought to define hot jazz's authenticity rehearsed and reinforced the kinds of primitivism he was ostensibly seeking to banish. (p. 59-60)

Poor Robert Goffin! Whilst believing that he was fighting conservatism his poorly thought out argument only reinforced it. It also led him to believe that he was dealing with aesthetics and talking about music whilst he was actually expressing the opposite political views to his own.

As for Hugues Panassié, J. Lane argues that "The kind of essentialism and primitivism that characterized his later jazz criticism, alongside Panassié's questionable political affiliations, thus provide two reasons for questioning those accounts that claim his *Le Jazz hot* to be exemplary in its eschewal of racial stereotypes or ethnocentric assumptions" (p. 92). So it would seem that authors like Ludovic Tournès missed the fact that essentialism and primitivism are already present in *Le Jazz hot*.⁸

One could be led to think that the three authors are subjected to the same accusations of primitivism and ethnocentrism but, in reality, Schaeffner and Goffin get placed in opposition to Panassié:

[...] Both Schaeffner and Goffin championed jazz as an expression of the salutary shocks of machine-age modernity, drawing analogies between the primitive rhythms of jazz and the reduction of modern subjects to a primitive state when subjected to the repetitive rhythms of the mechanized factory or when dancing to the rhythms of jazz in the nightclubs of Brussels and Paris. [...] Jazz, for Panassié, was an antidote to modernity and, as such, could be attributed a significant role in his political project of rebuilding an organic French society, polity, and economy modeled on the medieval corporations. (p. 124)

It seems to me that omitting to look at the musical side of things led J. Lane to a fundamental misunderstanding. Ideologically speaking, Schaeffner and Goffin are progressive (Lane calls Schaeffner a "radical ethnomusicologist" [p. 30] and Goffin is affiliated to the Surrealists) whilst Panassié is a conservative (even possibly of extreme-right allegiance)⁹. Their respective discourses on music get thus grouped based on this ideological matrix, which is the founding principle of the author's thought: the musical discourse is allegedly shaped by ideology and thus reduced to a superstructure that is negligible in itself.

This suspicious hermeneutic approach cannot see - because its programme does not allow it - that in this instance a debate of musical epistemology is taking place beyond the epistemic context of a colonial age (where primitivism, exoticism and evolutionism are strong paradigms belonging to a common base of thought and representations) and beyond the ideologies that the authors have associated themselves with.

With his progressive and antiracist views, André Schaeffner tried to increase the standing of Africa and black people in general. Nevertheless, his thinking was still indebted to the culture that he was coming from and based on the operating modes of Western art music, which jazz

⁸ Ludovic Tournès: *New Orleans sur Seine – Histoire du jazz en France*, Paris, Fayard, 1999.

⁹ This connection would need to be discussed in other circumstances (cf. Laurent Cugny, *Hugues Panassié – Le Jazz hot et la réception de l'œuvre panassienne*, Paris, Outre Mesure, 2017).

directly challenged. So the problem does not lie so much in the fact that his antiracist fight was coloured with primitivism, ethnocentrism or any other flawed colonial idea. The problem actually lies in the fact that, though he understood the importance of jazz, he could not see nor hear nor understand the musical transformation that was at work in that music and the new paradigm that it brought: a different way of producing music - which was not limited to matters of improvisation or composition - and a new way of producing forms which, to some extent, directly challenged the distinction made between improvisation and music writing.

Conversely, Robert Goffin and Hugues Panassié realized the importance of these transformations simultaneously. It was an intuition for them at first, which grew into a strong and nearly messianic belief. They may not have always expressed it very well, sometimes confused composition and improvisation and spoke of “spontaneity” where musicology would perhaps use other terms nowadays but this is not really relevant.¹⁰ It seems paradoxical for, as an ethnomusicologist and connoisseur of non-European musics, Schaeffner seemed better equipped to grasp such a phenomenon, but he did not, whilst a Belgian lawyer and a teenager without much culture saw this. Neither were musicologists or in fact musicians and perhaps the lack of musical knowledge was a necessary condition to be able to think outside of the box and start with a blank slate.

This phenomenon is very hard to explain but it is possible to imagine that musical habits may have played a part. In a very simple and straightforward way Goffin and Panassié felt something when listening to jazz. It was a musical shock at the level of reception and sensation (and which Schaeffner could have experienced just as well). They both were struck and mesmerized when listening to this music. The reasons for feeling that way were entirely musical and could not be put down to ideology and any other cause. When he was 16, polio put a sudden end to Panassié's practice of sport and dance which he loved so much. He remained handicapped throughout his life and the image people associated with him was that of a man walking with a stick. This is how he got to listen to jazz on vinyl discs and developed a burning passion for it for the rest of his life. It had nothing to do with an intellectual or musicological interest for the appearance of a new form of music practice, and even less to do with the aesthetic expression of a political or social vision of the world. It was an emotional shock. In the brilliant pages that open *Aux Frontières du Jazz*, Goffin claimed the same sensual experience in the lyric style that characterized him: “I deny many ignorants the right to speak of things that they only know as an experience¹¹. They have only seen jazz as a musical manifestation that they have tried to layer on the African past. They have failed to feel what was there to be felt. Only their reason spoke because they had left their hearts entangled in pre-war music” (Robert Goffin, *Aux frontières du jazz*, p. 12, where he clearly targeted Schaeffner and *Le Jazz*, precisely on the point discussed here). Only later did these authors attempt to theorize, each with their knowledge, culture, intellectual abilities, personal frameworks of thought, ideologies and within the *épistémè* of their time (how could they do any differently?).

Incidentally, Jeremy Lane notes that musical quotes and references to musicians are scarce in Schaeffner's book, whilst it is quite the opposite with Goffin and Panassié. It is well known that Schaeffner did not attend Parisian jazz venues. He was not interested. This new kind of music was solely a speculative object for him (the purely intellectual “experience” that Goffin opposed to his own); it is one of several pieces in an intellectual and political construction which

¹⁰ I do not think that questioning the concept of “spontaneity” is over, though. On the subject it is worth referring to some very recent research concerning free improvisation by Clément Canonne (*L'improvisation collective libre: de l'exigence de coordination à la recherche de points focaux. Cadre théorique, analyses, expérimentations*, PhD thesis [supervised by Béatrice Ramaut-Chevassus and Sacha Bourgeois-Gironde], Université Jean-Monnet, Saint-Étienne, 2010), by Mathias Rousselot (*Étude sur l'improvisation musicale*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2012), and Mathieu Saladin (*Esthétique de l'improvisation libre – Expérimentation musicale et politique*, Paris, Les Presses du Réel, 2014).

¹¹ One could be misled by R. Goffin's use of the word “experience”. He actually regrets that the “experience” was merely intellectual rather than sensory.

has its own stakes and agenda. The real difference between Goffin and Panassié was at the level of personality: the latter was truly affected by paranoia - a pathology that enhances the notions of aura and magnetism of the self - and his authoritarianism as well as hate of contradiction started to show very early on, whereas the former was an aesthete more interested in law and poetry than musicological dogma.

Schaeffner's intellectual and political rather than musical motives have been mentioned. However, another level of a meta-musical order differentiates between Schaeffner's approach on the one side, and Goffin's and Panassié's on the other. This meta-musical level lies in the context of the musicological debate taking place in France at the time (and which Lane totally ignores). Musicians as well as musicologists in the sphere of art music were then debating very forcefully whether or not jazz was going to be able to refertilize / renew their own art form. Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Ravel, Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc and Pierre-Octave Ferroud, a whole string of avant-garde Parisian composers of the time, had heated debates on the subject during the first half of the 1920s. Most of the discussions took place in *La Revue musicale* founded by Henry Prunières and André Cœuroy with the intention of reflecting the debates of this avant-garde on a critical and musicological level. Authors like André Schaeffner, André Cœuroy, Emile Vuillermoz, Arthur Hoérée, Marion Bauer, Jean Wiéner, Irwing Schwerké and Albert Jeanneret debated on the issue in *La Revue musicale* as well as a few other publications and their discussions sometimes paralleled those developed by composers.¹² This debate was not as vivid in the second half of the 1920s and it eventually dried out nearly completely in the 1930s, when jazz properly took off in France with the emergence of a world of its own: The Hot-Club of France was founded, the number of concerts grew, the *Jazz Hot* journal and the label *Swing* were created, Charles Delaunay's discography was published, etc. This debate had fundamentally to do with art music. The essence of jazz may have appeared like the central issue but it was actually only used to channel the real issue: where was art music going? The discussions between Schaeffner et Hoérée¹³ provide a good example of how a misunderstanding of the object could lead to a surreal dialogue where nobody was listening to each other at a time when music was on the fast track of self-transformation and other authors intuitively grasped that a new musical paradigm was emerging.

It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the people who took part in this debate did not feel the need to listen to this music - jazz as it could be heard in Paris and on recordings that were rapidly becoming more accessible - that they thought about it within the framework of categories set by art music and musicology (and in which the concept of national music plays an important role)¹⁴ and that, ultimately, they missed the real stakes: the fact that jazz was challenging some elements on which written music had been based. Schaeffner was one of the main protagonists of this debate whilst Goffin and Panassié ignored it completely, which was logical.

In the end, everyone is found guilty of primitivism for Jeremy Lane (and some worsen their case with added ethnocentrism or personal desires): André Schaeffner, Robert Goffin, Hugues Panassié, Paul Morand, Michel Leiris, Léopold Sedar Senghor (only the Nardal sisters are not

¹² Cf. Laurent Cugny & Martin Guérpin (ed.), *Une anthologie de textes en français sur le jazz, 1918-1929* (Paris, Outre Mesure, to be published in 2018), and Laurent Cugny, *Une histoire du jazz en France – Tome 1: du début du XIX^e siècle à 1929*, Paris, Outre Mesure, 2014.

¹³ Arthur Hoérée, *La Revue Musicale*, No. 12, 8th Year, October 1927, p. 213-241; André Schaeffner, "Réflexions sur la musique: le jazz", *La Revue musicale*, No. 1, November 1927, p. 72-76.

¹⁴ See for example what Maurice Ravel said on the subject during his trip to the USA in 1928: "Take Jazz Seriously!", *Musical Digest*, No. 13, Vol. 3, March 1928, p. 49-51, in *Lettres, écrits, entretiens*, Paris, Flammarion, 1989, p. 3, and "La musique contemporaine", Conference at the Rice Institute (Houston), April 7, 1928, in id., p. 55)

fired at in this omnidirectional condemnation). As Lane notes, in the 1980s Michel Leiris actually accused himself of “reversed racism” retroactively. This confession from the last man that could be suspected of racism precisely shows that this primitivism was a feature of that era. It was part of the common representations in French society and, with the notable exception of the Nardal sisters, even the most enlightened intellectuals struggled to escape it. Rather than adding to this general condemnation it seems more interesting to point out the deviations from this common framework of thought and to look for the signs of subversion of the stereotypes in these discourses which contributed to making those very stereotypes obsolete in later years. In order to do so a different, more open critical approach would be needed that would be less inclined to moral judgment. One of Jeremy Lane's sentences resonates strangely on this subject: “the construction of non-European cultures as exotic, primitive, elemental, and hence authentic resulting from a process of ethnocentric projection that revealed more about these European thinkers’ damaged sense of self than it did about the realities of the cultures concerned” (p. 52). Is there not another “damaged sense of self” to be seen in this obsessive search for faults¹⁵?

Paris Blues

Finally, some comments made recently about Martin Ritt's film of 1961 offer the opportunity for a more general investigation of the questions discussed above, of the compared treatment of various levels of the musical content and the discourse on music (meta-musical). This time we are dealing with a cinematographic work. Music constitutes one of its objects and the film generates a discourse on it.

Paris Blues is a film by Martin Ritt that was filmed in Paris and released in 1961. Duke Ellington was commissioned to produce the musical score. It shows jazz musicians and jazz itself in the French capital. It was rather badly received by critics at the time but is widely rehabilitated nowadays and it has been commented upon heavily over the years, especially recently in specialist jazz literature. I would like to discuss some of these commentaries at length, for they reveal significant attitudes.

Two jazz musicians from the United States: a white man, Ram Bowen (Paul Newman) and an Afro-American man, Eddie Cook (Sidney Poitier) live in Paris where they play together every night in a club owned by a singer, Marie Séoul (Barbara Laage). The famous Afro-American jazz player Wild Man Moore (Louis Armstrong) arrives on a train that is also bringing two tourists from the United States who are coming to Paris for a short break: a white woman, Lilian Corning (Joanne Woodward) and an Afro-American woman, Connie Lampson (Diahann Carroll). Two relationships then develop, between Ram and Lilian on the one hand, and Eddie and Connie on the other hand. This double sentimental plot serves as a backdrop for thoughts on music, exile, racial issues and many others (drugs for example).

¹⁵ Again with this quote: “However, Goffin’s descriptions of these brazen and sexually confident young women were marked by an unmistakable ambivalence. His characterization of jazz clubs as sites of “perdition” and of these women as “femmes fatales,” like his laments at the fate of their exclusively male victims, betrayed not merely an excited fascination but also a barely disavowed fear in the face of these developments”. (J. Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age...*, p. 53). Is it not that the same mirroring effect reveals a symmetrical fear of (and fascination for?) questions of desire, sexual urges and disorders in the discourses of these authors, which leads to associate moralism and puritanism? In order to conjure up these fears, accusations of racism remain the best weapon: “Goffin’s fixation on the physical and supposedly animalistic characteristics of these young women bore witness to the voyeuristic, objectifying, even racist nature of the gaze he was casting on this imagined scene of demonic revelry” (id., p. 57). The reduction of a thought to a personal fantasy is then only one step away: “At such moments, any broader political significance Goffin attributed to the music risked being subsumed under and subordinated to the role he wanted jazz to play in his purely personal quest for sexual liberation and extreme experiences” (ibid.). Following that, the case can be closed in all good conscience that justice has been made.

I will discuss the commentaries of the film that Rashida Braggs and Andy Fry have made in their respective books: *Jazz Diasporas - Race, Music and Migration in Post-World War II Paris*¹⁶ and *Paris Blues – African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920-1960*¹⁷, the title of which refers to the film in point specifically. It seems to me that these two authors do not pay enough attention to the musical scenes which offer a real discourse on jazz and music in general. Amongst those scenes a dialogue occurs between Ram Bowen and the (fictional) Art musician Raymond Bernard (André Luguet) near the end of the film, though it was alluded to in a scene at the beginning. The positioning of these two scenes acting as a frame clearly indicates that this dialogue is the key to understand the musical questioning that is taking place and which is not a contextual or decorative element of the film but one of strategic importance.

In order to grasp this it is necessary to start by listing the scenes where music is central, the very scenes to which the authors mentioned pay little attention:

Sequence #1: In the club

The musical backdrop to the credits is played by a group led by Ram Bowen performing “Take the A Train” in a club packed with enthusiastic listeners¹⁸. It is followed by the first sequence showing Marie Séoul, the manager of the Club 33, coming back to the club in the early hours of the day with her shopping. Ram and Eddie are still there after their sets, working on music by Ram this time. The latter plays a tune whilst Eddie listens to it with great attention and a pencil in his mouth. Once he is finished Ram looks at Eddie with a questioning look. Then, after a silence, Eddie leans over the lid of the piano and starts writing on the score that is there whilst Ram is looking at him:

Ram: What do you think?

Eddie: You know how I’m gonna score this part? For an oboe. Play it against your horn.

R: Well, how about it?

E: I’ll lighten up the melody and give it a nice effect.

R: Eddie, now, what do you think?

E: It’s good, man.

R: Just good, huh?

E: That’s better than bad.

R: But you don’t think it’s good enough to show?

E: I didn’t say that.

R: Well, you said the melody was heavy.

E: I didn’t say that either.

R: Eddie, I heard what you said. You said you had to score it for an oboe because the melody was too heavy.

E: Man, we been at this too long. We both need some shuteye.

R: If you don’t like it, why don’t you say so?

E: I said I liked it.

R: Yeah, I heard the way you said it.

E: What do you want me to say? It’s great? All right, you’re Gershwin, you’re Ravel and Debussy.

R: What’s wrong with that?

¹⁶ Rashida Braggs, *Jazz Diasporas – Race, Music, and Migration in Post-World War II Paris*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2016.

¹⁷ Andy Fry, *Paris Blues – African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920-1960*, Chicago & London, Chicago University Press, 2014.

¹⁸ The pan shot of the crowd (showing mixed race, heterosexual as well as homosexual couples) makes the characterization of the mores in the French capital very explicit.

E: Look, you're Ram Bowen. You write a piece of music, I listen to it, and that's what it says. Ram Bowen, all by itself. Now, what more than that do you want? Besides, what's my opinion, man? A court of law?

R: I don't want an oboe playing that melody. What do you think of that, man?

E: I think you're tired, you've been up all night.

R: I'm not giving that melody to an oboe.

E: So give it to a tuba.

R: Because it's so heavy.

The discussion is getting heated. Eddie gets angry and throws the score. After a pause we can sense that they are ready for reconciliation.

E: I like the music, man. I like it fine.

There is a lot of information here. Firstly, the place (centre stage) given to music writing. The pencil and score are present in the foreground. Secondly, two sets of oppositions are presented: composition *vs* improvisation and art music *vs* jazz. In comparison with the stereotypes the roles are reversed here: the Afro-American musician has the compositional knowledge and is in charge of the orchestration (as well as possibly the development) of a melody of Ram's invention. The first thing that Eddie says is that he is going to give the tune of the oboe, which is fundamentally an instrument belonging to the realm of art music and is very rarely used in jazz. He then says that it is going to play "against your horn", the trombone, an iconic instrument in jazz. Another opposition then appears, which has a structural function in the musical discourse of the film: heavy *vs* light. Eddie is going to "lighten" the melody, from which Ram infers that he finds it "heavy".

During the whole scene Eddie keeps things in perspective: good is better than bad (even if it is not as good as one would wish); to be Ram Bowen is not being Gershwin, Ravel or Debussy but it is already good and, above all, it is different. On the contrary, Ram's lens is absolute. For him there is only music, not different sorts of music. Quality is the only criterium that he recognizes. Good *vs* bad is the only binary opposition that makes sense to him. It is clear that a raw and non specified need for recognition lies behind it. From then on, Eddie tries to reassure him ("It's good, man; I like the music, man, I like it fine").

Sequence #2: Saint-Lazare Station

Ram Bowen is coming to meet Wild Man Moore at the station. A conversation develops on the coach:

Wild Man: Ram! Ram Bowen!

Ram: How are you?

WM: Knew you'd come and meet the Wild Man.

R: How are you there, Wild Man?

WM: Let me look at you. You're looking great boy, real great. Younger than me. This town agrees with you. What is it? The chicks or the wine?

R: Oh, it's both man.

WM: I hear you've taken the town right over. They tell me I got to blow real loud to put you down.

R: Oh yeah, sure.

WM: People's talkin about your playing, Ram. Nice, real nice. Be up there one night and blow you out of the joint.

R: Oh yeah, sure. Hey, I got a favor to ask you, Wild Man.

He shows a score to him.

WM: What's this? You writing music? It ain't relaxing to write it, man, only to play it.
[He looks at the score] Let's see what we got here.

He then disappears from the screen as he sits down and the sequence ends.

Wild Man Moore is both a colleague and a reference¹⁹. Both men belong to the same world of jazz musicians but Ram Bowen pays tribute to a master, even if Wild Man plays down his superiority ("They tell me I got to blow real loud to put you down").

However, the key sentence is clearly: "What's this? You writing music? It ain't relaxing to write it, man, only to play it". Wild Man reminds us that music writing and playing are two separate things and, we, jazz musicians are not on the side of writing. However, he accepts to look at a score straightaway and give his opinion on it. Once again, contradicting the stereotype it is the Afro-American man who has the knowledge not only of music but also written music.

Sequence #4: In the club

The sequence opens with a piano/doublebass/drummer trio (played by Aaron Bridgers, Guy Pedersen and Moustache respectively) playing "Sophisticated Lady".

Ram Bowen arrives and talks to the musicians probably in order to get to repeat.

Ram: Ok you guys...

Eddie: What happened with Wild Man?

R.: He's giving it to René Bernard.

E.: René Bernard?

At the moment that Ram pronounced that name the players freeze in shock. We get to feel that the stakes are extreme. However, Ram changes the subject immediately and the subject is dropped. Nothing has been said about that René Bernard but we understand that he must be a very important person as Wild Man Moore, who is a reference himself, passed on the score to him, probably with a view to hear his valued opinion. The scene only lasted ten seconds but it is clear that an essential dramatic seed has been sown, which is due to germinate later on.

Fifteen minutes in, three main plots are in process: a sentimental plot, an identity-related plot (being American, Afro-American, living abroad, being a woman) and a musical one. They get intertwined until they each get resolved. Two love relationships are weaved parallel to each other, in which music plays opposite roles: it plays virtually no part between the Afro-American lovers whilst it is a major element between the white couple. One understands very quickly that Ram Bowen is obsessed with music and that any love relationship comes second after his one-dimensional passion. However, it is not sure that Lilian feels the same way: she never misses an opportunity to show him that she loves him and his music in equal measure and does not differentiate between them.

¹⁹ Rashida Braggs identifies Wild Man Moore with Sidney Bechet. The timing could justify this idea: Bechet died just a year before the film was made, drawing to a close ten glorious years of French success. However, Bechet lived in France whereas Moore is only on travel. Besides, the enthusiastic fans on the station's platform recalls more the first visits of Ellington and Armstrong (in 1933 and 1934 respectively). Finally, the concert taking place at the Palais de Chaillot seems more likely to refer to Ellington's concerts in 1939 and 1950 (with a series of eight concerts that year) or Count Basie's in 1956 (even if Bechet did play there in 1957). However, Armstrong remains the most likely scenario, even if the name of the character has been changed (for the first time in Armstrong's career as an actor).

Sequence #6: In the street in front of the club

Lilian: I just wanted to tell you how much your music meant to me.

Ram: Thank you very much.

L: I'm sure you hear that all the time.

R: No, actually, you never hear that enough.

Sequence #8: Ram's bedroom (after sexual intercourse)

Ram: You come on like this with all the guys?

Lilian: No, only with the special ones.

R: How many of those have you met?

L: One, yesterday.

R: Yeah, but you were probably pretty ripe for him. Two weeks in Paris on the loose. That's why you thought he was so special.

L: No, I don't know. I watched all those people last night while he was playing. They thought he was very special, too.

R: Yep, plays a good horn.

L: Yep, plays a good horn. It's much more than that. It's the way he feels when he plays it, and the way he made me feel. That's why I may have been ripe, but not just for anybody.

There is more than light-hearted gallantries in this. For her, music is connected to desire. Both merge into each other and cannot be separated. Lilian does not come to listen to Ram because he is desirable but because she can hear that he is, that he is so wholly. She insists that it is not just about playing his instrument well; it's "the way he feels when he plays it". This also echoes the same expression used by Eddie Cook in front of Notre-Dame, talking about Paris ("the way the place makes you feel" in sequence #6). Lilian perhaps sums up her views in the answer that she gives to Ram enquiring about her musical knowledge: "I got a friend who says he knows everything about music, except what he likes, and I'm the opposite".

Coming next is the dialogue where Ram states plainly what was only getting more apparent since the beginning. Lilian is looking at the score of "Paris Blues" on the piano.

L: What's Paris Blues?

R: Hey, you'd better get dressed.

L: Do you write music, too?

R: Honey, I live music. Morning, noon, the whole night. Everything else is just icing on the cake. You dig?

It could not be clearer: Ram Bowen lives music and only for it²⁰. Eddie confirms it in a warning to Lilian a bit later ("Don't you let him fool you. he's as steady as a rock about the things that are important to him.")

Sequence #10: On the Boat

²⁰ Accordingly, drug use plays an important role in the film. Ram goes out of his way to help Michel Devigne (Serge Reggiani) out of his addiction. In his view, it is the peak of alienation: destroying a musical gift by way of physical and moral destruction with drugs. The scene showing the flamenco guitarist completely broken is important in that regard. While relapsing, Michel Devigne holds his own ideas on liberty and expresses a conception diverging from Ram's (and his bird metaphor). The scene ends with the following quote: « It's my way. I'm lucky. If I die, I'll be buried by friends ».

Lilian: It's just a crazy life.
 Eddie: Yeah, well, that's because you're one of the day people. We are the night people, and it's a whole different world.
 L: You don't think they can mix?
 E: Well, I don't mind them going to public places together, but I certainly wouldn't want one of them to marry my sister.
 L: Well, now, let me see. Connie's a day person.
 E: You're telling me.
 L: And I'm a day person.
 E: Mh mh
 L: But you know something? I think you are.
 E: Nah.
 L: Well, you're not like him.
 E: Well, I'm taller than him.
 L: No, you're steadier.
 E: Don't you let him fool you. He's as steady as a rock about the things that are important to him.
 L: Like music?
 E: Like music.
 L: Oh.
 E: Oh. Oh, indeed.

The choice of the contrasting image between night and day is certainly not innocent. Not only does it refer to the identity-related metaphor between darkness (black) and light (white), but it indicates that darkness is the realm of jazz musicians whilst “squares” are daytime people. However, Lilian outwits this assimilation. Ram is the ultimate night person, as is Eddie, but Lilian feels something else that draws him towards the day (“you're steadier”). Connie is the ultimate “day person” whilst Marie Séoul, the singer and manager of the club, is a “night person”. Lilian would like to believe that it is possible to belong to both worlds. As for Connie, she is defined by rationality, not sensation (“not just what you see but the way the place makes you feel”). So she is a daytime person to the highest degree. Lilian, on the contrary, always refers to her sensations in the last instance (“makes me feel”). Connie speaks of duty, roots and household, whereas the other three are more fluid, rhizome like (“who needs it?”)

Later, in Ram's bedroom, Lilian is tinkling away the tune of “Paris Blues” on the piano. Ram asks her the same essential and obsessive question that he has asked before:

Sequence #15

Ram: You think that melody's heavy?
 Lilian: Mh?
 R: Oh, never mind.

He eventually accepts to let her listen to a mock-up of “Paris Blues” played by an orchestra. The dialogue on music and desire that took place in the sequences #6 and 8 gets repeated on a different mode.

L: It's beautiful. Even if you hadn't told me, I'd know you wrote it, just from listening to you play, and from...
 R: From what?

L: From the way you are with me.

The film carries on and the various plots get resolved in the last twenty minutes. The key scene with regards to the musical plot is when Ram Bowen has a meeting with the mysterious René Bernard who had been mentioned with deference and apprehension in sequence #4. We do not get told who he is but see that he has a director's office and a secretary welcoming in an anteroom the lucky ones who have an audience with him (and who are undoubtedly rare).

Sequence #20: In René Bernard's Office

René Bernard: Mr. Bowen, so good of you to come.

Ram: How do you do, sir? Pleased to meet you.

RB: Please, have a chair. I have long been an admirer.

R: Thank you very much.

RB: But I know you didn't come here just to exchange pleasantries.

R: No, sir, I didn't.

RB: Mr. Bowen, I have read [the score you sent me] many times. You have a genuine gift for melody.

R: Well, what does that mean, Mr. Bernard?

RB: Simply what I said. You have a good melodic feel.

R: Mr. Bernard, I want to develop that theme into a piece to be played in concert. Now, what's the possibility?

RB: Mr. Bowen, you are a creative musician. Every time you put a horn to your mouth, you're composing. Your improvisations are highly personal. They give you a stamp as a musician. But there is a great deal of difference between that and an important piece of serious music.

R (after a while): In other words, you're trying to tell me I'm just sort of a lightweight.

RB: I don't know what you are yet, Mr. Bowen, and neither do you. I'm only saying that you haven't yet given yourself a chance to find out.

R: Mr. Bernard, I've worked with musicians all my life. I know everything I can do.

RB: Perhaps you need to do something else now. Paris is a great city for an artist to work and study. Composition, harmony, theory, counterpoint. Perhaps you need to change your life for a couple of years in order to give yourself a chance to do what you wish.

R: Well, in other words, it's no good.

RB: On the contrary, I like it.

R: But it's not good enough to be played?

RB: Oh, I'm certain a record company...

R: But nothing more than that?

RB: It is what it is. A jazz piece of a certain charm and melody.

R: Yeah, well, "Jingle Bells" is a great tune. You can hum that the first time you hear it. Well, thanks for listening. I appreciate it very much.

RB: Mr. Bowen, what are you asking me? To say you are what you are not?

R: No. You just told me what I am.

RB: You have a talent. You wish to be a serious composer, perhaps you will be.

R: And perhaps I won't.

RB: Perhaps you won't.

R: Mmh. Thank you, really, very much, sir.

This very rich dialogue crystallizes all the musical problematics that the film engages with.

Who is René Bernard? He could be a publisher²¹. In any case, he is an expert in art music, possibly a composer. Nadia Boulanger could be a potential model for she worked with numerous musicians at the time, many of whom were coming from the United States and there were jazz musicians amongst them. However, the character is most likely inspired by Maurice Ravel and his meeting with George Gershwin²².

The first level of interpretation of the whole dialogue is quite simple: according to René Bernard, Ram is a good melodist, nothing more, and the noble quality of art music remains inaccessible to him. This reading is too simple for it is Ram's, who is closed to any other interpretation. The film tells us so in a hardly cryptic way: repeating the model of the discussion between Eddie and Ram used in the first sequence, Bernard never says that he thinks that Ram is a bad musician. He even asserts that he is not saying that. So what is he saying? More simply, he is saying that art music and jazz operate on different modes and do not have the same implications. If Ram wants to turn from a kind of music in which he is an expert to another, it would involve developing the means to do so, for example working with a teacher like Nadia Boulanger²³. In accordance with the way that he has been since the beginning of the film, Ram cannot hear what he is effectively being told. He only reads it through his personal one-dimensional filter of good *vs* bad (using once more the metaphor of gravity: "I'm just sort of a lightweight"). He is constantly looking for a subtext and is deaf to anything else. He wants to hear that he is bad and has not got the build to make it to the next level, though René Bernard is only saying the same as Eddie and Wild Man: Jazz and art music are different from each other and you cannot belong to both without earning it²⁴.

He is also saying that musical identity is determined by practices and choices²⁵; that composition exists in jazz as well as in art music but it does not work in the same way. However, Ram has internalized inferiority. He is the one thinking that jazz and melody are not on par with art music and music writing²⁶. The composer of art music tries to tell him that it is not a matter of hierarchy but a question of different musical natures and procedures. Ram is responsible for internalizing and imposing on himself a supposed inferiority.

²¹ This is a suggestion made on Wikipedia (French).

²² In 1928 Gershwin met up with the European composers whom he regarded as his masters in the field of art music, Ravel in Paris and Alban Berg in Vienna (also Prokofiev, Kurt Weill and Franz Lehár). The references to melody made in the dialogue of the film recall an alleged conversation between Ravel and Gershwin. Gershwin allegedly asked Ravel what was the key to music and the latter replied by asking him what the amount of his yearly royalties was. On hearing the reply and how many noughts were involved in the number he apparently advised not to change anything. The sequence #4 bears another cue in the dialogue where Eddie gets fed up with Ram's insistence and need to hear that he is a genius. He eventually gives in and tells him that he is Gershwin, Ravel and Debussy.

²³ "Perhaps you need to do something else now. Paris is a great city for an artist to work and study. Composition, harmony, theory, counterpoint. Perhaps you need to change your life for a couple of years in order to give yourself a chance to do what you wish".

²⁴ "Mr. Bowen, you are a creative musician. Every time you put a horn to your mouth, you're composing. Your improvisations are highly personal. They give you a stamp as a musician. But there is a great deal of difference between that and an important piece of serious music."

²⁵ "I don't know what you are yet, Mr. Bowen, and neither do you. I'm only saying that you haven't yet given yourself a chance to find out".

[...]

RB: You have a talent. You wish to be a serious composer, perhaps you will be.

R: And perhaps I won't.

RB: Perhaps you won't."

²⁶ In that respect, drugs are very significant in the film. Ram tries very hard to help Michel Devigne (Serge Reggiani) get out of the circle of addiction. In his opinion, the physical and moral destruction caused by drugs and which leads to the annihilation of a musical gift is the highest degree of alienation. The scene with the completely wrecked flamenco guitar player is important in that respect. Michel Devigne plunges back in again but he also has his (own) views on freedom and he expresses a different conception from Ram's (the metaphor of birds), finishing with these words: "It's my way. I'm lucky. If I die, I'll be buried by friends."

Now let us turn back again to the human quadrangle at the heart of the movie. They are not just two Afro-Americans and two white people. They are also two men and two women on the one hand, and two musicians *vs* two non-musicians on the other hand.

Let us look at the two women first. Connie leaves music out of the equation completely. Eddie is a musician but it would have no impact if he did anything else. She is focused on family, roots and commitment. He is aware of it (“I would say that you're one of them socially conscious chicks”) but avoids dealing with these subjects. For Lilian, on the contrary, music plays a part in the relationship. Music is desire and desire is music.

As for the men, Ram is harrowed by musical contradiction: there is writing in jazz but writing jazz is not the same as writing art music. According to him, it should mean the same (in the same way as there is only music -not musics- for him). The other three protagonists (Eddie, Wild Man and Bernard) tell him that they are two different kinds of music writing, which he cannot and does not want to understand. Eddie, on the contrary, understands it and has managed to overcome (or avoid) this contradiction.

This is made clear in the dialogue between Lilian and Eddie on the river boat (sequence #10). She is well aware that the two men are different from each other. They both belong to the night whilst the two women are day people²⁷ but Eddie is different from Ram. The latter is totally possessed whilst the former is not (“you're steadier”). In that respect, Eddie is also a day person whilst Ram belongs to the night only, the night of music and music writing.

So what do we make of the denouement (or denouements, I should say)? Eddie goes back to America whilst Ram stays in Paris. Of course, the most obvious interpretation is possible: Afro-American Eddie returns to America and chooses love rather than a Parisian and, to some extent, better quality of life. Ram, the white man, stays in order to complete his musical journey, which is likely to end up in “art music”. This reading seems too simple to me for at least two reasons. Firstly, the two men express opposite intentions in the scene following the meeting with René Bernard: Ram tells Lilian that he is ready to go with her; Eddie tells Connie that he cannot follow her. The party scene in the flat is totally ambiguous. The confrontation between Ram and Michel Devigne - the gypsy guitarist who is addicted to drugs - is very meaningful. Ram has tried very hard to make him give up drugs. He thought that he had achieved that and suddenly realizes that it is not the case. He tries one last time but his friend rejects him on the grounds that Ram has decided to leave, that he cannot claim authority whilst deserting the field (“You're leaving, Ram why don't you leave?”). The film highlights these choices and dilemmas.

Secondly, Ram and Eddie change their mind at the last minute but the end of the film remains more open than one might think. Eddie has decided to leave but he does not get on the train with Connie. He stays for another few weeks in order to settle things. Nobody actually knows whether he will eventually get on that train too (the last look is threatening and the two men leave the platform side by side). As for Ram, he has indeed decided not to go back to their homeland with Lilian. He stays in Paris but what is he going to do there? Has he made up his mind to embark on a transformative journey and join the class of Nadia Boulanger? Or has he started to mourn composition as it is understood in art music and decided to assert himself as a jazz musician (writing jazz)? In both cases, there is ground to think that the film is interested in

²⁷ Marie Séoul is a woman of the night. She reminds Ram of it when she understands that he has started a relationship with Lilian:

R: “What are you trying to do? Tie me up?”

MS: I’m trying to keep you untied.

R: I know what I need.

MS: You need your work, Ram. That’s all. And me, or someone like me. Nothing else works for people like us.”

Both women in their own contrastive ways are convinced that they are part of Ram’s destiny: Lilian in believing that she can support him become himself, and Marie by being like him.

the internal conflicts and that an ending had to be chosen amongst many options (also taking into account some external constraints, such as those imposed by Hollywood).

Now let us discuss two of the commentaries that have been made about the film.

In her book *Jazz Diasporas* Rashida Braggs devotes about ten pages to *Paris Blues*. Bizarrely, she insists on wanting to present the film as racist (“some old racism”). Her critique focuses on the scene where Eddie and Connie give his ball back to a little boy.

Sequence #18: On the Bandstand

Child: Merci Monsieur Noir, merci Madame Noir.

Connie: So you don't mind being called “Mr. Black Man”?

Eddie: Of course not. Why should I? That's what I am. A black man.

C: You don't mind because that's a French kid. If that were an American...

E: Baby. Do you want to have fun, or do you want to discuss the race question?

C: I can't separate them. Not with you. It's too important to me.

E: It's...

C: You.

[Pause]

E: Look. Here, nobody says “Eddie Cook, negro musician”. They say “Eddie Cook, musician”, period. And that's all I want to be.

C: And that's what you are.

E: That's what I am here. Musician, period. And I don't have to prove anything else.

C: Like what?

E: Like... Because I'm negro, I'm different, because I'm negro I'm not different. I'm different, I'm not different, who cares? Look, I don't have to prove either case. Can you understand that?

C: There isn't a place on the face of the Earth that isn't hell for somebody. Some race, some color, some sex.

E: For me, Paris is just fine.

C: Eddie, you're wrong. You're wrong! And I'm not denying what you feel, because it wouldn't be there if there wasn't a good reason. But things are much better than they were five years ago, and they'll still be better next year. And not because negroes come to Paris. But because negroes stay home, and with millions of white people, they work to make things better for everybody everywhere in America.

E: Look, are we gonna stand here all day discussing this jazz²⁸?

Rashida Braggs writes about this scene: “Even Eddie's comment that he doesn't mind being called 'Monsieur Noir' suggests his subconscious awareness that attention to his blackness will never disappear” (p. 206). In the same way, Eddie cannot grasp the consequences of his assertions apparently (he is thus alienated):

Eddie's belief that racialized difference in Paris does not matter and that he is only perceived as a musician is actually founded on perceptions of exoticism and primitivism – part of the French conception of African and African-diasporic art and music. This exotic, primitive perception of race masked a very different relationship between the French and its residents of

²⁸ The choice of word is not random: “Jazz” is used here in its figured meaning of “shambles” or “entangled ball”.

African descent. Connie foregrounds what Eddie hides or is blind to. Connie draws attention to the treatment of other peoples of African descent in the French metropolises and colonies when she states, “There isn’t a place on Earth that isn’t hell for somebody, some race, some color, some sex”. (p. 207-208)

However, the reference to French people of African origin is absent in this scene as in the rest of the movie. Connie's last sentence seems to be rather saying in a general way that, indeed, there is no heaven on earth and that there is always a battle to fight for a category of people or another. That is her way of remaining deaf to what Eddie says of his personal condition. The author does not hesitate to go a step further with the suggestion that Eddie be blind to the suffering of French people of African origin. Actually, Eddie merely says that the situation in Paris, and for him, “*is just fine*”. It suits him. “For me, Paris is just fine” does not mean “Paris is just fine for any Afro-American”, nor “Paris is a paradise”. It means that Paris offers him an acceptable lifestyle in his situation and at that time in his life. He is talking about himself and no one else, no matter what subtexts one wants to see between the lines. The point gets repeated to close the scene with the little boy and his ball. Eddie lives in the real world and in the present whilst Connie's reality is tainted with idealism and morality (“You're wrong! You're wrong!”). It seems equally surprising that this view be presented as a manifestation of exoticism and/or primitivism.

Most of all, we understand that Connie is willing to acknowledge Eddie's “good reason” (“I'm not denying what you feel, because it wouldn't be there is there wasn't a good reason”) - the fact that his identity is less of a problem in Paris as well as the working conditions of musicians - but thinks that these are less important than the need to fight in the USA where segregation is actually taking place. Two points are being confessed here: firstly, she understands how Eddie feels but does not feel it herself. Generally speaking, she is controlled by thought rather than sensation, which Eddie noted previously (“I would say that you're one of them socially conscious chicks”). Secondly, she is not really interested in music.

One could also wonder whether her arguing the necessity for black people to fight on the actual ground where segregation is happening is not a way of making him feel guilty, in order to achieve her true, and less revolutionary, aim, which is to start a family and have (lots of) children (see sequence #18).

It seems paradoxical to me to blame the film for being ambiguous about the color-blindedness of Paris and at the same time highlight this scene which precisely touches on the issue (whilst this scene could easily have been removed from the film). The dialogue between Connie and Eddie simply sums up a recurring debate in the Afro-American community between assimilation and differentiation: ranging from paradigms such as those suggested by Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey and their successors such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and so many other Afro-American protagonists. Again, it would have been very easy for the producers of the film to avoid the subject completely.

However, the main problem caused by the directionality of the critique remains the lack of articulation with music. Regardless of one's opinion on what the film has to say about racial issues and the kind of hermeneutics that should be applied, there is a real issue with the refusal to take the musical dimension and musical discourse of the film into account. One particular sentence sounds like a confession: “Additionally, the film deemphasizes race relations as the core struggle of the story by foregrounding Ram Bowen's desire for his jazz compositions to be recognized by classical musicians” (p. 209) This is the problem, it would seem: Eddie does not say what one would want him to say, nor does the film deal with the (only) subject that one would want it to talk about.

In his book *Paris Blues*, Andy Fry also dedicates a few pages to the film. His indictment of it is rather radical: according to him, the film takes place “in a long tradition of viewing the French capital as a hospitable city for African Americans compared to the harsh realities of home” (p.2). However, the film seems to me rather moderate about this. The scene with the child and his ball has already been highlighted for showing the ambiguity of the situation (which must have already been perceived at the time). The following dialogue between Connie and Eddie highlights the various ways in which this type of situation (the interaction with the child) could be perceived and interpreted by the people involved. Also, if this “tradition” can rightly be questioned, it still was not just a totally fictional “Hollywood” style narrative. Numerous Afro-Americans have given testimony of the different reception and feelings that they experienced. Rashida Braggs herself confirms the fact with quotes by the pianist Henry Crowder as well as Richard Wright, and Andy Fry with quotes by James Baldwin. We could add to this anthology with the following extract from James Weldon Johnson's autobiography:

From the day I set foot in France, I became aware of the working of a miracle within me. I became aware of a quick readjustment to life and to environment. I recaptured for the first time since childhood the sense of being just a human being. I need not try to analyze this change for my colored readers; they will understand in a flash what took place. For my white readers... I am afraid that any analysis will be inadequate, perhaps futile. ... I was suddenly free; free from a sense of impending discomfort, insecurity, danger; free from the conflict within the Man-Negro dualism and the innumerable maneuvers in thought and behavior that it compels; free from the problem of the many obvious or subtle adjustments to a multitude of bans and taboos; free from special scorn, special tolerance, special condescension, special commiseration; free to be merely a man²⁹.

This has the same ring as what Eddie says in the sequence #7 of the film, facing Notre-Dame:

E: Look at it. And not just what you see, but the way the place makes you feel. I'll never forget the first day I walked down Avenue Champs-Élysées. Just like that, I knew I was here to stay.

Acknowledging this fact does not mean that we suggest that there was no racism in France, either towards Afro-Americans or other communities of African or north African origins.

Again, the main problem lies in the absence of music from the debate. It is only brought in the discussion on one occasion and the author gives a rather final interpretation of it, adding to a judgment without appeal:

*Jazz's evolving status as an art form had long been at stake in jazz films, as [Krin] Gabbard has shown. To take Louis Armstrong's movies alone, however, from *New Orleans* (1947) and *A Star is Born* (1948) to *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954) and *The Five Pennies* (1959), it is not the trumpeter himself who “elevates” jazz within the narrative. Rather, he confers his wisdom and authenticity – more, his “phallic power” – on a young white musician pushing him toward maturity, artistic or sexual. Armstrong brings greater range to this ancestral role in *Paris Blues*, not only jamming with Ram but also advising him on his compositions. Nevertheless, he is finally transcended – indeed, erased – as he always had been. The film's ending then, reasserts several distinctions that the story had sometimes placed in doubt: improvised jazz (black, feminized, commercial) is repatriated to the States; learned composition (white, masculine, artistic) remains in the capital of culture. (A. Fry, *Paris Blues*..., p. 266-267)*

²⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way – The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, New York, Da Capo, 2000 [1/1933], p. 209. James Weldon Johnson was one of the main leaders of the Afro-American community between 1910 and 1930 and an organizer of the *Harlem Renaissance*. He joined the *National Association for Advancement of Colored People* (NAACP, founded in 1909) in 1916 and became the first coloured secretary of the association between 1920 and 1930. He was also a writer and songwriter.

So, if “the story had sometimes placed [several distinctions] in doubt”, the message presented is nonetheless simple, binary and easy to decipher: on the one hand there would be improvised, black, feminized and commercial jazz, and on the other hand white, masculine and artistic “learned composition” (otherwise known as art music). The author thus produces three binary oppositions - black *vs* white, feminine *vs* masculine and commercial *vs* artistic - which correspond exactly to the original distinction made between improvised jazz and written art music. As for Louis Armstrong, he would appear to be “transcended – indeed, erased”. Indeed, the final sequence of the film shows a poster of Wild man Moore - Louis Armstrong being covered by an advert for the publishing company Larousse (a symbol of the great French culture?). However, the simple explanation may be that, unlike the two main protagonists - he was only on a short visit to Paris and thus did not have to deal with the same problem or dilemma. He travels in the whole world and visits places where he does not stay because of his career, powerful status and the lifestyle imposed by being a famous musician, not because his instability would force him to live a nomadic life. Unlike Ram Bowen and Eddie Cook, whose stay in Paris indicates uncertainties about their musical positioning and/or identity, Wild Man-Louis Armstrong's geographical mobility is not a metaphor for his uncertain status.

Besides, identifying improvised jazz with the Afro-American character on the one hand, and written composition with the white character on the other hand - as does the author - seems excessive. Ram Bowen is as much a jazz musician as Eddie Cook. That is precisely his problem. Conversely, Eddie the Afro-American is the one seen with a pen, writing on the score. Also, I cannot see the signs of an alleged feminization of Eddie and masculinization of Ram. With regards to stoutness, virility is clearly on Eddie's side (who mentions it: “I'm taller than him”). If the producers had wanted to make Ram look more masculine they would probably have hired someone like Marlon Brando or Charles Bronson for the role. Moreover, after Ram and Lilian's first night together he makes it very clear that she led the love-making. Even if the purpose of this remark was probably the characterization of Lilian, one could imagine more effective ways of reinforcing Ram's manliness. Finally, identifying jazz with a commercial activity to be opposed to written music which would be an artistic activity is also problematic. It is clear in the film that classical composers make more money. Ram lives in a small bedroom despite being reasonably famous. In comparison, René Bernard's office suggests that the man lives rather comfortably.

So *Paris Blues* is full of stereotypes? They can certainly be found if we look for them³⁰. What about Eddie's leaving and Ram's staying? It is a stereotype:

On a romantic level, however, color coding is enforced. Connie (Carroll), a “socially conscious” African American, prefers saxophonist Eddie Cook (Poitier) to trombonist Ram Bowen (Newman). Although Eddie enjoys freedom and respect in Paris, he will eventually agree to return to a United States that Connie assures him is transforming. Ram, on the other hand, will disappoint Connie's white friend, Lillian (Woodward). An aspiring composer, whose quest to complete his Paris Blues is the film conceit, he decides at the last moment that he must remain in Paris for the sake of his Art (A. Fry, Paris Blues..., p. 2-3).

What if the film had offered the opposite option, Eddie staying and Ram leaving? It would have been a stereotype too: the Afro-American man is alienated whilst the white man is always free to have a fresh start and can always afford to follow his desires. One could just as easily see a stereotype in the black woman focused on home and family as opposed to the white woman who offers a less restricted relationship. Conversely, what would have been said of a black woman devoid of Connie's political conscience? It would probably have been proof of her alienation. Stereotypes are by definition always reversible, especially when one does not believe

³⁰ More about women than racial issues. Reversed stereotypes can also be found, like that of Afro-Americans expert in music writing. And what about this sentence uttered by the woman in Lilian: “My God, how simple it is for them!” [men] (sequence #19)?

in the truth. Stereotypes swap reality for a representation? But how do they survive in the absence of reality, when there is no essence³¹? The stereotypes in *Paris Blues* are those of 1961 and, to some extent, those of the film industry in the USA at the time³². How surprising is it in a film produced by Hollywood in 1961?

Does this film overshadows racist issues in France at the time? It does if one expects the film to deal with such issues. Is it not possible to acknowledge that racist issues existed in France in 1961 (and still do) without this film telling us so?

In my opinion the main problem lies in the clear-cut and dichotomous conclusions drawn by Andy Fry³³. This is in complete opposition with the spirit of the film which shows intricate situations, divisions and moral dilemmas. Ultimately, the common point between the two critiques discussed and, in my opinion, the problem raised by their critical positioning lies in the assumption that the film is guilty. The fact that it must be so is not the result of an investigation but the premise of the investigation itself, the purpose of which is to highlight who is a victim and who is guilty. This position imposes a biased judgment on the film and causes a symptomatic elimination of the musical content.

To conclude, let us recall the scene involving René Bernard. In a metaphoric way It is possible to imagine that this scene foresees the critical viewpoint consisting in looking out for stereotypes whilst ignoring the musical stakes. Ram always wants to make the others (Eddie, René Bernard) say what he fears to hear (that he is a bad musician) but the viewer gradually starts to think that it is what Ram actually wants to hear. On the contrary, Eddie and René Bernard insist that they have not said what Ram wants to hear, that there is no subtext to their text. This seems to me to offer a parallel with authors who want to make the film say what it does not (and says it does not) as if they, too, wanted to hear what haunts them. Like Ram Bowen, their “critical” viewpoint boils down to internalizing a sense of hierarchy and claiming that René Bernard in the film is responsible for it whilst neither the film nor René Bernard ever establish such a hierarchy. In fact, they say something else and constantly remind the viewer that life is complex, that everything is complex, and that human beings deal with emotions and dilemmas. Beyond determinations such as being a woman or a man, being Afro-American or white, being a musician or not, their actions are the result of the relative free will and degree of freedom at their disposal to deal with such emotions and dilemmas. To write or not to write, to stay or to go, to start a relationship or not to start a relationship, to develop a relationship or not to develop a relationship, to have children or not to have children, to take responsibility for one's contradictions or not, etc.

³¹ This may be the meaning of Ram's answer to Connie in the sequence on the river boat:

C: “Oh Ram, you make it sound like it's some kind of a game. But what you do if it's not a game?

R: Don't ask me honey. I only play games”.

³² Only to some extent. Martin Ritt is everything but a Hollywood product. On the contrary, he is rather a representant of independent cinema. There is a long tradition of film makers who tried to impose their viewpoints against the constraints of Hollywood, either by opposing them frontally or by pretending to comply with the rules whilst actually subverting them using ambiguity and double entendre in their films. For example, let us mention the implied irony in Eddie Cook's answer to the question: can night people coexist with day people? “Well, I don't mind them going to public places together, but I certainly wouldn't want one of them to marry my sister” (sequence #10).

³³ Starting with the opening judgment that one may not share: “Sure enough, this tale of two American tourists (Joanne Woodward, Diahann Carroll) who fall for expatriate jazz musicians (Paul Newman, Sidney Poitier) is nobody's best effort: its plot is wayward, its dialogues clunky, its performances mixed” (A. Fry, *Paris Blues...*, p. 2).

Summary and Perspectives

The problems raised by the examples discussed above have wider implications because they exemplify a certain type of discourse currently developing in the anglophone world about music, musical facts and discourses on music. A few of the more general problems raised by this approach are listed below. They are to some extent independent from each other but have connections which reveal a degree of consistency.

- 1) *Decentering*. Even on those occasions when the musical level is not purely and simply discarded³⁴ it is at least compulsory to look at data around and beyond what is essentially musical³⁵. The concept of wider and broader musical objects has been integrated by musicology a long time ago. But we are talking of something quite different when the actual musical component of the object gets put on the fringe. The most common way of marginalization is to be found in a number of varying practices of the reflection theory³⁶, which denounces positivism³⁷ and the belief in objectivity in music.³⁸

³⁴ “Because music and musicology both enter domains marked by performance acts and language about musical practice, boundaries between them become blurred, and assurances about how one is differentiated from the other collapse. The title of the present article [“Musicology as a Political Act”] is meant to decenter, to make us wonder, like Susan McClary, if we know what MUSIC is anymore. [...] There is no single way in which music becomes essentialized into the object of musicology’s study. Indeed, each of the subdisciplines of musicology privileges different forms of essentializing, all of them, however, rallied with the intent of understanding something uncritically called “music”. Music exists “out there”. It has a metaphysical presence and ontological reality that the singularity of its name assures” (Philip V. Bohlman, “Musicology as a Political Act”, *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Autumn 1993, p. 411-436, p. 418-419).

³⁵ “Rather than looking at musicians, except when they worked to affect how audiences perceived jazz, my story focuses on the audiences, their reactions, and the sense that they made out of jazz” (Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French – Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris*, Durham & London, Duke University Press, 2003, p. 2-3).

“In that sense, this book is not about jazz, in the strictly musical sense meaning the notes that musicians played. Rather, it is about France, about what the arrival of a music that was being called jazz meant to people in the turbulent interwar period, and about how they used the concept of jazz to understand and remake their age” (id., p. 10-11).

“This study makes no claim to offer an exhaustive account of the reception of jazz in the French-speaking world, nor does it seek to analyze the full range of contemporary discourse on jazz. It chooses instead to focus purely on those texts in which a coherent jazz aesthetic was worked out. It therefore works from the premise that such texts offer peculiarly condensed and sophisticated attempts not only to define the nature of jazz as a musical form but also to respond to the series of political and cultural challenges posed by jazz’s arrival in the imperial *metropolis*, an arrival itself conditioned by the political, economic, and cultural logics of machine-age imperialism” (J. Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism...*, p. 31).

“Technical descriptions alone evidently fail to do justice to these sorts of questions. An adequate historical account of any aspect of jazz therefore has to see how different assessments of the music relate to cultural, ideological, economic, and political matters. This leads to the following question. Are changes in jazz styles just secondary signs of the social changes that they accompany?” (Andrew Bowie, “Jazz”, in *An Introduction to Music Studies*, Harper-Scott, J.P.E., Samson, Jim, ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 176-187, p. 180).

“The notes of a jazz solo, as they are coming into existence, exist as they do for reasons that are only concomitantly musical” (Amiri Baraka, *The LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader*, Harris, William ed., New York, Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1999 [1/1963, *Down Beat*, August 15, 1963], p. 182).

³⁶ “Are changes in jazz styles just secondary signs of the social changes that they accompany? The move from collective improvisation to solo playing can be seen, for instance, as connected to the move from a more traditional, collective local culture to the individualist culture of big-city life. On the other hand, should the most significant forms of jazz be seen as themselves having social and political effects, because they change peoples’ attitudes to the culture in which they live, as some avantgarde music did in the 1960s? There is no simple answer to these questions, and a response to them requires specific research in each case because the music and its context are inextricably linked” (A. Bowie “Jazz”..., p. 180-181).

“Jazz is designed to impart a narrative arc that traces the development of jazz from nineteenth-century musical precursors to the present, while offering a few ways to understand that arc. It differs from most jazz histories on at

- 2) *Hermeneutics of Suspicion*³⁹. The denunciation of inequalities as a critical standpoint becomes problematic when accusation is assumed as a premise. Looking for the guilty party (groups or individuals), which has usually already been identified, becomes the driving force behind the investigation (the effectiveness of which is undermined in the process, including from a political point of view)⁴⁰.

least three counts. First, we do not treat jazz as music in a vacuum, perpetuating itself as a baton passed from genius to genius; we see it, rather, as a reflection of broader cultural, political, social, and economic factors, and attempt to line up the crucial moments in its progress with historical events that it reflected and influenced" (Gary Giddins & Scot DeVeaux, *Jazz*, New York, Norton, 2009, p. 11).

"Though Schuller remains aware of the fact that "[n]o art or act of creativity stands in isolation, self-contained and uninfluenced by its times, its social and cultural environment, and its own history", the influential statement of methodology which I've quoted might well be said to bear some responsibility for the continuing institutionalization of formalist models of inquiry in jazz criticism" (Ajay Heble, *Landing on the wrong note – Jazz, dissonance and critical practice*, New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 14).

"Musical analysts need to confront the challenges of signifyin', the real-life dialogic flux of meaning, never groundable in a foundationalist epistemology, but always grounded in a web of social practices, histories, and desires. Modernism and classicism cannot take us into notes, where choices and details signify; nor out of notes, onto that risky rhetorical terrain Miles Davis never stopped exploring" (Robert Walser, "'Out of Notes': Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis", *Jazz among the Discourses*, Krin Gabbard, ed., Durham and London, Duke University Press, p. 165-188, p. 180).

³⁷ "As a result, a positivistic and formalistic approach of music is abandoned in favor of the view that before anything, music is a socially caused phenomenon. At the same time, the attention is shifted to the intertextual dimensions and the performative aspects of music. (German musicologist Ulrh Dibelius calls this a post-modern shift from the characteristics of music "itself" to its "modes of action". The new (post-structuralist or post-modern) musicology is based on a criticism and deconstruction of musicological objectivism, the general idea of the autonomy of (the theory of) music. In other words, a shift to contextuality.)" (Marcel Cobussen, "Deconstruction in Music", s.d., <http://www.deconstruction-in-music.com/navbar/index.html>).

"[Krin] Gabbard is, I think, right in pointing to the tendency for "jazz writers...to ignore...extramusical aspects of jazz by conceptualizing it as a safely autonomous domain, more dependent on rhythmic innovation than on social change". Indeed, a number of recent studies have taken issue with this general tendency in musicology and music theory: Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, for instance, in their introduction to *Music and Society*, tell us that "for the most part, the discourse of musical scholarship clings stubbornly to a reliance on positivism in historical research and formalism in theory and criticism" (A. Heble, *Landing on the wrong note...*, p. 13).

³⁸ "Both Hodeir and Schuller often referred to the importance of "objectivity" – a common priority among those who prefer not to interrogate their premises" (R. Walser, "'Out of Notes'"..., p. 171).

³⁹ "[...] As such a philosopher cannot and must not avoid questioning the absolute validity of the object that he/she is dealing with. For, *would I* be interested in the "object", how could I prioritize the interest in the object – even through the consideration of its cause, genesis and function, if I did not expect that "it" was addressing me through the process of getting to understand it? Is it not the expectation to be addressed by the object that fuels our interest in it? Ultimately, this expectation implicitly involves a confidence in language; the belief that symbolic language is spoken to humans even more than it is spoken by them. It involves the belief that human beings were born within language, amidst the light of logos "which enlightens all humans who get born into this world". This expectation and belief give a special importance to the study of symbols and, in all honesty, I must say that this special status or gravitas fuels all my research. Today it is being challenged by the whole current of hermeneutics, the standpoint of which we see as based on "suspicion". Doubting that such an object exists and that it could be a place where intentional aiming could possibly be turned around into a manifestation or an apostolic proclamation is the starting point of this other interpretative theory. For that reason, this hermeneutics is not a disengagement from the object but an interpretative practice that involves tearing the masks off and removing the disguises." (Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation – Essai sur Freud*, Paris, Seuil, p. 39-40).

"This methodological approach is acceptable if it does not involve a "sociology based on suspicion" which reduces every expression of common sense to an illusion to be unveiled by confronting it to the "true" reality: the representations that people have of the world that they live in is the only reality of interest to us here. So it is time to trust art audiences when they express what does not seem obvious to them anymore. It is time to listen to them, to take them seriously and, amidst the variety and heterogeneity of the views expressed, to identify the trends which structure and make sense of them." (Nathalie Heinich, *Le triple jeu de l'art contemporain*, Minuit, Paris, 1998, p.185.)

⁴⁰ "The kind of essentialism and primitivism that characterized his later jazz criticism, alongside Panassié's questionable political affiliations, thus provide [...] reasons for questioning those accounts that claim his *Le Jazz hot*

- 3) *Moralism and clear conscience.* The opposition between the victimization of those dominated and the guilt trip of those dominating (the latter often being ancestors from the same cultural background as the authors, who may be repressing some degree of bad conscience in the process) is the main means used in this practice of suspicious hermeneutics. It often shows what could be seen as a “double bind”⁴¹ in the way that the dominated (for example Afro-Americans or Black in general) are perceived: highlighting certain body or physiological features amongst others and displaying a different relation to the world gets condemned on the grounds that it confines the people concerned to a second rate status (if it is not that of animals or children, it is still an inferior status, which generates accusations of primitivism or exoticism). Conversely, the rejection of such features in favour of other qualities (to do with *logos*, for example) indicates an ingrained Western tendency to look for an image of itself in the other, leading to a chronic inability to conceive true otherness and rightful difference (accusations of Western-centrism and logo-centrism). There is thus no way out: what matters is the identification of faults (guilt trip) in order to rehabilitate the dominated (victimization).

In both cases, the aim is not to take apart ideological mechanisms in order to denounce processes of oppression and domination but to project a moral posture which legitimates an overhanging position and guarantees the good conscience deriving from defending a right attitude. There is another consequence of this positioning: it frees the author from axiological neutrality. Taking sides gets permitted because the cause is just and as the cause is just one cannot be in the wrong.

- 4) *The irrevocable meddling of politics in theory.* The hermeneutics of suspicion, moralism and good conscience establish the impossibility of avoiding politics in the academic field. One looks for (and thus finds) stakes of power in order to denounce them, which makes the discourse right and irrefutable⁴². This is easily done by stating that a discourse is essentially political and that, as a consequence, the political dimension is the only aspect worth considering, which characterizes one particular version of the reflection theory.⁴³

to be exemplary in its eschewal of racial stereotypes or ethnocentric assumptions” (J. Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism...*, p. 92).

⁴¹ “The notion of ‘double bind’ coined by Bateson refers to the simultaneous emission of two types of messages where one contradicts the other (for example, a father saying to his son: ‘Go on, criticize me’ but reading between the lines any real criticism or a specific kind of criticism would not be welcome). According to Bateson, this kind of situation nourishes a form of schizophrenia which he interprets as a ‘nonsense’ from the point of view of Russell’s theory of types. It seems to us that the ‘double bind’ is actually a common situation that is quintessentially related to the Oedipus complex. In fact, if there is a need to formalize it, I would rather say that it refers to another type of russellian nonsense: an alternative or exclusive disjunction is determined in relation to a principle which, nevertheless, constitutes the two terms or sub-groups of the alternative whilst being included itself in the alternative (which is different from what happens in the case of an inclusive disjunction). This is the second paralogism of psychoanalysis. In short, the ‘double bind’ is merely the whole lot of the Oedipus complex.” (Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *L’Anti-Edipe – Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, Paris, Minuit, 1975, p. 94-95).

⁴² “For [Stuart] Hall, what is at stake is the connection that cultural studies seeks to make to matters of power and cultural politics. That is, to an exploration of representations of and “for marginalized social groups and the need for cultural change”. Hence, cultural studies is a body of theory generated by thinkers who regard the production of theoretical knowledge as a political practice. Here, knowledge is never a neutral or objective phenomenon but a matter of positionality, that is, of the place from which one speaks, to whom, and for what purposes” (Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies – Theory & Practice*, London, Sage, 2008, p. 5).

⁴³ “I should like to argue in this essay, therefore, that it is because musicology has insisted on its apolitical status – call it positivistic, call it value-free, call it aesthetically independent – that the field has come face-to-face with its own political acts. Moreover, I shall push my point even further and argue that the reason for the field’s imagined escape into a world without politics results from its essentializing of music itself. This act of essentializing music, the very

- 5) *The construction-deconstruction antagonism.* The concept of deconstruction has been coined by Jacques Derrida to designate a specific process within linguistics. It has later been distorted, popularized and led astray by gross generalization making it synonymous with a univocal and deproblematized mechanics for critical dismantling, which is the exact opposite of what Derrida meant.⁴⁴ Indeed, deconstruction has become the mechanical dismantling of what has been “built” symmetrically and just as mechanically through the practice of a power of any sort⁴⁵ (as if an idea, concept or image could possibly not be “built”, which would mean that it exists in nature)⁴⁶. The result of the exercise in this context is an old school text commentary ultimately revealing a meaning that is known in advance.
- 6) *The use of the concept of essentialism.* It is mainly used as a threat these days. It is the ultimate weapon that can be invoked to disqualify any attempt to try and

attempt to depoliticize it, has become the most hegemonic form of politicizing music” (P. Bohlman, “Musicology as a Political Act”..., p. 419).

⁴⁴ “What Derrida explains – if we want to simplify things – is precisely that there is no simple origin to anything, that everything started before there was any beginning and that everything will continue beyond any ending. Conversely – as I believe Emmanuel Levinas puts it – “some past exists that was never in the present”. So right from the start everything has been very complicated. No experience, object, situation nor intellectual process can ever be reduced to a simple unit. These ideas may seem very general and abstract. However, Derrida’s main intellectual and methodological lesson can be put simply: everything is a lot more complicated than we think; everything is always and even more complicated than that. These ideas have been developed and have reached their full scope with two kinds of conditions: on the one hand Derrida has established a connection between the problem of presence and the link between speech and writing. On the other hand, he defined the specific purpose of Western metaphysics as “logocentrism”. [...] So what came to be known as deconstruction has two sides to it: on the one hand, a detailed critical Reading of philosophical texts, with a systematic exploration of their every corner, including the most minor and apparently insignificant elements, bringing into light irregularities and difficulties which challenge the assertions made in the texts. On the other hand, deconstruction involved the scholarly commentary of a number of literary texts, showing how the different pieces of the signifying puzzle fit together and giving a detailed account of the complexity at work behind these signifying mechanisms.” (Denis Kambouchner, *Derrida: déconstruction et raison*, conference at the University of Tongji, Shanghai, unpublished, May 23, 2007, p. 7-9).

⁴⁵ “This essay attempts to historically and philosophically deconstruct aspects of the musical belief systems that ground African-American and European (including European-American) real-time music making, analyzing the articulation and resolution of both musical and what were once called “extramusical” issues. This analysis adopts as critical tools two complementary connotative adjectives, “Afrological” and “Eurological”. These terms refer metaphorically to musical belief systems and behavior that, in my view, exemplify particular kinds of musical “logic”. At the same time, these terms are intended to historicize the particularity of perspective characteristic of two systems that have evolved in such divergent cultural environments” (George Lewis “Improvised Music after 1950 – Afrological and Eurological Perspectives”, *Black Music Research Journal*, No16, Spring 1996, p. 91-122, p. 92-93).

“If we, as historians, critics, and educators, are to adapt to these new realities, we must be willing to construct new narratives to explain them. These alternative explanations need not displace the jazz tradition (it hardly seems fair, in any case, to deconstruct a narrative that has only recently been constructed, especially one that serves such important purposes). But the time has come for an approach that is less invested in the ideology of jazz as aesthetic object and more responsive to issues of historical particularity. Only in this way can the study of jazz break free from its self-imposed isolation, and participate with other disciplines in the exploration of meaning in American culture” (Scott DeVeaux, “Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography”, *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Literature of Jazz Issue, Autumn 1991, p. 525-560, p. 553).

⁴⁶ “The fairy-tale narrative mapped a pathway to assimilation and social success. This master trope was crosscut by sensationalistic images of the primal Baker as a savage dancer and as the Black Venus. In most biographies of Baker, and in her own accounts, these images are treated as external constructions, which she nonetheless readily accepted and learned to manipulate” (Benetta Jules-Rosette, *Josephine Baker in Art in Life – The Icon and the Image*, Urbana & Chicago, University of Illinois Press, p. 2-3).

understand a phenomenon in a way that does not conform with the culturalist orthodoxy.⁴⁷

- 7) *In the musical field, the concealment of the product in favour of the process.* According to this critical standpoint, the product in itself is insignificant. It may even mystify the process which is perceived as containing all the elements at stake⁴⁸. This positioning avoids having to scrutinize the product (critique of analysis) and recognize a musical substance in it. At the same time, it deprives us of understanding the elements of the process which could be grasped via the product.
- 8) *The weakening of the historical perspective.* The rise of engaged positioning as well as the theorization of a claimed emancipation from axiological neutrality have led to a detached attitude towards history. This approach focuses on denouncing power struggles and looking for responsibilities.⁴⁹ It marks a difference between cultural history as theorized by a number of French historians (from the Annales School to contemporary historians like Roger Chartier, Philippe Poirrier, Pascal Ory or Jean-François Sirinelli) and those influenced by cultural studies.⁵⁰ In some extreme cases the historical material gets virtually overlooked (protagonists and events).
- 9) *The narrowing of the philosophical perspective.* The omnipresent reference to the philosophy of Michel Foucault (and to some extent to Jacques Derrida through the concept of deconstruction) functions as a free pass to access the good conscience provided by philosophical backing. The contribution of other contemporary philosophers, in particular those which have touched on music directly (Henri Bergson, Vladimir Jankélévitch and Bernard Sève, Francis Wolff for example) thus tend to be ignored.
- 10) *Marxist mirroring.* Panculturalism as it can be observed nowadays shows some striking homotheties with the Marxist discourse of the past, and not just in theoretical content or in a shared aim of transforming society. Originally,

⁴⁷ "In other words, McClary's lexis suggests that deconstruction is a form of analysis that uncovers an ideological sub-structure beneath an obfuscating surface: essentialism" (M. Cobussen, "Deconstruction in Music"... [7]).

"Hodeir's criticism, however, is marred by an inadmissibly essentialist construction of 'authentic' jazz" (Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, Chicago & London, The Chicago University Press, 2002, p. 90).

"The historical theory in which the causes of events are sought in developmental processes is an 'Essentialist theory' (Leo Treitler, "On Historical Criticism", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 2, April 1967, p. 188-205, p. 201).

⁴⁸ "Music is about process, not product [...]" (Charles Keil, "Motion and Feeling through Music", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 24, No. 3, Spring 1966, p. 337-349, p. 1).

⁴⁹ "Most of these countries have developed their own legend and lore with respect to their early exposure to, and contact with, American jazz musicians. The theoretical implications of these encounters – in Canada, England and France before 1920, and elsewhere in Europe, South America and the far East during the 1920s – have become a popular subject for critical analysis, bringing together as they do the interrelated cultural and sociological themes of modernism, primitivism, exoticism, racism, identity and "otherness". Missing from this body of writing, however, is a basic account of who went where, when, and did what. To that end, *Some Hustling This! – Taking Jazz to the World, 1914-1929* is a narrative of first encounters, notable events and significant figures in the internationalization of jazz." (Mark Miller, *Some Hustling This! – Taking Jazz to the world 1914-1929*, Toronto, The Mercury Press, 2005, p. 11).

⁵⁰ In the anglo-saxon media as well as academic worlds, cultural history is often associated with cultural studies, or even integrated in that vast and ghettoized field of study, the American form of which crystallized in the early 1980s and is now the most famous. Beyond the concept of subculture – which is currently disappearing – it focuses on the cultural study of minorities and groups which have been overlooked in the Western world and, primarily, in America where the WASP but also the individual, heterosexual and bourgeois models have dominated. The aim of this approach is clearly militant and encouraged by the academic labeling in gender, gay and lesbian or queer studies, African-American, Native-American, Asian-American or Chicano studies as well as colonial, post-colonial, subaltern or disability studies. This approach clearly makes a similar heuristic choice as the one made by cultural history as we have defined it but the value judgment (whether implicit or explicit) that underpins its investigations mark a difference between the two approaches. (Pascal Ory, *L'histoire culturelle*, Presses Universitaires de France, coll. Que sais-je?, Paris, 2004, p. 38-39).

culturalism developed as a reaction against marxism and economism (an approach that identified economic relations as the source of all phenomena, relegating all other levels or aspects to a superstructural level. Nowadays cultural studies seem to be drifting in a similar way with “culture” taking the place that economy held as the main infrastructural level – if not the only one. So culturalism became the substitute of economism. It is tempting to see a parallel between this hegemonistic tendency and that of marxism in the 1950s, which precisely triggered the development of cultural studies against it.

What do we suggest in the light of the observations made above? We certainly do not advocate in favour of a material-based musicology as opposed to a contextual musicology, nor do we support the idea of a product-focused musicology as opposed to a musicology focused on processes only, nor a musicology that would elect the musical component to a level of infrastructure that would be seen as the matrix of everything else. Instead, it seems that analytical, historical and socio-anthropological approaches should be regarded with equal respect and that as much attention should be paid to products and processes, which are indissolubly linked. The numerous aspects of a musical object should be taken into account but claiming a multidisciplinary approach has actually too often led to a field overlooking the others.⁵¹ Musicological activity should not involve musical analysis alone as the only reaction possible against the grip of panculturalism. Other approaches do not require musical analysis. However, it is an illusion to think that the musical material and the need to understand how it works from the inside can be systematically dismissed. As mentioned earlier, the focus has now broadened and there is no need to return to a form of musical centrism. However, music is our main object of study and it manifests itself as sound.

Redefining the scope and limits of our object raises the question of axiological neutrality again. It would be naive to believe in a mythical objectivity but we think that it is advisable to adopt a neutral attitude whenever possible, despite our various determinations and whilst maintaining a critical viewpoint. The game cannot be over before it has started and the story cannot be written before the investigation has taken place. This principle is a condition to have a chance of getting some results. One does not always find what one wished for. The outcomes of research are not always pleasing to oneself or to the others. Also, it would be naive to believe that there are no political implications in academic debates in general but it is not unreasonable to think that the musicological discourse is not governed by them either. Besides, one could even argue that such implications may conceal other sorts of implications which are no less important: implications that have nothing to do with theory but everything to do with academia and money. Finally, one may also believe that commitment is a private matter with an ethical element to it (in particular with regards to transmission to future generations) and every researcher has their own personal views on it. It is in no way a requirement.

Asking what is specific to jazz inevitably triggers critiques on the front of essentialism. It has been the case for a long time. However, the question does not go away for it and it is permitted to ask it to ourselves and others. It may even be considered as a sort of inspiring unreachable and unsurpassable goal. Besides, the means of such a search, as can be found in Vincenzo Caporaletti's theory of audiotactile formativity⁵², also bring an answer to the questions

⁵¹ “Cultural studies has always been a multi- or post-disciplinary field of enquiry which blurs the boundaries between itself and other “subjects”. Yet cultural studies cannot be said to be anything. It is not physics, it is not sociology and it is not linguistics, though it draws upon these subject areas” (C. Barker, *Cultural Studies...*, p. 4-5).

⁵² See the bibliography.

of the definition and the limits of jazz, which go hand in hand. Indeed, looking for the specific features of jazz in the ways that it operates as well as creates and shapes the music (formativity) leads to noticing similarities between jazz and other kinds of music which manifest similar and sometimes even identical patterns in the way that they create and shape the music. In such cases the differences tend to lie in the idiomatic contents of the various musics. With this approach questions such as whether the music of Egberto Gismonti belongs to jazz or not for example, are asked in a very different way. From an idiomatic point of view, it is not exactly jazz (though elements of jazz can be found in it) but from the point of view of formativity, it turns out to be very similar. In this light, it becomes clear that many musics which cannot be assimilated to jazz are nonetheless close to it (for example, in the case of Brazil, some of the musics labelled MPB - *Musica Popular Brasileira*). The paradigm of formativity always proves useful when applied to the musics that are clearly very close to jazz (the group Codona, for example). As a result, looking for the specific features of jazz as well as its essence or essences (if such a word can still be accepted) can still be a field of research whilst being based on very different criteria from those used (or rejected) in the past, and which were of an ethnic or idiomatic nature, for example. However, it does not mean either that these criteria are no longer relevant and need to be discarded.

One would thus advise the most open-minded methodological approach as possible and leaning on diverse means and tools. Under no circumstances could it be a mere alleged deconstruction, conceived as the reversed and simplified process following a mythical construction. Reconsidering our methods and positions may also lead to objects that the academic landscape has recently neglected: notions such as lyricism, energy, musical obsession, desire in music, urges of order and disorder as well as authenticity for example may be worth exploring again. Along the same lines, some fields that have been overlooked by postmodernism - such as psychology or aesthetics - could be revived.

On the front of resources one has merely scratched the surface of a large amount of discourses: Ernest Ansermet, Abbe Niles, R.D. Darrell, Roger Pryor Dodge, Don Knowlton, Henry Osgood, Wilder Hobson, Paul Whiteman, Marshall Stearns, Frederic Ramsey & Charles-Edward Smith, Robert Goffin, Hugues Panassié, Stéphane Mougin, Winthrop Sargeant, Rudi Blesh & Harriet Janis, Barry Ulanov, André Hodeir, Gunther Schuller, John & Alan Lomax, Max Harrison, Nat Hentoff, Nat Shapiro, Francis Newton (*aka* Eric Hobsbawm), Alfons M. Dauer, Michel-Claude Jalard, Lucien Malson, Charles Keil and this is not a comprehensive list. Drawing on a more recent example, Martin Williams expressed similar views to those developed here in *The Jazz Tradition* (1970). He even foresaw some of the deviations that had not yet happened.⁵³

There is also a deposit of discourses by musicians that has hardly been explored: autobiographies (Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet, Danny Barker, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis) or the best oral products that history has to offer (Nat Shapiro & Nat Hentoff, Ira Gitler, Arthur Taylor, Ben Sidran, François Postif, Thierry Pérémarti, Thomas Jacobsen).

⁵³ Cf. for example Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 261: "I find Marxist interpretations unsatisfactory for it seems to me that they see the complexities of man and his art as merely the transient tools of "social forces". It seems to me that even most perceptive and receptive Marxists – certainly the narrow and doctrinaire ones – turn art into a reductive "nothing but" proposition, robbed of its complexities and its humanity. Perhaps, that we might try a somewhat different approach, one which may be based more directly on the "knowable" aspects of music, and on those ways in which jazz differs from other musics – or at any rate other Western musics."

Jazz scores (those left by musicians) are in need of attention too: complete orchestral works (Duke Ellington, Claude Thornhill, Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, Gil Evans, Vince Mendoza) or the numerous “sheets” of all kinds, lead sheets, full scores or parts used during recordings, notes left by musicians. Even though a few pioneers have started the work it is clear that the study of these documents (including fake books and the most prominent *Real Book* which has had and still has a huge impact on the production of jazz) is still lacking in the musicology of jazz.

So we advocate for a reopening of the field of research, where a diversity of approaches and objects - in other words a truly multidisciplinary approach - would take place and be rehabilitated.

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