

Intermusicality, Humor, and Cultural Critique in the Art Ensemble of Chicago's "A Jackson in Your House"

Paul Steinbeck

Two of the most salient aspects of the Art Ensemble of Chicago's performances are stylistic diversity and intermedia. Audiences at Art Ensemble concerts and listeners to Art Ensemble recordings encounter an array of musical genres and media forms, from jazz, collective improvisation, and world music to poetry pieces, theatrical sketches, and elaborate visual displays. Many observers have linked the Art Ensemble's multiplicitous performances to their slogan "Great Black Music, Ancient to the Future," a phrase that captures the historical scope of Art Ensemble performance practice as well as the heterogeneity of modern African American expressive culture.¹ However, fewer music scholars have contended (either theoretically or analytically) with the group's stylistic diversity and use of intermedia—surely crucial components of the "integrative comprehension of the Art Ensemble of Chicago's music" that poet and critic Norman Weinstein advocated more than a decade ago.²

In this article, I offer a focused response to the challenge posed by Weinstein. Rather than providing a broad survey of the band's aesthetics and performance practice, I examine just one Art Ensemble piece, the Roscoe Mitchell composition "A Jackson in Your House," closely analyzing the 1969 recording and two subsequent

¹See Lincoln T. Beauchamp Jr., *Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future* (Chicago, IL: Art Ensemble of Chicago Publishing Co., 1997); Jason Berry, "Declamations on Great Black Music," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997): 42–54; Peter Kemper, "Zur Funktion des Mythos im jazz der 70er Jahre: Soziokulturelle Aspekte eines musikalischen Phänomens dargestellt an der ästhetischen Konzeption des 'Art Ensemble of Chicago,'" *Jazzforschung* 13 (1981): 45–78; and countless journalistic treatments of the Art Ensemble that have appeared in jazz publications and the popular press.

²Norman C. Weinstein, "Steps Toward an Integrative Comprehension of the Art Ensemble of Chicago's Music," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997), 5. Besides Weinstein's essay, other scholarly examinations of Art Ensemble performance practice include Michael Joe Budds, "The Art Ensemble of Chicago in Context," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997): 59–72; Allan M. Gordon, "The Art Ensemble of Chicago as Performance Art," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997): 55–58; Ajay Heble, "The Rehistoricizing of Jazz: Chicago's 'Urban Bushmen' and the Problem of Representation," in *Landing on the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 63–88; Robin D. G. Kelley, "Dig They Freedom: Meditations on History and the Black Avant-Garde," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997): 13–27; George E. Lewis, "Singing Omar's Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music," *Lenox Avenue* 4 (1998): 69–92; Bruce Tucker, "Narrative, Extramusical Form, and the Metamodernism of the Art Ensemble of Chicago," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997): 29–41; and Paul Steinbeck, "'Area by Area the Machine Unfolds': The Improvisational Performance Practice of the Art Ensemble of Chicago," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2/3 (August 2008): 397–427.

performances through 1981. As a multi-stylistic composition with several important intermedia elements (vocal interjections, a poetry recitation, and verbal commentary), "A Jackson in Your House" is emblematic of the multiplicity that characterizes Art Ensemble performances; accordingly, analytical approaches developed for "A Jackson in Your House" could shed light on other Art Ensemble compositions, concerts, and albums.

My analyses center on three related themes: intermusicality, humor, and cultural critique. "A Jackson in Your House" contains a variety of distinct musical styles, ordered both successively and simultaneously. As the composition unfolds, this stylistic counterpoint creates numerous instances of what Ingrid Monson has called "intermusical[ity]": "aurally perceptible musical relationships that are heard in the context of particular musical traditions."³ Monson's studies of intermusicality typically describe brief quotations or allusions inserted into a performance that otherwise occupies a single jazz style (for example, the "Fables of Faubus" interpolation and shout-chorus gestures that pianist Jaki Byard contributes to a quartet rendition of "Bass-ment Blues").⁴ In contrast, many of the intermusical relationships in "A Jackson in Your House" flow from the content and structure of Mitchell's multi-stylistic composition—an intricate, polyvalent text that riffs on the history of jazz and places the Art Ensemble in strategic opposition to received notions of how the jazz tradition ought to be interpreted. Additional levels of meaning arise from the intermedia elements of the piece, especially the musicians' vocal interjections and spontaneous verbal commentary. These intermedia elements are outwardly humorous, and they usually function to emphasize, dramatize, or signify on the intermusical dynamics embedded in the composition. Further analysis reveals that the vocal interjections and verbal commentary also communicate various sub-textual messages. Considered collectively, the sub-textual messages articulated by the Art Ensemble in "A Jackson in Your House" constitute a pointed cultural critique of the complex issues surrounding the jazz-historical topic of Mitchell's composition, including the social politics of race, the relationship between performers and their audiences, and the reception of black experimental music in the United States and abroad.

"Humour aussi sérieux que celui de la vie"

Roscoe Mitchell wrote "A Jackson in Your House" in 1967 or 1968 for the group then known as the Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble.⁵ The core of this Art Ensemble was Lester Bowie, trumpet; Malachi Favors, bass; and Mitchell, saxophones. Several other musicians performed with the Art Ensemble during this period, notably saxophonist Joseph Jarman, a colleague of Bowie, Favors, and Mitchell in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM, the African American artists' collective

³Ingrid T. Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 128. Intermusicality, according to Monson, "occurs primarily through musical sound itself, rather than words," and can be regarded as a special case of intertextuality (*ibid.*, 127).

⁴*Ibid.*, 137–177.

⁵Roscoe Mitchell, email to author, September 15, 2007.

founded on the South Side of Chicago in 1965). Jarman formally joined the Art Ensemble in 1969, when the band ventured to Paris in an effort to escape the faltering Chicago live-music scene. Just three weeks after their arrival in Paris, the Art Ensemble recorded their first album as a quartet, *A Jackson in Your House*.⁶ As the opening track of this LP, the composition “A Jackson in Your House” introduced thousands of European and stateside listeners to Bowie, Favors, Jarman, and Mitchell—late of the Windy City and now known collectively as the Art Ensemble of Chicago.⁷

The June 23, 1969, recording of “A Jackson in Your House” is both expansive and fast-paced. In less than six minutes, the musicians play an epigrammatic introduction, a moody percussion interlude, three contrasting renditions of the main theme, and an extended ending passage that incorporates two new melodic strains (see Example 1). Different intermusical relationships emerge in each section of the piece, as compositionally driven changes in theme and style are inflected by the real-time interpretive decisions made by the musicians. Throughout the performance, the members of the Art Ensemble dialogue (vocally and verbally) with the music they are playing, an aspect of “A Jackson in Your House” that was not part of Mitchell’s original compositional design but developed during the rehearsals immediately prior to the recording session, according to Jarman.⁸ Indeed, the musicians’ verbal commentary often seems like a specific response to the Parisian setting of the performance, a sub-textual strategy employed in subsequent versions of “A Jackson in Your House,” and in many other Art Ensemble performances as well.

introduction	0:00-0:14
percussion interlude	0:14-1:35
theme statement 1	1:35-2:16
theme statement 2	2:16-3:04
theme statement 3	3:04-3:36
swing vamp	3:36-4:34
first swing strain	4:34-4:47
second swing strain	4:47-5:10
first swing strain (return)	5:10-5:45

Example 1 Formal plan, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969).

“A Jackson in Your House” begins with Bowie on trumpet, Mitchell on soprano saxophone, Jarman on vibraphone, and Favors on double bass, playing an F-major fanfare in octaves. As Jarman’s final note rings out, he strikes a small cymbal; Favors and Mitchell respond with a chorus of bulb horns (see Example 2). The meaning of

⁶Art Ensemble of Chicago, *A Jackson in Your House*, BYG/Actuel 529302, 1969, LP.

⁷For more on the Art Ensemble’s activities in Paris from 1969 to 1971, see Paul Steinbeck, “Urban Magic: The Art Ensemble of Chicago’s Great Black Music” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2008), 108–200.

⁸Joseph Jarman, interview by author, December 10, 2008, Brooklyn.

Favors and Mitchell’s horn chorus is not immediately evident. Bulb horns and other “little instruments” routinely appear in Art Ensemble performances, and it is possible that in “A Jackson in Your House” the horns function like conventional instruments chosen for their acoustic properties.⁹ However, in the present context Favors and Mitchell seem to be using the horns to “say something” about the fanfare. Musicologist Ekkehard Jost has written that the Art Ensemble’s little instruments often “[stand] in a dialectical relationship to the music around [them],” and create a “confrontation of various levels of expression and style, in which the expressive power of one level is relativized by the other.”¹⁰ One could argue that in the introduction of “A Jackson in Your House,” Favors and Mitchell employ sonic confrontation to propose an interpretive dialectic. From the syntactical perspective provided by the opening fanfare, the horn chorus is incongruous, perhaps even un-musical. Conversely, Favors and Mitchell’s horn response makes the fanfare melody sound quaint and out-of-place—“a pompous overture,” in Jost’s assessment, “whose Baroque grace is considerably impaired by percussive interjections.”¹¹

Example 2 Introduction, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969)

* All musical examples in this article are my transcriptions, reproduced by permission of Art Ensemble of Chicago Publishing Co. (ASCAP). The examples represent pitches in the keys and registers native to the instruments being played, as in a transposing score. The text of this article refers to pitches at concert pitch, and adopts the convention in which middle C is labeled C4. To the left of the staves are the musicians’ initials: “LB” is Lester Bowie, “RM” is Roscoe Mitchell, etc. The arrow in this example (and in succeeding examples) denotes an audible interactive relationship.

⁹The definitive study of AACM instrumental practice is Gregory Alan Campbell, “A Beautiful, Shining Sound Object”: Contextualizing Multi-Instrumentalism in the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians” (D.M.A. diss., University of Washington, 2006).

¹⁰Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 178.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 179.

During the next section of the piece, Jarman improvises a string of rubato phrases in the key of F. Mitchell fills the spaces between these phrases, complementing the soft metallic timbre of Jarman's sustaining vibraphone with aphoristic utterances on bells, horns, steel drum, and other little instruments (see Example 3). Jarman's vibraphone improvisation echoes the introductory fanfare and also foreshadows the upcoming main theme. Viewed in relation to the entire performance, this percussion interlude and the preceding fanfare serve as a prelude or an anacrusis; just as significantly, the ambiguity of these two passages lays the foundation for the decidedly unambiguous intermusical relationships that materialize during the three statements of the main theme.

Example 3 Percussion interlude, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969)

* The triangles in this example mean “improvise(d),” constantly changing, according to the notational convention used by many AACM composers.

The full ensemble returns one minute later to present the main theme of “A Jackson in Your House.” At first this section sounds like a reprise of the introductory fanfare, but in the fifth measure of the theme Jarman switches from vibraphone to wood blocks, cowbell, and drums, in order to play a linear accompaniment pattern that rhythmically and timbrally resembles the rickety percussion parts heard in early jazz recordings (see Example 4). Jarman’s syncopated percussion work forms a quirky contrast to the foursquare, sequential melody performed by the rest of the group. If “music [has]...the functional equivalent of a past tense,” as Ingrid Monson has asserted, then the members of the Art Ensemble are variously portraying multiple styles and historical periods.¹² The main theme is a march melody, a parade tune, even a Baroque overture (in Ekkehard Jost’s hearing), while the percussion pattern belongs to turn-of-the-century New Orleans. Jarman’s accompaniment evokes the genealogical connections between early jazz and the musics of the nineteenth century, but also demonstrates through rhythmic means the disjunctures

¹²Monson, *Saying Something*, 188.

1:47

144

LB trumpet

RM soprano sax.

JJ vibes hi/low wood blocks

MF bass

1:53

LB

RM

JJ cowbell hi/low drums hi/low wood blocks

MF

Example 4 First two phrases of theme statement 1, "A Jackson in Your House" (1969)

separating Congo Square and the French Opera House, Bull Run and Funky Butt Hall.

In the final phrase of the main theme, the members of the Art Ensemble perform a scalar melody borrowed from the introductory fanfare, then break into hysterical laughter (see Example 5). Here the ascending-scale motion and ensuing wild laughter recall the bulb-horn chorus from the beginning of the piece. The horn response played by Favors and Mitchell after the opening fanfare, however, was as spacious and restrained as the present outbreak of laughter is extroverted and surreal. Like many of the intermedia elements in "A Jackson in Your House," this vocal device conveys multiple levels of meaning. The musicians' laughter lampoons the antediluvian main theme, as in the introduction, and it foregrounds the stylistic divergence between the theme and Jarman's early-jazz percussion playing. More subversively, the Art Ensemble's uproarious interpretive gesture expresses the audacious, oppositional spirit of the performance. In the days leading up to the recording session for *A Jackson in Your House*, the band's first concerts at the Théâtre du Lucernaire in Montparnasse were being acclaimed as "the New Thing's sensational debut in

Paris.”¹³ The Chicagoans chose to counter this one-dimensional (though positive) reception with a piece owing more to James Reese Europe and Sidney Bechet, who had charmed Parisian audiences decades earlier, than to the free-jazz figures who served as inevitable points of reference in critical evaluations of the Art Ensemble’s work.¹⁴

The musical score is for the last phrase of the theme statement 1, "A Jackson in Your House" (1969). It is written in 2/4 time and consists of four staves. The top staff (LB) is for trumpet, the second (RM) for soprano saxophone, the third (JJ) for hi/low wood blocks and cymbal, and the bottom (MF) for bass. The music begins at 1:59. The trumpet and bass play a melodic line, while the saxophone and wood blocks/cymbal provide rhythmic accompaniment. The piece concludes with a yodel and laughter.

Example 5 Last phrase of theme statement 1, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969).

The second iteration of the “A Jackson in Your House” theme is articulated by Mitchell, who employs his best Bill Cosby voice to recite a rhyming poem over Favors’s vigorous bass line. Mitchell has transformed the instrumental melody into a vaguely downhome toast to “Jackson,” the cat he owned before the Art Ensemble traveled to Paris.¹⁵ During the poem, Bowie and Jarman construct a madhouse background commentary out of muted chuckles, bulb horns, and half-valve trumpet. When Mitchell reaches the end of his recitation, he shapes the last note into a yodel, then a cascade of laughter, as he joins the mirthful milieu inhabited by the rest of the musicians. Jarman gets the last word with a hip pun: “Jackson—that cat is something” (see Example 6). The second theme is perhaps the funniest section of the performance, and the band’s laughter can be perceived as a spontaneous reaction to the witty poem, Mitchell’s comical delivery, and the boisterous atmosphere surrounding the recitation. This moment also illustrates the importance of humor to Art Ensemble performance practice, a factor that distinguished their music from much of the free jazz on the Paris scene at the time. Indeed, “A Jackson in Your House” readily refutes facile interpretations of the Art Ensemble’s output that were commonly advanced by

¹³“entrée fracassante de la New-Thing à Paris...” Daniel Caux, “Le délire et la rigueur de ‘l’art ensemble’ de Chicago,” *Jazz Hot* 252 (July–August 1969): 8.

¹⁴Further information on the critical reception of the Art Ensemble in Paris can be found in Eric Drott, “Free Jazz and the French Critic,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 61/3 (December 2008): 541–581; and Stephen Lehman, “I Love You With an Asterisk: African-American Experimental Music and the French Jazz Press, 1970–1980,” *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* 1/2 (2005): 38–53.

¹⁵Mitchell, email to author.

Paris-based critics, such as the *Jazz Magazine* reviewer who claimed that “to speak of the Chicagoans is to always use the same expressions: *black music*, *black power*, *aggression*...”¹⁶ Perhaps a more apt comparison would have been to the ludic “happenings” and Fluxus events then taking place at the American Center, an important Montparnasse venue that also hosted numerous Art Ensemble concerts in 1969 and after.¹⁷

2:29

RM

8 One two three There's a

8 Jack - son in your house All that

8 he will do is chase your shoe and watch you in the tub

8 Turn a - round and act the clown and scratch you on the rump

8 One two three There's a

8 Jack - son in your house And

8 he will nev - er catch a mouse

Example 6 Poetic portion of theme statement 2, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969).

During the next section of the performance, the musicians play a collectively improvised version of the main theme in an approximation of the New Orleans style. Mitchell and Bowie collaborate on a relaxed early-jazz counterpoint, supported by Favors’s appropriately archaic two-beat slap-bass groove. The members of the Art Ensemble have effected a stylistic permutation of the “A Jackson in Your House” theme, a variation that would presumably provide a better fit for Jarman’s accompaniment. However, the micro-rhythmic imprecision of Jarman’s percussion work makes the third theme statement sound slightly awkward, as if played by a recreational Dixieland band made up of straw-hatted weekend warriors. The intermusical dynamics heard earlier in the piece have given way to sharp parody.

¹⁶“Parler des musiciens de Chicago, c’est toujours employer les memes expressions: *black music*, *black power*, *aggression*...” Paul Alessandrini, “Jazz on the Grass,” *Jazz Magazine* 169–170 (September 1969): 9.

¹⁷See Nelyca Delanoë, *Le Raspail Vert: L’American Center à Paris 1934–1994—Une histoire des avant-gardes franco-américaines* (Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1994), 113–175.

This theme statement ends differently from its predecessors; rather than pause for laughter after they ascend the F-major scale, the members of the Art Ensemble detour into a tag ending that centers on the “shave and a haircut” rhythm that Jarman plays on wood block. All four musicians perform the “two bits” segment in rhythmic unison, but then Mitchell emits a superfluous note on the very next beat. He instantly acknowledges his calculated mistake, and the others loudly express their disapproval (see Example 7). Considered in conjunction with Jarman’s inelegant percussion playing and the deliberately amateurish sound produced by the performers throughout the third rendition of the theme, Mitchell’s “wrong note” musical joke and the subsequent commotion represent a pronounced shift in the Art Ensemble’s intermedia strategy. Previously in “A Jackson in Your House,” the musicians’ laughter and other vocal interjections were humorous in presentation, and communicated critical messages in oblique, sub-textual ways. Now the Art Ensemble’s cultural critique is moving ever closer to the surface. “Let’s get on down and play some more blues, man,” Jarman urges: “We’re gonna try to play some blues. Y’all are playing that ol’ hacked-up [stuff]—ain’t nobody want to hear none of that.” Jarman’s words convey the tight connections between the musical marketplace, the pressure it exerts upon musicians to innovate yet remain within identifiable genre boundaries, and—crucially—working musicians’ utter dependence upon the favor of paying audiences, sympathetic critics, and music-industry gatekeepers. These actualities, according to George Lewis, were particularly apparent to the members of the Art Ensemble and their AACM colleagues, who understood that “black music had become the most commodified art in history, and the space of positions for alternative black musical expression was becoming vanishingly small.”¹⁸ In this respect, the Paris scene was no different from what the Art Ensemble had left behind in Chicago. As Jarman wrote in the *A Jackson in Your House* liner notes, “humor as serious as life...[i]t sounds like good old jazz, because it’s just as good here as it was over there.”¹⁹

Jarman’s request to “play some blues” signals a turning point in the Art Ensemble’s cultural critique, and also marks the principal formal division of the piece. In response to Jarman, Favors initiates the long ending section of “A Jackson in Your House,” playing a I–VI–II–V bass pattern in the new key of B-flat. The moderate tempo of Favors’s bass vamp suggests a post-New Orleans “swing” idiom, which Mitchell elaborates with a pentatonic clarinet melody. Though the stylistic contrast between the new swing groove and the preceding theme statement is not immense, Jarman effectively underscores the intermusical relationship with a running monologue directed at the other musicians: “Tryin’ to play some blues!—You playin’ some jazz there, huh?”²⁰ (see Example 8).

¹⁸George E. Lewis, “Gittin’ To Know Y’all: Improvised Music, Interculturalism, and the Racial Imagination,” *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* 1/1 (2004): 19.

¹⁹“humour aussi sérieux que celui de la vie...[ç]a sonne comme du bon vieux jazz, parce qu’ici on est bien comme on l’était là-bas.” Joseph Jarman, liner notes for Art Ensemble of Chicago, *A Jackson in Your House*.

²⁰The relative familiarity of the early-jazz and swing musical styles employed in “A Jackson in Your House” may facilitate perceptions of intermusical relationships, according to Ekkehard Jost: “Getting this message across... means necessarily going back to models whose meaning the listener can decipher” (Jost, *Free Jazz*, 179).

The image displays a musical score for the piece "A Jackson in Your House" (1969). It is divided into two systems. The first system, starting at 3:19, is marked with a tempo of 200. It includes four staves: LB (trumpet), RM (soprano sax), JJ (cymbal and wood block), and MF (bass). The second system, starting at 3:24, continues the piece and includes 'chatter' annotations for the LB, RM, JJ, and MF staves. The RM staff has a specific annotation: "“Oh, man...” chatter".

Example 7 Last two phrases of theme statement 3, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969).

Jarman’s spontaneous verbal commentary recalls the writings of Anthony Braxton on the “reality of the sweating brow,” a critical concept that explains Western perceptions of black performance, specifically jazz music. According to Braxton, the “‘reality of the sweating brow’ has to do with how white writers have come to interpret whether a given black musician is accurately ‘doing the best’ he or she can, or whether that musician is merely ‘coasting’—or not ‘really trying to be creative’...A black so-called jazz musician’s activity... is viewed not so much with respect to his or her given music offering, but instead with respect to whether that person’s emotional surface output is viewed as sufficient.”²¹ From a Braxtonian perspective, Jarman’s energetic monologue could represent a jazz audience talking back to the performers—think of a 1940s Jazz at the Philharmonic concert, with enthusiastic fans crowded against the front of the stage, inciting their idols with shouts of “Go, man, go!” Alternatively, Jarman’s demonstrative performance might be a satirical enactment of what certain

²¹Anthony Braxton, *Tri-Axium Writings: Writings Three* (Lebanon, NH: Frog Peak Music, 1985), 297–298.

The image shows two systems of a musical score for the piece "A Jackson in Your House" (1969). The first system is marked with a time signature of 3:42 and a tempo of 144. It features four staves: LB (Lead Band), RM (Rhythm Machine), JJ (Jazz/Jazz Ensemble), and MF (Melody/Fiddle). The RM staff is labeled "clarinet" and the MF staff is labeled "bass". The JJ staff contains the lyrics: "Come on, let's play some blues!" and "Yeah, yeah!". The second system is marked with a time signature of 3:49 and features the same four staves. The JJ staff contains the lyrics: "Tryin' to play some blues!" and "You playin' some jazz there, huh?". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 8 Swing vamp, “A Jackson in Your House” (1969).

listeners expected from the Art Ensemble: emotional displays, physical abandon, and even sweating brows. This interpretation is consistent with French jazz journalists’ earliest reviews of Art Ensemble concerts, some of which depicted the musicians as exotics with painted faces and opaque performance rituals.²² Of course, these racially charged images were hardly unique to the reception of the Art Ensemble, as the long history of jazz in France has shown.²³ This “reality” is central to the meaning of “A Jackson in Your House,” as a compositional text and as a performed cultural critique. “A Jackson in Your House” sheds light on the Art Ensemble’s experiences during their first month in France, and it also speaks to the history of jazz, from its New Orleans

²²See Alessandrini, “Jazz on the Grass”; and Caux, “Le délire et la rigueur.” These reviews, the first published reports on the Art Ensemble’s Paris concerts, set the tone for future coverage of Art Ensemble events in France.

²³For more on jazz and twentieth-century French culture, see Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Jean Jamin, “Au-delà du Vieux-Carré: Idées du jazz en France,” *L’Homme* 158–159 (2001): 285–300; Denis-Constant Martin, “De l’excursion à Harlem au débat sur les ‘Noirs’: Les terrains absents de la jazzologie française,” *L’Homme* 158–159 (2001): 261–278; and Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

origins to latter-day jazz cultures from Chicago to Paris. In the same way, Jarman’s verbal commentary reaches beyond the performative moment to embrace African American musicians past and present, and to resist aesthetic, economic, or social restrictions placed on black creativity.

In the last section of “A Jackson in Your House,” Mitchell, Favors, and Bowie play a sixteen-measure melodic strain, then another new melody lasting twenty-eight bars. Jarman keeps time on a suspended cymbal, exhorts the other musicians (“Yes it is—Uh huh—All right, man!”), and sings along. As the swing groove continues, it becomes evident that Mitchell could have composed any number of novel melodies over Favors’s cyclic bass vamp, and it is increasingly difficult to predict precisely when the musicians will end the performance. The members of the Art Ensemble exploit this sense of unpredictability by returning to the first swing strain, then linking this strain to a new tag ending. This gesture roughly resembles the “shave and a haircut” figure from the third theme statement, but the musicians subvert expectations by prolonging the tag for an uncomfortably long stretch of time. After a few false finishes, the performers finally reach an endpoint: first Mitchell and Jarman, followed one beat later by Bowie and Favors. Curiously, Jarman and his bandmates choose to downplay this clever conclusion—no bulb horns, no laughing, no dialogue, only silence, so listeners can reflect for a while on what has transpired (see Example 9).

“Each Concert was Different”

“A Jackson in Your House” remained in the Art Ensemble’s repertoire for many years after the 1969 recording session. Subsequent versions of the piece departed significantly from the structure and sound of the original, and the range of interpretive possibilities was perhaps broader for “A Jackson in Your House” than for any other Art Ensemble composition. One important strategy for live performances involved omitting certain sections of the piece, as Jarman recalled: “Each concert was different, and in order to keep it more open we usually played parts of ‘A Jackson in Your House’ rather than the whole structure.”²⁴ In other words, the Art Ensemble believed that lengthy composed passages could inhibit the flow of group improvisation, and they preferred using briefer compositional fragments as points of departure during concerts. The band also placed a high value on contingency, collaboration, and other qualities related to improvisatory performance. In a concert setting, the members of the Art Ensemble would select a “set list” of a few compositions and improvisational scenarios just before taking the stage; this set list, however, could be re-ordered or even discarded as the performance progressed.²⁵ Similarly, the constituent pieces of the set list were also subject to spontaneous re-shaping in accordance with the collective cognition of the musicians. This flexible methodology ensured that the Art Ensemble’s

²⁴Jarman, interview by author.

²⁵Don Moye, interview by author, January 19, 2007, Chicago.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a jazz ensemble. Each system consists of four staves: LB (Lead Bass), RM (Rhythm Machine), JJ (Jazz Guitar), and MF (Melody/Fiddle). The time signature is 2/4. The first system is marked with a box containing '5:23'. The second system is marked with a box containing '5:29'. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including triplets and rests, across all instruments.

Example 9 Tag ending of first swing strain (return), “A Jackson in Your House” (1969).

performances would be both multiplicitous and seamless, in the manner of weaved cloths,²⁶ mythic narratives,²⁷ and multi-movement suites.²⁸

Concert versions of “A Jackson in Your House” incorporated some but not all sections of the composition. The actual arrangement chosen by the Art Ensemble was partially determined by the piece’s position in the overall trajectory of the performance. If placed at the beginning of a concert, the composition might conclude in an open-ended way, to facilitate an elision with the next piece on the set list. In contrast, placement at the end of the set list might require a version that emerges gradually from the preceding piece, and then works toward an exciting conclusion. Set-list positioning, however, was only one of several factors that influenced the interpretive decisions made by the Art Ensemble. Many of the remaining variables were associated with the particular setting of the concert—the venue and its geographical location, and also the audience,

²⁶Weinstein, “Integrative Comprehension,” 6.

²⁷Tucker, “Extramusical Form,” 33.

²⁸Lewis, “Singing Omar’s Song,” 75.

the Art Ensemble’s relationship to that audience, and the historical moment in which the performance occurred. These considerations demand analytical attention, because of what they can reveal about the performance’s intermusical dynamics, intermedia elements, and the critical stance that the members of the Art Ensemble wanted to convey.

An April 30, 1979, Art Ensemble concert in Athens, Georgia opens with Bowie (on trumpet) and Mitchell (on clarinet) exchanging blues licks in B-flat.²⁹ Seconds later, Favors answers with an equally bluesy melody, singing the words “down here in Dixieland” (see Example 10). Favors’s vocal line refers to the Southern locale of the concert, and also calls attention to the complicated history of the term “Dixieland.” There’s Dixieland as a synonym for early jazz—one of the styles represented in “A Jackson in Your House,” which happens to be the first piece on this concert’s set list. Then there’s the Original Dixieland Jass Band, who in 1917 made the first recordings of New Orleans music, and in doing so attracted criticism from musicians who felt that their performances were unserious mimickries of a tradition that belonged to blacks and Creoles.³⁰ Of course, all of these lexical associations can be traced to the notorious anthem “Dixie,” which originated in antebellum minstrel shows as a counterfeit plantation song. The members of the Art Ensemble were familiar with the codes of minstrelsy, and on occasion their performances parodied elements of the minstrel show.³¹ One memorable concert began with Favors strumming a banjo while the drummer danced across the stage with an oversized Raggedy Ann doll. Another musician, evidently enraged at the sight of a mixed-race couple, chased after them with a shotgun.³²

Example 10 Introduction, “A Jackson in Your House” (1979).

It is possible to hear “A Jackson in Your House” as a send-up of various conventions surrounding minstrelsy. Jarman’s verbal commentary during the swing section of the 1969 recording dramatizes the historically asymmetrical relationship between the music industry and black performers. Similarly, the nineteenth-century minstrel

²⁹ Art Ensemble of Chicago, live concert recording, Athens, GA, April 30, 1979, CD, collection of Jonathan Piper.

³⁰ See Sidney Bechet, *Treat it Gentle: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 114–115.

³¹ Thomas Aldridge Newsome, “It’s After the End of the World! Don’t You Know That Yet? Black Creative Musicians in Chicago (1946–1976)” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001), 186.

³² John B. Litweiler, “There Won’t Be Any More Music,” in *Down Beat Music ’71: 16th Annual Yearbook* (Chicago, IL: Maher Publications, 1971), 24.

show was all about the extraordinary measures that whites were willing to take in order to “‘master’ the power and interest of black cultural practices”—a double-sided phenomenon that historian Eric Lott has called “love and theft.”³³ This hearing of “A Jackson in Your House” is bolstered by what next happens in the Athens, Georgia concert. After Favors sings “down here in Dixieland,” the members of the Art Ensemble skip the main theme and move directly into the swing section of “A Jackson in Your House.” Jarman plays a lengthy soprano saxophone solo over the steady 4/4 groove, which makes him unavailable for the spontaneous verbalist role he had played ten years earlier. Mitchell and Bowie take over, exhorting the rest of the band with phrases that echo Jarman’s 1969 monologue. In particular, one of Mitchell’s exclamations—“go ‘head, boy!”—seems to crystallize Anthony Braxton’s “sweating brow” concept and its implications for black musicians performing in unfriendly territory.

Once Jarman’s saxophone solo comes to an end, the swing beat slowly dissolves. A few minutes later, Mitchell approaches the microphone to recite a poetic text: not the “A Jackson in Your House” poem, but a new piece that sounds like a hybrid of surrealist verse and a minstrel-show stump speech.³⁴ In a bold gesture, Mitchell adopts as his poetic refrain a word that rivals “go ‘head, boy!” in its potential for social provocation (see Example 11).

Two years after the Athens, Georgia concert, the Art Ensemble revisited “A Jackson in Your House” during a set at the Jazz Showcase in Chicago.³⁵ For the Art Ensemble, this was a rare appearance in their hometown, made possible by sponsors from the University of Illinois, who also documented the event on video.³⁶ At the time, the Art Ensemble’s popularity was at a peak. They were recording for the contemporary-music label ECM under a deal that brought the band worldwide distribution and a new level of critical esteem, including awards from mass-market publications like *Stereo Review* and *Rolling Stone*.³⁷ In Mitchell’s estimation, this newfound success was made even more meaningful by the realization that “the Art Ensemble was one of a very small number of groups that even survived the late ’70s.” Among the consequences of this generational upheaval was a jazz scene that “got a little more conservative,” as Mitchell put it (in an epic understatement).³⁸ The traditionalist revival in 1980s jazz was then and is now symbolized by Wynton Marsalis, whose rapid rise did not escape the notice of the Art

³³Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 113.

³⁴For more on stump speeches and the minstrel show, see *ibid.*, 77–78, 143. The affinities between the Art Ensemble, the Chicago Surrealist Group, and other American surrealists are explored by Robin D. G. Kelley, “Freedom Now Sweet: Surrealism and the Black World,” in *Surrealist Subversion: Rants, Writings & Images by the Surrealist Movement in the United States*, ed. Ron Sakolsky (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2002), 134–150; Franklin Rosemont, “Black Music and the Surrealist Revolution,” *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion* 3 (Spring 1976): 17–27; and Ron Sakolsky, “Surrealist Subversion in Chicago: The Forecast is Hotter than Ever!” in *Surrealist Subversion*, 23–110.

³⁵Art Ensemble of Chicago. *Live from the Jazz Showcase*. University of Illinois, 1982, videocassette.

³⁶Richard Wang, email to author, April 14, 2008.

³⁷Isio Saba, liner notes to Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Reunion, Around Jazz-II Manifesto* CD 122 SIAE, 2003, compact disc.

³⁸Roscoe Mitchell, quoted in Anthony Coleman, “Roscoe Mitchell,” *BOMB* 91 (Spring 2005), 71.

Water—watermelon!

It was only for kicks, cracks, and flacks
plicks and placks and plickers
Lackplacker lackplicker

I went away three day ago

Vickers, flickers, ack ack mackfacklack
Ack ack mackfacklack

Ouncladose oselacon seaco

Deonclaso coonclaso

oolinoundnighhenti

ooo—tti nigoundhhenti

ooo—tti nigoundhhenti

Ouncladose oselacon seaco

Deonclaso coonclaso

It was only for kicks, cracks, and flacks
plicks and placks and plickers

Water—watermelon!

Vickers, flickers, ack ack mackfacklack
Ack ack mackfacklack

Ouncladose oselacon seaco

Deonclaso coonclaso

oolinoundnighhenti

ooo—tti nigoundhhenti

Ouncladose oselacon seaco

Deonclaso coonclaso

oolinoundnighhenti

ooo—tti nigoundhhenti

Only for kicks, cracks, and flacks
plicks and placks and plickers

Water—watermelon!

Example 11 Roscoe Mitchell recitation, "A Jackson in Your House" (1979).

* Some of the spellings in this example are adapted from John Litweiler, *The Freedom Principle: Jazz after 1958* (New York: W. Morrow, 1984), 172.

Ensemble. Bowie himself regularly checked the Marsalis juggernaut during the 1980s and 1990s, when the two trumpeters were usually in contention for the top spot in *Down Beat* magazine's annual polls.³⁹ Marsalis returned the favor in Ken Burns's *Jazz* documentary, which criticized the Art Ensemble for having an audience composed of too few African Americans and too many French college students.⁴⁰

³⁹See, for instance, Bowie's remarks on Marsalis in Fred Bouchard, "Blindfold Test: Lester Bowie," *Down Beat* 51 (September 1984): 41.

⁴⁰Scott DeVeaux, "Struggling with Jazz," *Current Musicology* 71–73 (Spring 2001–Spring 2002): 365.

The Art Ensemble's November 1, 1981, performance of "A Jackson in Your House" is a friendly salutation to an appreciative hometown audience, as well as a robust rejoinder to the conservative faction then ascendant on the American jazz scene. The musical arrangement acknowledges the influence of the New Orleans tradition, but avoids the excessive reverence often encountered in contemporaneous tributes to early jazz performed by Marsalis and other revivalists. Instead, the members of the Art Ensemble juxtapose "A Jackson in Your House" with West African music and avant-garde jazz, in an imaginative illustration of their slogan "Great Black Music, Ancient to the Future." For Norman Weinstein, performances like this "[seem] to say, 'We take our heritage so seriously that we can signify upon it at every moment, lovingly.'"⁴¹

During a quiet passage midway through the concert, Favors introduces the oom-pah bass ostinato that ordinarily accompanies the main theme of "A Jackson in Your House." In response, percussionist Don Moye uses two hand-held "bird calls" to produce laughter-like sounds that approximate the bulb horns heard in the 1969 recording.⁴² However, the musicians avoid converging toward "A Jackson in Your House," and over the next ten minutes they gradually cycle through several different stylistic realms: first, a vivid percussion texture punctuated by sirens and bursts of gunfire; then, two short compositions that draw on the drum-and-bell music of coastal West Africa. The second African-inspired composition dovetails into yet another piece, the Art Ensemble's arrangement of a melody written by Albert Ayler. This piece, entitled "Bells," is in the same key as "A Jackson in Your House," a relationship that enables a smooth transition from one composition to the other. Bowie and Mitchell are still playing the coda of "Bells" when Favors reintroduces the familiar F-major bass vamp. Moye counters with his hand-held bird calls, and the others prepare for the "A Jackson in Your House" theme.

The members of the Art Ensemble play the main theme at a leisurely tempo that is closer to a New Orleans slow drag than a pace appropriate for parading. Mitchell, wielding a clarinet and a saxophone simultaneously, further denatures the melody with rough intonation and imprecise phrasing, as if he is letting his attention wander in anticipation of things to come. After two ragged readings of the main theme, Bowie pauses the band for an instant, then signals a much faster tempo. The musicians play the theme a third time, with considerable alacrity and in a convincing early-jazz style that creates a striking intermusical contrast with the preceding theme statements. This rendition of the theme concludes with an idiomatically appropriate "shave and a haircut" figure, but the performers bypass the "wrong note" musical joke from 1969 to play a crisp tag ending that the concert audience greets with immediate applause (see Example 12).

The Chicago concert essentially ends with "A Jackson in Your House," though the musicians play two encores before leaving the stage. This concert-ending function is partially enabled by the audience's familiarity with the piece, but it is mainly impelled

⁴¹Weinstein, "Integrative Comprehension," 7.

⁴²Don Moye, interview by author, September 6, 2007, Chicago.

by the sense of intermusical convergence generated during the long lead-in to the last theme statement. After several interpolated compositions and two languid versions of the main theme, the members of the Art Ensemble play the closing melody with a triumphant stylistic precision that engenders rich intermusical associations reaching back to the 1969 version of "A Jackson in Your House"—and to the streets and dancehalls of early-twentieth-century New Orleans. Bowie adds a fitting gestural counterpoint to this historical narrative as he struts and dips, New Orleans-style, in time with the bracing backbeat that emanates from Moye's snare drum.



Example 12 Tag ending of theme statement 3, "A Jackson in Your House" (1981).

There is a compelling resemblance between this performance of "A Jackson in Your House" and the emotional arc of a New Orleans brass-band funeral, which is "solemn" during the procession to the cemetery, but afterwards becomes revelrous and "playful," even "mock[ing]." ⁴³ If this intermusical analogy holds, then exactly who or what is being funeralized? Anthony Braxton's "reality of the sweating brow"? Or perhaps the jazz revivalists whose efforts threatened to ossify the tradition they revered? The Art Ensemble's perspective on this matter is suggested in a story told by Norman Weinstein:

The Art Ensemble performed in New Orleans in the 1980s and were received unenthusiastically. At the performance, Bowie pointed out to the audience the fact that they were playing within a mile of Congo Square. He then asked for several minutes of silence in honor of the ancestors there. The few minutes extended to perhaps ten. This was not an intermission, something a jazz audience would have known how to react to. Many in the audience noisily left the concert hall after five minutes. After all, they paid their money to hear jazz. This is America, where the dead are dead with finality. The group exhibited bad taste by defying the studied convention of the jazz concert. But who says the ancestors must be tasteful, tactful, must tell their eternal story continuously and sequentially in order to give the living "their money's worth"? ⁴⁴

"Working on the Buildings" ⁴⁵

In this article, I analyzed three performances of "A Jackson in Your House," a complex compositional statement that communicates intermusical meaning as well as numerous critical messages. Though this investigation was confined to a narrow slice of the

⁴³Albert Murray, *Stomping the Blues* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 196.

⁴⁴Weinstein, "Integrative Comprehension," 9.

⁴⁵Malachi Favors Maghostut, *Natural & the Spiritual*, AECO Records 003, 1978, LP.

Art Ensemble's output, I expect that it will be of interest to scholars with diverse specialties in jazz studies, improvisation studies, and music theory, and I hope that my analytical work contributes to those fields in at least three ways. First, my analyses could help to revitalize intermusicality research, an area of inquiry that (as Ingrid Monson demonstrated in *Saying Something*) can illuminate networks of influence and instances of musical historicity—compelling topics for many jazz scholars and practitioners. Second, the methodology for the analysis of intermedia performance developed in this article could bring jazz studies into a productive dialogue with the expanding body of literature on intermedia and musical multimedia, which is currently dominated by writings on flagship classical genres (opera, art songs) and popular forms (music videos, film soundtracks).⁴⁶ Third, I hope that my work will encourage members of the music theory community to re-engage with contemporary improvisation research by producing scholarship that integrates musical and cultural analysis in innovative and relevant ways.⁴⁷

All of the analytical projects just outlined could also motivate further research on aspects of the Art Ensemble's aesthetics and performance practice. Instrumental works like Mitchell's "Cyp" express intermusical relationships between twentieth-century experimental concert music and the Art Ensemble's own "Great Black Music," a connection that musicologists and critics have casually asserted but not yet examined at any level of analytical detail.⁴⁸ Similarly, an analysis of the Jarman composition "Dreaming of the Master" could explore the Art Ensemble's interpretations of another pivotal period in jazz history, specifically John Coltrane's music from *Kind of Blue* and *Crescent* to *Sun Ship* and *Stellar Regions*.⁴⁹ Additional endeavors that naturally proceed from this article include analyses of Art Ensemble performances that are even more oriented toward vocal and verbal intermedia elements than "A Jackson in Your House." Here I am thinking of Jarman's "Get in Line," the anti-war protest piece that follows the title track on the *A Jackson in Your House* album, and also the Favors composition "Immm," from *Bap-tizum*.⁵⁰ Unlike "A Jackson in Your House" and "Get in Line," "Immm" is entirely voice-driven. There are gongs and shakers, and isolated drum strokes cued by the composer, but everything else is vocal and verbal—Favors's melodramatic ecological lament, the musicians' gospel moans, and the astonishing collective coughing fit that initiates the piece. Essentially, "Immm" inverts the intermedia hierarchy of "A Jackson in Your House," where the voice comments on and dramatizes the compositional text; in contrast, "Immm" is a theatrical scenario where the instruments alternately support and signify on Favors's song. These analytical efforts (and others yet to be imagined), if pursued with diligence,

⁴⁶See, for example, the analyses in Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁴⁷For more on the regrettable detachment of music theory and music analysis from jazz studies and improvisation studies, see Paul Steinbeck, Review of *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* by George E. Lewis, *Journal of Music Theory* 51/2 (Fall 2007): 333–340.

⁴⁸Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Nice Guys*, ECM 1126, 1979, LP.

⁴⁹"Dreaming of the Master" was first recorded on Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Nice Guys*.

⁵⁰Art Ensemble of Chicago, *Bap-tizum*, Atlantic SD 1639, 1973, LP.

could ultimately generate an “integrative comprehension” of the Art Ensemble of Chicago and their extraordinary performances.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge Jim Cassey, John Howland, Shaku Joseph Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell, Famoudou Don Moye, and two anonymous reviewers for their contributions to this article.

Abstract

This article examines instances of intermusicality, humor, and cultural critique in the Art Ensemble of Chicago’s “A Jackson in Your House.” The members of the Art Ensemble use the multi-stylistic and intermedia aspects of the piece to create—in real time—complex critical utterances about jazz history, race, and performer-audience dynamics. Multi-stylism and intermedia structures are also general features of the band’s performance practice; the investigations in this article are proposed as models for future research on the Art Ensemble that integrates musical and cultural analysis.