WEEPING BETWEEN THE PORCH AND THE ALTAR:

A LOCALIZED TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ANCESTRY, FORM, AND FUNCTION BETWEEN THE SHOTGUN HOME AND NEW ORLEANS JAZZ

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY OF MAY 2024

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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APPROVED:

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## *Abstract*

This thesis is one of articulating relations. One side of this thesis is an interdisciplinary case study of two New Orleans cultural objects, **Jazz** and a vernacular architecture called a ***shotgun house***, as having ontologically similar design principles, values, and social histories. Applying scholarship, archival material, and conversation from Black studies cultural theorists, geologists, geographers, ethnomusicologists, artists, artisans, architects, daylaborers, nightworkers and organic intellectuals, I express conjunction between these practices to both emerge from what scholar Clyde Woods calls, a "**'blues epistemology**'…a system of explanation that informs their daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements… [in response to]… namely disenfranchisement, debt peonage, Jim Crow, and legally sanctioned official and private terrorism (1996: 16)." Ceremony of building in your own form as an expression of sovereignty. How similar could that ceremony perform between mediums?

The other side articulates a metaphorical relation between blackness and some of the earth's geological processes. For instance, diasporic cultures employing fugitive organization systems seen through a geological lens can begin to resemble sedimentary rock cycles including erosion (diaspora), deposition (plantation), diagenesis (production of 'blackness' as an ongoing legal and social phenomena), and diapiric uplift (Black arts' use of non-linear cultural progression/Sankofa/looking back while moving ahead). Displacement as a colonial-induced geological event. To be in practice with how ethnomathematics professor Ron Eglash sees many African logic systems presenting "design informed by social concepts" (1999: 20), I choose to connect the social history of Black music and Southeastern regional geology to engage together in a pedagogical practice I call "**deltaic thinking.**" The organizing philosophy that considers the instrumentation of sound as a relating medium to bridge between Black music (historical collective emotion) cultural characteristics and the characteristics of water as a global scale. As water systems flow bounded by western system imposition (levees), what typological resonance in how water response to impounded with the response to imposition inside the music of 19$^{th}$ century American Southern Blacks (blues people, Amira Baraka) that socially interpreted violent disenfranchisement? Black music as an emotionally historical material document of colonialist phenomena. In this way, consider this thesis as an effort in geologizing blackness. **The river is not a place, it is a practice.**

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**Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents,

Levi Black

and

Audrey Black

for holding so many songs in their hearts that filled the cars and homes I sat in as a child.

## *Prologue*

slaves are said to have worked
hard & long
on this island
sunup to sundown & beyond
sundays and christmas off
two clothes a year
are memories bestowed
to old Penn School

nearby expressionless summer homes
of early plantation owners sit observing the bay
the stately museums of Beaufort
the arsenals and ports of the English
built above Native remains:
the romance of American history

sand blows across the island
from ocean beaches
palmettoes & dark green foilage
hover menacingly
this land has been stolen and stolen
again…
made into cotton & rice riches
off strong brown backs…
the blowing sand and the palmettoes
know much of these things
but speak only at night
speak their silent mysterious language
only to themselves

today black bodies frisk
about the beaches
listening to soul radio
thinking of what?
when night becomes shimmering black
the small cabins of the blacks
grow silent
while voices of the land rise
to a feverish pitch,
voices
of endless
memory.

Tom Dent, 1982

*"I just love the houses in the south, the way they built them. That negritude architecture. I really love to watch the way black people make things, houses or magazine stands in Harlem, for instance. Just the way we use carpentry. Nothing fits, but everything works. The door closes, it keeps things coming through. But it doesn't have that neatness about it, the way white people put things together; everything is a thirty-second of an inch off."*

David Hammons. 1986

The Black American vernacular is one of gossip.

Figure 16a. The Helen LePage Maisonette, 1024 Gov. Nicholls Street, Square 106, Vieux Carré. Courtesy Hilary Irvin, New Orleans Vieux Carré Commission. The house is extant and may well be the oldest surviving shotgun-type house in New Orleans and the nation. It was constructed by the Haitian immigrant Pierre Roup in 1823, beside his own shotgun maisonette residence (Ref. NONA Felix de Armas [notary] March 17, 1836: 104:35).

## *Chapter 1: The Bisociative Physiognomies of Urban Louisiana*

"When you grow up in a flatland…you begin to see long distance and whichever direction you turn, you find that this flatness unfolds in a way that gives you some perspective on general forms, how things are laid out horizontally and so on. I would say that that's one of the most important things that goes into my music — that kind of horizontal form, and how to look at multiple directions that may seem to be flat because of the way in which it unfolds horizontally and space seems to spread out forever. So, you end up seeing that from top to bottom…"

Trumpeter and Composer Leo Wadada Smith

***Bisociation (n.):*** *associating one idea with two different contexts; necessary for humor, natural in dreams.*

***Physiognomy (n.):*** *the general form or appearance of something.*

### *Chapter 1.1: Introduction*

This thesis will address the Louisiana house type known as the shotgun home (Fig. 1) as an object towards a sociocultural and materialist investigation of a "Blues Epistemology," term coined by the late Black studies scholar Clyde Woods, within the context of form and politic that is understood to be found in Jazz as a(nother) way of seeing the world. Beyond this aesthetic reframing, I'll elucidate an ontological kinship between the two as well as presenting how these cultural forms were produced under the same conditions of possibility, most notably the geological and sociocultural environment where Black working-class freedmen in American South shaped the development of an

ethnoregional African-derived knowledge system and various cultural. Alternatively understood as "blues people," artisans, musicians, and sometimes both constructed syncretized (creolized) cultural forms and self-imagined histories (myths) in a kaleidoscopic network of relation to their lived environment (Baraka 1963).

Let's begin with articulating the cultural conditions that allows for objects such as Jazz and the Shotgun to carry such dense meaning. In the ways writer Amiri Baraka understands Jazz to be a collective design of Black musical architects inscribing a transatlantic traditional knowledge system onto sound, one can begin to recognize other artifacts in the area that were formed from this phenomenon too. This yields to the hypothesis that as *Jazz is an extension of material culture practices in the Black American south, its physical affirmation is in inscribed into the Shotgun form due to its similar environmental, historical, functional, mythological, ornamental, and spiritual precedents. How the shotgun ontologically shares many of the so-called 'musical elements' of Jazz is due to both cultural products emerge from and generally follow the informal structures constructed by the Black working-class musician-artisans in New Orleans found in what scholar Clyde Woods called "blues epistemologies" (1998).*

This mass diasporic event that is still producing cultural aftershocks can be understood as a rupture for enslaved Africans beginning their ontological transfer to Black. Enslavement and dehumanization predicating the production of a diaspora is to be considered a phenomenological shift for an entire people (modernity). Black modernity has been previously articulated by a Caribbean tradition of thought including Edúward Glissant, Suzanne Cesairé, Aimé Cesairé, Sylvia Wynter, and Rinaldo Wilcott. While surrealism may have its definitions rooted in André Breton and the surrealist movement

of the 1920's, it was the Cesairés' that presented the intersection surrounding generational psychosomatic traumas of colonialism imposing the violent extraction of Black labor causing an ontological and epistemological rift that African diasporic cultures worldwide are still reverberating from. And if this epistemology shows itself through often non-vocal abstract expressionisms of a people dealing with this predicament, then the dominant Black expression of the time, the blues, can be considered residue of a self-materializing humanity emanating from a people legally stripped of such.

How does imagining your own humanity through expression induce the creation of one for oneself? Hyperstition, a term coined by the Cybernetics Culture Research Unit, is defined as the overwhelming production of ideas to the point that realize themselves into reality. To practice a religion, or blackness itself, could be understood as a hyperstition (O'Sullivan 2017). An insistent collective desire manifested into reality. The blues secularly broadcasted a way of life through radical imagination— playing a major role in shifting the global social landscape. It is a surreal experience for a people to go through the conditions that prompt the self-insistence of one's humanity.

I relate this tradition of self-determination with theorist Sylvia Wynter's claim that the 13th century colonial event in the Caribbean basin was one of many sites where modernity was not only invented but was experimented on. This is most notable within her concept of "man-as-human," a dividing up of the world between Man (subject invested with rights) and subhuman (which Man is defined against) (Wynter 2003: 265). With relation to conceptualizing the human as a subject that deserves the rights granted with humanity, Rinaldo Walcott's scholarship surrounding Wynter iterates on the

consideration on how the Caribbean is an ongoing site where modernity is contemporarily modifies to its current situation. In Walcott's essay "Genres of Human", he sits with the aftermath of Caribbean basin being extracted by colonial powers resulting in the Caribbean to persist at the "center of Enlightenment modernity" (2015: 186). Persistence due to the violent acts of colonialism is predicated on the ideas of a hegemonic "sociopolitical and epistemological order" that restructured humanity into what Wynter calls "types", "modes", or "genres" of human such as the red, white, and black (2015; 190). Once confronted with their own desires of infinite growth through land ownership, European colonists predisposed themselves to rationalize such people as *other* (labelled Negro, Indian, Carib, etc.) to attain their goals of domination. Western existential reconciliation introduces a certain social numerator— that of the human. Wynter defines human as a psychologically and narratively constituted being, simultaneously biological (bios) and cultural (worded or logos) (2015: 190). Preliminary invention of Man-as-human (where anything outside of those considerations delegated and treated as other and less than) begins in the Caribbean. But it is through these horrific acts of forced dehumanization that a series of shapeshifting occurs. Fugitivity, rebellion, non-alignment, placelessness, and self-actualization via self-determination all prompted a forced reassemblage of sense of being that continues to find itself drawn and quartered by the dialectic between humanity and otherness. Listen closely to the words read and one hears an endless nameless voiceless cry of becoming that Jazz finds itself attuned on the Northern rim of the Gulf Coast.

I extend the geological aperture of the unhuman troubling themselves into existence to New Orleans, Louisiana, often considered the northernmost Caribbean city

due to its demographic and migration histories. The geographic parameters of this study focus on New Orleans as an accumulated site for modern Black social ideologies' growth to be expressed in both the material (cultural objects and practice) and immaterial (ideas, attitudes, and beliefs). This environment provides spatial and temporal proximity to ground my claim of formal and cultural synonymity between Jazz and the shotgun house as both being produced by the same people with the same general knowledge system, at the same place, at the same time, under the same socio-economic conditions at approximately the same time (late 19th to early 20th century).

To provide sufficient information on this socio-cultural kinship both rooted in the same philosophical framework, I will present the history of an emerging blues epistemology by weaving a network of characteristics – ideas, practices, forms – found in early Jazz music initially expressed by New Orleanian Black labor practitioners through drawing upon social theorists, musicologists, and anthropologists such as Jazz trumpeter and tin metal worker Lionel Ferbos, Black studies scholar Clyde Woods, Sculptor John T. Scott, and writer-anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, and many others. Through an interdisciplinary synthesis of musicology, anthropology, architectural studies, geology, geography, and the Black radical tradition (Moten 2003, 2020; McKittrick 2020), I seek to elucidate a typological coherence between the shotgun house and Jazz via common form, expression, goals, and practices among working-class Black New Orleanians constructing a series of survival practices and logic systems in the early 20th century that can be found in building and music arts as secularized ancestral ritual forms.

This thought ventures into a field known as psychogeography, where interpretation of architecture and its relationship to the goals of those who built and

designed buildings in the south is addressed. Originally defined by the Letterist International, a 1950's Paris radical collective of artists and cultural theorists, psychogeography is "the study of precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Debord 1955: 23). Through this lens, psychogeography plays an almost omniscient role in much of the discussion surrounding the residual logics of ambition being investigated inside the objects of Jazz and the vernacular architecture of the shotgun house. The term frames the behavior and emotions of individuals to be in dialogue with the geographic. Beyond examining the indirect or unintentional effects a building might bring to a person or people, this thesis will use building to interpret encoded social critiques and cultural impulses for a people navigating an incalculable amount of violence and surveillance under white supremacy.

This thesis begins with geographical analysis from geographers Carl Sauer and Fred Kniffen, who analyzed the natural environment's influence on people and in turn their culture, or "built environment" (Sauer, 1926). From there, I will think through the work of American material culture folklorist John Michael Vlach before joining this architectural information into the realm of Black Studies with Clyde Woods' interpretation of the blues as a way of knowing, or epistemology, to synthesize a bisociative approach of the musical cultures of New Orleans (such as Jazz and the blues) with what I consider its most representative form of material culture, the shotgun house. Through examples of thought from New Orleans laborers who played Jazz, this thesis culminates in proposing an alternative way of seeing two cultural objects as both

including a voiceless cultural-sociopolitical-geographic critique, affirmation of self, and its community.

This thesis reconsiders forms and expressions of humanity that geography, anthropology, and ethnomusicology either continue to disregard, or have only recently begun to examine, their own epistemological blind spots (e.g. native or reverse ethnography or the translation of theory from the global south). Here, I choose to stand firmly in the refusal of the academic manufacturing of a single line of history authorized via citation and peer review towards the reification of hegemonic positions of authority—effectively denying the very culture and cultural logic I'm choosing to contribute towards its development as a cultural tradition. Blackness as a phenomenon is a circulatory system of tongue speak. Think of this paper as an extended story of an opaque storytelling tradition where archives and documentation are evoked, providing compassion (ecstatic inscription) to a way of life considered unhuman and denied Western acknowledgement (rejection resource allocation). I am not a vying for acknowledgement or manufacturing an award capture device. I wish for this document to be read as an overheard whisper at best and not the words of an informant. As Latin American cultural theorist Julio Ramos states, "what could be the effect of a truth spoken by non-subject?" (Ramos 1996: 2).

In the way early New Orleans Jazz cornetist Sidney Bechet negates death through authorizing origin and instead adding to the plurality of beginning sharing unvouchable claims of finding a singular creator of Jazz (in his story it was his grandfather the famed one-armed New Orleans criminal Bras Coupé, both claims are in question). Or unknowable truths surrounding Buddy Bolden, the whom many consider to be the creator

of Jazz. At the same time, there's no recording of him to even verify this claim. Let this be another practice of negating the death of a thought, place, and form that was never meant to be contained inside the halls of an archive or institution (preservation as stasis as death, good luck my friend). Considering the illegible knowledges woven to Jazz, one can as Ramos considers, "specify symbolic networks…within which that writing in inscribed and which enables the constitution of a subject who in the very act of narrating his truth projects a new type of citizenship" (1996: 8). As origin cannot be flattened to a Euclidean point, I submit this presentation of disobedient incompleteness as an act against the sterilization via written word as a virtue inscribed in the goals of this paper, in myself and in a spirit of expression that has found a current resting site in the cultural artifacts of New Orleans, Louisiana.

In this city lies objects that have been made to recontextualize themselves in a new environment to repractice in resonance with its local surroundings. As Jazz's transatlantic metamorphism of African rhythmic sensibilities are well documented (Collins 1987; Gridley et al. 1984; Meadows 1979; Snead 1981; Wilson 1974), let's begin with the layers of history within the use and design woven into the shotgun home.

## *Chapter 1.2: The Shotgun Form's Social Histories*

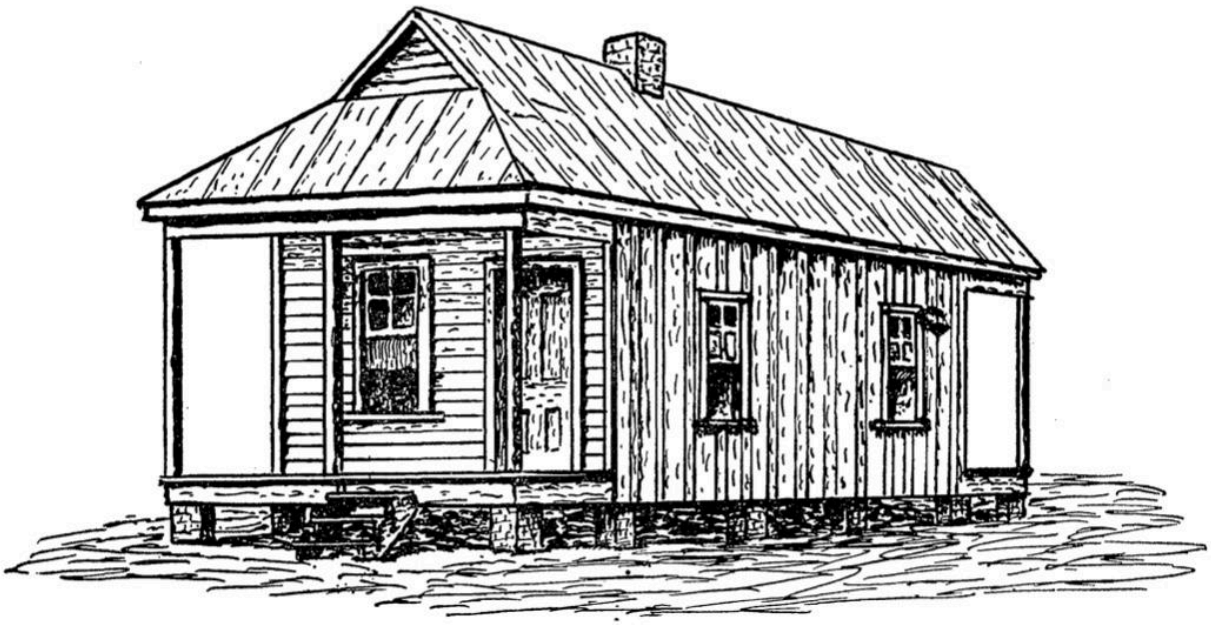

FIG. 9.—Shotgun type.

*Figure 1.—Shotgun type.*

To build on the claim that the shotgun house as an object that carries Black ontological form, sensibility, and kinship to Jazz, I begin with the introduction of the shotgun in the academic archives. Separated from its landscape to be forever considered a form, the first academic observation of these homes comes from Louisianan geographer Fred B. Kniffen in his article, "Louisiana House Types" (1936). Kniffen's description in the wake of his statewide survey continues to stand as the working definition for this architectural style (Fig. 1):

> Shotgun type: the folk-term here employed is commonly used in Louisiana to designate a long, narrow house. It is but one room in width and from one to three or more rooms deep, with a frontward-facing gable (1936: 186).

Kniffen roots his methodology from a book published a decade prior. American geographer Carl Sauer in *Morphology of Landscape* (1926) provides a model that assumes geography as a morphological study of cultural landscapes where the land is the medium that actors behaving in-on produce cultural objects that is in turn influenced by the land's local sensibilities. Finding formal patterns between a culture and its landscape was and remains to be a worthwhile concept to reimagine environmental response inside vernacular forms.

"Louisiana House Types" by Kniffen contributes a dialectical geographic survey between aspects of Louisiana's cultural and environmental nature. An example of such would be a hand-drawn raster presenting the density distribution of shotgun type homes in Louisiana in relation to the landscape's waterways (Fig. 2). The figure denotes how closely what/where/which architectures are in direct response with the proximal landscape of Mississippi's distributary banks. The figure below correctly entangles geological context when considering the intertwined roots between folk forms and its environment. In this case, the study recognizes how an object such as a dwelling can be a site of not just adaptation but "negotiation" as a people are naturally approached with a choice to choreograph or bring dominion to one's environment (Ward 2024). "Louisiana House Types" concludes this portion on the shotgun with, "…[the shotgun] is strikingly associated with the state's waterways, attaining marked dominance along the coastal bayous, but also significantly extending in narrow bands far up the Ouachita and Red [rivers]…" (Kniffen 1936: 191).

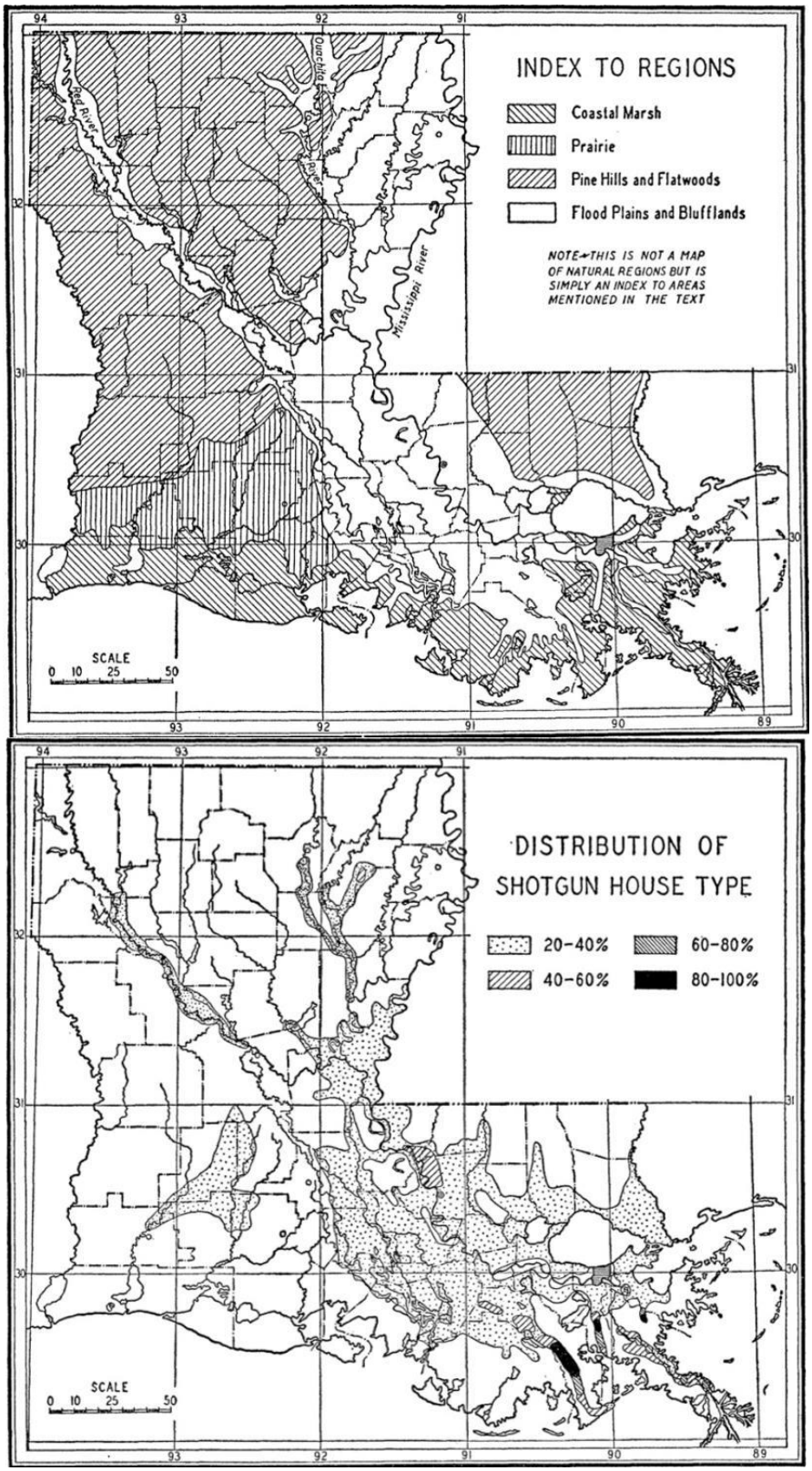


*Figure 2.—Distribution and Environmental Index denoting the geographical relationship the Shotgun type has with adjacent waterways (Kniffen, 1936: 191-193).*

Kniffen simultaneously recognizes how the discussion of making these distinctions becomes less about presenting proof but an attempt to generate a formal approach to an informal product. A qualitative piece of material culture on a quantitated-quantized method: "possible objections may be forestalled by pointing out that this study is not intended to be descriptive of specific areas, but rather it is one step in the attempt to define the cultural geographic regions of Louisiana. Nor is it entirely a materialistic listing and classification of the house types of Louisiana. It is also an attempt to get at an areal (relating to or involving an area) expression of ideas regarding houses-a groping toward a tangible hold on the geographic expression of culture" (Kniffen 1936: 196).

Field observations and references express the ways in which psychogeographical residue is found in the design practices and traditions that constructed the shotgun and the jazz form as it behaved in New Orleans at the time of their fabrication. These two forms are abstracted reconciliations between various traumatic events and environments that Black Americans experienced in 19th century and 20th century New Orleans. From this conceit, an overarching research question(s) that circulates throughout this document is articulated as such: What are the ways in which the processes that form regional landscapes, waterways, and the formations created from geological systems informs, engages, and collaborates with cultural actors towards the creation of multiple cultural objects? Can one find a common thread in the structure and dynamics of these locally proximal phenomena?

To iterate on Kniffen and Sauer's socio-morphological framework, I join the tradition of extending the shotgun form past its colloquiality in the American South to of one transatlantic transmission rooted in Western Africa. American folklorist John

Michael Vlach (1976) illuminated the coherency and continuity of African origin in the shotgun form and home that spans further back than the colonial declaration of the city of New Orleans itself. First attributed to the Yoruban speaking nations of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo in the West African region, the shotgun form owes its name to the same people for whom the architectural form itself is attributed to. But the term 'shotgun' seems carries many origin stories, one reaching back potentially centuries further than the other. Its denotative roots are bound to the Yoruban term, *togun*, literally meaning "house" or "gathering place" (Fig. 3). In the figure, you can see the lack of halls, with one room leading into the next in a linear fashion. From there a spiritual derivative is found; '*sho-gun'* translated as "god's house". Through space, time, and people, '*sho gun*' has been creolized into '*shotgun'*— relating a more modern folkloric etymology creating origin from the idea that these houses designed with one room behind the other are named from the idea one could shoot a shotgun and the discharged bullets would go from the front to the back door cleanly (Vlach 1986: 58-78).

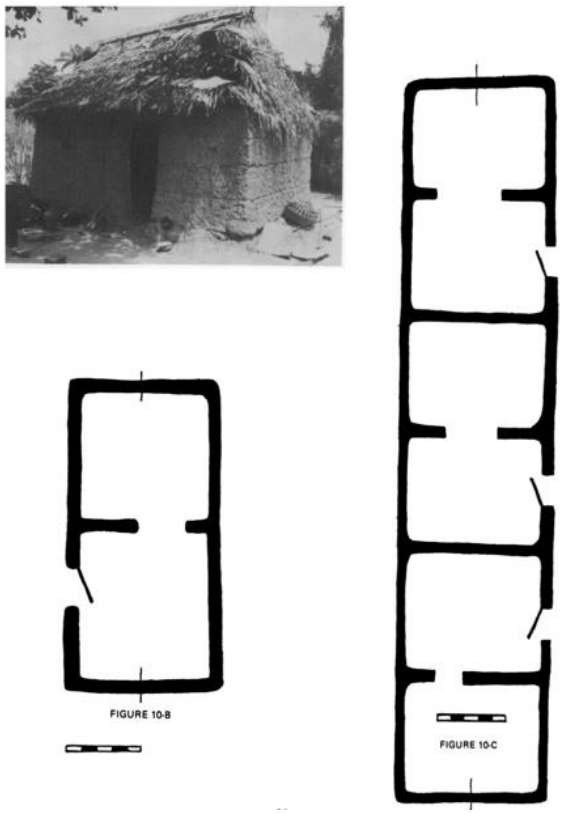


*Figure 3.— West African togun, a precursor to the Shotgun house type. Note the blueprint displaying one room behind the other with no halls in between (Vlach 1976).*

The form traveled in the 1500's during the transatlantic slave trade through the Middle Passage, one of the first places where the stolen people of West African were taken to Haiti. Indigenous people of this land, the Taino, were reported to live in constructed homes like Yoruban architectures figured above save for partitioned spaces (Fig. 3). After enslaved Africans made their arrival to Haiti, "cailles", or 16th century Haitian homes built of mud, straw, wood, and thatch with a narrow form and gabled entrance were constructed as an amalgamation of indigenous Taino-Haitian architecture (Draper 2000: 2).

Evidence of human-building relationship is not only present in form, but in function. The shotgun in Haiti is also the site of the western world's introduction of the

porch (Vlach 1976). The porch carries a built-in function of connectivity and sociality to the home. Its appearance and usage reinforce sensibilities of communal togetherness cultural embedded within African and African-diasporic traditions. Inside denser environments, the shotgun further galvanizes notions of congregation with multiple families alongside each other sitting and communicating side-by-side, porch-by-porch (fig. 10). These architectural examples present a sort of social condensation and potential conditions for informal communication networks that in part brought about the emergence of radical activity culminating to the Haitian Revolution in 1804 (Scott 1985).

After the successful revolution from French colonial occupation, Haitian migrants and colonial runaways migrated en masse to New Orleans via Eastern Cuba. Encouraged by the American Colonization Society, 90% of post-revolution migrants, including approximately 9,000 free Blacks, emigrated to New Orleans in 1809, doubling the population of New Orleans in one year, shifting the demographics of the city where almost 2/3$^{rds}$ of all residents were now Black (Vlach 1976). The social history of the shotgun before reaching America shows its qualities and commitment of communion, resourcefulness, and resolving acts of struggle can continue well after its suppression across bodies of water, generations, and colonial violence.

### *Chapter 1.3: Blues Epistemologies and Jazz Artisans*

Creolized African expressions, such as the shotgun and Jazz are artifacts of emergent abstractions and re/memberences from the violences of modernity contextualized under the framework of a self-subversive tradition of "looking back to move ahead", an English translation of a Ghanian Twi word, "sankofa" . This framework dovetails with the late Black studies scholar Clyde Woods claims of the roots of Black

American expressions begins with how they perceived their social and ontological realities through iterating and improvising on top of the knowledge system that travelled across the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico with them.

Blues epistemology is a self-referential ethnoregional "series of explanations that informs their daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements" (Woods 1998: 16). A reaction to the European led socio-spatial construction of the plantation regional bloc in the American South that "provided the material basis for an ethic of survival, subsistence, resistance, and affirmation from the antebellum period to the present" (Woods 1998: 27), blues epistemology can be viewed thus as a working class African-American knowledge system that includes socially institutionalized forms of philosophical, political, economic and social theories and practices, dedicated to the realization of self-determination. This way of knowing can be found embedded in the methodological approaches to cultural creativity and its framing through style, politic, and relation to landscape. African Americans have interrogated their political situation through many vectors, a main one being the use of style. For instance, *coolness* is rooted in a mechanism Albert Murray calls "living equipment" in which music, fashion, and speech serves as not only "stylistic code[s] for representing the most difficult conditions, but also provides a strategy for living and triumphing over those conditions with dignity, grace, and elegance" (1976). Black fugitivity and survival are both gestural acts of improvisation predicated on fragmented ancestral knowledges. The shotgun and the sounding materialization of Jazz are different responses to the same question, "what do I do now?"

To build theoretical coherence with how certain Black musics can be understood as sonic emanations of alternate worldviews, an antecedent music of Jazz, the Blues, can be read as a responsive form to the dehumanization practices done to Black people in the south during and in the wake of state sanctioned slavery (Woods 1998). Within this perspective, plantations and its planters become a pseudo-origin site that attempted to superimpose occidental terrain in the south with goals to "gain control over resources and over the ideological and distributive institutions governing their allocation" (Woods 1998: 26). The dominant expression during this period of colonial social dominance became the blues, a syncretic working-class African American expressive structure that engages in tactics of cultural transmission, satire, resistance, and highly developed tradition of social interpretation which brought an "introspective and universality system of social thought and practice" (31). The blues, both as an aesthetic and structure to produce and share embodied knowledges about the lived environment southern Blacks found themselves within, allowed for song-centered oral practices in African cultures to continue under rapidly increasing conditions of intense censorship, violence, and surveillance—a methodologically responsive form of undergrounded resistance. This epistemology is connected to but not synonymous with the set of performance practices codified under the term 'Blues music'. Such is in closer relation to what Amiri Baraka considers a "blues people," a people in the process of making sense of immediate and intergenerational trauma of the transatlantic slave trade and its aftermath (1969).

To problematize Woods' thoughts surrounding the blues (in method and practice) as something "latent and largely symbolic" (Woods 1998: 27) underneath oppressive systems of the southern capitalist hegemony referred to as the "plantation bloc" by

Woods, I wish to engage in the American south as a radical arena for various socio-political ethos to be performed on its landscape. This social tug-of-war between three-dimensional images provides a reference point and material evidence to these tensions of vying for a dominant worldview through the physical manifestation of social, cultural, economic, ontological values. Specifically, I wish to engage in the visual language of building in the colonial and antebellum South between the plantation bloc and blues people.

For the planter, the seeing of the American South was first and foremost of a quarry to mine nature and subjects to his will of consolidating labor and its value towards the ends of a small ethno-ingroup where his visual ideology projected onto landscape based predominately around Greco-Roman revival architectural styles. 'Revival', as a term, is one to bisociatively litigate as it functions dually as a descriptor and self-report of desire to project knowledges and outlook on colonially settled land. To name something with a 'revival' descriptor suggests the desire for not just a form to return but for certain set of values to return as well. The Greeks and Romans in their classical periods were civilizations that saw slavery as a universally beneficial force in civilization; planters used their ideological progenitors' visual notions to portray their understanding of social order as Woods states, "natural, classic, and timeless" (Woods 1998: 51). In New Orleans, this socio-visual impression continues its perpetuation now with white Mardi Gras Krewes situating themselves in the costumes of imagined versions of their ancestors to bolster their own ideas and desire of social hegemony. American Musicologist Matt Sakakeeny observes this in his essay "Textures of Black Sound and Affect; Life and Death in New Orleans" where Mardi Gras parades, confederate

monuments, and streets and schools named after slave-owners inscribe white supremacy onto the built environment (2024: 302).

If the blues became an encoded way to communicate a syncretized organizational practice to spread the ideals of the southern Black people, then the shotgun becomes one of the physical embodiments of this notion; a mix of personal sentiment, collective memory, determined desire. This balance of the social, the mythical, and the political inscribed onto the shotgun can also be metabolized through German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin's model of the dialectical image (Fig. 4) (Auberach 2007).

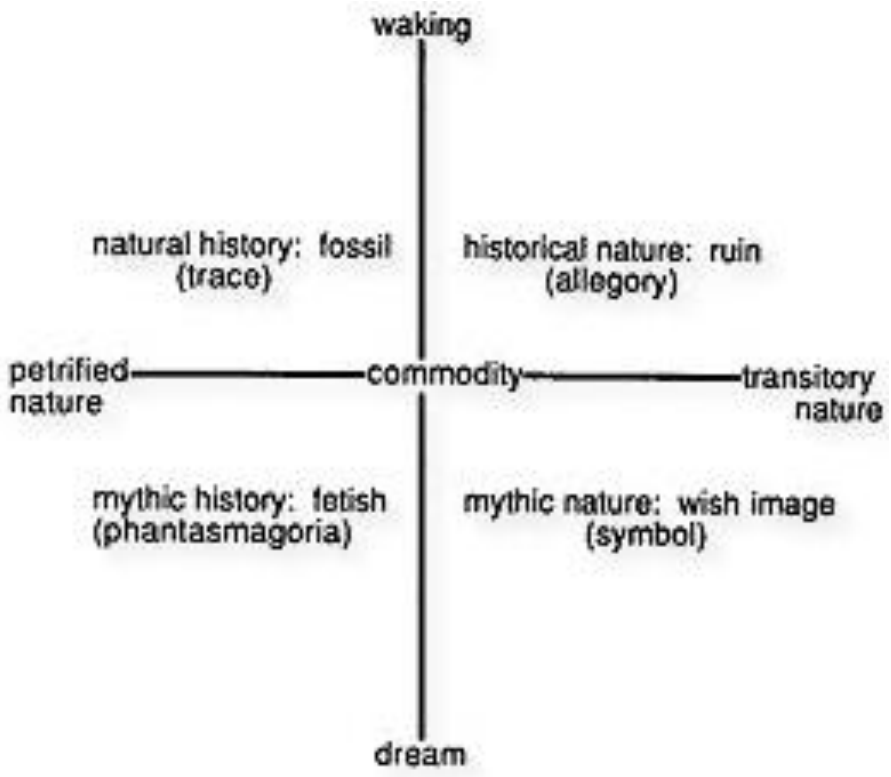


*Figure 4.— Walter Benjamin's "Dialectical Image" model (Auerbach 2007).*

The dialectical image is placed on two axes: waking-dream and petrified-transitory nature. Like the Greco-Roman commodity, this object (and most other objects)

sits in relationship with humanity. We both see the object for what it is and for the ideas they invoke in us. On the "petrified-transitory nature" axes, we see how ideas (before they are produced inside a commodity) exceed time as they exist as a superpositioned thought both in and out of time, but once materialized into a physical object it is bound to time and the temporal procession of decay. For the waking-dream axis, something similar is occurring. The commodity, in this case the shotgun, acts as not just a simple tool for shelter but as also a mythical object. This thought is akin to music as a recorded object and phenomenon (before and during its performance). New Orleans found its own dialectical image model in its approach to creative production with an American southern urban reconciliation of ideologies in mind and space reached through satire, self-subversion, and cultural camouflage.

Material culture produces a dual dynamic that actualizes and "spatializes political, social, and historical relationships" (Gooden 2016: 21). Through the tradition of a culture that strived to give multiple languages to what comes from understanding ones internal-external relationship to place, time, presence, and self. The blues and the material efforts made by these blues people deals in the negotiation of spatial praxes and resistance inside mind-numbing state sanctioned hegemonic brutality. But can what be spoken to inside the blues be expressed inside the architecture designed of blues people? Black architectural studies professor Mario Gooden explains the goals of architecture as a form of liberation:

> As a cultural practice, architecture must interpret and translate the historical, social, and political contexts of a place and how one comes to terms with that place. Such an architecture should reveal meaning, situations, and conditions

> (both apparent and subliminal) and allow for individual participatory action, the affirmation of presence in life, and a recognition of existential meaning and knowledge — the confirmation of the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. (2016: 18)

In Gooden's book, *Dark Space*, he examines the material history of African American architecture in the lineage of Black expression as a liberatory practice. In this way of seeing, this composition of thought aligns with an interpretative framework in ethnomusicology that is primarily interested in the spatial politics of music making in musical cultures. Such liberatory political practices is to be found in multiple documents of Black creation. Gooden uses the concept of African American architecture as a material example of the opaque cultural pathways that Black self-awareness was birthed out of, such as the irreconcilable duality of life in Americas is expressed through W.E.B DuBois' theory on double consciousness:

> Thus, double consciousness continues to exist as a condition of being that is communicated in the work and translated through language, meter, syncopation, manner, and self-consciousness" (2016: 99).

By focusing on interpreting social meaning in the historiography of Black expression, one can begin to see such gestures as subversive space-making or, more generally, an ongoing document of Black fugitivity that contains subversive tactics against forces that actively try to strip people from themselves and their potential to become self-realized.

The shotgun form and continued existence across the world reifies an understanding of one's internal and external relationships to place (geography) and time

(the order in which events occur), as well as an acting on an intimacy with one's own existence (the practice of presence and self-seeing). As a symbol of the retention of African forms creolized through transport across the Atlantic and throughout the circum-Caribbean, Jazz too is then reified and developed through the shotgun home as a method and space to exercise self-possession and determination. This emergent connection between the land and the people brings about a "blues geography" Woods refers to in his book *Development Drowned and Reborn* (2017) as a means to look at the material social landscape of early 20th century New Orleans that, in part, prompted the elements of Jazz to come together as a musical form. This networked articulation of Black expression amplifies notions of how the material and immaterial provide a deeper purview of the ways in which people opposed to occidental hegemonic forces act against such through encoded devices and objects towards a necessary affirmation of desired ethics of sociality and collective autodeterminism. This implication can further elucidate a type of epistemology or birthing ontology in relation to a then (and still) recent diasporic creolization in the American south landscape. A few examples of these elements can be sourced from Hurston's essay, "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1934): will to adorn, angularity, asymmetry, originality, imitation, and absence of the concept of privacy that will be approached in the following chapter. For example, one of these characteristics (absence of the concept of privacy) is further explained in Zora Neale Hurston's own words:

> There is no privacy in an African village. Loves, fights, possessions are…open disagreements openly arrived at. The community is given the benefit of a good

fight as well as a good wedding. An audience is a necessary part of any drama. We merely go with nature rather than against it (1934: 8).

These characteristics of expression are merely gestures which strive to reach for an ancestral-traditional value connection that's been severed. Through one lens this could be understood as an abstraction or even avant-garde but from another it could simply be a fragmented confession; speaking a complete truth with a voice made hoarse across an Atlantic voyage.

In oscillating back to thinking through a Blues Epistemology… contextualizing the blues as a simple or primitive aesthetic does a disservice to the amount of cultural and intellectual effort that iterates on an ever-evolving semiotic of Black self-creation that has been designed from its very outset to impose a degree of individuality on the numbing uniformity bred from slavery, poverty, Jim Crow laws, and white racism. From this perspective, this allows for an extended reading of the visual politics in the American South into building practices and aesthetics. Through this understanding, Jazz and the shotgun form usage, both produced by the New Orleans artisans in the early 20th century, are parallel emanations of Blues derived thought frameworks that continues to suggest a particular social organization and satirical commentary on Black life. Different in how its organizational form manifests, both jazz and the shotgun is a non-literate, non-vocal form of orature, communication, and wisdom from working class Black New Orleanians building and woodshedding through this tradition.

The local relationship between the working-class epistemology where material and immaterial (transcendent) desires are most clearly acknowledged is with *Spirit House* (Fig. 5), a public art sculpture from 2002 by artists John T. Scott and Martin Payton that

depicts a shotgun home ornamented with cut out silhouettes of “unnamed, unknown, African-American bricklayers, iron workers, fruit vendors, domestics and teachers who built the city” (McCash 2002). To venture further into how the process and creation of *Spirit House* is embodied in the general ethos of the New Orleans craftsperson, looking into John T. Scott background lends value to this conceit. In Powell’s study *Circle Dance: The Art of John T. Scott* (Powell 2005), Scott recalls his local environment as a fuel and reflection of his creative sensibilities:

> [Scott’s] five other siblings were taught from the very beginning that “if we didn't have something, we could make it." Scott's father, a cook at various hotels like the Roosevelt and at the Commander's Palace restaurant, taught John basic carpentry, while his housekeeping mother taught her son embroidery. Although Scott's parental apprenticeship would be augmented after he entered the public schools, his home-based lessons of a partly practical, partly creative volition towards making things-already fundamental to the New Orleans work environment and its aesthetic sensibility —would stay with the artist for life (2005: 22).

Once Scott began studying sculpture at Xavier University in New Orleans in the 1960s, he began to reframe the culture he was raised in less as a mindset, but moreso an alternative way to understand and approach the world:

> What I've been attempting to do for the last forty years, I guess, is to see things with what I describe as "jazz thinking," and it came from listening to musicians. It dawned on me that if you listen to a really good jazz group three things are always evident. That is, the jazz musicians are always in the "now" while you're hearing it, but these guys are incredibly aware of where they have been and have an

> unbelievable anticipation of where they are going. They do all three of these things at the same time. And I refer to that as jazz thinking, or spherical thinking. What I mean by that is, for example, if you can imagine that all your ideas, past, present, and future, are all interconnected like points on a glass globe, and you are suspended in the middle so that if you look up, you understand down because they are connected, and as you move forward you understand backwards because they are always connected. To me that's jazz thinking. It's improvisational thinking in the sense that I don't have to contrive some system of connecting two things that don't seem related because I understand the relationship (2005: 13).

In a welcomed moment of circuitousness, as I hope that this document is understood as an example of what Scott calls “jazz thinking". With the New Orleans environment carrying an ever-present, “partly practical, partly creative” lineage, in *Spirit House* Scott recognized the relationship between African continuity and adaptations happens between mediums. His own personal understanding of this is directly articulated with his construction of a “visual blues” in preparing for his *I’ve Known Rivers* piece for the New Orleans 1984 World’s Fair:

> I came across a piece of African mythology that said when early African hunters would kill something there was a tremendous remorse because they had taken a life. So the hunter would take his bow and hold the wooden side of the bow and change the tension on the string. A companion would play the string and give a libation of music to the soul of the animal that gave its flesh to feed the people. The idea knocked me out, so I started making bow-shaped sculptures. That’s how I started. As I researched this idea, I found that that instrument was called the diddley-bow.

> So I did more research and found that the instrument came to the west with enslaved Africans. It came into the Mississippi Delta. You know, Bo-Diddly's name came from the diddley-bow. Well, in fooling with this idea and really researching it, it dawned on me that I was really beginning to understand what blues music has done. The blues is a marriage, from what I understand, of African rhythms with western harmonics. Blues is where those two collided. And what I had done in that installation and in my Diddlie Bow series was to take African mythology and western technology and fuse them. So basically I had created a visual blues (2005: 15).

*Spirit House* is an art installation of an iron constructed shotgun home ornamented with various silhouettes of local workers, craftsmen, and their tools as a symbol to honor the workers that lived in the area. That the house is held up by Egyptian columns (as a reference to his claim that Greco-Roman columns are rooted in Egyptian engineering aesthetic practices) could be considered visual jazz, a generational iteration on binding "African mythology and western technology" with the shotgun form itself being its visual analog.

*Spirit House* displays a regional relation between laborers and artisans contextualized with a culture that both took part in. This dichotomy is further elucidated by Nick Spitzer in his essay, "The Aesthetics of Work and Play in New Orleans" (2002) where several jazz players express their philosophies of living through their day jobs as plasterers, tinsmiths, bricklayers, and carpenters. The aesthetic of labor in New Orleans also was influenced by the immaterial transcendent belief structures held in the south.

Sacred songs in the church use labor as a metaphor to communicate ideal relationships with God:

I'm working on a building

It's a true foundation.

I'm holding up the bloodstained

Banner for my Lord.

I'll never get tired of

Working on the building.

I'm going up to heaven

To get my reward.

*Figure 5.— John T. Scott and Martin Payton's Spirit House, 2002.*

Simultaneous pride in play and workmanship is most evident through carnival season and Mardi Gras where Black Masking Indians craft their intricate suits year-round by hand to present themselves and their representative tribes in kaleidoscopic fashion. In this sense, an ideological separation between compartmentalizing one's strong sense of creativity solely within acts socially considered as play doesn't really exist in New Orleans culture historically. A blur where work and play openly comingle is evident in its social life.

Creativity in both night and day is something Spitzer understands as "the everyday vernacular" and because the iterations of the of African derived secular and sacred (blues and gospel) music form known as jazz and the creation of a Black working-class in New Orleans happened in tandem, the syncretized tensions are found in both Jazz and in the building arts of the city (2002: 93). The intermixing of the tools initially used in Eurocentrically accepted art forms (opera, military marching bands, and orchestras) were soon brought into the tradition of African derived art forms (street parades, piano stomps and using brass instruments to bring social music into social spaces). In the building arts, Spitzer denotes this cultural tension through physical manifestations of, "elegant plastering to flamboyant ironwork; highly functional foundational foundations to whimsical cupolas" (2002: 95). One of these jazz artisans was banjoist and plasterer Johnny St. Cyr, a member of Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives and Sevens and Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers band in the 1920s. Born in 1890, St. Cyr worked under his father has a hod carrier and was a plasterer by age 14. He explains his understanding between music and building craftwork:

> A jazz musician have to be a working class of man, out in the open all the time, healthy and strong. That's what's wrong today; these new guys haven't got the force… a working man have the power to play hot — whiskey or no whiskey (quoted in Spitzer 2002: 96).

For a recently freed people, being able to extend your degree of mobility via self-employment was found simultaneously within the fields of music and craftsmanship. Through such a lens, this world can be understood as entirely performance-based, a willingness to affirming one's own desire in life when the sun's up and down. As we understand Jazz as performance-based, extending the craftsmanship as another performance-based medium is worthwhile to document this as working-class relationship to attain personal and creative freedom (Stanley-Niaah 2009). Spitzer continues this elucidation through examining the analogies Jazz artisans make when connecting these two worlds:

> Craftsmen themselves often make the analogies to music in their work, including the balance between tradition and improvisation, commitment to certain qualities of composition and creation, and in admiring the results of their labors among themselves and the public. Many craftsmen listen to music on the job for inspiration and find the sounds of work — the ring of the hammer and rasp of the trowel — to be musical (2002: 103).

Other artisans like Lionel Ferbos, Allison "Tootie" Montana, and Milford Dolliole shared this perspective on competition and cooperation in both building and sound arts. In New Orleans, there are as many tradesmen as there are musicians— all vying for the best, and highest paying, gigs. In both scenes, cooperative labor is on full display as much as

competition is as well. Examples include cornetist Freddie Keppard covering his hands with a handkerchief so onlookers couldn't decipher his fingering moves. Another form of competition that found reflections in the building arts of the south were jam sessions known as cuttings. Cuttings are contests in the middle of rehearsals where players compete for future gigs and social respect (Devi 2012). New Orleans craftsman Theodore "Teddy" Pierre Jr. summarizes this Black working-class relationship in a musical city:

> There's a great deal of coordination between what is happening in a musician's mind and what comes out of that instrument. There are manipulations with fingers and hands that have to be coordinated. The exact same thing happens when you're laying bricks. If you're not coordinated properly, when you go to "butter" a brick, or apply mortar on a brick, then put it on, if you don't get the sequence right, the wall never happens. Or if it does, you've got mortar smeared all over the place… it shows the laboring of weary hands.
>
> The same discipline applies in music. You've got to know exactly what you're doing. It takes practice. I can look at a wall and say these guys were really in a good mood, as opposed to you see[ing] another piece of wall where the joints are not quite right and there are imperfections… those guys weren't having such a good day. The same can said for musicians… completely out of tune (quoted in Spitzer 2002: 114-115).

Trumpeter Lionel Ferbos, previously referenced to, was emblematic of how building arts and music-making in New Orleans are understood by its practitioners as frameworks rooted in a bisociative epistemology that Spitzer considers, "the balance

between tradition and improvisation, commitment to certain qualities of compositions and creation, and in admiring the results of their labors among themselves and the public" (2002: 103). Progression through iteration (repetition with difference) allowed Ferbos to express himself while providing resources for his family through this duality of expressed discipline and creativity. A strong example of this relationship with work and play is his involvement in the New Orleans Works Progress Administration under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Jazz band formed by laborers from 1935-1943. During the Great Depression, because opportunities were shrinking for musicians to play and get paid, the government subsidized this issue by providing a government-sponsored construction and cultural project known as the Federal Music Project (FMP). The FMP allowed for the New Orleans Jazz Band to emerge and provide almost daily performances across town for under or unemployed day laborers to continue to live with relative dignity (Abate, 2006: 7).

As seen in the ethos carried and lyrics produced in this culture, social identities have been found to manifest both materially and immaterially. To briefly return to the Scott and Payton's *Spirit House* as an example, there is a clear investment for the spiritual dimension to be alive, visible, and aural in the spaces where African cultures thrive. Scholar of African American folk life and artist John T. Biggers saw the shotgun as a material connection of how a society inside another choose to engage with the world they've were placed into. The rooms, the front porch, and the placement of shotgun in tightly spaced rows represent features associated with close interactions and community (Fig. 6). Many of these features inside the building also pertain to acknowledging their spirituality (Draper 2000). Biggers explains how the shotgun's house triangle pediment

and rectilinear façade, "represent sacred forms whose esoteric means came from Africa, symbolizing fire and earth" (2000: 4). These connotations of form and function invoke something Kristin Schreiber calls a "domestic temple that provides spiritual protection, along with family connectedness" (2000: 4).

*Figure 6. John Biggers, Shotgun. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 1987.*

Blues epistemology reinterprets historical suffering under the regimen of planter into an aestheticized belief structure rooted in self-referential knowledges. This knowledge derived from African origin, indicates a transnational blackness, one that is affirmed in the daily life of the people who forced to interpret transatlantic communication. These communications echo through and materialize into the daylife (craftsmanship) and nightlife (music) of these people. Examining the shotgun extends such a claim with evidence to further affirm this boundlessness that blackness navigates

as an always-already developing system of fugitivity and reconnection. This notion is reminiscent of historian Lara Putnam's claim of how ideas that surround both rhetoric and music can act as an allied front towards a signaling a Black sensibility of something she understands as carrying a social citizenship to one's community— not just with dues and town hall meetings, but a collective desire that can be translated in the communal mundanity of everyday (and night) life (Putnam 2013).

Investigating the elements of the shotgun house presents itself to already be in coherent dialog with other elements crafted in the American South. These other elements, such as the Blues and Jazz, seem to find a throughline in a social expression known as a Blues Epistemology; a local system of knowledge constructed by working class Black southerners to ground themselves in a reality produced on their terms and not their overseers. In this chapter, I presented the historical context for how a landscape can be understood as the grounds for a blues epistemology. In the next chapter I'll be extending this epistemology by relating Tiffany Lethabo King's geological metaphor of the shoal with my own riverine object of study, the delta, to consider its form and function as having deep relation with how Black people have historically navigated and addressed mutual care throughout their time in the Western Atlantic basin. In doing so, I'll be considering how the delta can be seen as the underlying geological form beneath many of the Black social forms occurring in the American South. To be in consistent methodological relation with coastal sciences and its vernacular, I'm considering the delta as an antecedent geological formation for Black southern thought and its emanate objects. This will ultimately go under a sub-category of Woods' coined epistemology as *deltaic thinking*— for as how the delta carries itself, as might we.

## *Chapter 2: Southern Musicogeomorphological Architectures*

"What happens to our questions if we insist our methodologies are, in themselves, forms of Black well-being? What happens if the non-measurability-non-computability of Black-life is indicative of, necessary to, our analytics? What if we are not seeking outputs, answers, and conclusions, that end with only describing racism within our present system of knowledge? What happens if the answers that emerge from our colonial and plantocratic blueprints are not good enough? What if there is not a learning outcome? What if we taught and wrote not as problem solvers who count and assess variables (and creative texts can at times be theorized as variables) but as intellectuals to, with all our hearts, believe in opacity and giving on and with other than finding, grasping, and having?"

Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (2020: 117)

### *Chapter 2.1: Antecedent Geologies of New Orleans Jazz Hermeneutics*

This chapter inspects the form and function of the delta as a pedagogy in dialog with the initial chapters of Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals*, in which King demonstrates the geological metaphor of the shoal to elucidate the relationship between its physical behavior with radical Black fugitivity, navigation, and resistance (King 2019). Beyond metaphor, the shoal is also the site many enslaved Africans first reckoned with modernity. Through King's somatic-cerebral example of coastal geological processes, the shoal (as a lens of study) becomes a worthwhile endeavor to materialize the abstract notion of how diasporic blackness has proceeded over time in the Western world. However, the geologic vernacular in Black studies can be extended to ask what are

the preconditions of the shoal and how does this relate to the environmental negotiations blackness is expressed upon?

Retrograding King's shoal offshore geographical epistemology into the hinterlands, I discuss the geological idea of antecedent geologies and place the phenomena of blackness within the parameters of the geological rock cycle, specifically sedimentary rocks, to find precedent of activity that results in the shoal — a delta. Black infrastructures themselves have *antecedent geologies*, or in other words, modern Black material culture is predicated on the vernacular landscape that in turn influences the language of cultural production. This relationship coincides with the geological term of the same name and is the underlying principle behind the process that results in shoal formation as previously identified. First, I will articulate how the geological rock cycle pertains to cycles of diaspora as we've seen in the past half millennia. Second, I'll address the creation of the shoal with the creation of the delta and present the ways in which how the river system of southern Louisiana reflects the simultaneous anthropogenic imposition that Black people endured using Black music history as a proxy to document these changes (akin to how geologists look at the deposition left after events to interpret the past). Lastly, I'll relate both under a self-coined term *deltaic thinking* by comparing its characteristics with historical pedagogical practices such as rhizomatic and arborescent thinking.

The geological rock cycle carries the topological conceits of a circle, no clear beginning or end. For the sake of communicating through geometric-geological heuristics, we will determine a beginning and ending (or lack thereof) via the mathematic definition of origin, "a convenient point of reference" (Higuchi and Martin 2005: 3). By

collapsing the linear approach to history (and blackness by extension), there becomes no starting point and where one begins is never an objective one.

For this writing, the origin point in the Black rock cycle will be Africa, a metaphorical orogeny (mountain building episode) that has the dual geological purpose of generating lithification (rock production) through the compression of convergency plate boundaries that in turn constructs continents (Wegener 1929). Via erosion events led by water and wind, rock formations from orogenous events are slowly broken down into lithic fragments and travel through various currents away from their initial point of deposition (Reuseer et al. 1998). It is here where said fragments undergo a process known as diagenesis: all changes sedimentary deposit during burial and before metamorphosis (a complete melting episode that concludes the current form of the lithic fragment) (Blatt et al. 1996).

In looping this process with a brief social history of African diaspora, enslaved Africans were made 'negro' and became an extensional tool of the west to dominate nature as territory. Through such a lens, enslaved Blacks were an early modern form of technology, "the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry (Wu et al. 2020)". Science and its methodologies that inform the discipline should be understood as a western epistemology that has been conflated to be the singular (or most valued) knowledge system in the world, decimating other knowledges and languages in its wake to place itself at the top of its own constructed hegemony with what Wynter termed "…the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" (2003) that Black study attempts to unsettle. These gestures (generally practices of enslavement and resource extraction) continue to be justified under the guise of practicality to the

misguided ends of carceral state/environmental collapse. The duality of two manufactured realities (nature and man) are made legible in the name of western expansion as these two worlds underwent the same colonial pressures, at the same time under the same processes towards the same ends. Thus lies a colonial kinship between salt, soil, and Black people. Each and all in the hold beside one another.

These relational processes I alluded to earlier can be best understood in a geological sense as similar acts impressed upon both the land and the people but through different magnitudes and vectors; these processes being erosion, deposition, and diagenesis. Erosion is the breakdown of movement of source rock, creating lithic fragments. Unlike weathering, erosion inherently includes movement (Reusser et al. 2015). Deposition is the later settling of said lithic fragments. Over time, this depositional layer gets buried by newer, subsequent material, usually of the same material unless different source rock or chemistry was added into the parameters of the system. This is not a complete melting-recrystallization episode like metamorphism, but enough change will undergo the necessity for a new identification, while at the same time still resembling its source material from an elemental sense (Blatt et al 1996).

Paralleling this cycle with *self<—>made Black object<—>self-made subject* paradigm that Black history has travelled, the steps are eerily similar: we can understand erosion in a socio-cultural sense as the inciting event producing diaspora and the Black 'source rock' being Africa, these lithic fragments made disparate sediment particles across cultures to settle at shore's edge (e.g the American South). Continuous depositions leads to burial under pressure where changes reconstitute the fragments into something altered (diagenesis/production of blackness/*negrolithification*). From there, the surviving

spirit of blackness gets reestablished into various forms of fugitivity, and it is such fugitivity that allows these *negroliths* to travel back up through the rock record (space-time) to anachronize itself (resuspension of sediment/mud diapirs through sediment loading/sankofa) as sediment in and on the Earth.

For a Black geomorphological epistemology to carry a wider resolution than its ephemeral resting place (shoal) one must interpret the acting geological phenomena that produce shoals, a delta. From here, one can evaluate networked relations of how delta's work to geosomatically understand the construction of diasporic Blackness in the American South as an active geological process with its own set parameters and practices of building, evasion, capture, and rupture.

As a worthwhile geological-object-as-metaphor towards local sense of how Blackness was constructed in both process and procedure (in part due to its environment) we look to the delta. In the most basic of terms, a delta is a discrete bulge of the shoreline formed at the point a river enters an ocean, sea, lake, lagoon, or other standing bodies of water. A bulge is an accumulation of sediment as it is depositing quicker than it can be redistributed via waves or tides. A geologically exhaustive article by Jaap Nienhuis (2020) acknowledges over 11,000 deltas around the world, but for the sake of simplicity, I'll be imagining large rivers that in turn form the deltas that most people would acknowledge as such. This all happens, of course, if there is enough sediment in the river (a source) for a delta to form (a sink) (Blum and Roberts, 2012).

A delta follows a life cycle of around 1000-2000 years (fig. 7) with a clear growth phase and a deterioration phase. In a growth phase, a river must be captured as the delta main source of motion and deposition. As a result of this capture, the delta rapidly grows

towards its own relative stability. But as this bulge at the end of the river gets higher and higher, the river finds itself working harder to deposit the sediment at the top or even around this vertically accumulated earthen structure. So, the river shifts laterally towards another part of the shoreline, or avulses, towards the formation of another delta lobe. This begins the growth process for another area nearby to start its own new delta subcomplex, but it also begins the death of the previously mentioned delta (Roberts 1997).

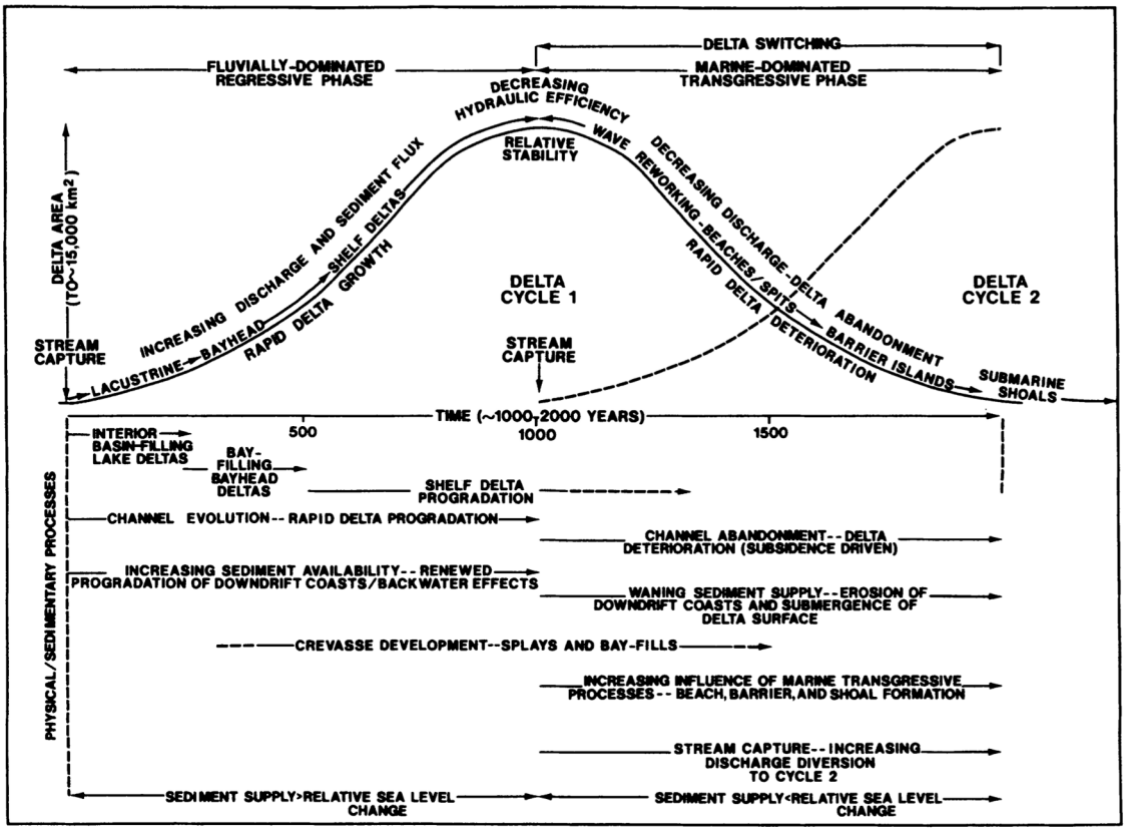


*Figure 7. The delta cycle of growth and decay. Harry H. Roberts, "Dynamic Changes of the Holocene Mississippi River Delta Plain: The Delta Cycle," Journal of Coastal Research 13, no. 3 (1997): 605–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4298659.*

Before arriving at the delta in greater detail, I wish to connect this geological phenomenon to King's Black shoal. A shoal is an abandoned outer structure that forms from detachment from a waning delta (Fig. 8). When a delta is active it spreads, or progrades, out into whichever body of water it's depositing sediment and water (see:

"active delta" in Fig. 8). During the abandonment stage of a previously active delta (see: "Stage 1" in Fig. 8), tides and waves, once powerless to the mighty river flow, now have enough force to rework the deposit (see: "Stage 2" in Fig. 8). This leads to an erosional headland which quickly gets detached into what is known as a barrier island. With further submergence, this drowned or subaqueous barrier island now is understood as a sand shoal (Stage 4) (Blum and Roberts 2012). With this background in place, let's now consider both the conceiving the nature of shoals and deltas with respect to Black studies as examples of *deltaic thinking* akin to the rock cycle superimposed on the colonial diasporic history of Africa.

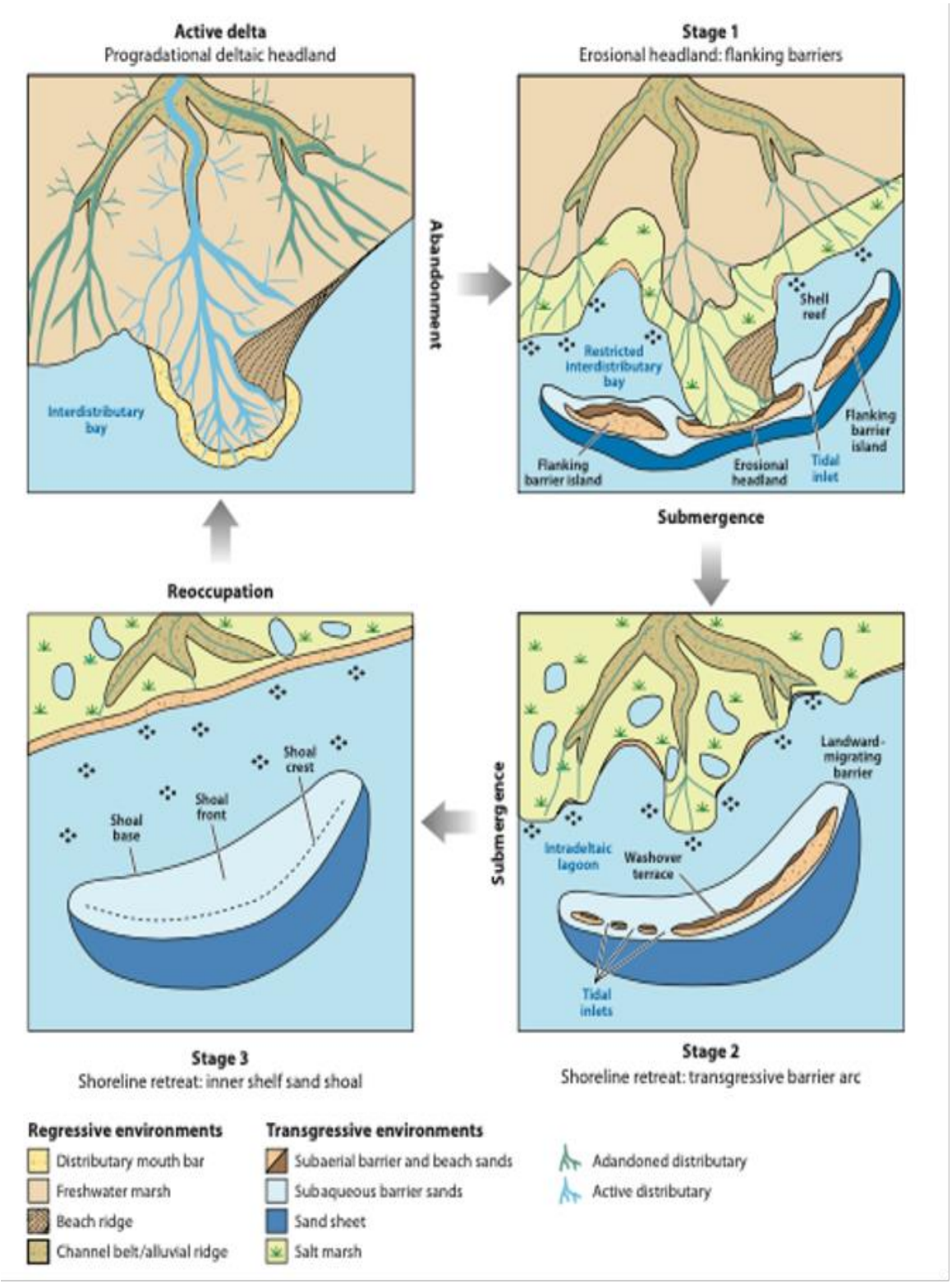


*Figure 8. Shoal cycle. Michael D. Blum and Harry H. Roberts, "The Mississippi Delta Region: Past, Present, and Future," Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences 40:1 (2012), 655-683*

### *2.2 Deltaic Thinking*

As a site of speculative understanding, deltas and their cycles are rich in knowledge that can superimpose itself onto-into Black methodology and logics. Figure 9a shows how southern Louisiana was created through a non-linear, spatial mixing of various delta lobes growing and expanded on top and beside each other. As the Mississippi delta constructed southern Louisiana in particular processes, so to was 19th/20th Black music constructed; an intermixed progression of sorrow songs begetting gospel begetting blues begetting jazz begetting r&b begetting rock begetting house begetting techno and rap, all producing their own discrete but interconnected lobes, expanding and stacking beside) (*Fig. 9b*). One can look at the figure below and get a sense of the history of Black music isn't exactly linear and contextual circulation. Later in this chapter, I'll return to Figure 9b to place it in conversation with other forms of visualization the expansion of Black musical genre.

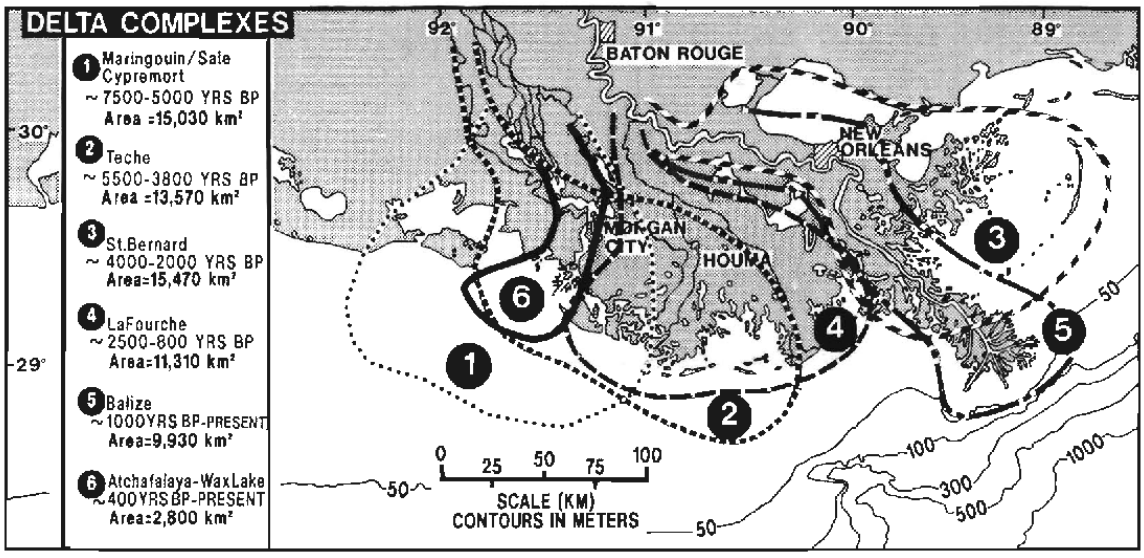


*Figure 9a. Map showing the six delta complexes that formed Southern Louisiana. Harry H. Roberts, "Dynamic Changes of the Holocene Mississippi River Delta Plain: The Delta Cycle," Journal of Coastal Research 13, no. 3 (1997): 605–27.*

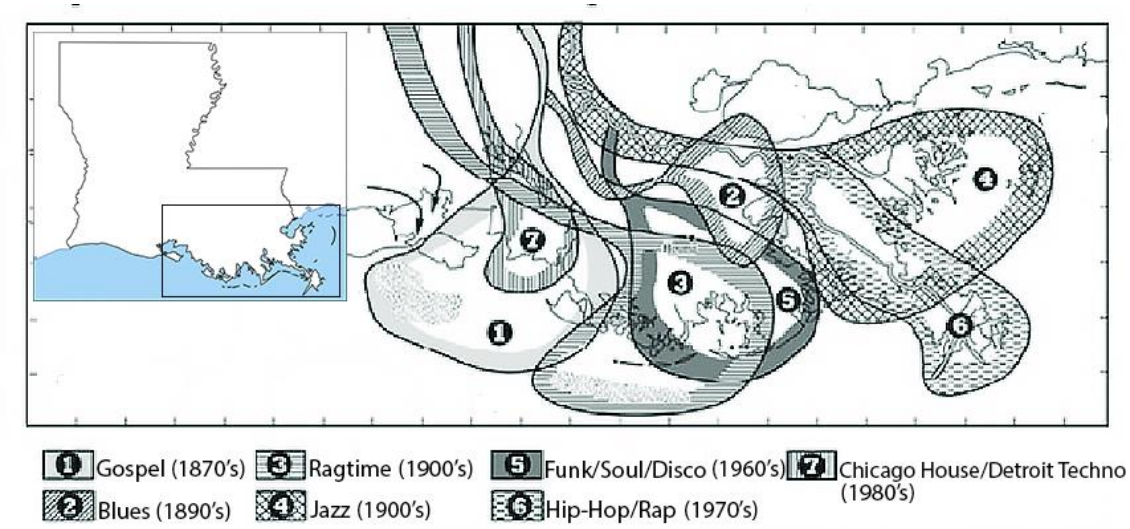


*Figure 9b. A truncated history of Black music superimposed onto Deltaic behavior.*

Southern Louisiana continues itself through expansive non-linear episodes of delta lobe evolution. As one area fills with mud and soil, it creates a small bulge that leads to the depositional area to move out of the way of where land is being produced towards an area that has less vertical resistance of deposition. This process of the end point of a river switching horizontally from one site to the next is due to avulsion. Avulsion is a term used in costal geology that denotes one main channel being captured by another channel, also known as channel switching (Singerland and Smith 1998). Before the use of levees, rivers would often switch channels after a large flood event or if the other banks of the river would break and carve out a new channel under the term "crevasse splay" (Nienhuis et al. 2018).

Ethnomusicologist Portia Maultsby's figure of Black music in all its abraidedness seems to resemble and resonate with the delta lobe diagram; river channels freely (as free as one can be inside American industry's parameters) meander and fold into themselves. The delta lobes avulsing system of deposition provides another dimension to this

historical phenomenon of iteration and expansion; as one area of growth shifts to another site nearby after sufficient deposition (cultural effort and expression).

But what happens when structure constrains avulsion, as in the construction of levees after the Great Flood of 1927 (Barry 2006) or capitalism commodifying what it once thought of as noise into extractive resource? How extraction of rich soils leads to physical degradation, how capitalism can be understood as a colonial mapping project and the inherent ephemerality of a delta refusing to carry permanence and to impose such upon it is violence (through delusion). The concepts surrounding shoal production and its processes can be viewed through another production, Black cultural production, each with its own internal and industrial stressors reworking itself within the tension of plantation forces.

All of this assumes that blackness, as both a sociocultural and depositional-erosional process where any violence enacted upon it, is something akin to weathering (the decimation of the American Indian population, in situ breakdown) or erosional (weathering involving transport, i.e. the great migration). Culture plays a pivotal role in this speculative coastal geology. For example, Mardi Gras season can be seen as a shoal, a tarrying or procession—a wading in the water. A friction point that slows down our worker-based responsibilities of life to the point where all we can do is live presently. In *The Disappearance of Rituals*, Byung-Chul Han elucidates the phenomenal shift that occurs during festival: "As forms of play, festivals are self-representations of life. They are characterized by an excess, an expression of an overflowing life that does not aim at a goal" (2020: 40).

Sound plays a pivotal role in the expression and survival of a people. Its radical potential is in not only what it can do but in understanding how it behaves. Its ability of amplifying disruption and elation provides access for many people regardless of where they're understood in the socio-economic system to affirm (through broadcast) a collective ethos. This act can be one of existential nourishment, especially for a people that may not have a socially legible voice otherwise. With this being the case in New Orleans (and other countless examples across history), sound plays an affective role in liberation and expression across time and space. Protest, revolution, and congregation almost always communicate their force through channels of sound of chant and drum. Sound behaves in the manner of which the people desire for themselves, freely and without hegemonic boundaries. To use the mechanisms of sound as immaterial analog, sound behaves in a similar capacity as water acts (another medium that travels as waveforms), opaquely, without quantization or segregation. Or as water finds itself filling up the finite spaces it accommodates, it begins to accumulate before looking for a path to diffuse its concentrated area of deposition. Towards a localized example of how culture might subconsciously model this tradition formally, the opacity of a second line comes to mind, another type of avulsion through the streets of the crescent city, its peak seasons matching the river's seasonal cresting. Another representational geo-analog can be how the humid sea-surface temperatures of the Gulf waters allows for the proliferation of fog-signals in lieu of lighthouses (Cubit's Gap Fog Signal Station in 1935, Fig. 10) due to lack of visibility. To hear is to see down here. The geology of the space informs those navigating and building on top, an antecedent geology of blackness.

*Figure 10. Cubits Gap Fog Signal Station, Cubits Gap, Louisiana. Photo: United States Coast Guard.*

The Mississippi River is a useful and proximal example to find a throughline between colonial and neocolonial stress-mutation on a landscape geographer Carl Sauer alludes to in his book *Morphology of Landscape* (Sauer 1926). So too did 18th century Czech classical composer Antonín Dvořák, perhaps flippantly, celebrating Negro spirituals as "product of the soil" (Snyder 1993). Dvořák's confidence that the spiritual was American music of the land and not of state, also hints at a metalanguage I find personally insightful in understanding music as much because of a physical, tilling process as it is a creative one. For instance, field songs: a term giving equal weight to the land as the shouts given to and of. To veer away from Dvorak's americentricity and continue this chapter's focus on articulating a more Mississippian understanding of Black cultural production, we can look to sorrow songs, spirituals, gospel, and predominantly something I'm broadly calling first wave Black genres as *unleveed musics*; where styles of song were generated almost as often as flood pulses on the river overbanked into the southern plain. No explicit constraints on music making outside of the socio-economic pressures for Black folk. Both the pre-industrial engagement of Black music of the time and the relative freedom of the river to flood as it wished were obviously not beautiful

events, but the understanding that these floods were needed to continue a fertile and healthy wetland was well known. Only until the Great Flood of 1927 was some permanent structures of outgroup (colonial) controlled infrastructure was instituted where in two decades' time, the majority of the Mississippi had been leveed and dammed-damned resulting in a riverine catch-22: those living on its banks indeed found annual safety from overbanking floods, but the land was now effectively disconnected from the renourishing soil from its life-source, now rendered vulnerable from various storms and future floods as wetland loss had already begun by 1932 (Tweel and Turner 2011).

To keep listening to the Mississippi River and its history as a knowledge system beyond metaphorical trope, Black cultural production was not far behind western riverine control structures. For the Mississippi, it was Fort Randall Dam where, in 1952, it became the single largest recorded decrease of suspended sediment load in the Mississippi River (Fig. 11) (Tweel and Turner 2011).

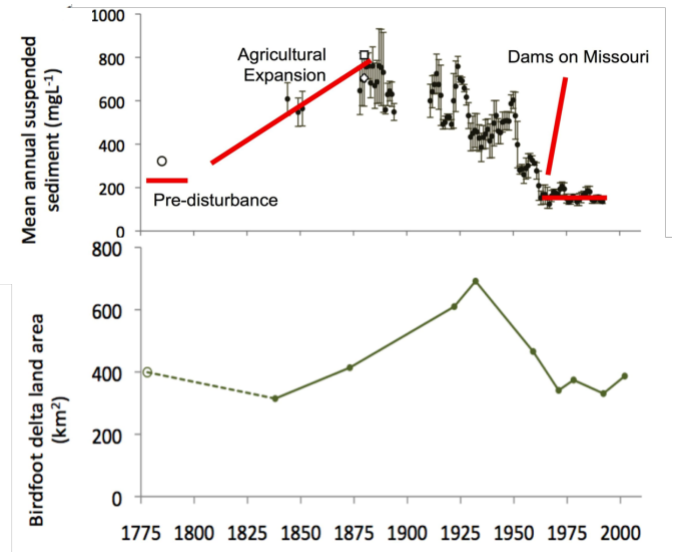


Figure 11. The Mississippi river delta land area coinciding with agricultural expansion and upriver damming, between 1775 and 2000. Andrew W. Tweel and R. Eugene Turner, "Watershed Land Use and River Engineering Drive Wetland Formation and Loss in the Mississippi River Birdsfoot Delta," *Limnology and Oceanography* 57, no. 1 (2012): 18–28. doi:10.4319/lo.2012.57.1.0018.

For Black musicians, it was the introduction of race records ratified by Billboard in 1940, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in 1998. These structures contained for what I'm calling second wave or leveed Black musics: Rap, Detroit Techno, Chicago House, and Jazz. These genres were matriculated into systems of extraction quickly captured by music industries towards economic gain, thus reflecting the bind the Mississippi River itself was also placed under for the sake of the subsistence of the eastern United States.

This deltaic understanding is close but not synonymous with Deleuzian rhizomes defined as a type of network that has the capacity to "connect any point to any other point" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Deltaic thinking introduces multiple tributaries depositing lobes connected through a shifting source network where the cyclical nature of river channel capture results in multiple depositional centers (Roberts 1997). Interconnected (intertwined) like the rhizome, yes, but not interdependent (mutually dependent). Instead, an emphasis shifting sites of dominant deposition as needed for the system's health. A sort of rhizome with inherent responsibility to area that need assistance or growth.

To illustratively compared this deltaic thinking with other figures that could be more associated with Rhizomatic thinking and what Deleuze and Guattari were comparing their model with another pedagogical structure, arborescent thinking, where knowledge is derived from a single source (stem) and ends with "fruits" that can't reach the roots.

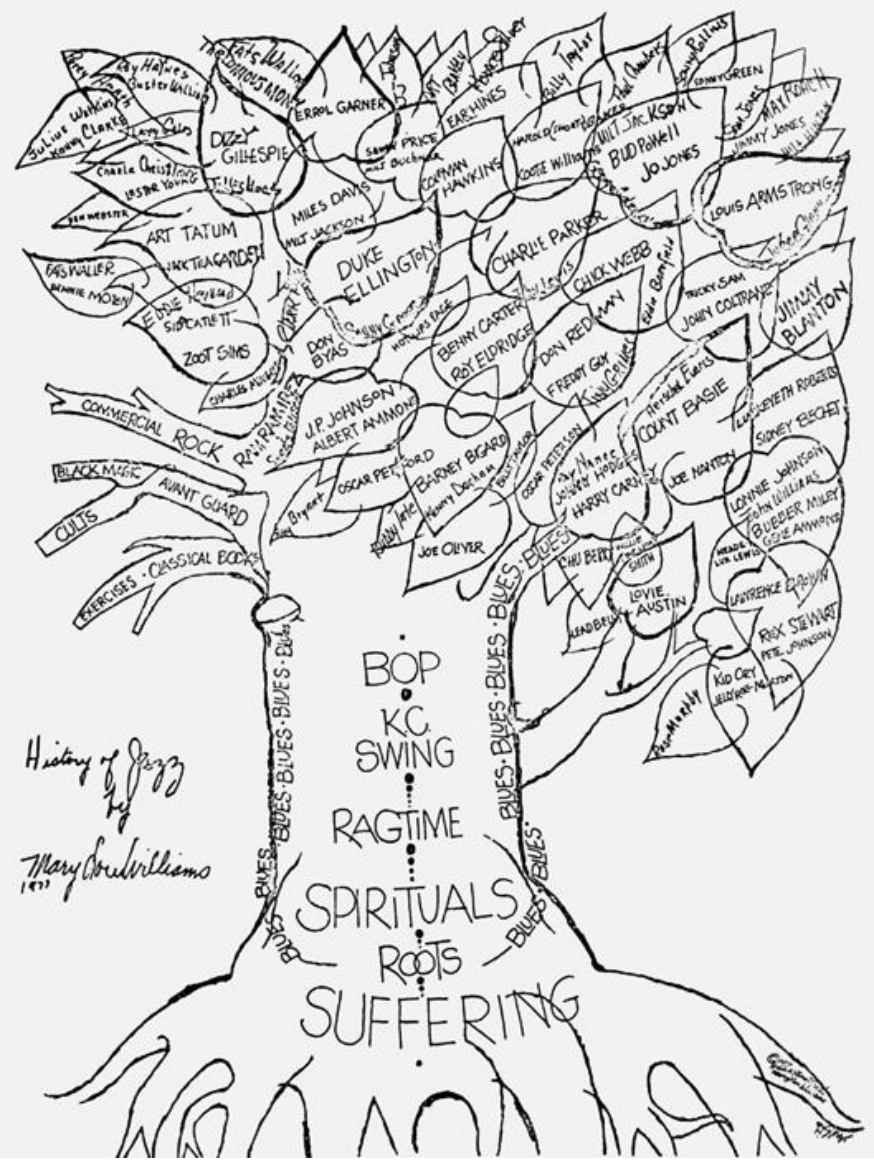


*Figure 12. History of Jazz.* Mary Lou Williams, 1977.

In a diagram drawn by Jazz Pianist Mary Lou Williams, she denotes the form of a tree of having relation with the growth of jazz, with his roots inherent to all such Black forms emanating from "SUFFERING". Ethnomusicologist Dr. Portia Maultsby seems to extend this series of cultural iterations by reaching a more non-linear conceptualization. In her figure, Black music morphs over time through various interdependent networks that circulate and interconnect.

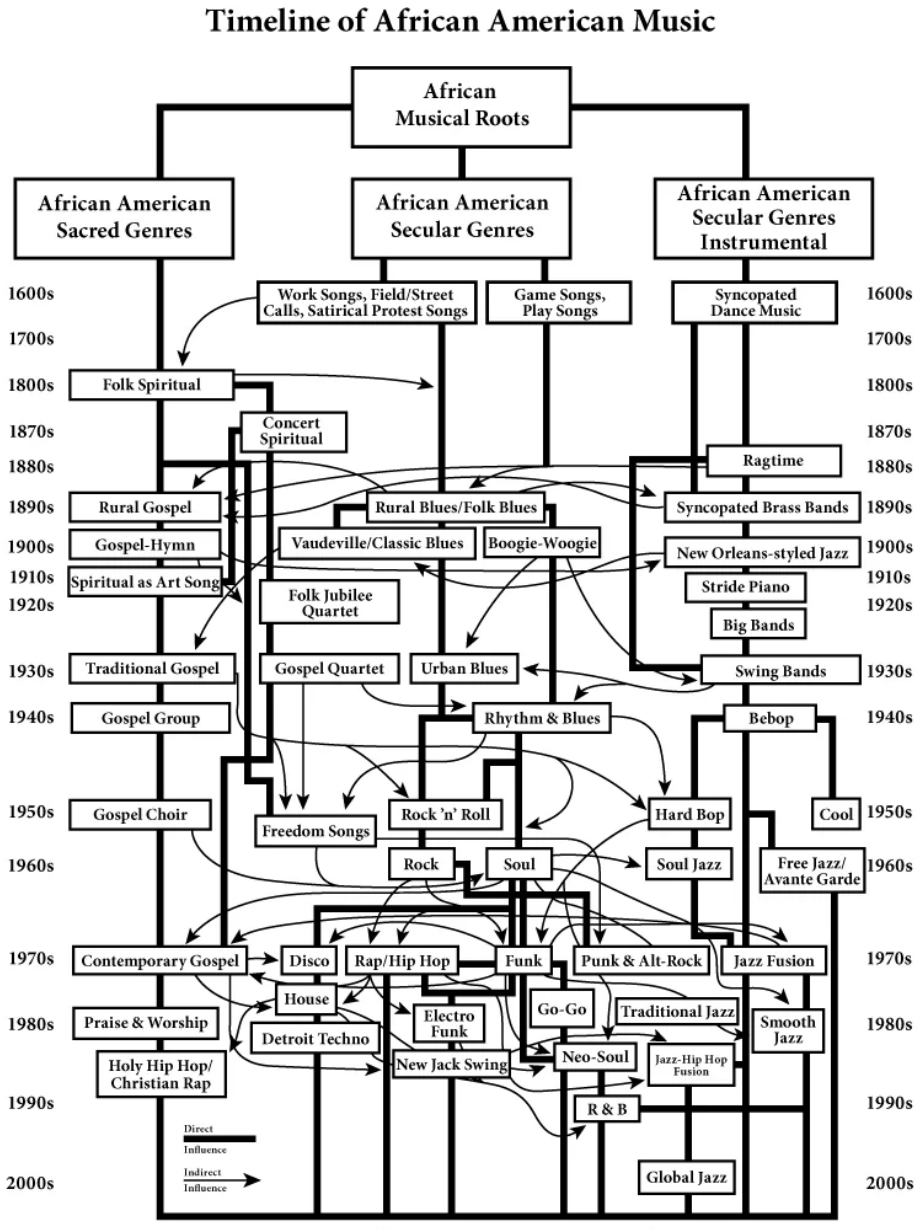


*Figure 13. Timeline of African American Music, presented as an example of a rhizomatic thinking structure. (Burnim et. al., 2014)*

Dr. Maultsby's "Timeline of African American Music" (2014) (Fig. 12) expresses a more communicative structure of the different genres in the African-American music continuum with direct and indirect influences acknowledges, thus addressing how crosspollination induces iteration. Here, I reintroduce my own figure to continue this iterative tradition of both the music and those philosophizing the structural history of

Black music. Using Southern Louisiana deltaic lobe history as an exemplary (not authoritative) image to visualize the structure of Black music through time, the epistemological differences between Williams' and Maultsby's figures are resolved as the delta allows to have a networked (interdependent, rhizomatic) yet dendritic (arborescent) form.

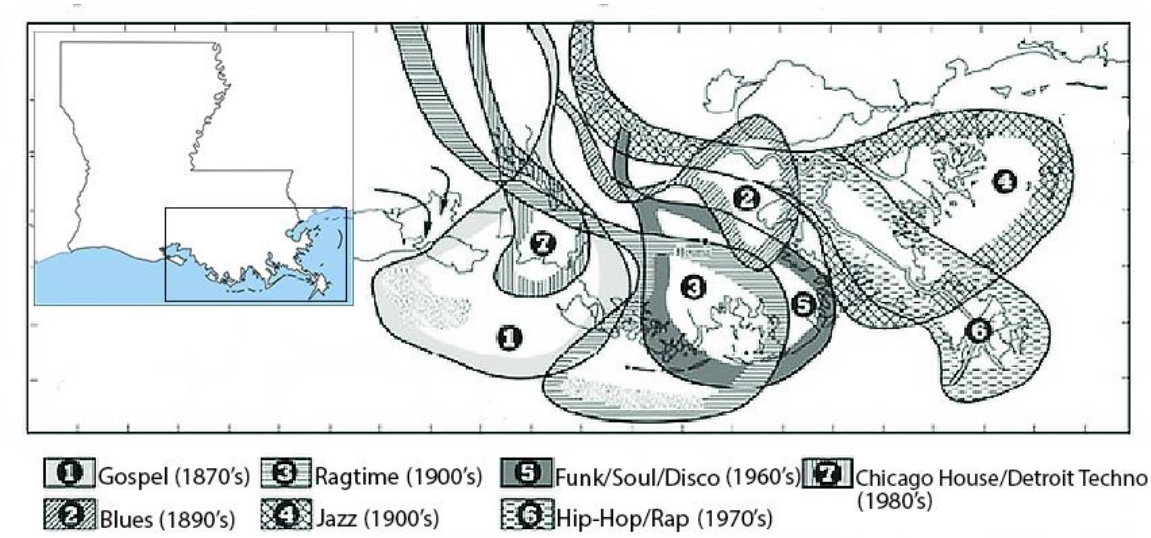


*Figure 9b. A Black musical history excerpt imposed on a deltaic structural history of Southern to denote how music is a spatial practice as much as it is a temporal one.*

Through deltaic thinking (as seen in the figure above), one can appreciate the significance of spatial context for the production and amplification of Black music. The figure above not only affirms that music is in direct relation to land but also that each type of music develops in proximal relation and response to what came before, during, and after it. This spatial acknowledgement allows for a previous concept in this paper, antecedent geologies, to be expressed visually in the history of Black music. The figure also includes the concept of growth and wane, the same way delta lobes of Louisiana do (Fig. 9a). This inclusion allows the reader to consider how genre often goes about moments of submergence, rapid growth and decline, with each of these stages having

environmental context. This notion feels akin to what techno producer and Non-Worldwide co-founder Melika Ngombe Kolongo (Nkisi) calls in DeForrest Brown Jr.'s podcast series "Techno At The End of the Future", "a decentralized rhythm strategy," whereas one rhythm gets subsumed by the mainstream or fades away, another rhythm is already popping up somewhere else, ready to continue the goal of getting people together (Haus der Kulturen der Welt 2022).

### *Chapter 2.3 House Music*

In the prior sections of this chapter, examples of how relationships between landscape, culture, and built environment were considered as a dynamic system whereas anthropogenic changes are imposed on the landscape. These systems, of which the earth naturally behaves, seems to resemble people's cultural methodology; this is to say, as the Earth goes about what architecture professor David Brown calls a "fugitive system" of organization (2005: xi), certain cultural formations seem to move in a similar manner.

Here, I elucidate some subversive tactics shared between the architectural and the musical practices emerging in New Orleans in the 19th century and early 20th century. I will compare the typological relation of the shotgun form with the musical elements of Jazz through several studies: architect Mario Gooden on Black spatial practices, musicologist Thomas Brothers' research on early Jazz, writer Marcus Christian and his understanding of performance methodologies in Voodoo ceremony, writer Ishmael Reed's thoughts on cultural camouflage, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston's essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (1939).

Following architect Mario Gooden's concept of Black liberation as ultimately a spatial practice, I take Jazz as akin to the act of building a dwelling in your own cultural

image with Western tools as an example of subversive space-making, or renegotiating space. I choose here to acknowledge a simultaneity of African characteristics transmuted into a Euro-American context occurring between the forms of the shotgun and jazz form. These two forms in their construction seem to carry conceits widely understood within the realms of musicology, but these elements need not be necessarily musical. Urgency, syncopation, improvisation, solos, call and response, and creative freedom collectively lending themselves towards forward momentum of a performance (of any kind!). Approaching each of these elements from a musicological perspective is commonplace. Urgent beats provide for a general pulse that Jazz is often associated with, the accented drum hits that introduce a feeling of activity that enlivens a particular song (syncopation). The act of creation without explicit preparation (improvisation) lies at the core of what is Jazz, as is the notion of general creative freedom as an objective. 'Call and response', a particular Africanism found in many African-derived musics (such as the sounds coming from a ring shout, gospel interactivity, the 12-bar blues 'AAB' form), is widely understood to be inside the DNA of Jazz.

But venturing beyond the music as the dominant site where these elements present themselves is an important step to recognize how music is an expression emerging out of a way of life. And for many New Orleanians, where craftsmanship and music behave in tandem, you can find these elements predicated in daily life. Let us return to the shotgun with these "musical" elements to consider how one might find a general typology between the shotgun house when considering the shotgun landscape in New Orleans as its own in-situ (in place) cultural genre where the construction of each particular house as a document of a performance, much in the way Jazz as a genre is understood through an

accumulated phenomena of performances, recordings, and notated sheets. Concepts such as improvisation, the solo, call and response and creative freedom as an objective to reach are all cornerstones of the jazz idiom.

So how (or why) is urgency connected to the Jazz idiom? Due to the nature of adaption from crisis for many Black New Orleanians at the time of Jazz generally being constructed, there lies a clear connection between one's day to day and how that day is reconciled through expression. In Thomas Brother's *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (2006) he claims that through taking part in brass bands, a parade performance that dovetails the military form of a marching band with many of the African elements previously described, Armstrong believed how music making (in parades and more widely as a profession), solves "the problem of trouble-free movement through a dangerous city": "Everyone loved me and just wanted to hear me blow, even the tough characters were no exception. The tougher they were the more they would fall in with my horn" (2006: 18). Here we can see how music was connected to desired ways of life. Because the music lent itself to accessing varying degrees of personal freedom in a violent environment where slavery and its wake, one can see the ways in which urgency wasn't only in the music but in the lives of every Black New Orleanian.

Where urgency underpinned the lives of Black folk in the 19th and 20th century, we can begin to find urgency inside the social history and architectural design of the shotgun. Arriving soon after the Haitian revolution, many Black people had to construct a living space for themselves and their family quickly. The economical nature of the shotgun allowed for much of the construction to occur quickly without a vast knowledge of various construction practice (Vlach 1975). In this way, the shotgun can be considered

a folk form, one where due to the ancestral transmission of home construction from Haiti and even further back from West Africa, the shotgun home lent itself to be built up quickly by many people needing solid shelter. African American legacy often being a series of embodied survival practices allow for both the shotgun and jazz to be in closer relation than previously recognized. Folklorist John Michael Vlach affirms this folk technology of promptly assert oneself under oppressive conditions:

> The African contribution to the Haitian shotgun thus involves both a form and philosophy of architecture. Because both aspects were part of design process, the shotgun quickly achieved stability and became deeply imbedded within Haitian culture so that mulattoes used the form while trying to establish their identity as free men. They later carried the idea of the shotgun house to Louisiana (Vlach, 1976: 69).

Syncopation, a deliberate disruption of consistent rhythm via stressing an off beat is a well-regarded as a cornerstone in jazz, but is it found in the shotgun home? Referencing the Detroit Collaborative Design Center at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture article "Syncopating the Urban Landscape" (2014) provides a worthwhile approach towards the recognition of syncopation both in design and grassroots urban planning that took place in 19th century New Orleans. Their working definition of syncopation is "to take the stronger, more dominant musical notes and make and them weaker, and at the same time to take the weaker notes and make them stronger" (2014: 2). This employment of insistent equity finds common ground with the social objectives of Black people's historical struggle in insisting for human rights in American society. Joining this idea with ethnomusicologist John Miller Chernoff's comments on

African expressive forms stating, “African music is not abstracted from its social setting as an art form but rather is directly integrated into social activities” (1979: 93), there’s a case to be made that this sense of inscribing this sense of equity can be emergent in the social activities of music-making and building. Here, syncopation becomes a symbolic and material gesture to introduce into various medium. New Orleanians syncopating the world around them showcases the social group’s core values that not only carries historical traces shown through ancestral knowledge systems but is also environmentally responsive. This gesture can be seen inside the form of the shotgun via its collective iteration of fixed structure. One can almost recognize a fractality within the shotgun as single object and as one that is in conversation with the thousand other shotguns in the city of New Orleans. In relation to the other home design and visual philosophy imprinted on the city through the French, Spanish, and (more generally) Euro-American populace, the introduction of the shotgun in the landscape was itself an act of syncopation. Each shotgun is in relation to each as most of the time they are building in proximal succession with one other, each having slight variation of design and ornamental aesthetic. The way Jazz has been predominately structured, understood as having fixed structure comprised of autonomous parts, so too is the structure of the shotgun and the framework of each shotgun next to another. With the shotgun, one can see the act of independent voices across a given form, the sensibilities are not separate from the ethos of a people.

Improvisation, potentially just as rooted in urgency of expression of speaking out alongside your community due to violent oppression resulting in a collective need to congregate for survival purposes, is dually important for the shotgun and Jazz’s existence

in New Orleans. Simply put, the fact that shotgun homes are existing in New Orleans is evidence of improvisation. What else is a population that has been refused first-class citizenship to do when they'd be given nothing? What they can with what they know with have around them. As much as creolization has to do with the producing the conditions of possibility for jazz, so does this function behave for the shotgun. Pressure on the continuity of time, cross-rhythms, the urge for freedom, figuring it out as you go along—these tactics were employed through New Orleans for centuries across medium.

The two modes of expression of the shotgun and jazz present gestures of exercising control over space on their own terms, using economical cheap objects to construct sites of resistance, and sharing a general "process of improvising within a highly constrained structure and set of rules" (Zack 2000). These two practices should be understood as forms that both also hold many of the characteristics of Negro expression Hurston speaks to in her 1934 essay. Using Hurston's criteria as a guide, Jazz's theoretical parameters will be compared to the architectural guidelines and historical use of the shotgun home. "The Characteristics of Negro Expression" by anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1934), lays out of a clear series of textural conceits that describe her observations during her time in the American South.

She produces 12 characteristics in total: drama, will to adorn, angularity, negro folklore, cultural heroes, originality, imitation, absence of the concept of privacy, the jook, and dialect. Here, I will engage with but five.

Drama (as creolization as syncretism)

Drama, or narratively dialectical tension, can be found at the core of Jazz. Imposing a blues scale on European tonal system introduces a sort of incalculability or

consistent unresolvability. Much of Black music is felt as loose translations of disconnected language and discontinuity of culture, leaving the listener with something more somatic in its historical wake of negation. In the shotgun form too, drama is inherited in its creation as the tension between using West African spatio-temporalities and form on American colonial soils leads to another sort of incalculability. Therein lies an opaque or semi-legible palimpsest of histories on a single cultural object. Looking behind the time of Jazz presents its musicological precedent, the Blues. The Blues carries this tension as well with African oralities and European tonalities all wrapped in in-between notes. Initially preserved in work songs (Armstrong finds origin in the blues as "levee camp songs" before he ever heard the term (Brothers 2006: 20).

The blues began as more a gesture that street men selling bottles and rags on a mule-drawn carts would employ to get the attention of patrons willing to buy tin horns or small trinkets for small change. Kid Ory, Louisiana trombonist and member of Armstrong's Hot Five band, spoke of the man often credited as the originator of Jazz, Buddy Bolden, as having stolen the music ideas he would become known for from these "rag-bottle-and-bones men" in uptown New Orleans. As it went on, a co-opted gesture becomes abstracted into standardized form. At its face, the Blues carried a rudimentary framework as Brother considers it, "a pattern of phrases and a set of chords, both repeated in the background, over and over— that is still commonly used in jazz" (2006: 21).

Over time, the style becomes standardized. I return to Brothers:

> In its basic form blues are built on three chords, which are used as signposts for the regular flow of four-bar phrases. The main chord of the three is built on the

> pitch that serves as a center of gravity for the soloist's melody; the two secondary chords alternate with it, but only briefly. Thus, blues harmony is much simpler than the harmony typically used in most popular songs (2006: 23).

In the way the Blues bends notes, a gesture that extended the capacity of the 12 equal temperament tonal system that much of western music and its notation follows, it's an artifact of what Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant considers "…Creolization, the meeting, the interference, the shock, the harmony and the disharmony between cultures, in the realized totality of the Earth-World" (1997: 34). I place Hurston and Glissant's thoughts in conversation with one another as two distinct methods of speaking to all that yields from the incident of coloniality; as creolization as drama as drama as creolization.

Will to Adorn, Originality, and Aberration on a Standard

Ornamentation or aberration on a framework is its own framework found in both objects of study in this paper. Historically, Jazz continues to introduce iteration upon standards to the point where much of Jazz are aberrations on aberrations. This can be seen in the cascade-style layout of many Jazz songs following the 12-bar blues form where the opening of the tune is a recognizable song to such a degree that one might be mistaken that they're listening to a cover (this is called the 'head') before the second portion of the song begins to iterate on the chords from the songs it's based on with enough difference for the song to be considered an original composition (contrafact), where finally the songs returns to its beginning and comes to a close .

The will to adorn is also found inside the musical features of jazz— syncopation, swing, polyrhythm can be understood as adornment or ornamentation on a series of chord changes. The feature that will be address mainly within thinking through Jazz listening as

a clue towards an alternative epistemology about a lived environment can be heterophony. Heterophony is the implementation of multiple autonomous improvising musical voices, each occupying the role of the soloist and accompanist simultaneously. Heterophony, beyond a musical element, is a trope, or as Ethnomusicologist Matt Sakakeeny relates it to in "Textures of Black sound and affect: Life and death in New Orleans" (2024), is moreso a "texture" in the New Orleans style that extends and precedes its emergence in Jazz and the Blues. Texture, as the quality of any whole composed of distinct parts, resonates with poet-activist Kalamu ya Salaam's description: "At a second line you will not likely hear anything that is memorable as a musical composition per se, and at the same time the whole atmosphere is unforgettable" (2010). Sakakeeny's discussion of texture aligns with Hurston's observations on the will to adorn as ritual that affirms a cosmological underpinning. Both syncopation and heterophony lend themselves to spatial and temporal layers with the modification of timescale as its own act of ritual (Sakakeeny: 2024). In returning to Gooden's thoughts of blackness being a practice in spatial liberation, the choice of harmonic layering through modification becomes its own gesturing towards liberation of the plot, notated and landheld.

Collectively, adornment becomes a site to affirm a liberation practice of expressing yourself amongst a historical struggle towards autonomy. And it's this desire rooted into the existential nature of blackness that finds many outlets. Once given a particular typology to do what you want on top of it, the possibilities to exert your truth into the world becomes almost indefinite. This is related to a different musical phenomenon of the contrafact, or a musical composition built using the chord progression

of a pre-existing song, but with a new melody and arrangement (Hora 2019). In many ways, the will to adorn becomes a microcosm of a previously discussed topic in this paper, antecedent geologies. Contrafact becomes a practice of palimpsesting, the superimposition of multiple structures created at different times. In this way, what many often address as a folk technology might have its roots in the geological. Abandoned riverbank meanders influencing but not dictating the decisions of a new avulsed stream.

This aberration on a standard that behaves by iterating endlessness occurring on top of a general framework is seen throughout New Orleans in the aesthetic and structural choices of a shotgun house. Changes in architectural styles across time (Greek Revival [1830-1850], Italianate [1850-1880], Eastlake Style [1880-1905], Bracket Style [1880-1905], Neoclassical [1895-1920], California and Craftsman style [1910-1940]) seems to gesture of the same approach to manipulate a standard to the current conditions and style while maintaining a generally strict parameter in how far that style can manipulate the frame of the form itself (Horning 2021). This sense of spatial efficacy allows for memory, improvisation, and access to self-expression to be reached in the creation of either of these organizational gestures.

Negro Folklore

Both social histories of jazz and the shotgun home are rooted in folklore. With respect to the shotgun home, artist John T. Biggers uncovered that the form of the shotgun home itself carries esoteric allusion to a symbolic west African spiritual tradition, as I repeat from architecture James Draper:

> Biggers utilizes the symbolic importance of these features along with other areas that others have not examined thoroughly, such as the triangle of the shotgun's

> pediment and its rectilinear facade, which "represent sacred forms whose esoteric meaning came from Africa, symbolizing, according to the artist, fire and earth." As Kristin Schreiber explains, the shotgun house then "refers to the African past through its communal space and design but also through the sacred connotations of its form," thus creating a "domestic temple" that provides spiritual protection (2000: 4).

Jazz, having its background rooted in the blues, social dance in drum circles, marching, and as a musical backdrop for nightlife, also carries folkloric elements in its musical structures. Albert Murray recognizes the structure of jazz to carry cultural ties itself:

> The improvisation that is the ancestral imperative of blues procedure is completely consistent with and appropriate to those of the frontiersman, the fugitive slave, and the picaresque hero, the survival of each of whom depended largely on an ability to operate on dynamics equivalent to those of the vamp, the riff, and most certainly the break, which jazz musicians regard as the Moment of Truth, or that disjuncture that should bring our personal best (1996).

Both gestures emerge from what Murray considers the creative act, such an act does not exist in a vacuum but in a historical cultural continuum. This historical continuum could potentially be found in New Orleans writer Marcus Christian's 1976 unfinished manuscript *The Negro in Louisiana* in which he quotes a short description of a voodoo ceremony:

> These would take their positions at one end of the room, near an impromptu altar, where a box containing an imprisoned serpent was placed. After the watchers had made sure that there were no intruders about the grounds, they would begin the

> worship of the serpent, while the king and queen exhorted their subjects to complete confidence in their powers and requested that each devotee make known his individual desires. Then, out of the crowd massed before them, each man would step forward and implore the voodoo god--"one for the gift of domination over his master's mind, another for fortune, and so on" (Christian 1976: 11).

This "each man" might have historical organizational ties to how jazz acts in social space. These "meetings" where one steps forward, alone apart from the crowd, to "make known his individual desires" carries deep connotations and relation to the break or the solo. Camouflage, as writer Ishmael Reeds tells it, is also inherent to African diasporic culture and the solo:

> "We consider jazz to be a storytelling …when you look at New Orleans jazz where all these instruments show up at the same time before a solo— we see that as a manifestation of a camouflage of a religion and you get that throughout the hemisphere wherever there's repression. You know, Blacks find some other way to express their ideas and so in Trinidad you get the steel drum because the actual drums are wiped out so there's always an improvisation" (The Morgan Library and Museum 2021: @12:29).

Manipulating and multiplying the idea of the standard becomes its own sense of opacity, where individual trees en masse blur into a singular concept of a forest before singling out a tree where it quickly retreats into the blur, passing by a neighborhood with the streets lined by shotgun homes denotes a similar kind of concealment frequency.

Absence of the concept of privacy

Anyone who has lived in a shotgun home knows how the absence of the concept of privacy, found in Hurston's "Characteristics" (1934) is found in the conceptual framework of the shotgun home. Hurston considers this notion as Black cultures reflecting "that we are an outdoor people accustomed to communal life" (1934:8). Both the internal and external living spaces of the shotgun only amplify this notion. One of the most important spaces that reflect this is the porch. The shotgun porch, being the first sighting of a porch in North America, is the decentralized hotspot for New Orleanian life (Vlach 1986: 43-47). Decentralized as it presents itself on many streets; multiple porches are in social networks where homeowners enjoy the social comforts of conversation from each other porches. It is where drama, enjoyment, and education take place. Jazz also knows this absent concept of privacy all too well. Like living in a shotgun, everyone is in everyone's business listening to what being said before responding without being acknowledged. Hurston speaks to this concept (or lack thereof) as "open disagreements openly arrived at" (1934). To engage with thinking about this negro characteristic, I look to Jazz bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus when asked about what he's saying to his band members when playing together live:

"Fuck you, you dirty motherfucker. You son of a bitch. I love you truly."

## *Conclusion*

For their geographical, socio-cultural, and historical ties bound to one another inside the 18th and 19th century, I consider the shotgun home form and the form of Jazz to be encoded in the same language/syntax/emergent desires from the same people at the same time at the same place. Predominately understood as an oral culture, it's important to elucidate the materiality of a culture that has often been relegated to a culture haunted by its disconnect of origin due to the transatlantic slave trade. If we understand jazz as having roots in the West African knowledge systems, the same set of conditions prompt the emergence of the shotgun. As we continue to understand the ways in which blackness has actualized and reified itself in space as a means of survival, we must see beyond what we've been told and look around to see what connections lie in front of us every day. The shotgun is no different.

This exercise to learn how to imagine a practice of expression and fugitivity in New Orleans as a series of relationally social organized practices that jump mediums and has resonant processes with the land these activities occur on. Blues epistemology is a system of explanation that informs their daily life, organizational activity, culture, religion, and social movements… [in response to]… namely disenfranchisement, debt peonage, Jim Crow, and legally sanctioned official and private terrorism. Blues is an interesting phrase as it holds in one hand a way to see the world and a musical genre with set of conventions in the other. This two-handed blur isn't necessarily by happenstance. African Music, even prior to colonization, was a well-matured form of expression that many had access to towards ceremony, ritual, iteration, progression, and complexity.

How music is so available for articulation of self for black people is ancestral and I personally wanted to find myself in that tradition of iteration and progression.

Fred Moten's proposition of a "break" (2003) in Black music as an ontological gesture woven into the music as cultural inscription/evidence of rupture/disconnect that informs African diasporic culture feels true and I began to wonder where that relationality could exist in other forms of Black art… not only sequestered in music or even in what people might understand as musical/musicality.

Working with New Orleans architect-artisan Theodore "Teddy" Pierre helped me see how "musicality" was all around New Orleans— beyond the conventions of considered music but in craftsmanship like bricklaying, and ironworking, plastering, and carpentry. Creativity, competition, style, and desire to claim the means to live on your own terms (self-determination). In thinking about this city as being in constant awareness of its environment, both surrounding and beneath, how are organic and non-organic forms of 'finding a way out' performing in one place? And how might they be related?

So if the break is this ancestral ontological gesture, then what other qualities in Blackness outside of music could interpreted as being rooted in a semi-conscious philosophy transferred into cultural convention? With New Orleans being one of the only majority Black cities in the 18th and 19th century and having a matured building arts practice, I thought architecture would be a form to listen for/see blackness in and on. In the way musicologists look to Jazz players to articulate this relation of blackness inside non-vocal expression, I look to the craftsmen for the same reason. This thesis' main contribution it's in the studied approach to interpret or give language to relational pathways that are already there.

Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals* provided academic precedent to geologize Blackness explicitly as a pathway towards a deeper noticing of Blackness. What I hope this thesis iterates from King's work is not only to consider looking at a geological site for metaphorical resonance but to think through a particular geological system as metaphor for an ongoing phenomenon that treats a people like earthen material to manipulate and extract. This thesis is not interested in the object of the delta but its movements as a delta as a well-developed geological system of recontextualization itself systemically with its surroundings, especially when navigating human emplacements such as levees, dams, and river locks. At a human scale, I consider Black cultural production a document of navigating fugitivity that carries a similar developing system of repractice under duress. And if Black music is understood to be a documented series of fugitive gestures, from the impressive to the mundane, I thought a delta plain landscape would be perfect for thinking through this process especially since there's seemingly an experiential communion between the sort of extraction-based colonial imposition both have endured (degrading, extraction, mining, where plantations are…the stage was set millions of years ago…)

Southern Louisiana is a prime case study to think about what sort of understandings we need to reconsider as we head into the anthropocene-plantationocene-capitalocene. If we're now including ourselves in the rock record scientifically, where does culture play a part in that renewed context? And not as a gesture of ego, but as confession that to study to earth as not to displace human systems-cycle from the geological. We perform as nature as nature.

***Epilogue***

*Shotgun house en route to its new location*

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group solo mass choir

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## Biography

A tonal geologist from the northern rim of the Gulf of Mexico, Ryan Christopher Clarke notices the passage of time as both a trained coastal sedimentologist and artist-researcher as an Editor and Director of Educational Programming at dweller electronics, a group dedicated towards providing afrological counterpoint within an otherwise eurologically dominant music industry. His individual works investigate local cultural objects and their metaphysical communications with their proximal geological landscape.

Knowing intimately the ways his home is at great risk of physical and social loss, he finds ways to not only document this loss quantitatively in scientific research, but qualitatively with works that aim to articulate the vernacular knowledges his people share with the Mississippi River Delta and its distributaries. By interpreting the various articulations of Black music as a depositional record, he views the progression of technology and culture at-large as downstream of Black innovation in dialog with their surrounding environment under the proposition of geologizing Blackness.