The Sound of Freedom:
Fragmentation, Improvised Beings, and Canadian Multiculturalism

By Paul Watkins

[T]he Canadian consciousness has the power to imagine what could be genuine multiculturalism—a radical form of democracy, marked by egalitarianism and inclusiveness for members in the idealized social order (Cecil Foster, *Blackness and Modernity* 503).

During the sixties, assertions were often made to the effect that jazz groups provided glimpses into the future. What was meant by this was that black music—especially that of the sixties, with its heavy emphasis on individual freedom within a collectively improvised context—proposed a model social order, an ideal, even utopic balance between personal impulse and group demands. (Nathaniel Mackey, *Discrepant Engagement* 34)

The above quotations signify, for me, that constant change in society—for the betterment of individuals and their group affiliations—is an ongoing process towards an idealized social order predicated on hope vis-à-vis the constant improvisational practices of defining the self in relation to others. These resonances of improvisational practices can be found in jazz's remarkably exciting history of improvisation, often upon an apparent standard, and innovation. The Mackey epigraph, for example, describes the force of Black music, most crucially in free jazz, as an artistic desire for both individual and collective freedom: it is a freedom not signified by homogeneity, but rather by disruption, disparate sounds, fragmentation, sonic adventurism, and ultimately an imperative sounding for greater freedom and equality, particularly as voiced from minority perspectives. Jazz, given its dialogic response to changes in political, cultural and sonic spheres, is the archetypal form to score the hopes that are often articulated, from the heterotopic space[1] (unique, yet somewhat *other* to the American civil rights movement) of Canadian multiculturalism. Much of this paper is an idealization of what Canadian multiculturalism can aspire to be: a gesturing towards a more equal and free society for all its members. This is hardly to suggest that multiculturalism, like free improvised music, guarantees a freer society, nor is it to dodge the inherent power structures in place that will remain a challenge to the ongoing process of creating a more just society. In a recent public interview between Cecil Foster and myself, Foster reminded us that, "when [Canada was] looking for a model of what the Canadian federation should be, they decided it would not be the United States. It would be other than the United States. It became a confederation, where power, a great deal of the real powers rested at the provincial level. So we have to this day the Quebec situation, the War Measures Act" ("Gesturing" 6). True, there are certainly gargantuan power structures in place at both the provincial and federal level in Canadian politics, structures that often thwart the freedoms of those in society who remain economically or somatically racialized, and thus marginalized, from the centre. However, despite the challenge that power is multiple and ubiquitous (for example, see Foucault), I hope to show how an improvised multiculturalism provides one possible template of how we can begin to think about change, and ultimately how we might work towards the notion of what Pierre Elliott Trudeau aptly termed The Just Society.

At the very least, this paper will attempt to demonstrate how improvised beings—that is, individuals allowed to exercise their identities as mutable constructs open to constant change—when theoretically read in relation to jazz innovation (and disruption) gesture towards what Cecil Foster (in the first epigraph) describes as "genuine multiculturalism" (503). However, it might appear anachronistic to assume that Pierre Elliott Trudeau (a white Canadian Prime Minister),[2] whose robust liberalism (which emphasizes equality of individuals) took shape through multiculturalism, championed the ideals that jazz and the American civil rights movement heralded freedom for most African Americans; yet, upon closer examination, multiculturalism in its most idealized form provides a framework for radical social change in the spirit of Black creative praxis and freedom). When I asked Foster about the connection that Canadian multiculturalism shared with jazz, and more specifically with the Civil Rights movement in the United States, he polemically stated, "it is difficult to see a separation between multiculturalism and the Civil Rights Movement" ("Gesturing" 6):

> But by the 1960s the [Canadian] system was bankrupt, ideologically the system was bankrupt. We see this for example in the *Bi* and *Bi Commission*, certainly not as a bicultural country, certainly not as a white man's country. But this also coincides with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, where the pressure was on for a second reconstruction. And it is key to think of Trudeau and John F. Kennedy in terms of the parallels. Where both of them were personalists in terms of their ideologies: Roman Catholic, left-wing personalists. The same ideology that produced Martin Luther King, that produced many of the leading leftist leaders, people who gave the world a universal declaration of human rights, people who fought against nationalism. (7)

Further, for many the American dream had become a fragmentary nightmare, first with the death of John F. Kennedy, and then when James Earl Ray gunned down Martin Luther King Jr. only one day before the Liberal leadership convention on Thursday, April 4th 1968. The upsurge of violence and chaos in America's largest cities following King's assassination shared front-page headlines in Canadian newspapers with the convention victory of Pierre Trudeau.[3] Multiculturalism and Trudeau's notions of The Just Society[4] presented an opportunity to negotiate disorder and fragmentation by embracing difference and trying to come together as a holistic group.

As I read it, the disruption articulated in much of the jazz movement can be applied to the current debates around multiculturalism, as both zeitgeists strive towards social equality and diversity. Further, dissonance as an embodied form compels us to think about how disruption can function as a model for critical practice with as much claim to critical distinctiveness as any of the other, supposedly more valid, systems of critical praxis often supported in academic institutions. Ideally, in their most organic forms, multiculturalism and improvisation—or a multiculturalism predicated on improvisation—provides frameworks in policy and, in hopefully praxis, to deconstruct some of the power formations that initially thought of Canada as the last (albeit amorphous) white man's country.[5] Ergo, the critical expositions of this paper are in opposition to structural functionalist approaches that assume to know the good for all people, due to the consequence that these approaches often cause structural methodologies to lose much of the discordant music and democracy demanded in the constant reconstruction of society.[6] Rather, I prefer interdisciplinary methodologies: postmodern and post-structuralist webs of intersecting bridges within a matrix of epistemologies; a matrix, in the sense that Houston A. Baker, Jr. uses

the word in his analysis of the blues, as a "point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (*Blues Ideology* 3). In taking such a web-like approach a multicultural pedagogy can, just as jazz is able to unite seemingly disparate sounds (often across cultural lines), construct an 'unreadability' (Paul de Man's term) in counter-hegemonic relation to an essentialist centre that claims absolute meaning. Evidently, there is no absolute meaning, or essence, for history as narrative can be read through what Kamau Brathwaite terms *tidalectics*, a counter-European theory to Hegel's dialectics, which provides an Africanist model for thinking about history. Discussing *tidalectics* in an interview with Nathaniel Mackey, Brathwaite describes how we can see history as more cyclical: "In other words, instead of the notion of one-two-three Hegelian, I am now more interested in the movement of backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic, I suppose, motion, rather than linear" (44). Hence, we are part of an ongoing continuum that is full of ruptures, repetitions, everyday vagaries, incommensurabilities, and (most productively) constant change that can potentially contribute to an increasingly free society. By using a multicultural theory that is concomitant with jazz improvisation and the larger Civil Rights movement, this paper aspires towards a theoretical sounding of freedom for the greatest number of people in society.

Jazz Discordances and Different Continuums within Improvisation Models

While this paper makes the claim that improvisation is a model for social change, improvisation, like multiculturalism, is interpreted in many diverse ways without exact agreement upon what either term precisely means. Improvisation and multiculturalism's semantic elusions of precise nomenclature and consumptive absorption into an exact standard attests to the mutability of both terms within multiple social contexts; however, such evasiveness does not preclude the responsibility scholars have in articulating how either concept can be a viable model for social change. Improviser and guitarist Derek Bailey wrote, "Improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practiced of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood" (*Improvisation* ix). Bailey also states: "Improvisation is always changing and adjusting, never fixed, too elusive for analysis and precise description" (ix). Thus, it is better to think of either term under a constellation of possibilities: such as spontaneity and metaphor (in the Greek sense of "carrying over"), and as metamorphosis upon a standard, explicated in Rob Wallace's description of improvisation as "the ability to change within a structure of rules which is itself constantly changing" (*Modernism* 7). As Foster states: "Change is life. For me, that is the quintessence of being human: how we deal with change. Change is time, the passing of time, if you ignore time you don't change. So if we are in time, we are in change […] multiculturalism is predicated on the notion of change. The old is always giving away to the new" ("Gesturing" 4). In this way, multicultural communities and societies are always changing to produce new concepts of identity and communal narratives through intercultural exchanges between its members. Improvisation enables us to think about what it means to negotiate differences within a community, and ultimately what it means to be living in a multicultural society that is frequently changing. Such boundless change (and lack of a singular or cohesive linear narrative) is what leads many of the detractors of multicultural policies, such as Neil Bissoondath, to argue that multiculturalism creates "idealized Blackness that is chaos and fragmentation with no clear sense of common unity, history or culture" (qtd. in Foster, *Blackness* 373). Essentially, Bissoondath is worried that multiculturalism leads to an "everything goes mentality," which he argues has "made us fearful of defining acceptable

boundaries" (*Illusions* 143). Bissoondath's concern is really a desire for a cohesive cultural narrative, as both improvisation and multiculturalism inherently affirm perennial alterations that deny simple reconciliations in favour of discordant possibilities.

Such cacophonous possibilities are what Sheldon S. Wolin describes as a discordant democracy embodied in one's civic responsibility to embrace and negotiate dissonance:

> The central challenge at this moment is not about reconciliation but about dissonance, not about democracy's supplying legitimacy to totality but about nurturing a discordant democracy—discordant not in the flashy but empty ways of latter-day Nietzscheans but discordant because, in being rooted in the ordinary, it affirms the value of limits. (*Politics* 605-6)

The efficacy of Wolin's "discordant democracy" is really what jazz artists, and multicultural citizens, attempt when negotiating differences by polemically critiquing hegemonic forces though creative and resistive improvisations upon the standards set before them. For example, improvising artists, such as Dave Douglas and Charles Mingus, are heralded by Fischlin and Heble in their work, *The Other Side of Nowhere*, for their "iterative consciences that directly address injustice, the meaning of democratic values (often in so-called democratic spaces where those values have been forgotten or lie dormant), and the transcultural importance of these sorts of resistances" (4). The resistive play upon a perceived standard, so often heard in jazz, and other forms of Black creative praxis are ultimately discordant acts of democracy that seek agency and mobility in the hopes of achieving greater recognition. Perhaps unsurprisingly, white critics have historically expressed distaste for the dissonance commonly found in Bebop and Hip Hop music, labeling the music as "noise" rather than trying to understand its polyrhythms or the cultural contexts that produce and value dissonance within a continuum of Black creative repetition.[7] Thus, a marginal and resistive community that feels it has been displaced might still be multicultural in its *anti-assimilationist* enactment, but it is certainly not an idealized, all-inclusive multiculturalism (on the level of policy) that allows for and encourages difference through constant interplay between the members of that community with other structurally isolated communities. Furthermore, disruptive praxis as articulated in jazz calls on inside and outside communities to listen, often antiphonically as a call towards greater freedom.

The African American context of jazz (very much embedded in notions of freedom for a group of people who were often viewed as inferior) is particularly relevant because it demands a listening praxis that is ethically grounded in the possibilities of a freer future. Indeed, Duke Ellington would explain after playing a dissonant chord on the piano, "Hear that chord. That's us. Dissonance is our way of life in America. We are something apart, yet an integral part" (qtd. in Ulanov, 276). In fact, it is largely this notion of being apart, yet being an integral part, that underscores the notion that in multiculturalism one can exist within whatever group affiliations one wants, yet still participate in the solidarity of a larger aggregation. Ellington recognizes this, and his words are a poignant reminder that African Americans are essential to American identity even if Jim Crow laws (1876-1965) prevented them from obtaining full citizenship. Further, the separate, but supposed equal policies of Jim Crow laws (such as segregation) appear as an attempted multiculturalism, when they were truly a totalizing order that offered greater privileges, such as voting rights, solely to those who fit within the totality politics of the state.

Despite such totality politics, even following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African American musicians managed to enact their own brand of what could be called, to adapt from

Foster, *internal genuine multiculturalism* by doing away with musical power structures and freely improvising without borders. For clarity, such an idealized form of *genuine multiculturalism* might sound like another turn towards authenticity, or a play for a reverse hegemony, but (as Foster told me) it actually functions without a claim towards a single vision for society:

> Because genuine multiculturalism, in my way of theorizing it, gestures towards chaos, and gestures towards a normless society. It becomes paradoxical, because how are you going to have a society that doesn't have norms? But how are you going to have norms in a way that do not imprison and enslave, and are libratory, so that you can absorb change […] multiculturalism is shot-through with these contradictions, and it will continue to be shot-through with these contradictions because it is about life and life is contradictory. There is no natural justice. Justice is always something we are always in the moment of creating or recreating. (5)

Thus, I think we can read multiculturalism, at least in how Foster articulates it, similarly to how avant-garde jazz musician Ornette Coleman theorizes harmolodics: "The kind of music we play, no one player has the lead" (liner notes, "Science Fiction"), signifying that meaning is a always contingently formed from a patchwork of diverse speaking voices. Nielsen avows in *Black Chant*, "harmolodic music destroys the conventional view of the relationship between melody line and background musician" (236).[8] Similarly, Charles Mingus' "Pithecanthropus Erectus" interconnects a variety of apparently incongruent sounds from an array of intertexts: it borrows from Duke Ellington's own tone poems, as well as reappropriates classical norms (and cultural milieus) while also sounding its own originality. In fact, the most exciting and politically endued jazz or Hip Hop draws from, appropriates, and recontextualizes a variety of forms to create a syncretic sounding that challenges any single referentially, repeating a tradition with difference. This repetition with difference is a call towards freedom because it creates new amalgamated spaces of possibility, like multiculturalism, ultimately allowing for the recognition of difference, even with an inherited standard. I believe that at the heart of improvisation and multiculturalism is a preoccupation with creating something new out of something old, yet unlike modernism and its privileging of certain forms, improvisation and multiculturalism, in idealized versions of themselves, are concerned with social equality for all people.

Further, modernism does not have an explicit claim to the concept of newness. To illustrate, Baraka, in engaging with Ezra Pound, argues that Pound's poetic dictum, to make it new, is, at heart, African: "Make it New attributed to Ezra Pound is Eastern. It is the African (and Sufi) explanation of why life, even though contained by an endless cycle, or not contained, *is* an endless cycle can be, is worthwhile, ie. make it new and lo and behold KARMA (digit???)" ("Notes" 46). Albeit, no matter how one phrases it, newness and change are central attributes of human beings living in any society, even if the hegemony of a society attempts to remain statically idealistic. Thus a theorist such as Charles Taylor, who desires repetition of the same with no difference, fearing that a deconstructive approach "[abolishes] all horizons of significance [and] threatens us with a loss of meaning and hence a trivialization of our predicament" (*Malaise* 68), participates in a representation of the same, not allowing much play for difference. In reality, the static idealism Taylor desires (particularly in multicultural and intercultural settings) is an impossibility and a paradoxically imaginative act. In fact fixity, rather ironically, is dependant upon difference to connote an unchanging order; it is little more than a

fantasy for the origins of identity often predicated on stereotypes of the Other. Thus, as a discursive strategy, Homi K. Bhabha argues that stereotypes provide "a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself" (*Culture* 100). For identities are ultimately constructed (see Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler), as cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues, "through, [and] not outside, difference […] through the relation to the Other" ("Identity" 4). Once we realize that identities are not static entities that hold an unequivocal grip upon our understandings of one another, that identities are in fact in a continual process of improvised reconstruction, we can begin to see how multicultural societies and intercultural spaces are the only possibilities for real individual freedom.

Ebb-and-Flow Identities and Multicultural Possibilities

If humans can be said to have any essence whatsoever, it is change. We are always in a state of flux, of improvisation, within our surroundings, which is hardly a new concept as the Greek philosopher Heraclitus is renowned for his principle of universal perpetual change as stated in his well-known maxim, "You cannot step twice into the same stream." In fact, citizenship itself, as Wolin argues, lives in the "ebb-and-flow of everyday activities, responsibilities and relationships" (604). Further, we construct our identities as discursive acts, which Stuart Hall argues is a view that sees identification as a progression never completed, and always in process: "actual identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (4). Like with improvisation, one is always doing or performing rather than being a single something, for gender itself is described by Judith Butler as a "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (*Undoing Gender* 1). Further, Butler argues that "gender is always doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (*Gender Trouble* 33). In performing gender, race,[9] or simply otherness, a polemic of constructed identity is confronted as malleable and open to change.

The problem in the social construction of race, gender, or identity occurs when others decide for us how we will be recognized, read, labeled, categorized and socially stratified in moment's of national crisis. This is at the centre of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which revealed racist stereotyping at the heart of colonial practice and asserted the need to recognize the economic and political realties which underlay assertions of racial difference, and which were the material base for the common psychological and cultural features of colonized peoples. Therefore the Nation is imaginary (see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Nations*), but the effects that imagination places upon its colonial or subjugated occupants/denizens/citizens have very real physical and psychological consequences, especially in moments of national crisis. We can see these horrific physical and psychological consequences in Clyde Woods' assessment of the Katrina hurricane in New Orleans as a blues moment. A blues moment because it stripped away all the veneer of acceptance and tolerance and showed that racism is still really alive in the United States.[10] The Katrina moment—which is the response to Katrina, not the hurricane itself— compels us to consider, especially for those in the United States, what citizenship actually means, calling into question Amendments Thirteen through Fifteen in the United States.[11] As Foster argues, "American blacks are not even aware that they do not really [technically have] the right to vote. Their right to vote is extended every five years. And at the end of the five years Congress then decide, 'Well, no, we're not extending this another five

years'" ("Gesturing" 11). Foster goes on to say that, "a Katrina moment really leaves, in glaring relief, the notion of inequalities of citizenship. It might be inequalities based on regionalism. It might be inequalities based on the colour of skin, or the historical construction. So a Katrina moment really brings this forward to us" (11). While Foster suggests that in Canada, Katrina moments are hopefully avoided "with our model of multiculturalism," he also bemoans that the fact remains that in Canada "we're not there yet" (11). Therefore, Foster argues that Trudeau's notion of a "universal Canadian" is important because although that person might be living in a certain province, "ultimately the primary identity, the identity would flow from the citizenship, not from the residency or the place you belong" (11). I take Foster's assessment of identity, citizenship and multiculturalism here to really be an idealization of what it would mean to be allowed to improvise one's identity, as well as the ethical responsibility we have to one another under a truly multicultural state. Like the harmolodic jazz metaphor of multiple discordant notes playing together, we can only hear true harmony when we listen to and embrace multiple fragmentary forms, while still somehow finding ways to come together as a whole. In this way, as Cornel West has argued in thinking about race in relation to music, "individuality is promoted in order to sustain and increase the creative tension within the group—a tension that yields higher levels of performance to achieve the aim of the collective project" (105).

Essentially, like jazz artists Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Mary Lou Williams, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane, and Charlie Parker—musicians who employ disruptive techniques, as well as repetition, blue notes, heterophony, pendular thirds, bent notes, and improvisation to their compositions—improvised multiculturalism and mutable identities iteratively highlight the formal and deconstructive approach required to remap a historically underprivileged community onto a *tidalectical* present. Given the potency of the jazz metaphor and the freedom in discovering that our identities are improvised—always open to future possibilities—we can be reborn, in Trudeau's analysis, as states and new individuals (Foster, *Blackness* 331). For "true freedom," as Foster idealizes, is "the ability to create oneself in one's image—an act of idealized Blackness as the created being is never static or fully completed as it is always in the process of being created" (113). Thus, the self is always a continual work-in-progress, discursively constructed (see Hall) and yet reliant on a past that is constantly being reassessed, like the Blues borrowing from the spirituals; like jazz borrowing from the Blues; like funk borrowing from Jazz; and like Hip Hop absorbing everything that came before it.[12] Dialogically, the self is always hinged upon the notion of "we": a *we* that I believe, and as others such as Foster have eloquently articulated, is multiculturalism—a coming together of seemingly disparate individuals.

For we cannot truly exist as individuals unless we reconcile ourselves with others to create a "we" that can be a multiculturalism formed cross-culturally, interculturally, and within a variety of heterotopic spaces. As Butler argues in *Precarious Life*, "I cannot muster the 'we' except by finding the way in which I am tied to 'you,' by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you" (49). In many ways multiculturalism is preciously this precarious act of yielding to *others* potentialities in order to allow for the maximum agency of every individual, improvising upon new amalgamated spaces—riffing on them, if you will—with our own unique jazz soloings. Foster describes multiculturalism as a type of religion, since there is always a level of uncertainty that must be fashioned in communities that exercise faith in the hope of creating a better future. As Foster polemically attests, "Multiculturalism is the living out of faith, the belief that the good that humans choose will be a good not only for their time but for the future as well" (*Race* 154). We are challenged to

negotiate with others on a daily basis, not in regimented unchanging structures, but as an aspiration and striving towards "the hope that something better will come" (155). George E. Lewis, in his assessment of philosopher Vladimir Jankelevitch's 1950's work on improvisation concludes that "improvisation becomes not so much a practice, but an aspiration toward freedom, that, even as it is doomed to failure, nonetheless produces a consciousness that continually transgresses limits and resists their imposition" ("Mobilitas" 120). In this sense, improvisation, like multiculturalism, is a mode of thought that aspires towards a mobility of freedom (aesthetic and cultural) that is enacted as each member of society performs an identity while collectively coming together to form a "we."

Creatively, this "we" is created in the spirit of Blackness, as Foster makes the poignant suggestion "that multiculturalism is part of the consciousness of Blackness and that, at least ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically, multiculturalism is Black and an exercise in Blackness" (*Blackness* xiv). In Foster's reading of Blackness, within the neo-mythic and ethno-racial registers,[13] there is no single essence; therefore, Blackness highlights the freedoms that are bound within the infinity of multiculturalism (344). Yet even while admiring the philosophies of Trudeau's Just Society, Foster remains somewhat critical of the Just Society's ability to produce a single ideal for everyone (371). Foster, as I read him, understands the importance of improvisation and constant change to produce an ideal society while many other critics position themselves as diametrically in full support of multiculturalism (such as Will Kymlicka who argues that multiculturalism has exceeded its practical and pragmatic limits) or who are critical of the policy, such as Bissoondath (who, as I earlier pointed out, argues that multiculturalism is chaos and fragmentation without any cohesive or common unity). Yet, given that multicultural policy itself has undergone many manifestations in Canada,[14] it is important to realize that the policy and its political advocacy are not static. However, many still argue that multiculturalism causes social division, and that it undermines the special status of Québécois and First Nations—with most critiques linked to one claim: multiculturalism promotes excessive relativism.

Many critics argue that multicultural policies and practices concentrate on the preservation of the (static) heritage of the Other and on containment within a dominant society, which has given rise to discourses of 'tolerance,' promoted by Charles Taylor in "The Politics of Recognition." Rinaldo Walcott, throughout his text *Black Like Who?*, argues that multiculturalism produces a static heritage that "support[s] identity politics and limit[s] political imaginings and possibilities" (35), which "locates specific cultural practices in an elsewhere that appears to be static" (119), and which makes "Others adjacent to the Nation, not quite citizens" (139). Other African Canadian critiques of multiculturalism, such as M. NourbeSe Philip's "Why Multiculturalism Can't End Racism" critique multicultural policy because it does not directly address the problem of racism. However, while it is likely impossible to ever completely end racism, multicultural policy is in fact "focused on the eradication of racism" for the Multiculturalism and Citizenship Secretariat now has a Race Relations and Cross-Cultural Understanding Program hinged on battling all forms of racial discrimination. Further, many theorists takes issue with multiculturalism on a semantic level, as Ric Knowles in *Theatre and Interculturalism* asserts: "I prefer intercultural to other terms available […] because it seems to me important to focus on the contested, unsettling, and often unequal spaces *between* cultures, spaces that can function is performance as sites of negotiation" (4). In some ways, Walcott, Philip, and Knowles are right in asserting that multiculturalism in Canada is not perfect, and although the policy does include specific methodologies on how to deal with racism, in many of its earlier inceptions it could be read as a policy that attempted an assimilation of certain groups,

specifically First Nations people through documents such as the White Paper,[15] and the later direct and seemingly inevitable exclusion of First Nations people as existing outside the 1988 Act itself (section 2 (*d*)). Yet, most of the critiques leveled against multiculturalism seem to perceive the Act itself as static when the Act is rather intentionally ambivalent as a policy that is intended to guide decisions, to create a space that allows for improvisations, future possibilities and inevitable change. It is intended to reflect the "racial diversity of Canadian society and [acknowledge] the freedom of all members" (3. (*a*)), which is hardly a static idealism so much as it is predicated on the hope of the people promoting the policy and moving within multicultural spaces. Multiculturalism is fragmentation, as many French Canadians still aspire to separatism, and many First Nations desire to remain within their own Nations and heritages. It is a policy that Foster argues should not homogenize distinct identities, but rather "we should seek to see most distinctly the many colours in Canada, rather than trying to see none at all in some misguided approach to social justice based on color-blindness" (*Race* 153), for in the acceptance of fragmentation, which inevitably must allow for the prospect of separatism, may lie dormant the possibilities of real freedom.

In seeking to move beyond a place where race matters, Foster uses the term "aboriginal" to claim that we are all "other"—essentially fragmented—in relation to the state. In my interview with Foster, he describes organic multiculturalism as a gesturing towards the notion that we are all aboriginal, in the wider anthropological sense, where aboriginal means we are not from the state: "So immigrants are aboriginal to Canada. So in a sense, the entrenched states that were there, those that were the ones we were trying to meld together under biculturalism, we all become aboriginals to those states. And we become members of the new state that was created since then, the state that is that of official multiculturalism. That is how I see aboriginality working today" (12). Further, Foster argues:

> no matter how idealistic we get about multiculturalism […] what can we really create as a society, until aboriginal people have self-determination, until they determine that they want to be part of the state? Until they have determined that they want to be part of the state as an expression of their free will, I don't know what we can do. (12)

At this pivotal moment in the interview, Foster has identified that even in his highly idealized vision of a multicultural Canada, there is the possibility that certain groups of people, First Nations more so than any other marginalized group, might never fully buy into the notion of a unified Canada. However, an improvised multiculturalism should allow for this possibility, especially if we ever hope to heal the manifold damages of neo-colonialism and imperialism in order to achieve a society where ethnicity can become organic. For multiculturalism is, as Foster told me, "an attack on the entrenched groups—on the old, as I call them axiom ethnicities—and [it] seeks to create an organic ethnicity, whatever that might be" (10). Essentially, an organic ethnicity challenges the notion of a single or "pure" authenticity in a state, where one might start from the position that there is something called "German," or "Canadian," and further, contests the belief that, however defined, they should have privileged positions.

Fragmentation and Improvised Beings

Charles Taylor, in *The Malaise of Modernity*, argues that the real danger in society is not actual despotic control but fragmentation (112), going on to claim that the absence of effective

common action throws people back on themselves (117). Taylor's anxiety is founded on the modernist notion of authenticity and judicial civility, which is threatened under polarization by special interest campaigns, and by a lack of what he believes to be effective compromise. Taylor has articulated one of the central concerns of multiculturalism, which is: how do we all come together, if all cultures, groups, individuals, and political factions have their equal say? It means we have to allow for the possibility that certain groups might desire to remain separate from Canada, and in fact many First Nations groups have a valid claim in this regard. Why should we limit their freedom any more than Canada historically already has? It also means that many French Canadians might desire to be considered their own Nation, even though Pierre Trudeau's vision for multiculturalism was to maintain English and French interests within the single Canadian Nation. Albeit, the reality is that multiculturalism idealistically allows for the voice of all individuals to be heard, thus it may disrupt, and in many ways decolonize, the notion of the Canadian Nation. Hence, as Wolin argues, the only way to have real democracy is for it to be discordant, centrifugal and ultimately noisy. Comparatively, Black creative music (from Jazz to Hip Hop) has often been interpreted as noise, as fragmented, when in reality it is often both carefully structured yet free music with a social imperative. This musical landscape of discordant noise aptly conjoins with the centrifuge that Wolin articulates—difference, identity, separatism, and multiculturalism—as the only valid system of democracy within multicultural lived realities.

Accordingly, like improvised identities and amorphous musical traditions, democracy is disconcerted like a blue note in blues or jazz—a worried or unsettled note. The protean nature of democracy as an "ephemeral system" (Wolin 602) allows for the greatest amount of democratic possibilities because those who typically do not have the medium to address or redress their grievances are idealistically given the opportunity to be heard within a system that is fluid and unfixed and always looking to reform itself in the interest of the common good. Thus, such fluidity and lack of fixity is, as Foster claims, "the future of a world that knows its Blackness—a place where boundaries are not fixed for humans or capital, where sovereignty and responsibilities are negotiable and transferable from one living space to another" (*Race* 179). Fragmentation is empowering, in the way that it was for many jazz musicians who reappropriated and refractured the materials they were bequeathed, not in the hopes of producing a unity of singular meaning, but rather in the hopes of fashioning icons of opposition that acknowledge the lived, yet shared, reality of a certain group of people. Under this rubric, as Foster argues, the only thing that really holds multicultural Canada together as a fractured unity is the "universalizing intent to do what is both good and right" (*Blackness* xv). Therefore, fragmentation of the Nation (into a collection of individuals hopefully choosing to exercise the good), as well as fragmentation of the self into whatever improvised being, is the future of freedom because it imposes the least constraint on individuals to conform to a fantasy of national identity.

To restate one of the central iterations of this paper, individuals allowed to exercise their identities as mutable constructs open to constant change is real freedom. Individuals, and by relation the societies that connect them together, have no single essence, and therefore, as Giorgio Agamben argues, "the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that human must enact of realize" (*Coming Community* 43). Rather, as humans discursively practicing the act of being human, we are always potentially striving towards a "coming community," where people do not belong to this or that universal, but to a whatever category: "the coming being is whatever being" (*Coming Community* 1). As Agamben polemically attests in *The Coming Community*, the

whatever simply belongs, since it is the condition of belonging itself (1-2).[16] We exist simply as possibility or potentiality, and it is the possibility of the whatever "itself being [taken] up without an identity [that] is a threat the State cannot come to terms with" (86). In the same way that the disruptive musical practice of Black creative musicians who created an *anti-assimilationist* musical soundscape, so too does multiculturalism, at its core, enact anti-assimilative predispositions against the State, for the Nation-State can no longer represent any single unitive ideology. Therefore, while The Bloc Québécois promotes sovereignty for Quebec, attempting to enact a strict singular French essence of its history, Quebec's current multicultural population (which contains many whom are non-French) will ultimately determine its future.[17] Similarly, the leaders of countries such as England, Germany and France have pronounced that multiculturalism is dead, when the reality is that multiculturalism and its hope for racelessness is perpetually being reconstructed and constituted in changing lived realities.[18] Multiculturalism becomes most dangerous to those who hold onto the last remnants of a colonial past, and by contrast, most enamored by those to whom it heralds a new freedom of separate, yet collective solidarity.

This is why I believe that multiculturalism needs to be read as non-linear, dialectically, or tidalectically, as not only belonging to a single heterotopic space, but as existing within a simultaneity of times and spaces, locally and globally. For if we read multiculturalism in the spirit of creative Blackness, in the spirit of improvised beings, then boundaries too become fictive, for Blackness is, as Foster asserts, "diasporic, the scattered seeds of humanity: international and local at the same time" (*Blackness* 54). This is why I believe that Black creative music across the diaspora embodies much of the spirit of multiculturalism, fitting within the enormous macro of Pan-African communication that now stretches across the entire planet. Idealistically, multiculturalism, like music, is not solely confined to any single space. For example, while in prison Nelson Mandela listened to Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On"—an act that Paul Gilroy describes as "The global dimension of diaspora dialogue [made] momentarily visible" (96). Blackness is dialogic, and it is something that can be improvised by any individual as a state of mind: "Black was not solely the colour of skin—it was the reflection of a mind that had good and pure intentions to all humans" (*Race* 65). Blackness, as Foster argues, is a universal feature common to all humans who embrace their creativity, disruptiveness, and spontaneity, for "humanity is black when viewed from this perspective of full self-determination and a holistic humanity that is essentially equal" (36). Black identity, or any identity formed within improvising principles, is alacritous in its continual formation. The perpetual challenge is to cultivate our own individual identities as improvised beings and to come together—without any essentialist pretensions—to work for the betterment of society.

The Sound of Freedom

It is difficult to claim that multiculturalism can be a policy for everyone: clearly there are dilemmas and cultural bridges that constantly need to be formed, as well as an ever looming xenophobic past that makes it unlikely that First Nations people will ever want to fully participate in the Canadian project that Trudeau and others set out to redefine. For Foster, under the banner of lived multicultural practice, there is nothing more critically important than civil rights for Blacks and First Nations people: "Until we can create a society that offers justice, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of inclusiveness for those two groups, then I'm not sure what we are creating" (11). In my opinion, multiculturalism should allow for intercultural intersections

as well as for the possibility of separatism, particularly in the case of First Nations people trying to repair the damage done by a legacy of colonialism. Further, Canada, like any country, has too many problems to solve with any simple quick solution, nor can multiculturalism (whether concocted by the state or realized by the people) solve them all at once. It is for this reason that multiculturalism, like the civil rights movement I argue much of its spirit is drawn from, is an exercise in hope: a hope dependent on people working together to create shared meanings for the good of society, for multiculturalism is a constant, ever changing search for justice and freedom, that "rejects the notion of speeding on our way to a perfect ending in favour of carefully progressing towards a widely accepted goal" (Foster, *Race* 167). Along the way, the challenge is to incessantly evaluate the progress to ensure the outcomes align with our best intentions and to ultimately fashion a society built in dialogue with others, rather than a cloistered one concocted by a few white men in power.

Isolation can only create more of the same; as Trudeau eloquently argued, societies must consider the interests of all people who inhabit them: "What I dare to believe is that men and women everywhere will come to understand that no individual, no government, no nation is capable of living in isolation, or of pursuing policies inconsistent with the interests—both present and future—of others" (qtd. in Axworthy 29). Thus, *genuine multiculturalism* (as Foster describes it) must venture towards a better future with a purity of intention not only in policy, but in the enactment of such policy at all levels of society. Otherwise we get more of the same, which is little more than the proliferation of white heteronormative ideals in the colonizing project that viewed Canada as a white settler Nation that attempted to wipe out all difference. Instead, what is needed is multiple heterotopic (often borderless) spaces of continual, often unscripted, possibility. This can only become a possibility when we realize there are no essences other than freedom from essences in the selfless gesturing of recognizing others as uniquely different to ourselves. At the root of being human is the ability to autoschediastically change and sound our own unique freedoms, but always in negotiation with other voices, polyphonies, dissonances, and antiphonic opportunities to form new epistemologies. Now, in our present multinational, often intercultural, and multicultural society, it is all about how we embrace these new epistemologies and the dissonance of others in continuing to shape our societies, not just for ourselves as individuals, but as a multiplicity of cultures and people who are all sharing this land mass we call home.

Notes

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[1] I use Heterotopia in the sense that Michel Foucault does, as a concept in human geography to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions. These are spaces of *otherness*, which are neither here nor there, such as the moment when you see yourself in the mirror. Essentially, heterotopic spaces have more meaning than initially meets the eye, and such spaces are often associated with possible utopian spaces.

[2] While I occasionally refer to certain people as racially Black or white, which I acknowledge to be little more than somatic markers and constructed identities, I do so with a strategic essentialism to typify how one's identity is often read within the neo-mythic (discursive) or ethno-racial (semiotic) registers with real implications and consequences in society.

[3] In my interview with Foster, he articulates: "Trudeau was the only candidate to mention Martin Luther King, to mention the importance of what was happening, and the fact that there were

weapons in the street. And he would then go on to argue in much of his speeches, especially when he was facing down the nationalists in Quebec, that the kind of violence that they were suggesting—he said, 'there is a right way or wrong way,' and I'm not passing judgment on that—he said that kind of violence was the same kind of violence that had resulted in the death of Kennedy, the second Kennedy, Robert, and Martin Luther King. So he always had those frames of reference" (7).

[4] The Just Society was a rhetorical device used by Trudeau to depict his vision for the Nation. It was part and parcel of his governmental ideology and was used in all of his policies from multicultural policy to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Although The Just Society was intended to provide more freedom to all Canadians—as Trudeau argued, "The Just society will be one in which out Indian and Inuit population will be encouraged to assume the full rights of citizenship" (*Essential Trudeau* 19)—many First Nations saw the policy as yet another governmental policy for assimilation of Native people into Canadian society. Native leader Harold Cardinal turned the phrase around in his book, *The Unjust Society* to argue against the assimilation of First Nations into white Canadian society.

[5] Whiteness, in early Canada, is amorphous in that its ideals are transnational (Canada as being another cite of the British Motherland), although its transnationality is imaginatively fixed by an edifice of whiteness that has attempted to keep out internal enemies. Canada was thought to be the "last white man's land," as Foster states: "Canada was cited as the site for a white man's country. As I argued in the book on the table [*Where Race Does Not Matter*], Canada became very much the prototype for apartheid in South Africa" ("Gesturing" 7). By keeping racial Others on the fringes of Canada society, early Canadian politicans and writers attempted to keep Canada statically and idealistically white, whilst America and its growing Black population endangered whiteness. Despite fearing the prospect of racial hybridity, William Arthur Deacon realized that miscegenation in Canada was inevitable, stating that "every day more white and black men and women are marrying each other. In time, the blending will be complete. Nothing can stop it" (*Vision* 119). Multiculturalism, in many ways, is about the inevitable destruction of the vision for Canada as an exclusive "white man's land," in favour of an embracing of difference.

[6] There are a slew of influential structural functionalists from Talcott Parsons to Herbert Spencer who apply structural functionalism, which is essentially a view of society as a structure with interrelated parts. While I generally agree that society is made up of many different parts, I don't necessarily agree that all parts are functioning on a supposedly stable, cohesive system as functionalists often believe. This approach does not always consider societal class, race, or gender inequalities and it often reduces culture to mental structures and so neglects its complexity and its historical and social specificity. This can be found in the work of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who argues in *Structural Anthropology* that the traditional difference between anthropology and history is that anthropology lacks written documents, so anthropologists must apply their analyses primarily to the unconscious elements of social life (23-24). To view the past as divided between that which is written down (and seen as more "accurate") and that which is not (oral elements of "primitive" societies) is extremely Eurocentric.

[7] See Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* and her more recently published, *The Hip Hop Wars*, which examines how many conservatives and white academics uncritically profile Hip Hop artists and fans of all genders, races, and classes (25). Further, it should also be acknowledged that there

have always been many supporters, both white and Black, in academia and musical circles alike, who have maintained the pedagogical efficacy and musical complexities of Bebop and Hip Hop. Further, such communities of repetition and difference recall what poet and scholar Amiri Baraka calls the resistive, anti-assimilationist power of Bebop: the "willfully harsh, *anti-assimilationist* sound of bebop" (*Blues People* 181-82).

[8] Harmolodics is the musical philosophy of Ornette Coleman and is closely linked with the jazz avant-garde movement. Harmoldics is defined by Coleman as the use of one's physical and logical components into an expression of sound. Harmolodics emphasizes that "harmony, melody, speed, rhythm, time and phrases all have equal position in the results that come from the placing and spacing of ideas" ("Prime Time" 54-55).

[9] Race, like gender and identity, is also socially constructed. Cecil Foster uses W. E. B Du Bois as an early African American theorist who realized the constructed nature of race and race-relations in America: "Du Bois was showing that race is really about how people are socially constructed, how they are placed within or outside the state, and what positions they are allowed to aspire to and achieve within the nation-state" (*Race* 92).

[10] See Woods, "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans," in the Works Cited.

[11] In summary: The Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution officially abolished and continues to prohibit slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was first intended to secure rights for former slaves. The amendment provides a broad definition of United States citizenship, overturning the Dred Scott case, which excluded African Americans. It requires the states to provide equal protection under the law to all persons (not only to citizens) within their jurisdictions. The Fifteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution provides that governments in the United States may not prevent a citizen from voting based on that citizen's race, color, or previous condition of servitude (i.e. slavery).

[12] Hip Hop artist Nas' song "Bridging the Gap" is a great example of how Hip Hop absorbs and is indebted to prior African America musical forms. The track samples Muddy Waters' "Mannish Boy" and Nas' lyrics demonstrate an appreciation of the musical forms and artists that came before him: "Did it like Miles and Dizzy, now we gettin' busy/ Bridging The Gap from the blues, to jazz, to rap/ The history of music on this track."

[13] The Neo-mythic register is a discursive way of attaining meaning that is effectively received knowledge, but is a knowledge based on our beliefs, wishes, historical conditioning, memories, and ideals for the future (see Foster, *Blackness and Modernity* xviii). While the neo-mythic register is unchangeable (in modern state citizenship), the ethno-racial is changeable. The ethno-racial register is, according to Foster "an appeal to semiotics as a way of knowing, especially through the symbol of the Black skin" (*Blackness* 6).

[14] The Royal Commission's 1963 mandate on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was to ensure the bilingual and basically bicultural character of the federal administration, which led to the 1969 Canada Official Languages Act. Spearheaded by Trudeau, the multicultural stage of Canadian cultural politics led to the official 1971 policy of multiculturalism, Bill C-93, and official legislation in 1988. Nevertheless, despite the advocacy of various cultures within the act itself it is important to note that the policy is largely motivated by the desire to maintain relations with the French and English in Canada by seeking harmony with the "national commitment to the official languages of Canada," English and French (*Act* 3. (*j*)).

[15] "The White Paper" was initially an act, created in 1969 under Trudeau's liberal government, with the intention of abolishing the "Indian Act." By demolishing the "Indian Act" the

government would essentially be abolishing land claims, status Indians, and making way for a gradual integration of Native people into Canadian society (arguably filling the initial secretive goals of the "Indian Act"). Thomas King argues the "White Paper" had a single goal: "To get the government out of the "Indian business" (*Truth* 137).

[16] The Latin word for whatever, *quodlibet*, signifies "it does not matter what," as well as to a polyphonic piece of music in which several melodies are combined in an often playful mode.

[17] Hence, largely because of how multicultural Quebec has become, in the 2011 Canadian election, the NDP (*Nouveau Parti démocratique*) became the official opposition to the Conservative Majority. The NDP had a historic breakthrough in Quebec, winning 59 out of 75 seats. The NDP's success in Quebec was echoed by the collapse of the Bloc Québécois—known for their promotion of Quebec sovereignty— which lost all but 4 of its 47 seats.

[18] In my interview with Foster, an audience member asked him what he thought about the many world leaders claiming that multiculturalism is dead because it does not work. Foster responded: "I would argue that the kind of multiculturalism that Merkel [Chancellor of Germany] and Cameron [Prime Minister of Britain] talk about is not multiculturalism. It's a form of pluralism. But it is not, say, the kind of multiculturalism that was pioneered in Canada in the 1970s onward, where in fact multiculturalism was an attack on the state. The state had to be remade. Canada could no longer continue to be a white man's country. It had to be a country of the people. Merkel and Cameron start from the position that there is something called Germany, where an ethnicity that is called German, however defined, will always and should always have privileged positions" (10).

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