

Friday, Oct. 25 at The Graduate Center, Elebash Hall

Session 1: *the 1950s & 60s in context*

9:00-9:30 am, Eric Charry, “The Development of Cecil Taylor’s Musical Language in the 1950s and 1960s”

Cecil Taylor’s new musical language is audible from his very first album, *Jazz Advance*, recorded in fall 1956 when he was 27 years old. By exploring the interplay of pianistic textures (interactions between the two hands) and directional gestures and contours (ascending or descending lines, moving or static clusters), Taylor created new stories to be told and laid the foundation for developments that have resounded to the present day. Taylor’s approach precluded the necessity for a steady pulse and meter, and with the arrival of drummer Sunny Murray in 1960 and bassist Henry Grimes in 1961 his unit began to join him in breaking through the musical forms of the day and forging new ones. Taylor’s innovations yielded an extraordinary burst of extended solo piano recordings, from *Carmen with Rings* (1967) and *Praxis* (1968) through *Indent* (1973) and *Silent Tongues* (1974). Few in Taylor’s generation systematized and wrote down the codes to their language for others to decipher, with exceptions like George Russell (1923-2009). Anthony Braxton (1945-) would do just that for his own music in his 5-volume *Composition Notes* (1988), which codified a system of 99 “sound classifications,” including gestures such as accelerating, gliss, long, low, parallel, and trills. The intellectual underpinnings of Braxton’s music from the late 1960s onward can be linked directly to Taylor’s breakthroughs. In this paper, I begin with a gestural and textural analysis of Taylor’s playing on his debut album, laying bare his new musical materials and how he deployed them. I trace their movements forward, while also working backward from his solo piano works in the 1970s. Similar to the ways in which barriers of speed, space, and race that occupied America during the 1950s were broken, Taylor and his units breached cyclic form and changed the rules of the art form, opening up new vistas.

9:30-10:00 am, Lewis Porter, ” The Consistency of Cecil Taylor’s Outlook From His First Recorded Interview in 1959 Through the Years”

In 1959, a jazz journalist recorded an interview with Cecil Taylor for a European radio show. Since its original broadcast, the reel-to-reel tape was untouched until I put in a request last year to an archive to have it digitized for research purposes. In this presentation I will play and discuss excerpts of the interview that illustrate that Taylor’s thoughts remained consistent over the years when discussing categories in music, the nature of experimentation in music, and his own relation to the blues and jazz traditions. (Please note, it is not permitted to play the entire 11-minute interview for the public. However, substantial portions will be played during this presentation.) For comparison, Dr. Porter will read excerpts from later interviews with Taylor.

10:00-10:30 am, Christopher Meeder, “‘I listen every day to Marvin Gaye’: Self-Characterization, Formal Education, and Cultural Affiliation in the Formation of Cecil Taylor’s Early Musical Style”

There is no disputing either the iconic cultural importance or the “difficult” reputation and controversy surrounding the career of Cecil Taylor. For reasons that include Taylor’s fondness for dissonance, complex rhythms, and often prickly conversational and writing style, Taylor’s background and biography are often depicted (sometimes by Taylor himself) as that of an

outsider to post-bop New York: a classically trained, upper class maverick from a white neighborhood who is more likely to quote Xenakis than Ellington in a performance.

Many details of Taylor's background contradict this general impression, from his parents' backgrounds and his childhood home, to the nature and details of his formal education at New York Conservatory and New England Conservatory. This presentation explores extant sources about Taylor's early biography with a focus on his formal musical education, which is much more focused on jazz and American popular Music than is usually discussed. It will also feature unpublished new research on Taylor's education and early career, including previously unavailable student records and letters from his first few years back in New York after graduating from NEC. Finally, a close analysis of "Rick Kick Shaw," one of Taylor's first recorded performances, will emphasize Taylor's position as a progressive voice from within the jazz tradition, rather than as a Eurocentric avant-gardist changing jazz from the outside.

10:30-11:00 am, Matthias Mushinski, "Critical Amplitudes: Cecil Taylor in Jazz-Hot and Jazz Magazine (1965-1968)"

"All of us come together because there is a certain kind of *life-giving ingredient* that goes into the kind of music that we make. Even the source of it, it's what the American situation is concerned, it has been African and the suffering that we've had... But what has happened as a result of what we have learned how to do is that we have provided people around the world another methodology to express themselves, to forgive" –Andrew Cyrille, *Conversations II: Dialogues and Monologues*

In February of 1965, the French jazz review *Jazz-Hot* published a feature article on Cecil Taylor, the first in a series of profiles of American free jazz musicians coinciding with tours that brought Don Cherry, Archie Shepp and Steve Lacy to Paris that same year. The opportunity to experience the music firsthand (along with Taylor's extended visit to Paris in 1966) seized the attention of the Parisian jazz press and led to a critical surge that spawned special issues devoted to the 'new thing' in rivaling French publications. The music—"the most important paramusical phenomenon of [their] time"—had arrived, and both *Jazz-Hot* and *Jazz Magazine* immediately set out to inaugurate a new theoretical criteria capable of addressing it.

This essay seeks nourishment from free jazz's *life-giving ingredient* via an impassioned commitment to what Fred Moten describes as "another way of thinking of things that is offered in the social aesthetics of black radicalism and its improvisatory protocols." As a case study, I will examine the critical reception of Taylor's music (album reviews, performance reviews, artist profiles, etc.) across *Jazz-Hot* and *Jazz Magazine* throughout the 1960s with a specific focus on the manifold recognition of free jazz as an "aesthetic opposition" to European sensibilities; the framing of the music as what Jean-Louis Comolli defined as "an instrument of decolonization." Taylor's music embodies a tension between the abstraction of art music and the desired functionality of folk music. It encompasses collective improvisations, networks of unpredictability, and scatterings of sounds that merge together familiar rhythms, found objects and disassembled instruments. In turn, this essay aims towards *an unknown totality* by highlighting the various ways in which the writers at *Jazz-Hot* and *Jazz Magazine* grappled with the task of amplifying the music's reformulation of the conversion between aesthetic and political insurgency—the polyphonic amplitude of maximal theorization and radical praxis.

11:00-11:15 am, Break

11:15-12:00 pm, Fumi Okiji, "Cecil's non-sensuous standard"

12:00-1:30 pm, Lunch

Session 2: *genealogies, becomings, gestures*

1:30-2:00 pm, Chris Stover, “‘As gesture jazz became...’: the genealogical role of Cecil Taylor’s standards”

Cecil Taylor recorded only fifteen or so jazz standards on his commercially-released albums, spanning the period from his debut *Jazz Advance* (1956) through his Copenhagen residency documented on *Nefertiti, the Beautiful One Has Come* (1962). In these tracks we can find nascent temporal and harmonic-melodic ‘stretchings’ where swing-rooted grooves become destabilized and tonal syntaxes are transformed into wholly original harmonic and melodic expressions.

This paper orbits around close readings of two performances: “This Nearly Was Mine” from *The World of Cecil Taylor* (1960), and “I Love Paris” from *Love For Sale* (1959). My analytic orientation begins with two assumptions. First, that there are two pairs of parallel syntaxes at play in these liminally-expressive tracks, in the temporal and pitch domains respectively. In the temporal domain this unfolds as an interplay between jazz’s fundamental adherence (at least in the late 1950s) to swing-rooted groove and the inchoate stirrings of what Ekkehard Jost would later refer to as the “urgent, dynamic chains of impulses” that characterized Taylor’s radical move away from such rootedness. In the pitch domain this is articulated as the relationship between the tonal harmonic syntax of Taylor’s source material and the dense chromaticism and idiosyncratic motivic fecundity of his improvisational process. Second, that these relations are not binary oppositions, but rather *fold* complexly and essentially into one another. I draw upon Gilles Deleuze’s concept of *difference* and Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of *becoming* to develop these points. Throughout, I invoke a metaphor of ‘stretchable strata’ that draws upon language in Taylor’s manifesto-like prose-poem “Sound Structure of Subculture Becoming Major Breath/Naked Fire Gesture” as well as Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical writings.

Drawing upon my detailed transcriptions and plurally-oriented analysis of both recordings, I develop a theory of temporal and harmonic-melodic *elasticity* that opens windows for understanding the wholly original syntax Taylor was already in a process of developing for his own compositional-improvisational spaces. I read these early performances, therefore, as genealogically crucial for understanding the directions that Taylor would take his music in ensuing decades.

2:00-2:30 pm, Anthony Caulkins, “Musical Gesture in Analysis: Gesture-Class as a Formal Structure”

In this presentation, I examine notions of musical gesture within the improvisational work of Cecil Taylor. Building on these ideas, I propose a possible system for composition and analysis of Cecil Taylor’s mode of complex improvisation. As a point of departure, I attempt to provide a provisional definition of musical gesture; I then posit a theory of gesture classification that draws on language used in post-tonal set theory, in order to develop the formalized structures of gesture-classes and gesture-class sets. In order to plainly illustrate this system of gesture-class, I use Franco Donatoni’s *Omar: due pezzi per vibrafono* to present and illustrate how a set theory of gesture can be applied to musical composition. While likening Franco Donatoni to Cecil Taylor might seem to be a stretch, each of these artists deals with musical gesture in importantly similar ways. Building on the sets shown in *Omar*, I discuss Cecil Taylor’s large

improvisation, *Indent*, in order to demonstrate systems of gestural flow between ‘gesture-classes’ and ‘gesture- class sets’. Finally, I show how these concepts can be applied to new compositional and improvisational explorations. Through each of these examples, I aim to provide vocabulary with which to describe music that can be seen as gestural in conception or construction, as well as insight into possibilities for new forms of composition based on exploration of gesture as a formal musical element.

2:30-3:00 pm, John Rufo, “Geologies of Cecil Taylor+Billie Holiday+Mary Lou Williams”

In a video interview uploaded February 2018, Cecil Taylor describes Billie Holiday’s performances by saying: “...all the times I saw Billie Holiday...[she] was the soul of the shit. And when I’m playing tonight, that’s who I’m thinking of.” He also prophesies, between elaborate pauses: “...What that woman did to me, if I ever grow up, *that’s* what I’d like to do to an audience.” Although strictly speaking Billie Holiday never “collaborated” with Cecil Taylor, I want to think about Taylor’s experience of Holiday live as perpetually present in his performances, how Holiday haunts, informs, and feels through Taylor’s recognition and theorization of “the soul of the shit.” With this haunting in mind, I will specifically consider a particular live performance and its recording that Taylor conducted in collaboration with pianist and composer Mary Lou Williams. This 1977 “dual piano” performance at Carnegie Hall, released the next year by Pablo Live under the name *Embraced: A Concert of New Music for Two Pianos Exploring the History of Jazz with Love*, is often written about as an infamous and disjointed “collaboration,” where Williams and Taylor failed to connect in the live space. However, I hear *Embraced* as Taylor and Williams’s complex conducting of an elaborate historiography of “jazz” and “love,” which, in its brutal beauties, goes cold and hot all at the same time. By “layering” pianos throughout the record, especially on the track “The Blues Never Left Me,” rather than simply trading lines, as in a more conventional style duet, this performance by Taylor and Williams gets us to a “geology” of memory and meaning that more fully brings to bear Taylor’s remembrances and resonances of Billie Holiday, especially seeing how the track list of *Embraced* itself follows Mary Lou Williams’s pedagogical schematic of jazz history, grounded in Black spirituals and blues. An overlapping call and response dub, maybe, and/or layering and strata folding. Where does Cecil/Holiday’s “soul of the shit” and Cecil/William’s tangled mass form (dis)union? Instead of answering these questions, this paper attempts to linger with these performances. Cecil Taylor might act as a participating complicator and converse conductor, a complex bearer of love and messenger of embrace. If Holiday sings “in my solitude, you haunt me...”, can we possibly feel, with Taylor and Williams, how “solitude” is never being left alone? Might we do history “with love,” in all of the mass of its mess?

3:00-3:15 Break

Session 3: *listening, structures, intermediality*

3:15-3:45 pm, Charles Sharp, “Structures becoming / Becoming structures”

Cecil Taylor’s music provides unique insight into the phenomenology of all music through its confrontation with structure and the productive tensions between composition and improvisation. This paper seeks to approach Taylor’s music through phenomenological hermeneutics asking what does it mean to listen to Taylor? The philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer suggests play as the ontology of the aesthetic experience, by which he means the condition for the possibility of art is its experiential unfolding of meaning. This temporal unfolding reveals “truth,” not as an essence to be discovered within the work, but as revelation drawn out between the perceiver (the hearer) and the work. Work, (art work or all work, rather than labor)

is always a working; an interstitial revelation between work and world. Gadamer specifically refers to this kind of an experience as a transformation into structure (Gebilde) and it is through that transformation that we can make a transposition from poetics to ethics; from work(ing) to world(ing). While “play” immediately brings to mind music, something which Gadamer barely discusses directly, it does not, in this context, refer to the act of creating music, the act of moving one’s fingers on the piano. That act is only the invitation for the play of interpretation done between, always between, the musician and the hearer. The structure, or what we might call the possibility for an understanding, of the experience contains both the intentions of the performer as well as the intentions of the hearer. This structuring as structure is radically and fundamentally different than how a musicologist would conceive of structure as a set of fixed chord changes. That approach leads to confusion with the music of Cecil Taylor. Taylor’s repurposing of structures heightens the need for a listener to engage in the structuring. I argue that this lays bare the structuring of becoming and offers us insight into that transposition from the poetics of structuring into the ethics of becoming and in laying that bare, it offers up the possibility of radical political critique of the usually transparent structures of life.

3:45-4:15 pm, Jeff T. Johnson, “Indent: Body as Paragraph”

“Indent: Body as Paragraph” is a performative response to Cecil Taylor’s live album *Indent*, which documents Taylor’s March 11, 1973 performance at Antioch College. “Indent: Body as Paragraph” was composed while listening to the album, and represents *playing with at a distance*, an embodiment of interface and medium. The piece comes from a book-length musicological poetics manuscript in progress, *Janky Materiality*, which explores blurry intersections and cracked interfaces between page, screen and speaker, analog and digital practice.

4:15-4:45 pm, Magdalena Dukiewicz, “Equilibrium”

There is this one specific album cover that brought me to Cecil Taylor’s music. It’s the album cover of *Solo*, which has what looks to be an image of foam leaking from squeezed fruit and two quarters of peel, although the image is taken as a rather abstract form. As a visual artist merging art and biology, it caught my attention because I saw a similarity with my own body of work. *Akisakilais* is another album with the cover that has this organic reference. A cold metal sheet precisely cut with surgical blades reveals bubbly forms. This contrast between a precise and structured frame with a wild, unrestrained inside is how I understand Cecil Taylor’s music. When I saw those two album covers, I started to wonder about the relation between those organic forms and his music. When I begin to listen to his compositions and improvisations but also watched him play, I started to comprehend that improvising is something very organic and primal, though very specific to each performer. Repeatedly listening to Cecil Taylor’s music I discovered that those “ugly” rough sounds and cacophonous tones turn into a whole new experience. It became clear to me that there is more structure than it may seem at first and it needs repeated listening for appreciation. There is an amazing amount of pure expression, rhythm and melody but also risk as the most extreme way to build tension and to release it. For me it’s like sounds falling, a disintegration, or transformation of the sound that’s happening naturally but also rigorously. The contrast between organized and chaos, intent of taking control over nature. I can relate to this in my practice since the nature of my pieces is to deconstruct. My work is all about performance and temporality but most important about process. I am trying to find a balance between organized and chaos but at the end chaos always take over because all matter strives to unify energy. This is how I perceive of Cecil Taylor’s music and this is what I am trying to emphasize in my own body of work. Those are universal laws that drive the Universe. Generally my works revolve around the binomial art-

nature. I use organic materials like hydrolyzed collagen, bones, squid ink, hair and blood among others, sometimes also found materials. Then I combine them in an unusual mixture to create a new order. Pieces are fragile and meant to deconstruct and finally, decomposed.

The performativity of each piece is a part of the creative cycle. I like the contrast between material and appearance. I have an interest in playing with materials that are culturally charged with meaning. Those esthetically sublime installations often confuse audience members who do not expect body fluids to be used as an art material. Technique that I am using is my own, developed through experimentation. In my presentation, I would like to compare Cecil Taylor's process with my own and to emphasize similarities with experimental methods I am using in order to create my pieces.

4:45-5:15 pm, Scott Gleason, "Re-sounding Collaborative Improvisation in Morgan O'Hara's *LIVE TRANSMISSION: Movement of the Hands of Cecil Taylor*"

Since 1989 New York City-based visual artist Morgan O'Hara has put pencils to paper in order to transcribe, in real time, thousands of musicians', dancers', laborers', politicians', and others' gestures as conveyed by their hand movements. O'Hara's intent is to transmit these physical motions as an embodied intensity, thus creating artworks that locate force and duration in their particular manifestations in a silent, recorded medium. Prominent among her subjects have been musical improvisers, including Butch Morris, Adachi Tomomi, Anthony Braxton, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor, who, under her own conception (as told to me in a 2007 interview I conducted), do not always consider her to be a collaborator in the improvisational process. O'Hara is a transcriber, a dual-handed, analog "seismograph" who records hand movements in real time by stilling herself, quieting herself. This situation creates a disproportionality as between the creative and recreative spirit of her drawings.

O'Hara's LIVE TRANSMISSIONS "broadcast" embodied sound-events to viewers, but after the real-time transmission to her from the improvisers, thus reinscribing economies of composerly mastery and analytico-critical response. We can, however, recuperate a utopian impulse in these LIVE TRANSMISSIONS by emphasizing the co-creative aspect, in which the improviser and O'Hara transmit their intensities nearly synchronously, and, under certain conditions, in which performers have used her LIVE TRANSMISSIONS as scores. In this way both present unified goals, yet are non-coercively open in their means. I will argue this by examining her LIVE TRANSMISSION of a 1996 improvisation by Cecil Taylor, and, drawing especially on Taylor's solo recordings from the 1990s and existing analyses of his improvisations, style, and technique, imaginatively recreating both the sonic particulars it implies, and its sonic aura, for sound, in the LIVE TRANSMISSIONS, is typically mute. In order to carry out this re-sounding, I utilize a variety of musico-critical, analytical, historical, and theoretical techniques, including verbal description.

5:15-5:30 pm, Break

5:30-5:50 pm, David Grubbs, "The Scented Parabola': Occasions of Cecil Taylor's Poetry"

Where Cecil Taylor is rightly described as a multidisciplinary artist, poetry is cited among those disciplines through which his efforts flowed. But for those compelled to seek out Taylor's poetry, it's quickly apparent that rather than the conventional channels of print culture, these efforts are more likely to be experienced through a range of fleeting, uncollected, at times marvelously startling occasions: poems functioning as liner notes on LP jackets (*Unit Structures*, *Spring of Two Blue-J's*, *Dark to the Themselves*, etc.); as spoken introductions to musical performances,

whether in concert or on record (*In Florescence*); as complete performances unto themselves (*Chinampas*); and as enigmatic responses to invitations to speak publicly. The intensely performative nature of Taylor's poetry, together with his propensity to vocalize while at the piano—or in the vicinity of the piano—place his vocal and verbal artistry on a continuum wherein the occasions of his poetry demand to be understood among the occasions of his music. In this talk, I contemplate that continuum in Cecil Taylor's work in which musical performance and poetry mutually illuminate and in which they meaningfully fuse.

5:50-7:30 pm, Dinner

7:30-9:30 pm, In Sonic Discourse with Cecil Taylor's Unit Structures Concert

Saturday, Oct. 26 at Brooklyn College, Buchwald Theater

Session 4: *memories, decoding, improvisation*

9:00-9:30 am, Jeff Schwartz, "The Influence and Significance of Cecil Taylor's Letter Notation: From the Mills Archives"

Cecil Taylor's influence is often perceived in dense pianists, from Don Pullen to Marilyn Crispell to Vijay Iyer, and in the high energy work of his former bandmembers, from Albert Ayler and Sunny Murray through Elliott Levin and Marc Edwards. This paper argues that it can also be concretely traced through the dissemination and application of his notation system, as partially documented by texts and scores in the Mills College archives.

In the early 1960s, as Taylor left song form and countable time behind, he switched from using standard staff notation to creating scores using the letter names of notes, with no meter, bar lines, or rhythms indicated, and teaching his compositions to his bands largely through dictation and demonstration. Marco Eneidi's 2000 Mills Master's thesis discusses possible precedents for this system and his experiences working with it under Taylor's leadership in 1992, then presents a portfolio of original compositions employing his own variations.

The papers of saxophonist Glenn Spearman, who performed with Taylor sporadically in the 1980s and 1990s, include many folders and notebooks of music composed in letter notation by Taylor, Spearman, Eneidi, by other Taylor associates including Frank Wright, Raphe Malik, Jimmy Lyons, and William Parker, and by Bay Area musicians Spearman worked with, such as Chris Brown, Garth Powell, and the members of the ROVA Saxophone Quartet. This documents a network of musicians developing formal and technical aspects of Taylor's music beyond its dense surface.

Spearman also copied a large number of mainstream jazz compositions into letter notation, even though the abundance of traditionally notated material in his archive suggests he could have read them as originally published. This paper examines the practical, aesthetic, and philosophical consequences of choosing letter rather than staff, number, or graphic notation and looks specifically at how Spearman, Eneidi, and other artists in this circle applied and modified Taylor's notational and performance practices in their own music, citing publications on Taylor by Ekkehard Jost, Matthew Goodheart, Joe Morris, and others, as well as interviews with musicians associated with Taylor, Spearman, and Eneidi.

9:30-10:00 am, Jessie Cox, "Cecil Taylor's Posthumanistic Musical Score"

“He would play the line, and we would repeat it. That way we got a more natural feeling for the tune and we got to understand what Cecil wanted. ‘Pots,’ which a lot of critics have called a masterpiece of modern jazz, was written this way.” Archie Shepp’s recount of working with Cecil Taylor during the 60’s sparked my inquiry into Cecil Taylor’s use of musical “scores.” Cecil Taylor’s score is aura-visual as well as an embodiment of thought, embodied through/in the ‘act’ of piano playing. Taylor sees Western notation as a “blocking” of “...total absorption in the ‘action’ playing,” where he conceives of ‘action’ as both internal and external; as the interactivity between the musicians; as a type of intra-action (Barad’s term for the “co-creation” of differences (individuals) subjects/objects, concepts, etc.) where “interpretation” and inventing are interdependent. This approach to composition completely questions/problematises musical-scores and instrumental/bodily idiomaticness. By using an aura-visual-embodied-score the idea of the musical material, process, performance, (etc.) is completely altered—re-sonating the importance of the embodiment of the mental/psychic (“Would then define the pelvis as cathartic region prime undulation, ultimate communion, internal while life is becoming visible physical conversation between all body’s limbs: Rhythm is life the space of time danced thru.”). One can look at this practice through the lens of intra-action -not only is the mental embodied but the mental is (one with) the body (both human-and instrumental-body). At this point Cecil Taylor’s score transgresses the aural, visual, physical and becomes a re-sonance of himself—himself being performatively enacted through process/improvisation-through the creation/manifestation of the score: “Practice is speech to one’s self out of that self metamorphosing life’s ‘act’ a musical symbol having become ‘which’ that has placement in creation language arrived at . . . The pupil mirrors only the inner light, an ear having heard identifies.”

10:00-10:30 am, Mark Micchelli, “Decoding Cecil Taylor: Transcription and Analysis of an Improvisation from *Imagine the Sound*”

Critics of Cecil Taylor—both supporters and detractors alike—frequently claim he derived his musical style from European modernism. Because Taylor never notated his music in a conventional manner, however, it is difficult to prove or disprove such influences concretely. Furthermore, given the rapid tempi and high degree of dissonance featured in his improvisations, transcriptions of Taylor’s music are few and far between. In this presentation, I attempt to remedy these problems by presenting a music-theoretical analysis of one of Taylor’s improvisations featured in the 1981 Ron Mann documentary, *Imagine the Sound*. I argue that Taylor’s improvisatory language, far from being rooted in European modernist techniques like modes of limited transposition or dodecaphony, is not only highly structured, but uniquely his own.

The fundamental unit of Taylor’s language is not the scale or the chord, but rather the peculiar, highly-restrictive way he approaches cells of notes. Horizontally, these cells consist of precomposed, ordered patterns of notes in either prime or retrograde; furthermore, such orderings can be taxonomized using only a handful of different contours. Vertically, the cells feature rigid note-pair mappings between Taylor’s left and right hands, proceeding strictly in either similar or contrary motion. Taken together, such cells account for nearly every note-choice in the improvisation, interrupted only at climactic moments by Taylor’s machine gun-like black- and white-key clusters. Formally, Taylor’s improvisation exhibits a similarly high degree of structure, containing surprisingly few cells given the tempo and duration of the piece; furthermore, the overall sequence of cells is largely predetermined, with Taylor often repeating “choruses” of cells two to four times each. The result is a performance that fluidly integrates composition with improvisation; the overall structure is determined at the start, with Taylor filling in the details on-the-fly.

10:30-11:00 am, Scott Currie, “With Blazing Eyes: Structuring Orchestral Improvisation as Compositional Realization”

In 2002, with grant funding from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, the Sound Vision Orchestra [SVO] commissioned Cecil Taylor to compose a new work for an ensemble of improvisers. Taylor conceived, rehearsed, and premiered the composition, entitled *With Blazing Eyes and Open'd Mouth*, with SVO over the course of four sets at the Knitting Factory in June of that year, with a subsequent presentation that October at the Skopje Jazz Festival. The first-hand close reading of this work that this paper offers will draw upon participant-observation within the ensemble, as well as artist interviews and musicological analysis of the notated score and its performed realizations, to explore Taylor's creative process and gain insight into his unique and influential improvisational conceptions. The enduring significance of this work in embodying these conceptions, as manifest in its reprise by SVO as reconceived and directed by William Parker at the Cecil Taylor Memorial concert in December 2019, will receive consideration in a concluding reflection.

11:00-11:15 am, Break

11:15-12:15 pm, Ben Young, “Let's Keep Listening”

Presentation will focus on some of the issues of transitioning our Cecil-Taylor-consumption from live-action to recordings-only. For our entire lives we have had access in some way to the “amazing” dimensions of Taylor's physical and public persona. Without his corporeal self, how shall we be amazed? Public digestion of his recordings will be a major avenue. We'll model this with a handful of audio examples. Time will also be budgeted to address questions from the field relating to Young's forthcoming biography of Cecil Taylor and the research with Taylor and others that has fueled it.

12:15-1:15 pm, Lunch

Session 5: Encounters: *the voice, confrontation, documentation*

1:15-1:45 pm, Chris Funkhouser, “improvised is how the voice is used”

I propose to present a multi-channel sound collage titled *improvised is how the voice is used*, based on a recorded interview I did with Cecil Taylor about his poetry in 1994. Digitizing the cassettes of our conversation, listening back to them, I selected 52 samples of his commentary. Using Ableton Live software, *improvised is how the voice is used* blends this material in real time with various recordings I've uncovered of his unique spoken word performances. The material is hierarchized and arranged so that Taylor's poetics are succinctly projected in the present, combining both technical and scholarly work in significant ways.

1:45-2:15 pm, Jeannette Lambert, “Meeting Cecil Taylor in the Rockies”

Drawing on notes from in my personal journal in 1985 when I attended the Banff Summer Jazz Workshop in Alberta, Canada, I will describe my studies with Cecil Taylor and the influence he had on me and my musical expression. I will explain the musical path that led to me producing improvised music and sound poetry just prior to my arrival in Banff. Next, I will discuss the particular challenges I faced at the summer workshop in an environment that was relatively hostile to free improvisation, to vocalists and to women. And then I will discuss how Cecil's arrival on this scene, and how his instruction and approach helped to encourage and inspire

many of us there. I will describe how he responded to the mountain landscape and shared his shamanic poetry with us. The music he structured around this explosive situation gave me clues on how to use improvisation and creative expression to live intuitively and can serve as a model for others who are interested in approaching their life and art in new and unconventional ways.

2:15-2:45 pm, Dominic Lash, “The inexpressible inclusion / of one within another”: Cecil Taylor on film – intermediality, negotiation, and confrontation”

As well as a number of concert films, Cecil Taylor is the subject of a small but very interesting collection of films and television programs with wider documentary aims. These include an episode of the French series *Les grandes répétitions* (Gérard Patris, 1968), segments of *Imagine the Sound* (Ron Mann, 1981), and the films *All the Notes* (Christopher Felver, 2003) and *The Silent Eye* (Amiel Courtin-Wilson, 2016). Taylor was of course a profoundly intermedial artist, highly productive in—for example—dance and poetry as well as in music. While these films explore many such different aspects of Taylor's creativity, they necessarily do so through the lens of yet another art: that of film. The relationships between filmmaker and subject that come across in these films represent a wide gamut of different forms of negotiation—from the conversational to the ritualized—that, on occasion, become outright confrontational. This paper will explore the relationships between Taylor's self-presentation in these films and the films' presentation of Taylor in order to further our understanding of the flows of energy—the tensions and contradictions—that both gave rise to and lay at the heart of his artistic productivity.

2:45-3:15 pm, Chris Felver, “The making of ‘Cecil Taylor: All The Notes’ with excerpts”

3:15-3:30 pm, Break

Session 6: *poetics, subculture, ritual*

3:30-4:00 pm, David Grundy, “With blazing eyes and opened mouth”: The Poetry of Cecil Taylor

Though Cecil Taylor was a quixotic, unclassifiable, brilliant poet, critical accounts of his work reduce poetry to the background of his creative practice. This paper aims to restore it to its rightful place. Acquainted with poets Bob Kaufman, Amiri Baraka and Diane Di Prima, and a member of the Umbra Poets' workshop, Taylor began to incorporate poetry into his practice in the early 1960s. Avoiding traditional publishing routes, he went on to include poetry in liner notes and performances for the rest of his career. Taylor's poetry reverberates with echoes of West African histories, the sufferings and resistances of recent African-American experience, the material-spiritual figuration of what is done to bodies and lives, and their gestures in response. In this paper I'll trace Taylor's figurations of ritual, performance and Black Power politics: in particular, the constant movement, re-invention and improvisation that occurs within the fixed yet mutable form of the voodoo ceremony, the improvised musical ensemble, and the experience of racialization, displacement and resistance in the Americas. Taylor's “dialectical surmise” takes place at the voodoo crossroads, the meeting-point of living and dead, Africa and America, piano and drum: seeking to “salvage time establish'd / area agglutinized abyss / being Astral & all registers between.

4:00-4:30 pm, Kehinde Alonge, “Documenting the ‘Subculture Becoming’ through liner notes”

In light of the passing of the late great avant-garde jazz pioneer Cecil Taylor, much of the conversation surrounding his legacy often concerns itself with the innovative sonic pursuits and feats set forth by the percussive pianist. However, these scholarly accounts often neglect to consider the centrality of postmodern poetic practices to Taylor's musical practice. In the liner notes of his 1966 album, *Unit Structures*, Taylor details at length the impetus for his methodological forms of improvisation in a manner that exceeds the reductive jazz criticism that commonly adorned the album sleeves of the era. Much of Taylor's writings more closely resemble the poetic manifestos of Charles Olson's Projective verse or, perhaps more appropriately, Russel Atkins' "Psychovisualism." Taylor's decision to pair his various sonic ventures with his own personal prose and poetry served as a consistent practice throughout his extensive musical career. Importantly, this practice was not limited to Taylor, as several other free jazz practitioners of the loft era scene in New York, the Black Artist Group in St. Louis, and the ACCM in Chicago also dedicated space on their album sleeves to display their distinct poesies and notation (including Sun Ra, Joseph Jarman, William Hooker, Jeane Lee, Anthony Braxton, and Oliver Lake). In an era noted for its migration toward Black artist-driven communes and self-determination, many musicians sought to consolidate various multi-disciplinary praxes onto an album cover as an extension of their ongoing resistance toward institutional entities (Jazz Clubs/festivals and Literary Press) noted for their discriminatory and exclusionary practices of payment and publication. With these topics all in mind, this spoken poesies and notation seeks to uncover the several impetuses which subtended Taylor's use of the album sleeve as a multimedia site or canvas capable of emboldening Black musicians' sense of voice, representation, and agency. This project hopes to not only bring awareness to the musical/poetic pedagogical applications presented by the content of the liner notes, but also the archival potentialities which lay latent in these artifacts composed by the burgeoning Black musicians of that era, whom Cecil Taylor referred to as the "Subculture Becoming."

4:30-5:30 pm, poetry readings & reflections on Cecil Taylor with Ammiel Alcalay, Elliott Levin, Anne Waldman & Devin Waldman, and Ammiel Alcalay reading from Steve Dalachinsky's "Mantis"

5:30-5:45 pm, Break

5:45-6:45 pm, Nahum Dimitri Chandler, "*Air Above Mountains (Buildings Within): A Meditation*"

This discussion will propose the value of the pursuit of an understanding of the itinerary of Cecil Taylor's musical and general artistic cultivation from the eruptive articulation of his work "Indent" in early 1973 through his transformative realization in the work recorded as "*Air Above Mountains (Buildings Within)*," just past mid-year, summer, 1976). While several conjunctures of Taylor's work may be understood as pathbreaking, it may be proposed that the art announced by him across that temporal-space emerged as radical and remained decisive in a singular manner throughout his itinerary of practice.

6:45-8:00 pm, Dinner

8:00-10:00 pm, Closing & Big Band Concert directed by Karen Borca