chapter summaries

This study of the AACM is intended to illustrate some of the strategies black musicians used in negotiating the complex, diverse, and unstable environment of contemporary musical experimentalism. The book documents both the ongoing relevance of 1960s changes in power relations, and the effort to erase the importance of those changes via corporate-backed canon formation efforts that often seem deliberately distanced from notions of musical value and influence collectively developed by communities of artists. This book is not only a personal product, but also the result of consultations with a diverse, internationally articulated community of artists, listeners and viewers, supporters, critics, and even detractors. It is a reconstructive project, performed to help me recover my roots, uncover retentions, and discover my own musical foreparents.

I do not pretend to speak for the AACM, and this book does not represent the "official AACM point of view." I try to let the members' own experiences and words tell the story, but at the same time, affirming my own interpretive function is the only truthful standpoint I can assume. In the course of my research, I needed to keep in mind that this is the documentation of a community of which I am a member, and thus, even while maintaining a critical orientation, the most important responsibility of researchers to the communities they document is to "do no harm." In that light, I cannot recuse myself

from the sense that the book's primary constituency is the AACM membership itself. Hearing the stories of the first-generation AACM musicians with whom I had worked for so many years, I became even more admiring of their perspicacity, their resourcefulness, their perseverance in the face of adversity, and above all, their sheer optimism. As an ethnographer and historian, I write in the hope that this work will help the AACM and the communities it has touched to realize just what they have accomplished, as well as all that they might accomplish in the future.

Chapter 1: Foundations and Prehistory

It is striking to encounter the differences in background, upbringing, experiences, and social and economic networks between the working-class histories that informed black experimentalism and the white, middle- and upper-class sensibilities, expectations—and frankly, entitlements—that conditioned the rise to prominence of its white counterpart. As multireed performer Joseph Jarman, an AACM original member, told me in 1998, "All of these people that we are talking about came from very, very struggling environments. Every one of them started out at the bottom—maybe not the flat bottom, but pretty close. But there was no class thing at all, I'm sorry. We don't have any upper class."[1]

This chapter takes the Great Migration as its primary informing trope. The first-generation AACM founders were all children of the first wave of migrants to venture north. Here, literary theorist Farah Jasmine Griffin's analyses of texts around the migration constituted an important influence on my own reflections on the first-generation AACM musicians.[2] Like many migrants' recollections, the stories of the South told by the early AACM founders tended to coalesce around the theme of loss: in particular, the loss of land, and the fall from a state of independence that such losses produced. Another Southern theme concerned the social and physical violence to which these communities were constantly subjected; usually, some watershed threat obliged the former Southerners to become refugees. Following Griffin, I observe that the migrants' twin assertions of mobility and agency set the stage for how these musicians looked at artistic practice later in their lives. Following the trajectory of these families into the urban world of Chicago, sociological data on the economic state of the black community dovetails with personal narrative as I try to give a sense of how these young musicians grew up during the Depression years—not only their musical backgrounds, but their interests in sports, art, and literature; their

educational and religious backgrounds, which varied widely; their lives at home, and their relationships with their parents—in particular, the black mothers who supported their early musical educations through social clubs and second jobs.

Despite growing up in the presence of legendary high-school band directors, the musical beginnings of many of the early AACM founders drew most crucially upon a tradition of autodidacticism that dominated jazz performance learning until the 1960s and 1970s, when the rise of secondary and postsecondary jazz education began, all but overwhelming the earlier pedagogical model by the early twenty-first century. I try to show how this ostensibly individualized autodidact practice of jazz learning was in most cases self-consciously collective, and moreover, hardly as socially Darwinist as some rather famous observers, including Ralph Ellison, have suggested. Here, I connect Scott DeVeaux's account of the economic advantages of jazz standardization with the accounts I collected of black Chicago's bebop "main scene" of the 1950s, a poorly documented scene for which the usual New York–centric historical tropes provide at best a rather too Procrustean fit. In later chapters, I try to trace how and why this autodidactic impulse gradually became institutionalized by this generation of Chicago musicians, as they moved to establish a new, critical practice of postjazz collective education as an alternative to the evident inadequacies of the education they had been receiving. I follow this earliest generation to the point where they are just beginning to explore their art, either through touring with bands, as most did, or through intense personal exploration, like saxophonist Fred Anderson, who is not known to have toured with any bands other than his own.

Chapter 2: New Music, New York

This chapter draws upon the work of historian Daniel Belgrad, whose notion of an "aesthetic of spontaneity" in the 1950s is useful in theorizing the explorations of chance, choice, and mobility that were taking place in both American musical production and the new European music of the time. The chapter takes pains to critically examine several rather starkly divergent accounts of the Greenwich Village art scene of the late 1950s, a precursor of the multimodal New York art scene into which the AACM would later emerge. Here, I place pressure on those histories that seem to arbitrarily disconnect transgressive art practices pursued by African Americans from the notion of the historical avant-garde.[3] Amplifying the obser-

vations of Fred Moten, I argue that this dominant, largely unquestioned narrative in performance studies tends to naturalize what is in fact a form of pan-Euroethnic propaganda.

This expanded context is required for two reasons: first, to establish a framework for later chapters that position the work of AACM musicians in the late 1970s as exposing major inconsistencies in this internationally promulgated story; and second, to encourage future historians of this crucial period in American musical history to pay more serious attention to the dynamics of race and class than has been the case to date. Near the end of the chapter, I return to Chicago, drawing upon the narrative of local writer J. B. Figi to point out that a historiography of the period dominated by New York–centered portrayals of integrated subcultures cannot account for the development of an experimentalism that, like the AACM (and Sun Ra), emerged largely in the context of hypersegregation. At the very least, a second model of the emergence of new music is strongly suggested here.

Chapter 3: The Development of the Experimental Band

This chapter follows the progress of the young Richard Abrams, whose rapid development as a composer and improvisor at this time included encounters with the ideas of Joseph Schillinger on the one hand, and the tutelage of bandleaders King Fleming and Will Jackson on the other. By the 1960s, autodidact practices of the kind Abrams, trumpeter Philip Cohran, and many others were following were important not only to learning music, but also to emerging explorations of alternative lifestyles, diet, and histories. These explorations became a form of resistance to dominant narratives that were felt to be complicit in reducing rather than expanding the health of the black community.

I introduce a younger generation of musicians, including Joseph Jarman and saxophonists Roscoe Mitchell and Henry Threadgill, as a prelude to the account of the origins and practices of the Experimental Band, widely viewed as the major precursor of the AACM itself. At the same time, I also critique accounts of the origins of AACM musical practices (including those of some musicians) that assume, often without close listening or historical analysis, an overly simplified notion of an evolutionary relationship with the work of Sun Ra. I imagine that for some Sun Ra partisans in particular, the conclusions I come to in this chapter may seem difficult, but I am hoping that paying closer attention to timelines and musical examples will help in establishing a firmer basis for those zones of influence and confluence that do exist; for disestablishing assumptions for which the evidence has

proven shaky, tendentious, or really nonexistent; and for reminding readers of the many areas of divergence, along the lines of method, aesthetics, and artistic and political goals and strategies, that existed between the two musical organizations.

Chapter 4: Founding the Collective

The centerpiece of this crucial chapter is drawn from audio recordings of the very first AACM meetings, which were held in May 1965. The recordings do much to dampen speculation regarding the motivations of the musicians in forming the organization. For example, the taped evidence seriously undermines the idea/rumor that the AACM was conceived by its founders and original members as a kind of alternative musicians' union. Nonetheless, communitarianism as a means to control one's resources is a major theme of this chapter, and I cite a number of twentieth-century attempts by African American artists to pursue this strategy, including the work of theater artist Bob Cole, the Clef Club, and musicians Gigi Gryce, Max Roach, and Charles Mingus; the UGMAA in Los Angeles; and the attempt by John Coltrane, Yusef Lateef, and the Nigerian drummer Babatunde Olatunji to create a performance space in Harlem in 1965.[4] The case of the Jazz Composers Guild is reviewed at some length, and I also review both the published critical opposition to these musician-led efforts to control the conditions of their work, and the internal debates and dislocations surrounding those efforts.

The chapter's account of the decline of South Side jazz clubs in the 1960s situates musical practice as a species of cultural and economic production which suffered as part of an overall descent into crisis, not only in Chicago's black community, but in black communities around the country—a fact of obviously crucial significance that cannot be gleaned from cursory scans of sales figures. Musicians of the period routinely compared this decline with the music's apparent recrudescence on the largely white North Side, as part of an overall drain of cultural resources from the black community, and I maintain that it was this consciousness, as well as the desire for work, that animated the formation of the AACM. On this view, the first concerts of the AACM were established not merely as an alternative to jazz clubs, but as a wholly new type of presentation of a new music that was not really well received in the few remaining clubs anyway.

The last, long section recounts the work of the four AACM founders—Richard Abrams, Philip Cohran, pianist Jodie Christian, and drummer Steve McCall[5]—in conceiving the idea of a musicians' organization, recruiting

participants for the first meetings, and setting the agenda for the wide-ranging discussions that ensued. The taped discussions, which I present in narrative form, demonstrate the diversity of musical direction (and gender) exhibited in the first meetings. Moreover, there is every indication that the musicians were moving to organize themselves in a relatively formal way. Rather than a band, these musicians were realizing a cultural organization. I examine the role of race in the discussions, situating the meetings in a space analogous to that inhabited by other grassroots black organizations that were started during the early Black Power period, in which a younger generation of black activists were sharply critical of what they saw as the failure of biracial coalition politics to improve social and economic conditions for African Americans.

The meanings of the terms "creative music" and "creative musician" are discussed by the meeting participants at a level of detail that casts doubt upon accounts that portray these terms as eponymous for "jazz" and "jazz musician." Clearly, had they wished to do so, the founders and original members could easily have included "jazz" in the name of the collective. That they did not, as well as the fact that the word "jazz" rarely appears in hours and hours of meetings, leads to the conclusion that the AACM's nascent discursive strategy was not a simple renaming enterprise designed to preserve genre boundaries and practices. Taking the musicians' words and discussions at face value, I conclude that their strategies of self-naming and self-fashioning were performed as a means toward transforming not only their livelihoods, but also their very lives and musical selves. Being a "creative musician" in this sense is an act of perpetual becoming, an assertion of mobility that can take one anywhere at all, beyond the purview of genre or method.

I draw upon first-wave AACM trumpeter Leo Smith's short book from 1973, *Notes (8 pieces) source a new world music: creative music,*[6] in concluding that a major aspiration of the theory that "jazz" and "creative music" are synonyms is the reification of the very borders that the musicians were trying to erase through their revised discourse. This concretization also comes bundled with an attempt to discursively revoke the mobility of the musicians themselves. To shore up this concretion, an ad hominem–based essentialism is deployed in asserting that the creative musicians were "really" jazz musicians after all. That this framing was in serious question can be gleaned from an exchange in a later chapter in which Muhal Richard Abrams counters another member's use of the term "jazz" with the rejoinder, "We're not really jazz musicians." The usual rejoinder to this expres-

sion of self-determination draws heavily upon a vulgar version of the institutional theory of art—that is, whatever they may call themselves, these musicians were part of an economic and social art world of jazz—or, as Eddie Murphy's gruff barber character in the film *Coming to America* spat out in dismissing Muhammad Ali's declared change of name, "I'm gonna call him Clay. That's what his momma called him."

These "world-of-jazz" discourses frame the music and the culture as wholly autonomous, even in the face of massive historical evidence to the contrary. In contrast, in these early proto-AACM discussions, the sense of becoming and the intimations of transition and openness are particularly strong. Who is "really" a jazz musician at a time when so many artists in the world of white American experimentalism, for example, were able to describe themselves without opposition as "former" jazz musicians? The example highlights how what I whimsically call the "one-drop rule of jazz" is effectively applied only to black musicians; as later chapters show, musicians of other ethnicities have historically been free to migrate conceptually and artistically without suffering charges of rejecting their culture and history.

Chapter 5: First Fruits

This section, again drawn in largest measure from the meeting tapes, chronicles the growing pains and identity crises experienced by the new organization. I discuss the first attempts at self-governance, self-promotion, and self-production by itinerant musicians without access to major resources. As the membership expanded, drawing younger members who were distanced from the bebop practice that marked the experiences of most of the older early members, the focus of the collective's activities began increasingly to center around new musical forms. I trace the early debates in the AACM that led to a split over issues of aesthetics, populism versus elitism, canon promulgation and historical reference, and the overall relevance of experimental music to the black community.

The rest of the chapter is given over to accounts of musical method and practice, as described by the musicians themselves, and as chronicled in press accounts of intermedia-oriented events given by Jarman, Mitchell, and other AACM artists. I trace the growing response of local and national press to the music, culminating in the first commercially produced AACM recordings, as well as the first concerts at the University of Chicago, organized by a group of faculty and graduate students that included Douglas Mitchell, now my editor for this book. One important event was a collabor-

ative performance between Fred Anderson, Joseph Jarman, and John Cage, in which Doug himself performed on drums.

Chapter 6: The AACM Takes Off

A centerpiece of this chapter concerns the role of the arts in the rise of black consciousness in Chicago, as two short-lived but well-remembered and highly influential community initiatives, the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) and Philip Cohran's Affro-Arts Theater, became major forces in the cultural and political awakening of the area. The AACM School, with its communitarian alternative and supplement to traditional music education, was also begun during this period. Using narratives produced during the period, I examine the impact of the politics of gender and sexuality in the black community on the perception of the AACM in particular. I also recount the ambivalence of black intellectuals regarding the vanguardist sounds emerging from black experimental music scenes, as a militant African American cultural nationalism conditioned the Black Arts Movement's search for authenticity. Here, I examine the roots of Amiri Baraka's mid-1960s analysis of the black middle class, both in his 1963 *Blues People* and his highly influential 1966 essay, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" in sociologist E. Franklin Frazier's scathing 1957 portrait of the black middle class, *Black Bourgeoisie,*[7] an account that drew substantially upon "sociology of deviance" ideas that were highly influential during the 1950s.

Music histories have been loath to come to terms with the interaction between cultural nationalism and anticorporate notions of self-determination, except where these have been articulated by Europeans or European Americans. In that light, I also discuss bell hooks's observation that even while many black musicians adopted nationalist positions, many others resisted nationalist-inspired restrictions upon their work. In fact, some musicians adopted both positions simultaneously, a stance that was certainly not limited to African Americans. For example, a manifesto such as John Cage's *Silence,* with its articulation of a pan-European intellectual history that became naturalized as constitutive of an overall American musical identity, is as starkly culturally nationalist as anything published during the heyday of the Black Arts Movement.

The creation of the long-lived and still-controversial AACM-identified slogan, "Great Black Music," arose during this period. The term became part of the AACM's politically inflected approach to media analysis and intervention, which in turn was an artifact of an overall questioning of

received wisdom and authority that African Americans, as well as other groups in U.S. society and abroad, were promulgating. At times, both musicians and audiences found themselves precariously situated atop the horns of a class-inflected populist-versus-elitist dilemma, grappling along the way with knotty issues of control and appropriation of a "cultural property," black music, that was simultaneously the most commodified and the most closely policed music in history.

Chapter 7: Americans in Paris

This chapter chronicles the encounter with the European music scene by the eight AACM members who first ventured across the Atlantic in 1969. Here, I also discuss the rise of the critically important first generation of European musicians who eschewed European jazz's former, self-confessed derivative nature in favor of a specifically pan-European musical identity. I identify the 1969 Baden-Baden Free Jazz Treffen [Meeting], at which the AACM and the new Europeans met, as emblematic of a form of identity politics articulated both through sound and via critical reception.[8]

The trip to Europe was the major catalyst in bringing the music and ideas of the AACM to worldwide prominence, and I describe the varied motivations of the members of the collective toward making the trek as partly influenced by the apparently distanced view that AACM musicians held toward the conceptions of free music then being promulgated in New York. Using sociologist Bennetta Jules-Rosette's work on black Paris, I contrast the ongoing impact of these musicians and their free jazz colleagues on French cultural history with their near-complete absence from U.S.-produced histories of black culture in France. A review of the media reception to these first AACM forays in Europe is complemented by the recollections of the musicians themselves in constructing my account of the AACM musicians' European experiences, and in particular, their Paris experiences. I explore French views on the relation of free jazz to the 1968 student upheavals in Europe, and on American black nationalism, including the fascination in the French jazz press with the ideas of Amiri Baraka, easily one of the most influential African American intellectuals of the time in Europe.[9]

I describe the uneasy encounter between the musicians' ideas of themselves as cosmopolitan border crossers and the demands upon them to accede to received notions of jazz and the naturalized role of the black musician, even as those notions were being challenged across the board at this time. To make sense of this seeming contradiction, it may be fruitful—in

this situation as in so many others—to view "jazz" not as a set of musicologically codifiable (however vaguely so) characteristics such as "swing," but as a race-, gender-, and class-inflected social location within which sound and musical practice take on additional meanings. In this light, it becomes easier to understand the task undertaken by the AACM musicians (as well as artists such as Ornette Coleman) to articulate a mobility of practice that in relatively nonracialized circumstances would be seen as operating outside the frame of jazz. Clearly, for these black working-class musicians, sound and musical method were not enough to accomplish that feat; in fact, the socially determined frame of jazz definition continually transformed its topography to accommodate virtually any direction these and other black musicians might take.

Chapter 8: The AACM's Next Wave

The chapter is largely concerned with the situation in Chicago for the AACM collective during and after the Paris sojourn. Despite considerable instability in venues and governance during this time, the collective continued to hold regular meetings and concerts, and also took on several new and younger members whose backgrounds were far different than those of the oldest AACM generation. The interaction between the generations prepared the ground for expansion, renewal, and challenge, as the AACM entered its tenth year of existence in 1975. The backgrounds of these newer members, which I probe in some detail, provide personal perspectives on the social upheavals taking place in the United States, such as the civil rights movement, the many student protests and campus takeovers, and draft resistance around the U.S.–Vietnam War.

I describe the ways in which AACM members financially negotiated the contrast between the continued rise of the AACM's visibility in U.S. jazz journals, and its strong support in the Chicago press, with the relative paucity of work in Chicago itself. This local lack of work was eventually balanced by growing opportunities for performance in Europe and even, for some members, by "major label" support from the U.S. record industry, prompting a number of these musicians—most prominently, the former Parisian expatriates—to give up on Chicago almost entirely. A kind of AACM diaspora (as writer Francis Davis once put it) emerged, as musicians, seemingly influenced by the example of their Europe-based colleagues, tried living in the rural Midwest, on the West Coast, and the eastern seaboard, and New York City. The AACM members' music was growing and maturing at this time as well, and I touch upon the changes in compositional and impro-

visative method being articulated by some AACM composers during this important transitional period.

Benjamin Looker's book on the Black Artists Group, the historically important midwestern artists collective whose emergence was influenced by the AACM, was sufficiently thorough to preempt my own work on the group, so in the interests of bringing to publication a project that was already rather late, the section on BAG in this chapter has been reduced to a size that would nonetheless respect the historical contiguity that binds BAG to the AACM.[10] I would like to thank Oliver Lake, Hamiet Bluiett, Marty Ehrlich, James Jabbo Ware, Baikida Carroll, the late Emilio Cruz, and in particular, J. D. Parran, for making themselves, their photographs, and BAG documents available to me.

Chapter 9: The AACM in New York

One important aspect of my work has been to follow the example of the AACM musicians themselves in challenging the assumed centrality of New York City to every jazz narrative. In the place of this romantic ideal I have outlined a distributed, internationalist vision that recognizes the prominent place of both European and midwestern American metropoles in nurturing the AACM's development and mediating its later notoriety. At the same time, recounting the struggles and successes of the large group of AACM musicians who invaded New York City en masse in the mid-1970s—a phenomenon reminiscent of the Great Migration itself—allows me to extend the actor-network model of "jazz" that I pursue throughout the book.

In particular, I draw upon that model in showing that AACM musicians were recognized at the time as playing a critically important role in fostering the breakdown of traditional barriers separating jazz and classical music, or low and high musical cultures, in ways that moved far beyond the miscegenationist model of early Third Stream thinking. In this respect, AACM musicians updated and revised a model pursued by black classical composers, an important group of creative music-makers who, I maintain, have been all but ignored by the major black cultural critics and public intellectuals who have come to prominence since 1960.

I observe that AACM musicians working in New York pursued membership in a variety of music scenes, including New York's "downtown" sociomusical networks, which had rarely included African American musicians since the Greenwich Village split between black and white vanguardist intellectuals in the early 1960s that I discuss in chapter 2. Powerful social, cultural, and economic forces were arrayed in opposition to the

mobility-oriented standpoint taken by those AACM musicians who opted for a multiple-network practice. I refer here not only to my research, but also to my experience as music curator of a major New York experimental art venue of the period. I note that the loft jazz of the 1970s, seemingly a recrudescence of its 1960s counterpart,[11] was in essence similar in infrastructural focus and motivation to other experimental arts activity taking place in alternative spaces around New York, as artists banded together to present new work in noncommercial venues.

Finally, I confront at some length the seeming inability of much contemporaneous media reportage devoted to music (jazz and classical) to either account for or support this early border crossing by a largely black musical community. Tied to outdated, racialized musical categories, many music reviewers and their editors seemed nonplussed at first by the musicians' genre refusals, and this confusion gradually transformed itself into an open hostility that had little to do with the race of the reviewer.

Chapter 10: The New Regime in Chicago

Chapter 10 returns to a Chicago-based AACM scene that was both transformed and partially transfixed by the goings-on in New York. A major generational shift was coming to the organization, as younger musicians who had not gone to New York with those predominantly older members began to exercise important influence in Chicago. Most of this latest wave of AACM members came of age in the wake of the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, and the apparent abandonment of working-class black neighborhoods in Chicago to the ministrations of powerful street gangs, such as the Disciples and the Black P. Stone Nation. White-coded rock music was a fact of life for this generation, many of whom listened to it (and played it) in equal measure with blues, jazz, and R&B. Unlike the earlier generation of AACM musicians, most of this group attended college, and grew up in arguably somewhat more affluent circumstances (sometimes considerably so) than their older colleagues.

By this time, few first-wave AACM members still lived in Chicago. Many younger members of the collective had never worked with the older musicians, and in a number of cases, had not even met them. The reminiscences of those who joined the AACM in Chicago during this time often point to this development as symptomatic of a kind of leadership vacuum. Perhaps inevitably, tensions between the Chicago and New York groups developed, in which generational difference sometimes became mapped onto perceived or real differences in aesthetics and musical direction. I recount

the attempts by New York and Chicago members to ameliorate what was rapidly becoming a serious geographic, experiential, and generational divide through "national conferences" and "anniversary concerts," where collective solutions were sought for the AACM's organizational issues as it expanded its geographical purview, and for issues related to work and infrastructural support for music-making.

I review how the mobility-oriented artistic stances of the AACM and similar organizations challenged cryptically race-based distribution policies that marked U.S. government and private funding for the arts. I also draw upon the work of my former student, ethnomusicologist Ellen Weller, in exploring the effect of U.S. government funding on the development of a nonprofit arts industry in which bureaucrats worked to remodel grassroots arts organizations in the image of the heavily corporatized, hierarchical forms of governance that they themselves deemed most workable. I then use this model to examine the particular case of the AACM.

Chapter 11: Into the Third Decade

The central thesis of chapter 11 concerns the role played by a group of enterprising, talented, and visionary women in transforming the AACM, challenging its view of itself at its very core. This group of mostly younger women grew up with the strictures and barriers to which black women who aspired to become artists and musicians were subject. This chapter, more than any other in the book, allows me to explore the intersection of gender, class, and race in depth, including the constructions of masculinity that some AACM musicians apparently took to be essentially constitutive of the collective's identity in the wake of the dynamics of black cultural nationalism in the United States.

This chapter also looks critically at the promulgation of powerful, corporate-backed canon formation initiatives in the jazz world of the 1980s. AACM musicians, to the extent that they bore membership in jazz-identified worlds, found themselves in the thick of the debates over tradition and innovation that marked this period. At the same time, as I note, the movement to promote a unitary jazz canon that excluded experimental music never gained sufficient traction in Chicago to overshadow what the city, along with much of the rest of the world beyond the borders of the United States and the limitations of its corporate media, felt was the AACM's creation of a homegrown movement of historical importance.

In fact, the Chicago mediascape began to treat the AACM—meaning not only its founders, but also its youngest exponents in Chicago—with a level

of support sometimes bordering on reverence. In the meantime, the level of local black community support and respect for the AACM strongly contradicted the argument that the "new music," which by now was decades old, had no significant black audience. At the same time that the AACM's local profile was rising, however, the international profile of many of its youngest members was somewhat less prominent than that of the older members. The "new music" of the AACM of the 1990s was much different from its 1960s and 1970s counterpart, a fact remarked upon both domestically and by commentators in Europe.

Chapter 12 (Transition and Reflections), and Afterword

The final chapter was conceived as an opportunity for me to contribute personal reflections about some of the AACM members who have, as many of us delicately put it, made their transitions. The afterword is conceived as a combination of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, Gatesian signifying, and the venerable antebellum practice of collective improvisation known as the ring shout. This conclusion is constructed more or less as a virtual AACM meeting, where the words of my AACM colleagues, as told to me in interviews, comprise just one of the many discussions of issues around the organization's past, present, and future that continually arise whenever members of the collective come together.