How do political imaginaries in the United States relate to the mostly instrumental, improvised, some would say Afrological, music we often call jazz? In which ways do jazz performance, experimentation, and vocabulary express and inflect visions of social transformation?

Focusing on improvised music and political imaginaries of the period between 1950-1980, this seminar explores the overlapping and mutually constituted dimensions of race, gender, sexuality, and nationality, among others, as indexes of political orientation. Emphasis will be placed on blackness as a set of enabling practices that, while addressing structural and longstanding facets of imposed marginalization, projects modes of social organization through musical statements and theorizations.

Central questions to be explored revolve around whether, how, and why a political critique is articulated, and a yet-to-be social world becomes graspable through certain manifestations of jazz.

Seminar Dynamics
Two persons will be responsible for structuring each seminar’s discussion. One person, the presenter, will write a 5-page report on the assigned readings and convey to the other participants her thoughts on them; the other person, the discussant, will bring questions and insights that will engage both the presenter and the other seminar participants.

The 5-page report the presenter brings to the seminar should not be a simple summary. Rather, besides providing a brief overview of the reading – no more than one page – the report should focus on two or three central concepts.

Both the presenter and the discussant will make printed copies of their work to all seminar participants.

Presenters and discussants are expected to bring and incorporate into their discussion at least two recordings that are pertinent to the week’s readings. When selecting the tunes, reflect on its specificities: form, or apparent absence of form, the way it is performed, the musicians’ interaction, and how, if at all, a political statement is made with or in spite of the music.

You are welcome to complement the sampling of a particular record with audio-visuals.
Formal musical knowledge if not required; we will agree on key terms and definitions with which you can frame your perspective on the recordings, readings, and during our dialogues.

Books are available at Resistencia Bookstore, 801 South 1st St # A, Austin, TX 78704, (512) 416-8885.

Week 1) (Jan 18
Introduction and assignments

Week 2) (Jan 25
Presenter
Discussant


Recommended


Week 3) (Feb 1
Presenter
Discussant


Recommended


Week 4) (Feb 8  
Presenter  
Discussant  


Recommended  

Week 5) (Feb 15  
Presenter  
Discussant  


Week 6) (Feb 22  
Presenter  
Discussant  

Charles Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog* (New York: Knopf, 1971)  

Recommended  

Week 7) (March 1  
Presenter  
Discussant  

Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles, the Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989)  
Bill Evans, liner notes to Kind of Blue (in O’Meally, *The Jazz Cadence of American Culture* and other publications).

Week 8) (March 8
Presenter
Discussant


Recommended

March 15 no class: spring break

Week 9) (March 22
Presenter
Discussant


Recommended

Week 10) (March 29
Presenter
Discussant

Week 11) (April 5
Presenter
Discussant


Recommended

Week 12) (April 12
Presenter
Discussant


Recommended

Week 13) (April 19
Presenter
Discussant

Week 14) (April 26
Presenter
Discussant


Week 15) (May 3
Presenter
Discussant

Jared Sexton, “People-of-color-blindness: notes on the afterlife of slavery.” *Social Text* 103 Vol. 28, No. 2, 2010