

**Enjoying Gospel Drumming:  
An Investigation of 'Post-Racial' Appropriation, Consumption, and Idealization in  
Contemporary Black Musicianship**

by

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### Abstract:

In this paper, I will examine the implications of post-racial ideology as a form of anti-racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I argue that post-racial positions can detrimentally affect collective understandings of difference, diminish awareness of the persistence of racism and of the difficult history of race relations in North America, and pose a number of theoretical issues for the study of popular music and culture. Drawing upon critical race theory, ethnomusicology, popular music studies, and the work of Slavoj Žižek—particularly his theory of *enjoyment* as a political factor—this study will outline how the capitalistic ideal of instant gratification is invested in post-racial outlooks. As a case study, I will refer to my research on black Pentecostal ‘gospel drumming’ and on the mainstream drumming industry in order to frame this discussion.

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## **Introduction:**

This thesis will examine and problematize a number of issues that were raised in my study of a recent development in mainstream drumming culture: ‘gospel drumming.’ In many international drum magazines, websites, and music instrument retail stores, gospel products and topics have saturated the market and its discourse—most apparently in the form of educational DVDs; appearances by gospel drummers at drum conferences and festivals; special edition gospel-labeled sticks, cymbals, and drums; as well as in thousands of web videos and discussion boards that debate and represent gospel drumming in different ways. Its cultural association with black Pentecostal religiosity is signified both implicitly and explicitly throughout these diverse spaces of drumming consumer culture, articulating ‘gospel’ within a discourse of specific consumer interests, ideologies, and judgments. In some respects, this often-overt cultural association with a distinctly American drumming style is juxtaposed with many techniques and products that are not ‘culturalized’ in the same way (e.g., linear patterns, or snare rudiments, such as ‘paradiddles,’ etc.), with the result that these techniques and products are rendered seemingly neutral in terms of ethnicity and cultural basis. In contrast, and often at the same time, the discourse situates gospel drumming within an overview of distinctly African American musical developments and contributions (e.g., jazz, New Orleans second-line drumming, for instance) such that it is historically positioned within a narrative of melting pot American nationalism. Similarly and more generally, culturalized and cross-cultural genres like Afro-Cuban, West African, and Latin-jazz are often framed in a world music/world rhythms context in the mainstream drumming industry, fostering practices of multicultural inclusivity, collaboration, and mutual appropriation which can

obscure boundaries between gospel drumming, African American music in general, and other musics of the African diaspora.

However, there exists a conflicting element in the gospel drumming discourse, one that reinvigorates a number of longstanding debates within popular music studies and ethnomusicology. The techniques and patterns of gospel drumming are often expressed through a rhetoric of objectivity and neutrality—as the impartial appropriation of drumming skills and the reduction of all forms of music to notational representations—while simultaneously there exists a profound emphasis on aspects of the style which are implicitly or explicitly asserted to be authentic and innate aspects, which problematically evokes notions of musical essentialism and racial understanding. What could explain these tendencies and developments in a contemporary North American social and political context, one that is often believed to be founded upon multicultural, globalized, anti-racist, and egalitarian ideals? What are the broader theoretical considerations that come out of the consumption of gospel drumming, its racial and cultural significations, and the conflicting discourse of objectivity? Drawing from the fields of critical race theory and political science, I argue that these issues and questions express the ideological coordinates of *post-racism*, an emergent social and political ideology that conveys certain values of late-capitalistic consumption and that also perpetuates notions of a world without racism. In this way, post-racism is a form of progressive politics, which I will argue is deficient in that it can detrimentally impact the already fragile multiculturalist project. Post-racism problematically rearticulates well-worn racial debates in ways that seem to perpetuate anti-racism, but one of my aims is to show that despite such intentions it can often achieve quite the opposite result.

Although there have been many ethnomusicological and sociological texts concerning racial authenticity<sup>1</sup>—especially in relation to black musicianship in North America<sup>2</sup>—my attempt to problematize these aspects of gospel drumming will highlight how the racial and authenticity questions raised in my case study are related to contemporary race relations and to misunderstandings of the issue of racism (in particular, the idea that racism is no longer a major concern in North America today). Political policies and social norms since the 1970s and 80s (especially in the US) have been profoundly shaped around this very issue, influencing the ways in which debates about race and culture operate in a late-capitalist society that increasingly sees itself as inherently anti-racist (particularly after the inauguration of Barack Obama).<sup>3</sup> It is from this vantage point that my awareness of and interest in post-racial/colorblind discourse originated. What the vast majority of these writings have asserted is a complex relationship between race and the ideals and processes of late-global capitalism. Much of this is centered on the purported importance of individual achievement and what Timothy

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<sup>1</sup> See Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, eds., *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Derek B. Scott, ed., *Music, Culture, and Society: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Gregory Barz & Timothy J. Cooley, *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See Harry J. Elam, Jr., and Kennell Jackson, eds., *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Frank Kofsky, *Black music, White Business: Illuminating the History and Political Economy of Jazz* (New York: Pathfinder, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See Johnny Bernard Hill, *The First Black President: Barack Obama, Race, Politics, and the American Dream* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Taylor calls the ‘sacralization’ of consumption,<sup>4</sup> offering many intersecting lines of inquiry that implicate the consumption and discourse of gospel drumming.

I will also draw specific attention to the writings of psychoanalytic philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who brings to the debate an effective politicized theorization of ‘enjoyment’ for contemporary late-global capitalistic societies. Žižek argues that we perceive our social and political space as being largely free of the ideological strain of the past (racism, feminism, socialism, gay rights, civil rights, etc.). Subsequently, forms of consumption perpetuate this ideal through unbridled consumption and the prioritization of privatized enjoyment, operating as the fundamental core in understanding the symptoms and ideologies of post-racism.

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I first became introduced to the topic of gospel drumming as an undergraduate music performance student and private lesson instructor in Toronto. I was studying a variety of techniques and styles on the drum kit, including ensemble and private instruction in ‘world rhythms’ for drum kit, Afro-Cuban, jazz, and African (Ghanaian) traditions. As many music students in the GTA would probably attest, there’s always been a certain degree of friendly competition between the students and alumni of the big music programs in the city—York University (my school), the University of Toronto, and Humber College. One drummer in particular, Larnell Lewis—who is now one of the elite Canadian endorsees for Yamaha drums—was studying at Humber, whose music program was known to produce, arguably, the best young jazz musicians in the city. Consequently, his playing was gathering lots of attention at York, largely due to a number of high-

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor 2007, 211.

profile gigs that he was landing with visiting American musicians, local heavyweights, and faculty members. Searching for Lewis on YouTube, I came across a number of performance videos and even instructional clips where he was featured—I was an immediate fan. However, discussions about his talent and style amongst my classmates quickly turned to this thing called ‘gospel’; a form of drumming I wasn’t familiar with, but was instructed about its inherent blackness (that he’s a good drummer because he was a black gospel drummer, etc.). I would not accept the notion that somehow racial considerations were a factor, finding this kind of rhetoric both ironic and disappointing, considering that we were all studying a form of historically African-American music at the post-secondary level. At the same time, however, most of the students in my year were white. In this manner, the racial appeals that attempted to rationalize Lewis’ professional successes also implicitly articulated a defeatist rhetoric concerning the whiteness of post-secondary jazz students (white musicians being the overwhelming majority of the student body in my music program).

After I graduated from York, I started working at a local music store/school in my hometown. At this point, mainstream drumming magazines like *Modern Drummer* were featuring a lot of gospel musicians, advertising gospel videos and products, and often included some gospel fill transcriptions and exercises. I started to practice and learn some of these gospel patterns and even came up with my own fills, eventually teaching some ideas to my students. When we had breaks between teaching students, the other drum instructors and myself would show each other new and exciting ideas and techniques we’d been finding online, in magazines, and instructional DVDs; gospel drumming patterns were very often at the center of our interest. However, throughout these

experiences, I still could not place exactly what made gospel drumming a distinct kind of performance, especially because the transcribed techniques and patterns were so similar to a number of other genres and styles or often lent themselves to a variety of musical tastes and approaches. From this vantage point, I started to examine how gospel was marketed and represented in drumming cultures and industries, as well as investigating the historical and political contexts involved in the appropriation and commodification of black musicianship.

This thesis is in three parts: 1) an overview of my case study, gospel drumming; 2) a broad discussion of the logics of post-racial political ideology, problematizing issues of *culture* and *race* that were raised in the case study, and; 3) a philosophical/psychoanalytic critique of contemporary racism in order to frame issues of black music appropriation and interpretation. An interpretation of my fieldwork interviews (described below) and an analysis of discourses around gospel drumming will allow me to illustrate the relationship between race, culture, consumption, and desire (in Žižek's Lacanian sense of the term) as inherently tied to the role of the Other within the neutralized political spaces of late-global capitalistic society (what Žižek calls 'post-ideological' space). In this way, I hope to emphasize how one of the central problematics for social and political thought today is a profound denial of the existence of racism; that the process of 'culturalization' and the prevalence of relativistic thought reduce the politics and principles of distinct groups to a neutralized state. Finally, I hope to connect how these developments are bound to the ideals and practices of late-global capitalistic consumption, as exemplified in the gospel drumming case study.

Beginning in December 2011 I conducted interviews with three African Canadian church drummers from the Greater Toronto Area. Each participant was given a pseudonym for the study (Tara, Chris, and Cory) so that their involvement would not jeopardize their professional careers and status in the rather small black church drumming scene in the GTA. My conversations with each drummer were informal and covered a number of issues and topics in a spontaneous manner; the most pertinent aspects of our conversations made their way into this paper. Although this feature of the study provides something of an ethnographic component, I do not contend that it is an ethnographic study. My approach to these interviews was to integrate the voices of black church drummers in order to provide some greater context and perspective to other materials explored in the thesis, but not to perform a full course of fieldwork nor to try and draw any of the sorts of conclusions that would require such work. Arguably, many of the interviewees' viewpoints were echoed in published interviews and statements of other black gospel drummers found in popular magazines and DVDs, reproducing some of these discursive aspects in interesting ways. However, their concerns also raised a number of surprising issues—some of which go beyond the scope of this paper—and I have attempted to expand and reflect upon these topics where appropriate. Each participant graduated from Humber College in Toronto, and they all expressed that many gospel players in the area studied there. Tara is a Toronto-based drummer who teaches, records, and performs throughout the GTA. She is regularly hired to play for different churches, choirs, and artists. Chris is a professional drummer based out of Brampton, ON and plays with a number of well-known contemporary gospel and pop music artists. Cory

is a veteran drummer and music producer from Kitchener, ON, having performed, recorded, and toured across North America.

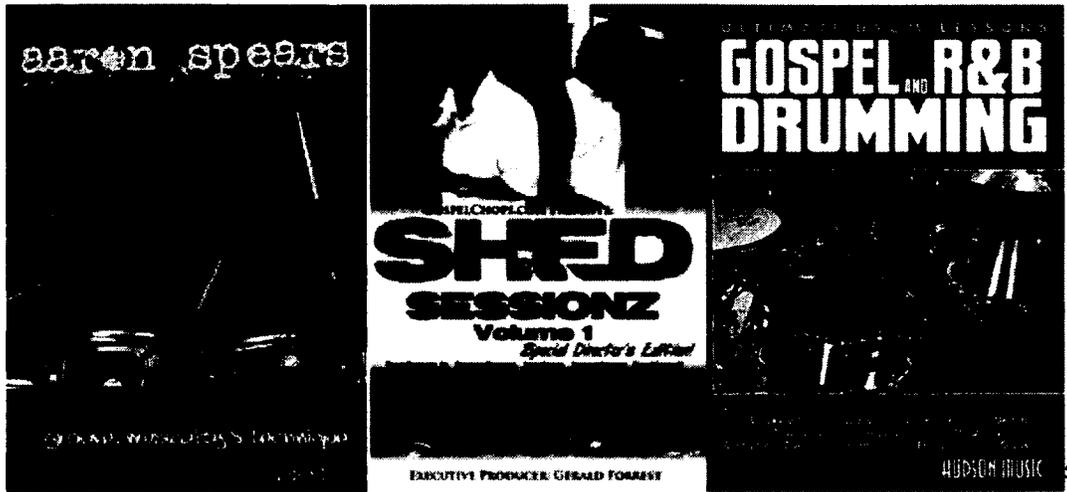
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Although my analysis will be predominantly Marxist in theoretical approach and critical stance, I do not assume that such considerations deterministically structure the direct values and behaviors of black Pentecostal musicians, nor of the consumers who purchase and appropriate gospel materials and ideas. Instead, I hope to raise what I believe to be some of the necessary questions and concerns that should concern all forms of research in the study of contemporary popular music and culture:

- How can we theorize and understand racism within the purportedly post-racist space ‘after Obama?’
- Is it sustainable to study popular music without considering our current global economic, political, and ecological situation?
- How do we theorize familiar topics such as authenticity, fetishism, or exoticism within post-racial space?

Though I will not be able to examine each of these questions in full detail for the purpose and scope of this paper, my aim will be to examine their broad outlines with respect to one particular context, as well as to illustrate how a commitment to serious work in cultural and political theory intensifies fields of music discourse in a contemporaneous manner. To this end, I unapologetically advocate for greater political engagement between the objects of musical study and the subjects who study them.

Chapter 1  
Case Study: Gospel Drumming



*this is completely not racism, this is a compliment. my bestfriend is black. but, black people are some of the most talented drummers in the world. [whophead007]*

- *love this comment because this really helps black people represent!!! [imnotsure556]*
- *It has nothing to do with skin color, but how much time you put into practice, black, indian, asian, canadian, white whatever. all the same [MrBlue707]*
- *on the scene that they are 4 of them they remind me the savages round the fire playing drums oug ougk ougk [sapzapgr]<sup>6</sup>*

Over the past 10 years or so, ‘gospel drumming’ has developed into a tremendously popular topic throughout the mainstream drumming industry. Maintaining a strong presence both in forms of drumming print media, educational videos, and on the

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<sup>5</sup> DVDs left to right: *Aaron Spears Beyond the Chops: Groove, Musicality, and Technique* (Hudson Music Ltd., 2009), *GospelChops.com Presents Shed Sessionz Vol. 1* (2005), and *Ultimate Drum Lessons: Gospel and R&B Drumming* (Hudson Music Ltd., 2011).

<sup>6</sup> YouTube comments from ‘Cora Coleman-Dunham in Kick Snare Hat.’ Stable URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLoJXEWJBbg&feature=fvwrel>. Accessed on March 19, 2012. Throughout this thesis, material quoted from Internet sources is given in exactly its original form, including details of spelling, punctuation, etc. (unless indicated otherwise).

Internet,<sup>7</sup> gospel-related techniques and products (listed below) have literally inundated the international drumming market. Categorized as a new style of drumming with its own advanced skills and techniques, students and educators can appropriate and expand upon gospel ideas and themes, integrate them into their own playing and even post a variety of user-generated gospel content on the Internet. Transcriptions of gospel drum fills and patterns can be found in numerous blogs and websites, and they are often featured in drum magazines and instructional videos. The world's largest drum companies have been diligently producing a range of gospel-specific products in response to its growing popularity, including Vater's 'Gospel Series' drumsticks, Pearl's 'Gospel Percussion' Pack, Sabian and Zildjian Cymbals 'Gospel' and 'Praise and Worship' packs, and a variety of educational materials. Hudson Music Ltd., arguably the largest producer of educational drumming videos, has released some of the most successful gospel DVDs, including *Dynamic Drumming 3* with Chris Coleman (2005), *Aaron Spears: Beyond the Chops* (2009), and *Ultimate Drum Lessons: Gospel and R&B Drumming* (2011). Even DW Drums—predominately known as a drum kit manufacturer—has released a gospel-based drumming DVD, *Kick Snare Hat* (2008), highlighting four of their leading gospel endorsees (Nisan Stewart, Gerald Heyward, Cora Coleman-Dunham, and Aaron Spears). There are also a number of very popular, independent gospel video productions, such as the GospelChops.com *Shed Sessionz* Series (Vol. 1-3; 2005, 2008, 2011), and Gospel Musicians *Urban Drumming Techniques: Featuring JLaToiya* (2011), highlighting particular aspects of church drumming (shout music, for example). Many gospel

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, a YouTube search result for 'gospel drumming' yielded 23100 results as of September 11, 2012. However, this does not account for other search terms, such as 'gospel chops' (7570 videos), 'gospel drummer' (14000 videos), and 'gospel shed' (7830 videos).

drummers appear in advertisements and interviews, perform at industry trade shows, and endorse a variety of professional drumming products. Subsequently, the international music instrument trade show NAMM has become an unofficial showcase for gospel talent, as many black church drummers attend and perform in various cymbal and drum booths in the hopes of getting attention and securing an endorsement—much to the chagrin of ‘elder’ church drummers like Jeff ‘Lo’ Davis.<sup>8</sup>

The dominant visual and narrative portrayals in gospel drumming texts (i.e. advertisements, magazine covers and interviews, instructional DVDs, etc.) indicate that the style has its roots in African American churches—in particular, Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches. These church drummers incorporate various techniques, musical genres and styles into their playing, including R&B, older gospel and hip hop, but also progressive rock, jazz, fusion, punk, and metal. As with many avid drummers from around the world, these church drummers participate in the broader networks of popular drumming culture, consuming products, watching/downloading instructional videos, and reading magazines. Many have studied music performance at a post-secondary level, as was the case for each of my interview participants. Throughout the genres of pop, hip hop, and R&B, gospel drummers perform with the world’s biggest names and stars: Britney Spears (Teddy Campbell), Christina Aguilera (Brian Fraser Moore), Mary J. Blige (Rex Hardy, Jr.), Usher (Aaron Spears), Beyoncé (Kim Thompson), Jay-Z (Tony Royster, Jr.), and many others.

Throughout the broader (online) drumming community, there exists a general consensus that gospel has a certain approach and sound which is most often characterized

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<sup>8</sup> Jeff Davis’ interview in the bonus section of *Ultimate Drum Lessons* (7:30min).

by its very loud dynamics and complex and busy improvisational patterns that punctuate predominately 4/4 rock and hip hop-style grooves (see pgs. 38-46 for an in-depth analysis and reference to online forum examples). Two key features that have become characteristic of the style are the *shed* and the gospel *chop*. The former indicates a collective performance practice that involves multiple drummers performing simultaneously in a groove, collaborating and challenging one another with complex drum fills and patterns. The latter generally indicates a short drum solo pattern that is performed through the complex separation of strikes between the hands and feet in various groupings of 32<sup>nd</sup> note triplets and sextuplets across the kit (a *linear* drumming style—more on this later). These *chops* are typically short phrases and ideas that are often appropriated from other drummers—in the *shed*, lifted from albums, drum DVDs, and web videos. A drummer, then, incorporates this ‘chop’ into their playing and applies it to a number of musical settings. This practice has opened up many drummers to gospel ideas and texts (DVDs, web videos, products, etc.) and has helped spread gospel drumming in a very accessible way, enhancing the popularity of certain gospel players, their characteristic styles, approaches, chops, and ‘isms’—the way they hold their sticks, where they begin a solo, the way they set up their drums, what kinds of cymbals or brands they use, etc. Subsequently, drummers from around the world have appropriated gospel ideas through the utilization and development of ‘chops’ and identify these techniques and approaches with gospel players, in particular.

As we will see, however, for many practicing church drummers the recent popularization of gospel drumming, and the emphasis on chops in particular, does not properly reflect gospel music practices and, especially, gospel's spiritual intention.

Church drumming is rooted in the specific context of the church service: drummers accompany choirs, organists, and other musicians, improvising according to the spiritual trajectory of the service, which could last for hours. The issue of ‘real’ vs. a sensationalized/popularized form of gospel drumming resonates throughout gospel texts (DVDs, etc.), as well as in online drumming forums: “if you are not playing it in church to me its not ‘gospel’ drumming...its just funk grooves and linear sextuplet and 32nd note licks.”<sup>9</sup> The loud dynamics and busy playing that have become characteristic of the style are often overstressed, reducing the image of black church drummers to essentially being ‘chops’ players; rendering their technique and ability as a passing gimmick or fad; decontextualizing the role of the church service in their stylistic approach. In this way, the almost complete identification of the chop with ‘gospel’ negatively simplifies and generalizes the style and its drummers. Any attempt to engender a standard for a distinctly ‘gospel technique’ (the very thing which most DVDs and other gospel products wish to impart) runs the risk of essentializing all black drumming to being somehow linked to ‘gospel.’ Compounding this issue, mainstream drumming magazines and educational DVDs tend to feature black gospel drummers who perform in this over-the-top, highly technical style of ‘chops’ playing. In many instances, the most sensationalized form of gospel drumming is the dominant referent which contours much of the popularity and discourse of gospel techniques and skills, influencing many up and coming drummers (including those from black churches): “that’s the way gospel drummers portrayed themselves—as chops...even with the younger ones, it isn’t about musicality,

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<sup>9</sup> Drummerworld.com discussion board, ‘Gospel RnB Drumming (its more than shedding).’ Stable URL: <http://www.drummerworld.com/forums/showthread.php?p=1015056>. Accessed May 5, 2012.

its about chops.”<sup>10</sup> From this vantage point, it is necessary to outline some of the historical and religious contexts regarding black Pentecostalism in order to better understand the significance of faith in the musical practices of these church drummers.

**The Church as Site of Musical Habitus**  
*Mapping the Historical and Religious Contexts of Black Pentecostalism*

The term ‘black Church’ is often utilized as a sociological and theological shorthand that encompasses the history and pluralism of the seven major, totally black-controlled Christian church denominations that originated in the US following the establishment of the Free African Society of 1787.<sup>11</sup> Functioning as some of the most stable and coherent institutions in America following slavery,<sup>12</sup> black churches and their worship services have long been documented for their intense enthusiasm and the open display of emotions and feelings; congregants are encouraged to ‘get into’ the Spirit, shout, and often move in a trance-like state. These practices have been described as the ‘first theater’ in the African American community.<sup>13</sup> Singing is second only to preaching in most black churches as “the magnet of attraction and the primary vehicle of spiritual transport for the worshipping congregation,” so much so that both are almost invariably the minimal conditions for a successful ministry.<sup>14</sup> The development of gospel hymnody from the Protestant City Revival Movement—which simultaneously occurred during the widespread use of spirituals during the Second Awakening—evolved in the rapidly growing urban centers. Black gospel music, however, quickly set itself apart from the

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<sup>10</sup> Interview participant Cory.

<sup>11</sup> Lincoln and Mamiya 1990, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

music of white congregations through use of call-and-response and improvisatory practices.<sup>15</sup> Gospel music's mixture of sacred and profane African American styles—spirituals, jazz, and blues music—found its place in church choirs during the 'golden age' of gospel music (1930s-1950s), largely through the works of Thomas A. Dorsey, Kenneth Morris, Sallie Martin, and the popularization of soloists such as Mahalia Jackson and quintets like the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi.<sup>16</sup> The secularization of more contemporary forms of gospel music was also due in part to widespread forms of multimedia, taking the genre to new venues on radio, recordings, and television. This inevitably altered more traditional song forms and styles. Gospel music played a critical role in the development of Pentecostalism and vice versa, as the more liberal use of instrumentation and musical embellishments in Pentecostal churches profoundly influenced the sound of gospel music.<sup>17</sup> Today, gospel music encompasses multiple genres and styles under a single, catchall term, including influences of rock, hip-hop, soul, and electronic music.

Although there are numerous African American Christian church denominations in North America, utilizing diverse forms of musicianship in their services, popular understandings of gospel drumming can be most directly linked to developments within black Pentecostalism. The performative characteristics of Pentecostal religiosity are essential to understanding the often loud, emphatic, improvisatory style that is attributed to gospel drumming, as these drummers “perform with emotion” and express “gratitude

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 363-364.

towards God,”<sup>18</sup> connecting emotional experience with musical improvisation and spiritual release. Black Pentecostal churches have long utilized musical instruments and encouraged improvisatory performances during the service, calling on musicians and congregants to be emotionally moved by the Spirit. These musical performances are characterized by emotional freedom, intensity, spontaneity, and physical expressivity, facilitating community interaction,<sup>19</sup> placing a strong emphasis on aspects of being “saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Half of the service is completely comprised of music, replete with foot-stomping, hand-clapping, and complex rhythms with a series of outbursts and shouts.<sup>21</sup> The exaggerated physical gestures and musical embellishments can point to “the soulful spontaneity of the Sanctified [Pentecostal] church and the animated exhortation of the Sanctified preacher...emulating and inciting an emotional intensity parallel to the Holy Spirit possession that is a trademark of the Sanctified worship service.”<sup>22</sup> These churches have functioned as an important site for musical innovation and the use of new musical technologies, as many black churches today—Pentecostal, or otherwise—are outfitted with the latest musical products including in-ear monitors, drum kit isolation screens, and costly PA systems.

Black Pentecostal church congregations, as with other denominations, are comprised of closely-knit communities. Members often address each other as brother, sister, and mother, sing in call-and-response format, and punctuate individual and

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<sup>18</sup> Reed 2003, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Cusic 2002a, 121.

<sup>21</sup> Cusic 2002b, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Cusic 2002a, 15.

congregational singing with claps, shouts, and other gestures of encouragement.<sup>23</sup> Once the full expression of the Spirit is felt to have been achieved, the service concludes. Through the adoption of strict codes of dress, doctrine, and worship, these black churches in many cases offered a sense of moral superiority over whites throughout the early 1800s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, offering a constructive response to the unlikelihood of achieving social, political, or economic equality.<sup>24</sup> According to Melanie Reed, in the US the philosophies of Evangelism, Holiness, and Pentecostalism have become so compatible that the three terms are frequently used interchangeably.<sup>25</sup> However, according to Sandra Barnes, what characterizes contemporary black Churches as progressive today is the cross-denominational adoption of neo-Pentecostal themes in Methodist and Baptist congregations, emphasizing charismatic worship services and preaching, the urging of the Holy Spirit, and expectations of spiritual and secular success.<sup>26</sup> The use of musical instruments in some cases intensified the desire for conversion that characterized Evangelical practices, adding to and expanding upon the practice of *glossolalia* ('speaking in tongues').<sup>27</sup> In many ways, gospel drumming practices exemplify a form of instrumentalized glossolalia. These church drummers improvise complex passages and patterns in accordance with the spiritual trajectory of the service, often without the ability to recall what they just performed. In some cases, gospel drummers take liberties with time, stretching the pulse through extensive solos and fills, and in most cases the aesthetic of the style is to perform these fills cleanly, often getting back into a groove on beat one.

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<sup>23</sup> Reed, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Reed, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Barnes 2010, 53.

<sup>27</sup> Reed, 7-8.

Musical instruments have long been integrated into black Pentecostal and Holiness church services, and indeed these were some of the first American congregations to use them since instruments were long considered to be “of the Devil” by Evangelical and Baptist denominations.<sup>28</sup> The drum kit—and prior to this, percussion, such as the tambourine, hand claps, and other instruments—continues to serve an important function within black churches in its accompaniment of the choir, punctuating key sermonic and hymnal phrasings, and textual readings.

I) *The Spirit, Professionalism, and the Intangibility of ‘Feel’*

In Robert L. Stone’s text, *Sacred Steel* (2010), which examines the legacy and ingenuity of lap steel guitar playing in particular Pentecostal churches in the Southern US (the Keith and Jewell Dominion Churches), we can glean some very important insights concerning the connections between black Pentecostalism and the dynamic characteristics of church musicianship. According to Stone, making a ‘joyful noise’ (Psalms 100:1) is an essential element in Pentecostal worship.<sup>29</sup> As these churches are extremely demonstrative, music—both instrumental and vocal—plays a central role in worship and reflects “what and how the steel guitarists play.”<sup>30</sup> The steel guitarist and rhythm section are expected to increase the energy level of a song, which in turn inspires the congregation.<sup>31</sup> Inspired improvisations are also expected, as playing pieces completely as written is almost unheard of.<sup>32</sup> “For example, a listener unfamiliar with this manner of worship may perceive the music as repetitive and excessively loud and

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<sup>28</sup> Cusic 2002a, 121; Reed, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Stone 2010, 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

dramatic—that is, ‘over the top.’” But, Stone continues, “characteristics such as repetition and wild, intensely dramatic passages serve important functions in worship services and other church meetings...in order to heighten the worship experience.”<sup>33</sup> The service is ultimately controlled by the pastor, but spontaneity is recognized as an essential element of the religious experience; congregants dance, perform percussive rhythms through clapping, and even use instruments brought from home, all of which raises the overall intensity and volume of the service.<sup>34</sup> The steel guitarist utilizes this energy and improvises according to the situation, which can include matching the cues directed by the pastor as well as drawing upon a vast repertoire of spirituals and hymns that congregants may spontaneously initiate during a service (attempting, then, to draw the singer into the correct pitch and to allow for the other members to join in through consistent rhythm).<sup>35</sup>

According to Stone, rhythm comes first for many of these Pentecostal church musicians, as the drum set is most often their first instrument. The emphasis on rhythm for steel guitar players was instilled through rhythmic ‘framing’ on the guitar—strumming it percussively—a skill that one develops when first starting out on the instrument.<sup>36</sup> The drummers in these churches must perform at high volumes in accordance to the energy and in response to the overall volume of the guitars, congregational voices, and other instruments, often “resorting to cymbal crashes in an effort to increase the energy level.”<sup>37</sup> Stone points out one of the main critiques of gospel

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 35.

drummers: “consequently, Keith Dominion drummers who have not played outside of church have a reputation for playing loudly and using excessive cymbal crashes. Those who choose to perform outside of church must learn to control their dynamics and use of the cymbals.”<sup>38</sup>

*Sacred Steel* articulates how the musical religiosity of black Pentecostalism can affect and inform the musical developments and performance styles of its church musicians. One theory that can help to describe this process is the Bourdieuan concept of *habitus*. John Shepherd describes this theory as “a logic of practice deriving from the internalization of objective social conditions through successive processes of socialization...taking into account the full force of social structures at the same time as remaining sensitive to the ability of individuals to strategically engage the lived consequences of such structures.”<sup>39</sup> It is a “mediating notion that helps us revoke the commonsense duality between the individual and the social...capturing the *internalization of externality and the externalization of internality* [emphasis mine].”<sup>40</sup> One’s experience of living within a certain musical world (as structured by these social, historical, and cultural dimensions) becomes embodied, operating beneath the level of consciousness. Although the *habitus* guides all actions—tending to produce practices patterned after the social structures that spawned them—autonomy is still achieved through *individuation*: each person has a unique trajectory and location within the world, even though our social categories of judgment and action are shared by all those who were subjected to similar

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> Shepherd 1991, 176.

<sup>40</sup> Zafirovski 2004, 2.

social conditions and conditionings.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the practices of sacred steel and gospel drumming are shaped and informed by the social conditions and structures of Pentecostalism, internalizing its religiosity into musical expression (rhythmic glossolalia, for instance) that signify social cohesion and individualism.

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For many of the world's most famous gospel drummers, black churches provide essential spaces for musical development and spiritual education. In church situations, according to Aaron Spears, "the organist... was normally the person who was pretty much in control of everything. Your job as the drummer was to support what he was doing. He or she would always be the one to say, 'Hey, you're rushing,' or 'You're dragging.' So that was my click track and my metronome."<sup>42</sup> Teddy Campbell, for instance, who is widely known for performing with the American Idol band, stated in *Modern Drummer*:

I grew up in church, playing strictly gospel music. I think that's the best school ever, because not only does your pocket get strong in that setting, your awareness of what's going on *around* you improves, because you have to pay attention to so many things in church [...] *And spiritually too, you've got to be in tune with what's happening. If the spirit is trying to move to a worship mode or to more praise and aggressive music, you've got to be able to switch over.*<sup>43</sup> (emphasis mine)

Chris Coleman, another well-known gospel drummer in the industry, observes:

We cover every genre of music in gospel. The beat may be a blues shuffle, a four-on-the-floor dance beat, a straight-8th rock thing, or even a waltz. Church drummers also get real-life performance experience from the start. In all the weekly services, you're playing in front of a lot of people who are really into the music. There's a lot of pressure to make the music groove and feel good. There are always other drummers waiting around who are anxious for their opportunity to play, so if you want to stay on the drums, you have to

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> *Modern Drummer* Interview, "Fantastic Four: From the Church to the Shed." Stable URL: <http://www.moderndrummer.com/site/2009/05/fantastic-four/>. Accessed March 2, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> *Modern Drummer* interview with Teddy Campbell, "Back through the Stack." Stable URL: <http://www.moderndrummer.com/site/2012/01/back-through-stack-teddy-campbell/#.T2oPzI4kg7A>. Accessed February 18, 2012.

lay that fire! [laughs] In church, if you don't have a really good feel, you get bumped. You have to play with a lot of intensity from the first note of the song, whether it's slow or fast. The church is one of the best training grounds around for stage experience.<sup>44</sup>

What these accounts demonstrate is how the fostering and development of musical professionalism is quite apparent in these church communities. Church drummers have to learn songs very quickly and must often perform songs they do not know at a moment's notice: "A lot of times we would do concerts where there was no sheet music and we had thirteen songs in different styles. So just being able to absorb music quickly and keep it locked in is how I've learned to approach music."<sup>45</sup> Some church drummers also play in front of hundreds, even thousands of congregants every Sunday, taking directions and cues from the choir master or the organist, making sure they aren't over-powering the singers and that they're contributing something both musical and spiritual to the service. This kind of experience often begins at a very young age, and these sentiments were also revealed in three interviews that I conducted with African American Church drummers from the Greater Toronto Area. For each interviewee, the role of the sacred is of paramount importance to understanding the intent of gospel drumming and the forms of practice that develop out of its church service context. Some started performing in the church environment as early as age eight often in spontaneous circumstances due to the main church drummer being injured or sick one day. Such was the case for interview participant Chris, who recounted that:

All the musicians, they just disappeared. We don't know what happened. My dad was the only one that was there—he plays guitar—so he looked at me one day and said "Well, we

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<sup>44</sup> Modern Drummer interview with Chris Campbell, "Amazing Journey." Stable URL: <http://www.moderndrummer.com/site/2011/02/chris-coleman/#.T2oQI44kg7A>. Accessed February 18, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Modern Drummer interview, "Keith Harris." Stable URL: <http://www.moderndrummer.com/site/2004/05/keith-harris/#.T2oQfY4kg7A>. Accessed February 17, 2012.

don't have anybody else, so I think this is your time" [...] So I became the drummer there on a weekly basis, at eight I've just been playing ever since.

Tara also provides details about the excitement and pressure associated with playing in large 'multi concerts,' where a number of choirs, solo artists, and ensembles perform only two songs each in front of huge church crowds:

In the choir, that's when you start to play and try to impress... but basically you're showing up with two songs to play. If that's all you have to play and all your peers are in the audience and you have two songs [...] you're practicing for weeks, two songs. It really does become about putting all your power and glory and craziness into these two songs. It becomes like you're trying to do your best, trying to stand out and be appreciated, and that's when it starts to get crazy. That's where the craziness... I don't want to say it becomes necessary, but you know, everyone wants to be that drummer where everyone went "whoa"! And that's the context when it's most necessary, so to speak [to play gospel chops]. It's not so much the Sunday mornings. That's when you have the whole congregation and you don't want to lose them.

The characteristic features of gospel drumming showmanship, improvisation, and performativity can be directly linked to the various musical events and practices that occur in church environments. As Gerald Heyward similarly recounts in *Kick Snare Hat*, young drummers would often wait all week until the next service, working on the same patterns and ideas but always trying to showcase something new for the congregation and for their peers. In this way, the church service functions as a very demanding forum for developing one's musicality by presenting ideas to the congregation:

Being a Church drummer, when you go home on Monday, and you had a good weekend—so, which means that you might have played at a Saturday night program, you might have played at a Friday night program and then you played your church on Sunday. Between those three days, the compliments that you got from those three days would make you, you know, leave, be home on Monday, start practicing from Monday all the way to next Friday. So, what you would do was either go over what you already knew, or, you would just go over the service in your head. You would say, 'Oh yeah, I know we're going to play shout music, so let me try and get a new shout beat.' So, you get the new shout beat, but then you say, let me try and add something to it that I didn't play last time. So, that became, kind of like, what you would be doing. Or, just fooling around to see what you could play, you know what I mean? Hearing different things in your head and just trying it... and if it works, you're going to try it in the service, you're going to try it somewhere.' (Gerald Heyward, 12:40-13:36min)

The pressure and anticipation that accompany church performances and special church events call upon young drummers to play at a very sophisticated and professional level. In the process, these kinds of church practices signify a constellation of meaning and belonging for these drummers, generating forms of cultural and social capital. For Tara, *actual* church/gospel drummers have to “start from the bottom,” accompanying a choir under the lead of a choir director or the organist:

I think a lot of non-gospel drummers...if they really think that they're going to play gospel, they're really going to have to start from the bottom up, because you have to learn to be in it, so to speak. Otherwise, it's a disaster...not a lot of people can grab the intention at the same time as learning it... You can grab the fills, but I guess it doesn't necessarily mean anything unless you're doing it within its intention...if it isn't played within its right intention, then it's nothing... You only really have value if you start from scratch and build up.

Consequently, playing for free, paying your dues, and learning how to accompany before diving straight into the complex gospel chops reflect the importance of the role of the church in the lives of these drummers on the road towards professionalism. The hermeneutic role of spiritual *intention* is of great importance here; not only in the sense of one's own personal relationship to God but also in the understanding of how faith should take precedence over any material or personal gain. This point is repeatedly emphasized in drumming forums and websites (often with the use of problematic essentialist and racialized language), where many up and coming drummers are interested in performing gospel drumming in all-black churches and choirs:

Hey everyone....I have got the basics down from watching great drummers like Aaron Spears, Gerald Heyward etc....But does anyone have any books or dvds u recommend to watch to get those killers fills up to speed or even to learn them from scratch! Or do u have any great fills to show? Im a white drummer in Uk, trying to make it in the Black Gospel Scene in usa...!! Also... is there anywhere in the usa, where i can go to really get into and see the gospel scene? Any festivals or places i should know about.... Thanks everyone [JRdrummer20]

Important point. One of the things i've picked up on gospolchops interviews and past threads is that it's not cool to place your drumming gift before your faith in God - by all means overplay and throw down absurdly inappropriate fills but always do so in praise of your deity. If you don't have a faith, or it isn't strong enough then i'd imagine they'd smell you out sooner or later. If you're just wanting to play like the gospelchops guys, then study the website, and be black. [jonescrusher]<sup>46</sup>

As Cora Coleman-Dunham states in *Kick Snare Hat*: “gospel music definitely has an influence on my playing for different reasons...spiritually, it’s one thing when you play music...being Christians, and I’m sure the other guys would agree with this, it’s one thing when you play music and you love God and you want to represent God, but it is another thing when you play music that is for God.” (Cora, 11:53min). A self-identified ‘gospel drummer’ who lacks the religious and performance background of playing in church is often regarded as inauthentic—something consistently emphasized amongst black Pentecostal Church drummers in DVDs and in my interviews:

Gospel drumming or being a musician in the church is more than just playing, it’s a spiritual thing. Its something that comes from the inside that is very difficult to explain to somebody who does not have much background of being in the church...[who] doesn’t have an understanding about what it is to have a relationship with God [...] It’s not something I’m thinking about, it’s something that’s just coming out of me...there’s a certain feel that comes from inside and it adds a different approach to the music.<sup>47</sup>

Interview participant Chris emphasizes how the sacred intention permeates the discourse of gospel drumming. The ineffability of spirituality and of performing in the service of God directly stimulates musical practices in meaningful ways. Religiosity emphasizes the importance of placing faith in God above the individualistic gains of developing better drumming technique through appropriation and consistent practice. The path towards musical professionalism is placed within a certain ideological stratum, undergirding the

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<sup>46</sup> Drummerworld.com discussion board, “Gospel Chops.” Stable URL: <http://www.drummerworld.com/forums/showthread.php?t=31721>. Accessed July 20, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Interview participant Chris.

talents and successes of these individuals as indicative of personal faith, generating unique interpretations about the cultivation of drumming techniques in the face of religious values.

However, this point also presents a number of questions concerning the marketing and consumption of gospel products to the broader drumming audience. While gospel drumming is often cited for its cultural distinction in the black Pentecostal church and other African American denominations, the dominant narrative and promotion of gospel in the mainstream drumming industry circulates mostly around trans- and cross-cultural claims similar to those made in the appropriation of any drumming technique or style—that regardless of ethnicity or background, anyone can perform gospel just as one can learn Afro-Cuban, Brazilian, jazz, progressive rock, etc. In this way, the *objective* approach to drumming—sets of replicable techniques and patterns—integrates gospel performance into a network of skill-sets and methods that coexist through employing a relativistic interpretation of all drumming styles. And yet, many black church drummers remain apprehensive about the idea that gospel can be appropriated, studied, consumed, and performed authentically by those outside of the church community. Similarly, although sometimes for different reasons, participants in various drumming forums and online discussion groups sometimes express essentialist and racialized declarations that perpetuate the inherent ‘blackness’ of gospel, obfuscating the valuable parallel discourse of musical enculturation and relegating gospel to the precincts of *race*.

Such practices raise several important questions. First of all, how are we to frame the distinct ontological contexts and beliefs that structure the practices of Pentecostal musicality in the lives of actual gospel drummers? How do we account for these

considerations within the broader pedagogical framework of objective drumming technique? What are the examples, methods, and practices used to promote gospel drumming, and how might these be problematic? Is race a prevailing factor in the gospel drumming discourse? These are the kinds of questions I will try to examine and address in the following section and throughout the thesis, emphasizing aspects of the musical habitus of the Pentecostal church and how these are framed in the broader drumming consumer culture and discourse.

### ***Branding the Inexpressible***

#### *Tensions and Issues in the Commodification and Professionalization of Gospel*

The gospel category has been exploited throughout various drumming industries in order to market and sell product. As one church drummer from Toronto observed, gospel cymbal packs “are just regular cymbals. They weren’t made especially for gospel music. Do they need special cymbals for gospel music? Exactly, it’s foolishness! But again, business; it’s all business, so they’re making money off of black people and Christians because the Christian market is huge.”<sup>48</sup> However, according to Sabian Cymbals, these packs were modeled after what many Sabian endorsees were using in their ‘gospel’ set-up. Sabian offers two different gospel packs. Each include 5 cymbals, mostly deriving from their AAX, HH, and HHX lines (see image below). According to Sabian’s Master Product Specialist Mark Love,

AAX, HHX, and HH cymbals are ideal because Praise & Worship music requires a wide range of musical dynamics. The hats are medium top/heavy bottom for crisp, clear sticking; the splash is quick and punchy; the crash is fast and full; and the ride has a bright bell with clear stroke response across the rest of its surface. By being responsive at all volumes - from low to loud - and producing tonal qualities preferred for this music,

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<sup>48</sup> Interview participant Cory.

both Praise & Worship sets - AAX for brighter sounds, HH/HHX for warmer, darker tones - are ideal for small or large musical and venue settings.<sup>49</sup>

These cymbals were chosen as appropriate and popular configurations for the contemporary gospel drummer, repackaged and priced at a cheaper rate than buying separate pieces, allowing for drummers to access and afford top-quality cymbals. Still, the price for one cymbal pack hovers around \$1000, which is very expensive for most church budgets and young drummers. The Sabian brand is also associated with many professional drummers who are particularly influential in the gospel drumming scene, for example Dave Weckl, who was the chief artist consultant for much of the Sabian HHX line (including his 'Legacy' cymbals). Furthermore, since most gospel drummers perform multiple genres and styles of music, each pack is meant to address a particular need, for example catering to those who play in mostly heavy music genres (AAX), or those who play jazz and other styles with a wider dynamic range and with a preference for dark and dry cymbal tone (HHX).

Despite these arguments in favour of such marketing, one interview participant (Cory) expressed significant concern about the intentions of the industry, revealing the sort of anxiety that often arises out of the commoditization of any new popular music style or genre, as well as a distrust for "white corporate America," who "for years would not even look at the black gospel drummers and the black gospel musicians, [were] all of a sudden 'whoa, we've been missing out on making money from a whole group of people.'" At the same time, Cory also contradictorily stated that in Canada, "we don't see the power of the Christian market because our Christian market here is very un-

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<sup>49</sup> Sabian Cymbals article/interview with Mark Love. Stable URL: <http://www.harmonycentral.com/blogs/News-Sabian/2010/08/25/sabian-presents-gospel-praise-worship-cymbal-packs>. Accessed July 20, 2012.

tapped...and that's one of my dreams is to be able to tap into it a lot more than what it is." As can be seen in this apparent contradiction, positions in the debate surrounding gospel drumming's commoditization and consumption are complex, and can vary because of the broad and diverse make-up of the international drumming community. Opinions on matters of exploitation and misinformation, or conversely the encouragement of entrepreneurial success, largely rest upon the drummer's personal relationship to the gospel category, which includes its cultural and often historically racial significations. Perhaps Cory's frustrations and bitterness towards the mass commoditization of gospel drumming focuses on how major drumming brands are benefitting from the black church market, preferring to support and advocate the development of brands and productions that are more closely associated with the black church community. According to Gerald Forrest, creator of GospelChops.com, black church drummers faced many obstacles and barriers in the music and drumming industry:

In 2004, when I first envisioned what is now GospelChops, I had no idea of what it would become. The only thing I knew for sure was that gospel musicians were some of the most talented cats in the world, yet, the most overlooked as well. Back then there was no such thing as "gospel" cymbals or "gospel" drumsticks. In fact, many gospel musicians seeking to get a mainstream gig in those days had to almost deny their gospel roots. I simply felt a desire to help; a desire to push the "church cats" to the forefront, where I thought they belonged.<sup>50</sup>

Cory hails the work of Gerald from Gospel Chops, stating that he "opened up so many doors for a lot of those guys. And I remember when he started gospel chops [...] he was one of the guys who approached big business, corporate, white America and said, 'Hey endorse us! Look at how many people are buying my product; look at how many people are interested in my product...'" Cory also emphasized how he worked very hard

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<sup>50</sup> GospelChops.com 'Thank You' post. Stable URL: <http://gospelchops.com/2012/03/25/thank-you-gospelchops-no-thank-you/>. Accessed July 6, 2012.

throughout the 1990s to get drum endorsements. After securing them, he mentored some up and coming church drummers in the area who wanted to get noticed and sponsored as well, stating how for a very long time it was difficult:

I had people from the States emailing me and calling me, “How’d you do it? How do I go about getting endorsements?” So, I started writing blogs on the Internet, telling people how to go after endorsements because I knew a lot of people from the different companies. And so, you know, a lot of these guys were starting to get seen by these different companies. I saw Sabian had a gospel pack and I just started laughing my head off. I mean [...] you can’t say you’re taking money from the niggers more than that (laughing). There’s nothing more to say like, “let’s take the black people’s money” more than that ignorance.

The widespread recognition of gospel drummers, according to these accounts, indicates both a long-overdue notice by the industry, as well as an awareness that the commodification of gospel drumming opened whole new sets of problematics and tensions.

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Returning to the topics of ineffability, feel, and their associations with black religiosity, the tropes of Pentecostalism are rearticulated in many gospel drumming products (especially in DVDs). Interestingly, the majority of these drumming texts are portrayed as being instructive and educational, although many of the key points of interest in these areas are expressed in terms of incommunicable experience (innate groove, feel, etc.). In this way, the mass commodification and consumption of gospel drumming has provided a widespread forum for the circulation of Pentecostal values and musical interpretation, inflecting the narrative of the style as being one of cultural distinction. One of the most well-known gospel drummers, Aaron Spears, states in a *Modern Drummer* interview:

I'm constantly getting hit up on Facebook and MySpace: "Hey, how do I get to that level?" I'm like, "Dude, honestly, it's a chance thing." For me, God just kind of placed me in a situation where I was able to play in front of people that gave me a shot. But there's no surefire way, and that's the truth. There are so many amazingly talented musicians and players that just never get the opportunity.<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, throughout his highly successful *Beyond the Chops* instructional DVD, which is set up in a master class/workshop scenario, Spears consistently described his technique and approach as being mostly about 'feel,' even claiming that there is often no particular method to his playing:

I've noticed a lot of your fills I have a hard time hearing where the ONE is. Can you demonstrate some of the ways you phrase your fills to give that illusion of off-time, back into time again? [Attendee 1]

It's all in, like, you know, where you start it. There's not a particular method to it, it's just, kinda of like, just a feeling thing. Just get in where you fit in.<sup>52</sup> [Aaron Spears]

When you're playing in the odd-meters like that, are you counting? Are you singing the melody, like, how do you know where you are? [Attendee 2]

For me man, I um, it's just, it's really a feel thing, to be honest with you. I hate to keep saying it, but it's just one of those things where I think I've practiced it enough to where it's just kind of an internal thing...it's just really a feel thing, it's kind of like an internal thing to just feel where the ONE is...<sup>53</sup> [Aaron Spears]

Spears elaborates on how performing in church "allows you to play with that emotion, you really play from your heart ...for me, growing up in church, I really play from my heart because it was an expression of gratitude for me to tell God thank you for allowing me to play with this gift, allowing me to give this gift back to Him."<sup>54</sup> The role of emotion, interpreted and channeled as the Pentecostal mediation of divine Spirit, functions as a powerful instrument to express musical ideas, as well as grounding gospel

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<sup>51</sup> Modern Drummer Article, "Fantastic Four: From the Church to the Shed." Stable URL: <http://www.moderndrummer.com/site/2009/05/fantastic-four/>. Accessed March 12, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Disc One, "Aaron Spears Beyond the Chops: Groove, Musicality and Technique" (Hudson Music and Hal Leonard Corporation, 2009), 8:37 to 10:47min.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 1:16:24 to 1:17:47min.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 14:45 min.

drumming as a style that is premised upon spiritual release. Interview participant Chris also expressed these kinds of observations in his approach to drumming: “When I play in church on a Sunday morning, I can’t exactly say or tell people, because people used to ask me all the time when they see me play, ‘Can you show me what you did in this song here?’ I can’t do it, because I don’t remember what I did because to be playing in a setting like that, it’s almost spiritual.”

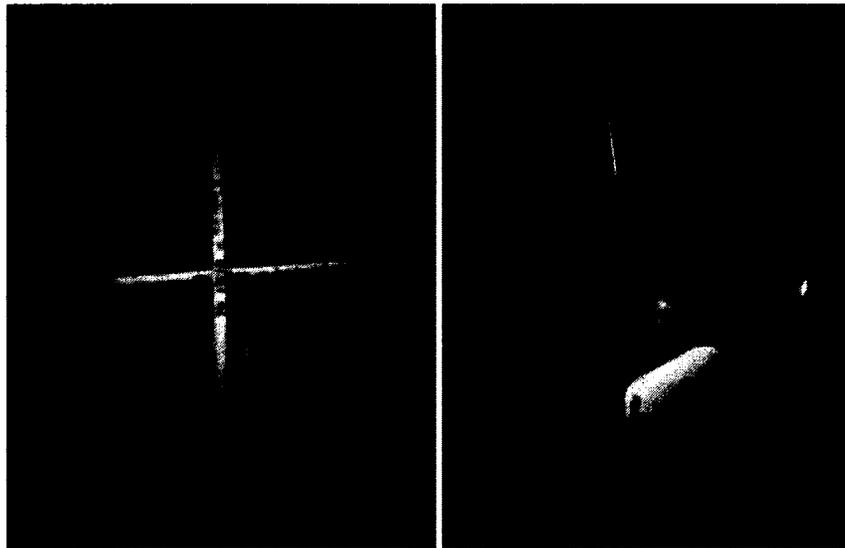
This kind of ineffable dimension to the gospel sound is repeated in many successful gospel drumming DVDs which, again, are often marketed as being educational materials. For instance, *Kick Snare Hat* (2008) specifically emphasized the importance of religion in the lives of four ‘hip hop and R&B drummers,’ even utilizing a number of Christian iconographic images (most often drumsticks in the shape of a cross) to visually connect church-based practices with their musicianship (see images below). Such imagery appears in many gospel drumming advertisements and DVD covers, including the logos for Christian drumming collectives (Drummers For Jesus, for example) who organize international conferences and workshops with numerous professional Christian drummers, as well as the Tony Royster, Jr., DVD *The Evolution of Tony Royster, Jr.* (2009), which features an illustration of Royster, Jr. as an angel.

In *Kick Snare Hat*, the narrative is loosely structured around the importance of playing the fundamental parts of the drum kit, featuring solo performances of mostly groove-based segments on just a kick drum, snare drum, and hi hat cymbal. Echoing a familiar tendency to frame gospel playing as ‘more than chops’ (hence, the suggestive title of Aaron Spears’ DVD *Beyond the Chops*), the performances connect the legacy of African American groove drumming in gospel and secular popular music after the 1950s

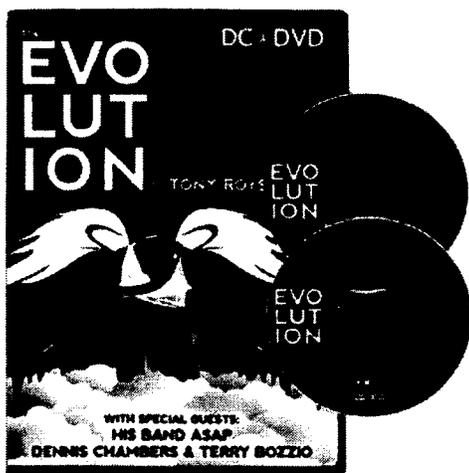
with the maturity and technical development that is associated with these progressive, contemporary Black gospel drummers. In *Kick Snare Hat*, each drummer talked openly about their faith and the role that God plays in their professional careers and musical development, informing us of how they view their trajectory to becoming well-known and sought-after professional musicians. For Cora Coleman-Dunham, her relationship with certain individuals and mentors in her life were prayers answered by God for her to meet them; similarly, for Aaron Spears, he stated that without God, he would not have been able to meet the people that helped getting him where he is today: “because he saw fit for me to be able to interact with these people and meet these folks and do these different gigs...like, it’s definitely all him” (Aaron Spears, 14:00-14:36min). Each segment featured the role of the church and gospel music in each of the drummer’s lives—Nisan Stewart led his band and church choir inside a church in his hometown of Los Angeles; Aaron Spears’ discussed how his parents, like many devout and strict Pentecostal families, did not let him listen to anything but gospel and church music; and Gerald Heyward performed a ‘Shout’ 2/4 gospel beat with his uncle ‘Butch’ on organ at his Brooklyn Church.

The staging of religiosity in the *Kick Snare Hat* DVD situates these hip-hop and R&B drummers within a distinct musical and cultural narrative. Interestingly, the packaging of the DVD does not mention the term ‘gospel,’ and yet it is almost completely about gospel drumming—hip-hop and R&B are able to implicitly signify the presence of gospel and black religiosity through their juxtaposition with more explicitly religious imagery and themes. The apparent absence of technique or method for these gospel drummers is continually rearticulated throughout this and many other DVDs. For

Heyward, "Gospel drumming is not technical; it's a feeling. It's all about a feeling. It's all about whatever comes up, whatever happens in a service. It's what you learn, what you're eating, what you're hearing. Most gospel drummers listen to other gospel drummers, where I listen to jazz drummers and just play gospel, but there's a twist that we put on it that you can't teach nobody it...it's just gotta be something that you're around." (14:26-15:00min) This sentiment, however, can problematically present gospel drumming as an innate skill, where groove and feel are not learned but are something internal and without a specific pedagogical technique. Of course, the interpretation offered by Heyward and others does not fully limit gospel style to the realm of black religiosity; it is quite clear that any drummer could transcribe examples of gospel drumming performances and replicate these patterns, or identify certain repetitive ideas and themes and discern a field of gospel knowledge.



(Above, L-R: Gerald Heyward and Cora Coleman-Dunham in 'Kick Snare Hat')



(Above L-R: 'The Evolution of Tony Royster, Jr.' DVD cover; Drummers for Jesus icon)

Interview participants Chris and Cory were both quite explicit in asserting that gospel is a style just like jazz or fusion:

...it doesn't matter what color you are, because I know some white people that kill black people at gospel drumming...it's a style, it's just that ignorance prevails over anything else in this world, usually, and so that ignorance is something even in our churches that keeps our churches segregated and apart. (Cory)

I'm not going to dispute the fact that gospel drumming has a unique sound. It's just like jazz and fusion. A jazz drummer sounds like it has its own element; when you hear a jazz drummer play, you can tell he's a jazz drummer based on his touch, his feel, his finesse. When you go to fusion drummer, he's a little more technical, there's a little more backbeat to it. You know, every genre has a sound, and I do agree that a gospel musician has a unique feel or sound to their playing...(Chris)

Still, for Chris, the sound that gospel players provide is something different, offering a 'twist' to other genres and styles:

There's a certain feel that comes from inside and it adds a different approach to the music. If a fusion guy called me to play, it's not going to exactly sound like fusion, it's going to sound like the influence that I'm bringing to it which is coming from inside of me. A lot of people may say that you sound like a gospel drummer and stuff like that...well that's just what's flowing out of me, I can't necessarily say it's gospel drumming, it's just what's coming out of me.

However, the narrative of spiritual ineffability and innate talent can potentially give rise to notions of natural musicianship for all black Pentecostal drummers—a move which is uncomfortably close to familiar racialized and essentialist discourses of black musicality. As interview participant Tara states, for her, a gospel drummer is “someone who plays in church... a black church, though... Someone who plays black gospel music, plays in a choir. The word black, to be honest, that’s what I kind of expect.”

These interpretations of the gospel sound articulate only a portion of the discourse of innateness surrounding gospel drumming. The following section will outline some examples and problematics that arise out of these kinds of assertions within the field of mainstream drumming education, highlighting the sentiments expressed by actual church drummers as well as pointing out issues in the portrayal, commoditization, and reception of gospel drumming in the broader drumming community.

### *1) Shedding, Shouting: Gospel Chops and Linear Drumming*

There are thousands of online video clips that feature complex and sensational gospel chops from all over the world.<sup>55</sup> Gospel chops are often short, complex, and orchestrated fill ideas that are to be learned and applied within a number of musical situations. They incorporate a variety of techniques and styles into predominately 1- or 2-bar phrases. The problem is that, for some of my interviewees, the massive popularity of gospel chops have influenced a generation of young drummers to play too loudly with too many fills in a group performance setting, doing so under the assumption that they are

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<sup>55</sup> Stable URL:

[http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=gospel+chops&oq=gospel+chops&gs\\_l=youtube.3..35i3912j0i8.1912777.1913402.0.1913548.5.5.0.0.0.118.464.2j3.5.0...0.0...1ac.1.cvnTYwC3OsU](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=gospel+chops&oq=gospel+chops&gs_l=youtube.3..35i3912j0i8.1912777.1913402.0.1913548.5.5.0.0.0.118.464.2j3.5.0...0.0...1ac.1.cvnTYwC3OsU). Accessed September 11, 2012.

truly 'playing gospel.' The practice has also become completely separated from the church service context, obscuring the technique of using complex fills as an accompaniment to other instruments and voices. Recounting one instance at a Brampton Ontario church, Tara was asked to watch a recent Humber College graduate audition with a black church choir:

The singers were so uneasy by his playing. His focus was on getting these fast notes and fills in, as opposed to playing the groove and, you know, establishing the bass and the song and whatever. The guy in charge comes over to me and says 'He doesn't sound like he went to school'...he was confused! [...] I tried to quickly explain that some people have an interpretation of what gospel is, and he went and he learned a couple of gospel fills and came in and tried to plug it all in, in just this one song—thinking maybe that that was what people were expecting to hear. Maybe he was confused, too...he didn't even know it was a disaster. He was just so into getting those fills in that he didn't notice that the singers were uneasy, looking over and wondering what was happening in their song they're supposed to be singing.

Like Tara, all of the interview participants expressed a general concern over the representation of gospel drumming on the Internet. In many YouTube gospel drumming clips, the focus is almost entirely on a certain idea or section that is isolated and that features only the busiest, most complex sections from an entire song. What could be a song performed during a church service that lasted 30 minutes to an hour is reduced to a small clip on video:

They missed the beginning of the song and they missed the verse...they missed other songs that didn't maybe have that...it's not just all that, and I think that's what the biggest misinterpretation of gospel drumming.<sup>56</sup> (Tara)

Chris also felt that "a lot of the young guys coming up now are watching [YouTube videos] and think that this is the way it should be, and therefore, everybody is going to end up sounding the same." The influence and accessibility of gospel video clips has shaped a certain understanding of the style, much to the chagrin of drummers who

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<sup>56</sup> Tara and I were discussing a particular gospel drumming clip, entitled the 'Triple Back Beat Gospelchops.com;'" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRAj6e5XoqY>; Accessed on March 05, 2012.

actually perform gospel music in black churches. Echoing Gerald Heyward and others in the *Kick Snare Hat* DVD, Chris states that

...you can teach somebody the chop or the combination that you do, but it will not have the sound or the element [...] because gospel drumming is not just notes, it's a feel, its spiritual, it's something that comes from inside [...] So, the educational sides of it, you could write out charts and licks and stuff like that, but if you don't have that element of church in you, it's not going to have that same sound.

The gospel chop has become an essential aspect for drumming practices in general, as it integrates many other styles, techniques, and traditions. The blending of genres—gospel jazz chops, metal/gospel chops, etc.—is representative of the fluidity of the term, indicating a practice that has become far removed from its original intention. However, the immediate questions would be: how are certain drum fills or chops distinctly 'gospel?' How does this complex, often progressive metal-sounding pattern reference gospel music? The de-contextualization of these fills from their role in the church service obscures the original intention behind gospel drumming patterns and fills: to provide energy and to articulate the Spirit present to the service. It would be a mistake to assume that all chops are inherently sacred—a problematic form of reductionism that would not allow for the possibility of difference or change. Instead, it is important to question how the rise and popularity of gospel drumming revolves mostly around the chop despite the fact that 'gospel' potentially encompasses not just the use of these fills and patterns but also the complex, rich, and diverse legacy of black church musicianship and gospel music. In one sense, the standardization of gospel chops in the language of popular drumming culture has put emphasis on up and coming black church drummers from the US and Canada. Simultaneously, the potential reductionism of the term can negatively place any black church drummer within the gospel chop category, even if they have no clear associations with the church.

## II) Gospel as a Drumming Style

There are some very unique instances in the Pentecostal church service where the drummer is featured. These established church practices have been highlighted in a number of gospel drumming texts and DVDs, integrating the musical features of Pentecostalism within the context of mainstream drumming culture. Subsequently, the portrayals of gospel drumming in these texts reflect a form of professionalization of Pentecostal church drumming, intersecting the social conditions of the black Pentecostal community with the norms and standards of the mainstream drumming industries (conferences, festivals, educational DVD productions, advertisements, magazine interviews and features, signature-series gospel products, etc.). For example, during the praise break section of a typical gospel 'shout' tune, a fast drum pattern lends itself quite easily to incorporating metal, punk, and progressive rock drumming ideas. For gospel drummers, the 2/4 shout rhythm can gradually speed up from an initially slow, shuffling tempo and is repeated numerous times. These sections can often last for hours. However, for interview participant Cory: "If you really want to get down and nitty gritty, the [gospel] chops are the same chops you play in metal music...like, it's *exactly* the same chops...there's nothing different except for feel. When I play speed metal, it's the same thing as shout music." In this way, the shout section of a Pentecostal service functions as a forum in which new drumming ideas and techniques can be performed at blistering speeds. The technical development and the cultural capital associated with its Pentecostal practice is clearly rearticulated in GospelChops.com's *Shed Sessionz Vol. 2* DVD, where a roomful of African American drummers 'battle' each other in a competitive setting within this 2/4 shout pattern. Known as a gospel shed, these friendly and inclusive

competitive events take place outside the church service context. Participants perform simultaneously in a groove with one another, improvising elaborate drum fills as well as showcasing some new ideas and developments in their individual practice. Interestingly, these Shout music sheds are premised upon the church service context: each musician is expected to punctuate certain sections of the song for spiritual effect and to solidify the congregation in time. The emphasis on finishing a chop on beat ONE on the crash cymbals—as it is frequently seen in the *Shed Sessionz* solos—opens the possibility for any number of complex fills and patterns that could be applied to a Shout tune (as long as they mark these sections of time properly and ‘cleanly’). The very structure of the shout shed in *Shed Sessionz*, then, invites new and unique improvisations for drummers to initiate during the service.

Continuing from Cory’s point on metal drumming, it is important to indicate one of the key developments that helped to shape progressive rock and funk drumming since the 1970s: *linear drumming*. Generally, this is understood as an approach where each drumming surface—be it the hi-hat, snare, kick, or toms—is struck individually, with no two performed in unison. This is in contrast with more standard rock and hip-hop beat patterns, such as indicated in figure 1.

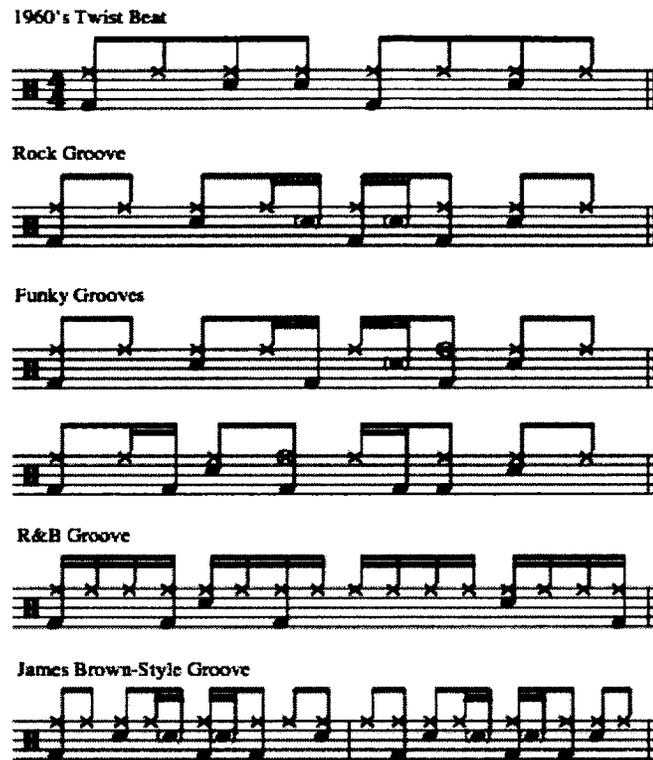


Fig. 1<sup>57</sup>

The syncopated rhythms, as illustrated above, play off of the hi-hat to regulate the eighth- or sixteenth-note pattern, keeping this element consistent and providing a sense of momentum for the pulse. In contrast, figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 indicate that the irregular use of linear techniques in the hi-hat and drums breaks up this consistent eighth or sixteenth-note pattern. One can also notice the distinction between ‘layered’ playing and the individual-surface-oriented performance style of linear drumming, striking different sound sources in an irregular manner, creating interesting and complex-sounding grooves, as well as drum fills—something that gospel drumming is particularly known for:

<sup>57</sup> ‘Rock, Funk, and R&B’ patterns. Stable URL: <https://drummagazine.com/lessons/post/wedding-drumming-101-a-crash-course/>. Accessed March 19, 2012.

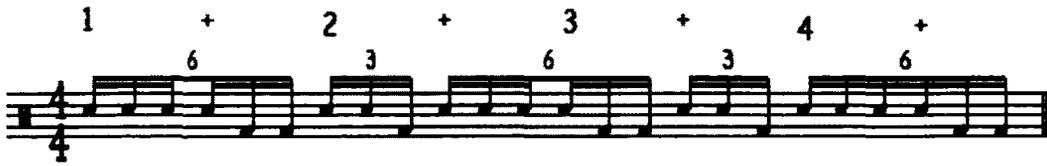


Fig. 2<sup>58</sup>

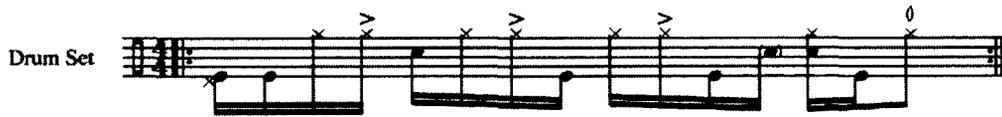


Fig. 3<sup>59</sup>



Fig. 4<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 5<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> 'Gospel Style Linear Example 1' transcription. Stable URL:  
<http://www.drumstheword.com/blog/new-free-drum-lesson-linear-gospel-triplet-style-drum-licks-fills>. Accessed March 9, 2012.

<sup>59</sup> 'Funky Linear Drum Groove.' Stable URL:  
<http://mbsdrumchannel.blogspot.ca/2010/06/funky-linear-drum-groove.html>. Accessed March 9, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> 'Free Drum Lesson: Cool Gospel Linear triplet Lick.' Stable URL:  
<http://www.drumstheword.com/blog/free-drum-lesson-cool-gospel-linear-triplet-lick>. Accessed April 5, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> 'Aaron Spears Fill' (Excerpt). Transcription by Branam, T. stable URL:  
<http://www.drummerworld.com/Videos/aaronspearsslow.html> Accessed March 9, 2012.

In many ways, linear drumming is the direct application of traditional snare drum rudiments and exercises to the kick/snare/hi-hat, creating a new sound and feel. A number of professional drummers are generally credited for these developments, particularly Steve Gadd, Dave Weckl, Rick Gratton, and David Garibaldi. Each interview participant highlighted these drummers as having a considerable influence upon their playing, as do many drummers in the mainstream drumming community. Unsurprisingly, most drummers (including gospel drummers) who read drum magazines cite these very same players as their main influences:

I've studied Vinnie Colaiuta, Dennis Chambers, Tony Williams, and Elvin Jones, and I try to emulate them. My friends will sit by my drums and say, "Do your Vinnie licks" or "Do your Dennis licks." Just from trying to do that and learning all these drummer's styles and mimicking them has helped me create *my* style. I don't come from where Vinnie or Dennis came from; I'm not from Pittsburgh or Baltimore. So what I listen to and think is totally different. When I put my thing on [their styles], it's weird. It's trippy. People trip out on my ability to play odd meters, but I don't even notice when I'm playing them. I don't count 'em; I *feel* 'em.<sup>62</sup> (Thomas Pridgen)

However, the problem is that gospel patterns are transcribed and characterized as being predominately linear in their approach; linear fills that mostly punctuate the ONE during a hip-hop or R&B groove. Objectively, in notated form, gospel and linear techniques are treated as exactly the same, especially in online drumming forums and lesson websites, where linear patterns are referenced as a basis for understanding 'gospel' drumming. Throughout Internet discussion boards and drumming forums, gospel *is* linear drumming, often represented as a separation between the hands and feet (indicated by R[ight] and L[eft] hands and F[oot]/Kick drums). It's "linear sextuplet fills...usually in a pretty simple sticking...just played at high speeds [...] RLLRFRL RFFRLR FRLRFF RLLRFRL

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas Pridgen Modern Drummer Interview, "Turning Bedlam into Beats." Stable URL: <http://www.moderndrummer.com/site/2008/07/thomas-pridgen-2/#.T2oOYo4kg7A>. Accessed March 2, 2012.

[...] that is an example of what they call a "gospel lick" these days...really just linear sextuplets and fun as hell."<sup>63</sup> It's just 'lots of linear overplaying,' 'just a linear fill.'<sup>64</sup> Compounding this reductive definition of a 'gospel' approach is the variety of genres that have been integrated into contemporary forms of Christian worship, extending the label of 'gospel' to signify a wide range of tastes and styles.<sup>65</sup> There is nothing culturally or racially specific about these linear patterns, but once black drummers play them, they are most often identified as being Gospel.

### III) *Mainstream Narratives and Presentations of Gospel Drumming* *Objective Techniques, Particular Contexts*

Developing both astounding technique and deep grooves under the watchful eye of his grandmother, Addie, at the Berkeley Mt. Zion AME Church Of God, Thomas Pridgen learned how to glorify God with a nod to Dennis Chambers, Tony Williams, and Vinnie Colaiuta. Drum gods beware: This young turk is about to steal your thunder and claim your throne.<sup>66</sup>

The majority of educational DVDs that offer historical perspectives on black music and drumming are framed within a nationalistic, Americanized ideology. Danny Gottlieb's *The Evolution of Jazz Drumming* (Hudson Music, 2011), for example, provides lessons on the distinctly American developments on the drum kit and goes in depth about the technical aspects of these historical patterns. Stanton Moore's *Groove Alchemy* (2011) focuses on a chronology of funk and grooves ranging from the 1960s to present day, honing in on southern, New Orleans-style innovations, second-line drumming

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<sup>63</sup> 'Gospel Playing' forum discussion. Stable URL:  
<http://cdn-x.drummerworld.com/forums/showthread.php?p=855130>. Accessed March 19, 2012.

<sup>64</sup> 'Difference between linear fills and gospel chops' forum discussion. Stable URL:  
[www.pearldrumsforum.com/showthread.php?254059-difference-between-linear-fills-and-gospel-chops&s=e80c35b6b103f86e25b84218145b996c](http://www.pearldrumsforum.com/showthread.php?254059-difference-between-linear-fills-and-gospel-chops&s=e80c35b6b103f86e25b84218145b996c). Accessed March 19, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Jeff Davis Interview in *Ultimate Drum Lessons*, 4:20-4:40min.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Pridgen Modern Drummer Interview, "Turning Bedlam into Beats."

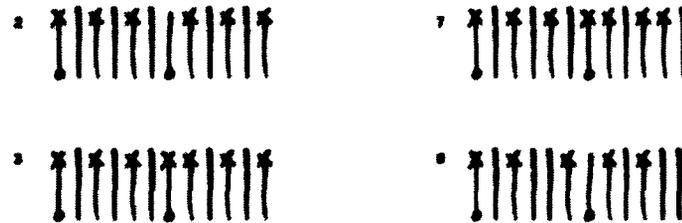
applications, and even breaking down the techniques of James Brown's famous drummers, John 'Jabo' Starks and Clyde Stubblefield. Steve Smith's *Drum Technique/History of the US Big Beat* (Hudson Music, 2002) offers an in-depth introduction to the history and profound significance of African American contributions to drumming.<sup>67</sup> As stated in Smith's brief historical overview, the "culture of slavery informed the swing beat when superimposed on European musical concepts." In general, most instructional DVDs offer various techniques and styles in order for drummers to become well-rounded musicians, able to perform and alternate seamlessly between Afro-Cuban, jazz, funk, etc. Both the Gospel Skills and GospelChops.com *Shed Sessionz* videos are framed within the explicit signifiers of black Pentecostalism, compared to the more implicit significations that are made in mainstream gospel DVDs, like *Kick Snare Hat*. The contextualization of gospel drumming as such is quite prominent in mainstream DVDs, as many include bonus interview sections in order to historicize contemporary gospel drumming as an amalgamation of church and secular drumming traditions, as can be seen in Aaron Spears' *Beyond the Chops* DVD with 'archival footage' (the term used in the DVD advertising) of him performing in church (more on this point later on).

Of course, the mainstream drumming industry is no stranger to the marketing of drumming traditions of various cultures and to constructing a narrative around their practices. In many world drumming texts and videos, authors often go quite in depth about the distinct cultural, performative, and historical contexts, similar to the treatment of some black Pentecostal drumming texts. Some texts have gone so far as to develop new styles of notation which they present as appropriate to the unique culture of the

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<sup>67</sup> Steve Smith: *Drumset Technique/History of the US Beat* (Hudson Music and Hal Leonard Corporation, 2002), Disc Two, 1:37-2:40min.

musical style, seeking to provide ‘authentic,’ or ‘organic’ styles of notation, as illustrated in an instructional book by Billy Martin, ‘Riddims: Claves of African Origin’ (Music in Motion Films Limited, 2006)<sup>68</sup> (see image below):



These ‘riddims’ are described as “authentic African claves and traditions that owe as much to bebop innovator Max Roach as reggae pioneer Sly Dunbar,” alluding to a structural influence of African claves upon these black drummers. Martin also provides an overview of the impact of the slave trade on the spread of these African claves throughout the Americas. Although Martin’s intent to contextualize these claves was surely in the interest of preserving their cultural history, the method by which he presented them is slightly tokenistic and reductionist. Similarly, Pete Lockett, a well-known world percussionist from the UK, offers an in-depth rhythmic analysis of South Indian rhythms, their contexts, and their application to the drumset:

Dispelling the mystery and simplifying the complexity of Southern India’s classic Carnatic rhythmic system, *Indian Rhythms for Drumset* is the first book of its kind to apply authentic Indian rhythms to the modern drumset.<sup>69</sup>

In short, the emphasis on the *cultural* dimension in these world-drumming texts often contrasts with the professionalized and more Americanized approach in many gospel

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<sup>68</sup> Image taken from stable URL:  
[http://www.sheetmusicplus.com/look\\_inside/18069113/image/89752](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com/look_inside/18069113/image/89752). Accessed March 12, 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Quote taken from stable URL:  
[www.hudsonmusic.com/hudson/products/indian-rhythms-for-drumset/](http://www.hudsonmusic.com/hudson/products/indian-rhythms-for-drumset/). Accessed March 9, 2012.

drumming materials, one that seemingly integrates the distinctions of race and ethnicity into the narrative ideologies of American nationalism and objective skill. Still, both approaches can be said to highlight the inherent diversity within current global and multicultural contexts for any given Western nation. What most often distinguishes the world drumming discourse is that it is framed around a rhythmic Other who exists outside Western culture, in contrast with the ever-present African American rhythmic Other as situated in gospel drumming. However, there are a number of instances in the gospel drumming discourse—most notably in mainstream drumming texts and products—that evoke essentialist understandings of the style in ways that mirror the world drumming discourse. In this manner, the gospel narrative sometimes veers away from the nationalistic and melting pot features of Americanism to one that distinguishes the musicianship of African American drummers in problematic and exclusionist ways (akin to the non-Western, musical Other). The following section will outline some examples of these kinds of gospel drumming texts and products that raise specific questions about the narrative and its propensity to essentialize black church drummers.

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The representation of gospel drumming as an objective technique and category has produced mixed results. For instance, there have been a number of interesting examples in gospel drumming texts where distinct practices associated with black Pentecostalism have become professionalized in the broader mainstream market. Firstly, particular brands have become somewhat synonymous with gospel. Yamaha and DW have become the two main drum brands of choice, whereas Sabian and Zildjian cymbals dominate the market. Although both brands offer gospel cymbal packs, Sabian cymbals

are some of the most visually apparent in gospel videos, especially their ‘O-Zone’ cymbals, which have large holes cut into them. It isn’t coincidental that the most expensive drum products and the most innovative and new products are featured by gospel drummers—the popularity of gospel is certain to move significant amounts of product. But there is also a practical aspect as well; for example, Sabian ‘O-Zone’ cymbals feature a quick decay, which can be a positive design feature in that they are less likely to overpower a choir.

As another example of gospel’s narrative construction, there are thousands of gospel shed clips online that capture groups of mostly male drummers performing in churches and homes, improvising and demonstrating complex fills and ideas with one another. In many cases, there is either a song or loop being played over a PA system, or there are bassists, keyboardists/organists, and guitarists that accompany the drummers. Interview participant Chris states that sheds are “a lot of fun and you do learn stuff, you’re able to pick up stuff off of each other. You create more ideas at the spot, because one guy does something and then you’re going to try to do the same thing and maybe try to twist it in a different way. It opens up your brain a bit more.” Within the mainstream market, these sheds have been rearticulated into official, professional showcases for up and coming gospel talent: the ‘Gospel Summit’ (Modern Drummer Festival, 2006), and the ‘Yamaha Groove Hour’ (Montreal Drum Fest 2011), for example. *Kick Snare Hat* also features a shed in the DW warehouse, replete with a dramatic entrance by all the drummers, emerging out of a luxury car. The Aaron Spears *Beyond the Chops* DVD even features ‘archival footage’ of him performing in church and in drum sheds. Included with Spears’ DVD is an interview component with professional drummer Jojo Mayer, delving

into Spears' church background—his early influences, 'culturally speaking'<sup>70</sup>—and popularity as a gospel drummer:

Could you kind of give us a little bit of, kinda like...gospel 'for dummies,' or like, sort of like an introduction into, you know, where those things happen, how they happen, and how you see how they evolved, and where they're going...where they are right now and where you're going?<sup>71</sup> (Jojo Mayer)

In this way, the DVD offers an interesting narrative that positions Spears as an authentic gospel drummer, which is reinforced through referencing older footage of him performing in the sites of established gospel music practices (the shed, church). Spears' DVD maintains the gospel drumming themes of ineffability, feel, and faith in God, as I have mentioned earlier; he is explicitly positioned as a professional gospel drummer through framing his playing as a product of his faith, gospel sheds, and growing up in the church service context. However, the master-class format of the DVD, the slow-motion icon that appears during a complex solo, the accompanying transcriptions of some of his fills—each of these elements present Spears in the same manner of other professional drum educational videos, except that he offers very little technical advice about his methods and focuses instead on the role of personal faith. In this manner, Spears' DVD presents the information like other drumming videos, which mostly focus on certain techniques and patterns that consumers can learn and appropriate. But the content of the DVD is structured mainly within a narrative of cultural intangibility: how gospel chops and practices are best understood as a product of black religiosity, not a matter of distinct methods or techniques that can be appropriated outside the context of the church service and (especially) the shed.

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<sup>70</sup> *Beyond the Chops*, Disc Two, 12:46.

<sup>71</sup> *Beyond the Chops*, Disc Two, 5:45-7:30min.

As a final example of narrative construction and professionalization, following the success of the *Beyond the Chops* DVD, Hudson Music released another video entitled *Ultimate Drum Lessons: Gospel and R&B Drumming* (2011) (a compilation of previously released Hudson Music material). The addition of ‘R&B’ drumming somewhat obscures the gospel category as a distinct style or contemporary development. It is well known that much of the history of early American popular music—rhythm and blues, soul, and rock—developed out of black gospel church traditions. So the question to be raised is: what is so ‘new’ about gospel drumming today, if not just a historical development of these well-established genres in popular music? There is also the obscure attachment of hip-hop drumming to the gospel drum category, as illustrated in the *Kick, Snare, Hat: The Superstars of Hip Hop and R&B* DVD (2008). In reality, distinguishing ‘a gospel style’ is quite difficult, as gospel has become (presumably) interwoven into the narrative of all black drumming. As well, according to the bonus Jeff Davis’ interview in ‘Ultimate Drum Lessons,’ for a long time, there were no resources or players that documented gospel drumming, so church drummers “migrated to whatever they liked” (rock, jazz, etc.). Davis explains that these drummers “lent themselves to [these different genres], but they didn’t identify with [them] because they were church guys.”<sup>72</sup> The integration of a variety of genres into contemporary forms of Christian worship—the ‘mega-churches’—has also caused the gospel label to signify a wide range of tastes and styles:

There’s a lot of Christian churches that’s rock oriented, but then you have contemporary music that’s R&B oriented, now you have the rap and you have hip hop. So, you have all these inflections that you call ‘gospel.’<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Jeff Davis Interview, *Ultimate Drum Lessons*, 6min.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:20-4:40min.

The description on the back of the *Ultimate Drum Lessons* DVD reads that the ‘godfather of modern gospel drumming,’ Jeff “Lo” Davis is the host, offering insights and introductions to the drummers featured. The DVD “contains educational lessons and incredible performances from some of the greatest drumming artists playing these styles today.” There are drummers in the DVD, such as Daniel Glass and Steve Smith, who offer historical overviews of gospel and big band drumming, touching on certain aspects of early gospel music and ragtime drumming. But, there are other drummers, such as Adam Deitch—best known in hip-hop and fusion jazz—whose link to gospel music is not so clear. Performers like Deitch also stand in stark contrast to the more well-known and explicitly labeled gospel drummers, such as Marvin McQuitty, Aaron Spears, and Gerald Heyward. In fact, there are a few drummers featured in the DVD who have never been identified as gospel drummers before. Some have their clips from previously released instructional DVDs integrated into the video, but their relationships to gospel remains quite vague. For instance, John Blackwell, Jr., mostly known as the drummer for Prince, has slowly come to be labeled as a ‘gospel drummer’ in recent years. Clips from his 2003 Hudson Music DVD, ‘John Blackwell: Technique, Grooving, and Showmanship’ appeared in the ‘Ultimate Drum Lessons’ gospel DVD. Although Blackwell, Jr. grew up in the Baptist Church, his identification with gospel drumming has become more prominent after his ‘Technique’ and ‘Hudson Music Master Series’ (2008) DVDs. He is mostly noted for having long-standing roots in funk, fusion, and R&B, and his considerable experience in the drum corps informs much of his characteristic showmanship (stick twirling, etc.). But, for some of the interviewees, his inclusion in the ‘Ultimate’ DVD represents a bit of a stretch for the gospel style, even to the point of

inspiring distrust in the portrayal of gospel by the producers of these DVDs. For Tara, “he [Blackwell] doesn’t feel church to me...it’s not fair, and if you’re not black, you don’t get that label.”

#### IV) Racial Reverberations:

Unfortunately, to expand upon Tara’s comment, many black drummers have been labeled 'gospel' in a problematic manner; the term becomes a moniker that essentializes any form of complex black drumming as an indication of the gospel style. The most talented and advanced black drummers are often quickly labeled ‘gospel’ by other musicians, indicating an understanding of the style that often equates it with generalized blackness. Interestingly, even though each of them perform in black churches and play with gospel artists and choirs, none of my interviewees self-identify as gospel drummers. Instead, they wish to highlight their overall musicianship and ability to play within many genres and styles. This very same sentiment was echoed by Jeff Davis in the ‘Ultimate’ DVD, maintaining, “the bar is being lowered if you’re acknowledged as just a gospel guy, because ‘just a gospel guy’ can only do certain things.”<sup>74</sup>

Interview participant Cory detailed a number of issues he had with the construction of the gospel category and its racial undercurrents:

The assumption is by certain people that don’t know me because I’m black, is that you know, I play hip hop, gospel and jazz, that sort of thing, where meanwhile, I have a very deep rooted background in rock, also.

According to Cory, “anything black has to be gospel, R&B, rap, hip hop, that type of thing. I mean, there’s white guys out there who are killers in gospel drumming, but they’re not going to be seen because, again, we put the black people in that label.” Cory

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 2min.

even believes that there are many black gospel players who are “called gospel, but they’re nowhere near Christ.” It appears that there is a fine line between acknowledging the *cultural* distinctiveness of gospel—its associations and roots in black churches—and perpetuating its *racialized* history and social significance. Although culture and race are closely connected discourses, the latter does not necessarily dictate the former. Citing one of his greatest mentors, a white drum instructor who now resides in Brampton, ON, Cory states that

It was a white guy that taught me to groove the way I groove. It wasn’t ‘black gospel,’ it wasn’t a black person; it was this white guy that taught me the basics of drumming to my playing now. You see, so, that’s how I learned, it was a white guy; it was no ‘black gospel,’ it was nothing like that. I had the chops, but I didn’t have the feel, and it was a white guy that taught it to me.

For Cory, this instructor was the main reason behind his groove and feel, challenging assumptions about natural black rhythm. Here, Cory outlines the cross-culturalism of popular black genres and musicianship—that the premise of gospel is its deep connectedness to black music and culture, but non-black drummers are able to master and perform these techniques as well. In this way, black music genres are not relegated solely to black performers, but contain skills and techniques that anyone can learn, enjoy, and apply to their instrument. Though this kind of long-standing view promotes inclusivity and collaboration, the gospel drumming discourse is inundated with racialized and polarizing views on black musicianship. The crudest examples of this kind of dialogue are found in many online drumming forums and discussion boards. Furthermore, the gospel and black drumming discussions often initiate other racialized arguments that both challenge and perpetuate these assumptions (below quotes have been edited for length):

1. Gospel Music is a genre. Anyone can play it. It doesn't matter who you are. Music is universal, transcends race, and connects people. Besides, gospel music wasn't created by "the blacks" it was music created by our churches in order to praise to God [centrichawk]<sup>75</sup>
  - a. 1st of all i said" black Gospel drummers" not black drummers. he's emulating black gospel drumming so naturally im comparing to the blacks, its one specific genre. i said they are tight because its a commom trait, like saying new yorkers are fast paced people or japanese are the best in electronics, chinese are busnesminded and so on, not all of them are but its a k[n]own common trait. [...] [benhhx]
  - b. impressive! you play like a moderately sized black man [...] [samiegfunk1]
2. Saying that all Gospel drummers sound the same is right up there with saying that all members of a certain race look the same [...] [Ryan\_Cox]
  - a. [...] I know plenty of gospel drummers from all reaces, and from my perspective of watching them practice and jamming with them, watching them perform., they will even tell you that's how they prefer to play. So there is no need to pull that card out and taint a good conversation by taking a shot at someones familiarity on the subject, and character by an ignorant accusation of racism [Judesign]
  - b. [...] He was not saying certain races playing certain types of music. He was saying that "all gospel drummers sound alike" is as ignorant as saying "all white people can't dance." [dale w miller]<sup>76</sup>
3. The blacks have all the rnb pop business and they sound perfect for the job [...] no offense..!! may be just a similarity but I think blacks have a different groove feeling perhaps another vision that have all [tweaked]
  - a. This may sound a little bit too racists but I kindda agree with Tweaked...I am an Asian who has been playing the drums for 15 years...I always be able to notice the difference between black, white and asian drummer...they may have the same skill sets...certainly the groove is different...it's not the race that make the difference..... I think it is the culture that we are born from...if you watch Akira Jimbo ...he is a damn good player....but he plays almost strictly techniques with a lot less feel on the groove, a great white drummer like Steve Smith concentrate more on the grooving techniques and theory while the black drummers sometimes don't have any lessons and I have ask a lot of gospel based drummer. Their skill come mostly from 3+2 beats but they can groove the heck out of it [...] [zidjan]
  - b. [...] Growing up in Hawaii there are Asians who groove like monsters and there are some who are stereotypically stiff. And I know black musicians who are very intellectual in approach and have very little swing or groove [...] While in the US, folks are very PC and adverse to any sort of racial profiling, growing up in Hawaii was different. There folks acknowledged their different ethnic backgrounds and weren't so sensitiv about it. [Aeolian]<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Comments from YouTube clip, 'Drum Solo kinda gospel chops.' Stable URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrKqVAXlwQE>. Accessed June 20 2012

<sup>76</sup> Pearl Drummers Forum, 'Gospel Chops Style Drummer' discussion. Stable URL: <http://www.pearldrumsforum.com/showthread.php?187414-Gospel-Chops-style-drummer/page2>. Accessed June 20, 2012.

<sup>77</sup> Drummerworld.com forum. Stable URL: <http://www.drummerworld.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-31179.html>. Accessed June 20, 2012.

Of course, the drummerworld.com and Pearl drummer forums and discussions demonstrate only a fragment of the gospel drumming debate; however, due to their overwhelming popularity,<sup>78</sup> the comments highlight the kinds of popular ideas and debates that have been circulating around gospel drumming since its recent rise in popularity. How users rationalize and talk about race online can help to illustrate some of the ways in which race is discussed in gospel drumming contexts—how the Asian, white, and black drummers are said to have the ‘same skill sets,’ but of course the ‘groove is different;’ how some black drummers, contrary to stereotype, are ‘highly intellectual in approach,’ resulting in ‘little swing or groove’ (this was also meant to argue against American political correctness, it seems); and how the gospel term is believed to already presuppose blackness, likened to the stereotypical example that ‘white people can’t dance.’ Throughout the internet, discussions about black drumming and its racial basis proliferate and are met with both harsh criticisms and strong support.

In some ways, the gospel drumming category is vulnerable to long-held racial stereotypes of black musicality precisely because of its often-direct identification with black musical genres. The immediacy of seeing fantastically talented black drummers perform a style called ‘gospel,’ accompanied with the rhetoric of innate and natural talent, seems to foster and perpetuate forms of racial thinking. One theory that might explain this is Charlton D. McIlwain and Stephen M. Caliendo’s concept of ‘racial cueing.’ In this way, gospel drumming is coded with implicit ‘racial appeals’ to consumers. Racial appeals effectively cue race to identify a kind of racialized

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<sup>78</sup> According to ‘Alexa: The Web Information Company,’ drummerworld.com is the top percussion website. Stable URL:  
<http://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/Top/Arts/Music/Instruments/Percussion>.  
Accessed July 5, 2012.

communication that will provide an idea about what we should think about when we are exposed to it, as well as ways to interpret it.<sup>79</sup> These messages do not necessarily mean that the associated texts and utterances are indeed racist, but that the structure of the implicit racial appeal interpellates consumers to ‘think racially’. The leap towards essentialist and even racist understandings of gospel drumming is therefore not so difficult from this initial vantage point. Furthermore, race-based persuasive appeals are much more effective when they are constructed implicitly and when the underlying racial message remains hidden from public view.<sup>80</sup>

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It is here that we can locate one of the most problematic issues in the gospel drumming discourse. In contrast with ‘objective’ drumming skills development—an approach which suggests that anyone can learn and perform techniques and styles from around the world and which advocates open access and equity for all drummers, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or race—the existing discourse surrounding gospel often tends to problematically essentialize and naturalize the terms of its playability under varying tropes of *authenticity*. Of course, the difficulty with any authenticity discourse is the mutability of its ideological center. Whatever the purportedly authentic subject or object may be in any instance, it can change or come to signify different things. What proves to be the greatest danger is when such discourses turn racial in legitimized and accepted ways. The narratives of spiritual ineffability and innate talent can potentially give rise to reductive notions of natural musicianship for all black Pentecostal drummers. Equally, the direct racial claims made by black church drummers and by members of the

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<sup>79</sup> McIlwain and Caliendo 2011, 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

broader drumming community remove the spiritual connotation, essentializing all black drumming as being potentially rooted in the gospel, perpetuating long-held stereotypes about the innate sacredness of all black music. In short, the markers of difference that the gospel drumming discourse emphasize can problematically essentialize black Church drumming, provoking the specter of race to function as a legitimating marker of 'authentic' gospel drumming.

On the one hand, there is the dominant ideology and marketing strategy that gospel, like any other drumming style, is transcribable, appropriable, commoditized, and ultimately accessible to everyone. Most drumming students develop a variety of techniques and become knowledgeable of other genres (rock, jazz, latin, Brazilian samba, etc.), often in the hopes of being able to eventually perform any of these styles professionally in a live or studio situation. The cross-cultural practice of objective drumming pedagogy, especially within a multicultural context, allows for notions of hybridity, variation, and communication between various individuals, cultures, and communities. As well, the practice and development of various styles and techniques from around the world promotes musical inclusivity, community, and collaboration for all drummers. And yet, there are significant issues and concerns that arise out of the gospel case study, indicating how the issue of racial authenticity is very much an ongoing discourse in contemporary drumming culture. This process is propagated by both the black church drumming community *and* is present in the broader forms of drumming media (industry magazines, videos, websites, forums, discussion boards, etc.).

## **Chapter 2** **Positioning the Logics of Post-Racial Ideologies**

The previous chapter outlined some contextual and historical aspects of the gospel drumming style, along with the often-conflicting representations of its practices and imagery in mainstream drumming texts and products. Continuing with this line of thought, the following section will deal primarily with representational and interpretive issues that surround the gospel drumming discourse; namely, the discursive emphasis on the *cultural* content of gospel and the methods of ‘culturalizing’ its practices within pedagogical spaces which are constructed as ‘objective’ and ‘race-neutral.’ I stress the importance of this objective/cultural dialectic because the notion of culture needs considerable analysis, as the term signifies much more than a neutral recognition of characteristics inherent to black Pentecostal experiences and musical practices. In some cases, the concept of culture removes or negatively frames the content and context of a musical practice in ways that mirror racial forms of exclusion and exceptionalism. For instance, the notion that ‘real’ gospel drumming cannot be taught without ‘living it’; or how implied references to the gospel style can be used to integrate any black drummer into gospel products; or how world drumming styles have been framed in ways that similarly render their musicality as exotic, authentic, and Other; and how the emphasis on black gospel naturalism often takes precedence over the fact that many of these drummers perform multiple genres, come from a variety of educational backgrounds, and refuse to label themselves as being explicitly gospel drummers.

In this work, I frame the ‘cultural’ as an *ideological* shorthand that can articulate the state of current race relations (which I will discuss under the rubric of post-racism) and whose presence often signals the willful absence or avoidance of an explicitly racial

discourse. Assertions of universal and fixed notions of race have been rearticulated under the guise of ‘culture,’ indicating a broader agenda of ridding the public sphere of social and political antagonisms that characterized much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (civil rights, feminism, socialism, etc.). For many scholars who study post-racist ideologies, what exemplifies such responses to history are their criticism of any grand ideological project or movement, and an articulation of popular strains of late global capitalistic rhetoric that have become quite dominant—viewing any persistent social and political antagonisms as existing outside the putatively egalitarian field of democratic Western societies. I will outline some details of these debates in order to elaborate the issues of race that were identified in the case of gospel drumming. However, in order to set the context I will first outline a critique of ideology in general, referring both to musicological literature, and, predominately, to the work and political philosophy of Slavoj Žižek.

***Music and Culture:  
Mapping the Relevance of Ideology Critique***

Popular music is often critiqued and largely understood in relation to its *cultural value*, that which generates meaning in concrete historical situations,<sup>81</sup> produced within the nexus of material value production.<sup>82</sup> However, the *function* of culture, as Richard Middleton observes, is “always defined in opposition to something else—economics, society, psychology, biology—and its representations have their roots elsewhere: in a golden past, in a utopian future, in the captivating unfamiliarity of ‘primitive’ societies, of the ‘folk,’ the ‘people,’ the anthropologically *different*.”<sup>83</sup> Continuing, Middleton

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<sup>81</sup> Kramer 2006, x.

<sup>82</sup> Qureshi 2002, 88.

<sup>83</sup> Middleton 2003, 5.

states that culture “is what is learned, what is cultivated,” but it can “seem natural,” although “its representations are historically specific—part of the history of the theory; and the tension between nature and culture [as] part of a broader crisis of knowledge.”<sup>84</sup> For Christian Lahusen, culture is always appropriated and used, *becoming a medium for and stake of the struggle of social distinction*.<sup>85</sup> In this sense, the study of culture—its multifaceted dimensions of labor, material production, and the shared beliefs and societal values that develop in these environments—is very much the study of ideologies; of the broad sets of ideas and assumptions that grow out of social relations in such a way as to appear helpful and explanatory to people from various perspectives.<sup>86</sup>

Arguably, it can be quite difficult to view anything as outside of an ideological structure. ‘Meaning,’ ‘belief,’ ‘ideal,’ ‘value,’ ‘intent,’ ‘culture,’ ‘context,’ ‘popular music:’ every one of these terms can easily be located within an ideology. As Middleton observes, a key consideration for many deconstructionists and poststructuralists alike is the Foucauldian conception of power, the solvent of knowledge, as simply everywhere, an inescapable horizon of evaluation.<sup>87</sup> As a theoretical concept, the study of ideology in popular music might initially appear to be an overly negative one, as the critique has often pessimistically diagnosed a certain degree of subservience on the part of subjects to hierarchical structures and forms of authority. This has sometimes led to quick assumptions about the ideological delusions of the masses, the erasure of notions of autonomy or individuality, and a tendency to render the ideals of counter-cultural, free-spirited rebelliousness that characterize so much of popular music as empty of any

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Lahusen 1996, 64. Emphasis mine.

<sup>86</sup> Green 1999, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Middleton 2006, 205.

significant power. Such a critique might also seem counter-productive in the sense that its theoretical presuppositions do not align well with more recent liberating projects of identity politics, hybridity, the deconstruction of grand narratives, and the subversion of rigid truth-claims and institutional powers.

However, a theory of ideology does not necessarily imply the negation of individualism or subjectivity, nor does it solely promote an authoritative and hierarchical view of social structures that enclose the self in such a way that it appears fixed, or reduced to living an illusion. Instead, ideologies can operate very much on a conscious level; certain issues can be explicitly disavowed in order to perpetuate an ideal (as when a post-racist ideology disavows the continuing existence of racism as a crucial factor, for example). There are a number of methods by which subjects rationalize and legitimize such ideals, and as we will see, many of these can be theorized under the guise of post-racism especially as it is related to forms of consumption. It is therefore important not to fall into the trap of assuming that ideology always indicates 'false consciousness,' but rather to acknowledge that we are often very much aware of what we are doing.

The role of ideology, and of its critique, in my research presents a number of interesting questions and topics. For instance, the significance of religious belief and the importance placed on developing technical skills in the lives of gospel drummers; how racial identification and belonging is important for marginalized and racialized groups; how 'objective' patterns and drumming techniques are framed in the context of cross-cultural appropriation; and how these ideals are associated with notions of consumerism, multiculturalism, democracy, etc. The ideological articulates constellations of meaning and discourse, emphasizing how the examination of multiple issues implicates music

within the broader sphere of society and politics. It is my hope to help draw attention to streams of contemporary ideology critique, with special emphasis on critical race theory in the study of popular music, highlighting how music functions within these wider debates.

I) *Laying the Groundwork: Post-ideology, Culturalization, and Depoliticization*

*I like the unwritten bar rule: "No religion and no politics"*<sup>88</sup>  
[Jeff Almeyda]

To begin, I refer to Slavoj Žižek's critique of what he calls the 'post-ideological' turn in contemporary Western politics and discourse. Žižek suggests that the grand ideologies of the past—socialism, feminism, civil rights and racism, for instance—have been successfully fought and won long ago,<sup>89</sup> therefore any ideological struggle or cause that repeats these kinds of political themes would seem redundant and unnecessary. In this sense, post-racism is merely one of a number of broader neoliberal developments that articulates race as an issue of modernity, much like issues of gender (post-feminism) and class. According to Žižek, western capitalistic societies since the 1980s have been characterized by an overwhelming effort on the part of some to build a consensus for apparently non-ideological positions, insinuating that social reality is, today, something neutral and unproblematic. We are now free, the argument runs, from unreasonable, utopian ideologies that repress others; instead, we occupy the privileged and objective stance of dealing with political issues logically and reasonably in late-global capitalist society. By drawing attention to topics such as racism, we bring the discourse of racial

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<sup>88</sup> 'Religious Discussions on Drummerworld' forum. Stable URL: <http://cdn-x.drummerworld.com/forums/showthread.php?s=95677bf16d1c10bf3303c9847c3ceba6&t=41275>. Accessed June 20, 2012.

<sup>89</sup> Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000, 323.

inequality into a space ‘without racism,’ and so such attention-drawing is often discouraged and disavowed as unnecessary. However, Žižek argues that the perpetuation of racism has actually been reinvigorated in such a post-ideological space.

For example, the ideal of ‘objective’ drumming skills described earlier suggests that the replicability and transcription of various performance techniques and styles neutralizes the specific content and context from which they derive—a form of post-ideological relativism that is not meant to negate that which is particular, but attempts to integrate these distinct cultural contexts into a broader discursive network that allows for shared appropriation and greater potential for music-making and creation. In this context, all forms of drumming can exist without reference to any problematic ‘extramusical’ issue or concern—race, gender, religion, and politics do not factor in as heavily as the overarching ideal of learning, developing, and performing techniques and patterns. Quite simply, for those who hold such a position, ‘good drumming is good drumming.’ For many proponents of this post-ideological view, one can even transcend barriers by learning, appropriating, and excelling at the drums, perpetuating the ideal of exceptional individualism, which is often articulated in master-signifiers such as the ‘American Dream,’ etc.

However, in their crudest form non-ideological positions can problematically maintain notions of timelessness, filtering out any sense of contradiction.<sup>90</sup> When ideological contradiction does occur (as when notions of innate or natural talent in gospel drummers conflict with the ideology of universal learnability as described above, for instance), the premise of neutral knowledge and objective skills is undercut by myth,

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<sup>90</sup> Flisfeder 2010, 162-168.

stereotype, authenticity debates, and the mobilization of tropes and topics that have been essential to American popular music discourses since the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Non-ideological positions also rely upon a certain degree of denial regarding the continued existence of racialized antagonisms that have shaped the history and reception of black and popular music (see Radano 2003). What continues to take precedence in popular culture are, indeed, the narratives of immediate, natural, and innate talent, and a celebration of performers who embody 'star quality,' raw emotion, divine spirit, or (sacred) blackness. The perpetuation of these beliefs illustrates how ideology operates within spaces of popular music performance and consumption. Furthermore, it indicates that knowledge is often judged to be, in-itself, unable to account for the value and meaning that is often placed upon exceptional musicianship. Too much technique is often seen as cold, controlled, sterile, or without a good feel or spirit. On the other hand, natural talent has always been classically romanticized, racialized, and fetishized as wild, authentic, raw; an ideology that proliferates throughout reality television shows, premised upon the notion of hidden, natural music talent (in particular, *Canadian/American Idol*, *Canada's/America's Got Talent*, *The X Factor*, and *The Voice*). As we have seen, gospel drumming discourse is subject to these very same trends and tendencies in popular consumer culture, highlighting the conflicts that arise from attempts to objectify or neutralize a musical genre/style from its historically-racialized and fetishized associations, in ways that simultaneously reinscribe and disavow these connections.

For critical race theorists such as Alana Lentin, Tim Wise, and Charles Gallagher, the discourse of race has been realigned in order to assert the feasibility of a neutral, unproblematic space of social relations. For Žižek, contemporary political differences

have become naturalized and neutralized into ‘cultural differences,’ that is, into different ways of life, which are something given, something that cannot be overcome: they can only be tolerated.<sup>91</sup> Echoing Žižek’s critique, Alana Lentin claims that racism can continue to exist in a post-racial society, but it is now ‘cultural’ in nature;<sup>92</sup> tensions are acknowledged, containing within them the long-held signifiers of racism (predominately colored by forms of exclusionism), but they are coded as cultural rather than racial (conflicting religious values, for instance). However, as Robert Young states, “the racial was always cultural.”<sup>93</sup> In this way, discrimination and prejudice against others can be fully justified under the language of cultural difference—as with the claim, for instance, that there are systemic cultural issues within the Islamic community that are inconsistent with dominant Western values (the wearing of the hijab, for instance); or, that the ‘problem’ with the black community stems from various cultural dissolutions of value, leading to a poor work ethic, etc.

Etienne Balibar’s theory of the ‘racist complex’ similarly articulates the forms of exclusionism inherent to post-racial ideology: it inextricably combines a “crucial function of misrecognition” and a “will to know,” a violent desire for immediate knowledge of social relations<sup>94</sup>—in other words, an urgent explanation for why the Other is the way they naturally are. As Balibar has famously stated, current forms of racism can be described as “racism without races,” whose dominant theme is “not biological heredity but the *insurmountability of cultural differences*; a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others, but ‘only’ the

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<sup>91</sup> Žižek 2008a, 140.

<sup>92</sup> Lentin and Titley 2011, 50.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>94</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, 19.

harmfulness of abolishing frontiers: the *incompatibility of life-styles and traditions*.<sup>95</sup>

The will to know that is inherent to the racial complex postulates that these cultural differences and antagonisms—the incompatibilities—are *not* racially motivated, even though they are articulated through the language of racism.

The ‘immediacy’ of the racist complex articulates how the desire to know the drumming Other—how do gospel drummers *do that*? What makes black Pentecostal drumming sound like *that*?—addresses a sort of surplus or excess that exists within the objective ideology of skills development. In this sense, skill sets can remain the same for any drummer, but it’s the supposedly exceptional, raw, natural talent of a player that is quite often overemphasized, generating explanations for how and why they play the way they do. Though the reasoning for these claims often revolves around tropes of essentialism and authenticity, many of its proponents frame the statement as being not about race (‘I’m not racist, but...’). Following Žižek and Balibar’s theorizations of the ‘cultural turn,’ we can argue that the discourse concerning the musicianship of gospel drummers has been similarly reduced to singular tropes and aspects, overshadowing actual forms of practice with a preference for common-sensical, culturalized explanations. Such accounts illustrate the will to know, exemplifying the immediacy that is offered in these reductive interpretations of the musical Other.

For Wendy Brown, what it means to discuss the ‘culturalization of politics’ proceeds from the basis that “every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence.”<sup>96</sup> In this way, the essence—the natural, innate-ness of a certain culture, ethnic, racialized community—is maintained

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>96</sup> Lentin and Titley, 56.

within the Other, “functioning like a nature,”<sup>97</sup> but it is articulated as if it has transcended the racial signifier in the language of culture. Depoliticization effectively removes a phenomenon “from comprehension of its historical emergence and from [the] recognition of the powers that produce and contour it. No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject.”<sup>98</sup> This kind of process is essential to understanding how aspects of the gospel drumming discourse are heavily racialized; how forms of musical practice that these drummers undertake (private lessons, church performances, post-secondary education, etc.) are reduced to a singular trope that provides the basis for understanding everything one needs to know about gospel drumming (blackness, black sacredness). If black gospel drummers are said to possess innate talent and skills which are depoliticized and mystified of their distinct religious intentions, musical practices, and diverse educational backgrounds, then both the mainstream drumming industry and gospel drumming culture risks perpetuating race as a legitimating factor in the cultivation and study of these techniques and skills.

Of course, racial discrimination is not limited to misconceptions of genetics or biology.<sup>99</sup> Race signifies a broader constellation of values and beliefs that often, as Etienne Balibar states, articulate themselves as incompatible and insurmountable cultural differences.<sup>100</sup> Subsequently, religious belief as it has been vilified particularly against Muslims of Middle-Eastern and African decent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, operates as a legitimation for exclusionism. It is not merely belief that generates anxiety in a post-9/11 world, but the political formations that emerge around these different life-worlds and

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<sup>97</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Lentin and Titley, 57.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>100</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, 21.

interpretations of both the physical and the transcendent; illustrating how the belief of the Other in the West is not marked immediately and spectrally as it is with skin color, but represents the impossibility of *knowing* the Other who appears like everyone else (in a multicultural society), generating a desire to control their dissimilarity through culturalizing their politics. This anxiety concerning the Other's belief is both theological—'love thy neighbor as thyself'—and historically grounded in how political organization can and have been "cloaked under ecclesiastical business."<sup>101</sup> However, difference in modern Western societies has always been racialized. Therefore, when we speak of difference, buried within there is a reference to race.<sup>102</sup> The legacy of race is the tendency to naturalize difference, to see it as fundamentally, inextricably, and inherently different.<sup>103</sup> This tendency can also be invoked when celebrating the cultural distinction (i.e. difference) of black Pentecostal gospel drummers within the objective space of skills development, blurring the line between exceptionalizing and excluding these drummers from the broader discourse and community, potentially leading to essentialized and mystified understandings of their difference as innate or authentically, religiously black.

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This section examined and introduced some of the features of post-racial ideology and considered how it can be framed in a musical context. The initial naiveté that informs one of the extremes in the argument is the general belief that racism is not as prominent as it was throughout most of the twentieth century; that somehow, late-global capitalistic societies reflect a new era of race-relations and mutual understanding. The very idea of

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<sup>101</sup> Wilmore 1972, 109.

<sup>102</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, 95.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

gospel drumming articulates the tension inherent to the post-racial problematic of discussing black gospel *culture* and not accounting for the *racial* formations that often characterize much of its discourse. Explaining notions of authenticity and innate black musicianship as due to a ‘cultural’ difference can obscure the problematic line of race without escaping it. Alternatively, the discourses of gospel drumming that *did* resort to racial discussions can be understood as demonstrating how black musicians, in many cases, are stereotyped as possessing the immediate mastery of techniques that are by others developed objectively. That is, the black gospel drummer—or, black gospel ‘culture’—are believed to innately possess the tools and abilities that others work hard at practicing and developing over time.

The following section will delve deeper into the discourse and literature of post-racism in order to situate how notions of race are discussed in broader social and political space. This study will outline how these kinds of contemporary views influence understandings of difference, skin color, and the ways in which these factors relate to issues pertaining to musicological discourse. One of the most interesting facets to the literature, as already discussed, is this problematic framing of ‘culture’ in the context of post-racism, a point I will continue to examine throughout this thesis. The post-racial frame highlights problematic forms of acknowledgement and/or denial of historical and persistent forms of racism—a process that has been formed out of correlating dimensions of consumption, economic opportunity, and anti-racism as an interrelated whole. The extensive literature on post-racism and colorblindness provides interesting insights into the cultural study of music, and positions race as a recurring problem in contemporary politics and the public sphere.

## II) The Post-Racial Frame (or, the Romance of Upward Mobility)

There are a number of definitions, descriptions, and discourses of the 'new racism,' identified variously as 'raceless racism' (Theo Goldberg), 'post-racism' (Eduardo Bonilla-Silva), and even 'reflected racism' (Slavoj Žižek). What characterizes and helps to connect these different terms is the acknowledgement and awareness of how race has been largely downplayed, neutralized, and re-articulated within contemporary social and political space. Furthermore, the concepts all speak to how individuals and communities progressively deal with race-related issues privately and relativistically, internalizing and interpreting racism as a matter of individual morality. Post-racism raises a number of profound issues concerning the cultural study of music, particularly for popular genres and styles that have direct links to racialized, non-white communities. The linkages between upward mobility and the ideals of capitalistic consumption place racial debates in a highly problematic space of individual morality and initiative, perpetuated by the circulation of capital and cultural goods in global markets. It is absolutely necessary to examine post-racial discourse, especially in the face of its proliferation and social currency after the inauguration of President Barack Obama (often cited as *the* post-racial event of the 21<sup>st</sup> century). What tends to color the post-racial debate is the move of revisiting black/white relations, but through the lens of a post-civil rights/post-Obama context that is said to already presuppose universal equality. I argue that through examining post-racial debates, the themes and issues that arose from my case study of gospel drumming can be contextualized in their contemporaneous situation; that gospel drumming can exemplify race-relations in a Western society that often views racism as a relative non-issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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In many ways, the very idea of a 'post-racist' society functions as both an ideology and a non-ideology. The latter expresses how ideology—understood as a negative, authoritative and prohibitive set of rules, laws, and beliefs—is viewed as being both inoperative and a non-issue within multiculturalist, pluralistic, and race-neutral society (the 'post,' then, also refers to a transcendence of belief in racially-based claims). The former expresses that post-racism is pure ideology in that post-racial liberalism, as a political set of policy initiatives, finesses and explicitly overlooks actual inequality in order to propose policies that advocate for universal justice and inclusion.

There is great importance in the fact that post-racism is structured under capitalism. Many individuals experience and access Others through commodities and consumption. With this in mind, post-racist ideology does not ignore race; it in fact acknowledges race while disregarding racial hierarchy, often taking racially coded styles and products and reducing these symbols to commodities or experiences that whites and racial minorities can purchase and share. It is through such acts of shared consumption that race becomes seen as nothing more than an innocuous cultural signifier.<sup>104</sup> For many critics, post-racial, colorblind, and race-neutral attitudes are often discursive tools that allow for white hierarchical powers to maintain their positions, but appear inclusive through the veneer of equal opportunity. However, for Alana Lentin, the denial of the salience of race in the lived experience of the racialized—the adoption, instead, of a position of racelessness—speaks to the absence of acknowledgement of past

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<sup>104</sup> Gallagher 2009, 92.

significances (hence, not living up to the ‘post’ within the term).<sup>105</sup> Declaring that a society is post-race is to ignore that, in actual fact, racelessness applies only to white people who see themselves as existing outside the racial framework, as white is interpreted as being race neutral while everything else ‘has race.’<sup>106</sup> In Lentin’s view, normative values of whiteness structure and inform the seemingly progressive and inclusive ideologies of post-racism and colorblindness. The following section will outline the discourses of post-racial liberalism and white colorblindness, moving into more oblique issues that surround the politics of contemporary racism. For the purposes of unpacking the ideological ramifications of holding to post-racial attitudes, it is necessary to provide a critique of so-called progressive and liberal post-racial attitudes, connecting how in practice these ideals and values can be channeled through forms of often damaging political rhetoric and policy. In this way, I hope to illustrate how well intentioned post-racial stances (for instance, as adopted by non-black drummers and gospel drumming consumers) can actually engender and instigate greater racial misunderstanding. Furthermore, as these political formations and developments are also directly tied to economic values and policies—including notions of individual (American) exceptionalism—it is important to frame how the post-racial debate articulates notions of transcending the structures of marginalization and racialization through upward mobility, highlighting how this can be a highly problematic social value.

Tim Wise defines *post-racial liberalism* as a form of left-of-center politics that emerged after the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 60s had achieved some of its

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<sup>105</sup> Lentin and Titley, 79.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

immediate, legislative goals.<sup>107</sup> However, following these developments and major victories for the movement, many of America's scholars, political leaders, and public intellectuals began to focus on non-race-specific remedies for the existence of any lingering racial inequalities, interested instead in universal, race-neutral, non-specific policies that did not address racial discrimination as a factor.<sup>108</sup> One of the key proponents of this development was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was one of the first supporters of a post-racial liberalism in the 1970s. Moynihan advocated for what he called a 'benign neglect' of racism as a political issue in the United States.<sup>109</sup> In general, post-racism advocates a colorblind universalism; a form of pragmatism that views radical idealism as unreasonable, citing a cross-racial practicality as necessary in order to garner white support for non-race-specific policies. This is premised on the supposed unwillingness of whites to support policies that address racial-specific initiatives,<sup>110</sup> and on the presumption that there are no institutional obstacles faced by people of color that do not simultaneously implicate white citizens on an even playing field.<sup>111</sup> Wise argues that politicians who advocate for similar universal, non-affirmative action policies (healthcare, education, and job creation strategies) receive much greater support amongst congressmen and voters. This is an integral point that Wise claims profoundly defined Barack Obama's successful 2008 Presidential Election, which heavily exploited the ideals of universalized, non-race-specific policies. This was a crucial step for Obama's success as he had to reposition himself a number of times in response to his mixed

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<sup>107</sup> Wise 2010, 16.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 28.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 20; 38-39.

ethnicity, and was also pressured to answer to accusations of conspiracies surrounding his supposed connections to Islam, black Radicalism, and place of birth, proving to all voters that he did not favor a certain ‘kind’ of American (as he put it in a number of speeches, “There is no white or black America, but the United States of America”). Quite succinctly, Moynihan stated in the 1970s: “Congressmen vote for everyone more readily than they vote for any *one*.”<sup>112</sup> Subsequently, the unwillingness to address racial tensions and the inequities of people of color in the West effectively silences any direct involvement that wishes to correct them.

For many whites, colorblindness has become the dominant ideological lens through which contemporary race relations are understood. As a political ideology, the commodification and mass marketing of products that signify color but are intended for consumption across the color line further legitimates color blindness.<sup>113</sup>

Through colorblind policy, whites can see the success of racial minorities as indicative of a new meritocracy; one that presumes socio-economic success is due to individual hard work and determination, removing from public discourse any suggestion of white supremacy or guilt while legitimizing the existing social, political and economic arrangements which privilege whites ...It allows whites to define themselves as politically and racially tolerant as they proclaim their adherence to a belief system that does not see or judge individuals by the “color of their skin.”...The veneer of equality implied in colorblindness allows whites to present their place in the racialized social structure as one that was earned.<sup>114</sup>

Colorblindness amongst whites represents the desire for a form of enlightened, mindful transcendence of difference; a form of consciousness that sees the universal in human beings beyond skin pigmentation, knowingly connecting skin color both historically and spectrally to the social and cultural antagonisms of the past between whites and non-whites (while simultaneously denying any continuing importance to this connection). The

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>113</sup> Gallagher, 92.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 93.

acknowledgment of color is presupposed in order to take a colorblind stance, through which one ignores or 'sees through' the other's difference. According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, the term 'colorblind racism' "refers to the dominant white racial ideology of the modern era, in which whites, under the guise of being colorblind, refuse to acknowledge the reality of racism and reject any consideration of how their own racial identity provides them with privileges vis-à-vis people of color."<sup>115</sup> Post-racist, colorblind supporters believe that if we continue to discuss racial matters today, then issues of racism will continue to flourish throughout society. They therefore advocate a position that "the past is the past."<sup>116</sup> In order to take such a position, one must overlook the continual inequities in contemporary society, while paradoxically placing the reasons for these issues in complicated and highly racialized categories. According to the work and research of Robert Blauner, blacks and whites differ in their interpretations of social change, "because their racial languages define the central terms, especially 'racism,' differently. Their racial languages incorporate different views of American society itself, especially the question of how central race and racism are to America's very existence, past and present."<sup>117</sup> In this sense, whites and blacks can talk past one another, as both interpret and talk about these issues differently. For Blauner, whites locate racism in color consciousness and its absence of colorblindness, "regarding it as a kind of racism when people of color insistently underscore their sense of difference, their affirmation of ethnic and racial membership, which minorities have increasingly asserted."<sup>118</sup> In this sense, the reduction of the Other's distinction is necessary for Whites to perpetuate the

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<sup>115</sup> Wise, 23.

<sup>116</sup> Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004, 563.

<sup>117</sup> Blauner 2009, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

'accepting,' colorblind ideology, neutralizing difference so that diversity can be experienced in a society 'without race.'

Of course, colorblind principles and assertions are also emphasized by non-white populations and marginalized groups. Drawing from the critical literature as mentioned above, the argument predominately rests upon normative views of whiteness that would structure the consumer interests and ideals of the mainstream drumming industry.

However, there are multiple facets to the term and its discourse that are articulated in a number of ways. In theory colorblindness and post-racist anti-racism are built upon ideals of inclusivity, pluralism, and optimism, which are desperately needed in any discourse wishing to challenge oppression. For instance, the premise of developing musical skills as an impartial and objective practice emphasizes an important and inclusive ideal. In some ways, it speaks to the kind of musical humanism that Paul Austerlitz outlines in his text, *Jazz Consciousness*, as many musicians often evoke notions of universalism, suggesting that they are musical 'citizens of the world.' Quoting bassist Cecil McBee, music is "a universal language...I've had people around the world understand what I was saying from my heart musically...That's a very powerful force and you must appreciate it."<sup>119</sup>

However, it is particularly relevant to understand how, according to Paul Gilroy, many people of color have been forced to invoke 'planetary humanism' or 'strategic universalism.' Saying that all people are fundamentally the same does not betray ignorance of the valuable lessons of cultural relativism, but it is instead a powerful strategy to counter the dehumanization of racism.<sup>120</sup> Quoting Gilroy:

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<sup>119</sup> Austerlitz 2005, xiv-xv.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

Yearning to be free, that is, to be free of 'race' and racism, has provided enduring foundations for the resolutely utopian aspirations to which a racially coded world gave rise among the subordinated, immiserated, and colonized.<sup>121</sup>

For those who are ethnicized and racialized, it is understandable that their desire to reconfigure and transcend racial differences placed upon them is extended as a right for all others. Although this line of thought continues to think within racial coordinates, it is in the hope that it may lead to methods of understanding each other without racial distinctions. The racial identification that has been evoked by black gospel drummers, for instance, articulates what Cornel West describes as the black exceptionalist tradition, celebrating the creative tradition of black communities and lauding the uniqueness of Afro-American culture and personality,<sup>122</sup> forming significant networks of black solidarity, pride, and strength. However, these connections are made both implicitly and explicitly in gospel texts, capable of generating different kinds of racialized interpretations of the style. In *Kick Snare Hat*, for instance, the gospel drumming narrative is predominately structured around black musical genres and their sociological connections to urban environments and references to black culture:

The heartbeat of Hip Hop and R&B comes from the streets. It's a dream that never dies and a lifestyle that only a few drummers will get to live. From the inner cities, to the churches and from the woodsheds to the arena stages, the drummers that play the music all have a story to tell and it's as real as it gets...Learn what inspires them, drives them, and takes them to the top of their game...If you love Hip Hop and R&B drumming, you'll love Kick Snare Hat' (Back Cover of Kick Snare Hat DVD).

In this way, the *cultural* emphasis of current hip hop and R&B drumming, as presented in the packaging of the DVD, is not only a reference to historically African American genres but also an implicit claim that the gospel 'twist' colors and shapes both of these styles in a very specific and racialized way. The problem is in how the packaging and

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> West 1982, 70.

presentation of the DVD makes no explicit reference to gospel drumming and the profound emphasis of the black Church, as well as the fact that all of the drummers in the DVD have been marketed as gospel players for quite some time prior to its release. In short, the content of the DVD was almost completely about gospel drumming, but its packaging and marketing framed black religiosity as an *implied* influence upon contemporary hip hop and R&B. In this way, the best and brightest hip hop and R&B drummers are also implied to be authentically black gospel. Black Church-ness frames the style of hip hop and R&B in ways that evoke essentialist understandings of black musicianship. The narratives of racial transcendence, ‘moving up’ and out of urban centers and becoming successful, also evoke the romanticized upward mobility tropes that have become indicative of and celebrated in contemporary post-racial society; that anyone from any background can become successful on their own terms and abilities.

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Not being racist but no white people lol guess we don't got the rhythm lol  
[NYtomb]

fuck them! Lolz I'm not racist but there a loads of sick as white drummers.  
[drummerboy7227]

Gospel's just not a real popular style with white drummers- but go check out Mike Clark before you say white people don't have rhythm.  
[TheLast PictureShow]

- (YouTube comments for GospelChops ‘Shed Sessions’ Clip)<sup>123</sup>

There are many complications, contradictions, and consequences involved in holding to post-racial positions, especially in the ways that these ideologies address the persistent differences and inequalities that continue to exist. Bonilla-Silva’s work on

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<sup>123</sup> ‘Shed sessionz shout part 1!! crazy gifted drummers’ comments section. Stable URL: [http://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?v=jZ\\_kTNoH\\_7w&page=1](http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=jZ_kTNoH_7w&page=1). Accessed May 2, 2012.

post-racial politics and ideology has provided much of the groundwork into this kind of research. As he describes, the 'new racism' of today developed where whites often feel a sense of 'reverse racism.'<sup>124</sup> What characterizes the new racism is the covert nature of racial discourse that simultaneously avoids racial terminology—causing the mechanisms of inequality to appear invisible—while elaborating upon an apparently racial agenda over political matters and allowing for white privilege to continue in a manner that defies facile racial readings.<sup>125</sup> What situates the 'new racism' alongside 'post-racial' attitudes is the denial that whites—historically and presently—experience significant differences in racial equality. Essentially, race-issues are reduced to matters of economics: access to jobs, health care, and education, problems that include all citizens. A new form of prejudice has, therefore, come to prominence, one that is preoccupied with matters of moral character,

informed by the virtues associated with the traditions of individualism. At its center are the contentions that Blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and that they take what they have not earned. Today, we say, prejudice is expressed in the language of American individualism.<sup>126</sup>

In this sense, whatever inequality one experiences is seen as largely self-imposed, pointing to one's own social and (possibly) cultural deficiencies amidst an atmosphere of non-racial prejudice. Bonilla-Silva also contends that the main components of the 'post-racist' ideology are the "denial of the centrality of discrimination ("Discrimination ended in the sixties!"), the abstract extension of liberal principles to racial matters ("I am all for equal opportunity; that's why I oppose affirmative action"), the naturalization of racial matters ("Residential segregation is natural..."), and the cultural explanation of minorities'

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<sup>124</sup> Bonilla-Silva et al., 559.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 559-560.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 560.

standing ("Mexicans are poorer because they lack the motivation to succeed")."<sup>127</sup> This kind of sentiment is also explored in the work of Tim Wise, who states that post-racial liberalism can often do precisely the opposite of what it is intending: if the impression of racial transcendence alludes to race as being no longer a factor—that all citizens have the same rights and freedoms—then it is more likely that any inequality amongst blacks will appear as due to a cultural or biological flaw, rationalizing racial biases.<sup>128</sup>

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Theo Goldberg states that it is important not to view race as “an antiquated institutional apparatus, an antique hangover, an unfortunate holdover,” but that we should understand it as an “enduring occupation of modernity,” often exposed through the desire to make race disappear in order to correct it.<sup>129</sup> Goldberg claims that there is a widespread, international social trend that renders race “irrelevant socially.” Racism then conceptually becomes stigmatized so that only the obviously bigoted, extreme individuals get to qualify.”<sup>130</sup> Continuing, he states that:

Here, racism is reduced in its supposed singularity to *invoking* race, not to its debilitating structural effects or the legacy of its ongoing unfair impacts...As race evaporates from the socio-conceptual landscape, racisms (in their plurality) are pushed further and further out of sight, out of “existence,” unmentionable because the terms by which to recognize and reference them recede, fade from view and memory.<sup>131</sup>

In this context, traditional (i.e. explicit) racism has been curtailed from the public domain: “from the formal sphere of politics [...] restricting it to the privacy of occasional individual choice and (self-) determination [making] race and by extension the effects it produces as racist discrimination and exclusion matters of personal morality rather than

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Wise, 18.

<sup>129</sup> Goldberg 2009, 360.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

public law. Race is rendered accordingly before, beneath, or beyond the law.”<sup>132</sup> Personal conviction (one’s informed ‘common-sense’) and community-specific values, versus the broader, so-called ‘ideological’ projects (affirmative action policies, etc.) that set out to address the systematic issues related directly to persistent racial inequalities, are currently the preferred tools utilized to confront racism today. However, this negates the usefulness of a ‘post-racial’ society, as the challenge of racism becomes less and less a concern for the broader public. Racism is hidden in plain sight, addressed through coded methods of talking around racism, without challenging its structural impact and power. In this sense, the desires and incentives to quash racism and the antagonisms of racialization require significant reassessment, as the post-racial is gradually becoming the dominant ideology of race in popular music and culture. The legacy of racism is one which necessitates continued effort to challenge its authority, as the willful denial of its presence allows for it to exert itself unrestrained.

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Racism is very alive, I mean, it’s different, right. Before people could be out in the open and say, “Hey nigger, hey honky, hey this and that.” But now it’s hidden, like ‘gospel drumming.’ (Cory)

The post-racial discourse presents only a partly convincing case for existence of universal racial equality. Perhaps this is because the basis for much of its argument relies too heavily on material and economic considerations. Or maybe it is because the ideology is expressed by both the political Left and Right, concurrently upholding the existence of a new post-racial era towards different ends. Regardless, what the debate illustrates is how race is very much a central topic in the supposedly non-racial discourse of post-racism, though it may be signified through use of a range of rhetoric. By connecting a

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 363.

discussion of post-racism with the gospel drumming case study, I wish to problematize how these dialogues and debates are increasing throughout strands of popular culture and political discourse, potentially shaping and impacting musical issues that have been historically haunted by the specter of race (black music in the US, in particular). The last part of this chapter will examine how the post-racial rearticulates many long-held black music and musicological issues in new and important ways. Namely, I will focus on the interconnected debates between capitalism, race, and ideology—how the post-racial articulates a form of race-relations that is contingent upon the ideals and processes of capitalistic consumption, with special attention to the subject of *authenticity*, in particular. This discussion will outline how certain strands of musicological thought frame black music in problematic ways, often with the intention of celebrating and maintaining the distinctiveness of black musicality. Finally, I will consider psychoanalytic theories of enjoyment and explore how relativistic themes in gospel drumming discourse compound individualistic tendencies in the post-racial debate.

***Problematics:  
Two Analyses of Post-Racial Music Consumption***

I) *The (Capitalistic) Ideology of Authenticity in Popular Culture:  
Consuming 'Real' Gospel*

Considering the degree to which *authenticity* functioned as a prevailing ideology throughout the gospel drumming discourse, I will examine the ideology of authenticity as a window into the post-racial: how obsessions with authentic experience are inexplicably tied to a division between notions of market, culture, difference, and distinction (cornerstones for popular music consumption). The fetishization of musical objects and their cultural origins serve to illustrate how a Marxist critique sheds light onto the logics of authenticity discourses in the circulation and consumption of commodities—how a music’s ‘realness’ is represented in a musical object (the gospel drumming text) while the unattainable ‘thing-ness’ about it (blackness/black religiosity) resides outside of its bounds (intangible, cultural, etc.). Although it is a classic, well-worn topic in popular music and ethnomusicological research, the concept of authenticity remains one of the most pervasive and illustrative forms of capitalistic ideology *par excellence*.

The implicit judgments and values that are inherent to the core of an ideological claim can place whatever is in its proximity as either continuous or discontinuous with it. In other words, ‘you’re either in or out.’ Richard Middleton (1990) identifies the politics of authenticity that exists between folk and popular music, where the former is often seen as ‘real’ music and produced ‘by the people:’ “folk impinges on commercial popular music in its presentation as ‘Other,’ with which popular music can be adversely contrasted.”<sup>133</sup> This is because, as Middleton states, “the judgment of ‘authenticity’ is

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<sup>133</sup> Middleton 2002, 129.

always directed at someone else. Either it removes this practice from its own mode of existence and annexes it to the system of an imperialist cultural morality, or it scapegoat's undesirable ('inauthentic') practices and casts them beyond the pale."<sup>134</sup> The very notion of the 'popular' in music is in itself an attempt to locate "the space, that terrain, or contradiction—between imposed and 'authentic,' 'elite' and 'common,' predominate and subordinate, then and now, theirs and ours, and so on—and to organize it in particular ways."<sup>135</sup> In this sense, an ideology of authenticity is always concerned with and includes its Other, containing within it a dialectic that frames its understanding. Similarly, for Simon Frith, ideologies can actually shape the way future music interprets itself (i.e., the ideology of folk music and rock). Frith states that folk music does not describe musical production but musical *values*, which are derived from its critique of commercialism: "the rock-folk argument... is not about how music is made, but about how it works: rock is taken to express (or reflect) a way of life; rock is *used* by its listeners as a folk music – it articulates communal values, comments on shared social problems."<sup>136</sup> In this sense, musical ideologies are *functional* and can be utilized in a number of political manifestations—demarcating others, forming communities, generating one's 'cultural capital,' etc. However, ideologies are often *implied* without explicit reference to these operations. This is because ideology often operates 'naturally,' 'innocently,' and 'obviously,' for its partiality and contingency have been repressed in the interests of a false universality.<sup>137</sup> As Regula Qureshi states, music (in this case, the *use* of rock music) accrues value to the patron in the form of "cultural capital," a

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>136</sup> Frith 2007, 31-32.

<sup>137</sup> Middleton 2002, 247.

suggestive concept that usefully evokes a non-material value created through appropriated labor.<sup>138</sup>

The gospel drumming case study encompasses a number of similarities with the discourse of rock-folk authenticity. Firstly, the construction of the gospel category in the mainstream drumming industry is a particular representation of gospel that has, for some, been interpreted as a sign of gospel drumming's international success. For others—in particular, for some black church drummers—this has posed significant conflicts with the spiritual intention of church drumming. In this sense, the 'folk' aspect to the discourse (the interpretation from a church drummer) is in conflict with the popularization of gospel. However, the demarcation of gospel/not-gospel fluctuates and is largely undefined; it is contingent upon the *values* that inform the unique predisposition of each drummer who approaches gospel drumming from their different vantage points. At the same time, gospel drumming is utilized within the broader networks of drumming culture (magazines, DVDs, websites, etc.) as yet another example of drumming technique; used as a kind of folk music in the appropriation, deconstruction, and further innovation of these gospel patterns in the lives of both black and non-black (religious and non-religious) drummers. What maintains the 'folk' aspect to the use of gospel drumming is precisely the interest and values that are mandated in the networks of drumming culture (which are, for the most part, exceptionally open to sharing any kind of drumming style or technique with others).

The nexus that exists between material production and the cultural value that develops out of it is a central object of critique within a classical Marxist reading of

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<sup>138</sup> Qureshi, 88.

commodity fetishism. As Martin Stokes writes, during the Romantic era “music became a secular religion, inevitably debased by its contact with the commodity form. From this perspective music and money exist in separate moral spheres and are not easily exchanged.”<sup>139</sup> In this sense, the authentic functions outside of commoditization, although it is simultaneously projected onto the commodity itself and is exchanged through the process of consumption. David Brackett notes that the ideal of authenticity and of authentic expression in popular music has long been part of the Romantic ideology “so necessary to the production and consumption of art under capitalism.”<sup>140</sup> ‘Authentic’ music is the most available for appropriation and economic exploitation precisely because it carries the greatest cultural capital, in turn creating the greatest desire for consumption.<sup>141</sup> Brackett highlights one of Frederic Jameson’s critical observations on authenticity:

The only authentic cultural production today has seemed to be that which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system: black literature and blues, British working-class rock, women’s literature . . . and this production is possible only to the degree to which these forms of collective life or collective solidarity *have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and by the commodity system.*<sup>142</sup>

For Jameson, these marginalized genres and styles can only seem to navigate capitalism as long as they appear as if they are outside of its production. However, their final penetration into the capitalist system is understood as being both inevitable and central to the ideological disavowal of authenticity politics, which results in a form of cynicism. In this sense, accusations of ‘selling out’ are dependent upon the complete disavowal of how ‘authentic’ art forms become incorporated into the capitalistic system. The ideology of

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<sup>139</sup> Stokes 2002, 146.

<sup>140</sup> Brackett 1995, 88.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 89. Emphasis mine.

many subcultural, 'indie,' and marginalized music genres are only operative through the adoption of such a position, as characterized in previous forms of similarly counter-cultural, 'non-commodifiable' musical movements (such as the individualized folk artist of the 1960s, or the DIY self-reflexivity of punk music). This is, of course, repeating Marx's analysis of *representation*, which mediates between the poles of the ideal and the material, where the need of repeating imagery and symbols from the past forms a totality as the subjective will is capable of imposing itself upon the material environment in order to legitimize its cause as righteous and true.<sup>143</sup> As Brackett reflects, "The individualized artist needs connoisseurs to appreciate [his or her] work; the punk needs to distance himself from commerce and side with the people as a paradoxical means of differentiating himself from commercial music so that he too can find a market of connoisseurs."<sup>144</sup> This 'branding' of marginalized artists—"the construction of ideologies and pseudo-histories associated with a product primarily to encourage a specific community to identify with a commodity"<sup>145</sup>—was astutely critiqued as early as Adorno, who recognized the creation of a "pseudo-individuality' that propagated the myths of composers and singers through the dissemination of their recordings."<sup>146</sup>

Henry Klumpenhouwer states that

fetishism manifests itself in music in the belief that the value of the musical commodity (however it appears) arises from its material characteristics, rather than the place its producers hold in the totality of social labor—a belief, in other words, that the music commodity's use-value, its ability to satisfy (in this case, aesthetic) needs, the nature of the enjoyment it creates, is the source of its value.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Hawkes 2003, 92-93.

<sup>144</sup> Brackett, 171.

<sup>145</sup> Schiffer 2010, 79.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Klumpenhouwer 2002, 35.

This has considerable implications for when we contextualize the fetishistic dynamic within a world music paradigm. For many in Western society, music functions as “a bridge to other cultures, representative of a new global age of cultural tolerance and equality, allowing participants to be engaged in the enrichment of all cultures through the affirmation of his or her own difference.”<sup>148</sup> Subsequently, the consumption of cultural products such as world music is interpreted as being much more than just the purchasing of musical products: one can read themselves as living through the experiences of others, free associating subjective emotional responses as universal meanings and understanding this process as a form of genuine cultural understanding.

The gospel drumming case study similarly articulates certain popular culture discourses of authenticity and its relationship to consumption. Notions of real or authentic gospel drumming—which are problematically tied to long-standing interests in marginalized communities, bodies, classes, and ethnicities—appeal to values that prioritize the significance of non-commoditized forms as true musical expression. Insider and outsider discourses are also constructed from a number of vantage points: in particular, the dichotomy existing between gospel church drummers (insiders) and non-church drummers (outsiders), as well as the demarcation of the gospel label that is unfairly placed upon black drummers (effectively rendering their gospelness/blackness as a deficit, fad, or recent trend compared with ‘unbiased,’ objective drummers who perform a variety of techniques). However, accessibility to these drumming products, gospel or otherwise, involves a considerable amount of money (drums being quite expensive, and

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<sup>148</sup> Aubert 2007, 54.

educational DVDs often run around \$30 and up), creating insiders and outsiders in economic terms as well.

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Among other things, these debates articulate one of the most recurring and significant authenticity-related themes in popular culture: the theme of *anti-capitalism*, which is premised upon the desire of consumers to separate ‘authentic’ forms of expression from the capitalist process. Such a desire is seen, for instance, in the hope that while gospel drumming can be bought, sold, marketed, its ‘realness’ evades the process. We have seen some of this in the reactions to gospel drumming products by some of my gospel drumming interview participants. However, in many ways, the concern over ‘selling out’ or the desire to assert the ‘realness’ of gospel articulates a long-held narrative of authenticity in popular music and culture.

In one sense, to support ‘authentic’ music is to support the egalitarian ideal that every subject’s experience is worthy of being made into art (democratic populism)—an ideal that is continually reinforced by many testaments of struggles against corporate might as it is exercised over the criteria of authenticity (where the consumer is always right and the market determines culture [i.e. market populism]).<sup>149</sup> The functioning of capitalism in a liberal democracy allows for the spirit of an authentic individualism to be expressed and more importantly appropriated and manipulated by all others. Authenticity is, once again, "defined against artifice, *real* by *contrast*; but, what is at stake is not authenticity of experience," but an "authenticity of feeling."<sup>150</sup> This feeling that is evoked through musical affect gives pleasure to the consumer who, through owning certain

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<sup>149</sup> Frith 1988, 101.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

recordings and merchandise, achieves this pleasure through the aura of 'sincere,' authentic, anti-capitalist iconography that can appeal to everyone's experience of capitalism.<sup>151</sup> Anti-capitalistic authenticity, then, "makes sense of desire aroused and desire thwarted," offering a "sense of personal worth that is not determined by either market forces (and wealth) or aesthetic standards (and cultural capital)."<sup>152</sup> As Middleton states,

The ideological work responsible for the social organization of musical taste is not the product of a simple, identifiable ideology, still less is it reducible to economic class forces; rather, it is the articulation and inflection of a multitude of lines of force, associated with different sites, audiences, media, production apparatuses and discourses, together creating the changing positions available to us on the map of pleasure.<sup>153</sup>

For Middleton, pleasures are inextricably linked with judgments, and the euphoric exists only in comparison with its dysphoric opposite—also *value*.<sup>154</sup> Understanding "how the trope of authenticity works within [popular] culture demands that we tease out an understanding of its commodification, at a moment when the project of the self ... has largely devolved upon a subject that struggles to define itself beyond the function of consumption."<sup>155</sup> This is because "authenticity was born in shock...[i]ts conjoining of ethical and aesthetic imperatives [...] a 'you should' with a 'you want'."<sup>156</sup> The injunction to enjoy, the pure symptom of capitalism, is inherent to the very structure of capitalism itself; it calls upon us all to consume with pleasure, and popular music operates perfectly as one of the objects of our desire.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Middleton 2002, 248-249.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>155</sup> Middleton 2006, 204.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 232.

For Fabio Vighi, to oppose the processes of capitalism “requires more than a sentiment of irritation, frustration or rage...it requires our facing the unpleasant fact that despite all our well-meaning resistance and remonstrations, *our being coincides with our being consumers*—and that it is only thanks to our being consumers that the capitalist machine continues to thrive.”<sup>157</sup> We must therefore consider “the extent to which our entire existence depends on the thrills, the little pleasures, of consuming arrays of ever-changing products, lifestyles and fashions, without which we would feel humiliated and lost.”<sup>158</sup> The ‘wager’ of the category of *enjoyment* has to do, simultaneously, “with *capitalism and anti-capitalism*, inasmuch as it is: 1) what propels capital forward in its headless drive towards profit-making; 2) what keeps consumers libidinally attached to the capitalist machine, and; 3) what allows us to imagine the breaking up of the current order.”<sup>159</sup>

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I have examined the ideology of authenticity as a way to highlight how claims for ‘real’ gospel drumming can be analyzed as expressing an essential trope in capitalistic consumption—the desire to displace the meaningful affect of a certain form of music from its status in commoditization. Such processes and ideals have been central to the formation, popularity, and proliferation of many music trends and subcultures, negotiating and signifying broad sets of meanings and values in various forms of commodities. Simultaneously, the anti-capitalist trope that is inherent to many popular music scenes and genres illustrates the maintenance of an ideology in the face of its

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<sup>157</sup> Vighi 2010, 26.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 17.

actual forms of material production. For instance, the value that is attributed to gospel drumming rests between the politics of authenticity (as existing outside the commoditized form—residing in the experience of the black church) *and* the circulation and commoditization of gospel products (denoting success, status, and recognition amongst the broader drumming community—as indicated in Cory’s earlier comments about bolstering the Christian market in Canada, while remaining suspicious about the mainstream drumming industry’s portrayal of gospel). As I have mentioned previously, the popularization and production of gospel merchandise has generated a number of apprehensions with some of my interview participants. In this manner, non-black church drummers who purchase gospel products and appropriate the drumming skills in gospel videos and texts would only be performing a version of black church drumming that is not defined within the specific church service context (i.e. deemed inauthentic).

Middleton, Frith, Stokes, and Klumpenhouer outlined how these views are intertwined in the circulation of capital and the value that is placed upon popular forms of music. In the third and final chapter of this thesis, I will delve deeper into such intersections of consumption, desire, and ideology through a reading of psychoanalytic and Marxist critiques of consumption (a Žižekian approach). But before doing so, the following sections will explore in depth two other issues that form an important part of the backdrop to my gospel drumming case study.

## II) Constructing 'Black Music:' Academia and Americanization

The discourse of black music study has long been one of recuperating and rearticulating power imbalances, remembering histories of oppression under slavery and white rule, and constructing new philosophies of blackness that are positive, liberating, complimentary, and incorporated into a broader narrative of national identity. There are a great number of instances where the creation and adoption of a much-needed cross-disciplinary theoretical arsenal were used to combat persistent racism and inequality against blacks, as well as to construct a philosophy of and pride in black music and culture.<sup>160</sup> Drawing from predominately Marxist critiques, as well as the rich history of black socialist radicalism and revolutionary politics since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of these developments advocated for a reformed identity politics, a resistance to capitalism, and interestingly, developed many narratological constructions of a politicized and historicized black musical utterance in order to situate the sounds of blackness as signifying both endurance and strength in the face of white oppression. Two exemplary thematic tropes within this discourse concern black rhythm and voice.

For Angela Nelson, rhythm is *the* textual element that allows researchers to see and understand African creative expression; it is the fundamental, spiritual organizer in the lives of African Americans as both Africans and African Americans use rhythm to reflect and relate to their larger environment.<sup>161</sup> In traditional West African cosmology, rhythm is the force that is at the root of all meaning and expression; it is the impetus behind the arrangement and ordering of all temporal manifestations, giving form to speech, actions,

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<sup>160</sup> In particular, post-colonial theory, feminism, and particularly, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *Signifyin(g)*, Melville Herskovit's Africanisms and syncretism, and Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

<sup>161</sup> Nelson 1999, 1-2.

and creativity.<sup>162</sup> Rhythm philosophically communicates religious experience in African cultures and helps its ritual participants to reach “communitas.”<sup>163</sup> Rhythm and time, in this sense, are not just in relation to the musical understandings of pulse, tempo, and meter, but of a markedly African conceptualization of time in the everyday: rhythm as structure and structuring element for the internal and external worlds. Rhythm is also a key element of sound and an organizational structure capable of producing physical and psychophysical effects, particularly when it accompanies religious rituals (or even secular dances), inducing under appropriate circumstances a heightened state of consciousness or trance.<sup>164</sup> It plays a fundamental role in bonding societies and groups and in structuring the collective experience of time; people learn how to keep together in time through various forms of movement socialization, which are mediated by rhythm.<sup>165</sup>

In relation to the black voice, Cornel West cites Mahalia Jackson’s ‘moan’ as illustrative of the core of black expression—where “the deep black meaning of this cry and moan goes back to the indescribable cries of Africans on the slave ships during the cruel transatlantic voyages to America and the indecipherable moans of enslaved Afro-Americans...[supporting] black endurance against madness and suicide.”<sup>166</sup> In this instance, the sounds of black history can be situated within a single utterance. In Lawrence Levine’s historical analysis of sacredness in black culture—specifically, the description of *vituperative* practices of harsh, verbal criticism as a method of achieving psychological and spiritual catharsis (a precursor to games such as the Dozens)—it can

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<sup>162</sup> Madison, 1999, 91.

<sup>163</sup> Nelson, 3.

<sup>164</sup> Munro 2010, 4.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>166</sup> Werner 2006, 8.

be understood that any black musical utterance is contextualized as a vocalization of spiritual transcendence, pain, overcoming pain, and survival.<sup>167</sup>

The temptation to support these kinds of progressive claims and constructions can represent a broader interest in anti-racism and social justice, but can also align with a contemporary worldview of a ‘raceless’ human society. However, for Ronald Radano, what drives much of these discourse formations is the affirmation of ideological commitments to “black” and “white” as conceptual categories.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, through what Radano describes as “the tenacity of black musical racialism,” scholars are often too quick to determine grand historical nuances in the music, linking even contemporary black musical expression to African “sacred worlds,” to the narrative of the ring shout.<sup>169</sup> At its worst, such thinking treats the theories of signifyin(g) and African tropology as the only necessary description of all black music.<sup>170</sup> Most importantly, these constructions often overlook the inherently interracial character of black music as understood within the formation of an American identity. For Radano, it has always been perceived this way: “the legacies of oppression and segregation that undoubtedly contributed to black music’s distinctiveness are not enough to sustain arguments of an unyielding black, musical essence.”<sup>171</sup> Black music’s “‘soulfulness,’ its depth of feeling or ‘realness,’ its emotional and rhythmic energy, its vocally informed instrumental inflections,”<sup>172</sup> are all popularized ideas of how black music is essentially drawn from the depths of social

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<sup>167</sup> Levine 1977, 299-300.

<sup>168</sup> Radano 2003, 7-8.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

tragedy, garnering its strength and resiliency from a history of enduring racial oppression.

In one sense,

the sustaining of this kind of “selective tradition” has performed well to refuse white racism’s challenge to black cultural legitimacy. On the other hand, this type of narrative is discussed under a singular notion of meaning and form, undercutting the interracial conversations and tensions that historically and continue to assume black music’s cultural significance in its capacity to influence and reflect the legacy of racial relations in North America.<sup>173</sup>

In the case of rhythm and blackness, rhythm as a musical concept was profoundly and intimately connected to the idea of modernism itself: “Black rhythm not only reflected society but infiltrated the very texture of American social existence, giving the social a perceptible musicality expressing “racial” (black) influence.”<sup>174</sup> Rhythm was a metaphor of contamination, making white blood ‘hot’ through seductive rhythm, conflating all qualities of excess, from drunkenness to fever, from violence to sexual promiscuity.<sup>175</sup> The social power of rhythm, as critiqued by Kofi Agawu in his essay “The Invention of African Rhythm,” was invented within the discourses of colonialism—beginning with Ibn Butlan’s eleventh-century document on purchasing slaves: “If a black were to fall from the sky to the earth, he would fall in rhythm”<sup>176</sup>—as a way of defining African difference.<sup>177</sup> In North America, Radano notes, there is a similar tendency to reduce all of black music to an essential rhythmic difference that underlies contemporary notions of authenticity.<sup>178</sup>

For Radano, black music, as the defining expression of race in America, has been shaped and reshaped within “a peculiar interracial conversation whose participants

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., xii-xiii.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 103, 238.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 103.

simultaneously deny that the conversation has ever taken place,”<sup>179</sup> ‘infecting’ white bodies with a difference that they themselves have constructed.<sup>180</sup> If one conforms to the literal rhythms of racial assumption—the “square renderings of time and culture”—the subtle nuances of interraciality in black music are lost, “incapable of noticing the blurring of the nightmare of the color line that overwhelms and dictates the understanding of black music in American culture.”<sup>181</sup> Black music, like all Western musical practices, is “patently inter-musical as it is intermediated, and, finally, interracial. Critical analysis of black music only helps to propel the revelation that there exists a conspicuously marginal and invisible black music that *is* the nation’s voice.”<sup>182</sup> As Middleton states, “it is as if a hybridity that cannot be admitted is forcibly refashioned as a hegemony (which, in spite of itself, will be a sort of hybrid anyway).”<sup>183</sup> However, there are methods to reconfigure notions of racial difference under structures that support themes of commonality, particularly within discourses surrounding mutual belonging through one’s nationhood.

These forms of reconfiguration have been seen in how gospel drumming is often connected to the discourse and genre of hip-hop (as illustrated in the *Kick Snare Hat* DVD). The amalgamation of gospel into the hip-hop canon—existing as either a branch of hip-hop drumming, or explained by appeal to a commonality that is found throughout black drumming culture—disguises any differentiation or distinctiveness that is characteristic of the gospel style. This move also integrates the gospel discussion into the broader African American musical discourse, paradoxically negating (or disavowing) the

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Middleton 2006, 39.

over-emphasis on racialized explanations for the sound of black drumming in the broader networks of drumming culture and industry.

One of the dominant narratives and methods of race neutralization is the integration of black music as ‘American’ music. In a number of drumming texts and educational materials, many forms of black drumming are nationalized into ‘American’ traditions (Steve’s Smith’s *The US Big Beat* DVD, for example). However, this narrativization is often taken not in the critical sense of Ralph Ellison’s claim that black music *is* American music, but in the problematic sense of how many take Martin Luther King’s famous quote literally (that people be judged not based on the color of their skin, but the content of their character), opting to disregard the impact or reality of color and race-thinking altogether in a rather cut-and-dry disavowal of basic antagonisms in black and white relations. Very often, the desire to overlook race and see how ‘we are all one’ negates the discussion altogether. One such problematic is that claiming jazz to be ‘America’s music’ fails to recognize that the music’s key innovators were *African* American, while also overlooking developments in Latin and South America.<sup>184</sup> In response to this problematic, John Lipsitz provides an interesting reading of Ken Burns’ widely popularized and heralded film *Jazz* (2002), which, as he claims, uniquely embodies a certain kind of multicultural rhetoric and ideal characteristic to its time of production. According to Lipsitz, the ultimate achievement of Ken Burns’ nine-part film is that it presented the public with a distinct way of understanding national history and national culture of the United States. It created an accessible, enjoyable, and convincing story about national identity, progress, and heroic artistic achievement, reflecting the ideals of

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<sup>184</sup> Austerlitz, x.

triumphant nationalism and “managerial multiculturalism.”<sup>185</sup> In a very general and populist sense, multiculturalism has often been understood as standing in for anti-racism *in itself* as an ideal.<sup>186</sup> But, most importantly, multiculturalism urged white nationalists to acknowledge the importance of black people to the U.S. national project while allowing blacks to see themselves as key contributors to something in which all Americans presumably take pride.<sup>187</sup> Lipsitz states that *Jazz* echoed

the insistence in elite circles at the start of the new millennium about the exceptional (and even divine) character of the U.S. nation-state and its mission in the world, about the obsolescence of the anti-racist and egalitarian struggles of the mid-twentieth century, and about a new model of civic life that hides from the persistence of racial inequality by celebrating the incorporation of exemplary individuals from diverse backgrounds into the ranks of those who rule...[It is] not just a film *about* history, this production *makes* history by condensing the complex and conflicted history of jazz music into an allegory of national identity.”<sup>188</sup>

For Lipsitz, these arguments are logical and part of a long tradition, advocating a central place for African Americans in the history of modernism. However, in the version of modernity that Burns’ film presents, jazz is a specialized and autonomous activity detached from the plural traditions from which it emerged: from tent shows, brass bands, drum and bugle corps playing, vaudeville and variety performances, work songs, field hollers, and dances.<sup>189</sup> The film also occludes the internationalism that has informed the art of so many jazz musicians.<sup>190</sup> Referring to the opening scenes of *Jazz*, narrator Wynton Marsalis claims that “jazz objectifies America” and that it can tell us who “we” are. Lipsitz states that the audience is being interpellated as national subjects, as

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<sup>185</sup> Lipsitz 2007, 81.

<sup>186</sup> Lentin and Titley, 75.

<sup>187</sup> Lipsitz, 82.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

“Americans” (or, subjects outside of America).<sup>191</sup> For Marsalis, racism’s relationship to jazz is incidental, only the historically specific obstacle to genius that these artists faced. “It happened to be racism,” Marsalis observes, “but it is always something.”<sup>192</sup> In this sense, the story of jazz is the story of a modern, innovative, heroic, American genius, connecting Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Charlie Parker, to the European art music of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven; driving home the quintessential inter-racial and class-crossing achievement of jazz.<sup>193</sup> Race is identified in the film, but the overarching narrative of American-ness—which signifies a number of its own ideological projects and intentions (exceptionalism, individualism, the American Dream, and now, post-racism)—takes precedence, obscuring the atmosphere of explicit racism at the time of its development, as well as the interracial relationships between blacks and whites in its representation (even in regard to the very term and categorization of ‘jazz,’ argued as a racist construction by whites).<sup>194</sup>

Radano’s critiques present a number of implications for understanding the discourse of gospel drumming. For instance, notions of blackness and black religiosity have often been invoked as markers of gospel’s authenticity, used to indicate a deep, penetrating cultural and racial basis that discursively structures the understanding of the drumming style. For Radano, forms of reductionism are too-often perpetuated in the narratives of black music through maintaining the idea of inherent sacredness in every black musical utterance. In many ways, the discourse of gospel drumming reveals a similar desire amongst black church drummers (and non-black drumming consumers) to

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>194</sup> Austerlitz, 1-3.

construct a narrative of authenticity in the face of gospel's growing popularity, commodification, and cross-cultural, stylistic appropriation. However, this process can engender and justify racialized explanations for black musicianship, or denote the 'realness' of gospel to religious factors that exist outside purely technical development, especially when non-black drummers perpetuate these kinds of racial considerations. Furthermore, as Radano observes, those who perpetuate black authenticity discourses often maintain problematic forms of reductionism, but not as a means to essentialize blackness in a derogatory fashion. These discourses are often maintained in the hope of constructing and immortalizing aspects of black music through appealing to the contextual, socio-cultural, and historical foundations of the black experience in North America. The very concept of black music and its articulation in the American context also presents a number of questions in the gospel drumming case study, discerning how and when notions of 'black' and 'white' are polarized in racial contexts, existing as conceptual categories that inform a certain dialectical tendency in the construction of black music narratives, arguing that black music is inherently interracial despite many attempts to differentiate black musicians from white.

Lipsitz' work provides a contemporary case study (Ken Burns' *Jazz*) that highlights current race-relations and multicultural issues in a black music context, suggesting how the popular narratives and media representations of black music can be informed by the broader political ideologies of the time (i.e. multiculturalism). From these theoretical outlooks, the discourse of gospel drumming—as indicated in the various mainstream drumming texts, web videos, and discussion boards—illustrates a number of issues and questions that problematizes contemporary race-relations and conceptualizations of black

music. The rhetoric of objective drumming technique, arguments for cultural and racial factors in the performance of gospel drumming (as indicated in online discussion boards and YouTube comments), and the mainstream drumming industry's often-problematic attempts to construct a narrative of gospel drumming (*Ultimate Drum Lessons*, in particular): each of these examples highlight how certain tensions exist in the various conceptualizations and narratives of black musicality today, challenging naïve assumptions for post-racial transcendence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

III) *The Question of Pleasure in a Post-Racial, Multicultural Context:  
Žižek's Theory of Enjoyment and its Musical Implications*

The most exciting feature of Žižek's theory of enjoyment is his extension of the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* into the political field, "concerning himself with the ways that ideological formations work as economies of enjoyment to forbid, permit, direct, and command enjoyment."<sup>195</sup> As Jodi Dean puts it "our politics is more and more directly the politics of *jouissance*, concerned with ways of soliciting, or controlling and regulating, *jouissance*."<sup>196</sup> This pleasurable/painful enjoyment cannot be signified directly, "as it exceeds symbolization and can only be signified through inconsistencies, holes, and slippages in the symbolic order."<sup>197</sup> These 'holes' are the intangible differences and accounts that stand out from a dominant structure. In the case of the mainstream drumming industry, such an effect can be located in conjunction with the ideology of objective drumming technique, where gospel functions as yet another example of drumming patterns and styles that can be appropriated and commoditized. The enjoyment

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<sup>195</sup> Dean 2006, 8.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

of music and gospel drumming, then, can be effectively articulated and theorized as a feature of Žižek's politicized jouissance. Echoing Balibar's notion of the racialized will to know, the purportedly authentic features of blackness that have been attributed to the gospel style and have been emphasized in educational drumming texts and discussion boards can be understood as fulfilling an immediate void where the ideology of objective skills development fails. They imagine a real, true, and innately racial pleasure in the authentic performance of gospel drumming. From this logic, the black gospel drummer is endowed with intangible rhythmic talent, bypassing the pillars of knowledge and technique, or, mastering them through this inherent proficiency for drumming. From Žižek's theoretical view, what the black gospel drummer possesses is access to unbridled enjoyment—an imagined jouissance where the racialized fantasy hopes to provide an answer. Racial expectations and presuppositions for exceptional black drumming attempt to locate the gap where jouissance resides, which is always felt or sensed, but impossible to locate with any specificity. The process of racializing black church drummers is, in this way, directly tied to economies of enjoyment. Racial thinking reduces the musicality and talent of African American drummers to a singular function, but it also permits access to jouissance for non-black drummers, albeit through a highly problematic and reductionist ideological window. Non-black gospel drummers have access to a range of options in response to this situation: yield to the racial ideal; integrate the popularized practices into their drumming, humanize/universalize all drumming as contributing to the production of *life* (a concept to be discussed shortly); or neutralize the specificity of gospel drumming's contextual and social relationships to uphold an objectivist and technical position.

However, the objectivist stance is of special interest in that it evokes Lacan's notion of the Discourse of the University, a social discourse that is enunciated from the position of 'neutral' Knowledge. It addresses this position through the enunciation of power in the form of 'truth' (the Master signifier).<sup>198</sup> In this way, the 'neutral knowledge' of objective skill appears as if it alone can turn someone into a proper, musical subject. However, "the constitutive lie of the University Discourse is that it disavows its performative dimension, presenting what effectively amounts to a political decision based on power as a simple insight into the factual state of things."<sup>199</sup> What the Discourse of the University does is reduce the human to its bare life—*homo saucer*—as the "dispensable object of the expert caretaking knowledge"<sup>200</sup> (dispensable, in the sense that the neutral knowledge is portrayed as being enough to make up any subject). The musical subject of the University Discourse does not lack, but possesses access to Knowledge—access to the jouissance of the Other (the gospel drummer) within the field of objective drumming technique. However, if we are to adhere to the Lacanian theory of the subject, the excess, the indivisible remainders that remain outside the indoctrination of University Discourse are the details that properly make up the subject (as one that is inherently lacking). As Žižek states, "what one should avoid here is the Foucauldian misreading: the produced subject is not simply the subjectivity which arises as the result of the disciplinary application of knowledge-power, but its remainder, that which eludes the grasp of knowledge-power."<sup>201</sup> If the basis for musical skill resides in the intangible and racialized

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<sup>198</sup> Žižek, *Jacques Lacan's Four Discourses*. Stable URL: <http://www.lacan.com/zizfour.htm>. Accessed March 17, 2012.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

aspects (outside the neutral knowledge of objective skills and technical discourse), musicians can reduce the content of the style to the Other—as the one who enjoys a privileged relationship to the *jouissance* of gospel; a musical exception who resides outside the master-signifier of objective, neutral skill. Within this fantasy scene, racialization performs as a method to fetishize the Other, and to simultaneously despise the Other for their ability to undermine its neutral, technical space. Compounding this is how the ineffable and authentic preferences for ‘great drumming’ are often the most popular sources of admiration in consumer culture. In this way, Knowledge alone does not articulate ‘feel,’ ‘groove,’ or ‘swing’—the most sought-after and idealized features of authentic and innate musicality—but coldly asserts itself as if it is an authoritative discourse.

Žižek has theorized at length contemporary forms of ethnic nationalism and multiculturalism—the appeals to ethnic and/or racial identity (rights to self-determination, cultural/linguistic preservation) on the basis of a certain *essential difference* for inclusion, recognition, and redress.<sup>202</sup> However, these forms of identity politics are precisely the kinds of stances that minorities have taken in contemporary Western societies, much to the disapproval of liberals and conservatives who see such claims as sidestepping the collective, unified, post-racial ideal. In turn, the ideals and forms of enjoyment that Others seem to possess within the national field can seem foreign, excessive, intrusive to the lives of the white majority and separate from the ‘white racial frame’ and norms of whiteness. (see Feagin, 2010). But from Žižek’s perspective, “a nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to be

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<sup>202</sup> Dean, 13-14.

materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths or fantasies that secure these practices.”<sup>203</sup> From this vantage point, Žižek controversially maintains that the ideology and state policy of multiculturalism “demands that the excessive enjoyment of the Other should be curtailed so that everyone’s access to *jouissance* is equal,”<sup>204</sup> that the multicultural injunction is one of ‘cultural apartheid,’ distanced and remaining ‘not to close’ to our way of life.<sup>205</sup> In this sense, “the *truly* unbearable fact for a multiculturalist liberal is an Other who *really does* become like us, while retaining their own specific features.”<sup>206</sup> The distinctions and excesses of the Other, who is understood to be neutralized under the post-racial ideology, stand out as the ideological ‘inconsistencies.’ For instance, black gospel drummers learn and perform within the networks of popular drumming culture and education alongside thousands of others. However, their racialization may be taken by some to polarize any sense of communal solidarity and belonging, negating the salience of cross-cultural appropriation and shared consumer interests. The distinctive religious practices of black Pentecostalism also possess characteristic forms of ecstatic worship, physicality, and improvisation that could seem idiosyncratic to outside observers, leading to cultural and/or racial misunderstanding. Therefore, as the ideology of white colorblindness hypothesizes, the ‘excessive’ differences that the Other identifies with must be prohibited in order to maintain the post-racial ideal and/or demarcate their differences as Other. In this manner, the objective drumming stance attempts to overhaul the shock of difference through bypassing the issue altogether, amalgamating all forms of drumming into appropriable

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>204</sup> Žižek 2008b, 89.

<sup>205</sup> Žižek 2011, 46.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

patterns that can exist outside the politics and histories of cultural and racial antagonism (a post-ideological discourse). Such a process aligns with Žižek's observation that multiculturalism is an ideological hegemony, "one that overtakes the reality of the predominant form of social relations."<sup>207</sup> And, like all hegemonic ideologies, "multiculturalism is an ideological *fantasy*, which can potentially conceal forms of racism, violence and inequality; where 'civil' forms of racism (i.e., implicit, or disguised) can only function (in the guise of) the illusion of anti-racist multiculturalism."<sup>208</sup> As Jodi Dean states,

We find enjoyment in fantasizing about *their* enjoyment, in positing an enjoyment beyond what we imagine for ourselves. We do not like the excess of the others' ways of life (their music, the way they smell, their relation to their bodies). Their way of life seems immediately intrusive, an assault, like they are flaunting it, daring us, blatantly refusing to sacrifice their enjoyment and come under a common symbolic order. Why do their lives seem so authentic, so real? Why are they so much more in tune with their sexuality, able to eat and drink and live while I am hard at work? The very excessiveness of their enjoyment makes them 'them,' other, foreign.<sup>209</sup>

In this sense, the Other within multicultural space requires much more than simple 'tolerance' (enduring the excessive and intrusive aspects about them), but a certain degree of sacrifice and prohibition from our own enjoyment. This is because the ideological identification with national master-signifiers ('Canada,' 'America,' etc.) provides a sense of communal belonging, formed through the Althusserian interpellative answering to the hail of our institutional apparatuses (telling us what it means to be \_\_\_\_\_). But the plurality of difference that is inherent to the multicultural ideal requires all of its citizenry to be tolerant, accepting, and sensitive to the beliefs and rights of the Other, considerate of how our way of life is contextualized within the complex

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Dean, 15.

spectrum of multicultural difference. As Matthew Sharpe outlines,

political life, from the perspective of much contemporary theory, is based on identification with ideologies, and, specifically, on identification with the ideological keywords, such as 'democracy', 'freedom' or 'America', that hold ideologies together. Symbolic identification with these ideological keywords, or 'master signifiers', shapes the identity of subjects as citizens of a political community. The subject recognizes itself as 'a social democrat', or 'a good Australian', because he or she has integrated this master signifier into its subjectivity in a decisive way. The subject is able to identify with (a) master signifier(s) in this way because ideologies are always propagated through institutions. The institutional rituals of civic life are a form of ideologically saturated socialisation into the accepted values and ideals of the political community.<sup>210</sup>

However, when subjects become disenchanted with an ideological master signifier, "they do not necessarily adopt a new one. Generally speaking, they just carry on as before, only in the context of a *cynical* distance towards their professed values and ideals."<sup>211</sup> For Žižek, cynicism is a form of manipulation, where one preserves an internal distance towards symbolic fictions (i.e., dimensions of authority in which we do not truly believe in or can properly verbalize). The cynical subject is "quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality [i.e., the proven falsehoods for perpetuating racial thinking and musical essentialism], but he nonetheless still insists upon the mask."<sup>212</sup> Continuing, Žižek states that "cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of an enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it."<sup>213</sup> It is only then through the performance of collective rituals (e.g., developing drumming technique through studying gospel texts) where participation brings satisfaction and communal solidarity for the cynic; *jouissance* is gained through performance of the institutional rituals that the ideology justifies, conjuring up,

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<sup>210</sup> Sharpe and Boucher 2010, 8.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>212</sup> Žižek 2008c, 25.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

unconsciously, a sublime object that would represent the ultimate fulfilment of the dreams of community implied in the master signifier's ideal<sup>214</sup> (i.e. objective drumming skills and technique). We can also extend these 'rituals' to the practices that bind the drumming community together (consuming drumming magazines, DVDs, taking lessons, performing live, etc.), which become meaningless through this cynical distancing; the practices are only capable of engendering partial satisfaction for its community (what Žižek calls 'surplus enjoyment')—the left-over enjoyment from the supposed loss that happened when the subject adopted that ideology in the first place—leading to an eventual desire for restoration (the ideological fantasy).<sup>215</sup> In this way, the racial fantasy sabotages the ideology of objective drumming through cynically adhering to the ideal (that all drummers can perform equally well without bias) while simultaneously resorting to racialized understandings of black drumming.

Žižek critiques the so-called 'multiculturalist' stance so harshly because he interprets it as a politically motivated ideal that can be utilized as a form of post-ideological (and post-racial) manipulation; one that ensures the illusion of liberation, social justice, acceptance, tolerance, equality, etc. For Žižek, contemporary racism functions under different modes and operations. "First, there is the old-fashioned unabashed rejection of the Other...on behalf of authentic values...Then there is the 'reflexive' politically correct racism:"

the multiculturalist perception of, for example, the Balkans as the terrain of ethnic horror and intolerance, of primitive irrational bellicose passions, as opposed to the post-national liberal-democratic process of solving conflicts through rational negotiation, compromise, and mutual respect.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>216</sup> Žižek 2011, 47.

Žižek states that here, racism is elevated to the ‘second power:’ “it is attributed to the Other, while we occupy the convenient position of a neutral benevolent observer, righteously dismayed at the horrors going on down there.”<sup>217</sup> And then there is the third form of racism: ‘reversed racism,’ which celebrates the exotic authenticity of the Other.<sup>218</sup> In this sense, racial exceptionalism and exoticism are not politically incorrect as long as the ideology of post-racial multiculturalism is functioning properly, allowing us to overlook *actual* inequality (the persistent exoticism of, mostly, non-white Others) and to see exoticism as indicating the celebration of difference within (post-racial) equal space. Žižek calls this ‘reflected racism,’ referring to how it is paradoxically able to articulate itself in terms of direct *respect* for the other’s culture.<sup>219</sup> Instead, this process only asserts the opposite: that the naturalization of racial exception can only be legitimately accepted within a space of race-neutral equality; that exceptions are made with regard to which the multiculturalist is allowed to act out his/her repressed racism.<sup>220</sup>

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My emphasis in this section was to examine the ways in which contemporary narratives of black music are framed and how they can generate and legitimize forms of consumption. The theoretical work of Žižek expands upon the political dimensions of enjoyment within a post-ideological context, considering how notions of race are situated in this discursive space. Whether these accounts maintain racial differences between black and white, ‘multiculturalize’ or ‘Americanize’ blackness, or legitimize forms of essentialist and authentic global consumption, the reiterations of race constitute diverse

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Žižek 2008b, 4.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 3.

ideological expressions that can reflect contemporary discourses in black music. The post-racial literature outlines how current methods of interpreting culture and the 'case for race' in Western democracies simultaneously disavow and signify race; it is in this way that I argue that the dialectical discourse of gospel drumming—its cultural/racial distinctiveness and its neutral integration into the broader, 'objective' pedagogical framework—can help to illustrate these kinds of post-racial issues.

### **Chapter 3: Racism Within the Society of Unprohibited Enjoyment**

This third and final chapter will problematize notions of race and subjective interpretations of racism in contemporary popular music, bringing together themes and concepts that were raised in the previous sections and positioning them within the field of capitalistic *enjoyment*.<sup>221</sup> In this section, I am going to take the opportunity to pursue some themes and questions which extend beyond the confines of my gospel drumming case study, but which follow from it in a general way that is essential to understanding its broader context. I will investigate aspects of the philosophic and psychoanalytic dimensions of racism in order to situate its discourse within the context of late-global capitalism. In particular, I will focus on literatures and debates concerning two prominent threads in consumerism—counter-culturalism and relativism—reflecting on how both outlooks articulate authenticity and race in ways that are congruent with post-racial ideology. The premise of this work is to problematize how these often crude and naïve ideologies are associated with consumerist multiculturalism and indeed to suggest that multiculturalism in-itself represents anti-racism in a manner that can maintain racial discourses and legitimize forms of commodity fetishism. Far from insinuating the existence of a deep and profound racism against and/or amongst black gospel drummers, I more simply hope to highlight how ideological fixations located in these consumerist trends can perpetuate racialized discourses. Consequently, the racial issues and issues of authenticity that were raised in the gospel case study can be understood as expressing a broader symptom within popular culture.

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<sup>221</sup> I am again referencing Slavoj Žižek's distinct theorization of the term as a form of political jouissance.

I) Subjective Ontologies of Pleasure and Consumption:  
The Limits of Relativism and Counter-Cultural Ideology

In the context of late-capitalistic consumption, ‘immaterial’ pleasures of the sort that are often extolled in popular music are very much involved in a mystified relationship with their production. For example, there are many subcultural genres of popular music (punk, for instance) that criticize global capitalism and advocate social anarchism, and yet are supported by international record labels and distributors. More directly related to this study, there are hundreds of team-building drumming organizations, such as the massively successful Drum Café (originally from South Africa), Drum Pulse, and Drum Tree, who are hired by large corporations and businesses to help boost morale amongst their employees all over the world (clients range from Dominoes Pizza to ExxonMobil). Drum Café, for example, utilizes African drumming as a tool for ‘organizational happiness,’<sup>222</sup> citing psychological studies and anthropological narratives to support the use of drumming as a method to make employees happier and more productive in the workplace. However, the manner in which their marketing is done is through focusing predominately on cross-cultural values, because ‘for hundreds of years, drumming has been used in building communities in Africa.’<sup>223</sup> As one team-leader states in a YouTube clip, Drum Café uses ‘drums and music because they are universal in their expression.’<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Drum Café website. Stable URL: <http://www.drumcafe.ca/index.html>. Accessed July 23, 2012.

<sup>223</sup> From the ‘Teambuilding’ portion of the website. Stable URL: <http://www.drumcafe.ca/teambuilding.html>. Accessed July 23, 2012.

<sup>224</sup> ‘DrumInterJan’ YouTube clip. Stable URL: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=n4OglhTRx3A#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=n4OglhTRx3A#!) Accessed July 12, 2012.

Drumming is a universal expression that transcends all boundaries: personal, organizational or cultural. Drum Cafe teaches staff to increase productivity and efficiency through better team work. Our leadership program has been designed by global Motivation Speakers, HR Consultants, Company CEOs, Leading Musicians and Academic professors. The Fortune 500 companies can't be wrong. [...]Music is a universal language, that allows us in a universal way to break down barriers and transcend the difference among us as humans and individuals. In Africa and in many other cultures around the world, *drumming has been used for centuries to bring people together* [...] Turn your company or department into a community.<sup>225</sup>

The idealization of music and drumming as a cross-cultural, universal phenomena is very present in the Drum Café sales pitch, illustrating a romanticized narrative of drumming (as tribal, from motherland Africa, etc.) that asserts cultural values in a partly imagined Africa as being beneficial to corporate life in the West. Although the end result is supposedly a happier and more productive employee, the path to happiness is believed to be natural and innate because 'we all tap the steering wheel in our cars...we all tap our feet to our radio.'<sup>226</sup> In this sense, the pleasure that is perpetrated and extolled in the advertising of these drum team-building workshops mystifies labor production in order to romanticize and idealize the culture of corporate work. The 'authentic' experience of enjoying and participating in drumming reflects cross-cultural universality and commonality, overtaking the stereotypical malaise and unhappiness that is attributed to working life at a desk job. Throughout this process there is a problematic correlation asserted between the authenticity of the Western self (indicated as the corporate worker) and the authentic non-Western musical Other, emphasizing universal narratives of music to legitimize the desire for Westerners to experience and learn African drumming. For example, as it states on the Drum Pulse website:

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<sup>225</sup> From the 'Why Drumming Works' section of the website. Stable URL: <http://www.drumcafe.co.za/interactive-drumming.php>. Accessed July 12, 2012.

<sup>226</sup> Team Drum Tree website. Stable URL: <http://www.teamdrumtree.com/why-us.html>. Accessed July 12, 2012.

Africa is the home of the drum and the birthplace of drumming. Each region of this vast, great continent has a special affinity with music and rhythm. Creating music is not just about entertainment. It's a living part of the community. DrumPulse brings all this spirit into our authentic African drumming workshops [...] We offer two core options with our African drumming workshops. Your event can be led by either one of our in-house expert rhythm facilitators (who will transform your group using African rhythms within our unique DrumPulse format), or you can experience the more traditional learning format with one of our Ghanaian drumming instructors. Both are fantastic fun and will have your team working together on a new, creative level.<sup>227</sup>

Drum Pulse's narrative of African drumming as a community-building 'way of life' not only places the Westerner's pleasure as a universal equivalent to it, but does so through an interesting and somewhat problematic positioning. Perhaps paradoxically, the narrative perpetuates a highly *universal* stance that is supported by relativistically interpreting African drumming, framed as though 'we all do it' in the first place—we all enjoy music, like African people do. Simultaneously, this cross-cultural relativistic stance exerts itself as a universal truth, as it is premised upon an ideological narrative that recasts the shared practice of subjective interpretation (relativism) as a common-sensical reality (we all do it; we all 'find our own truth'). In this way, the cross-cultural universal that is musical expression is true enough for individuals to legitimately appropriate and enjoy the authentic experience of African drumming in a manner that is highly relative to their own needs and backgrounds, for the purposes of boosting morale and productivity of employees. This practice can be understood as an aspect of a much broader trend in Western popular culture, extending to the highly profitable New Age and self-help texts that focus on individual happiness and/or subjective interpretations of world religions on your own terms. The ideal for the universal enjoyment of drumming is meant to justify cultural appropriation in Western, late-capitalistic societies. However, there is a certain

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<sup>227</sup> Drum Pulse website. Stable URL: <http://www.drumpulse.com/african-drumming-workshops>. Accessed July 12, 2012.

degree of tension that is generated when musical values and pleasures are invoked and exploited under the umbrella of advancing worker productivity for corporate interests.

The pleasures in popular music consumption can be generally identified as the values and meanings that the music signifies, many of which have tended to be popularly perceived and admired for their apparently non-commoditized status. This was seen in the many representations and interpretations of gospel drumming offered by my interview participants, as well as exemplified in many gospel DVDs and drumming forums. The issue, however, is that the assertions of innateness and authenticity that are made by black gospel drummers can be co-opted and interpreted as supporting long-established racialized debates throughout the broader drumming community, not as matters of highlighting cultural distinctiveness and community identification.

Subsequently, non-black drummers can adopt and rearticulate these narratives, idealizing black gospel as a form of authentically-black drumming. However, there already exists a popular preference for these kinds of discourses. This process of valorizing the ineffable and the intrinsic can be linked what Fabio Vighi identifies as one of the main preoccupations of postmodern, late-capitalistic society. For Vighi, we enjoy and privilege the so-called production of *life*, the value of immaterial labor that appears ‘outside of’ and even hegemonic over material production. Following this line of inquiry, the production process is mystified and is seen as involved in the immaterial nature of life itself, which is “the complex of knowledge and passions, of languages and emotions, that make up subjectivity.”<sup>228</sup> In this sense, postmodern *life* as the project of constructing subjectivity is the mystification of the material processes that help to develop cultural

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<sup>228</sup> Vighi, 68.

value, disconnecting enjoyment and value from the 'cheapening' structures of material production. The authenticated, musical other (black gospel, etc.) is situated in this privileged space in ways that are meant to distinguish it in an attractive manner, often in contrast with normative views of whiteness and mass/popular society. The emphasis on gospel's exceptional techniques and, in particular, its distinguishing associations with black church performers, appeared in the conferring of distinction that was highlighted in mainstream drumming DVDs and texts. However, the results of this process were mixed, and in some cases (especially in the *Ultimate Drum Lessons* example), the connections between gospel and other styles and drummers appeared inconsistent and incoherent. Subsequently, such methods can actually lead to greater cultural and racialized misunderstanding and can rationalize forms of musical essentialism.

These sites of production and contention, however, expand beyond the mere commoditization and manufacture of musical objects; they can also include the social institutions and locations of music making that develop, localize, and position musical value in their material processes (music education, for instance). Consequently, these established practices and musical regimens hamper the indefinable production of *life*, that which is inherent and not necessarily (or, preferably) learned. Idealized in this way, these practices are significantly undervalued in comparison with the ineffable, immaterial, innate, and the authentic; the brands of enjoyment that remain independent from the replicable and commoditized form (gospel drum lessons; post-secondary education, etc.).

Of course, the distancing of meaning and value from the flows of capital illustrates a classically Marxist analysis of commodity fetishism (see Klumpenhouwer in *Music and Marx*, 2002). However, this process presents a number of problematic

implications when we contextualize the fetishistic dynamic in an ethnomusicological context. The consumption of cultural products, such as world music, is interpreted as being much more than just the purchasing of musical products: one can read themselves as living through the experiences of others, free associating subjective emotional responses as universal meanings and understanding this process as a form of genuine cultural understanding. To identify with the musical other is, in this sense, a liberating experience, legitimized not as a form of tokenism or exoticism but interpreted as a genuine, authentic desire to understand and engage the other in the race-neutral, multicultural context that they project as already-existing; participating and *enjoying* in the other's music-making and cultural differences through consuming cultural commodities.

From this line of inquiry, I argue that commodity fetishism can be linked to the ideology of *counterculturalism* as a central perpetrator in the contemporary prioritization of individualism, ideologies of authentic subjectivity, and the consumption of difference. As such, counterculturalism articulates the constellation of value and meaning that informs Vighi's postmodern *life*, privileging difference and fetishizing the Other as markers of distinction and authentic incorruptibility. My hope is to outline how the field of countercultural discourse elucidates interesting problems and debates that raise questions about why there is a prioritization of these kinds of experiences and how they can generate essentialist and racial discourses.

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According to Žižek, contemporary popular culture and critical theory too quickly 'humanize' and flatten the specificity of narratives in order to privilege an *authentic* and

*intimate experience*. Subsequently, these discourses do not address the central issues that call upon taking an *actual* position or stance.<sup>229</sup> What does Žižek mean by these claims? First of all, I argue that what Žižek identifies here is the prevalence of, and his aversion to, counterculturalism (in the sense outlined by Heath and Potter), which is often highly individualistic, relativistic, and interpreted as rebellious, privileging authentic, privatized, and unprohibited enjoyment and consumption. This sort of counterculturalism is one of the most popularized ideologies of popular music, especially in rock and roll. Here, individual experience is prioritized; the idealization of difference shapes the understanding of the other and, more importantly, reflects the counterculturalist's understanding of him or herself. This distinctly relativistic outlook suggests, to Žižek, a certain deficiency and/or lack concerning political antagonisms within the public sphere, and in this respect Žižek's complaints are akin to Theo-Goldberg's critiques concerning the 'privatization' of racism (as discussed in the previous chapter). I would also hazard a generalization and say that politically, many popular musicians, especially those who identify with the subversive and rebellious musical ideologies stemming from the cultural revolution of the 1960s, would align with these kinds of values—themes and tropes that have become essential to understanding contemporary popular music and culture (freedom, individuality, self-expression, etc.). However, for many of its critics, especially Heath and Potter (2005), countercultural ideology often confuses deviance with dissent, interpreting hedonism as a political act and uncritically advocating highly individualistic behaviors which are often articulated in various forms of consumption. At their extreme, Leftist countercultural discourses favor relativistic viewpoints, thus offering no hard-

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<sup>229</sup> Žižek 2011, 58-59.

lined choice between alternatives, but view all choice as lying within a compatible (and celebratory) field of pluralism. For Žižek, this approach would essentially neutralize all forms of positioning, leaving subjects with nothing to hold onto. For many of its critics, the ideals of counter-culturalism have become widespread, impacting consumer behaviors and articulating how contemporary ideologies of authenticity stem from its development and proliferation.

Such a throughgoing emphasis on individual experience and multiple perspectives has clear affinities with certain varieties of postmodernism. And as David Hawkes argues, the postmodern sign,

whether financial or linguistic, is epistemologically false and ethically degenerate. Postmodernism is thus the veritable apotheosis of ideology... nothing more than the ideology of consumer capitalism, [that] multiculturalism and philosophical relativism suggest that 'the phenomenon of 'globalization' was absolutely compatible with post-modernist ideology... presenting such tendencies as liberating and progressive, denouncing dominant, 'hegemonic', culture, and allying itself (postmodernism) with the 'oppositional' and the 'counterculture.'<sup>230</sup>

In this sense, counter-culturalism in the postmodern context is merely "the ultimate subordination of identity to the market, in which people purchase personality traits as they would any other commodity."<sup>231</sup> The diagnosis of this kind of deficient political project also extends into various critiques of academic disciplines. In a critique of cultural studies, for instance, John Mowitt claims that "cultural studies is unable to comprehend or grasp its own conditions of possibility" precisely because "the concepts at its disposal... are forged out of a structural mis-recognition of their corporate and ultimately US corporate derivation."<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, as Paul Bowman writes, "cultural studies

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Bowman 2007, 126.

fetishizes 'resistance,' but the theme of 'resistance' is equally *de rigueur* in the marketing and advertising of brands of jeans, meaning that resistance really is useless."<sup>233</sup>

Similarly, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2005) provide a rather concise and entertaining critique of counterculturalism, outlining its popular mystification of consumerism and its often-confusing political motivations. The authors state that the confusion amongst many of the proponents of so-called subversive and authentic forms of popular culture and consumption reside in the fact that there is nothing to 'sell-out' of in the first place. The 'authentic' is merely another locus for competitive consumption, mystifying commodification, and falsely contrasted with the drastically 'inauthentic' reality of mainstream Western society.<sup>234</sup> Theories of capitalistic co-optation imply that the symbols of authentic resistance—subversive art, music, literature, clothing, etc.—are assimilated and appropriated by 'the system' and sold back to the masses as commodities, thereby neutralizing the counterculture "by piling on substitute gratifications so high that people ignore the revolutionary kernel of these new ideas."<sup>235</sup> But this reflects the myth of counterculturalism, which depends upon the highly individualistic and libertarian claims that rail against conformity within mass society, mistaking the consumption of products that represent the rejection of mass society—ranging from the VW Beetle, to rock music, Green products, and exotic world music—as processes outside the marketplace and competitive competition. In reality, counter-cultural politics have been one of the primary forces driving consumer capitalism for the past forty years,<sup>236</sup> as there has been no tension in practice between the counter-cultural ideas that informed much of

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Heath and Potter 2004, 269.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 2.

the 1960s rebellion and the ideological requirements of the capitalistic system.<sup>237</sup> If anything, the counter-culture was from its very inception intensely entrepreneurial and reflected the spirit of capitalism.<sup>238</sup> In short, the non-conformists are the driving forces of consumer spending,<sup>239</sup> as “conformity and distinction...always go hand in hand—one conforms to the habits and standards of the exclusive club [punk, rock, folk music scenes, etc.] in order to distinguish oneself from the great unwashed.”<sup>240</sup> Creativity and the value system of bohemian ‘cool’ is the very lifeblood of capitalism, ‘radicalizing’ the consumer, and subverting everything except capitalism.<sup>241</sup>

The turn towards Otherness and exoticism has been key to counterculturalism as it encourages escapism, the immersion of oneself in a culture drastically different from one's own, suggesting that “some other culture, just over the horizon, possesses some completely different thinking and acting.”<sup>242</sup> By trying to escape from the repressiveness of modernity, counterculturalists “project their own desires and longing onto other cultures, essentially constructing the exotic as a reflection of their own ideology.”<sup>243</sup> The consumption of ‘authentic’ products and experiences of ‘pure’ and ‘innocent’ world cultures are then based upon on how much social capital will be conferred to the consumer (their *distinction*), transforming these ideals into positional goods.<sup>244</sup> For Heath and Potter, counter-cultural politics have almost completely replaced socialism as the

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 277.

basis of radical and political thought,<sup>245</sup> making it nearly impossible to propose political actions for social change without advocating a complete rejection of mainstream politics and mass culture in its entirety. Social norms, which are governed and enforced by varying degrees of law are therefore interpreted as signs that social order as a whole is a system of repression.<sup>246</sup> In an extreme interpretation, any sort of behavior that exhibits a sense of regularity is reductively criticized for its supposed absence of autonomy and individualism.<sup>247</sup> Counterculturalism denies the distinction between social deviance and dissent, as the breaking of any rule can be seen as engaging in an act of ‘resistance,’<sup>248</sup> romanticizing criminality, madness, and even violence. Any proposal for concrete reforms and changes to existing political institutions and laws are rejected, as they are traced back to gigantic ‘technocratic’ apparatuses of conformity and social repression.<sup>249</sup> This can effectively lead to the adoption of many ‘solutions’ that exacerbate the very problems counterculturalists are trying to resolve.

Pleasure and enjoyment have also been central to countercultural theory. Since the ‘system’ achieves order through the repression of the individual, simply having fun can be seen as an extremely subversive act, and hedonism is transformed into revolutionary doctrine.<sup>250</sup> According to Todd McGowan, the salient feature of contemporary American society is the premium that it places on individual enjoyment.<sup>251</sup> This represents a transition from a society that was “founded on the prohibition of enjoyment (and thus

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>251</sup> McGowan 2004, 1.

dissatisfaction of its subjects) to a society that commands enjoyment (in which there seems to be no requisite dissatisfaction).”<sup>252</sup> In the former modern society, McGowan suggest that subjects had to sacrifice a certain degree of enjoyment in the name of social duty and to bolster the social order as a whole. In the case of the current mode, individual, private enjoyment takes precedence and the overall importance of the greater social order seems to recede.<sup>253</sup> In this sense, the current countercultural mode reflects McGowan’s society of enjoyment, prioritizing pleasure as a chief mode of social and even political existence in contemporary society. As McGowan outlines, prohibition has always been a central facet in theories of civilization and social organization, ranging from the work of Levi-Strauss (the seemingly universal, cross-cultural Law against incest) to Freud. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, “societies are able to perpetuate themselves because subjects derive enjoyment from its sacrifice, because the sacrifice of enjoyment produces enjoyment. Social coherence depends on the enjoyment that subjects derive from the sacrifice of their private enjoyment for the greater good of society... we must qualify the idea that entrance into society requires the renunciation of enjoyment.”<sup>254</sup> However, there’s a catch: what remains after this renunciation is a gap, a lack that constitutes the subject as a *desiring* subject (the objet petit a). The wish to reclaim what was lost (trying to access the objet a) often comes through the form of consuming products (except, once we purchase something, our desire shifts and we want to consume something else). This constant cyclic process of desire emphasizes how the

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

society of enjoyment has made enjoyment more difficult to locate, elevating it to a social ideal and obligation.<sup>255</sup>

The countercultural turn, in this way, is very much involved in the perpetuation of these individualistic values, generating forms of consumption that are based upon the accessibility of enjoyment over any other ideal. The pleasure and enjoyment gained from music are directly implicated in this process. For example, the appropriation of gospel drumming as a distinct form of cultural and racial difference confers a certain distinction upon the drumming consumer (as an accepting, cultured, and authentic individual). Within these contexts and theoretical frameworks, contemporary consumer interests in products that represent 'authentic' experiences are grounded in a form of consumerism that stems from counter-cultural distinction. The tenants of individualism, the prioritization of enjoyment, and the abstraction of culture from capital articulate the ideologies of authenticity as linked to contemporary forms of capitalistic consumption. In this way, the desire to consume certain cultural products, such as gospel drumming texts, can be a result of accessing objects that represent values in broader consumer society.

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One of the central facets of the individualized, countercultural reading of others is the priority it places on relativistic thought. As Philip Bohlman notes, within a globalized context relativistic thought integrates the music and cultures of various locales and traditions into a logic of generalized equivalence—the ability to interpret, appropriate, and consume the music of one cultural source is taken as equal to the expressions and lineages of another:

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 7.

Globalism is the current form of a more persistent ethnomusicological framework, relativism, which we might understand as the seemingly innocent and generous claim that "all cultures have music." With this gesture, music becomes a relativized and universalized object, as necessary to the existence of "culture" as eating and biological reproduction. Because all cultures have music, so it goes, we are justified in studying music as music. By no means does this relativism prevent the anthropological ethnomusicologist from formulating his or her own essentializing modality, which, in the past decade or so, has taken the form of equating "music" and "culture," observing the two interacting in neat packages in which "sound structure equals social structure."<sup>256</sup>

In this sense, the equivalence of 'all music is music' echoes the objective drumming approach that 'all drumming is drumming,' simultaneously legitimizing the appropriation of any and all drumming techniques and representing a broader drumming narrative that integrates the distinctiveness of styles and genres into the neutralized space of skill and technique. However, as Alana Lentin states, "the approach of 'all cultures are equal' is often due to a sense of *equivalence*, not equality, allowing for an equal openness to criticism, positing a "disabling, authoritarian relativism" as the *key* ethical and political challenge for diverse societies."<sup>257</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to outline some of the facets of relativistic thought in order to problematize its implications for musical appropriation. In the context of gospel drumming, the distinct cultural differences and histories that the style's popularity signifies can be disavowed through relativistic interpretation. The commoditization and objectification of gospel can be seen as the extension and realization of this kind of thinking—a realization which potentially generates the kinds of reactions made by black church drummers in regard to the authentic and non-commodifiable status they attribute to certain expressions of gospel drumming. For example, interview participant Cory felt that the gospel cymbal packs were exploiting black gospel drummers, and both Tara and Cory were often immediately labeled gospel

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<sup>256</sup> Bohlman 1993, 421.

<sup>257</sup> Lentin and Titley, 63-64.

drummers because they were black amongst other musicians in the GTA. Subsequently, there is a certain degree of distrust in the mainstream portrayals of gospel drumming, as was indicated by the sentiments of my interview participants. These reactions appear warranted, considering the extent of racialized discourse that surrounds the drumming style in forums and mainstream drumming texts.

According to Paul O'Grady (2002), representations of objective reality differ depending on the concepts we use to think about it. In one sense, 'objectivity' rests upon the idea of *inter-subjectivity*, which is determined by a 'shared agreement between reasonable individuals.' In sharp contrast is the *absolute* conception of objective reality, which does not claim any human input into the reality acquired in enquiry.<sup>258</sup> For O'Grady truth, meaning, ontology and knowledge today are no longer best regarded as stable, unified concepts, as there is no single universally-accepted view that fixes the truth about any of these issues.<sup>259</sup> Instead, there exists today a tension between free-for-all approaches to truth, where a multiplicity of conflicting views can be accepted with a certain nonchalance, and the drive to limit such proliferation and to exercise some kind of control on what is acceptable and what is not.<sup>260</sup> The distinctive interpretation of gospel drumming by many actual black church drummers, for example, points to a specific worldview that is shaped by religious values and community practices. The free-for-all approach to interpreting, commoditizing, and appropriating gospel drumming—as a set of replicable patterns and skills that are objectively appropriated like many other styles and techniques—generates tensions for proponents of the specific role that these patterns hold

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<sup>258</sup> O'Grady 2002, 8-9.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

in black church services. Throughout the gospel DVDs and magazine interviews, the church represented the core of black Pentecostal performance, articulating how faith and church practices frame the musical development of these players. Consequently, as started earlier, the relativistic approach lends itself to the objective stance of ‘all drumming is drumming,’ allowing for proponents of this ideology to evade the particular signifier of religiosity that is essential to the claims made by these drummers, amalgamating the approaches and traditions of other styles as equivalent in this regard. The sense of commonality and equivalence that is achieved amongst drummers who mutually advocate free-for-all, relativistic interpretations produces an ideological position that legitimizes cross-cultural appropriation of *all* forms of drumming. In this way, the collective power of relativistic interpretation exerts itself as an ideology—the objective stance is asserted through the shared practice of relativism amongst drummers, which amalgamates all forms of drumming under a cohesive structure. Through this logic, historical and cultural contexts are contingent upon the prioritization of subjective interpretation, which is central to the relativistic stance. It is important to restate that I am not maintaining the inherent black religiosity in all forms of gospel drumming practice. It is merely that the insinuation of objectivity is not a neutral stance; one must also consider how this outlook relates to the distinctive particularities in which it amalgamates, leveling these distinctions and neutralizing their uniqueness in order for others to participate in and to enjoy their musical practices. The defusing of difference is not innocent but can be a very precarious project, as it can redefine the ontological weight of a particular form of music without taking full consideration of its context.

Relativistic accounts are not limited to the simplistic binary of '*whatever you want to believe*' (crude relativism) against '*this is what you believe*' (authoritative, fixed laws and truth claims). There are, instead, a number of dynamics to what is sometimes generalized simply and singularly as relativism. Such a generalization runs the risk of casting other closely related yet still distinct critical positions as being inherently relativistic. For instance there is skepticism, which holds that we don't genuinely have knowledge of absolute truths and should therefore suspend judgment. A relativist would also hold that many alternatives are available, but unlike the skeptic would maintain that more than one of the alternatives are ultimately acceptable and can constitute genuine knowledge.<sup>261</sup> In this way, counterculturalism evokes the relativistic interpretation quite frequently. As well, in some cases relativistic accounts which initially appear to be inclusive actually undermine the cognitive and meaningful capacities of others by taking truth entirely out of the equation. For instance, some hold to a limited 'non-cognitivism,' asserting that truth isn't at issue at all. This asserts that none of the disputants really have the truth, as they are all merely uttering opinions, none of which are genuine candidates for truth.<sup>262</sup> In this sense, because truth isn't at issue, diversity can easily exist.<sup>263</sup> This position presupposes that there are at least some things which are true in a non-relative way (e.g. scientific statements about the world), but many others which are not candidates for truth or falsity (e.g. value judgments, moral views, religious views, etc.).<sup>264</sup> Therefore, in some cases, the ideals of inclusion and diversity are dependent upon avoiding a direct confrontation with the very thing that the ideal presumably supports.

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

This ideal operates best when the neutralization of diversity of opinion occurs, where competing worldviews can flourish as long as they do not have to speak directly to one another.<sup>265</sup>

Following Susan Haack, O’Grady provides a typology of relativisms which indicates the multiplicity of positions covered by the term, as well as the confusion of a variety of different positions under the one label:<sup>266</sup>

*(is relative to...)*

1.) Meaning	a.) language
2.) reference	b.) conceptual scheme
3.) truth	c.) theory
4.) metaphysical commitment	d.) scientific paradigm
5.) ontology	e.) version, depiction, description
6.) reality	f.) culture
7.) epistemic values	g.) community
8.) moral values	h.) individual, etc.
9.) aesthetic values, etc.	

The different combinations of meanings/relationships between the two columns indicates, generally, the complex ways that something can be in relation to something else.<sup>267</sup>

According to O’Grady, most relativists attempt to avoid any sense of contradiction, accommodating a diversity of religious, moral, and political beliefs and countenancing the possibility that widely different viewpoints, even those that appear to contradict each other, may nevertheless be valid.<sup>268</sup> In this manner, the objectivist and culturally/racially distinctive approaches to gospel drumming articulate the infinite chain of signifiers that occur in the interpretation of a singular event or topic. Both approaches are equal, thus representing an inclusive space for different interpretations. However, relativism develops certain limits or problems when its proponents advocate a politics of cultural,

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 28.

experiential, and ontological *equivalence* under which inherently complex factors are reduced to a universalized uniformity that depoliticizes any form of belief or stance. Such an approach negates the content of difference (religious, political, ontological) and renders the other as an equivalent projection of oneself. In the case of gospel drumming, the objectification and commoditization of the style illustrates how mainstream, professional interpretations of gospel rely upon relativistic accounts for its widespread appropriation.

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This chapter took liberties with delving into questions and problematics that arose out of my research concerning the appropriation and interpretation of gospel drumming. My intention was to consider how issues of relativism and countercultural consumerism implicate aspects of the gospel drumming discourse, and then going further, how the tropes of authenticity and cultural relativism can be understood in a broader, late-capitalistic context that extends post-racial debates and ideologies. The commoditization of non-white musical cultures has long been an issue within musicological study; however, my engagement with the post-racial literature precipitated a number of theoretical considerations that revolved around issues of interpretation and legitimization strategies for certain kinds of consumer behaviors. These are facets of the debate that, I feel, articulate a contemporaneous situation in the production and consumption of culturalized and racialized musical products in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Conclusion:**

The gospel drumming case study raised a number of questions about musicianship, race, and authenticity in a contemporary social and cultural context. My efforts to theorize and problematize gospel drumming, as well as similar developments in the mainstream drumming industry, were an attempt to locate its debates within the multifaceted political discourse of post-racism. From this vantage point, the reinvigorated discussions of reductionist and essentialist black musicality that characterized much of the gospel drumming example can be understood as articulating aspects of contemporary race-relations in a late-global capitalistic, multicultural context. My examination of the ideological dimensions of post-racism were intended to position issues of race within the broader discourse of consumerism; how certain forms of consumer behavior are informed by multicultural and countercultural ideals that often valorize the tropes of authenticity (as racial, cultural, folk, popular, non-conformist). In this manner, the commoditization, appropriation, and consumption of gospel drumming repeat many of the discourses of black musical authenticity precisely because many of the ideological tropes of popular music generate tensions with the replicable and tangible processes of capitalistic consumption. Though gospel drumming represented only one example of a development in popular music and culture that intersected issues of racism and consumerism, I argue that the critique of the post-racial frame can be applied to a great number of other case studies that communicate these kinds of debates.

Throughout this thesis, I occasionally took liberties in terms of pursuing certain theoretical issues beyond the clear confines of the gospel drumming case study, although such sections of the thesis were designed to expand upon crucial issues implicit to that

case study. Such work was necessary to contextualize current forms of racism in broader social and political frameworks, especially in light of the countless works of musicological scholars who address racism in their texts (see especially Keil 1966, 2005; Bohlman and Radano 2003). However, there were strands of the argument that I could not examine in detail due to the length and scope of the thesis. For instance, there is the question of how musical appropriation is a necessary aspect of developing technique, constructing a musical identity, and communicating with others (in this way, the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur will be of great interest to my future work). There were also some very interesting anecdotes and issues that were raised by the interview participants that I did not get to fully address in this thesis. For example, Cory expressed how there are problems of segregation and racial bias amongst members of the black church, unfairly preferring the performance of African American players to non-black musicians (subsequently, this caused Cory to move to a different church). Tara also observed this kind of tension between black and white drummers:

If a group of guys had a chance to hire somebody, and if two drummers can play the exact same thing, but one's black and one's white...if the hiring people are white, they want the white guy. I don't know if that's racism, or just kind of natural, and it's the same thing: if you had a bunch of black guys, and this white guy worked on his gospel chops and he sounds exactly like the black guy, they're not calling this guy (unless every black guy gets shot at one time and there's nobody and the choir will not exist). Basic like that—people—right?

Tara expressed how there is even a developing tension between gospel and non-gospel players in the Toronto scene:

I also feel that there's tension building against gospel players, and I think this goes beyond just drums, I think it goes to keyboard, too, possibly bass, but not as bad...I don't know, I think there's a tension between people that play in church and people that don't, just musically because I guess people that don't play in church sometimes, I feel they get a little intimidated by the ease of the musicianship that gospel drummers have. Maybe the ego, I don't even know. But I do see a tension arising, even just here in Toronto, there's like a nervousness that I'm starting to see develop...an intimidation of what gospel

musicians know. I'm thinking of a keyboard guy in particular who gets either defensive, like "Oh he plays gospel too?"

These observations made by the interview participants provided significant insight and context to this study. I am certain that if I had interviewed more church drummers and drum educators, this would have yielded even more fascinating examples and questions about contemporary race-relations and gospel drumming techniques. I hope to expand upon this research and compile more ethnographic data in future work, focusing on the cultural politics of rhythm and drumming in social movements and media representations.

Internet technologies have made a profound impact upon the widespread dissemination of racial discourses. The circulation of YouTube video clips and their attached comments display a unique and developing area of research in the fields of ethnomusicology and popular music, exemplifying the pedagogical potential of these videos for musical development and the transmission of social and political values (often amongst very young users). The work of Kiri Miller (2012), in particular, has provided great inroads to these facets of music and technology debates, focusing on the relationships between users and musical video game culture. For example, the bulk of YouTube drumming videos are presented as educational materials, where everyday users document their performances in order to provide lessons or get feedback from other drummers. The often-racist rhetoric that accompanies many YouTube video clips adds an extra layer to the circulation of drumming performance videos, where users not only participate in the networks of drumming culture, but also rearticulate stereotypical and popular narratives of music performance practice. Since there are thousands, even millions of online users who utilize these kinds of video clips for the purposes of

developing musical technique, further examination will be required in order to understand the effect of racialized discourses and hate-speech that so characterizes the medium. The interpretation and appropriation of musical techniques and styles via the Internet postulate a number of questions regarding contemporary models of musical education—many well-known post-secondary institutions, like the Berklee College of Music are now offering very expensive online music courses (predominately pre-recorded video clips) for students to ‘study with professors’ in an online environment.<sup>269</sup> The expansion of music performance education courses via these kinds of digital Internet technologies—as well as the demand for these courses and, in general, rising tuition costs—will need considerable examination in the years to come. This is absolutely necessary as tuition is progressively getting more expensive and universities are increasingly focused on profit margins through the enrollment of more students.

Finally, it is imperative to question and analyze ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ positions that are proposed in music research. However, it is even more important to examine the politics of social justice that are so-often perpetuated in discourses of popular music. The post-racial frame, in this sense, exemplifies how both conservative and liberal values articulate contemporary race-relations and politics in mutually problematic ways. As Alana Lentin outlines,

Arguments on both sides of the political spectrum have been heard over recent times in support of the idea that society is ‘post-race’ (Gallagher 2008). The election of Barack Obama to the US Presidency in 2008, for example, has been taken by those on both the left and the right to mean that race has ceased to pose a barrier to opportunity. For the centre left, this is a good thing that convinces us of its intrinsic non-racialism and sustains the general belief that racism is mainly an irrationality now overcome. For those on the right, Obama’s election and other examples of minority successes, prove not only that racism was overblown but that, due to the unjustified support given to minorities in the

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<sup>269</sup> Berklee drum course website. Stable URL:  
<https://www.berkleemusic.com/welcome/berklee-drums>.

wake of civil rights in the USA, those who are really discriminated today are members of the displaced white majority.<sup>270</sup>

Politicizing musicological issues within the post-racial frame situates its discourse as historically contingent, which is especially relevant in light of our current global economic crises, increasing state corporatization, and impending ecological situation. Examining the state of race-relations in this broad and difficult political field is of great importance, as issues of culture and difference have often become central points of contention at similar moments of profound change throughout the course of history. In this way, the very idea of post-racism illustrates the need for sustained critical thought when issues such as racism become taken for granted and presumed to be a problem of the past.

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<sup>270</sup> Lentin 2012, 1.

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