

Remapping Aesthetics through Musical Labor:

Julius Eastman and the CETA Orchestra in New York City, 1978–79

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1

Imagine yourself a music-lover in New York City in 1978. It's Sunday, May 7 and you are thumbing your way through the kilo-plus weight of that day's *New York Times*. After no small amount of effort, you extract the "Arts and Leisure Guide" and survey the upcoming musical offerings. Work is light (your boss is out of town for once) and you are looking for something early in the week. Scanning the exceedingly fine print, you locate Tuesday's listings and are intrigued by the following: "CETA ORCHESTRA OF N.Y.—All-baroque. Kitchen. 59 Wooster St. At 8:30."¹ You're puzzled by a few things in this brief item. What is the CETA Orchestra and why are they playing baroque music at the Kitchen? You'd heard about the goings on in SoHo—wild punk rock concerts and a whole new "loft" jazz scene—but have been too spooked by a steady stream of neighborhood crime reports to risk venturing below 14th Street.² The Kitchen is supposed to be ground zero for whatever the avant-garde had mutated into since the 1960s; so why in God's name was it hosting an unknown orchestra playing old music? Weren't those sounds for Carnegie Hall? You screw up your courage and decide to check it out.

As Tuesday night rolls around you put on your best flannel shirt, stop off for a quick drink at your favorite bar in Greenwich Village and meet a handsome stranger. Eager to impress, you suggest he accompany you downtown for some culture, even if the Kitchen concert doesn't sound like

1 Ann Barry, ed. "Arts and Leisure Guide: Theater Dance Film Music," *The New York Times*, May 7, 1978: D38.

2 David HersHKovitz, "Confronting Crime in SoHo," *SoHo Weekly News* February 1, 1979. Clipping, The Kitchen Collection, Getty Research Institute.

the hottest thing happening. He agrees if you'll drop by the Mineshaft afterwards. Doubling back after a wrong turn taken at the Performance Garage, you both wend your way through poorly lit streets to an unmarked doorway that might be the right place. Surprisingly, the concert is free, and you and your companion are handed programs with works by Rhys Chatham, Ralph Jones, Alan Lloyd, and Arthur Russell. You're a bit embarrassed. These aren't baroque composers you're familiar with—and you got an A in your college music appreciation class! Reading further down, your simmering annoyance with the *New York Times's* fact-checking bubbles over. This isn't baroque music; it's *new* music for *baroque* orchestra! A lithe dreadlocked man in a white T-shirt, black leather vest, and jeans has taken his place in front of whatever the CETA Orchestra is. As you take in the scene, you think you recognize him from one of Boulez's "rug concerts" at Avery Fischer Hall just a few years ago. Julius Eastman gives the downbeat, and the music begins.

2

What kind of map is a musical performance? How might it make vivid a sense of geographic knowledge conjoined to aesthetic experience and artistic labor? My opening thought experiment suggests some ways in which historical attention to performance lets us experience music as a form of cartography and an event of place-making. In what follows, I take up a series of propositions from the late Adam Krims who argued that music's affects and affordances "assign music a particular and lamentably under-explored role in mapping the contemporary city."³ His attention to *the music itself*—which he redefines as "a crucial, highly planned, and controlled social object"—inspires me to sharpen attention to the ways in which the poetics of musical performance "increases in significance as music increasingly acquires a central role in characterizing spaces."⁴ That is to say, sound and space interpenetrate one another, each shaping the other affectively and ideologically in order to *make a scene*. Aesthetics, however, can overdetermine geography and obscure other potential cartographies; yet, I should be clear that I am not against the scene as a unit of analysis as it has been developed in the work of Will Straw and others.⁵

3 Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (London: Routledge, 2007), xvi.

4 Krims, xvi.

5 See the locus classicus: Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change:

What I resist is the historiography of downtown (detailed below) that has used the concept of scene to reify a set of artistic values while excluding other relations upon which those values depend.

In crafting the fictionalized thought experiment above based on an incorrect concert listing, I noted some dissonances in what one might expect to constitute the discrete scenes of 1970s New York City. These show up as discrepancies between the kinds of music an avid concert music fan might expect to hear in a particular neighborhood and what they actually heard in those places. In my opening narrative, I've mapped New York City with familiar terms found in both music criticism and scholarly literature. There's midtown concert music associated with big institutions of classical music (where one would expect to hear Bach and see Boulez conduct) and downtown, with its air of dangerous cool, where you could hear the latest in postmodern classical, punk, and jazz, and then end up at a gay sex club like the Mineshaft down the block (which featured a soundtrack of avant-garde, punk, and classical music).⁶

Troubling this standard geographical narrative is Julius Eastman, who was a powerful force in both these and other milieux. As a polymath composer-performer-improvisor-conductor-pianist-vocalist, Eastman was a near constant presence in New York City's musical life from 1966 to 1986. He made his debut in a piano recital at Town Hall in 1966, performed dozens of concerts with the Creative Associates at Carnegie (now Weill) Recital Hall, sang at Lincoln Center under the baton of Dennis Russell Davies and Pierre Boulez, was a fixture at the Kitchen with the SEM Ensemble and other musical collaborators, and appeared regularly with Lukas Foss and the Brooklyn Philharmonia.⁷ Scholars including

Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (1991): 368–88, and more recently Benjamin Woo, Jamie Rennie, and Stuart R. Poyntz, "Scene Thinking," *Cultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2015): 285–97, and Will Straw, "Some Things a Scene Might Be," *Cultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2015): 476–85.

6 Joel I. Brodsky, "The Mineshaft: A Retrospective Ethnography," *Journal of Homosexuality* 24, no. 3 (1993): 245.

7 On Eastman's Town Hall debut see Theodore Strongin, "Piano Recital Given by Julius Eastman," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1966: 58. On Eastman's performances at Carnegie Recital Hall with the Creative Associates see *passim* Renée Levine Packer, *This Life of Sounds: Evenings for New Music at Buffalo* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On his performance of Frederic Rzewski's cantata *Struggle* with Dennis Russell Davies see Donal Henahan, "'New and New Music' Begins Its Fourth Season," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1974: 22. On his performance of Peter Maxwell Davies *Eight Songs for a Mad King* with Pierre Boulez and the New York Philharmonic at Avery Fischer Hall see Raymond Ericson, "Music:

Bernard Gendron and Tim Lawrence have detailed Eastman's role in the downtown scene, focusing on his collaborations with Frederic Rzewski and Arthur Russell respectively.⁸ My other work has emphasized Eastman's circulation through various communities inclusive of downtown (as in his collaboration with Meredith Monk who composed *Dolmen Music* with Eastman's voice in mind) and also brought attention to his movement through the city's outer boroughs as an organizer of the Brooklyn Community Concerts with Tania León and Talib Rasul Hakim (of which more below).⁹ The work of the present article will be to broaden our view of New York City's musical geography with Eastman as our guide to the ways in which downtown was linked to the broader city's musical labor structures. In taking a spatial turn towards Eastman's musical life, I am indebted to Alexander Liebman's pioneering work and build upon it.¹⁰ Liebman insists we theorize Eastman's life as an instance of how "Black and queer geographies expose and subvert capitalism's gendered and racialized processes of codification, enslavement, extraction, and erasure."¹¹ Following Liebman, I will turn to the work of Black geographer Katherine McKittrick to track the racial logics at work in Eastman's musical life within and without downtown's confines.¹²

With the two-or-so years of Eastman's involvement with the CETA Orchestra as my historical present, I want to question the logic of scene-making upon which downtown's historiography depends. Through the confluence of cultural and financial capital, scenes formalize what sociologists Daniel Aaron Silver and Terry Nichols Clark describe as "the

Eight Songs at a Rug Concert," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1975: 40.

8 Bernard Gendron, "Rzewski in New York (1971–1977)," *Contemporary Music Review* 29, no. 6 (2010): 557–74; Tim Lawrence, *Hold on to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973–1992* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

9 Ryan Dohoney, "A Flexible Musical Identity: Julius Eastman in New York City, 1976–90," in *Gay Guerrilla: Julius Eastman and His Music*, ed. Renée Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 116–30; Dohoney, "For Failed Friendship: Meredith Monk, Julius Eastman, and the Intimacies of *Dolmen Music*," *American Music* 44, nos. 1–2 (forthcoming).

10 Alexander Liebman, "Nothing to Practice': Julius Eastman, Queer Composition, and Black Sonic Geographies," *Cultural Geographies* 29, no. 4 (2021): 1–17.

11 Liebman, 2.

12 In addition to McKittrick's work discussed below see Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

aesthetic view of place.”¹³ Gendron argues that downtown’s new music scene became one by establishing institutional spokespersons and discursive stability. He writes:

By a ‘new music scene’, I mean first a local network of new music composers, musicians and the array of agents and institutions that give it support and sustenance. A network only becomes a ‘scene’, as Downtown did, when it acquires a public face, an image largely constructed by the mass media. Of course, the existence of a new music scene presupposes that, at a given time, there were at least overlapping (if not common) musical interests among its constituents.¹⁴

What I take Gendron to say here is that networks and scenes are not the same things. What I’ll argue for in what follows is the historiographic advantage of attending to matters beyond aesthetics as I reiterate Benjamin Piekut’s strenuous call for us to move from simple connective concepts of networks to a broader range of actors, technologies, and bodies through which music moves.¹⁵ By mapping the peregrinations of a group of musicians—the CETA Orchestra—I also want to amplify Kirsten Carithers’s call for greater attention to labor in the stories we tell about music history. She is adamant that we do not let aesthetic categories obscure the material structures and human work that produce those categories in the first place.¹⁶

There is a politics implicit in any translation from a network to a scene. Strategic acts of forgetting haunt these translations, but they do not seal them off from further reflection. Indeed, I want to reflect on what’s forgotten in valedictory claims such as those of Rhys Chatham, who celebrated the inclusive non-hierarchical aesthetics of downtown like this: “Tearing down the walls of the music establishment was very much in the air. ... The breakdown of barriers separating genres of art music, improvised music, and rock was complete. ... [B]y the middle of the 1980s there was no longer [a] feeling of transgression.”¹⁷ Chatham’s claims of victory are ironic,

13 Daniel Aaron Silver and Terry Nichols Clark, *Scenescapes: How Qualities of Place Shape Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1.

14 Gendron, “Rzewski in New York,” 558.

15 Benjamin Piekut, “Actor Networks in Music History, Some Clarifications and Critiques,” *Twentieth Century Music* 11, no. 2 (2014): 191–215.

16 Kirsten Carithers, *Interpretive Labor: Experimental Music at Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025).

17 Rhys Chatham, “Five Generations of Composers at the Kitchen,” in *The Kitchen Turns*

as aesthetic freedom is contingent upon geographical restriction such that freedom from generic and institutional constraints is predicated upon *not* leaving SoHo. It was hyperbolic of Chatham to claim success in the demolition of the music establishment. At best, downtown provided a heterotopic space where boundaries could be troubled and new possibilities explored, but which did not overcome and even likely enabled the rapacious gentrification that followed downtown's cultural ascendancy. But what of those moving in and out of that space, those like Julius Eastman for whom downtown wasn't always hospitable? Who had such freedom and for how long? My wager is that Eastman and his involvement with CETA will tell us much about the dynamics of musical freedom as it was enlivened and constrained by the material conditions of life in New York City in the aftermath of the 1975 financial crisis. While Chatham and others could celebrate new aesthetic possibilities of the 1970s, the labor dynamics of the musical establishment remained firmly in place—the CETA Orchestra throws this situation into sharp relief.

3

A few years before Chatham's celebration of downtown's aesthetic liberation, sociologist Samuel Gilmore published an analysis of Manhattan musical life that divided the city into three zones, each with their own musical cultures distinguished by "social" (that is institutional) referents and "cultural" (that is aesthetic) referents.¹⁸ "Midtown" is the domain of repertory classical music (as its cultural referent) and institutions such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Opera, and the New York Philharmonic (as its social referent). Spatially, this area comprises the middle of Manhattan from Town Hall in Times Square to Lincoln Center in the West 60s. "Uptown" is defined by the cultural referent of academic composition (usually reduced to serialism, though much more pluralist in practice). Its social referents are universities: Columbia University, the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, and the Manhattan School of Music. "Downtown" is associated culturally with experimental and "innovative" practices of "nonspecialist" composer-perform-

Twenty: A Retrospective Anthology, ed. Lee Morrissey (New York: The Kitchen, 1992), 18–19.

¹⁸ Samuel Gilmore, "Schools of Activity and Innovation," *The Sociological Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1988): 203–19.

ers and socially with do-it-yourself venues such as private lofts (like Environ), school concert halls (like the Third Street Music School Settlement) and nonprofit performance spaces (like the Kitchen).¹⁹ Gilmore's model, as with any sociological model, doesn't capture it all. This is most notable in his definition of "uptown" which excludes the vibrant creative life of Harlem. Long before uptown came to be associated with the modernism of Charles Wuorinen and the Group for Contemporary Music, it was a vital center of Afro-diasporic modernism stretching back into the late nineteenth century.²⁰ Those in the know were taking the A train to get to Harlem long before they took the 1 to Columbia's McMillin Theater.²¹ Gilmore's model also fails to include the outer boroughs of the city, notably Brooklyn and Queens.²²

George E. Lewis has cautioned scholars against leaning too heavily on Gilmore's model, noting that while "the terms 'uptown,' 'midtown,' and 'downtown' are still used in New York, it must be emphasized that in the 1970s, as now, the art worlds to which they refer interpenetrated one another to a considerable extent to form an overall 'art music' scene in New York."²³ Yet writing on downtown emphasizes the geographical distinctions of the city as well as its supposed singularity.²⁴ The richness and importance of this work notwithstanding, the geographical distinction of downtown is at best a cracked lens through which to view New York City's late-twentieth-century musical practices. Building on my comments on Chatham above, what strikes me about the conceptual linkage of geography and aesthetics is its similarity to nineteenth and twentieth-century historiography which rendered music histories as national histories, naturalizing ties between aesthetics and place. As Brigid Cohen notes of this historiographical mode,

19 Gilmore, "Schools of Activity," 210.

20 Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

21 There were, however, important (if temporary) alliances formed in the late 1960s between Black modernists, gathered as the Society for Black Composers and Columbia University's music department.

22 On Black radical self-determination in Brooklyn and Queens in the period see Kwasi Konadu, *A View from the East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York City*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

23 George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 330.

24 See, for instance, Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and Tamar Barzel, *New York Noise: Radical Jewish Music and the Downtown Scene* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

Such national presentations of history are not relegated to the past, but endure in the present. Survey books of nineteenth and twentieth-century concert musics still often organize their narratives through nationally defined schools and categories. Toward this end, traditional genealogies of influence and style are by no means neutral, but bound up with ideas of national inheritance and expression. If questions of migration remain understudied and under-theorized in musical modernism studies, then this gap persists because national frameworks of historiography have obscured the conditions of displaced and nationally disenfranchised peoples.²⁵

Scholars can reproduce such geographical determinism at the level of the city as much as the nation and fail to consider mobility and displacement that cross-cut urban landscapes and subtend neighborhood identities. This association of the aesthetic with the spatial in Gilmore's analysis is case in point. My approach in following the CETA Orchestra and Julius Eastman around New York City in the late 1970s is to bring Cohen's insights in conversation with "micro-spatial" history.²⁶ Through my micro-spatial approach to the CETA Orchestra, I rethink place-bound aesthetic views like Chatham's in favor of an analysis that does not assume any deterministic relationship between urban geography and musical style. Christian De Vito writes of a micro-spatial perspective:

Here, the point is not to see each place as one "context," but rather to acknowledge that the context of a social process lies in multiple localities, individuals, objects and knowledges. Seen from the perspective of the researcher, this means that the relevant unit of analysis does not coincide with one single place, connection or individual, but with the whole of the networks created by their interactions related to the specific historical object that is being observed.²⁷

By attending to the "whole network created by their interactions," I'll argue that the CETA Orchestra proffers itself as a relevant unit of analysis that will help us map an alternative geography in which downtown is a neces-

25 Brigid Cohen, *Stefan Wolpe and the Avant-Garde Diaspora* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 112–3.

26 Christian G. De Vito, "History Without Scale: The Micro-Spatial Perspective," *Past & Present* 242 (2019): 348–72. See also De Vito, "Verso una microstoria translocale (*Micro-Spatial History*)," *Quaderni Storici* 50, no. 150 (3) (2015): 815–33 and Christian G. De Vito and Anne Gerritsen, eds., *Micro-spatial Histories of Global Labour* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

27 De Vito, "History without Scale," 361.

sary but not sufficient spatial unit for our accounts of NYC in the late 1970s and will help us see the labor of musicians as essential to any emergence of an aesthetic sense of place.

4

In April of 1978, composer-critic Tom Johnson noted a curious development in the city's music life the previous winter:

Symphony orchestras usually arise out of actual needs. Some audience or community decides it needs an orchestra, some good musicians need jobs, some local businesses need tax writeoffs that will improve their community image, a few key individuals need an outlet for their managerial and conducting skills, and gradually the factions pull together. It's a natural kind of process and, if all goes well, it can result in a full-time professional orchestra, though this can easily take 10 or 20 years. But what if we don't want to wait that long? What if we decide to just legislate a full-time orchestra, simply allocating funds and declaring it into existence as of January 2, 1978?²⁸

And so, the CETA Orchestra was born. The allocated funds were provided by the U.S. federal government and authorized by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973. In effect from July 1, 1974 to September 30, 1984, CETA provided block grants to state and local governments amounting to \$55 billion over its duration. Unlike the earlier New Deal era Works Progress Administration (WPA), CETA was decentralized and gave the grant recipients great latitude in the distribution of funds. However, like the WPA, CETA was created to address economic collapse—specifically the recession of 1973, which worsened soon after the law was passed. During its implementation, CETA was adapted to increase public sector employment and mitigate rising unemployment.²⁹ While not explicitly intended to serve the arts, block grants did go to state, county, and city governments who used the money to found CETA Orchestras, some as early as 1976: Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles, California; Cleveland, Ohio; and

²⁸ Tom Johnson, "'I Personally Like Getting Paid': Stalking the orChEsTrA," *Village Voice*, April 3, 1978: 35–7.

²⁹ For a history and analysis of CETA see Grace A. Franklin and Randall B. Ripley, *CETA: Politics and Policy, 1973–1982* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

elsewhere.³⁰ These orchestras employed out-of-work musicians, though the brief duration of the grants (one year) and the uncertainty of their renewal made CETA Orchestras precarious operations. Adding to the complexity were conflicts engendered between these players and union musicians—notably in Chicago—that pitted musicians against one another for gigs in a musically dense city.³¹

The challenges in New York City were even more daunting. Adding to the difficulties of a national recession was the financial collapse of 1975.³² This dire situation made CETA funds even more necessary. While other cities, such as San Francisco, had been using CETA dollars for the arts as early as 1974, New York did not follow suit until 1977.³³ City officials from the Cultural Council Foundation invited the contemporary music ensemble *Speculum Musicae* to form a CETA Orchestra. *Speculum Musicae* would be categorized in Samuel Gilmore's framework as an uptown ensemble and is notable for their performances of the music of Charles Wuorinen and Elliott Carter. The group declined to sponsor the orchestra, though its flutist Paul Dunkel seized the opportunity to lead the nascent group. Already the assistant conductor of the American Composers Orchestra, he volunteered his services to the still-embryonic organization.³⁴ Lukas Foss, long-time supporter of Julius Eastman from their days together in the Creative Associates at Buffalo, eventually housed the CETA Orchestra within the organizational structure of the Brooklyn Philharmonia, where he had been music director since 1971. As I will elaborate on below, Foss had committed the Philharmonia to public service and outreach; giving CETA a home was congruent with these commitments.³⁵

30 On the Chicago CETA, see Monroe Anderson, "New Orchestra Attacks Lack of Union Support," *Chicago Tribune*, August 13, 1976, 15. On the Los Angeles CETA Orchestra see Richard Slater, "Balazs Plays Unaccompanied Bach at Immaculate Heart College," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1978: E11. On the Cleveland CETA Orchestra see "Calendar of Events," *Cleveland Call and Post*, August 26, 1978: 7B.

31 Anderson, "New Orchestra Attacks."

32 On the financial collapse, real estate and the arts see Kim Moody, *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present* (New York: New Press, 2007) and Hillary Miller, *Drop Dead: Performance in Crisis, 1970s New York* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2016).

33 "Comprehensive Employment Training Act Artists Project records circa 1977 to 1980," *NYC Records and Information Services*, accessed July 13, 2026. <https://a860-collectionguides.nyc.gov/repositories/2/accessions/1229>.

34 Raymond Ericson, "Music Notes: CETA Orchestra," *The New York Times*, July 15, 1979: D20.

35 Nicholas Kenyon makes this point in his review of a CETA concert from 1980. See

One of the conditions of membership was the rigid poverty-level income requirements of CETA programs more broadly. Sadly, for freelance musicians like Julius Eastman, these were easy to meet. But when their applications for membership were approved after organizers heard 140 auditions, players were guaranteed a \$10,000-a-year income.³⁶ At its founding the group was fewer than 20 players. On 9 January 1978, Eastman wrote to his friend, composer Rocco di Pietro, with details of the instrumentation: “The orchestra consists of 4 violins, 2 violas, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 1 bass violin, 1 cello, 1 trumpet that also plays one of the violas.”³⁷ Early rehearsals were in a cramped room in an upper corner of the Brooklyn Academy of Music but soon moved to the more spacious basement of the Hanson Place Central Methodist Church. Eastman, who served as resident composer, vocalist, and co-conductor with Dunkel, was pleased with the initial situation. He said to Tom Johnson, “Of course I personally like getting paid. That’s a great thing. And there’s not the pressure. You know how it is—one rehearsal and one concert. I call it fast food concerts.”³⁸ Clarinetist Rob Yamins reiterated Eastman’s opinion, “The orchestra has a lot of promise . . . We’re all free-lancers, and it’s a big advantage to have that steady check coming in every two weeks.”³⁹

But as in Chicago, membership in the CETA Orchestra complicated labor relations among freelance musicians in the city.⁴⁰ Tom Johnson reported one of the musician’s concerns:

The orchestra has also had to take a hard line on the question of performing free in situations where musicians might otherwise have been hired. This is a crucial point. One of the orchestral members was disturbed by the possibility that he might be assigned to augment a local opera orchestra as a CETA musician. The year before, the opera company had paid him to play the same job, so if he had agreed to do the work as part of his CETA employment this year,

Nicholas Kenyon, “Musical Events: Politics,” *The New Yorker*, February 2, 1980: 110–1.

36 On the audition numbers see Kenyon, “Musical Events,” 111. On the salary see Johnson, “I Personally Like Getting Paid.”

37 Julius Eastman to Rocco di Pietro, January 9, 1978, reprinted in Rocco Di Pietro, *Yours in Beethoven: A Memoir of My Musical Journey with Julius Eastman* (self-published, 2023), 51.

38 Johnson, “I Personally Like Getting Paid,” 35–6.

39 Johnson, 37.

40 On labor relations with the CETA Orchestra in Chicago see Anderson, “New Orchestra Attacks.” On the history of musical labor in Chicago see Amy Absher, *The Black Musician in the White City: Race and Music in Chicago, 1900–1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

essentially he would have been taking an existing job away from himself, or from some other free-lancer. Abuses of this sort could easily occur.⁴¹

This complexity was matched by a mind-boggling level of bureaucracy. The orchestra would only play for nonprofit institutions that put in formal requests which required a 16-page application form. Even so, by July of 1978 the group had grown to 30 members and had a steady stream of concerts all over the city that first year: Goodman Auditorium at the Hebrew Arts School on 129 West 67th Street, the International Center for Photography at 1130 Fifth Avenue, Midwood Field in Flatbush, Brooklyn, Fordham University, Port Authority Bus Terminal, Riverside Church, the Staten Island Ferry, and the Kitchen in SoHo.⁴² They also collaborated with the Boys Choir of Harlem, the Opera Orchestra of New York, Meet the Composer, and the dancers Katherine Liepe and Vic Stornant. CETA violinist Clara Zaher remarked, “It’s musically stimulating too, because it gives us a chance to do all kinds of repertoire.”⁴³

5

With a need to cultivate broad musical appeal for a city-wide audience, the CETA Orchestra couldn’t take a committed aesthetic stance nor align itself with any particular scene. In 1978 the orchestra’s repertoire ranged from John Williams’s *Star Wars* soundtrack to Alessandro Scarlatti songs to Joseph Haydn’s symphonies to a work by Fluxus composer Philip Corner.⁴⁴ Such catholic tastes bolstered an image of the orchestra as a service to the whole city. Its name eventually changed in the summer of 1978 to the CETA Orchestra of New York which solidified its commitment to the five boroughs. With its free concerts all over the city, the orchestra made music into an accessible public good.

That CETA funding was available to create an orchestra required the law to be reinterpreted so that it might include the arts at all. The legis-

41 Johnson, “I Personally Like Getting Paid,” 37.

42 Ericson, “Music Notes: CETA Orchestra,” D19.

43 Johnson, “I Personally Like Getting Paid,” 37.

44 For the John Williams performance see “Water Music,” *Staten Island Advance*, August 18, 1978: A5. For the Scarlatti performance see the program reproduced in Di Pietro, *Yours in Beethoven*, 48. For the Haydn and Corner performances see Ann Barry, “Arts and Leisure Guide,” *The New York Times*, March 12, 1978: D32.

lation was intended as a job-training program and funding well-trained artists and musicians was not part of the plan. Indeed, its support of the arts would be used against CETA as news of financial abuse came to light around the time the New York orchestra came into existence. Yet, arts administrators were able to make convincing cases to the Department of Employment for funds, something evinced by the other CETA Orchestras formed before New York's. The template for success was crafted early in the program's life. In 1974, San Francisco arts administrator John Kreidler argued for CETA funding for the arts and performance on the grounds that they *were* a public service and were within the remit of the program. He showed that unemployment rates for artists were far worse than national averages. In his proposal, Kreidler made a virtue of the fact that artists were already well-trained and could be put to work immediately in service of the public. That CETA had "adopted a broad concept of what could be categorized as a public service" worked to arts administrators' advantage.⁴⁵ Journalists and politicians went on to successfully make cases for CETA as a funder for the arts.⁴⁶ In November of 1979 Joan Mondale, second lady of the United States and the Carter administration's arts representative, spoke at the dedication of five murals created at the World Trade Center by CETA-supported artists: Ilya Bolotowsky, Hunt Slonem, Germaine Keller, James Biederman and Cynthia Mailman. The New York CETA Orchestra provided music for the dedication. In her comments, Mondale explicitly connected the CETA program both to the arts projects of the Works Progress Administration and Eleanor Roosevelt's commitment to public art:

Artists should be employed to do what they do best, whether it's painting, writing, dancing, making music—whatever it is, and the CETA program does this. Art needs to be looked at. It is more than just decoration of public places; it sharpens our perceptions and helps us to get a little more out of life ... [Eleanor Roosevelt] would smile at us today, at the CETA Orchestra and the wonderful murals, and she would feel that, yes, we are growing up.⁴⁷

45 Colleen Hooper, "Ballerinas on the Dole: Dance and the US Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), 1974–1982," *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 3 (2017): 73.

46 Rosalyn Bernstein, "Artists on Salary: Funds for the Starving Class," *New York Magazine*, August 21, 1978: 45–9.

47 Quoted in Elain Boies, "Islander's Mural Glows in Spotlight at Arts Celebration," *Staten Island Advance*, November 9, 1979: C3.

Amidst dire economic conditions, Mondale looked back to the progressive era to celebrate the work of CETA. She argued for art's status as a public good even as critics assailed the program, especially its funding of artists, dancers, and musicians. Journalist Ralph Kinney Bennett criticized these artists "on the dole," "many of whom have left jobs in the private economy."⁴⁸ Unbowed by such criticism, President Jimmy Carter continued support of CETA though arguments like Bennett's would eventually contribute to the program's demise in 1983 following Ronald Reagan's election. Yet the CETA Orchestra's fate was sealed not by Reagan, but by New York City's Cultural Council Foundation which defunded the orchestra at the end of 1980.⁴⁹

6

In the months following the CETA Orchestra's founding in January of 1978, Julius Eastman's role expanded beyond his initial appointment as composer-performer. By March he was sharing conducting duties with Paul Dunkel on a concert of Haydn, Wagner, and Philip Corner at the YMCA at 180 W. 135th St. in Harlem.⁵⁰ His work with the Brooklyn Philharmonia and music director Lukas Foss made Eastman an important liaison between the CETA Orchestra and its sponsoring institution. Foss featured Eastman regularly as both composer and performer in the Philharmonia's "Meet the Moderns" concert series. In 1976, Foss appointed Eastman, along with Tania León and Talib Rasul Hakim as co-coordinators of a Community Concerts series under the auspices of the Philharmonia. These concerts initially served as a vehicle for the organizing work of the Society of Black Composers, which Hakim had co-founded in 1968 with Ben Patterson, Carmen Moore, Hale Smith, Dorothy Rudd Moore and others. The Brooklyn Philharmonia's board approved the Community Concerts; Consolidated Edison and Philip Morris provided seed funds. These corporate sponsorships proved necessary as the Philharmonia's board approved the series on the condition that no resources be diverted from the orchestra's established programs and that it should be supported only by new gifts.

⁴⁸ Ralph Kinney Bennett, "CETA: \$11-Billion Boondoggle," *Reader's Digest* (August 1978): 75.

⁴⁹ Maurice Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn: A Biography of the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 118.

⁵⁰ Barry, "Arts and Leisure Guide."

The founding of the CETA Orchestra coincided with the Community Concerts' second season and the musicians were put to work on the series. Their labor came as a relief. Philharmonia manager and archivist Maurice Edwards described the relationship between the two orchestras like this: "The CETA Concert Orchestra became something of an extension of the Brooklyn Philharmonia—almost like a stand-in, taking on assignments that the parent itself could not handle for various reasons that were mostly logistical and monetary."⁵¹ This arrangement is curiously similar to *outsourcing*—where labor costs are cut by employing short-term contingent labor—which the CETA musicians certainly were.⁵² Edwards framed this expansion of the Philharmonia's labor force at no-to-minimal cost as in service of the public good and saw their sponsorship of the CETA Orchestra as an "opportunity to bring music to many more people than it could possibly afford to serve through its own community outreach, family, and educational programs."⁵³

Eastman's work as CETA conductor and coordinator of the Community Concerts demonstrates the ways in which the argument for the orchestra as a public good was made. One tactic was to emphasize increased audience access to music. The CETA Orchestra worked exhaustively to bring concerts into the urban public sphere including sites of mass circulation like the Staten Island Ferry and the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Another tactic was to increase composers' access to performances. In their service to the Community Concerts, the CETA musicians increased access to the music of historically marginalized composers. These tactics comprised a broader strategy designed by Foss and the Philharmonia that remapped the geographical focus of the organization's efforts. Foss, Léon, Eastman, and Hakim used the Community Concerts to increase musical offerings in neighborhoods surrounding the Brooklyn Academy of Music, whose programs offered European imports of music theater and performances by downtown-affiliated artists. Works mounted there by African American composers living in Brooklyn, downtown, Harlem or elsewhere were few and far between. The Community Concerts developed a dual focus on geographical and aesthetic expansion that extended the orchestra's reach into the majority African American neighborhoods of Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, and Cobble Hill. The concerts were

⁵¹ Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 107.

⁵² On the contemporary state of outsourcing in relation to new music see Martin Iddon, "Outsourcing Progress: On Conceptual Music," *Tempo* 70, no. 275 (2016): 36–49.

⁵³ Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 107.

held in established Black-founded and run institutions including the Paul Robeson and Billie Holiday Theaters. These concerts frequently travelled into Manhattan—specifically Harlem. The board and Foss hoped that by exposing new and primarily African American audiences to the orchestra, its base of support would expand and bring new listeners to the Philharmonia's concerts at BAM.⁵⁴ Foss did not conduct the community concerts; in another act of outsourcing, that job was given over to Léon. After the CETA Orchestra became involved, Eastman shared these duties with her. CETA musicians were called upon for the Community Concerts' orchestral programs, such as a program of William Canaday and Anthony Coleman at the Queens Museum on June 16–17, 1979 and a concert of Ed Bland and Judith Martin in the Museum Mile Festival on June 26. Eastman's work on other concerts in 1978 and 1979 was supported by his CETA salary, defraying costs that the Philharmonia would have otherwise had to bear.

By reorienting the Philharmonia's activities outward to other parts of Brooklyn and Harlem, the Community Concerts coordinators reimagined a broader cultural movement begun in the 1960s with the Black Arts Movement. Jazz (along with Soul) had assumed a political and musical significance within Black Nationalist movements that largely eclipsed African American composers, whose access to Euro-American ensembles and institutions had been historically limited.⁵⁵ Black composers were in something of a double bind, excluded from both Black cultural nationalism and the primarily white art music establishment.⁵⁶ The Community Concerts provided a space for the exploration of Black-composed music as a force for cultural nationalism and politics. Each of the composer-coordinators negotiated this uneven terrain by exemplifying a creative mobility exemplified by the Black radical tradition.⁵⁷

Yet, by the second season of the Community Concerts—when the CETA Orchestra was in its service—the exclusive of programming Black composers was challenged. Jon Gibson recalls that Eastman initiated the shift in emphasis. Léon and Eastman along with Hakim made programming decisions, which became contentious around matters of representation. Playing

⁵⁴ Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 98.

⁵⁵ For an instance of the marginalization of composed music in Black radical aesthetics see James T. Stewart, "The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist," in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. Leroy Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Morrow, 1968), 3–10.

⁵⁶ Though some composers, like Julia Perry and Ulysses Kay made significant inroads into elite institutions with Guggenheim fellowships (Perry) and Rome Prize fellowships (Kay).

⁵⁷ See Dohoney, "A Flexible Musical Identity."

to his contrarian type, Eastman programmed Gibson's *Melody IV* (1975) and *Song II* (1974) on the second Community Concert of the 1977–78 season performed at both the Bushwick United Methodist Church and the Harlem Performance Center.⁵⁸ Gibson (1940–2020) was a habitué of downtown, a white composer-performer working with Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Gibson remembered, “Years later someone told me that these concerts were supposed to feature Black composers and performers exclusively which they did except for me. I was taken aback when I learned that Julius had to fight long and hard on my behalf to get my music on this program. He never mentioned any of this to me at the time.”⁵⁹

Concerts in subsequent seasons featured integrated programming. Eastman brought in works by white experimental composers Beth Anderson, Petr Kotik, and Frederic Rzewski for a concert celebrating Langston Hughes at Medgar Evers College in Crown Heights, Brooklyn on February 23, 1979.⁶⁰ The concert also featured music by co-coordinator Talib Hakim and Joyce Solomon. Tania León programmed and conducted an all-Latin American concert given at INTAR in Manhattan as the final Community Concert of that season. These shifts in programming marked a turn from the original goal of advocating Black cultural nationalism towards proffering a multiculturalist musical aesthetic, exemplified by the 1978–79 theme of “Music of the Americas.” Outreach remained the goal; as Maurice Edwards emphasized, “With concerts built around the works of living Black, Hispanic, and American Indian composers, we are trying to reach people who might not otherwise come to hear us at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.”⁶¹ The Community Concerts were restructured after the CETA Orchestra's dissolution. Once funding for the musicians ran out at the end of 1980, the Community series was combined with the Family concerts in the 1981–82 season to minimize the added labor for the Philharmonia players. It continued into the late 1980s and garnered support from grants and corporate sponsorships.⁶²

58 Gibson was programmed with works by Yuji Takahashi, Chou Wen-Chung, Angela Bofill, and Joyce Solomon. Solomon would later join Eastman for performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1986 for choreographer-dancer Molissa Fenley's *Geologic Moments*. See Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 106.

59 Quoted in Renée Levine Packer, “Julius Eastman: A Biography,” in *Gay Guerrilla*, ed. Packer and Leach, 49.

60 Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 111.

61 Quoted in “Brooklyn IBM News: Philharmonia Season Openers Sponsored,” *International Business Machines Corporation* 1, no. 2 (August 1979).

62 Edwards, *How Music Grew in Brooklyn*, 123.

7

Let us return to my opening thought experiment: The Kitchen, one of the key sites of the downtown scene. Eastman conducted the CETA Orchestra in two nights of new music for baroque orchestra on May 9 and 10, 1978. The May 9 program featured music by Rhys Chatham, Ralph Jones, Alan Lloyd, and Arthur Russell; May 10 featured Tania León, Rocco di Pietro, Judith Martin, and Ned Sublette.⁶³ The mix of voices is eclectic, featuring downtown denizens like Chatham and Russell, Eastman's former collaborator Martin from the SEM Ensemble, and his current collaborator León from the Community Concerts. Sublette recalled the performance of Russell's *Instrumentals* like this: "I had never heard *Instrumentals* before, and I was amazed at how good it sounded with that grumpy group of players, who would rather have been at home watching TV ... I thought it was a beautiful take on orchestral sonority and structured indeterminacy." Russell himself was "not satisfied."⁶⁴ Given the sheer amount of concertizing that the CETA Orchestra was responsible for, it was likely that the players were exhausted. Sublette and Russell's attitude towards them is striking for its dismissal of the labor of the musicians. But it is precisely the labor of the CETA Orchestra that I have insisted we pay attention to. If we were to follow Sublette and Russell, we might fault them for undermining the sound of the downtown scene—for not reproducing its aesthetic sense of place at one of its key sites. But following Eastman and his fellow travelers through New York's urban territory, we might rather consider the ways in which such scenes are possible at all only through the work of a "grumpy group of players."

The scene of musical failure at the Kitchen returns me to the theoretical propositions presented at the outset of this article: that, against a reified conception of scene suturing together aesthetics and space, as in Gilmore and Chatham, we might instead attend to micro-spatial mobilities of performance labor that cross-cut urban locales. Musical labor, mutable and exploitable, could be put in service of multiple scenes and cultural initiatives. I've traced this in Eastman's work with the CETA Orchestra. Together they endeavored to create music as a citywide public good in keeping with the broad goals of the CETA program. Their labor supported the cultural nationalist project of the Society of Black Composers through their work on the Community Concerts Series for the Brooklyn Philharmonia. In

63 See the flyer for the concert in Di Pietro, *Yours in Beethoven*, 47.

64 Sublette and Russell quotes both in Lawrence, *Hold on to Your Dreams*, 156.

each performance, the orchestra formed a novel coalition with a sponsoring organization—from the Staten Island Ferry to Riverside Church—that showed the potential for music to be translocal, to establish connections through musical labor and a broad notion of music's social worth.

This is in line with De Vito's goals for a translocal micro-spatial historiography: "Translocal microhistory has the dual objective of deconstructing universalistic concepts and reconstructing the histories, meanings, and representations that lie beneath them."⁶⁵ Beneath reifying scenic signifiers like "uptown," "midtown," and "downtown," we can shift focus to those forces connecting them. I've argued that labor is certainly one of these but so is a conception of music as a public good. To notice this however is not to substitute one reified conception (aesthetic-space) for another (general musical value) but is instead to take up another task of translocal microhistory: rethinking comparison. To note a shared structure of labor and political value is not to suggest that they operate in each location in the same manner. Again, De Vito: "the homogeneous discontinuity of the historical fabric points to the fact that each place is shaped by the intersection of multiple social networks and connections and by their evolution over time. The specificity of each site derives, in other words, not from its isolation, but from the specificity of the connections that traverse and shape it."⁶⁶ In the end, because of its particular configuration of institutions and cultural cachet, downtown has remained a name to conjure with, while no comparable scene was forged by the Brooklyn Philharmonia or the Community Concerts. I'll turn now to a closer, final look at the specificity of the CETA Orchestra and its service to the Community Concerts.

8

As with most musical relationships, the CETA Orchestra was short-lived. Eastman left the group sometime in late 1979, writing to Rocco di Pietro in an undated letter, "The CETA Orchestra and I have fallen out, such that

65 "La microstoria translocale ha per duplice obiettivo la decostruzione dei concetti universalistici e la ri-costruzione delle storie, dei significati e delle rappresentazioni che si celano al di sotto di essi." De Vito, "Verso una microstoria translocale," 822.

66 "Il riconoscimento dell'omogenea discontinuità del tessuto storico rimanda al fatto che ciascun luogo è costruito dall'intersecarsi di molteplici reti sociali e connessioni e dal loro mutare nel tempo. La specificità di ciascun sito deriva cioè non dal suo isolamento, ma dalla specificità delle connessioni che lo attraversano e lo costruiscono." De Vito, 823.

I don't perform with them anymore."⁶⁷ But as I argue elsewhere, the temporariness of Eastman's musical relationships need not diminish their importance.⁶⁸ Their contingency has much to tell us about the actual existing conditions of musical life in New York City. Despite its brief life, The CETA Orchestra from 1978 to 1980 provided stability for musicians like Eastman who found themselves confronting the rising precarity unleashed by a fiscal crisis that utterly transformed the urban landscape. The orchestra's defunding in 1980 and the ending of the CETA program outright in 1983 exemplified at the city and national levels the "new federalism" emerging in the 1970s and supercharged by the Reagan administration.⁶⁹ Now more commonly known as neoliberalism, Reagan's policies were prefigured by those impacting New York City in the 1970s and strategically dismantled social safety nets, including CETA.

Scholars have called such strategic disinvestment *urbicide*—the enforced destruction of a city.⁷⁰ Urbicide operates through "selective urban development practices that prioritize economic goals and/or specific historical narratives, leading to the intentional or unintentional destruction of diverse urban spaces [that] erode collective urban memory, undermine cultural sustainability, and diminish community resilience."⁷¹ As Sharon Zukin has shown, the gentrification of downtown New York and the aestheticization of the "loft lifestyle" were modes of selective urban development at work in the 1970s.⁷² Despite its analytical and activist uses, Black feminist geographer Katherine McKittrick cautions us against romanticizing urbicide and lazily adopting what she interprets to be its dehumanizing logic. An urbicidal historiography has deleterious effects on what kinds of stories are allowed to matter. Given the racial dynamics that attend to narratives of urbicide, vibrant signs of life—especially Black lives like Eastman's and his collaborators in the Community Concerts—get lost:

67 Di Pietro, *Yours in Beethoven*, 50.

68 Dohoney, "For Failed Friendship."

69 E. Terrence Jones and Donald Phares, "Formula Feedback and Central Cities: The Case of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1978): 31–54.

70 Martin Coward, *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

71 Sebla Arin Ensarioğlu, "A Threat to Cultural Sustainability: Urbicide," *Space and Culture* 29, no. 3 (2026): 302–18.

72 Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

[T]he complexity of a Black sense of place—questions of encounter, practices of resistance—can be, at least conceptually, swallowed up by the very death and decay that is bolstered by the hard empirical evidence of Black geographic peril. With this in mind, urbicide—the deliberate death of the city and willful place annihilation—can stand in as a viable explanation for the ongoing destruction of a black sense of place in the Americas.⁷³

The mapping of Eastman's work with the CETA Orchestra and that orchestra's work with the Community Concerts testifies to the complexity of Eastman's musical geography in New York City in the 1970s and exemplifies the ways in which a "Black sense of place is not a steady, focused, and homogeneous way of seeing and being in place, but rather a set of changing and differential perspectives that are illustrative of, and therefore remark upon, legacies of normalized racial violence that calcify, but do not guarantee, the denigration of Black geographies and their inhabitants."⁷⁴

9

In conclusion, I'd like to advance some methodological claims as they are thrown into relief by Eastman's movement through New York City. What I find compelling about McKittrick's work is the emphasis she places on poesis as a response to these conditions. As Clyde Woods argued, musicking has often been a way in which Black lives make space matter and, in turn, shape landscapes.⁷⁵ Building on Woods, McKittrick argues forcefully against narratives of urbicide that make spectacles of Black death. Such narratives remap antebellum plantation logics onto contemporary geographies. She takes pains to emphasize that urbicide cannot not dispense with Black life and is continually met by assertions of Black aliveness—what literature scholar Kevin Quashie describes as a *poetics of being*.⁷⁶ Blues and hip hop are perhaps the most consequential iteration of this everyday Black living in the face of structural divestment, but they are not the only genres

73 Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (December 2011): 951.

74 McKittrick, 950.

75 Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 2017).

76 Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

where these dilemmas were confronted. Indeed, my attention to the micro-politics of Eastman's labor in NYC offers another way to test McKittrick's thesis. In each of the examples above, Eastman responded to precarity with creativity and (ultimately dissonant) coalition-building. Translocal analysis of such work brings McKittrick's insights into renewed focus.

To build on her theory, I have been thinking McKittrick's geography and De Vito's translocal microhistory in tandem with the vocal philosophy of Adriana Cavarero, of which I have written elsewhere.⁷⁷ I am particularly concerned with Cavarero's concept of "an absolute local" (*locale assoluto*) that emerges whenever voices (and musicians) sound out in relation to one another. Cavarero writes that the space of the absolute local is "the name of a taking-place of politics that has no predefined borders, nor any fixed or sacred confines."⁷⁸ The radical potential of such locality resounds in performances of CETA Orchestra and redefines relations of belonging and resistance in novel ways. Relations we saw with the orchestra included its reframing of music as a public good and its expansion of access to it. Musicking may do no more than reveal the structuring constraints of a place, but it also might generate a politics that points towards their overcoming. Music's production of an absolute local is what McKittrick might mean when she articulates the work of Black poesis as a particular form of place-making. And it resonates with De Vito's concern with a "historical fabric ... made up of singular configurations."⁷⁹ Such place-making valorizes life against death, and we hear such valorization in the musical life of the CETA Orchestra and the Community Concerts. Even if the conditions of urbicide constrain and condition the production of an efficacious political moment, musical work may yet bypass them, at least as long as the sound resounds.

With my attention to micro-spatial moments in 1970s New York, I also have a broader point to make about the historiography of downtown and its supposed boundaryless creativity. Chatham's geographically constrained cultural triumphalism cited above obscures the fact that boundaries did remain and hides the fact that downtown was not hospitable to all. With its aesthetic emphasis, it devalues the difficult interrelatedness that was

77 Ryan Dohoney, "An Antidote to Metaphysics: Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Philosophy," *Women and Music* 15 (2011): 69–84.

78 Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 204.

79 "Il tessuto storico nel suo complesso è costituito da configurazioni singolari." De Vito, "Verso una microstoria translocale," 823.

achieved by Eastman and the CETA musicians' labor. Instead, my trans-local micro-spatial approach leads us to a historiography that does not determine in advance how musicians and music might relate to one another. And it does not shy away from recovering the evidence that remains and using it to answer the ethical demands placed upon us whenever we set out to map musical life. Eastman and the CETA Orchestra's achievements call for us to undertake a more just geography that does not disguise racialized constraints under the guise of aesthetic freedom but recognizes that fleeting moments of place-making through musical performances can remap the geographies we think we know.

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Abstract

The New York CETA Orchestra was legislated into existence in 1978 at a time of economic peril both for New York City as well as the nation. Over its brief life, the CETA Orchestra played in all five boroughs and made a strong case for music as a public good. Their mobility across the Five Boroughs—from the Staten Island Ferry to the Paul Robeson Theater to the Port Authority Bus Terminal—displayed a form of musicianship that decoupled associations of place and aesthetics. Following the CETA Orchestra from 1978–1979 reveals shortcomings in geographical models of musical history that divided the city into distinct aesthetic zones of “uptown,” “midtown,” and “downtown.” As a corrective to a Manhattan-centric model, I offer a micro-spatial account of New York City musical life detailing Julius Eastman and his involvement with the CETA Orchestra. Eastman served as resident composer, vocalist, and conductor with the group. Through his connections to Lukas Foss and the Brooklyn Philharmonia, Eastman brought the CETA Orchestra into the service of the Philharmonia’s Community Concerts. These focused on the music of Black composers performed in majority Black neighborhoods of Brooklyn, Queens, and Harlem. Eastman is usually grouped among the “downtown” experimentalists, yet Eastman’s work with the CETA Orchestra and that orchestra’s work with the Community Concerts testifies to the complexity of musical geography in New York City in the 1970s and the dynamics of race and labor shaping it.

Keywords: urban geography, micro-spatial historiography, Julius Eastman, Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, musical labor

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