

FREEDOM

IS

A

CONSTANT

STRUGGLE

USA. Waveland, Mississippi. November 1964. Bob Moses at an SNCC conference.  
Photo: Danny Lyon/Magnum Photos





*“Is knowledge of freedom always knowledge of the experience of freedom even when that knowledge precedes experience?”*

In his incredible book *In The Break - The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Fred Moten poses that question. But it's really a statement: about a whole social, artistic performance and the construction of black identity or selfhood. He's saying something like: for black people to be able to understand anything of freedom, they've had to create their own spaces in which to practice and perform it.

In these spaces, he suggests, an alternate sociality has been attempted: an ensemblic, collective, non-individualistic performance of blackness<sup>1</sup> as the performance of freedom; a necessarily political, necessarily aesthetic, necessarily erotic black social life.

1 – Of blackness having way more to do with this idea of performance than say, skin colour.

2 – From Mississippi SNCC member Sam Block's song "Freedom is a Constant Struggle". The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was a key

contributor to the American Civil Rights Movement, emerging from a series of student meetings led by Ella Baker at Shaw University in April 1960. It established Freedom Schools and organised large-scale voter registration drives, notably the Mississippi Freedom Summer



Members of the AACM, ca 1968.  
Photo: Wadsworth Jarrell





In *Scenes of Subjection* Saidiya Hartman explores black identity and the insidious forms of racial trauma<sup>3</sup> that make clear the tragic link between the experiences of slavery and modern Black American life; of the transition from subjection to subjection.

Because of this, she proposes that any space of freedom today, if it can exist at all, can only do so as a fugitive one. You are not free of an oppressive society if it's still the arbiter and granter of your freedom; you are only free once it has crumbled. For now, any free space must be in flight from society: at large, temporary and mobile.

3 – i.e.: Trauma that's 'insidious' because it's everyday and structural, systemic, ongoing and un-spoken. In this case: the 'granting' of humanity, enjoyment, protection or rights, legal or economic constraints and the daily rituals of terror; both pre and post-emancipation.

4 – Wendy Brown





Teresa Maria Díaz Nerio, *Travesti de Sangre*, performance  
in collaboration with Stefanie Seibold, 2011





What is the relationship between such fugitive spaces and the improvisations of freedom they support? Could you call those improvisations allegorical<sup>5</sup>? Do they point to a community's politics? By creating a space so as to perform an idea of freedom do they bear witness to a desire for freedom in the absence of its experience, as a way of learning something of it?

Fred talks of this performance (of blackness, of freedom) as an ongoing performance of encounter: of rupture, collision, passionate response. Doesn't that sound like a description of the free jazz and inner city education programs of the AACM in Chicago or the loft jazz scene in 70's New York? Isn't it a way to understand the link between the politics and the poetics of the Black Arts Movement in Harlem?

5 – Allegory in the way that Vanessa Place understands it: as a pointing *to*, but not a talking *about* an idea. It's a decision, but not a representation.

6 – Angela Davis



Ultra-red with Fred Moten, *What is the Sound of Freedom?*,  
2012 Whitney Biennial. Photo: Bryony McIntyre





What does it mean to think about the languages, gestures and aesthetics of the black radical tradition here in Glasgow; are its concerns similar to our own? Or if not: how do they differ?

At a time when libertarians and conservatives seem to have reduced any idea of freedom to little more than the consumers' freedom to choose, wouldn't it be more helpful to think instead of a freedom from certain things: from poverty or oppression, from choice or the free market?

Does that necessarily imply freedom as collective action rather than a freedom of the individual will? Could this be a link between our situation and the black radical aesthetic? One in which freedom is improvised and performed as a social process: constantly in flux, remaining fugitive and in flight.





Photo: Emma Hedditch





## THU 18

***A story that cannot be told, yet must be told. Zong! and its context***

**M. NourbeSe Philip with Fred Moten**

Thursday 18 Apr | 7:30pm | Free

In November 1781, the captain of the slave ship Zong, sailing from Liverpool, ordered that some 150 Africans be murdered by drowning, so that the ship's owners could collect insurance monies. Equal parts song, moan, shout, oath, ululation, curse, and chant, NourbeSe's anti-narrative poetic lament "Zong!" tells this story that cannot be told, yet must be told. How, given the city's role in the history of slavery, might we read this poem in Glasgow today?

## FRI 19

**Wadada Leo Smith**

Friday 19 Apr | 7:30pm |

Day or Festival Pass

Trumpeter, multi-instrumentalist, composer, improviser and educator, Wadada is one of the great figures in jazz, and the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) a musician-led institution that seeks the creative and representational control of its music and education. His music, grounded in a historical poetics, suggests what can be done as racism, poverty and justice intersect; bearing witness to a struggle built upon patience, collective action, a thousand acts: "*None of these pieces are meant simply to be listened to.*"

**John Tilbury**

Friday 19 Apr | 8:15pm |

Day or Festival Pass

Tilbury is the great avant-garde pianist of our time. We continue to be deeply affected by his thinking on music, politics and ideology: "*There is no such thing as an artistic conscience which is not governed by world*

*outlook...the content of a piece of music is not something mysterious, unattainable or elusive. On the contrary, creative listening, that is, listening to music that involves the mind as well as the ears and heart, can attain a measure of understanding of what a composer is saying about the world."*

**Fred Moten – Reading**

Friday 19 Apr | 9:15pm |

Day or Festival Pass

Fred insists on the right to use and enjoy a property shared by all: sound, or as he calls it, phonic substance. So maybe his poetry is a way of searching for sounds that he holds in common with a readership, sounds that make, as it were, common sense. Through this searching, African American history, avant-garde jazz riffs and activism intertwine in experimental verse of extraordinary and affecting beauty that has to be heard.

**Wadada Leo Smith & John Tilbury**

Friday 19 Apr | 10:15pm |

Day or Festival Pass

The AACM's founding documents concern community self-determination (in the shadow of the Great Migration and racial segregation) as much as they do music. Many of the key figures of European free improvisation were attempting to musically embody Marxist or even Maoist ideas of social organisation. How might two of the great musicians working within those contrasting traditions of freedom collaborate? What might this produce: musically, socially, allegorically?

# SAT 20

## ***The Experiment: Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez and Wadada Leo Smith, in Conversation with Fred Moten***

*Pt. 1 | Saturday 20 Apr | 2:30pm | Free*

*Pt. 2 | Saturday 20 Apr | 4:30pm | Free*

Baraka, Sanchez and Smith are engaged in a deep and extended artistic practice that simultaneously resists and honours the distinctions between literature and music, notation and improvisation, sight and sound. The conversation between them will focus on how their senses of these intersections determine their inhabitation of another: the convergence of aesthetic and social experimentation.

## **No-Total, Or staying within the tale**

*Saturday 20 Apr | 7:15pm |*

*Day or Festival Pass*

We acknowledge a discrepancy or chasm between the everyday practices of performance, music and/or activism in situ (where the persons involved encounter and live with their community) and the abstracted world of the arts festival. The persons invited to this episode are situated within their own communities, histories, locations. What happens when they are relocated, and framed differently by people with different histories? How might people in communities we're part of (here and there) address this reframing? What kind of listening and acknowledging do we offer each other? What is it to listen to an 'elsewhere', and do we ever do anything else when we listen to music?

## ***Ni 'mamita' Ni 'mulatita'***

**Teresa María Díaz Nerio**

*Saturday 20 Apr | 8:45pm |*

*Day or Festival Pass*

A performed film lecture; maybe a little melodramatic, maybe danced, maybe not, but either way exploring how the 'Rumberas' of Caribbean cinema of the 40's and 50's subverted demeaning images of themselves (e.g.: the prevalence of brown/blackface, the mammy and the mulata

stereotype) through dance, sound and a sociality that insisted on blackness as being a cultural performance, not simply due to skin colour.

## **Daniel Carter & William Parker**

*Saturday 20 Apr | 10:00pm |*

*Day or Festival Pass*

Is the music of exceptional jazz saxophonist Daniel Carter an improvisation of his free associationist, non-impositional anarchism? When William Parker, the great jazz bassist of our time, says: "*it is the role of the artist to incite political, social, and spiritual revolution, to awaken us from our sleep and never let us forget our obligations as human beings...*" what's he getting at? And: what might their collaboration tell us about our own performances of responsibility and liberty, whether individual, social or musical?

# SUN 21

## **Listener as Operator**

**Howard Slater**

*Sunday 21 Apr | 2:30pm | Free*

In which our favourite Yorkshire born autodidact/ volunteer play therapist/ writer tries to think alongside the black radical tradition. What's political about the tension between the individual and collective in free jazz? Is it exemplified by the ability to singularise without becoming an individualist, to be prepared to improvise amidst a meeting of singularities that bring with them a collective awareness of belonging to a shared history?

## **Sonia Sanchez**

*Sunday 21 Apr | 3:45pm | Free*

Sanchez emerged as a seminal figure in the 1960s Black Arts Movement, writing in the name of black culture, civil rights and women's liberation. A poet, playwright and activist, her work responds to oppression by using black dialect as a poetic medium and a jazz-like improvisational rhythm, urging readers to embrace their blackness and turn away from the falsity of Western values.

*"The haiku in her hands is... as abrupt and as final as a fist."* David Williams

## **Fred Moten – Chat**

*Sunday 21 Apr | 5:00pm | Free*

In many ways, this Episode is our attempt to engage with Fred's incredible writing: his painstaking and painful chronicling of *"passionate responses to passionate utterance, painfully and hiddenly disclosed always and everywhere in the tracks of [black] tradition"*, of the phonic substances that harbor a *"knowledge of freedom in the absence of what we would recognize as the experience of freedom"*; of his proposal that all black performance (culture, politics, sexuality, identity, and blackness itself) is improvisation.

## **Unfree Improvisation / Compulsive Freedom**

**Ray Brassier & Mattin**

*Sunday 21 Apr | 7:15pm |*

*Day or Festival Pass*

How do you know what you want? Increasingly today impulse masquerades as freedom – even as our impulses are conditioned, controlled and manufactured. To believe something is to be committed to believing many other things that rationally follow from it. Couldn't autonomy be the logical, rational freedom from false choices: should freedom be doing what you ought, not doing what you want? How might a philosopher and artist turn this thinking into an enabling condition in the context of noise and improvisation?

## **Zong!**

**M. NourbeSe Philip**

*Sunday 21 Apr | 8:30pm |*

*Day or Festival Pass*

*"A brash, unsettling book, Zong! wants to chant or shout history down, shut history up... Fretful, possessed, obsessed, upset, curse and homeopathy, both, it visits a breathtaking run of glossolalic scat upon historical trauma."*

Nathaniel Mackey. Can a collective performance of NourbeSe's poem of black life as it exceeds containment enact alternative forms of selfhood that emerge in and out of African diasporic experience?

## **WordMusic**

**Amiri Baraka & Henry Grimes**

*Sunday 21 Apr | 10:00pm |*

*Day or Festival Pass*

Amiri Baraka stands alongside a handful of others, (Baldwin, Douglass, Ellison, Hughes, Hurston, Wheatley...) as one of the great African-American literary figures. Founder of the Black Arts Movement, he is America's great radicalised poet transcribing the tragic as political despair, the broken rhythms of blackness: radicalism set to work. Henry Grimes was central in defining the bass sound of free jazz on monumental recordings and performances with Albert Ayler, Charles Mingus, Cecil Taylor... His is a sound of syncopation and anarchic organization, spanning bone dry sawing to rich harmonic shading.

## VENUE

### **Tramway**

25 Albert Drive, Glasgow, G41 2PE  
0845 330 3501  
[www.tramway.org](http://www.tramway.org)

## TICKETS

### **Festival Pass — £14**

Access to all events at the festival

### **Friday Day Pass — £6**

Access to all events on Friday 19

### **Saturday Day Pass — £6**

Access to all events on Saturday 20

### **Sunday Day Pass — £6**

Access to all events on Sunday 21

Access to free events is unreserved

### **Online**

[www.tramway.org](http://www.tramway.org)

### **In person**

Tramway, 25 Albert Drive  
Glasgow, G41 2PE

### **Phone**

0845 330 3501

### **Box Office**

Open: Mon to Sat 10am – 8pm,  
Sun 12noon – 6pm

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Our Episodes are intended\* as a kind of convivial, exploratory cross between a salon, festival and live magazine; maybe a kind of concentrated space in which ideas about art and its social use can be investigated through intense performances and thought-provoking discussions with leading international artists and thinkers, and hopefully with the people in Glasgow who might have the most to say in return.

*\* But anyway, we don't particularly care about what individual people intend, ourselves included: what this weekend turns out to be about is really up to us all.*

### **Episode 4**

Co-produced by:

**Arika**

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**THE SKINNY**  
INDEPENDENT CULTURAL JOURNALISM

Design by Julia  
[www.julia.uk.com](http://www.julia.uk.com)

Can art forms like black radical poetry, free jazz or improvisation create a space in which people can enact ideas of freedom? Did they ever? And can they still do so now?

This is kind of a festival or salon of experimental music, poetry, performance and discussions, variously concerned with notions of the performance of freedom.

More information at:  
[www.arika.org.uk](http://www.arika.org.uk)