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# Mingus, Cassavetes, and the Birth of a Jazz Cinema

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## Introduction

In November 1958, John Cassavetes premiered his revolutionary independent film *Shadows* in a series of midnight screenings at the Paris Theater in New York City. *Village Voice* critic Jonas Mekas immediately proclaimed it a work of genius, calling it "the most frontier-breaking American feature in at least a decade."[1] Most audience members, including Cassavetes, hated it.[2] Cassavetes reassembled his cast and crew and shot extensive new footage, modifying old scenes and adding new ones. The final version premiered at Amos Vogel's legendary Cinema 16 on November 11, 1959, and was an overnight critical sensation.

*Shadows* chronicled the lives of a mixed race family in which two light-skinned siblings (Lelia Goldoni and Ben Carruthers) and their darker-skinned brother (Hugh Hurd) live day to day in 1950's New York bohemia. The program notes from the 1959 screening (billed with Alfred Leslie and Robert Frank's *Pull My Daisy* as "The Cinema of Improvisation") described the film as "John Cassavetes's pulsating revelation of the demi-world of the night people; floaters, chicks, jazz musicians and hipsters in the neon-lit desert of Times Square." They continued, "Overpowering in its immediacy, this brilliant return to improvisation in the cinema etches a compassionate, violent portrayal of pick-ups and brawls, loneliness, casual affairs and search for identity."[3] These insightful early notes by Vogel go to the film's very core, yet simultaneously set the tone for many years of misconceptions.

**The three siblings**

One of the myths that propelled *Shadows* to instant notoriety was its improvisational origins. It's considered by many to be the first "true" cinematic jazz narrative, both for its racially charged subject and its unconventional, unscripted making in the streets of Manhattan.[4] It's been further celebrated for an original score by one of the all-time jazz greats, Charles Mingus.

However much of the legend is deceptive. Little of Mingus's music appears in the final film. Actual jazz scenes are conspicuously absent. And recent writings

1 Jonas Mekas, *Village Voice* (January 27, 1960), quoted in Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 10.
2 Much of the audience walked out on the film. Cassavetes later described the evening as "absolutely disastrous," and amusingly added that "no one tried to phony up their reaction to it; one friend of mine patted me on the shoulder and said, "That's OK, John, you're still a good actor." John Cassavetes, interview, *Playboy* (July, 1971), 70.
3 Amos Vogel, "The Cinema of Improvisation," Cinema 16 program notes, Nov. 11, 1959, quoted in *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society*, ed. Scott McDonald (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 364.

4 Jazz, improv, and movies have of course been intertwined since cinema's inception, initially through improvised accompaniment to silent film, and an immediate transition to the sound era in the early Vitaphone programs. Yet while jazz-themed movies were prevalent, and original jazz-scored films date at least to the early 1950's, their level of authenticity is variable. Bud Shank, who played on Leith Stevens' score to *The Wild One* (1951)—considered by many to be the first completely jazz-scored film—felt that Stevens didn't have a true jazz background, and noted Shorty Rogers was brought in for the arrangements. In Shank's view, the studios opposed the use of actual jazz musicians, whom they thought couldn't read music, and insisted on studio orchestras. In the case of *The Wild One* Rogers expanded the instrumentation and supplemented the studio musicians with ringers, including Shank. Shank felt in this case, and always, it was about control: the studios would say, "You'll play *this*," and were inherently threatened by improvisational forms. (conversation with Bud Shank, Nov. 14, 2007)

by Ray Carney, Tom Charity and others have attempted to debunk or clarify much of the improvisation myth.

Carney reveals that when Cassavetes essentially reshot half the film in 1959 and formed the work's eventual release version, he used a script.[5] Even the supposedly improvised scenes from the first shoot were in essence "scored" by Cassavetes, who gave his actors not just notes but sequential scenarios and specific guidelines right from the start. They then developed the film's first draft through rehearsals in the Variety Arts building studio where Cassavetes ran acting workshops with a partner, Burt Lane.

The final work, which integrates footage from two distinct shooting periods, with gaping continuity mismatches and diverse acting and shooting styles, is in many ways a collage, and an excellent example of how our minds can synthesize and selectively process contradictions into a unified whole, creating both story and myth.

Like the splintered story and film footage, the final soundtrack is in essence a collage. The score by Mingus, the most authentic link to the New York jazz scene in the film, and a key to some of its most powerful moments, is not wholly improvised, and is actually just one of several musical components. The exact question of the score's provenance, and Mingus's role within it, leads further to the film's heart, and provides a central insight into its genuinely radical nature.

*Shadows* did develop a unique jazz cinema, but a quite different one than has been understood 'till now. Cassavetes's investment in jazz will be seen to permeate every level of his filmmaking throughout his career, at the same time that the jazz connection's outer trappings are questionable. Charles Mingus, conversely, embodied the jazz experience, while his surface involvement in the film was minimal. His contributions to the project, ironically, are central to it in their very limitations, and speak to both the development of Cassavetes's jazz cinema and Mingus's own subsequent work. Mingus was both the worst and best possible choice for Cassavetes's musical partner.

Sorting through the deceptive surfaces and deeper substance of *Shadows* is essential to understanding both the work itself and its truly revolutionary making. The film's most potent achievements are reflected in the odd collaboration of Mingus and Cassavetes, two of the century's most riveting American artists; a surprisingly unchronicled collision of dynamic forces that was outwardly a fiasco, yet nonetheless yielded a masterpiece.

5 Ray Carney, *Shadows – BFI Screen Classics* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001).

## Shadows and Masks

Despite his early association with jazz and the Beat movement, John Cassavetes was more truly a product of the theater world than anything else. *Shadows* had an incendiary dramatic agenda that's hard to fully understand today. The Cassavetes/Lane acting workshops were in part a direct response to and negation of Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio strand of Stanislavski's Method acting, which was then taking the nation by storm. Cassavetes and Lane particularly disliked the group critiques advocated by Strasberg. Cassavetes specifically pushed the actors to go beyond the "effective memory" technique (the most publicized component of the Method), and personally *create* their characters, primarily through improvisation—often using their own names. The participants then refined their parts in continued workshop development under his guidance.

The film's content was of course also transgressive for the time: an intensely earnest exploration of race relations. The twin rebellions of dramatic method and social content were to synthesize in what Cassavetes saw as the first "Off-Broadway" film.

Yet his rebellion was ultimately his own, and quite distinct from the theatrical, cinematic or jazz avant-gardes as they're understood today. Tom Charity has noted that many filmmakers in the experimental tradition better fit the "beat" billing than Cassavetes, and his relationship to jazz was more aspirational than immediate. His actual concerns were more personal. The strength of *Shadows* lies not in the documentary accuracy of its portrayal of the bohemian jazz scene, but in the depth of its characters.

A brief glance at the role of the performing arts in Cassavetes's later films illuminates the dynamic. The white jazz musicians' problems in *Too Late Blues* (1961) serve as stand-in for the director's own artistic battles at the time of its making. [6] *Faces* (1968) is

6 Although ostensibly a jazz film, *Too Late Blues* is at its core a love story. The jazz aspects revolve around a generalized depiction of an artist's struggle for integrity, and his sellout in the form of his work for a wealthy countess. This paralleled Cassavetes's own ambivalence about working for Hollywood at that early point in his career, with the jazz milieu as an affectionate proxy. Ironically, Cassavetes may have initially intended the film as a return to more meaningful work after *Johnny Staccato*, a television series in which Cassavetes starred as a jazz-playing private eye.

The film's title enters when Ghost Wakefield (Bobby Darin) is told his attempts to reunite his group are "too late." Yet it proves untrue—they indeed reunite. In the original shoot, however, his lover then leaves. It's too late for her, but not the music. Paramount subsequently intervened and in the final version all are reunited. It's not "too late" for either.

In an early review of *Too Late Blues* in *Film Quarterly* (Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 1961), the African American critic Albert Johnson intriguingly celebrates the film's authenticity, distinguishing it from other quality studio jazz pictures: "In each of (the other) films, white musicians formed the center of the dramas," and in each appeared " . . . such familiar stereotypes as the

ostensibly set in a film production milieu that's absent after the first scene, and is ultimately a critique of the middle class. By *Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976), the performance backdrop has transformed to the seedy underbelly of burlesque nightclubs. With *Opening Night* (1977), he at last openly explored his years in the theater with Gena Rowlands. Jazz was neither a life commitment or portrait subject, but more arguably, a loved model for his own creative and social struggles.[7]

Cassavetes had claimed that at the time of making *Shadows*, he "wanted to be a black man, because it would be something so definite and the challenge would be greater than being a white man."[8] This impulse manifested most clearly in the character played by Ben Carruthers. In his own life Carruthers romanticized the jazz life, perhaps in part because he played no instrument. There's a famous photo of him in front of Birdland by photographer William Claxton. While very striking, the image reveals his discomfort with the saxophone he's holding; a discomfort also evidenced with the trumpet he carries in the film.[9] Carruthers genuinely reflects both his and Cassavetes's fascination with African American life more than jazz itself.

seductive femme fatale; the jazz-impelled neurotic hero; and the Negro jazz-philosopher, imparting the spirit of his music to an eager white youth. A further study of these . . . films reveals that the standard pattern of approach to the problems of jazz musicians has always been on a purely mythological level. The very fact that Negroes figure very minimally in these works indicates the limited awarenesses of the directors, writers, and actors concerning the milieu in which they were supposed to be involved."

Yet many of these characteristics still figure in some form in *Too Late Blues*, and even Johnson, one of the few to like the film, qualified his praise; "It is therefore, quite interesting to discover in John Cassavetes's new film, *Too Late Blues*, a truly challenging Hollywood film . . . ."

While characteristically brilliant at moments, the film was inherently compromised through its studio production, as Cassavetes himself was quick to acknowledge. The film is in effect, a compromised film about compromise. It stands as a fascinating if flawed hybrid of Cassavetes's work as an auteur and more formulaic Hollywood fare, and as an intriguing self-portrait of the artist at a moment before he leapt completely into the uncharted waters of a full-blown independent directing career.

7 Cassavetes also claimed a practical reason for his move away from jazz-scored films: "If I can't have a musician from the beginning of a picture, I'm dissatisfied. I want them every day for six months. Also, (film is) a bastardized form for serious musicians." John Cassavetes, quoted in Brian Case, "John Cassavettes: Nostalgia in Times Square," *The Wire* (July 1984): 24. Indeed, for many of his subsequent films Cassavetes worked with musician Bo Harwood, who also did sound recording and editing, and was hence around the projects from start to finish.

8 John Cassavetes, quoted in Ray Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 59. Though they provide an invaluable reference, Ray Carney's works cited here do not designate their original quote sources. It should be noted that in the introduction to *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, Carney acknowledges that he "took shorter statements that Cassavetes made on different occasions and placed them back to back to form one longer, more comprehensive statement." He also acknowledges that he "cleaned up' the text in several other small ways."

9 Lelia Goldoni told me that during production Carruthers developed a fascination with Miles Davis, which likely influenced his eventual choice of a trumpet. In some of the earliest shot scenes he carries drumsticks in his back pocket.

**Ben Carruthers – "Birdland, 4 am, New York City, 1960" (William Claxton)**

In an ironic twist that's gone virtually unnoticed, the story's literal subject of blacks passing for whites is in fact mirrored in the film's making, wherein white actors actually passed for black. While Ben Carruthers was one eighth black, Lelia Goldoni was Sicilian, with no black heritage. In a modern echo of blackface, Carruthers used a sunlamp at the time of the initial shoot. To quote Carney, "when Hugh said that nobody would believe Lelia was his sister, (Cassavetes) replied, "We'll let the audience worry about the mother and father." To a later query by Goldoni he said, "if they can believe it even for a second, maybe they'll start asking what being Negro means and start thinking about the whole concept."[10]

In fact he was right, as the very fact of its pretense embodied the theme of the film. *Shadows* is more accurately a portrait of confused identity than of the jazz/beat underground of 50's New York. Blacks want to be white and whites want to be black; shadows are sibling to light.

While at a textual level the film speaks to a black desire for social acceptance, at a subtextual level it speaks of white envy for precisely that desire: the black American's life-affirming struggles of the era.[11] In this sense, *Shadows* is the filmic embodiment of Norman Mailer's controversial essay "The White Negro," written the very year of *Shadows*' initial shooting. Mailer famously romanticized the black American experience, and specifically jazz, as the cultural model for the hipster and Beat generation.[12]

10 John Cassavetes, quoted in Carney, *Shadows*, 16.

11 The dynamic persists to our current epoch, where the equivalent would be a white desire for "street cred," mirrored by the "successful" black's need to "keep it real". In both cases, material success is equated with whiteness and vitality with blackness.

12 Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," *Dissent* (Fall 1957). Mailer's definition of the "hipster" as an elite vanguard is particularly idiosyncratic,

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It is this characteristic tension between the film's text and subtext that fuels the film. Race inversion and its attendant identity issues are both literally and formally a theme. The film's original negative editing leaders are inscribed with the now-forgotten working title *Screen-Shadows*, reminding one that cinema itself is a shadow-play, wherein the film stock's dark areas shadow the screen from the light of the projector's beam. [13] The racially ironic casting adds a further level.

In an odd testament to the strategy's success, Goldoni, who gives one of the film's most electrifying performances, had difficulties getting parts in subsequent years. She couldn't get white roles because she was believed to be black, and couldn't get black roles because she was too light-skinned.

The film's naturalist spin on blackface represents a significant transformation from the days of minstrelsy, in that the odd mix of envy and fear many whites held for blacks no longer needed to be masked in parody or stereotype. Masked, yes, in that the plot inverts the race/class aspirations that underline it, but a deeply humanist masking—as the film's title suggests. (Cassavetes said the name initially came from a charcoal sketch by one of the actors.)

Masks are themselves a theme, appearing in the crucial bedroom scene between Tony Ray and Lelia Goldoni as well as the scene at the Met or "the Margarine". The theme is carried further in Cassavetes's second, and only other 16mm production, *Faces*, which is in many ways a bourgeois companion piece to *Shadows*.

Cassavetes's studio partner Burt Lane believed that "personality masks" and their attendant unveiling were central to dramatic conflict, and this is apparent in both the race/identity questioning of *Shadows*, and the sexual/power struggles in *Faces*. Ray Carney points out that much of Cassavetes's dramaturgy in this area is directly indebted to Lane. In this sense, Cassavetes's very ideology is itself a mask or front, as much as the jazz trappings of his first film.

Charles Mingus was spearheading his own musical revolution at the precise moment of *Shadows*' making. An innovator in multiple forms like Duke Ellington, he was then leading a rotating ensemble called the Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop. Like Cassavetes, Mingus took mostly unknown artists and crafted an environment that gave extraordinary freedom to the participants, encouraging them to explore their own impulses and vision to an unprecedented degree. The similarities between the respective workshops of Mingus and Cassavetes are unmistakable.

In a representative description of his methodology, an anonymous Duke University website author claims that Mingus's unique approach to the bass—to be described more fully later—"by nature, leads to improvisation which, at the time, was frowned upon by many critics. Claiming that improvisation was nothing more than "spontaneous composition," Mingus refused to allow the critics to detract from his art and often encouraged instinctual playing."[14] Some of the biggest names in '60's avant-garde jazz, including both Eric Dolphy and Rahsaan Roland Kirk, cut their teeth in Mingus's Workshops, which were jokingly called "sweatshops."

In other respects, Cassavetes and Mingus were complimentary rather than similar. While *Shadows*' great emotional and personal authenticity does not quite extend to its outward depiction of the jazz/beat milieu, and Cassavetes's relation to the race issue was one of aspiration--Charles Mingus's connection was more than immediate. Mingus was a seething mixture of genius and fury, outspoken on issues of ethnicity and racism. In his autobiography, written in a unique form of third person (as both narrator and subject, part of a tripartite literary persona), he writes of his teen years:

> " . . . Watts had its own pecking order like any average American community of working Negroes still too busy slaving as free men to evaluate themselves and their true position in society. Some of the fellows, three, four, five years older, selected Charles as the underdog because, well, he was kind of a mongrel, lighter than some but not light enough to belong to the almost-white elite and not dark enough to belong to

and itself arguably quite stereotyped. He writes that its model, the Negro, " . . . discovered and elaborated a morality of the bottom, an ethical differentiation between the good and the bad in every human activity from the go-getter pimp (as opposed to the lazy one) to the relatively dependable pusher or prostitute." Gene Santoro rightly notes that in his modern elegizing of the negative, Mailer falls directly in line with the post-Enlightenment notion of the Noble Savage. Gene Santoro, *Myself When I am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 132.

The term "White Negro" in fact originated centuries earlier, in the West Indies. It is not within the scope of this essay to provide a synopsis of the extensive literature on race identity or Whiteness in either cinema or American social history, but it is worth noting that by 1967, Gary T. Marx observed Mailer's views differed from the pejorative stereotypes used by social critics "only on the emotive dimension of prejudice; (Mailer and the Beat writers) like super-sexed, narcotics-using, primitive, easy-going, spontaneous, irresponsible, violent Negroes, while racists dislike them. Their conception of what it means to be Negro probably differs greatly from the experience of most Black people." Marx goes on to describe the upward social aspirations of a black bourgeoisie, in contrast with the downward aspirations of the hipsters and Beats. Gary Marx, "The White Negro and the Negro White," *Phylon* 28 (2) (Summer 1967): 168-77.

13 Cassavetes recut his original negative after the re-shoot. The labeling was discovered in my inspection and repair of the negative while restoring the final version for the UCLA Film & Television Archive in 2002. The removal of the word "screen" from the film's final title eliminates the formal reference, situating the finished work more firmly in the realm of its characters.

14 "Charles Mingus: History," http://duke.edu/~rdk1.history.htm (accessed May 15, 2009; site now discontinued).

> the beautiful elegant blacks, the kind that make a man like Bud Powell say to Miles Davis, 'I wish I was blacker than you.' There really was no skin color exactly like his."

and,

> "Whenever he looked in the mirror and asked, 'What am I?" he thought he could see any number of strains—Indian, African, Mexican, Asian and a certain amount of white from a source his father had boasted of. He wanted to be one or the other but he was a little of everything, wholly nothing, of no race, country, flag, or friend."[15]

This unique blend was to simmer near boiling inside Mingus his whole life. His music directly confronted race issues, as reflected in the titles of such works as "Prayer For Passive Resistance," "Free Cell Block F, 'Tis Nazi USA," and most famously, in the classic "Fables of Faubus."

He was legendary for his anger and prone to violent incidents; even known to punch out his fellow musicians. But his emotional range was far wider than his fiery reputation. Gary Giddins notes that "Mingus *was* the black-music experience in the United States—in its hybridization, its questing after form, its improvisation, competitiveness, impertinence, outrage, intellectualization, joy, emotionalism, bitterness, comedy, parody, and frustration."[16] *Shadows* would present a chance for him to vent his rage and vision in a new medium.

## The Recording

As with all things Cassavetes, the stories surrounding the collaboration with Mingus on the film's score aren't completely consistent. It's best pieced together from several different accounts.

In 1957, Cassavetes, a rising young actor, appeared on New York radio host Jean Shepard's program, *Night People*. Cassavetes described the acting workshops he was leading, which included a riveting improvisation on an interracial romance. He then launched into an impassioned plea for a new American cinema art; one based on actual life rather than Hollywood artifice. The next morning—so the legend goes—the program's listeners began showing up at the workshop, bringing money and volunteering to help. *Shadows* was born, and with it, the modern independent cinema movement.

**from opening credit sequence**

According to Mingus[17], Jean Shepherd held a poll of his *Night People* listeners to see who they'd like to score the film, and he was picked. Shepherd had worked on Mingus's 1957 album *The Clown*, in which he improvised a story over Mingus's music for the record's title track. It wasn't Mingus's only spoken word piece of the era. He'd worked with several poets including both Langston Hughes and Kenneth Patchen around the time of the *Shadows* session.

Marshall Fine cites photographer Sam Shaw as the literal link between Mingus and Cassavetes,[18] but Shepard was clearly a vital factor in that he also represented an aesthetic bridge between their improvisational and rebellious worlds. Shepard was (not unaffectionately) described in Nat Hentoff's liner notes to *The Clown* as "a New York radio bard whose free-association stands on WOR have enlisted behind him a growing legion of 'night people' who profess vehement non-conformism with 'day people' but manage to be quite conformist within their rebelliousness."[19] Well before *Shadows*, he was improvising stories of unchronicled aspects of American life, often accompanied by cackles, kazoo, and percussion rapped out with his knuckles.

While coming from completely different places, both Cassavetes and Mingus were Night People, and their collaboration is ultimately a direct

15 Charles Mingus, *Beneath The Underdog* (New York, Vintage Books, 1971), 65-6. The book's working titles were *Half Yaller Nigger* and *Half Yaller Schitt-Colored Nigger*, but Mingus knew it could never be published under either of those names.
16 Gary Giddins, *Visions of Jazz: The First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 446.
17 Charles Mingus interviewed by Arnold Jay Smith. "Charles Mingus: Developmental Changes," *Down Beat* (Jan. 12, 1978): 22.
18 Marshall Fine, *Accidental Genius: How John Cassavetes Invented American Independent Film* (New York: Miramax Books, 2005).
19 Nat Hentoff, (liner notes). Charles Mingus, *The Clown*, Atlantic, SD-1416, 1957; Rhino R2 75590, 1999 reissue.

manifestation of not just their vision, but in a sense, Shepard's. The film's opening titles read, in a symbolic gesture to the world from which it arose, "Presented by Jean Shepard's Night People."

Cassavetes, for his part, said he'd originally wanted Miles Davis to score the film, but had decided against it when Davis signed with Columbia Records.[20] As a novice director, Cassavetes would be in for a challenge with either one of these two legendary personalities—but one has to give him credit for trying. He takes up the story here:

> " . . . someone said there was this great improvisational artist down in the Village who'd cut a few records, so I listened to a couple and *oh!* – this guy was wonderful! Charlie Mingus. So Charlie said, 'Listen, man, would you do me a favor? I'll do it for you, but you have got to do something for me.'
>
> 'Sure, sure," I say.
>
> 'Listen, I've got these cats that are shitting all over the floor. Can you have a couple of your people come up and clean the cat shit? I can't work; they shit all over my music.'
>
> So we went up with scrubbing brushes and cleaned up the thing. Now he says, 'I can't work in this place. It's so clean. I've got to wait for the cats to shit.'[21]

Whether Mingus was just playing games with him isn't clear. For at the same time, Mingus was taking the score quite seriously.[22]

At the time of the Workshops and *Shadows*' conception, in 1957, Mingus was at the center of the New York jazz/beat underground. A bridge between the bebop of Charlie Parker and the experimental jazz to emerge more fully in the next decade, his ensembles were among the most influential of the era.

If Mingus had unmet aspirations, they would only seem to be towards more "established" music and large-scale works approaching the classical tradition.[23] Alongside his intense involvement in pushing the limits of jazz improv, he had studied double bass and composition for years with the esteemed Herman Rheinshagen and Lloyd Reese. [24] As Mingus told *Down Beat* magazine:

> "I have a melody in my head. I know what I'm going to do before I do it. I hear all the voicings: trumpet, saxes, all of them . . . If there's a trombone next to the baritone half a step away, I hear it. I have a symphony in my head all the time." [25]

Yet he had practical difficulties fully realizing his compositional vision during his lifetime. His most ambitious foray into this area was the ill-fated Town Hall Concert of 1962. Mingus feuded bitterly with the event's producer, George Wein, who planned the evening as a traditional performance. Mingus was writing the music up until the last moment, and pictured a recording session with frequent stops and starts. The resulting event was in many ways a debacle, with Mingus working hard to seemingly sabotage his own success. [26] It was only after his death that its accomplishment was truly realized.[27]

20 Cassavetes apparently thought this was a form of selling out. Of the decision not to go with Davis he said, "We were a little bit crazy in those days.Very pure. (When Davis signed with Columbia) I got so angry I didn't want to use him. I saw Miles years later, and he said, 'What happened?' I felt really bad!" (John Cassavetes, in Case, 24) It should be noted that George Avakian had actually signed Davis to Columbia two years earlier, in 1955, shortly after the formation of Davis's legendary quintet with John Coltrane, Red Garland, Paul Chambers, and Philly Joe Jones.

Perhaps ironically, Davis disbanded the quintet in 1957 and went to Paris, where he would eventually record the soundtrack to Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (Elevator to the Gallows). Although the score was recorded on December 4, 1957, just a few months before the *Shadows* session, it's conceivable Cassavetes knew of the film. The convergences and divergences between *Shadows* and *Ascenseur* are illuminating, and will be discussed in a series of footnotes following.

21 John Cassavetes in Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 77. As observed in footnote 7, Professor Carney has combined comments made on several occasions. See also: Case, 24.

22 Characteristically, he took his jokes with cats seriously as well. See the "Charles Mingus Cat Toilet Training Program," on Sue Mingus's official Mingus website, http://www.mingusmingusmingus.com/Mingus/cat_training.html (accessed May 15, 2009). The text was originally published in booklet form as a subscription bonus for her *Changes* magazine.

23 Many consider Charles Mingus to be the only legitimate heir to Duke Ellington in this regard. Mingus himself was not shy to acknowledge the debt, and indeed early in his career went under the name "Baron" Mingus.

24 Rheinshagen was the principal bassist of the New York Philharmonic. Reese was an extremely influential music and composition teacher in Los Angeles, and a key figure in the vital Central Avenue music scene. His many other students included Eric Dolphy and Buddy Collette.

25 Charles Mingus, *Down Beat*, 22.

26 It was during the crazed preparations that Mingus, in a stressed rage, broke trombonist Jimmy Knepper's jaw. The charts were still being copied as the concert began. All the musicians were in tuxedos except for Mingus, who was wearing a short-sleeved shirt, vest, sandals, and no socks. Bob Coss describes Mingus's celebrated grabbing of the microphone in the middle of the event: "The microphone (he) grabbed had no amplification, but what he said, more or less, was: "Get your money back. I couldn't stop you from coming here. The press agents lied to you. You've been taken advantage of. Go out now and get your money back. I don't want you to think I've done this to you. It was supposed to be a recording session, but Mr. George Wein . . . changed it into a concert. So get your money back. The company has lots of money. It would take years to rehearse this music." Bill Coss, "A Report of a Most Remarkable Event," *Down Beat* (December 6, 1962). At midnight, the venue owner shut off the power.

Gary Giddins notes that "the disastrous Town Hall concert . . . eventually came to be reckoned as a defining moment (in Mingus's career), impenetrable, yet decisive." (Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 445). For a fascinating and extended account of the concert, see "Central Avenue Sounds: Buddy Collette," an oral history interview between Mingus's childhood friend and noted musician Collette, and Steven Louis Isoardi in 1989 and 1990. The entire interview is available at: http://content.cdlib.org/xtf/view?docId=hb6g5010zj&brand=calisphere&doc.view=entire_text (accessed May 15, 2009).

There is an indelible sequence in Thomas Reichman's 1968 documentary film *Mingus* that also bears relevance to the discussion—the final scene, in which Mingus is evicted from his New York studio. As Mingus is forcibly escorted away by the police, we hear his wife Sue's voice stating that they are trampling on his music. The film's penultimate image of Mingus's abandoned bass sitting unattended amidst his belongings in the street resonates as speaking archetypally of his lifelong struggles. Mingus's rage and regret are viscerally palpable in his interviews that pepper the scene.

27 Portions of the music were recycled into the subsequent triumphs of *The*

It is from this context—aspiration towards acceptance in the classical canon— that Mingus was to approach *Shadows*. His biographer, Brian Priestley, indeed describes Mingus's attraction towards working on such a "prestigious venture."[28] Cassavetes notes that "When Charlie looked at part of the film on the Moviola, he said, "It's going to take me a long time, you know. I went to Julliard."[29] But in this case as well, there were cross-impulses at work.

Cassavetes, in love with the idea of a jazz improvised score, booked what he apparently thought was a lot of time to record—a double session, "three hours, with a projectionist."[30] This was some time in the spring of 1958, when he was in post-production on the first version of the film.

Mingus had other ideas. In an act of supreme irony, he chose to carefully compose every note of Cassavetes's off-the-cuff score. The irony is only heightened by Cassavetes's violent opposition to the controlling Hollywood studios, who were threatened precisely by the improvisational aspects of jazz. Whereas Cassavetes's race and class aspirations led to his attraction to jazz as a spontaneous "outsider" form, the composer he hired was conversely aspiring directly towards a fixed structure he rebelled against.

Both artists might here be seen contributing to what Erving Goffman called "deminstrelization," wherein an individual--of any race--concertedly aims to "show that the set of behavioral expectations held for him are the very ones which do not apply to him."[31] This should by no means be seen as defining or limiting—it's part of what drove their respective geniuses.

Yet Giddins notes that Cassavetes didn't appreciate the irony[32], with good reason. As with the Town Hall concert, Mingus never finished the score, or for that matter even came close. To resume the story, Mingus showed up at the session with what Cassavetes said was about fourteen seconds' worth of music. Brian Case reveals that in their 1984 *Wire* interview, a seemingly snide Cassavetes "grinned at the recollection of Mingus and his retinue (arriving)—the jazz patroness Baroness Nica de Koenigswarter on one arm, a string of foxes on the other, the confused and brow-beaten members of the Mingus Workshop trailing reluctantly behind. And there were the standard Mingus death threats and tears." In the same interview, however, he notes, "(Mingus) . . . did all the copying and carried all the instruments there."[33]

**the recording (Marvin Lichtner)**

*Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* and *Ah Um*, but that was not the end of it. Mingus was to spend the rest of his life continuing to develop the Town Hall music, into *Epitaph*, the mammoth 4,000-plus measure composition that was discovered posthumously.

*Epitaph* premiered with a 30-piece orchestra in 1988 (nine years after his death), at Lincoln Center under the baton of Gunther Schuller, and was an unqualified success. The New Yorker went so far as to call it the first advance in jazz composition since Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige*. However the event's staging was not without parallel to the original performance. While the charts were all prepared well in advance of the Lincoln Center premiere, they had been digitized, and computer glitches prevented their printing 'till the last minute, so that once again they needed to be sight-read by the musicians.

28 Brian Priestley, *Mingus: A Critical Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 90.

29 John Cassavetes, in Case, 24.

30 John Cassavetes, in Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 77-8. According to Louis Malle, the recording of the *Ascenseur* score took about seven hours: "We rented a sound studio in Paris, on the Champs-Élysées, and started working, as jazz musicians do, very slowly. We worked from something like ten or eleven that night until five in the morning. In one night, the whole score was recorded." Louis Malle, excerpted from *Malle on Malle* (1993) in *Elevator to the Gallows*, DVD (booklet). (1958; Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 2006), 18.

31 Marx, *The White Negro and the Negro White*. See Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1963), 110. Goffman casts the term within a prescriptive orthodoxy whereby individuals "stigmatized" by a physical or social constraint may accept or not accept those limitations. He contrasts it with the notion of minstrelization as conceived by Anatole Broyard, and also labels this opposition "normification." For Goffman, a more middle road is often desired.

32 Gary Giddins, "Eternal Times Square," in *John Cassavetes: Five Films*, DVD (booklet). (Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 2004).

33 Case, 24. Cassavetes's somewhat patronizing description of the scene strongly suggests that de Koenigswarter may have been a model for the countess in *Too Late Blues*.

The session eventually began, with the score that existed. Said Cassavetes:

> "Everybody's saying, 'Why don't you just tell Charlie to improvise?' Then all the advice starts. So I said, "Come on, Charlie. You guys can improvise, you're wonderful, you can do that off the themes that you have.' 'No, man—can't do it! Can't do it! We're artists. It's gotta be written.'"[34]

According to trombonist Jimmy Knepper,

> "It came out very stiff 'cause it was written so precisely—it was all eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets—and they wanted to record all the music in one date. But we took so long over this one tune that it never did get finished."[35]

Echoing the reviled Hollywood studios' arguments against jazz players, Cassavetes claimed the musicians couldn't read the music anyway, and described saxist Shafi Hadi blowing his instrument in frustration, casting furtive glances at Mingus.[36]

**Center image: Mingus with Phineas Newborn Jr.**

The question arises as to how exactly Mingus *could* have written such an intricate score as he envisioned, as even for the initial sequences he would have been without a film reference while writing. Video of course didn't exist, and Cassavetes would have had the only film workprint. At most, Mingus could have occasionally visited Cassavetes and producer/editor Maurice McEndree as they were cutting, and seen excerpts on the Moviola.

According to Gene Santoro, Mingus had "visited the set, talked with the director and actors, and composed motifs. Cassavetes left him to do what he wanted."[37] Cassavetes described Mingus's comprehensive vision during production and noted, "The minute he saw the film, he could see the rhythms of the city . . . pick them up and play Ben Carruthers on the street."[38]

**Dannie Richmond and Mingus**

But irrespective of what Mingus saw or how he saw it, there would be no practical way to sync music and picture until recording, so it's little wonder the result was incomplete. The low-budget nature and limited resources of the independent shoot distinguish it sharply from studio-produced jazz scores of the era, and in effect, led directly to a *need* to improvise.[39]

According to Cassavetes, when push came to shove, they played a part of what Mingus had written and improvised the rest. "Charlie was the conductor from the bass . . . . In the end, everybody was doing everything. Charlie sang . . . , played some piano, and Phineas Newborn, Jr. took over the bass."[40] Santoro adds that Mingus and drummer Dannie Richmond recorded effects separately.[41] They somehow got through the session. The musicians were paid about twenty dollars apiece for their work.[42]

34 John Cassavetes in Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 78. See also: Case, 24.
35 Jimmy Knepper in Priestley, 90.
36 Case, 24.
37 Santoro, 131. A comparison with *Ascenseur* is apropos. As Malle tells it, "I showed (Davis) the film twice, only twice. We agreed on the parts where we felt music was needed. And we took advantage of the one night off he had from the club . . . . I think that makes the score of *Ascenseur* unique. It's one of the very few films that is completely improvised; I don't think Miles Davis had had time to prepare anything. We would run those segments that we had chosen for music, and he would start rehearsing with his musicians." (Malle, *Elevator to the Gallows*, 18-19).
René Urtreger, the French pianist who worked with Davis on the film, said that Davis played them themes a few days before on the piano, but they didn't know what scenes they went with. Despite its improvisational nature and a magical atmosphere that permeated the session, the recording was in ways frustrating for Urtreger, as each cue need to be a very precise length, i.e. 39 seconds. "On Piano, René Urtreger," interview for *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* DVD, Arte, 2005 in *Elevator to the Gallows*, DVD.
38 John Cassavetes in Case, 24.
39 By way of contrast, a CD of the Ellington/Strayhorn score of *Anatomy of a Murder* contains fourteen alternate takes alone, suggesting the greater preparation enabled by professional production.
40 John Cassavetes in Case, 24.
41 Santoro, 131.
42 In comparison, Diane Dorr-Dorynek was paid $40.00 per week for doing the correspondence for Mingus's Jazz Workshop at that time.

**Cassavetes and Mingus**

The session's progression from fiasco to completion was in effect an exercise in disaster salvation, and ultimately typical of both artists. It's very failure led to spontaneous solutions. Summarizing the dynamic at play in Mingus's working process, Cassavetes said, "He was always torn between the two—the mathematical beauty of the composition and the freedom of improvisation."[43] What Cassavetes saw so clearly in the score to *Shadows* was to in fact describe much of Mingus's larger oeuvre. And in describing it thusly, Cassavetes perhaps also spoke unconsciously of himself.

## The First Cut

That the two men indeed reached a compromise is clear, as there are several Mingus cues in the film's final version, and apparently many more in the first. It has only recently become possible to get even a sense of the results. Ray Carney discovered a copy of Cassavetes's long-lost original edit of *Shadows*, and presented it publicly at the Rotterdam Film Festival in January 2004. After just two public screenings it's now unavailable once again due to legal disputes.[44] Fortunately Jonathan Rosenbaum was at the Rotterdam screening and has written a detailed account, claiming the Mingus score is one of the version's most experimental aspects.[45]

What was the initial collaboration like? Both Carney and Rosenbaum mention a muted trumpet mimicking speech sounds over Tony Ray's phone call scene, which appears quite differently in the later work. Rosenbaum cites Mingus's singing "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" at one point, which corroborates Cassavetes's own account.[46] In another piece, for FIPRESCI, Rosenbaum further mentions "a highly fragmented approach that mixes brief, selected passages from a wide range of instruments, musicians, and arrangements."[47]

The description indeed bears resemblance to much of Mingus's music, particularly from the mid-to-late 1950's, and is instructive in understanding the affinity of his oeuvre to dramatic works. The previously mentioned Duke University website nicely summarizes this, saying Mingus "deliberately incorporated a variety of different styles into his unique sound. His approach to his instrument (pioneered by Duke Ellington and bassist Jimmy Blanton) was centered around the idea that the bass deserved equal footing with the other lead instruments. This idea led to a single-line vocalic sense of attack which is often referred to as the 'conversational approach'."[48] Rosenbaum correctly notes this reached its peak in Mingus's collaborations with Eric Dolphy. Said Mingus:

> "See, in bebop . . . aside from chord changes and patterns and lines . . . , there was another expression on the bandstand that was called 'conversation.' That is the only thing that developed with Eric *past* (not *better* than) Bird . . . We used to really talk and say words with our instruments . . . We had different 'conversations,' we'd discuss our fear, our life, our views of God—which is still the main subject today."[49]

Rosenbaum's account of the use of varied styles is borne out in several fragments of the first version which Ray Carney has posted on his website, *www.cassavetes.com*. One excerpt is from the film's opening title sequence and features a short montage of music cues, ranging from a lush arrangement with cello and flute, to a romantic piano solo, to a

43 John Cassavetes in Case, 24.

44 Shortly after the release of the final cut, a public debate broke out in the pages of the *Village Voice* as to which version was better. Amos Vogel encouraged Cassavetes to take a stance resolving the issue, and the director came out strongly for the second. Some time after these disputes the initial cut was lost, and subsequently became a legend among film historians. The Cassavetes estate has taken the position that per his views at the time, the final cut is definitive and the first should not be shown. Ray Carney cites evidence that Cassavetes later backed off his hard-line statements and claimed he was not opposed to exhibition of the original. While Professor Carney holds the rediscovered physical print, the Cassavetes estate has made claims to the intellectual content, and the film remains in limbo, unavailable for public viewing.

45 Jonathan Rosenbaum, "The Shadow of Shadows: First Thoughts on the First Version," *Cinema Scope* 18 (Spring 2004): 58-61.

46 Case, 24.

47 Jonathan Rosenbaum, International Federation of Film Critics -- Festival Reports, Rotterdam, 2004: "Simon Field and the Original Shadows," http://www.fipresci.org/festivals/archive/2004/rotterdam/jrosenbaum.htm (accessed May 15, 2009).

48 Charles Mingus-History, *Duke University*. A parallel to the phone booth scene appears in *Ascenseur,* when Jeanne Moreau wanders the streets in search of Maurice Ronet. Davis engages in a duet with tenor saxist Barney Wilen which suggests the hubbub of background conversation.

49 Charles Mingus in Priestley, 114.

dynamic excerpt of "Nostalgia in Times Square" which remains in the film's final version. The cues, which appear here over scenes of the characters wandering around the city, comprise a kind of overture. The use of varied styles is also evident in the brief segments appearing in the film's trailer.[50]

Carney's site also posts an unexpected clip: a scene of David Pokotilow meeting Benny and his friends after Lelia and Tony Ray abandon him in Central Park. The underlying music is in fact Mingus's later classic "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting." Its appearance in *Shadows* before any released recordings of the song does not necessarily suggest it was written for the film.[51] Rather, its inclusion seems more likely to have been an on-the-spot decision.

Despite the legend of Mingus's "fourteen seconds" of music, the currently available evidence suggests significantly more was recorded. Mingus would have then pulled from existing or in-development material and improvised as appropriate. The mere act of choice involved can be seen as its own form of improv.

"Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" in particular doesn't seem to have a specific connection to the scene it plays under, raising the question of whether its actual placement was an in-the-moment decision by Mingus or a subsequent editorial decision by Cassavetes. A close listen to the cue suggests the latter, as there appears to be a fade-out in the middle of a drum solo and then an abrupt edit as the main theme re-enters at the scene's conclusion. The truth of the matter is likely unknowable, but both scenarios have their own implications towards improvisational methodology—performative in the case of Mingus, and editorially in the case of Cassavetes, as shall be discussed.[52]

## Visions and Versions

Regardless of how the film's recording session unfolded, and its arguable practical success (in that the music was at least recorded), both Mingus and Cassavetes seemed disgruntled with the experience, and subsequently moved in other directions. Both spoke relatively little of the collaboration. Mingus's initial *Shadows* experiments, including those with both mimicked speech and shifting ensemble methodologies, will be seen to be one step in the continuing evolution of his art. Cassavetes also refined his vision substantially after the initial cut of the film.

### the mix

What happened between the two versions? Just as Mingus, a consummate improviser, had found improv not suited to his conception of the score; so did the disastrous Paris Theater screenings cause Cassavetes to further clarify his own improvisatory vision and working methods. He went back and reshot much of the story, according to Ray Carney, with carefully scripted new sequences.

He also omitted and recontextualized scenes from the original, modifying the film to such an extent that essential plot points and their effective meanings were entirely transformed. Both the act of scripting and the process of editorial revision were to become crucial components of Cassavetes's later methodological development.

In the process of revising *Shadows*, much of Mingus's music was apparently omitted from the film. When Cassavetes wanted to rescore the new cut, he said, Mingus was in Tijuana. Cassavetes instead approached the original session's tenor sax player, Shafi Hadi, who was more than happy to improv sax solos for the soundtrack.[53] Drummer

50 The trailer also contains what appears to be an outtake of a cue by Shafi Hadi and Dannie Richmond.

51 It's intriguing to note that "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" was included in the Jan. 16, 1959 Charles Mingus Jazz Workshop gig at the Nonagon Gallery in which Mingus later recorded his other *Shadows*-inspired works, the aforementioned "Nostalgia," and "Alice's Wonderland." Mingus may have retained some association of the song with the film for a time, although it does not appear on the album resulting from that session, released in turn as *Jazz Portraits, Mingus in Wonderland,* and *Wonderland*. An early version of "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting" in fact appeared in a collaboration with Langston Hughes on March 18th 1958, very close to the time of the original *Shadows* scoring session. However its record debut is primarily associated with the famous studio recording on the *Blues and Roots* album, which took place on Feb. 4th, 1959, just shortly after the Nonagon live performance.

52 We know that Cassavetes recontextualized Mingus's cues even as early as the original cut. Photographer Marvin Lichtner relates that he was at the infamous Paris Theater screening, and was standing in the back of the theater as the film ended. Immediately upon the conclusion of the movie, during the expectant applause that followed, a lone figure stalked quickly up the aisle towards the exit. It was Mingus. Lichtner approached him, to congratulate him on his work. Mingus stopped in his tracks, looked him dead in the eye and said, "Go fuck yourself." Mingus was furious at Cassavetes's re-editing of the score (Marvin Lichtner, phone conversation, February 13, 2008).

53 See Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 78. In this telling, Hadi was paid $100.00 for the session. In his *Wire* interview, Cassavetes gives a slightly different account of the process, saying he saw Hadi on the street: " . . . he was having a hard time and I said come on up and play something. He said, "Can I just play what I feel? Sure. Let's go." – John Cassavetes in Case, 24.

Dannie Richmond accompanied Hadi on a number of takes. There are some wonderful photos by Marvin Lichtner of an ectstatic Cassavetes gesticulating like a madman, guiding and almost conducting Hadi through the recording.

**the second recording: Dannie Richmond, Cassavetes, Shafi Hadi**

**the second recording: Cassavetes and Hadi**

In striking contrast, Lichtner's photos of Cassavetes and Mingus on the earlier date suggest the tension of their quite different relationship. The two men are sizing each other up, almost like boxers squaring off in a prizefight. Mingus stated, "Cassavetes thought you did a score in one day. He used my name but couldn't play my music."[54]

What one hears in the finished film are in effect three scores alternating: One of Mingus fragments, one of Hadi sax solos, and a third by Cassavetes's friend Jack Ackerman, who wrote the nightclub and dancehall music one hears repeated in the film—including "A Real Mad Chick (is like an ice cream cone)," dropped over Irving Berlin's "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody." The resulting assemblage is a key component of the "collage" nature of the film, which also encompasses the previously mentioned narrative and continuity gaps arising from the two shooting periods. Without a doubt the Mingus fragments are the most effective and powerful component of the film's soundtrack.[55]

The question arises however, as to which have been recontextualized from their initial recording. A scene featuring both artists at their best illuminates the question and is worthy of extended analysis. The party in the siblings' flat appears in each of the two versions, runs approximately five minutes, and uses music continuously throughout: the longest stretch of music in the film. Although it appears to be one extended cue, there are brief moments where it drops out, and other subtleties appear in the mix that reveal a true integration of sound and image.

The scene commences with Lelia's introduction to Davey Jones. The underlying cue is classic ebullient Mingus: a chaotic mix of catcalls, shouts, percussive effects, bells, and a variety of whistles - but without a driving bass line to provide continuity. It almost suggests an informal band is goofing around at the party, as Mingus's screams sound like a partygoer's. Yet amidst the chaos, a flute solo evokes a more personal and intimate tone, in sympathy with the drama of Lelia's encounter.

An abrupt sound edit occurs at David Pokotilow's entrance to the room, when a burst of party noise indicates a shift of direction. The music cue seems to be edited as well, perhaps to a different portion of the same take. Underneath the party noise the drums kick in more prominently, heightening the celebratory hubbub as the viewer is broken out of Lelia's corner of the apartment. Then the din recedes as Pokotilow reaches Lelia and the interlude concludes. The flute, which had continued quietly throughout, now rises back to prominence, returning the film's focus to one of personal interchange. The drums in turn withdraw to the background.

Upon Pokotilow's exit there is another glimpse of the party, accompanied by a brief fade-out of the score which prefigures the next significant tonal change in the scene. The percussion almost immediately resumes, accompanied by an occasional swirling flute. Cassavetes cuts to Carruthers sulking in isolation. The levels of the tense yet oddly drifting cue subtly rise and fall, in and out, perfectly drawing the moment as Ben sits in an alienated funk, observing

While it's possibly true that Mingus was away on the actual recording date, it's worth noting that around that very time, in the spring of 1959, Mingus was in fact in New York working on a semi-improvised teleplay, *A Song With Orange in It*—which also never fully incorporated his music. Along with his spoken word experiments, Mingus's *Shadows* score can be seen as part of a concerted investment in the integration of jazz with the literary and dramatic arts, even if the productions were often star-crossed.

54 Charles Mingus in *Down Beat*, 22.

55 Elements of collage may have appeared in the first version's soundtrack as well. David Meeker cites the inclusion of Jelly Roll Morton's "Jelly Roll Blues" in the initial cut. See David Meeker, *Jazz on the Screen—A Jazz and Blues Filmography* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2007), 962.

Hugh's African American friends, and ultimately, rudely rejecting the advances of a young woman.

At the scene's pivotal moment the music drops out entirely, allowing the viewer—for the first time in the entire sequence—to focus solely on the dialogue. The woman tells Ben, "You're not kidding anyone but yourself… Your sense of values are all mixed up." Ben's response—a hostile shove, is accompanied by a piercing scream from Mingus, breaking the tension. An anarchic, raging crescendo occurs as the woman throws her drink at Ben, and a fight with Hugh explodes. The music raises the siblings' quarrel to one of the film's most dramatic moments; the only in which the contained emotions of the race issue are allowed to burst out fully.

**at the editing bench**

In analyzing the extended scene, several things emerge. Unlike the previously mentioned "Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting," this cue was very clearly intended by Mingus to accompany the action with which it appears. Yet the resulting emotional and dynamic range of the music is so symbiotic with the picture that it's entirely impossible to determine how much is a result of sound editing and mixing, and how much occurred in the initial recording. Herein is seen the vast potential of what *Shadows* might have been, in more ideal circumstances. The moment the cue ends, the heightened emotions of the actors lose a level of depth as the scene continues, though still effectively. In fact the abrupt closure of the score allows an enraged scream to place a small exclamation point on the fight.

Another key cue has been overtly recontextualized—to a subtle and startling effect. It's a sparse drum rhythm that extends for just a few seconds. The first time it appears is in the scene between Lelia and Tony, just before they enter his apartment. It's the moment at which Lelia decides to sleep with him, and the rhythm, in its underscored urgency, suggests a quickening heartbeat as the stakes of their relationship suddenly rise drastically. The scene was filmed in the 1959 reshoot, and Cassavetes's brilliant placement of the cue sets up the fall in which Tony realizes his girlfriend is partially black.

The connection is made apparent by the second, later use of the cue, when the scene is reversed, and Tony enters Lelia's apartment to "apologize" for his racist response to his discovery. This scene used footage from both 1957 and 1959. In each of the two scenes, the music echoes a confrontation of one's greatest fears, yet in a way that's so understated it's barely noticed. Cassavetes's after-the-fact reuse of the cue (paralleled in his recycling of Ackerman's "Beautiful" in other parts of the film) is at once a maximization of limited materials anda structural device, unplanned by either artist at the time of the recording. It illustrates Cassavetes's particular genius for salvaging gold from scraps.

While Cassavetes continued developing the film well after the 1958 recording session, so did Mingus continue developing his score. A few songs in Mingus's repertoire grew out of it. A fragment of "Nostalgia in Times Square" is heard briefly before the fight in the alley, near the film's end in the final version. "Nostalgia" was eventually revised yet further, into "Strollin," with lyrics by Nat Gordon apparently influenced by the film.[56]

Another song associated with *Shadows* is "Alice's Wonderland." Both "Nostalgia" and "Alice's" were recorded in full on Jan. 16, 1959. "Alice," however, appears in neither version of the film. Nat Hentoff notes that "Mingus wanted to write for the love scene under which the music would have been played, and so he wrote a continuation

56 At one point Mingus claimed "Strollin'" preceded "Nostalgia" – see http://www.mingusmingusmingus.com/Mingus/song_titles.html (accessed May 15, 2009). The chronology cited in this essay is based on Brian Priestley's account.

of the score for himself."[57] The only scene in the final film that "Alice's Wonderland" would seem to fit is Lelia's dance with Davey Jones.[58] When synchronized, the effect is surprisingly stunning—adding a depth absent in the actual film (one of the aforementioned uses of Ackerman's "Beautiful").[59]

As the scene in question may have been part of the reshoot, the synchronization exercise is academic; however it's instructive to read Mingus's own description of the piece and learn just how apropos it is. Saying the song "may be the prettiest thing I ever wrote," he goes on to describe it as a portrait of

> "a girl trying to make it in this big, rough world, like I am. I try to show her sadness (the alto on top) but also her strength in her art and in her conviction in what she believes in (the tenor on the bottom) even if there are still harsh, unresolved parts of her life."[60]

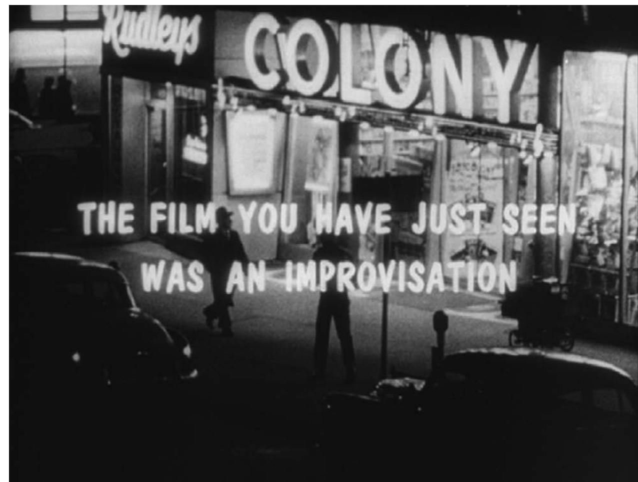
Ray Carney has noted Cassavetes's attempt to have each character in the film have an epiphany, and the scene with Davey, Lelia's last, is clearly that. Mingus's unused cue draws the character perfectly.

Mingus later modified "Alice" as well. He renamed it "Diane," after Diane Dorr-Dorynek, his then-girlfriend and assistant, who perhaps also inspired his interpretation of Lelia Goldoni's screen character.[61] Mingus's renaming of both *Shadows* songs, while consistent with a life of reinvention and revision, nonetheless suggests a distancing from an aborted collaboration.

## The Cinema of Improvisation

Shafi Hadi's solos may be the only "traditional" improvs in the final version of *Shadows*: wholly made in the moment. But at close analysis, they accompany primarily minor scenes.[62] In point of fact it's quite another dimension of the film that illuminates its revolutionary character, as well as ultimately, its connection to jazz. *Shadows* is not a film about jazz, it embodies it.

Even the supposedly improvised scenes from the initial workshops were clearly rehearsed by the time of filming. Their iteration changed, but their essence was established. Much of the dialogue was later redubbed. Revealingly, Cassavetes left in the famous end card which read, "The film you have just seen was an improvisation." It *was* an improvisation—past tense.




**the end title card**

This is most clear in the crucial confrontation between Tony Ray and Hugh Hurd in the door of the siblings' apartment, which clearly has the actors repeating lines developed through a rehearsal process. This was the exact workshop scene highlighted in Shepard's radio broadcast. Despite the reworking, it remains a powerful scene and suggests the dynamism and rawness of the original concept. This dynamic of vital revision is at the core of Cassavetes's later work.

His great art was more truthfully that of finding the *spontaneity* of improv within a rehearsed or scripted form. Tom Charity, for example, has emphasized the improvisation of movement rather than text as being a central aspect of Cassavetes's art.[63] To quote Lelia Goldoni, the goal of their acting was to "respond to the given circumstances in the present moment of time."[64]

But Cassavetes was also a master of myth. The title card, which helped create the *Shadows* legend, stands as a testament to our love of that mythology more than truth itself.

57 Nat Hentoff (liner notes). Charles Mingus, *Mingus in Wonderland*, United Artists, UAS5063, 1959; Blue Note, CDP 7243 8 27325 2 5, 1994 reissue.
58 Ray Carney's BFI *Shadows* monograph posits that this scene was filmed in the reshoot, around the same time the recording was made. However Jonathan Rosenbaum's *Cinema Scope* essay mentions an additional scene of Lelia Goldoni dancing in the first version (apart from the scene with Tony Ray, which is verifiably in both). If Rosenbaum's account is correct, Mingus would likely have seen it, although in the original cut the scene is accompanied by a Frank Sinatra record.
59 I assembled this clip purely as an experiment while completing the UCLA Film & Television Archive restoration of the film's release version.
60 Charles Mingus, in Hentoff, *Mingus in Wonderland*.
61 Gene Santoro writes that "Diane was very smart and very beautiful. At times she had a self-possessed air, although others found her vulnerable, delicate, nervous, uncomfortable around people." Santoro, 132.
62 In general his takes are easily distinguishable by their distinctly lighter tone, although they do on occasion echo aspects of the original Mingus approach. An example would be Hadi's use of representational sounds, such as the sax's emulating the pulsating echo of a clock to suggest Hugh's chronic lateness in the train station scenes.

63 Tom Charity, *John Cassavetes: Lifeworks* (London: Omnibus, 2001), 22.
64 Lelia Goldoni, phone conversation, May 22, 2006.

It created a legend, and in so doing threw many critics off the mark in their understanding of the film's artistry and its connection to jazz.

The collaboration of Mingus and Cassavetes on what's arguably the most famous beat or jazz film illuminates a fine point about the nature of improvisation. Theatrical improv is by common definition unscripted, with the performers determining the course of action as they go. Musical improvisation, at least pre-free jazz, tends to operate within some predetermined guidelines--like an existing song's harmonic structure, to pick an example in the western tradition.

That's ultimately much closer to Cassavetes's working methodology. He'd give his actors actions, a story arc, or words, and then let them go. Cassavetes famously told his actors that they had to "own" their parts. But 'though the performances may have belonged to the cast, the scenarios were largely his.

Cassavetes, describing his eventual refinement of the process in *Faces*, said,

> "The *emotion* was improvised. The lines were written. The *attitudes* were improvised. I give somebody some lines, and the interpretation must be their own . . . . Improvisation came into the film by permitting each actor to interpret his role, rather than me interpreting the role as a director . . . . As a technique, improvisation is useless. As a way to achieve an individuality in characterization, it's very, very constructive."[65]

This in turn points to Cassavetes's quarrels with the nature of authorship. Like jazz players taking a solo, Cassavetes's actors were highly individuated in the context of the work as a whole. He said,

> "(The performers) are like authors, because they create a character through their knowledge of people and their understanding of people . . . . I feel I'm gaining for the picture. There are more points of view than I could express."[66]

This is indeed the case. Cassavetes had originally conceived *Faces* as a bitter expose of the empty lives of the middle class, yet he was first to observe that it was his cast who humanized his anger, through their love for their characters.

The technique reached its apotheosis in *Opening Night*, when he at last explored his life in the theater directly. *Opening Night* culminates in an extended play-within-a-film that at once destroys and revitalizes the script being performed. In what can be seen as the ultimate distillation of his dramaturgy, Cassavetes and Gena Rowlands very literally enact his methods and theories before a live audience and camera. The scene feels nothing like jazz, but is enabled precisely through an improvisatory ensemble method that echoes it.

Cassavetes's highly specific technique is ultimately reflective of a lifelong attempt to reconcile his theatrical experience with his cinematic vision. He remained a great innovator in working methods throughout his career, but the implicit conditions of improvisation—spontaneous creation—inherently argue with the nature of film, a recorded medium. Music of course can be recorded, and tape can "capture" a performance—but our very choice of verbs describing the task reveals much about the dynamic of recording an action. Once an improv has been recorded, its nature has been in essence transformed.

While much has been made of Cassavetes's work with directorial and performance methodology, it should be made clear that he was ultimately wrestling with the limitations of a "frozen" medium. He was notorious for recutting his films in multiple versions—not just *Shadows* but virtually all of his works. In the case of *Faces*, he initially intended each scene to be cut by a different editor. The sole existing print of a pre-release version of the film would seem to bear this out, with clear stylistic differences appearing between scenes. [67] The film's cinematographer, Al Ruban, eventually prevailed upon Cassavetes that a single editorial voice was needed, and assembled the final version. The story is a clear example of Cassavetes's struggles with fixing a narrative down, and points to a quarrel with the limits of recorded media and authorship that extend beyond a film's performative aspect.

His arguments with the medium can ultimately be traced to his beginnings as a stage actor. The fluidity of live drama, with each performance of a work differing in iteration, is quite contrary to the fixed and lasting aspects of cinema. Yet he was to eventually bring an improvisatory performance-based spirit to the very process of editing.

One must specifically note the nature of Cassavetes's revision process. According to myth, the first version of *Shadows* was impressionistic; a free-floating artistic mood piece—and the subsequent release version was more coherent, more mainstream. Much of the myth is traceable in rough form to Jonas Mekas, who famously wrote of the first version's "breaks with made-up faces, with written scripts, with plot continuities," and described the final edit

65 John Cassavetes in Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 161.

66 Ibid.

67 This is perhaps most marked in the extended episode when two businessmen visit Gena Rowland's house, which in the pre-release version includes incongruous background music that completely distinguishes it from the rest of the film.

as "a bad commercial film, with everything that I was praising completely destroyed."[68] In point of fact, however, Cassavetes's final collage jumbled the narrative structure between the two drafts, disrupting a more-or-less coherent chronology in the 1957 version, creating numerous continuity lapses at both the scene and sequence levels in the 1959 version. Some of the many ruptured continuities include the rock club, money-borrowing, and fight scenes. A complete breakdown of the versions, allowing further analysis, appears as an appendix in Ray Carney's BFI Film Classics monograph on the film. Jonathan Rosenbaum also noted a "dogged obeisance to certain narrative conventions" in the initial cut.[69]

*Faces* is a further instance in which Cassavetes modified his initial chronology, from its form in the pre-release copy to a finished work that is a somewhat non-linear patchwork.[70] It should be noted that even the existing pre-release version of this film (there were in fact several others, which don't survive) was just another step in Cassavetes's revision process. *Faces* had originally been conceived as a two-act play, in which the first act was comprised of groups of men competing for the favor of a single woman, and the second act featured the reverse scenario. Hints of this structure still exist in the completed piece. In the case of both *Faces* and *Shadows* the project's evolution was from a coherent or defined structure to a more enigmatic one.

Cumulatively Cassavetes had an "improvisational" involvement throughout the creative process, extending well beyond the performative aspects of a work to encompass post-production, editing, and ultimately, the forming of "living" artworks. He would try to bring that freshness to all his films, by any means available to him, through a continuous struggle between twin poles of structure and spontaneity. And the elliptical narrative enigmas introduced in the editing often worked in balance with his gradual movement towards more tightly defined improvisations with his cast.

The final collaged score of *Shadows*, integrating the work of Hadi, Ackerman, and Mingus, and the recontextualizing of numerous music cues as described, is an unheralded instance of Cassavetes's spontaneous methodology. In this sense, the act of editorial collage takes on an authentic jazz sensibility; an authenticity that is arguably absent in the film's outer fabric.

68 Mekas, 10.

69 Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Cinema Scope*, 59.

70 To cite one example, the film's early version opens with the sequence of John Marley and Lynn Carlin telling jokes in bed, then going unromantically and sadly to sleep—thus setting up his subsequent encounter with Gena Rowlands. The final version inserts the bedroom scene in the middle of a later sequence; what was initially a single shot of John Marley playing pool—requiring the viewer to deduce that the bedroom scene is a memory or flashback. The brevity of the pool shot contributes to the lack of clarity.

Mingus's own ambivalent relationship to improv has already been mentioned. But it went further. While he has on the one hand been celebrated exactly for his ability to inspire his collaborators into some of their most dynamic and memorable performances, even that aspect of his work isn't straightforward. Brian Priestley quotes saxist Jackie McLean describing Mingus as a controlling monster: " . . . (he) was in the way so much, you couldn't play for it. The man'd stop your solos—he was totally tyrannical."[71]

In actuality Mingus's involvement with improvisation was, like Cassavetes's, continually developing. By 1959—just shortly after the period described by McLean—Priestley notes that

> " . . . (his albums) with larger forces represent not only a major breakthrough in Mingus's own development but a complete break from the currently accepted methods of handling a seven–to–nine piece group. As in his attempted compositions for *Shadows*, it was axiomatic that such a group was really a miniature big band, and therefore had to be carefully structured and shrewdly orchestrated, but Mingus's method was now the trusted one of dictating lines for each player, and leaving structure and orchestration to arise spontaneously."[72]

For Mingus, the relationship between writing and performing was symbiotic. The anonymous website author writes that " . . . even his style of composition favored improvisations for, after the mid-1950's, he rarely wrote down fully developed scores. Rather, he would sit at the piano and sing/hum melody lines and then allow his band members to expand on the line and contribute melodically, technically and perhaps most important to Mingus, personally."[73]

The parallel to Cassavetes's unique brand of personalized yet guided theatrical improv is once

71 Priestley, 99. The quote would also appear attributable to John Handy. Gary Giddins further notes that "Shafi Hadi said that he didn't feel free to express himself." (Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 448) Yet Giddins nonetheless observes Mingus incited some of Hadi's most inspired playing.

It seems appropriate that Hadi, who had issues with Mingus, would leap at the chance to work with Cassavetes on his own in the second recording session. Cassavetes's descriptions of Hadi are notably more glowing than his descriptions of Mingus: "He comes in with his saxophone and behind him is his life, you know . . . . He played. He was terrific. He played the story of his life to music." (Cassavetes in Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 78. See also Case, 25) Carney adds that Cassavetes was so pleased he helped Hadi record an unreleased album of music based on the film. Conversely, Gene Santoro relates that when Mingus learned about Hadi's solos for the film, he immediately fired him. (Santoro, 131)

72 Priestley, 99.

73 Charles Mingus-History, *Duke University*. For an extended explication of his views on the relationship between spontaneity and composition, see: Charles Mingus, (liner notes). "What is a Jazz Composer?," Charles Mingus, *Let My Children Hear the Music*, Columbia Records, KC 31039, 1972, reprinted in Charles Mingus, *More Than a Fake Book* (New York: Jazz Workshop), 1991, 155-57.

again unmistakable. And it's instructive to note that the key moment in his change of working method is exactly that of *Shadows*' making: 1957-1959. Conceivably, his frustrations with the film in part informed his shift at that time. His methodology was then shifting away from formal composition towards a process that gave him structural control within an improvisational context.

Like Cassavetes, poles of freedom and structure were at the crux of Mingus's art, and his place between the poles was comparable. Paralleling Cassavetes's retreat from freeform improv, Mingus was initially resistant to free jazz and it's apparent formlessness. In a legendary, perhaps apocryphal, encounter, he once sarcastically asked Ornette Coleman in what key he was playing, clearly expecting a non-answer. Coleman replied, "I think it's obvious it was C sharp, Charles." The conversation went downhill from there.[74]

Yet despite these examples of his favoring controlled form, it was none other than Mingus who helped lay the groundwork for free jazz. He was an early innovator of modal jazz, suspending traditional chord movement in his 1954 *Jazz Composer's Workshop* album, and developing the idiom further in his classic 1956 LP *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, which featured a section entirely without structure or theme.[75] The later *Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus* (1960) was in many ways a direct response to Ornette Coleman and the challenges of his music.

The connection of all this to *Shadows* is of no small importance, as it's this pivotal moment in jazz history which stands as backdrop to the film's making and release. Many consider the true emergence of free jazz to be November 1959, when Coleman began his legendary New York residency at the Five Spot in Greenwich Village—within days of the Cinema 16 premiere of the 2nd version of Cassavetes's film on 24th Street a few blocks away. It was during this residency that Mingus encountered Coleman.

The conflux of events was telling not just for Mingus and Cassavetes personally, but for their respective art forms. At the very same time, Jack Gelber's play *The Connection*, which featured jazz musicians playing on stage in character, was running at Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre.[76] As Tom Charity observed, "improvisation was in the air."[77]

It was not simply in the air, but transforming rapidly. Just as Coleman and Mingus were wrestling with the limits of jazz, Cassavetes was in a completely different sense, doing the same with theatrical improvisation. In both cases formal structure was the axis, but the movements were in opposite directions. Jazz improv was loosening up, while Cassavetes's experiments with actors were in the process of tightening.

Tellingly, the 1960's saw theatrical performance move markedly towards the greater freedom allowed in its exercises, in the work of numerous groups including the Living Theatre. Their work in turn echoed a flourishing of the cinematic avant-garde, from which Cassavetes became increasingly disassociated. P. Adams Sitney's canonic *Visionary Film* chronicles the development of experimental cinema at this time as a movement away from experimental drama (or psychodrama) towards structuralism.[78] Cassavetes's innovations, while extremely daring, were conservative in comparison—revealing that his concerns lay more in the human theater and storytelling than experimentation itself. And Charles Mingus's deeply personal music was to follow a parallel path.

## Mirrors

Some Cassavetes enthusiasts have felt threatened by factual challenges to the myth of his improvisations. They're merely following the wrong model. He did use improv, extensively, to create a breathtaking sense of spontaneity in film. His contribution, however, lay not in the making of improvised movies. It was to develop a uniquely jazz-inspired methodology.

74 The story was told to me a by a musician in the experimental group Killsonic, one of whose members heard it from trumpeter Bobby Bradford, who in turn had played with Coleman. It should be noted that C sharp is an extremely rare key in jazz. Mingus, in the May 26, 1960 issue of *Down Beat*, said of Ornette: "It doesn't matter what key he's playing in . . . . It's like not having anything to do with what's around you, and being right in your own world. You can't put your finger on what he's doing." And in the same article: "It's like organized disorganization, or playing wrong right . . . . It gets to you emotionally, like a drummer. That's what Coleman means to me."

75 Although George Russell was the early proponent of modality, it is popularly associated with Miles Davis, and Gary Giddins notes that the first hints of it in his work appear in the *Ascenseur* score, when he more or less instructed his musicians to "play this for four bars, then this for four bars, and I'll make it up." ("Miles Goes Modal," featurette in *Elevator to the Gallows*, DVD) While Davis was aware of Russell, it seems quite possible that the time-constrained conditions of the recording sessions, combined with no prior rehearsals, led Miles to experiment with modality as an effective way of improvising a film score. If so, cinema can here be seen in effect influencing jazz history, in Davis's subsequent *Milestones* and *Kind of Blue*, the epitome of his modal work.

76 Shirley Clarke's subsequent film adaptation of *The Connection* in 1961 stands as an intriguing counterpoint to Cassavetes's *Too Late Blues*, made the same year. The overt traces of *The Connection's* theatrical origins stand out prominently in some of the trained actors' performances, adding an air of artifice at odds with the groundbreaking pseudo-verite style, and parallel Cassavetes's concurrent use of actors to portray musicians. However the actual musicians in *The Connection* (including Jackie McLean and composer/pianist Freddie Redd) are completely at ease and natural in performance, offering a commanding filmic presence and genuine jazz sensibility distinct from the actor-musicians in either film. Interestingly, actor Carl Lee's powerful lead role as a non-musician also stands out, suggesting it is not necessarily the staged dialogue of *The Connection* that engenders its occasional lapse into artifice.

77 Charity, 24.

78 P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1974.

His revolutionary contribution, as noted, was in fact a move towards a dramatic model that paralleled mid-50's jazz. Mingus was an ideal counterpart to Cassavetes in that he directly confronted the boundaries that Coleman extended, and consciously chose to retreat. As Brian Priestley noted, " . . . Mingus's 1959-60 work had enabled him to discover that, for all he may have influenced the new avant-garde and enjoyed flirting with it, his allegiance to an overriding compositional form was far stronger."[79] Both Cassavetes and Mingus therein fit Nat Hentoff's dualistic description of Shepard's Night People: "conformist within their rebelliousness."

Their genius flourished not so much in pure rebellion, as in disaster salvation. In the making of *Shadows*, their collaboration was itself just such a disaster: a case of two singularly minded artists vying for control. Mingus's arrival with an unfinished score, while infuriating Cassavetes, put him into the precise zone he needed to flourish: a zone of desperation that led to the brilliant music eventually recorded. Likewise Cassavetes, when faced with a catastrophic unveiling of the first version, essentially reinvented the movie and in the process, his subsequent methodology.

In this quite unexpected sense, the two did give birth to a unique jazz cinema. Cassavetes's later films, while mostly scripted, honed the basic techniques he originated in his first film, letting the actors improvisationally develop the scenes with a furious spontaneity steered by structures or texts. This improvisational approach extended even into post-production, through a collaged edit of *Shadows* that repurposed both dramatic scenes and music cues, and was paralleled by Mingus's continued revision of his own score.

Cassavetes's emphasis on the performer's personal contribution was also immediately analogous to jazz; particularly Mingus's brand of it. The ideology of the individual, which they both advocated, extended from the aesthetic to the political. Cassavetes claimed,

> "All my pictures . . . are about individuals. That's the only thing I believe in . . . Groups can go fuck themselves. All of them. You know, a black to me is a black . . . when he's a person, he's a person . . . . I don't care what title [they put] on – to me there's a name for each person."[80]

79 Priestley, 120. Gary Giddins agrees: "(Mingus) extended the emotional and technical scope of jazz within its essential idiomatic constraints." (Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 450) One can in fact argue that both Cassavetes's and Mingus's innovations are at least as bold as their avant-garde counterparts, but their willingness to simultaneously embrace traditional forms denies their categorization as pure avant-gardists (if one is indeed compelled to categorize). See also: Charles Mingus, "An Open Letter to the Avant-Garde," *Changes* (June, 1973), reprinted in Mingus, *More Than a Fake Book*, 119.

80 John Cassavetes in Carney, *Shadows*, 34.

With its emphasis on solos, jazz, perhaps more than any other art form is an ensemble practice specifically integrating expression of the individual. This dynamic arguably peaked in the radical agenda and ensemble work of Charles Mingus. In the case of both Cassavetes and Mingus, the result of their methodology was a powerful ensemble exploration of the emotions of the players.[81]

Beyond its formal aspects, *Shadows* was consciously placed in a jazz milieu. This helped hide its true nature, for the film's New York jazz scene setting was in reality a working context for the more crucial exploration of race identity issues. Though Cassavetes's personal investment in those questions was fundamentally aspirational, the film succeeded on another level. For underneath its pretense, Mingus's participation lent the film a deep authenticity.

In the years after making *Shadows* Cassavetes largely moved away from discussions of race, which he no longer felt to be as pressing. He said, reflecting on his earlier desire to be negro,

> " . . . now, American black men are white men, so there's no challenge and I don't really wish to be that anymore. I don't know about other men's desires, but it is my desire to be an underdog, to win on a long shot, to gamble, to take chances."[82]

While both attitudes are distanced by the safety of his whiteness, they articulate the sentiment that made Cassavetes romanticize the black American's place in society. And they parallel Mingus's own very real struggles.[83] Beneath the mask of the film's plot—in Mingus's parts of the final "collaged" score—is a direct connection to Cassavetes's aspirational race and identity questioning. Mingus's life struggles, including his "upward" battle for the acceptance

81 Giddins writes that Mingus, "more than any other jazz composer of his generation . . . was willing—determined—to confront his fears and force his musicians to confront theirs. He was dogmatic, pensive, demagogic, irreverent, furious, nostalgic: a far cry from the cool and collected brainy music rife in jazz in the '50's." (Giddins, *Visions of Jazz*, 455)

This is perhaps the final irony—and blind fate—of Cassavetes not pursuing his first choice for the film, Miles Davis. The score for *Ascenseur*, improvised in precisely the way Cassavetes imagined, is monumentally beautiful, but austere and removed. As Malle notes, "It was not like a lot of film music, emphasizing or trying to add the emotion that is implicit in the images and the rest of the soundtrack. It was a counterpoint, it was elegiac—and it was somewhat detached. But it also created a certain mood for the film." (Malle, 19)

It was pure Davis; the embodiment of cool. Mingus, like Cassavetes, was pure fire, and *Shadows*—unlike *Ascenseur*—is a film of personal fire. Each film found the music perfectly suited to it.

82 John Cassavetes in Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 59.

83 Mingus, reflecting on having to wait thirty years to have a particular composition played, noted that " . . . when people are born free—I can't imagine it, but I've got a feeling that if it's so easy for you, the struggle and the initiative are not as strong as they are for a person who has to struggle and therefore has more to say." Mingus, "What is a Jazz Composer?" http://www.mingusmingusmingus.com/Mingus/what_is_a_jazz_composer.html (accessed May 15, 2009).

of large-scale jazz composition, are immediate reflections of the larger black experience of the era. They at once echo the film's story and invert the "downward" or "White Negro" impulses of Cassavetes.

Both men embody the era's fight for life, self-individuation, and identity. By a reductive analogy, they comprise two flip sides of Goffman's deminstrelization model. In the case of Cassavetes, the desire was escape from a stultifying white experience, in the case of Mingus, it was for a respect beyond any notions of race whatsoever. Their twin aspirations, mirrored in each other, lie at the heart of *Shadows*.

For Mingus the challenges never disappeared. His autobiography describes his life's progress--again in third person:

> "He fell in love with himself. 'Fuck all you pathetic prejudiced cocksuckers . . . . I dig minds, inside and out. No race, no color, no sex. Don't show me no kind of skin 'cause I can see right through to the hate in your little undeveloped souls."[84]

The book's title is, appropriately, a step further than Cassavetes: *Beneath the Underdog.*

## Mingus and Cassavetes

The collaboration, or non-collaboration, of Cassavetes and Mingus, is a study in alchemy. The two men couldn't work together, but along with a dynamic cast created a collage-like work that was far greater than the sum of its parts. If Mingus's technical role in the production was small, he's nonetheless at its core, for he bore in his life and music the validation of Cassavetes's themes.

Summarizing their collaboration, Cassavetes said,

> "We had the same kind of artistic fury. We pretend we're loose and in the end we're dictators . . . . I do think Charles was more of a structured person than I am. He lived in a very structured way even though he was a wild man . . . . In other circumstances, and different times, I think he'd have been a classical musician and formal composer."[85]

In this light, their personal battles reflect a shared inner conflict that combusted on impact. The two in fact were like half-siblings in their disparate work towards jazz and cinema. The self-claimed mongrel Mingus was Cassavetes's mirror—and his internal struggles between twin demons of spontaneous rage and formal control stoked the burning furnace of *Shadows*.

84 Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*, 66.

85 John Cassavetes in Case, 24.

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*Photos of* Shadows *recording sessions courtesy of Marvin Lichtner and the Cinema Museum. Photo of Ben Carruthers courtesy of William Claxton.*

*1st recording session: Charles Mingus, double bass; Phineas Newborn Jr. and Horace Parlan, piano; Jimmy Knepper, trombone; Dannie Richmond, drums; Shafi Hadi (Curtis Porter), tenor saxophone, Anthony Ortega, reeds; two other unidentified musicians.*

*Also present: Jack Ackerman, Seymour Cassel, Nica de Koenigswarter.*

*2nd recording session: Shafi Hadi, Dannie Richmond*

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