2
STYLE AS ANALYSIS

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1. The Map and the Territory

Analysis of style—we've all seen that. Style as analysis will take a bit of explaining.

Although I'm no stranger to the analysis of popular music, I never took a class in how to do it. In the 1990s, when I was in graduate school, specifically musicological study of popular music was new enough that you kind of had to make it up as you went along.[1] The study of popular music as such wasn't new, but musicology, as usual, was late to the party, trailing in with a six-pack of warm Coors and enduring the stares of the cool kids who had been there all along—ethnomusicologists, sociologists, comp-lit types, and people hailing from academic disciplines whose names end in "studies."[2] These pop studies scholars were already conversant in a cultural theory idiom that most musicologists hardly knew existed. What musicologists had was analysis … only we weren't sure how to use it in this new context.

And pop studies scholars weren't sure it should be used at all. They criticized musicology for its habit of making the Western art tradition the measure of vernacular music, as well as its assumption that music-analytical techniques evolved for the one could just as easily be applied to the other. Even so, the fact that musicologists had music-analytical techniques at all commanded a certain grudging respect. Even now, as I write this, a philosopher friend of mine tells me that we are considered "the particle physicists of the humanities." Back in the 1990s, as Robert Fink writes, scholars who had long made their home in pop music studies found themselves in a 1950s sci-fi movie scenario, besieged by "alien interlopers with superior technology (*'Their ability to analyze music is centuries ahead of ours, Mr. President!'*)" and having to defend themselves with "a scorched-earth antiformalism backed up with Marxist accusations of cultural and class imperialism."[3] Musicologists responded to the accusations with guilty promises to do better, and then we went back to doing what we always do: analyzing the music.

But how were you supposed to do that? Some of the problems we encountered in trying out our seat-of-the-pants pop music analysis had to do with the nature of notation itself—indeed, with the nature of writing. What I, at least, didn't yet realize was something Marshall McLuhan grasped back in the 1960s: every medium has its message. Notation isn't just a neutral container for or carrier of musical information. Like all media, it has inbuilt biases.

Pop metaphysicians such as Robert Anton Wilson like to say "the map is not the territory," meaning that the rational mind has a habit of creating abstract, schematic reductions of experience—concepts, in other words—and then mistaking the concept for the experience.[4] Writing itself does this as a matter of course. It would be hard to imagine how it could avoid doing so: meditate for an hour (or smoke some weed), try to write down your experience, and you will be forced to conclude, like Dave Hickey, that "all the volumes of Proust [are] nothing, quantitatively, compared to the twenty-minute experience of eating breakfast on a spring morning at a Denny's in Mobile."[5] Notation, a specialized kind of writing, likewise "suppresses and displaces the greater and more intimate part of any experience that it seeks to express."[6]

On its own, this abstraction of meaning from experience is not a problem, since writing gives us a great deal in return for our loss of experiential immediacy. But abstraction becomes a problem when music analysts take the map for the territory, notation for auditory sensation. And in pop music it is even more of a problem, because so much of it is expressly *about* its own ineffable sensory presence.

If you are raised in a culture of musical literacy, it takes an effort of the imagination to understand what you get from notation, and when I was in graduate school I didn't know yet that I needed to make the effort. You don't know what you don't know: the problem of notation was, for me, what Donald Rumsfeld called an "unknown unknown." I had no trouble believing that notation is a neutral container for musical information, because I didn't know it was a belief. When I set about trying to put into words the certain particular *something* I felt in listening to a jazz solo, it didn't occur to me not to start transcribing right away. I assumed that once I had notes on the page, I could start looking for patterns that eluded my hearing but that might all the same connect with what I *did* hear. The notation would simply provide a hi-res version of the lo-res image my ears had given me. It took me a long time to realize that there was a Platonic metaphysics buried in my assumptions: our senses lie to us while truth lies in a realm beyond the senses. Written marks on the page give access to that "realm beyond" and the ultimate reality of music is that part of it that exists in that realm. The musical score becomes realer than the music you hear; the map becomes the territory.

So, an example: I was writing about Thelonious Monk's 1948 recording of "Misterioso" and wanted to say something about the tension between Monk's gnomic piano figures and Milt Jackson's flourishes on the vibraphone. I wanted to transcribe four measures of Jackson's solo for my analysis, so I used transcription software to slow down the blizzard of notes that I heard rushing by, always too quick to grasp, when I played the music at normal speed. One measure that gave me trouble contained twenty-six notes.[7] At full speed it was a blur, a throwaway gesture of offhand virtuosity. At slow speeds, the individuality of pitches started to emerge, and what had sounded like a single arcing spurt started to sort itself into a few groupings: a fast seven-note ascending chromatic scale, two slower descending triplet figures climbing down from the phrase's apex, a fast triplet followed by a pair of loping two-note figures, and finally a quick downward four-note scale landing on two emphatic sixteenth notes (be-bop!). I then set about trying to figure out what the exact metrical relationship was between these squiggling musical animalcules that my auditory microscope had revealed to me. What resulted was a notated measure that looked like something out of an Elliott Carter string quartet—a black smear of notes bristling with tuplet brackets and ratio numbers.

I sent the transcription off to a jazz musician who was managing the copyright of "Misterioso" and wanted to see my work before signing off on it. He asked me to redo the Elliott-Carter-ish measure of Jackson's solo, saying something like, "Jackson wouldn't have thought of this measure as broken up into all these little units … you hear that as a single gesture, a kind of *buhhrrrrrapp!* happening in the moment." He suggested that I could simplify my notation and bar the first twenty-four pitches together as thirty-second notes and the last two as sixteenths.

Now, I had avoided this kind of simplified barring because it represented neither the teeming profusion of rhythmic detail I heard when I slowed down the music nor the complexities that resulted when I tried to map those details onto the rectilinear grid of Western rhythmic notation. I had reasoned thusly: (1) I wish to represent something I hear in a recorded performance; (2) in notating the music, I come to perceive complexities I couldn't hear before; (3) whatever I was after in step (1) emerged in step (2). What is latent in hearing becomes manifest in notation. Therefore, (4) the movement from hearing to notation is a journey towards greater truth; hearing is secondary to notation. And so my transcription obeyed the dictates of notation, not the act of hearing, and in this way had become unrecognizable as a representation of the listening experience.

I was an unwitting Platonist, like most musicologists. (Most scholars are crypto-Platonists, one way or another: we probably wouldn't become scholars if we were happy with the world just as it appears.) My troubles with "Misterioso," though, gave me my first inkling that notation isn't simply an upgrade from heard music. The music is in what you hear, not what you read (at least when you aren't talking about Carter). Jazz consists of spontaneous human actions taken in specific places and at specific moments of time. But then (this was my next realization) so does all music: this is what Carolyn Abbate, after Vladimir Jankélévitch, means by "real music."[8] Sometimes, it so happens that a recording machine is running, so the music can pause for our inspection and, if we like, we can notate what we hear. But the form the notation takes, and the meaning we assign to it, is relative only to its purpose, whether that is to tell student jazz musicians how to play a famous solo or to give readers a point of reference in a scholarly analysis. The notation isn't the primary reality, unless the composer decides that it is. And this almost never happens in popular music.

2. Abracadabra

Ramsey Dukes notes that written language must seem like a very powerful magic to those who have never seen it before:

> Imagine that you are a runner and that there is a crisis in the land. A wise man has summoned you, given you a tablet of clay and instructions to run to a neighboring land and present this tablet to your king. For some reason beyond your comprehension you are told to guard this tablet with your life, and to hand it over intact. When you arrive exhausted at your destination, the king takes this tablet in his hands, gazes at it in silent contemplation for a while, then proceeds to fire questions at you. To your astonishment his questions reveal a knowledge of the crisis which has happened several days' running distant. By some extraordinary magic this little clay tablet seems to have spoken to the king, conveying knowledge of distant

> places, telling him that support is needed … Is it surprising that writing was early associated with magic?[9]

In a culture habituated to literacy, it is hard to see magic in something so commonplace as a memo. So, it is not immediately obvious that notation is similarly magical: it allows us to throw our voice and make ourselves disappear. And, as in *Parsifal,* it can turn time into space.

Here, I am about to do some magic. Watch:

> Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 57 (the *Appassionata*) begins with an arpeggiation through the tonic chord of F minor, descending from the fifth scale degree to the tonic F in the piano's lowest octave and climbing back up to the keyboard's middle register, the upper line recapturing the fifth scale degree (m. 3) and resting momentarily on a C-D-C neighbor motion over a rootless applied dominant half-cadence. This neighbor motion is immediately echoed in the next measure, which repeats the preceding four-measure phrase a semitone up, starting on D♭. Measure nine repeats measures 3 and 4 on their original pitches, resolving the upper line from D♭ back down to C. Thus, the first eight measures enact a larger-scale neighbor motion on C just as measure 3 enacts the same gesture locally, though the larger-scale neighbor motion is between C and D♭, a semitone rather than a whole tone—a change that is ratified in measure 10 by the ominous D♭ eighth notes in the bass, which strike three times before resolving downward to a quarter-note C. (Listeners will immediately recognize this as the "V for Victory" rhythm of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5.) In ten measures Beethoven has fashioned a figure that unfolds itself at two structural levels. Were I to continue my analysis we would see that it unfolds on yet larger levels: the C-D♭-C figure glimpsed in the opening measures becomes a generative motive that determines the entire structural span of the first movement. It also informs almost every dramatic moment in the first movement—for example, the furious retransition to the recapitulation, where (in mm. 130–34) the "V for Victory" D♭-C gesture from measure 10 is hammered over a lashing sixteenth-note right-hand tremolo. Indeed, this generative motive determines even the three-movement span of the whole sonata, as the second movement's key of D♭ major echoes the motive's upper-neighbor D♭.

This paragraph is the sort of thing that gives musicology its reputation as the "particle physics of the humanities": it uses a technical language that is as incomprehensible to the average reader as advanced physics equations. A musicologist should be able to follow this paragraph easily enough, and those who know the piece well can even follow my argument without having to look at the score. But scholars outside of musicology might accuse me of trying to confound them with barbarous jargon. In response, I might insist that without the technical language there is no way for me to make my argument. And there the conversation usually ends, with the critical-theory practitioners feeling excluded from the conversation and therefore apt to complain about the "class imperialism" of classically trained musicologists, and the latter feeling misunderstood.

Meanwhile, both sides have missed the magic.

If you don't read music, then the only way you will ever experience Beethoven's *Appassionata* sonata is aurally. And an aural experience of the *Appassionata,* or any other

piece of music, is always the experience of an individual. It is always a physical vibration happening at some specific place and time in some specific ear canal. If I wish to write an account of such concrete experiences, I cannot avoid putting myself in the picture. Without the technologies of musical literacy, I must say what things *sound like,* which means I must say what they sound like *to me.* But if I have a score, I have an independent object outside of myself to which I can impute agency. Things happen out there in the score, objectively.

Imagine you have assigned an analysis paper to freshman music majors and one of them writes this: "The next part feels like an epic rage-fest, like this argument I had with my mom where she ended up smashing dinner plates on the floor. Each time I hear the bass go duh-duh-duh-*duh,* I think, *crash, another plate hits the linoleum!* And all the while it's like I'm hearing this frantic old-time silent movie music, the kind they play when a lady gets tied to the train tracks." This description might make you smile, but you'd probably still suggest the student revise it, as it puts all the detail in terms of her personal experience. Who cares about your argument with your mom? That's just subjective stuff. I wasn't there, I can't know what that was like. Tell me about things that are intersubjective, that pertain to the music itself and not to anyone in particular.

So, the student revises this passage and writes something like this: "In measures 130–134, the "V for Victory" D♭-C gesture from measure 10 is hammered over a lashing sixteenth-note right-hand tremolo." What has happened is that the student has gone from saying "In this place I hear XX" to "in mm. 130–134 XX takes place." Whereas before she has resorted to a colorful analogy that resonates with her own experience (for example, the right-hand tremolo sounding like some silent-movie music she has heard), now the student points to something with an independent and objective existence in the score. We have taught her to perform a magic trick: she has learned to throw her voice. She has taken her personal experience and projected it into the score. So doing, she has disappeared.

(Incidentally, I suspect that when undergraduates resent their music analysis classes, on some level it's because they don't want to disappear. Undergraduate music majors must make a transition from the world of orality to that of literacy, and it is often as traumatic for them individually as it is said to be for entire societies forced to undergo the same transition within a single generation.[10] Of course, most undergraduate music majors enter school knowing how to read music, but theirs is what Eric Havelock calls "craft literacy": they use notation as a tool, but they do not think within the ideal spaces that their literacy makes possible.[11] My colleague Daphne Tan once remarked to me that getting first-years to think within the space of music literacy can be a challenge: some of them will fight every step of the way, struggling against a feeling of alienation from personal musical experience.)

Outside the world given us by notation, sounds can only exist in specific concrete times. This is true even if you are listening to a recording and repeat, loop, skip around, and otherwise jump outside of the recording's own time. What you're hearing is still something happening in *your* time. It is an event. Now, some of the things in my analysis of the *Appassionata* can be heard in this way. The C-D♭-C figure of the *Appassionata*'s third measure, for instance, is an auditory event. However, in my analysis I argue that the C-D♭-C figure generates structures that are simultaneously "enacted" on different time-scales, some of them very long. So, when does this "generative motive" takes place? The question doesn't make sense. Such a "generative motive" cannot *happen* any more than the ideal of justice

can. Justice might be manifest in this or that court decision, but justice itself is an abstraction that can only exist in the non-time of concepts.

The same is true of numbers and letters. David Abram suggests that it would never have occurred to the Greeks to imagine a realm of eternal Forms if they had not become habituated to alphabetic literacy: the way that letters exist in this abstract way, independent of their contingent appearance in the phenomenal world, suggested an ideal and eternal world superior to the one given us by our senses.[12] Without notation, it likewise could never have occurred to me to write about a "generative motive," or to use such spatializing architectural metaphors as "entire structural span of the first movement." For that matter, without notation it would never have occurred to Beethoven to write music whose motives develop with such complexity or with such long-term consequences. Beethoven wrote music whose meaning is wired into an ideal realm of Forms in an arm-wavingly explicit way, which is one reason musicologists love him.

To help ourselves understand such music, we naturally resort to diagrams that resemble architectural blueprints.[13] In this way we can amplify what notation already allows us to do, which is to take in, at a glance, what takes many minutes to unfold in lived time. Events that, in our sublunary phenomenal world, can only relate to one another in time, become spatially related instead. If we know how to read it, a Schenker graph allows us to survey the entire first movement of the *Appassionata* as if it were a landscape and we were riding high above it in a hot-air balloon (Figure 2.1).[14]

Indeed, Schenker makes this very point:

> But the highest triumph in listening to a work of art, the proudest bliss, is to elevate the ear as it were to the power of the eye, to intensify it. Imagine a landscape, broad and beautiful, surrounded by mountains and hills, full of fields and meadows and forests and brooks, full of everything that nature can create in the way of beauty and variety. And now one climbs to a point from which one glance encompasses the entire landscape.[15]

To "elevate the ear … to the power of the eye," to turn (musical) time into space … this is the greatest magical act of notation. Philip K. Dick believed that only God could accomplish such a feat.[16]

At this point you might think I am implying that only concrete sound-events are "real" and that entities like my "generative motive" are phantoms that exist only on paper, the product an empty intellectual game that rests upon a bogus metaphysics. Not at all. I am saying that they are magical entities, and I respect magic. Aleister Crowley's famous definition of magic as "the

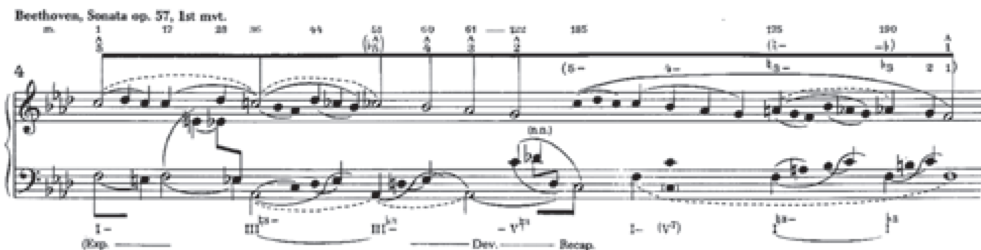

Figure 2.1 Schenker's graph for Beethoven, Op. 57, 1st movement

Science and Art of causing Change in conformity with the Will" isn't too different from our commonplace understanding of magic as the use of some eldritch mental faculty to manifest changes in material existence.[17] Educated moderns are likely to roll their eyes at such mind-over-matter notions—calling something "magical thinking" isn't usually a compliment—but consider that we accept magic all the time when it is presented to us as "marketing." A logo, like a magical sigil, is a mental form, scrawled on a piece of paper, intended to conjure wealth.[18] A paper phantom like Schenker's musical sigil can likewise call into existence very real and material things, like for example Schenker's *Freie Satz,* and thus a Schenkenerian school of thought, and therefore music theory conferences and journals and degree programs, etc., all of them pooling with similar emanations of Will and coalescing into legitimating narratives that manifest, ultimately, in the school of music in which I am typing these words. Which is what pays my mortgage and is thus, for me, as real as it gets.

What is *real*? The actions we take upon our thoughts fatten them up, ontologically speaking. To paraphrase William James, what is *real* is what happens to an idea. In this sense, reading and writing is a magical practice. Music is whatever it is, but the things we scry in it *become* real through the actions we take upon those scryings and the material forms and relations that result from those actions. Word incarnates.

3. Style as Analysis

The question I wish to ask is therefore pragmatic, not ontological or moral—not "is notation essentially alien to pop music?" or "is it wrong to use notation in pop music analysis?" but "what are the affordances of musical notation in pop music?" What does notation let us do? And, what is more to my point, what does it prevent us from doing? The greatest strength of notation is also its great weakness: it imposes on music what Lionel Snell calls a "Platonic layer," a beyond-the-senses realm where truth might be found.[19] It turns time to space, it lifts music out of particular experience and raises it to the Universal … but the richness of sensory immediacy, the presence of sound prior to cognized or verbalized meaning, the sheer luxurious tactile there-ness of music disclosed in the moment—that is what is lost. This is as true for classical music as it is for pop.

All music presents itself to our senses simply by virtue of manifesting in space and time. But American vernacular music since World War II, and especially music that participates in what I call the hip sensibility, is to some extent *about* sensory immediacy.[20] If technocratic modernity translates human lives into marks on a spreadsheet, vital and unspeakable experience into institutionalized bureaucratic meaning, then freedom means living fully in the experiential moment, outside the regulated meanings of administered society. Consequently, the great work of the hip sensibility is to fashion an evanescent and subversive "presence culture" in opposition to a mainstream "meaning culture."[21]

This is an ideology, though, not a natural fact; presence is no more inherent to popular music than the "Platonic layer" is inherent to classical music. Like the Platonic ideology of classical music, the presence ideology of pop is a creation of critical intellectuals as much as musicians, and in both cases not all musicians subscribe to the intellectuals' program. Jazz musicians, for example, are likely to insist that jazz is "a very structured thing" and not the freeform spontaneous effusion of feeling that hipsters have taken it to be.[22] But just as notation offers affordances to musicologists, the hip sensibility's insistence on immediacy and presence affords pop critics and scholars a way to imagine what freedom means, what a meaningful life looks like, and how meaningfulness and freedom can be won through

music. When someone says "punk saved my life," maybe you should believe them. This, too, is powerful magic.

So, if we choose to approach pop music from the standpoint of presence, the obvious question becomes: how do you do analysis without notation?

Brian Eno doesn't read music, though this hasn't stopped him from being a particularly thoughtful music analyst. Eno notes that a recording, like a score, "takes music out of the time dimension and puts it in the space dimension," though with rather different consequences.[23] The spaces made by recordings are textural, their flooring and upholstery and furnishings made of sounds that studio technology can make "fatter or thinner or shinier or rougher or harder or smoother or punchier or more liquid or any one of a thousand other things."[24] Anyone who has listened to pop music on a good sound system knows what Eno is talking about: a recorded pop song is a 3D immersive environment in which every sound takes its place in a 360° virtual headphone space. Each sound has its own delicately calibrated presence, its own timbral and textural particularity. How are we to notate this? The fatness and shininess and punchiness and smoothness? We can't. All we have are those adjectives: fat, shiny, punchy, smooth.[25]

Leaning on adjectives is another habit we try to break in undergraduates. A student writes "the opening is punchy, but the next passage sounds smoother" and in annoyance we red-pencil "vague description!" next to it. "Punchy" means different things to different people, whereas "marked by four dissonant and heavily accented quarter-note chords" is much more specific and removes most of the indeterminacy that our individual points of view give to our descriptions. Again, notation gets us out of the picture. But try, just try, to analyze Brian Eno's "Zawinul/Lava" without resorting to the subjective language of feelings and sensations. There is hardly any pitch structure to hold onto; notatable content is the least interesting aspect of the track. What compels repeated listening is the iridescence of its tone colors and the fugitive shapes of sounds that hover on the brink of hearing and recognition. If you have *Another Green World* at hand, go to 1:13–1:14 of "Zawinul/Lava." What is that sound way in the background? How would you represent it? Never mind how you would write it in standard notation. (You can't.) You have to say what it sounds like—maybe you say it's "like a distant cry" or something. Whatever you come up with, you have to say what it sounds like *to you*. You're back in the picture.

And once you've set off down that road, why remain satisfied with stale expressions such as "like a distant cry"? All the resources of fine prose are at your command—expressive description, metaphor, storytelling, irony and wit … get cracking! Your task becomes the artist's: to express, through your own subjectivity, an image so vivid it allows others to feel what it is like to be you, listening to this music.

Sometimes when I suggest this to grad students, they'll say, this isn't our job, it's what you'd expect of MFA students. If a student is writing poetry or fiction for a grade, it's fair to criticize stale imagery or unresonant metaphors, because that's the sort of thing they're used to being evaluated on. You wouldn't ask them to footnote their poems, so why ask a music intellectual to write belletristic prose descriptions of Brian Eno songs?

Actually, there are music intellectuals that do just that: they're called critics.

The Experience Music Project Pop Conference was founded in order to enable a discussion between pop critics and scholars. (I read papers at three meetings, in 2007, 2008, and 2011.) Granted, I saw some of the inter-group tensions over notation-based analysis I have mentioned here, as well as the rock-crit comedy of manners whereby aging hipsters stake a

claim for academic legitimacy while affecting to despise it. But the sessions I attended were overwhelmingly positive and productive for me, primarily because they offered models for the prose analysis of music—the kind of analysis for which writerly style is the primary analytical tool. Seeing the best critics' prose analysis side-by-side with the best notated analysis was a revelation, because I could see that they were projects of equal intellectual heft and worth, conducted largely in isolation from one another but moving in parallel all the same. The hopeful idea at the heart of EMP was that we could all learn from one another. Maybe music critics could learn to read music, and musicologists could learn to cultivate a little poetry in their writing.

So, at last, this is what I mean by "style as analysis:" paying attention to style and voice in writing, not simply to make our analyses clearer but as a means for doing analysis, particularly analysis of those textural and timbral elements of music that resist notation.

Now, the more science-minded among us might have some objections.

Whatever their differences, scientists and artists begin with the same question: *can you and I see the same thing the same way? If so, how?* The scientific thinker looks for features of the thing that can be stripped of subjectivity—ideally, those aspects that can be quantified and whose values will thus never change from one observer to the next. In this way, he arrives at a reality independent of all observers. The artist, on the other hand, relies on the strength of her artistry to effect a marriage between her own subjectivity and that of her readers. To a scientific thinker, this must sound like magical thinking: *you're saying you will imagine something so hard it'll pop into someone else's head exactly the way you envision it?* The artist has sought the opposite of the scientist's observer-independent reality. She creates a reality dependent upon observers, indeed a reality in which human beings must participate in order for it to exist at all.

So, one objection would be that musicology, which after all was named *Musikwissenschaft* (music-science) by its earliest practitioners, is an essentially scientific enterprise, and that the artist is simply playing a different game. But if that is so, then presence culture remains forever outside our remit. And isn't the motto of the humanist "nothing human is alien to me"? Well, here is something human, and scientific approaches don't work on it. ("Good news, Mr. President: Their technologies are helpless against Brian Eno!")

The artist claims to use empathy and imagination to bridge the gaps that lie between our private emotional worlds; to the scientific thinker, this sounds more like telepathy than any testable human faculty. Even critical-theory academics, people who read Latour and view science as just another set of narratives, are nevertheless the products of a scientific culture and tend to accept its physicalist assumptions on a deep and largely unexamined level; they, as much as scientists, will find the artist's claims to empathetic identification no more convincing than the miracle stories attributed to saints.

To all of them I say, *eppur si muove.*

Even in the terrifyingly critical pages of *Partisan Review,* reviewers had to pause now and then to note the little miracles of empathy that good criticism routinely pulls off. Writing about a collection of Whitney Balliett's jazz columns, William Youngren begins with a routine dig at *The New Yorker*'s middlebrowism and makes fun of such purple sentences as "[Coleman Hawkins's] heavy vibrato suggested the wingbeats of a big bird and his tone halls hung with dark velvet and lit by huge fires." However, Youngren then puts the sentence back in its context and points out that, "if you happen to know how Coleman Hawkins sounded in the twenties and then in the thirties … what you are struck by is not

its fanciness but the astonishing descriptive accuracy that it shares with the more matter-of-fact sentences around it." Here is Balliett's entire paragraph:

> Hawkins' early style was rough and aggressive. His tone tended to be harsh and bamboolike, and he used a great many staccato, slap-tongued notes. But these mannerisms eventually vanished, and by the mid-thirties he had entered his second and most famous phase. His heavy vibrato suggested the wingbeats of a big bird and his tone halls hung with dark velvet and lit by huge fires. His technique had become infallible. He never fluffed a note, his tone never shrank or overflowed—as did Chu Berry's, say—and he gave the impression that he had enough equipment to state in half a dozen different and finished ways what was in his head.

Youngren insists that, "Fancy writing or not, during those years Hawkins really did sound just the way Balliett says he did."[26] When I first read this passage, I thought, yup, he's right, that is *exactly* how Hawkins sounds. It was a little miracle of telepathy: somehow, Balliett knew what Hawkins's sound felt like to me, and (a second miracle) was able to put in words. And finally (an auxiliary miracle) this *Partisan Review* writer had done the best that second-order criticism can do: he had joined his voice to mine and for a moment there we were, all three of us, digging Hawkins's sound and nodding our heads together. My moment of inner agreement was also a moment of gratitude for being understood. In such moments, you feel a little less alone, and this is all I can ask of criticism. Or scholarship, if I'm being real.

4. Air Guitar

If we're advancing candidates for beatification here—trying to make a case for a *bone fide* miracle of empathy the way the Vatican argues for new saints—I have a passage of my own to nominate, from Mitchell Morris's *The Persistence of Sentiment: Display and Feeling in Popular Music of the 1970s*. This book is a proof-of-concept for my argument: it shows that an attention to style and voice really can allow an analyst to go (boldly, even) where no musicologist has gone before.

In the fifth chapter, Morris wishes to inhabit Karen Carpenter's voice and so imagine the easeful melancholy in her 1970s listeners' hearing of her hit songs. Swinging from Todd Haynes to exotica to Norbert Elias to Dave Hickey to Elisabeth Le Guin to Marcel Proust to Adam Phillips, Morris ends up in a moment-by-moment, sound-by-sound account of the first sung phrase of Carpenter's "For All We Know," and the cumulative force of the entire passage is such that we understand (and moreover *feel*) how this music mattered to her audience and, therefore, how it might matter to us. I cannot do justice to the full scope of Morris's argument, so I will focus on just one of the links in this chain—Morris's meditation on Hickey's notion of "air guitar."

> Musical performance, whether air guitar or the "real thing," is always framed by a tense interweaving of shame and the desire for self-revelation. Air guitar itself usually takes on an attitude of defiant good humor, pretending to frivolity to cover up its real investments in the music. Raucous silliness and broad parodies of masculinity cloak the nakedness of the air guitarist's love. Lip-synching represents an attempt to slice through this conflict by fiat, to overwhelm the embarrassment by sheer force of will. "Look at me!" a drag-queen lip-syncher implicitly says. "I am

> the incarnation of fabulousness, all the more because my performance is part fiction and part reality, and the real parts are those that seem most peripheral. Look upon my moves, ye glamorous, and despair!"[27]

Reading this, I perform my own air guitar, "flurries of silent, sympathetic gestures with nothing at their heart but the memory of the music," as Hickey writes. I call on my body's memory of air guitar, on the emotional memory of silly scenes at parties long ago, on images, colors, sounds, voices of friends I haven't seen in twenty-five years …

… and my imagined form, the astral double I fashion as I read this passage, begins to move in sympathy with the writing. It's not just "good humor," it's "defiant good humor," a slightly oxymoronic expression explained by the next clause, "pretending to frivolity to cover up its real investments in the music." Yes! That is exactly what it felt like, or feels like—what my astral double feels as it lip-synchs Morris's words. "Raucous silliness and broad parodies of masculinity cloak the nakedness of the air guitarist's love": further and better particulars of the emotional case, plus "cloak the nakedness" in such close proximity to "parodies of masculinities" casts a queer side-eye on the proceedings, which … well, yeah, that has the ring of truth to it, too. "Lip-synching represents an attempt to slice through this conflict by fiat, to overwhelm the embarrassment by sheer force of will." The previous sentences have set up the inner conflict between "shame and the desire for self-revelation," a conflict that exists in us pretty much all the time and not just when we're at a karaoke bar, and this sentence brings home all those moments where we try to resolve the conflict by bull-rushing the distance between love and self-protective irony. We drape our irony around our love like the lei you garland over your buddy's shoulders at a Hawaiian-themed cookout. You are just kidding around, and you are totally sincere. Thus, the drag queen's "I am the incarnation of fabulousness, all the more because my performance is part fiction and part reality, and the real parts are those that seem most peripheral. Look upon my moves, ye glamorous, and despair!"

And at that last bit, my astral double pumps his fist. *Yessss!* Quite apart from being structurally satisfying, the rhetorical detonation of an image patiently built up in the previous four sentences, it's just a *gone* bit of writing, especially that last kiss-off line, a camp twist on Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias." I read Morris's chapter on Carpenter, and it's the two of us, Morris and me, lip-synching to poor old Karen's sweet sad voice—lip-synching to lip-synching, actually—and nodding together, *yup, that's what that's like.* And now that you're reading this, maybe that makes three of us. Maybe. Everything I have written here is a wager—a wager on the possibility that we each, in our private solitudes, can find occasions to reach out to one another and find a hand reaching back, to gaze out and find our gaze returned.

To say that writing can set up moments of empathy that annul the distances between us, at least briefly, is to suggest that an act of writing well can be an act of care. And that sounds a bit sissy, doesn't it? The cognitive style of the academic humanities teaches us hardness, insists that such nigh-telepathic connections between artists and critics, or between critics and readers, can only be hopeful and self-consoling fictions.[28] In this context, William Cheng writes, "Hope, like care, can itself feel queer because it doesn't traffic normatively in reason or hard evidence."[29]

Remember I said that the tension between "shame and the desire for self-revelation" isn't confined to karaoke bars. It is also the dialectic that drives music scholarship, which performs its own air guitar in order to reveal the self—the dirty secret of our love, a love

that dare not speak its name, our naïve love for the music and our childish show-and-tell desire to share it—and at the same time to hide it. Now you know the answer to the question I haven't asked: *why* would we want to disappear in our own analyses?

As I finish writing this essay, I find that I have ended up writing a piece of "reparative musicology," though not altogether on purpose. Cheng writes that reparative musicology is "a way of approaching texts, events, and people with refreshing surges of positive affect" and asks "what futures burst open when we temper our flares of chronic suspicion with cooling bouts of reparative belief, willful vulnerability, and childlike optimism?"[30] In this case, it's a future that sounds fatter, shinier, punchier, smoother. Maybe a bit happier. That's a weak note to end on, I know, but screw it. My wager still stands, and I like my chances.

Notes

1 I am using "musicology" in a loose and purposefully untheorized sense that will nonetheless be immediately understandable to any scholar of pop music. Musicology here denotes those scholars who have been trained in music-historical and music-theoretical disciplines informed by the notational analysis of music from the western art tradition. Increasingly, though, the latter definition is starting to account for fewer and fewer of those who self-identify as musicologists. So, I sometimes use "musicology" for something more general: music scholarship that involves talking about music *qua* music, which means that I am writing about a tendency found in musicology, music theory, ethnomusicology, and even in the writing of people, like Greil Marcus, who probably don't identify with any of these disciplines. "Talking about music *qua* music" doesn't mean prior commitment to a formalist aesthetic or making sharp ontological distinctions between "the music itself" and "extramusical" factors. But it does mean that at some point the scholar feels that s/he is going to have to say something about "how the notes stick to the page," as David Grayson used to say to me, or what things actually sound like. Whether we're talking about notes on the page or sounds in our ear canals is a distinction I explore in this essay, but for now let's say that either way the vernacular sense of "musicology" I am trying to develop here is less a specific method than a general orientation towards musical particularities. I have heard it argued that Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993) is not musicology, and maybe it's not if we're going by the department where Koestenbaum works or from which he received his PhD. But *The Queen's Throat* offers a fine grain of musical detail, using a poet's sensitivity to metaphor and description to shape passages that let us feel what it's like to listen to certain specific musical recordings. That's close enough for me.

2 I like to imagine that musicology showed up in a blazer and chinos but decided to leave the tie at home, not wanting to look too stuffy.

3 Robert Fink, "Elvis Everywhere: Musicology and Popular Music Studies at the Twilight of the Canon," *American Music* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 150.

4 Robert Anton Wilson, *Prometheus Rising* (Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Press, 1983), 36.

5 Dave Hickey, "Air Guitar," in *Air Guitar: Essays on Art & Democracy* (Los Angeles, CA: Art Issues Press, 1997), 164.

6 Hickey, "Air Guitar," 164.

7 Now that I'm looking carefully at the transcription that was eventually published (Phil Ford, "Somewhere/Nowhere: Hipness as an Aesthetic," *Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 1 [2002]: 49–81), I find that I wrote a note—an A♭ fourteen notes into Jackson's flurry—that for the life of me I cannot hear now, no matter how slowly or often I play the recording. Years ago, I found twenty-seven notes; now I find only twenty-six. If this tells us anything, it's that two observers can, with the best will in the world, conduct a militant search for objective musical truth and fail to agree on what they hear, even if those two observers are the same person. Whether that suggests something about the fallibility of human senses or the weirdness and indeterminacy of reality I leave to the reader to decide.

8 Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable,* trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Carolyn Abbate, "Music: Drastic or Gnostic?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Spring 2004): 505–36.

9 Ramsey Dukes, "Foreword to 'Leaves of Yggdrasil'," in *What I Did in My Holidays: Essays on Black Magic, Satanism, Devil Worship, and Other Niceties* (Oxford: Mandrake and TMTS, 1998), 56. Ramsey Dukes is the pen name of the magical philosopher Lionel Snell (see note 19).

10 The theorists of the "Toronto School," notably McLuhan and Walter Ong, wrote extensively about the traumas and transformations that non-literate societies undergo when they make a forced transition to literacy: see especially Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

11 Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Belknap, 1963), 39.

12 David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 112–13.

13 See Mark Evans Bonds, "The Spatial Representation of Musical Form," *Journal of Musicology* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 265–303.

14 Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition. Supplement: Musical Examples*, translated and edited by Ernst Oster (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2001), no page; Example 154:4.

15 Heinrich Schenker, "Das Hören in der Musik," originally published in *Neue Revue* 5 (1894): 115–21; quoted in Bonds, "The Spatial Representation of Musical Form," 298.

16 That is, God as Dick variously conceived it: Logos, Christ, VALIS, "the plasmate," etc. Philip K. Dick, *VALIS* (New York: Bantam, 1981).

17 Aleister Crowley, with Mary Desti and Leila Waddell, *Magick: Liber ABA, Book IV, Parts I-IV*, 2nd revised ed., ed. Hymenaeus Beta (York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1997), 139.

18 Douglas Rushkoff's graphic novel *Aleister and Adolf* (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse, 2016) is an entertaining speculation on the connections between magical sigilization and postmodern branding, an idea suggested in Crowley's own writings and in latter-day interpretations by such thinkers as Ramsey Dukes and Hakim Bey.

19 Lionel Snell, *My Years of Magical Thinking* (The Mouse That Spins, 2017).

20 Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford, 2013).

21 I owe these terms to Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

22 The characterization of jazz as a "very structured thing" is Wynton Marsalis's; it forms the title of a chapter in Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1994).

23 Brian Eno, "The Studio as Compositional Tool," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, eds. Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 127.

24 Brian Eno, "Ambient Music," in *A Year with Swollen Appendices* (Boston, MA: Faber and Faber, 1996), 293.

25 Analysts are trying to create new forms of notation that can handle timbre and location in headphone space, for example by using pictures of waveforms. See, for example, Nicholas Cook, "Methods for Analyzing Recordings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, and John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 221–245. A lot of these proposed techniques are unconvincing and seem (to me, at least) a last-ditch attempt to put off the evil day when analysts will have to drop the pretense that they are themselves entirely absent from their analyses. Using waveforms as notation reminds me of a joke in a Fry and Laurie sketch, where a man reports his name to the police as "Derek [drops a small brick on the desk]." Names make sounds, and dropping bricks also make sounds, but it is impractical for your name to be a sound of a dropping brick. ("How do you spell [drops brick], Mr. [drops brick]?" asks the puzzled officer.) Likewise, music can be notated and sounds can be registered as waveforms, but waveforms don't really work as notation, because you can't meaningfully reconstruct what they represent by looking at them, which in turn means that you can't perform any of the symbolic manipulations that conventional notation allows you to do. You can't say "this is a V-I cadence" or something; you can only say, "this is a [drops brick]."

26 William Youngren, "Balliett's Bailiwick," *Partisan Review* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1965): 93.
27 Mitchell Morris, *The Persistence of Sentiment: Display and Feeling in Popular Music of the 1970s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 128.
28 Lisa Ruddick characterizes this cultivated hardness as "academic cool," a "cast of mind that disdains interpersonal kindness, I-thou connection, and the line separating the self from the outer world and the engulfing collective," and for which only cultural theory is inviolably sacred. Lisa Ruddick, "When Nothing is Cool," in *The Future of Scholarly Writing: Critical Interventions*, ed. Angelika Bammer and Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 72.
29 Will Cheng, *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 53.
30 Cheng, *Just Vibrations*, 39, 17.

3
THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC

Giles Hooper

In the Beginning

If, on proposing a dissertation on "Music and Technology" to a music department in the United States, ethnomusicologist Mark Katz can recall being told that "the sociology department is over there," then I can recall, having myself just introduced a module on "Rock Music" in a music department in the United Kingdom, one of my colleagues insisting, in my presence, that "we must resist this so-called popular music" (this was as late as 2004).[1] One cannot and must not ignore the elitist and insular attitudes against which those wishing to engage with popular music have often felt compelled to define themselves.

And so—in a familiar story requiring only summary recapitulation—as long as the established musicological discipline generally ignored popular music, the study of popular music was mainly confined to the disciplines and departments of sociology, anthropology, communication studies, cultural studies and, later, media studies; and this would come to have a significant impact on the disciplinary identity of "popular music studies," one which still resonates today.[2] There are, of course, always exceptions, albeit the rarity or iconoclasm of their enterprise rather confirms their exception.[3] Notwithstanding the aforementioned, in the mid–late 1970s, academic engagement with popular music—or rather with its contexts of production, mediation and consumption—mainly came from within the disciplines of sociology and post-Marxist cultural studies, and often focussed on industry, identity, and "subcultures."[4] Engagement with material practices (and texts) tended to derive from, or was informed by, ethno-musicology, which however tended to focus on non-Western musics and/or blues and folk, rather than on the urban/commercial/industrial popular musics of Europe and North America.[5] Although reductive, one might propose a tripartite model in which particular disciplinary or methodological approaches were initially married, in the main, to particular repertoires. The institutionalised study of music (i.e. "musicology" broadly conceived) mainly focussed on the texts of the Western art and concert repertoires. Sociological, industrial, and cultural study mainly focussed on the contexts of Western popular repertoires (especially rock). Ethnomusicological study mainly focussed on the texts and contexts of non-Western repertoires (or selected Western folk repertoires).