

Review Articles

Difference in Contact: Early Music, Colonialism and the Archive

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AND

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Acoustemologies in Contact: Sounding Subjects and Modes of Listening in Early Modernity, edited by Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne G. Cusick. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021. x + 338 pp. ISBN 9781800640368 (hard cover); 9781800640351 (paperback); 9781800640375 (PDF); 9781800640382 (epub); 9781800640399 (mobi); 9781800640405 (XML).

Anna Maria Busse Berger, *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany, 1891–1961: Scholars, Singers, Missionaries*. Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2020. xii + 352 pp. ISBN 9780226740348 (cloth); 9780226740348 (ebook).

Towards the middle of 2021, the world felt like a shattered place. The fatigue of a little more than a year of social distancing was perhaps at its most acute, and resuming a more immediate form of academic exchange seemed all but impossible. It was during this time that we were approached by this journal's then newly appointed reviews editor, Amanda Hsieh, to co-author a review article. It was an intriguing request for us both: review articles in the humanities are seldom co-authored and even more seldom by two authors with diverging backgrounds and research interests. In our work, one of us (George) focuses on medievalism and queer theory in contemporary opera, while the other (William) concentrates on issues of modernism in post-apartheid South Africa. The former is currently at the University of Oxford, the latter at Rhodes University in the rural Eastern Cape province of South Africa. We had not written together before and neither of us had ever imagined working together. What were we to make of this request, which would require the reconciliation of so many differences at a time when establishing the social closeness of thinking together seemed unfathomable?

We quickly agreed that this article could not take a conventional form. Indeed, there was an opportunity, if not a necessity, to structure the text around differences: both our own and those that underpin the books at the centre of this review. After several conversations, we decided that the best way to engage with these differences would be through an epistolary exchange. We did not have an explicit strategy or parameters for the exchange other than that we would conduct it over email and that William would write the first letter.

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In retrospect, the epistolary form enabled two important aspects of this review article. First, it allowed us to sustain what Rachel Bower calls the ‘I-you grammar’ of letters, which foregrounds ‘connection and distance’.¹ Establishing this grammar was perhaps fundamental to containing at sentence-level the disciplinary and geopolitical differences both of our own authorial positions and of the books under review, while simultaneously asserting that these differences must be brought into contact – that they must be connected – for the critical project to succeed. Secondly, the epistolary form establishes and maintains an acute temporality. As Samuel Richardson, one of the earliest exponents of the form in anglophone fiction, asserted in an often-cited letter of 1754, the epistolary is a ‘way of writing, to the moment’.² Letters become a trace of their time: indeed, our own written exchange, which took place between January and March 2022, was spurred by radical upheavals at both disciplinary and societal levels.

Yet while epistolary exchanges are marked by time, we have decided to omit the specific dates of our letters. There are a few reasons for doing so, but primarily we wish not to obfuscate the edited nature of the final text by suggesting that this article appears as was first written by us. Although the last letter was sent in March, a process of reworking followed. Colleagues, mentors and friends (Elizabeth Eva Leach, Laura Tunbridge and Stephanus Muller) gave us invaluable feedback, and Amanda’s keen editorial eye played a significant role in shaping this text. Presenting undated letters also allows the exchange to remain an open-ended, uncompleted conversation for us and, we hope, for you too.

Dear George,

How do we as musicologists write about the historical moments in which music becomes a junction, a contact point, between people of different cultures and geographies? This question strikes me as one that has renewed import for our discipline for two reasons: 1) questions of difference – racial, cultural, geopolitical, musical – have, since the reignition of decolonial discourse following the Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter movements, been recentred as some of the most pressing for musicology, if not for the humanities more broadly; and 2) the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted through global travel restrictions a kind of nationalist politics of contact which replicates modernity’s colonial world order. These two aspects of our existence – both here in South Africa and, I am sure, in the United Kingdom, where you are – demarcate issues of contact and difference, or, perhaps more accurately, the contact of difference.

How, if at all, do musicologists respond? In asking this question I am aware that there has been a wealth of scholarship on the global circulation (and thus contact) of music especially from the Global North to the Global South. One can, for instance, look to Björn Heile’s work on global modernism³ or Grant Olwage’s superb studies of hymnody in Southern Africa.⁴ We might also think about the extensive body of scholarship on the representation of the ‘Oriental’ or ‘African’ other in Western art music epitomized perhaps in the decades-long work of Ralph

¹ Rachel Bower, ‘Collaboration and Correspondence’, *The Cambridge Companion to J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Jarad Zimble (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 122–37 (p. 128).

² Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh, 14 February 1754, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 289.

³ Björn Heile, ‘Musical Modernism, Global: Comparative Observations’, *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music*, ed. Björn Heile and Charles Wilson (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), 175–98.

⁴ Grant Olwage, ‘Singing in the Victorian World: Tonic Sol-Fa and Discourses of Religion, Science and Empire in the Cape Colony’, *Muziki*, 7/2 (2010), 193–215.

P. Locke⁵ or in Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh's edited volume.⁶ We may also think through the politics of appropriation in popular music, to which Steven Feld⁷ and Louise Meintjes⁸ drew our attention a number of years ago. Taking a broad definition of the discipline, musicology in this sense has been very good at considering the contact of difference, but my sense is that there remain assumptions made in these studies which require critical re-examination.

I wonder, in reading across these texts about issues of historiography and our proximity to the archival trace, what methodological assumptions we make in the definition, selection and treatment of these traces, and how these choices determine the ways in which we write about the contact of difference. These questions occupy my mind as I read two recent publications that aim to address forms of contact mediated by music in and of early modernity, namely *Acoustemologies in Contact: Sounding Subjects and Modes of Listening in Early Modernity* edited by Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne G. Cusick, and *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany, 1891–1961: Scholars, Singers, Missionaries* by Anna Maria Busse Berger. The two texts, in my estimation, are strikingly different in theoretical and methodological approaches as well as in the geographies and historical periods that they consider. Yet I think that reading them alongside one another allows us to consider the limits within which our discipline is able to speak about the contact of difference. I can nevertheless only partially sustain such a discussion, since what interests me are questions of difference rather than historiography. I need to borrow your eyes and ears, which are more keenly attuned to issues of writing history. Will you read with me? All the best,
William

Dear William,

Thank you for your email, which stressed me out (in a productive way). I think your qualifying 'if at all' in relation to present-day realities of contact and difference is worth dwelling on. While there are musicologists who are also activists (among them union representatives, organizers in movements like Rhodes Must Fall and members of mutual-aid networks), I think academia's institutional structures preclude it from effective, radical action – at least for now. Could musicology ever ground a deportation flight? Topple a statue? Close a detention centre? I don't know. For now, I think direct action has to happen in our (scant) spare time. Critique, for all its limitations, is academia's only potentially radical domain. I have much to learn from your work on decoloniality.

⁵ For example, Ralph P. Locke, 'Constructing the Oriental "Other": Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3 (1991), 261–302; 'Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East', *19th-Century Music*, 22/1 (1998), 20–53; 'Beyond the Exotic: How "Eastern" is *Aida*?', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 17/2 (2005), 105–39; '*Aida* and Nine Readings of Empire', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 3 (2006), 45–72; *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶ *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

⁷ Steven Feld, 'Pygmy POP. A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 28 (1996), 1–35.

⁸ Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

I agree that we must constantly re-examine how race and difference function in musical discourses, because as musicologists we inevitably work at junctions between cultures. When we study music that predates the idea of race constructed by nineteenth-century European colonial thought, the complexity of difference is compounded by the fact that we are also studying empires, nations and societies which no longer exist. These issues of epistemology and positionality are compounded when White people, such as ourselves, read and write about histories of racial difference.

Musicology focusing on early music has had a corner of scholarship that looks beyond European Christendom since at least the early 1970s, when Frank Llewellyn Harrison published his *Anthology of Ethnomusicological Observation c.1550 to c.1800*⁹ and Amnon Shiloah began to publish critical and archival research on the histories of Jewish and Islamic music.¹⁰ More recently, Geoff Baker's work on colonial Latin America,¹¹ Olivia Bloechl's and Glenda Goodman's research on indigenous North Americans' musical encounters with Christian missionaries,¹² Don Harrán's work on Jewish musicians in early modern Italy and beyond,¹³ and Bernard Camier's and Julia Prest's work on eighteenth-century francophone colonies¹⁴ (to name only a few) have decentred White, Christian European interests and raised vital questions about what historical musical otherness can teach us. Arguably one of the fastest-growing foci of medieval musicology is crusade song, which, as recent publications by Rachel May Golden, Marisa Galvez and Linda M. Paterson attest, can provide us with some critical access to the subjectivity of European Christians invading the Levant.¹⁵ Several of the writers I've listed here feature in *Acoustemologies in Contact*, and I'm indebted to the contributors to the Inclusive Early Music reading list for having already introduced me to much of their work.¹⁶

⁹ Frank Harrison, *Time, Place and Music: An Anthology of Ethnomusicological Observation c.1550 to c.1800* (Amsterdam: Frits Knuf, 1973).

¹⁰ Amnon Shiloah, 'The Symbolism of Music in the Kabbalistic Tradition', *World of Music*, 20/3 (1978), 56–69; and *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c.900–1900): Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscripts in Libraries of Europe and the U.S.A.* (Munich: Henle, 1979).

¹¹ Geoffrey Baker, *Imposing Harmony: Music and Society in Colonial Cuzco* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

¹² Olivia Bloechl, 'Wendat Song and Carnival Noise in the Jesuit *Relations*', *Native Acts: Indian Performance, 1603–1832*, ed. Joshua David Bellin and Laura L. Mielke (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 117–44; Glenda Goodman, 'Conditioned Ears: How to Listen to Mohican-Moravian Hymnody', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 77/3 (2020), 380–6.

¹³ Don Harrán, *In Search of Harmony: Hebrew and Humanist Elements in Sixteenth-Century Musical Thought* (Neuhausen-Stuttgart: American Institute of Musicology/Hänsler-Verlag, 1988); 'Another Look at the Curious Fifteenth-Century Hebrew-Worded Motet "Cados Cados"', *Musical Quarterly*, 94 (2011), 481–517.

¹⁴ Bernard Camier, 'A "Free Artist of Color" in Late Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue: The Life and Times of Minette', *International Journal of the Study of Music and Music Performance*, 1 (2019), 1–26; Julia Prest, 'The Familiar Other: Blackface Performance in Creole Works from 1780s Saint-Domingue', *Colonialism and Slavery in Performance: Theatre and the Eighteenth-Century French Caribbean*, ed. Jeffrey M. Leichman and Karine Bénac-Giroux (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

¹⁵ Rachel May Golden, *Mapping Medieval Identities in Occitanian Crusade Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Marisa Galvez, *The Subject of Crusade: Lyric, Romance, and Materials, 1150 to 1500* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Linda M. Paterson, *Singing the Crusades: French and Occitan Lyric Responses to the Crusading Movements, 1137–1336* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018).

¹⁶ Brian Barone, Remi Chiu, Karen Cook, Andrew Dell'Antonio, Gillian Gower, Kirby Haugland, Erika Honisch, Robert L. Kendrick, Anne Levitsky, Lucia Marchi, Melanie Marshall, Luisa Nardini,

When most people think about colonialism, they imagine European invasions of the Global South between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ But when we exclude the premodern, we forget the violent colonial activities of the Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Persian, Arab, Norse, Venetian, Genovese, Amalfian, Mongol, Chinese, Frankish and Byzantine empires, some of whose cultural upheavals created the modern world as we know it, and whose techniques of conquest and subjugation are, in many ways, yet to end.¹⁸ Musicologists have wildly varying degrees of access to sources through which to imagine what these colonial landscapes might have sounded like.

All of this is to say that the contact of difference in early music is complicated. The methodological assumptions that you mention are hard to escape: even if we had a time machine, our postmodern sensibilities would layer a whole new dimension of otherness on to the encounter, generating all kinds of meanings. This supreme distance from what you term ‘the archival trace’ is why studies in medievalism are so often so presentist,¹⁹ confronting that which is closer to home: things like right-wing crusading rhetoric,²⁰ liberal race-blind casting policies in Arthurian BBC dramas²¹ and neo-Nazi aesthetics.²²

How can we listen to subjects from centuries ago without White voices being the loudest? I recently heard Joseph Osei-Bonsu give a paper about how West African griots resist colonialism’s historical erasures through story and song, and how such resistance can provide archives upon which Afrofuturism can draw.²³ I wonder if we might start by comparing how *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany* and *Acoustemologies in Contact* approach the question of what an archive can be?

Best wishes,
George

Dear George,

Your proposition of turning to the conceptualization of the archive in these two texts is a productive one. We are presented here with two very different interpretations of a very similar archive. To explain what I mean, I want to turn first to Paul Ricœur’s idea of the trace (I alluded to this concept in my first letter and perhaps should have clarified what I meant by it). Traces are the impressions (or inscriptions) left by things in the past which act as the vessels that, broadly

Alina Tylinski, Travis D. Whaley, Emily Wilbourne, Giovanni Zanovello, ‘The Bibliography’, *Inclusive Early Music*, <<https://inclusiveearlymusic.org/bibliography>> (accessed 4 February 2022).

¹⁷ Stephen Howe. *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15–18.

¹⁸ See Rhys Jones and Richard Phillips, ‘Unsettling Geographical Horizons: Exploring Premodern and Non-European Imperialism’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95/1 (2005), 141–61.

¹⁹ See especially Richard Utz, *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (Leeds: Past Imperfect, 2017).

²⁰ Bruce W. Holsinger, *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror* (Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007).

²¹ Philippa Semper, “‘Camelot must come before all else’: Fantasy and Family in the BBC *Merlin*”, *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Gail Ashton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 115–23.

²² William J. Diebold, ‘The Nazi Middle Ages’, *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past*, ed. Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O’Donnell, Nicholas L. Paul and Nina Rowe (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 104–15.

²³ Joseph Osei-Bonsu, ‘The Griot in *Sunjata*: A Paradigmatic Herald of an Afrofuturistic Messiah’, unpublished conference paper, Pearl Kibre Medieval Study 16th Annual Conference, 7 May 2021. I am grateful to the author for generously sharing a transcript of his paper with me.

speaking, transport the past into the present. They can be organized into three types: the material or physical trace, the affective trace and the cortical trace.²⁴ Cortical traces refer to the neurological impressions in the brain, and largely deal with the mechanisms of recall. Material traces take the form of external markings of the past, the concrete inscriptions through which history is accessed. These are the traces that, in the traditional sense, make up the archive and are grappled with by historians. Finally, the most problematic for Ricoeur: affective traces, or affection-impressions as he sometimes refers to them, emerge as the lingering residue of striking or marking events. They are not external markings in the sense that their materiality can be indexed; rather, they are the impressions created by experiences.²⁵

I want to set aside the cortical trace and focus on the affective and the physical. I think that both Busse Berger and the contributors to *Acoustemologies in Contact* remain very much concerned with the physical trace as the thing that predominantly comprises the archive. Yet Wilbourne and Cusick eloquently show how their collection attempts to use the physical trace to detect the remnants of the affective trace. They write in their introduction to the volume that contributors 'listen for the impact that sounds make on individual bodies, and for the extent to which such responses were naturalized by cultural formations that gave the relationship between sounds and their meanings a seemingly monolithic veneer of truth'.²⁶

This affective reading of the physical archive is perhaps most apparent (and most thoroughly theorized) in Olivia Bloechl's and Danielle Skeehean's contributions to the volume. Bloechl recentres the 'bodily experience of hearing and sounding'²⁷ in the French Jesuit *Relations* archive (1632–73), while Skeehean problematizes the 'cold empiricism' engendered by the archive of Atlantic slavery which negates the affective sonic experience of the Middle Passage.²⁸ Busse Berger, in considering texts found in, among others, the Moravian Church archive in Herrnhut and the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, takes a different approach to the physical trace. The physical trace here does not directly serve to ascertain the affective nature of musical exchange in East Africa, but serves in the more conventional sense as the foundational unit in the history of the contact of difference in this area.

While remarkably different in their approaches, there remains in both texts for me a hierarchy that invariably assigns the physical trace the power of scholarly legitimation, rendering the affective trace a contingent (though at times powerful) methodological device. This is a hallmark of Western historiography and I do not fault the authors for taking this approach (and I hasten to add that the contributors to *Acoustemologies in Contact* do problematize this hierarchy). Yet I cannot help but wonder whether the musical archive that might productively provide access to thinking about the contact of difference would require an inversion of that hierarchy such that the affective trace provides scholarly legitimation, on which the physical trace becomes contingent.

I sense that such an inversion comes close to the type of archive described by Achille Mbembe in *Critique of Black Reason*. Writing about the development of what he calls 'Black

²⁴ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 427.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Emily Wilbourne and Suzanne G. Cusick, 'Introduction', *Acoustemologies in Contact*, ed. Wilbourne and Cusick, 1–11 (p. 3).

²⁷ Olivia Bloechl, 'Listening as an Innu-French Contact Zone in the Jesuit *Relations*', *ibid.*, 13–35 (p. 35).

²⁸ Danielle Skeehean, 'Black Atlantic Acoustemologies and the Maritime Archive', *ibid.*, 107–33 (p. 109).

Reason', Mbembe argues that there emerges a narrative in which the 'Black Man affirms of himself that he is that which cannot be captured or controlled; the one who is not where they say he is, and even less where they are looking for him. Rather, he exists where he is not thought.'²⁹ The narrative, Mbembe continues, sought to create an archive in the wake of a history in which the experiences of 'Blacks did not necessarily leave traces, and where they were produced, they were not always preserved'.³⁰ Asking then how an archive might be constituted in the absence of the physical trace, Mbembe argues that, 'It became clear that the history of Blacks could be written only from fragments brought together to give an account of an experience that itself was fragmented, that of a pointillist people struggling to define itself not as a disparate composite but as a community whose blood stains the entire surface of modernity.'³¹

The thought of what it would mean to engage this type of archive, however, stresses me out (in a productive way, as you say), because it seems that in doing so we would be forced to leave the disciplinary safety of musicology with its focus on what Mbembe in his provocative position paper entitled 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive' shows is a Western archive which disregards other epistemic traditions.³² To mitigate this stress (and thereby defer the question of leaving musicology behind), I wonder whether we might consider the people who populate the archives examined in the pages of the books we are reviewing. Whose stories are we reading?

All the best,
William

Dear William,

The trace reminds me of a palimpsest, a manuscript which has had its inscriptions scraped away to make way for a next text. Traces of the old inscription remain. People are not books, I appreciate, but J. Martin Daughtry's 'Acoustic Palimpsests and the Politics of Listening' uses this metaphor vividly to discuss material and affective traces in sonic cultures.³³

It can sometimes feel as if the physical trace is all that's left of premodern history; traces in every sense of the word, considering how many manuscripts have been damaged or lost. These objects, many of them incredibly rich in content and meaning, are, as you say, our primary way of accessing history (albeit always mediated by how we read them, the act of which itself is messily affective). I stipulate 'primary' because I wonder if we can parse the affective and the physical in the other direction: can books, especially manuscripts, be harbingers of the affective trace? Can people be the physical trace? Sometimes we can access the physical via the affective, and that doesn't necessarily result in a disruption of the balance of power. Take an example that's closer to home (at least for me): for how long, without interruption, has the 'Veni creator

²⁹ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 28–9.

³² Achille Mbembe, 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', paper given at Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (Wiser), University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2015, <<https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>> (accessed 2 February 2022).

³³ J. Martin Daughtry, 'Acoustic Palimpsests and the Politics of Listening', *Music and Politics*, 7/1 (2013), <<https://doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0007.101>>.

spiritus' been sung to the same Gregorian melody in catholic worship?³⁴ It depends on what you mean by interruption, but several centuries of embodied, human practice have meant that that particular chant has never needed to be dug out of an archive or rediscovered. Of course, as a direct consequence of missionization, catholic worship is very culturally pervasive (both Roman and reformed, although this picture becomes complicated when we take into account post-Reformation Roman Catholic oppression in countries like Ireland). Changing our archival method doesn't necessarily disrupt balances of power, but sometimes it can.

If it is possible to reach the physical trace via the affective, Busse Berger's personal connection to her subject matter provides her with an opportunity to, as you put it, 'transport the past into the present'. Amid her meticulous and fascinating accounts of the correspondences, articles and recordings made by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century missionaries, I am struck by her references to visiting the regions that she writes about (and to living in Tanzania as a child).³⁵ She has personal correspondences with former missionary Martin Brose; German Benedictine nun and editor of Swahili antiphonals Sister Barbara Ruckert; and Athanasius Mphuru, the son of a Lutheran pastor in Tanzania.³⁶ I'm curious to know more about how these churches sound now: are they still mission outposts, or are they more assimilated? What memories, passed down from parents and grandparents, might their congregations hold of missionization? Such an oral history would be a massive undertaking, but a worthwhile one. The archive of local memory could be an important locus of the affective trace you describe.

I think the most interesting member of what Busse Berger terms her 'cast of characters' is the Sierra Leonean musicologist and composer Nicholas G. J. Ballanta, 'the only comparative musicologist of his generation' to resist comparison between medieval European modes and African tuning systems.³⁷ There are many ways of answering your question of whose stories we're reading here. In the case of Ballanta, many of Busse Berger's sources are correspondences by White men. She convincingly reads between the lines of varying degrees of hostility and patronization (both in the financial and derogatory sense of the word) to open a window onto the life of a Black musicologist in the early twentieth century. Unsurprisingly, the story is, as Busse Berger puts it, a 'depressing' one.³⁸ Beyond Ballanta's story, maybe this depression is an affective trace that we can run with.

Excavating affective traces seems to demand a certain amount of imagination on the part of the historian. But writing about music history always does, and we should admit that: it is, at least to an extent, a literary act.³⁹ To be clear, I am not advocating for post-truthism. On the contrary, acknowledging the role of authorship in historical practice should generate more space for productive ambiguity; being clear-eyed about empiricism's limitations and open to the inescapable mysteriousness of subjectivities past and present means potentially exposing ourselves to that which we cannot measure. This imaginative historical process is hyper-mediated in writing like

³⁴ Melody reproduced in Richard Taruskin, 'Hymns', *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols., i: *Music from the Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century*, <<https://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume1/actrade-9780195384819-div1-002005.xml>> (accessed 20 May 2022). The adjective 'catholic' spelt with a lower-case 'c' encompasses both Roman Catholic and reformed traditions (such as Anglicanism and Lutheranism).

³⁵ Busse Berger, *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany*, 1–2, 144, 230, 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 196, 167.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁹ For a discussion of this specific to medieval history, see Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. Morrow, 1991).

Jane Tylus's chapter in *Acoustemologies in Contact*, where she imagines how Tasso and Monteverdi in turn imagine how a medieval Muslim woman might have reacted to the soundscapes of the crusades in their madrigal *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624).⁴⁰ The clanking of Tancredi's armour, described but not literally heard, is a sonic point of contact and a potent musico-dramatic linchpin.⁴¹

Whereas Tylus's reading of a Monteverdian crusade narrative imagines the voice of the oppressed in seventeenth-century Italian culture, Cusick's description of Francesca Caccini's Medici court entertainment *La stiava* (1607) interrogates the position of the oppressor.⁴² *La stiava* depicts the Mediterranean slave trade, and Cusick writes of audiences' pre-existing 'notions', which composers can harness to 'activate' affective responses, in this case ethno-religious enmity.⁴³ I read these 'notions' as ultimately indistinguishable from ideology; Cusick argues that *La stiava* functioned as 'effective propaganda supporting the Medici's fantasy of leading a new crusade for Jerusalem' within a long-lasting strain of anti-Muslim opera.⁴⁴ Given that none of Caccini's music for *La stiava* survives, Cusick's chapter is a pertinent example of how music historians can imaginatively listen for the affective trace between the lines of genre, rhetoric, voice-type assignments and reception history.

At the end of your previous email, you suggested that we step outside the disciplinary safety of musicology. Where else do you think we should look? Geographically, we seem to be traversing rather an uneven north–south axis. We have to ensure that the contact points we're describing never come across as being too frictionless or tidy, or we run the risk of reinforcing that axis.

Best wishes,

George

Dear George,

I think the comparison that you make between the palimpsest and the trace is very important, and I'm glad that you have introduced Martin Daughtry's work into this conversation. The palimpsest highlights for me a type of anxiety that always accompanies the trace: that of forgetting. In the act of inscription and erasure of the trace (on the page, in this case), something is necessarily lost. Yet Ricœur, via Heidegger, would remind us that the process of erasure is in one way a condition of inscription or remembering.⁴⁵ And in another, it can be pathological or motivated by ideologies of oppression. This latter possibility becomes increasingly important in a process whereby, through the writing of history, the distinction between material and affective traces becomes blurred. It is often in such an instance – when reinscription is accompanied by a pathological form of forgetting (whether on the part of the state or the individual) – that, as you say, the changing of the archival method does not disrupt balances of power.

Let me leave Ricœur to attend to your question of disciplinarity, and I want to suggest that we look momentarily beyond music to debates among historians and archaeologists here in

⁴⁰ Jane Tylus, "Non basta il suono, e la voce": Listening for Tasso's Clorinda', *Acoustemologies in Contact*, ed. Wilbourne and Cusick, 265–88.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 271–4, 283.

⁴² Suzanne G. Cusick, "La stiava dolente in suono di canto": War, Slavery, and Difference in a Medici Court Entertainment', *Acoustemologies in Contact*, ed. Wilbourne and Cusick, 201–37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 221, 225.

⁴⁵ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 442.

South Africa. In an attempt to address the recurring (since the 1950s, at least) question of writing precolonial South African history, a group of historians and archaeologists initiated in 2007 the Five Hundred Year Project, which aimed not only to capture Southern African history since 1500, but to rethink the methodological and disciplinary concerns of doing so.⁴⁶ The project, as Peter Delius and Shula Marks have argued, revisits a number of important questions around the types of sources used in writing this history.⁴⁷ Most interesting perhaps, for our purposes, is the way in which oral testimony and traditions have been treated in this project. While historians of the precolonial era have grown increasingly sceptical about oral sources, Delius and Marks show how oral *traditions* stabilize over time and come to be accepted within communities.⁴⁸ Jeff Peires's work on the career of Rharhabe (c.1715–c.1782) as the right-hand son of the amaXhosa king Phalo is particularly compelling in this regard.⁴⁹ Listening through various oral traditions, Peires pieces together a substantial narrative for a person who has virtually no presence in written texts.

Thinking about the Five Hundred Year Project, I am struck by potential shortcomings in our own discipline. Do we, in musicology, differentiate between oral sources and oral traditions? Do we take oral traditions as archival texts? I think this differentiation between source and tradition speaks strongly to your point about accessing the Middle Ages by listening to twenty-first-century people: there is something about history that is captured here in a sounding tradition, but that is accessed in the living processes of iteration and reception. Returning to *The Search for Medieval Music*, I wonder how Busse Berger's churches sound today, because I sense that something of the historical processes she so clearly lays out for us can be amplified in the sounding of contemporary sonic (as perhaps a subset of oral) traditions.

Oral traditions, and perhaps here specifically those oral traditions outside the Global North, have often fallen within the remit of ethnomusicology rather than that of musicology. As Busse Berger shows us, it is earlier forms of ethnomusicology that proffer the fallacious idea that oral traditions give us access to a static history of the other, which until the point of colonial contact remained unchanged.⁵⁰ Such thinking is rare in contemporary ethnomusicology, but I think that the disciplinary baggage of this way of thinking has made it harder to deal with the moments in which more distant histories spill over into the present.

That said, I believe that we are approaching a disciplinary moment when the boundaries between musicology and ethnomusicology might be usefully transgressed. It seems to me that the historical contact of difference, mediated through both material and oral traces, might require us to think beyond the bounded methodological frameworks of historical analysis and living ethnography. As a possible model, I am drawn to South African scholar Cara Stacey's work on the Abu al-Izz Isma'il bin al-Razzaz al-Jazari's musical automata described in al-Jazari's *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices* (c.1206). By rebuilding al-Jazari's

⁴⁶ Contributions to this project were published in *Rethinking South Africa's Past: Essays on History and Archaeology*, ed. Peter Delius and Shula Marks, special issue, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38/2 (2012).

⁴⁷ Peter Delius and Shula Marks, 'Rethinking South Africa's Past: Essays on History and Archaeology', *ibid.*, 247–55 (p. 251).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁹ Jeff Peires, "'He Wears Short Clothes!'" Rethinking Rharhabe (c.1715–c.1782)', *Rethinking South Africa's Past*, 333–54 (p. 334).

⁵⁰ See Busse Berger, *The Search for Medieval Music*, 11–25.

perpetual water flute, Stacey draws out both something of the distant sonic world and the imaginative and creative necessities of engaging with history in a decolonial way.⁵¹ Indeed, in Stacey's electroacoustic composition *Untoward* (2019), which she composed as part of her research on al-Jazari's flute, I hear a kind of aesthetic historiography that animates sonic sources from a long-silent world.

Maybe, then, we can think about the aesthetic mediation of the contact of difference. You say that writing history is to an extent literary. Indeed: to what extent do we read or see or hear the methodological implications of such slippage in our field? Do we fear slipping from fact into fiction? Is this even a useful dichotomy to hang on to? In asking these questions, I am reminded of Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez's discussion of decolonial aestheSis as a methodological counter against the aesthetic regime of colonialism.⁵² Do we perhaps require greater attunement to this difference?

All the best,
William

Dear William,

You're right to draw out the difference between oral histories and oral traditions. I've recently been teaching a course on the troubadours and trouvères, and the major *chansonnier* manuscript sources post-date most of them by over a century. Whatever happened between the singing of these songs and their being written down will always already have been forgotten and fundamentally reinscribed. Busse Berger's previous book *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* is an influential study of how oral and written cultures coexist, which (following social anthropologist Jack Goody and medieval literature scholar Mary Carruthers) pushes back against misconceptions about oral cultures' disappearance with the advent of writing.⁵³ Busse Berger further suggests that oral traditions were highly generative in medieval Europe, in the sense that memory (rather than writing) was the canvas for composing and improvising complex polyphony (although some of her arguments have proved controversial).⁵⁴ I'm not sure if this medieval example counts as stabilization per se, at least not in the same sense as the oral traditions within precolonial societies you refer to. But it forms a very interesting counterpoint to the intense cultural destabilization at work in the colonial encounters that Busse Berger writes about in *The Search for Medieval Music*.

Such destabilization might be a fruitful parallel between *The Search for Medieval Music* and *Acoustemologies in Contact*. Each of the historical subjects in these books – perhaps more often than not the White people – is in a state of serious musical instability. Among the most striking examples in *Acoustemologies* is Goodman's fascinating account of colonists being captured and

⁵¹ Cara Stacey, 'Al-Jazari's Perpetual Flutes: Reflections on the Recreation of an Early, Water-Based Musical Instrument', unpublished conference paper, 14th Annual Conference of the South African Society for Research in Music, Stellenbosch University, 2019.

⁵² Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez, 'Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings', *Social Text Online* (2013), <https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aestheSis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings> (accessed 2 March 2022).

⁵³ Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ See Jane Flynn and William Flynn, 'Reviews: "Medieval Music and the Art of Memory"', by Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Early Music History*, 28 (2009), 249–62.

forced to sing by Indigenous American nations, not as a mode of punishment but as compulsory assimilation.⁵⁵ Goodman writes that these practices have been documented by ‘oral histories [...] early ethnographic writings [...] anthropologists who collaborated with Haudenosaunee individuals to rework those sources [...] and] archeological studies’.⁵⁶ Pushing past the sensationalist potential of the captivity narrative, she uses first-European accounts to articulate ‘instances in which colonists unwillingly confront their vulnerability as intruders’.⁵⁷ This insecurity exerts itself on Busse Berger’s missionaries, too. Their correspondences are full of anxieties about the ‘hybridizing’ of early and African musics: the use of local melodies versus imported Lutheran chorales; the translation of hymns into tonal languages in which melody can change the meaning of words; hand-wringing about supposedly ‘unmusical’ local singers with ears unattuned to Western temperament; and the extent to which they are ‘preserving’ the traditions of the Indigenous people they are converting (or indeed allowing ‘pagan’ customs to continue). In one episode, Busse Berger relates how Moravian missionary Franz Ferdinand Rietzsch’s attempts to combine Nyakyusa harmonic language with the Lutheran chorale ended in a ‘choir rebellion’, with singers not only feeling ‘deprived’ of ‘white music and white notation’, but associating Nyakyusa music with un-Christian dance practices.⁵⁸

I can’t escape the feeling that Busse Berger sometimes treats her missionizing subjects too generously. For example, she writes of how Moravian missionary Traugott Bachmann’s ‘respect for local customs applied to all areas of life’ (except faith, clearly) and describes him as a ‘deeply religious man of great modesty’.⁵⁹ Similarly, she writes that the Leipzig Mission’s Bruno Gutmann was ‘widely admired by Africans’.⁶⁰ As White scholars writing about race and colonialism, perhaps we can see more than a little of the insecurity of Busse Berger’s missionaries in our own work: like the captive colonizers in Goodman’s chapter, do we ‘confront [our] vulnerability as intruders’ willingly or unwillingly?

You ask if we should fear slipping from fact into fiction. Yes, we should, and we should channel that fear into a desire to listen to the past in new and discomfiting ways. As Mbembe writes, ‘the Western archive is singularly complex. It contains within itself the resources of its own refutation’; this archive is made of the colonial encounters and diasporas that it generated, which can in turn ‘make foundational claims on it’ or indeed tear it apart.⁶¹ Aesthetic mediation is one way of reclaiming the archive, which Osei-Bonsu explores in his research on griots that I referred to in passing in a previous email.⁶² Specifically, he describes how griots have preserved their history by retelling the thirteenth-century Mande epic poem *Sunjata*. Citing James Olney’s suggestion that *Sunjata* ‘begins, and thus, in effect [...] ends, not with the performer of deeds but with their perpetuator, not with the past but with the present, not with the hero but with the griot’, Osei-Bonsu writes of the need for an ‘afrofuturistic griot [...] at the helm of each momentous, Afro-centered revolution’.⁶³

⁵⁵ Glenda Goodman, “Hideous Acclamations”: Captive Colonists, Forced Singing, and the Incorporation Imperatives of Mohawk Listeners’, *Acoustemologies in Contact*, ed. Wilbourne and Cusick, 83–106.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁸ Busse Berger, *The Search for Medieval Music*, 158.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶¹ Mbembe, ‘Decolonizing Knowledge’.

⁶² Osei-Bonsu, ‘The Griot in *Sunjata*’.

⁶³ James Olney, ‘Of Griots and Heroes’, *Studies in Black Literature*, 6 (1975), 14–17 (p. 17), cited in Osei-Bonsu, ‘The Griot in *Sunjata*’.

Of course, aesthetic mediation can be a tool for oppression too. I came across a music video of a Mormon college male-voice choir while looking up one of the compositions that Busse Berger mentions. I find it a highly disturbing example of modern musical mission;⁶⁴ Stacey's work sounds much more reflective, though.

All best,
George

Dear George,

The importance of highlighting destabilization as a parallel between these two texts should not be understated. I think that in considering the contact of musical difference, we are faced with the danger of trying to find some form of stable ground, often conceived of as shared terrain or a reflection of the self in the image of the other. While Busse Berger certainly draws out the destabilization of her subjects in these moments of contact, as you say, I am struck by a contrasting stabilization in the institutionalization of comparative musicology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps this stabilization is a result of the distance between the site of encounter (German East Africa, in Busse Berger's case) and the locus of knowledge, which remains mediated by a centre in Europe. Perhaps in the space between these sites there is a certain epistemic time created in which the ethnographer's unsettling encounter with the other is ameliorated, repressed, or even forgotten. I wonder to what extent the processes of creating distance and time are still present in scholarship today. Yes, we write more readily about our intrusive positions as White scholars (see, for instance, Marie Jorritsma's powerful contribution to a recent issue of *Ethnomusicology Forum*),⁶⁵ yet to what extent does the scholarly machine, which we perpetuate at some level with this exchange, simply absorb the excess of our own destabilization? Can we ever truly confront our 'vulnerability as intruders' in the broader system of scholarship with which we are so familiar?

In asking these questions, I think it is useful to turn to Dylan Robinson's *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*.⁶⁶ In contrast to many of the texts we have spoken about, Robinson undoes the normalization (in Western scholarship, at least) of the White subject's perspective of difference and focuses instead on Indigenous encounters with Western music in Canada. What I find particularly compelling in the context of our discussion is his development of the term 'inclusionary music'.⁶⁷ As a critique of the more general (but ideologically deceptive) term of 'intercultural music', inclusionary music 'signal[s] how Indigenous performers and artists have been structurally accommodated in ways that "fit" them into classical composition and performance systems'.⁶⁸ The idea of making Indigenous music fit into or around a Western musical approach underscores for Robinson 'an interest in – and often a fixation upon – Indigenous content, but not Indigenous structure'.⁶⁹ It is in this fixation on

⁶⁴ 'Baba Yetu (By Christopher Tin) Lord's Prayer in Swahili – Alex Boyé, BYU Men's Chorus/Philharmonic', YouTube video, uploaded by Alex Boyé, 23 March 2016, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsINANZ6Riw>> (accessed 18 February 2022).

⁶⁵ Marie Jorritsma, 'Teaching Ethnomusicology in Times of Trouble: A Perspective from Johannesburg, South Africa', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 30/1 (2021), 105–28.

⁶⁶ Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, Indigenous Americas (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

content and the resultant indifference to structure where there emerges a form of ‘epistemological violence through art music’s audiophilic privileging of and adherence to its own values of performance and virtuosity’.⁷⁰ Christopher Tin’s setting of ‘Baba Yetu’, which you referred to in your last letter, is perhaps an excellent example of Robinson’s inclusionary music. It takes the Swahili translation of the Lord’s Prayer and a few clichéd ‘African’ references as the content upon which it fixates. Yet it never attends to the religious or choral structures of performance in which the original prayer might have been presented in colonial East Africa.

Robinson’s notion of ‘inclusionary music’, furthermore, strikes me as a powerful analogue for the broader state of scholarship we have discussed so far. I would perhaps even go as far as to suggest that our discussion of the different archival traces and the imbalances of power that they reproduce may be indicative of a kind of ‘inclusionary musicology’, which does little to articulate the structure of the Indigenous knowledges and histories that we (music scholars) examine. Perhaps in attempting to confront our vulnerabilities as intruders within certain epistemic spaces, we might also have to confront the very structure in which these encounters occur. We can think more carefully about the types of structures of thought and subjectivity we ignore when fixating only on the content of the colonial other’s archive.

George, I sadly must bring our correspondence to an end. Our teaching term has started, and I am confronted again with the overwhelming task of offering a course on the history of Western art music in a post-Fallist context. I find myself slipping into a register of brutal honesty in my classes: I am unsure why we still need this history, I tell my students, or how to present it in a way that chimes in any sense with their lived experiences. Johann Buis asked as long ago as 1991 whether Bach should survive in the new South Africa.⁷¹ I don’t believe that his question adequately addressed the issue, which for me has to do with a broader epistemic regime. The question should be whether how we encounter Bach – as a subject of history, and as a subject of scholarship – should survive in the decolonial world.

Thank you for reading with me,

William

Dear William,

Bizarrely enough, this suppressing desire for ‘stable ground’ between the space of encounter and the locus of knowledge that you describe resonates with the periodization of the Middle Ages. The so-called ‘dark ages’ seem most approachable when either flattened into superstition and ignorance, or elevated to fantasy and romance (or both).⁷² It is this base othering that, according to Busse Berger, prompted Ballanta to refute the idea that anything like medieval European music could be found in twentieth-century Africa. As Busse Berger details in Part II of *The Search for Medieval Music*, many of Ballanta’s contemporaries were members of the *Singbewegung* (‘singing movement’) and *Jugendbewegung* (‘youth movement’), societies for participatory hiking and folk singing which idealized pre-industrialism and sometimes

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Hungry Listening*, 15.

⁷¹ Johann Buis, ‘Should Bach Survive in a New South Africa?: Redefining a Pluralistic Music Culture in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, in *Papers Presented at the Tenth Symposium on Ethnomusicology* (Grahamstown: International Library of African Music, 1991).

⁷² For case studies illustrating this phenomenon, see Andrew Albin, Mary Carpenter Erler, Thomas O’Donnell, Nicholas Paul and Nina Rowe, *Whose Middle Ages? Teachable Moments for an Ill-Used Past* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

imagined parallel exoticized African and medieval utopias. The endurance of this primitivist fallacy never fails to amaze me. Recent iterations I've seen in the wild include:

1. Mark Kermode's 2020 introduction to *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey*, a 1988 film about medieval peasants who get stuck in late twentieth-century New Zealand. Kermode uncritically relays director Vincent Ward's claim that the film was partly inspired by a newspaper article about two Papua New Guinean people visiting an Australian city for the first time and 'raising questions of what our ancestors would make of the world we've created';⁷³ and
2. Derek Brewer's 1997 introduction to the Gawain poet, where he suggests that 'medievalists do well to travel in the Third World where they can study societies analogous to European medieval society at first hand'.⁷⁴

I feel as though we've barely scratched the surface of the contact of difference in our correspondence, not to mention the fact that we've run out of time to discuss the fascinating chapters by Nina Treadwell, Emily Wilbourne, Patricia Akhimie and Ileri E. Chávez Bárcenas in *Acoustemologies in Contact*. As your university's term begins, mine is just winding down. It's also Lent now, so the church is in a state of penitence. Doctrinally, the church is Christ's body, of which each Christian is a part (a literal 'member').⁷⁵ Being part of this body can be a mortifying experience because one member's sins are, in a way, the sins of the entire body. The two are inseparable. The church is yet to reckon fully with its colonial sins, which reach at least as far back as what Geraldine Heng terms the 'soft power' of fourteenth-century monks proselytizing about Latin Christendom in Maghrebi Africa, Mongol Eurasia, India, China and beyond.⁷⁶ But if the stabilizing scholarly machine you mention hungrily absorbs content from the colonial other's archives, the church has bodily absorbed entire colonial others, incorporating them into constituent parts of itself. Between precolonial history, decolonial critique, and – for thousands of members of post-missionized Indigenous communities and diasporas – devout Christian faith, the landscape will be anything but stable.

Thank *you* and all the best,

George

⁷³ Mark Kermode, 'Mark Kermode introduces *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* (1988)', BFI Player, <<https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-the-navigator-a-medieval-odyssey-1988-online>> (accessed 27 February 2022).

⁷⁴ Derek Brewer, 'Introduction', *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 1–22 (p. 3).

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12–27.

⁷⁶ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 31.