

Acoustic Multinaturalism, the Value of Nature, and the Nature of Music in Ecomusicology

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In recent years, questions regarding music, sound, and nature have intensified. This intensification is visible in various domains of musical practice, such as the increased audibility of composers involved in acoustic ecology as both practitioners within and theorizers of the field; the global presence of sound collectives employing audio recordings and music scholarship for the purpose of denouncing environmental problems; and the emergence of what are considered “new fields” of study, such as ecomusicology, biomusic, and zoomusicology. This coincides with a growing interest in listening and in sound as phenomena and the institutionalization of sound studies as a disciplinary field.¹ Finally, it coincides with a renewed

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1. Jonathan Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Michael Bull, ed., *Sound Studies* (London: Routledge, 2013).

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questioning of the relative merits of “cultural” versus “musical” analysis in the Anglo-American musicological tradition, reflecting the increasing difficulty of keeping apart the colonially inflected disciplinary divisions of music studies in terms of both musical object and method (musicology, ethnomusicology, music theory, etc.).²

The concatenation of questions about sound, music, and nature, the emergence of sound studies, and the renewed debate on the analytic paradigms of musical disciplines point to a shifting conceptual ground of the acoustic in the humanities. And the musical disciplines are not alone. As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro remarks, the present moment is one in which “the terrifying communication of the geopolitical and the geophysical, everything, contributes to the crumbling of the foundational distinction of the social sciences—that between the cosmological and anthropological orders, forever separated, that is, at least since the seventeenth century (recall the air pump and the Leviathan), by a double discontinuity of scale and essence: evolution of species and history of capitalism, thermodynamics and stock market, nuclear physics and parliamentary politics, climatology and sociology, in two words: nature and culture.”³ In the case of music, this “separation between the cosmological and anthropological orders” takes the form of rekindling the long historical debate in the West about sound and music as phenomena that lie between nature and culture,⁴ but one moved by an urgency that it did not have in earlier periods, now posed by “the intrusion of Gaia” into the affairs of humans.⁵ This is not so much a “crisis” of thinking as it is a radical transformation of the conditions for posing questions regarding what historically in the West have been considered the differential fields of nature and culture (*ATDC*, 49).

In what follows, I explore how ecomusicology has articulated the

2. Kofi V. Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *RA*. See also Olivia Bloechl, *Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

3. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Transformação na antropologia, transformação da antropologia,” *Sopro*, no. 58 (2011): 4–15, esp. 4.

4. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and *Music Theory and Natural Order from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Suzannah Clark and Alexander Rehding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

5. Isabelle Stengers, *Au temps des catastrophes: Résister à la barbarie qui vient* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 49. Hereafter, this work is cited as *ATDC*.

question of sound/music and nature, and the values that coalesce around the emergence of this discipline. I find it is significant that while the problem of the environment in many of the fields of the social sciences and the humanities has questioned the idea of nature and the implications of this for recasting the politics of critique within the disciplines themselves (as is the case with philosophy and anthropology, for example), ecomusicology, to the contrary, announces its emergence as a new encompassing musical field fueled by recourse to the notion of nature. Rather than assume the collapse of the distinction between “the cosmological and anthropological orders,” ecomusicology, until now, has tended to reaffirm such a distinction, even while it critiques the separation between “Man and Nature.”

I will argue that this peculiar affirmation largely rests on the values ascribed to sound/music and to different musicological disciplinary practices that are inherited from the genealogy of musical disciplines. In this essay, then, I explore values by closely analyzing the literature in ecomusicology and then go on to propose a contrast with Feldian acoustemology as a tradition that—through its links to sound studies, acoustic practices, and structuralism—suggests a different entry point into the problematics of sound/music, the anthropological, and the cosmological. This alternate entry point is central to articulating what I am here calling acoustic multinaturalism.

The Operational Implications of Naming the Field

In this essay, the question of value in the emergence of ecomusicology as a discipline is understood less as a problem of recognizing the relative merit of different approaches to ecomusicology by specific authors than of exploring the mode through which the discipline has framed the problematics that it seeks to articulate. According to Isabelle Stengers, if the act of “naming is operating and not defining—that is, appropriating—the name cannot be arbitrary” (*ATDC*, 50). So rather than defining ecomusicology, what I seek to do in the following sections is to explore how the emergence of the field operationalizes a series of problematics through the modality of naming. A “problematic space is characterized always by a polemic that emerges with the nomination of the problem itself” (*ATDC*, 50). So we return to the classic question: What’s in a name? What does ecomusicology seek to operationalize?

According to Aaron S. Allen, the term *ecomusicology* “gained cur-

rency in the 2000s in American and Scandinavian academic circles.”⁶ In his definition, ecomusicology, “or ecocritical musicology[,] is the study of music, nature and culture in all the complexities of those terms” (EC). For Denise Von Glahn, “ecomusicology explores relationships to the natural world and questions how those relationships imprint themselves on music and scholarship; who gets to articulate the relationships; and . . . how select composers understand the essential dynamic between humanity and the rest of nature.”⁷ Thus, what initially seems to position the discipline is a mode of thinking about nature framed by a specific body of literary critique.⁸

This framing is accompanied by a “holistic” impulse that seeks to bring the diverse musical disciplines, as well as the different approaches to questions of acoustics, music, and the environment, under the discipline’s purview. Allen conceives of ecomusicology as a mixture of literary ecocriticism studies with Charles Seeger’s “holistic sense of musicology,” that is, “including what today are historical musicology, ethnomusicology, and other related interdisciplinary fields” (EC). It is also meant to function as an “umbrella term that may bring together fields that do not usually interact [in order to] encompass a broadness [that] allows scholars considerable flexibility to combine diverse disciplines in ecocritical studies of music,” a crucial issue because “‘nature’ is one of the most complex words in the English language, and the study of it, as with the similarly contested words ‘music’ and ‘culture,’ can take many approaches” (EC). The term *ecomusicology* is also “applied to a diverse array of musical and artistic endeavors including soundscape studies, acoustic ecology and biomusic” (EC). In 2007, the American Musicological Society established the Ecocriticism Study Group (ESG), and in 2011, the Society for Ethnomusicology established the Ecomusicology Special Interest Group in response to increasing interest.

In its effort to encompass diverse approaches to the question of

6. *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Ecomusicology,” by Aaron S. Allen, accessed July 21, 2014, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as EC.

7. Denise Von Glahn, “American Women and the Nature of Identity,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 3 (2011): 399–403, esp. 403.

8. Within literary studies, ecocriticism is just one mode of framing the question of literature and the environment. The debate is increasingly engaged with the broader theoretical impulse that questions an ontology that affirms the separation of nature and culture. For a discussion of Anglo-American literary studies and the questions of nature, see Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

sound/music and the environment, and through its particular articulation of music, nature, and culture, ecomusicology has tended to reaffirm a multiculturalist ethos—that is to say, an ethos that accounts for all forms of diversity under a single epistemological umbrella, the concepts of “nature” and “culture.” Rather than unsettling the division between the cosmological and anthropological orders, that is, unsettling the very ontological grounds of “nature” and “culture,” it seeks to establish a musicological holism on a disciplinary foundation that take such terms for granted. What emerges is a mode of naming that sets the terms of the polemic a priori and, in doing so, erases different histories of framing the problematic of “nature” in music. But a brief look at different trajectories of thinking about sound/music, nature, and culture shows us that these have not necessarily been uncontested terms.

As Allen himself recognizes, “interest in ecomusicology has paralleled increasing environmental concern in North America since 1970, a period of greening in academia when environmental studies developed in the physical, natural and social sciences as well as in the humanities” (EC). The 1970s was the moment of formal emergence, for example, of the term *acoustic ecology*. In the initial editorial of *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology*, launched in the year 2000, composer Hildegard Westerkamp cautiously stated that “the term acoustic ecology first appeared in the mid-seventies, to our knowledge, when the World Soundscape Project (WSP) at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada published *The Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* and describes it, despite its earlier antecedents, as ‘a relatively new field of study . . . in the process of defining itself.’”⁹ This handbook “attempted to bring together ‘most of the major terms dealing with sound from the areas of phonetics, acoustics, psychoacoustics, psychology, electro-acoustics, communications and noise control, together with those from music which seemed appropriate for an environmental handbook, and several soundscape terms which we have invented and adapted.’”¹⁰ Acoustic ecology, then, was initially framed by

9. Hildegard Westerkamp, “Editorial,” *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 1, no. 1 (2000): 4. It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze the debates within acoustic ecology. One need only look at the different issues of the journal *Soundscape* to note the types of polemics and activities that the field has articulated. For some of the polemics and diversity of approaches that it has sought to encompass around the issues of sound experimentalism and the environment, see David Rothenberg and Marta Ulvaeus, eds., *The Book of Music and Nature* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

10. Westerkamp, citing R. Murray Schaefer’s preface to Barry Truax, *Handbook for*

an experimental history of sound composition that generated a repertoire of sonic terminology along with different modes of experimentation with sound. Through its forty-year history, such experimental work has generated intense debate not only about notions of sound and the implications of recording the sounds of “nature” but also, more recently, about an increasing set of polemics on the nature of acoustic representation and the question of the real.

The 1970s was also the decade when scholars such as Steven Feld and Anthony Seeger began a series of studies on indigeneity, music, and nature that called for a transformation of the anthropological and musicological grounds on which ethnomusicology had been constructed. These two scholars in particular began a crucial discussion that articulated the relation between myth (or the cosmological), sociocultural anthropology (or questions about human sociality and what today we call affect), and understandings of sound/music and their relation to questions of “nature.” This discussion began to question the *conceptual* ground of the terms discussed (music, animals, sounds, nature, culture, persons), thus initiating a movement away from questions of social anthropology (i.e., how musical sociality and performance is articulated) toward an inquiry into acoustic ontology that began to unsettle the very division between culture, nature, and sound/music.¹¹

Any attempt to encompass these tendencies under the single umbrella of musical diversity and an affirmation of nature leaves untouched the polemical questions surrounding the very ideas of sound and nature that Feld and Seeger placed on the agenda. Rather than holistically encompassing the *simultaneity* of these different genealogical trajectories, we need to explore what “organize[s] their common space of possibility.”¹²

Acoustic Ecology (Burnaby, BC: Aesthetic Research Center, 1978). In Westerkamp, “Editorial,” 4.

11. As I explore below, in the case of Steven Feld, this leads directly to the emergence of what he has termed “acoustemology.” In the case of Anthony Seeger, it is important to note his seminal and crucial participation, due to his research and early activities in Brazil as a teacher, in the early and today seminal Brazilian anthropological debate on “nature” and “culture.” Seeger’s first book is significantly titled *Nature and Culture in Central Brazil: The Suyá Indians of Mato Grosso* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). See also Anthony Seeger, Roberto da Matta, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “A Construção da pessoa nas sociedades indígenas brasileiras,” *Boletim do Museu Nacional*, no. 32 (1979): 2–19.

12. Patrice Maniglier, *Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France* (Paris: PUF, 2011), 7.

This common space of possibility is shaped by the fact that the 1970s is also the moment of “emergence of a varied constellation of environmental disciplines in the irruption of the ecological era”¹³ as well as a moment of transformation of the possibilities of portable sound technologies due to increased access to digital technology. That is, the ecological question began to unsettle the taken-for-granted conceptual and methodological ground upon which questions of “nature,” music, and sound had been historically articulated at a moment of experimentation with sound recording and circulation. While the fields briefly mentioned here operate mostly within a Euro-American disciplinary and compositional context, I would like to suggest also that the coincidence of this moment with different “liberationist” movements, however articulated in different parts of the world, was simultaneously unsettling the relation between territory and knowledge that eventually led to postcolonial or decolonial critique.¹⁴ Instead of a “holistic” multicultural approach, we find that the *conceptual ground* for issues of domination-territory, culture, nature, music, and sound began to be radically interrogated. Questions of sound/music, ecology, and culture started to be deterritorialized by the simultaneity of avant-garde experimentalism, anthropological inquiry, changing sound technologies, and the consequent reorganization of musical modes of production and association that articulated an emergent, on-the-ground postcolonial critique. In proposing a new discipline, ecomusicology ultimately appropriates the sense of urgency that the topic of sound/music and nature has acquired today. To be sure, this creates a much-needed network of interaction between musical scholars concerned with these issues. But the *terms* through which networks are operationalized are also crucial in defining how the network itself actually works.

As repeatedly noted by scholars in ecomusicology, questions regarding nature and music are not new and have been central to the development of Western music theory, to the emergence of sound studies, and to ethnomusicology. So what is new, rather than a topic, is the sense of urgency it acquires today. Alexander Rehding even posits the turn to environmental issues as the central question of twenty-first-century musicology, in contrast to the question of psychoanalysis, which, for him, arguably guided

13. Enrique Leff, “Sustentabilidad y racionalidad ambiental: hacia ‘otro’ programa de sociología ambiental,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 73, no. 1 (2011): 5–46, esp. 14.

14. Ana María Ochoa, “Plotting Musical Territories: A Comparative Study in Recontextualization of Andean Folk Musics in Colombia” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1997).

twentieth-century scholarship.¹⁵ Environmental issues emerge, then, as central to the field in relation to a sense of crisis; this in turn provokes questions about the political purposes of music scholarship and how it is undertaken in the context of a broader transformation of the type of analytical labor that has prevailed in the humanities, in particular in music studies, over the last decades. As a result, it is posited that ecomusicology “might represent a genuine departure from general musicological practice: while themes and methodologies are still in flux, the field derives much of its relevance and topicality from a sense of urgency and from an inherent bent toward awareness-raising, praxis (in the Marxian sense), and activism” as “distinguishing marks in a discipline that is often reluctant to make political commitments” (EAN, 410). For Rehding, “the critical issue that ecomusicology will have to wrestle with is how to implement this sense of crisis,” and “the task of the immediate future is for ecomusicology not only to hone its guiding questions but work out its political leanings and define the nature of the tasks that it seeks to pursue” (EAN, 410). Rehding is correct: the political emerges as the key issue here. But the political is not only a form of “activism.” Narrowly framed as such, it has the potential to emerge as an “outside” of theory. This is actually a fundamental issue, since understanding “the political” as an outside of theory that only returns through appeals to activism depends in good measure on how sound/music–nature/culture relations are themselves conceived. It is to this issue that I now turn my attention.

The Irruption of Gaia into Musical Disciplines and the Humanities

According to Rehding, one of the central means of addressing ecological questions in musicology has been “the use of conceptions of nature as epistemological or musical wellspring” (EAN, 410). He explains how “the various deconstructive movements of the 1990s have . . . shown exhaustively how concepts of nature have been employed to exercise argumentative or rhetorical authority” in modes of understanding music (EAN, 410).

15. Alexander Rehding, “Ecomusicology between Apocalypse and Nostalgia,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 409–13. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as EAN. It is important to note here how critical thinking emerged in different parts of the modern world, taking different historical trajectories. The trajectory from psychoanalysis (or a linguistic turn) to nature (or an ontological turn) does not necessarily depict a global trajectory.

Yet “the deconstructive approach may enter into contradiction with the very real urgency of the issues expressed by the ecological movement” because what is at stake is not the way nature is used to harness musical authority through discursive means. As Rehding pointedly states, citing Kate Soper, “it is not language that has a hole in the ozone layer” (EAN, 411). So, what seems to be the problem here, according to Rehding, are the limitations of the existing musical disciplines, because the urgent issue (climate change) is not addressed through discourse analysis.

For historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, in contrast, what is at stake is the idea of the political and its effect on critique, particularly as it has been articulated by postcolonial historical studies, due to the political challenges posed to a humanist-centered discipline by the nonhuman temporalities and entities.¹⁶ There is no question for him that the rise of postcolonialism has been a crucial move within the politics of culture and the cultures of politics throughout the twentieth century, refracted by and to many scholars and activists around the world as an indispensable critique of power.¹⁷ But the issue for the field of history is the impossibility of framing power inequalities as solely a problem of capital:

The critique that sees humanity as an effect of power is, of course, valuable for all the hermeneutics of suspicion that it has taught postcolonial scholarship. It is an effective tool for dealing with national and global formations of domination. But I do not find it adequate in dealing with the crisis of global warming. . . . Climate change, refracted through global capital, will no doubt accentuate the logic of inequality that runs through the rule of capital; some people will no doubt gain temporarily at the expense of others. But the whole crisis cannot be reduced to a story of capitalism.¹⁸

Idelber Avelar frames a related problematic for literary studies, one that itself builds on Chakrabarty’s own mode of positing the limits of the notion of critique for the field of history:

16. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.

17. It is in this sense interesting to note that the “crisis of the humanities” provoked by the intrusion of Gaia into human affairs coincides with an increased production of books articulated as knowledge “from the South.” This is precisely the result of the multiplication of knowledges “otherwise” that emerges from the deconstruction of mainstream disciplinary formations “in the North.”

18. Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History,” 221.

The unveiling as cultural of traits assumed or mistaken as natural has been the bread and butter of our fields for many decades. . . . Throughout the twentieth century nature has been a constant presence in the humanities, but only negatively, as the object of an operation of denaturalization. The renewed inseparability of natural history and human history experienced today challenges the humanities to understand nature in ways other than simply through the lens of a culturalist critique of naturalization. It is no longer enough to unveil the cultural ground of concepts, notions, and habits hitherto taken to be natural. In the urgency of the ecological crisis we live today we can no longer afford not to face the question of a nature as positivity.¹⁹

To rephrase Avelar's statement: we can no longer afford a particular Western ontology and its relation to academic knowledge, that is, the "persistent anthropocentric effort of 'constructing' the human as the not given, as the being itself of the not given, as observed in all of Western philosophy, even the most radical."²⁰ Avelar, moreover, links Chakrabarty's critique of capital to a critique of the anthropocentrism of human rights where the only juridical subjects endowed with rights are human. So, bringing Chakrabarty's and Avelar's critique together, we see what is at stake once we recognize the sense of urgency provoked by climate change: first, a radical transformation of the sense of the political, by centrally acknowledging the history of the global techno-industrial complex²¹ that gives rise to the current crisis; second, the implications of the current crisis for questioning the ontological grounding of the concepts that have given us our notions of the political, including power, rights, nature, and culture; and third, the consequent need to recast our modes of thinking.

19. Idelber Avelar, "Amerindian Perspectivism and Non-human Rights," *Alter/nativas*, no. 1 (2013): 1–21, esp. 8, accessed July 21, 2014, alternativas.osu.edu.

20. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Metafísicas caníbales: Líneas de antropología post-estructural* (Buenos Aires: Katz, 2011), 44. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *MC*. See also Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Marilyn Strathern, *After Nature: English Kinship in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

21. Such a techno-industrial complex developed under different political regimes globally in the twentieth century and so involves a complex history of capital and power that also includes noncapitalistic regimes. See Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth about Climate Change* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

What is also at stake, then, is ultimately that the problem of difference cannot continue to be understood solely in terms of *cultural* difference as the basis for exposing the history of power inequalities and of constituting notions of human and cultural rights. Within the anthropocentric Western tradition, notions of nature as a negatively constituted operation have corresponded to the operationalization of positively constituted notions of cultural diversity and epistemic relativism. This is why questioning the positivity of the terms *nature* and *culture* has become central to the transformations of critique itself and to the conceptions of rights and capital associated with them. For us to understand the implications of this for musical disciplines, it is important to briefly recall the turn to culture in musical disciplines in the last decades and its implications for understanding the current turn to nature.

On the Positivities of Musical Disciplines: Music Analysis and Cultural Relativism

The central problematic in the history of ethnomusicology has been a division between the methods and truth value in the study of cultural dimensions of music (understood here as the anthropological dimension of the field), and the methods and truth value of the study of what used to be called “musicological” characteristics, by which was usually meant the theoretico-analytical dimensions of music qua hard scientific musical data: scales, pitches, rhythmic structure, and so on. Due to the rise of cultural studies since the 1980s, with its emphasis on different forms of critique of power and the recent history of social constructivism in anthropology, this history took different turns.

The “reflexive turn” in Anglo-American ethnomusicology in the 1980s and 1990s, derived largely from the critique on “writing cultures” in anthropology, coincided with transformations in the music industry and the consequent rise of world music as both an analytical term in the discipline and a category of the music industry. This conjunction brought to the foreground strategic questions regarding the political-epistemological operations of writing, archiving, producing, and circulating music, as well as a reorganization of the questions of musical production, economic distribution, and the politics of representation that took precedence in those decades. Such questioning of the historical and epistemological strategies of production in ethnomusicology had very different outcomes in the work of different

scholars, and it is not possible to summarize them here.²² Questions of production (both of ethnographic writing, of the musicological archive, and of the recording industry) became central for critical thinking in this period, a terrain of thought largely operationalized by the critique of the concept of world music. Simultaneously, critical, or “new,” musicology in feminism and queer studies emerged. This “began to reshape the scope of Western musicology toward a dehegemonized pluralism.”²³ Also, the field of popular music studies consolidated as a different but interrelated mode of affirmation of cultural relativity and diversity, under the aegis of cultural studies.

All this operated an incipient denaturalization of the *canonic center* of the different musical disciplines along with an affirmative politics of cultural diversity. Because of this, today it is widely assumed that the tenets of the Western music canon have been destabilized, since the musical disciplines are no longer absolutely defined by a division of the field between the West (musicology and music theory) and the rest (ethnomusicology), which makes “cultural” analysis a requirement for all. Thus, Nicholas Cook can proclaim, “We are all ethnomusicologists.”²⁴ Even though such destabilization of canonic repertoires is relative, as noted by both Philip Tagg and Mark Pedelty recently,²⁵ the idea that “cultural” or “contextual” analysis is important for understanding music history, ethnomusicology, or the history of ideas in music theory has recently become a keystone of all musical disciplines. All this comes with an affirmation of the need to recognize cultural difference. Thus, all musical disciplines become “cultural” and acknowledge the importance of cultural diversity. By the same token, what used to be the central problem for ethnomusicology becomes the problem for everyone else: the tension between the modes of establishing the truth value of “cultural” analysis and the truth value of analytical methods framed by the scientific disciplines for musical studies.

22. Suffice it to say, for now, that while for some, in terms of ethnographic writing, such a turn was deeply embedded in a more profound relation to anthropology, for many such a turn with the coincidence of the rise of popular music studies resulted in a distance from the dialogue with anthropology via the emergence of cultural studies.

23. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, “Other Musicologies: Exploring Issues and Confronting Practice in India,” in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 311–35, esp. 311.

24. Nicholas Cook, “We Are All (Ethno)musicologists Now,” in *The New (Ethno)musicologies*, ed. Henry Stobart (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 48–70.

25. See Philip Tagg, “Caught on the Back Foot: Epistemic Inertia and Visible Music,” *IASPM Journal* 2, nos. 1–2 (2011): 3–18; Mark Pedelty, “Ecomusicology, Music Studies, and IASPM: Beyond ‘Epistemic Inertia,’” *IASPM Journal* 3, no. 2 (2013): 33–47.

Within Anglo-American musical disciplines, one of the reactions against the self-proclaimed excesses of this culturalist turn has been to reinstate the need for music analysis as central to understanding non-Western musical cultures, thus recasting the historical disciplinary debate and the problem of ethnomusicology anew. This is perhaps most clearly voiced by Kofi Agawu initially, who states that an excessive culturalization diluted the musical object and operated as a new form of colonialism by invoking “the culture” or the “metaphysics” of those researched as grounds for establishing the truth value of musical cultures. According to Agawu, this invalidated historical Western modes of musicological analysis, frequently invoked as politically and analytically relevant by local researchers themselves, researchers who needed methods such as transcription or music theory analysis to carry on their own decolonizing projects. Thus, if cultural analysis is problematic, a proper reaction to it may be to reinstate proper music theory methods—that is, the more proper scientific, analytical dimension of music (thereby supposedly affirmative of local musics)—in order to “empower” communities by providing the valid analytical tools.

Agawu bases his critique of “ethnotheory” on a critique on “ethnophilosophy” by African philosophers, particularly Paulin Hountondji. According to Hountondji, and through a proposal adopted by Agawu for the critique of ethnomusicology, ethnophilosophy diminishes the significance of African philosophy, particularly its potential for a speculative ground through oversimplification of the local. He therefore calls for “imaginative elements of our [African] past,” along with “philosophy as a scientific discourse of universal standing” (*RA*, 182).²⁶ Agawu states that all theory ultimately is ethnotheory since, after all, it is all locally produced, and he sees in the metropolitans’ efforts to find a local music theory a denial of musical change and of adoption of different musical terminologies throughout history by different people. He proposes acknowledging such changing terminologies in the name of a project that affirms the positive dimensions of translatability as a mode of decentering metropolitan power. He then pursues this proposal as a postcolonial critique of the excessive culturalist localisms of metropolitan ethnomusicology: “to accept the translatability of all indigenous produced knowledge is to accept the existence of a crucial level of nondifference between the conceptual worlds of any two cultures” (*RA*, 143). For him,

26. For a different reading of Hountondji’s work, see Gregory Schrempf, *Magical Arrows: The Maori, the Greeks and the Folklore of the Universe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

“gone are the days when African music was either reduced to a functional status or endowed with a magical metaphysical essence that put it beyond analysis” (RA, 183). Although he does not directly define what analysis is, it is evident by the examples he provides in the pages that follow this critique that it is the analysis of “hard” facts of music—pitch, tonality, rhythmic structures, and so on—in the name of a “compatibility between conceptual worlds . . . [that] can facilitate a more even-handed traffic in intellectual capital between musical cultures” (RA, 188). This will produce an “unhierarchized network” in which “Eurocentric cross-culturalism will be replaced by a dense network of exchanges in which origins and destinations change regularly and swiftly and are accessible to, and at the same time enriching for, all actors” (RA, 188).

However, on the one hand, “dehierarchizing the network” is not only a conceptual problem but also a problem of the economics of academic production and circulation. On the other hand, the paradoxical move Agawu makes here is to affirm a new mode of cosmopolitanism in the name of Western understandings of epistemology. As such, Agawu’s critique does not necessarily undo the geopolitics of knowledge that have privileged the methods and analytical values of the center but casts them under the guise of a new cosmopolitan diplomacy of translation with no apparent hierarchies.

On the one hand, Agawu reaffirms the researcher (no matter where he or she is located) as the transcendental subject of knowledge (and by fiat of capital’s relation to knowledge), thus importing a Western metaphysics of knowledge as the mode of universal (now understood as cosmopolitan) knowledge production. A central tenet of scientific transcendence is the excision of the political from its operations of truth making.²⁷ Scientific facts (and, by implication, those that are considered the “hard facts” of musical analysis) acquire their truth value precisely because they claim not to be political or influenced by political choices, because they are “natural,” by which is generally meant, in a vague way in music studies, that they constitute the object itself.²⁸ As such, a mode of knowing or an epistemology (the

27. For an analysis of how this is done in the formulation of Western notions of knowledge and epistemology, see Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*; Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991); and Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

28. For a history of the complex philosophical entanglement between ontology, epistemology, science, and the emergence of a notion of a transcendental subject in Western

subject's scientific understanding of the nature of an object) is confused with an ontology—one that supposedly counts for all cultures. Differently located modes of musical thought count as thought precisely because they are “reduced to a dispositive of recognition” (*MC*, 18), since such cosmopolitanism eminently depends on forming networks based on the mutuality, or “translatability,” of concepts. By linking this cultural relativism to a mode of cosmopolitanism that affirms the transcendental values of Western epistemologies, what we have is, in the name of a postcolonial decentered cosmopolitanism, the affirmation of notions of knowledge, culture, and science deeply entrenched in the last few centuries of Western thought. The reduction of others to “magical” assumptions is critiqued, but instead of invoking the need for different ontologies to move away from magical conceptions to differently positioned ontologies, what is invoked is the historical need for a decentered notion of recognizable conceptualizations that enable a global mutuality of recognition upon the Same proposed by the West. Paraphrasing Viveiros de Castro, the Other is recognizable as Other only as long as it remains the Same (*MC*, 15).

To summarize: if in the name of musicological critique and of social constructivism musical disciplines extend the notion of culture by naturalizing culture as something all peoples “have” and of musical analysis as something all peoples “do,” in the name of a “proper” postcolonial analysis, what is extended is Western epistemology's notion of scientific transcendence as the transcendence of the researcher, no matter his or her location. Here the main function of acknowledging different musical systems seems to be “the repressive recontextualization of the existential practice of all the collectives of the world in terms of the ‘thought collective’ of the analyst,” as Viveiros de Castro puts it (*MC*, 16). This reinstates an internal Mobius strip that feeds back on the distribution between the truth value of Western epistemic methods (which has “truth-claims” that are not socioculturally contingent)²⁹ and the truth value of cultural relativism. So, ultimately, the recent history of critical discourse in musical disciplines has tended to deploy a positivity of Western scientific methods as well as a positivity of the idea of cultural diversity, that is, of nature (as the scientifically given) and culture (as the humanly made but scientifically studied). While the cri-

philosophy and politics, see, for example, Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, and Stengers, *Power and Invention*.

29. Martin Holbraad, *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 29.

tique of so-called cultural analysis as pertinent to all fields begins to unveil the limits of culturalism, it leaves intact that distinction between nature and culture upon which the simultaneously competing and complementary truth value of cultural relativism and the truth value of the scientific-mathematical and philosophical legacy of music theory analysis are based.

This becomes even denser if we consider the fact that the idea that all peoples “have” cultures is itself modeled on a notion of science. Martin Holbraad has traced how, in the transformation of evolutionary theories of culture into theories of cultural diffusionism in nineteenth-century anthropology, the idea developed that “what we all share by nature is the capacity to be socially and culturally different from each other—our unique nature, so to speak, is to be cultural.”³⁰ In this transformation, the natural sciences provided the model for analysis and definition of a proper scientific object for the social sciences through the naturalization of the notion that all peoples “have” cultures: “Treating social and cultural orders as a part of nature meant that they could still be studied in the same sense, if not necessarily in the same way as other natural phenomena. . . . According to this image, people of all societies make sense of the natural world around them, including themselves as part of that world, by means of their own cultural repertoires and according to their own social arrangements.”³¹ Thus, the idea that all peoples have cultures becomes naturalized as a scientific model of study in a feedback between the scientific expectations of studies of culture and the natural sciences.

I do not doubt that different analytical methods in music are valuable tools that potentially could be deployed to empower communities who need to use them. But the problem with deconstructing the geopolitics of knowledge without unsettling the ontological implications of the distinction between nature and culture is that it ultimately leaves intact the geopolitics of knowledge, this time not by relativizing the culture of the other but by extending the assignation of truth value through the way that questions of ontology in Western metaphysics are entangled with the truth value of science in epistemology. None of this unsettles the philosophical ground for formation of concepts in musical disciplines.

If what the ecological crisis names are the limits of the positivity

30. Holbraad, *Truth in Motion*, 27. On how this transformation takes place in the relation between language and culture, see Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

31. Holbraad, *Truth in Motion*, 25.

of culture and nature, then musical disciplines face a particularly thorny problem; in the name of diverse forms of contemporary critique, they have tended to affirm both the values of nature (as science) and of culture as a human universal and a given (natural scientific) positivity, a distinction between the given and the made that is assumed as valid for all peoples. But this positivity of cultural diversity is not only a problem of the history of anthropological relativism. It is a problem that coagulated in musical disciplines through a naturalization of musical diversity in ethnomusicological discourse, thus divorcing ethnomusicology from the continued critique of the anthropological object that transformed anthropology itself through creative relations with the fields of history, philosophy, and literary criticism, and more recently through encounters with the problem of climate change. Indeed, for anthropology itself—to name just one field with which ethnomusicologists formerly dialogued—this has implied the need to generate “a new anthropology of the concept that corresponds to a new concept of anthropology, in which the conditions of ontological self-determination of the studied collectives prevail absolutely over the reduction of human (and non-human) thought to a dispositive of recognition” (*MC*, 16). The very notion of Gaia, used in the title of this section, has increasingly been employed as a term that displaces the taken-for-granted notions of nature, earth, culture, human, and so forth in anthropology. This is because of the central place given to rethinking the conceptual order within the political recasting that the crisis of the environment poses for all disciplines.

Returning, then, to music studies: I believe that the reaffirmation of the values of musical analysis, of musico-cultural relativism, of a postcolonial critique based on the constant confusion between Western ontology and epistemology (knowledge as being), and of the rejection of the drastic need to rethink the political stakes provoked by climate change is deeply rooted in certain political positivities that prevail within the notion of music itself in Western disciplinary contexts. This is something that emerges in the understandings of diversity and sustainability, and their relation to music in ecomusicology.

On Music as Political Positivity: Diversity as Cultural Capital

The political purpose of ecomusicology is most frequently framed in terms of “making music serve the interests of sustainability.”³² As such,

32. Pedelty, “Ecomusicology, Music Studies, and IASPM,” 162.

different books and articles in ecomusicology often begin by denouncing problematic environmental-musical relations and then seeking out the multiple ways that music might productively engage in sustainable development.³³ As a form of activism, the language of sustainable development has tended to permeate ecomusicological discourse as that which accounts for the political response to the crisis of environmentalism.

As Jeff Todd Titon notes, the transference of ideas from ecology to cultural heritage has been a determining factor in the transformation of the language employed by institutions such as UNESCO—for example, a shift from the language of folklore to the “safeguarding” of cultural heritage.³⁴ This shift has also given rise to a series of critiques of top-down institutional models. Based on such critiques, scholars have proposed a number of more collaborative models that are designed to better address musical diversity and different modes of ecological relation.³⁵ In this scenario, as Marc Perlman points out, a nature characterized by biodiversity (or threatened by its disappearance) corresponds to a notion of (equally threatened) diverse musics of the world—in short, a comparison and “juxtaposition of species diversity with musical diversity.”³⁶

This parallelism between musical diversity and biodiversity participates in a broader discussion that goes beyond questions of sustainability and is found in the ecologization of music since the 1970s. As David Ingram observes, “ecophilosophical speculation” on music has been a central problematic in the history of Western music philosophy, particularly

33. The notion of music sustainability has been developed primarily by Jeff Todd Titon. See his “Economy, Ecology, and Music: An Introduction,” *The World of Music* 51, no. 1 (2009): 5–15, and, in the same issue, “Music and Sustainability: An Ecological Point of View,” 119–37. Other texts that explore the issue within ecomusicology include Mark Pedelty, *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); Nancy Guy, “Flowing Down Taiwan’s Tamsui River: Towards an Ecomusicology of the Environmental Imagination,” *Ethnomusicology* 53, no. 2 (2009): 218–48; and Aaron S. Allen, “‘Fato di Fiemme’: Stradivari’s Violins and the Musical Trees of the Paneveggio,” in *Invaluable Trees: Cultures of Nature, 1660–1830*, ed. Laura Auricchio, Elizabeth Cook, and Giulia Pacini (Oxford: SVEC, 2012), 301–15.

34. Titon, “Music and Sustainability.”

35. Titon, for example, has sought to decenter the top-down discourse of resource management of intangible cultural heritage through the search for collaborative modes of preserving endangered music through the use of the notion of ecosystem and principles derived from it. See Titon, “Music and Sustainability”; and Pedelty, *Ecomusicology*.

36. Marc Perlman, “Ecology and Ethno/musicology: The Metaphorical, the Representational, and the Literal,” *Ecomusicology Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (2012): 15–21, esp. 15.

with questions surrounding music's capacity to tune the relation between humans and the world.³⁷ Ingram posits "an ecologization of sound" across "a wide range of popular music styles" in Anglo-America since the 1970s and examines "the different ways in which they have mediated American relationships between nature, technology, and environmental politics" (*JG*, 16). In his excellent book *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*, Ingram explores several recent "eco-philosophical claims." The first is an "environmental ethics," in which it is claimed "that music is a form of utopian expression that prefigures a better society in the future, including a healed relationship between music and the natural world" (*JG*, 15); the second claim posits the "utopian promise of popular entertainment"; while the third ("eco-listening") asserts "that the activity of listening itself has a special role to play in the formation of ecological awareness" (*JG*, 15–16). After mapping out these different claims, Ingram addresses how they take hold across "a wide range of popular music styles" and then examines "the different ways in which they have mediated American relationships between nature, technology, and environmental politics" (*JG*, 15).

The ecologization of sound is thus closely associated with the notion that music, sound, and listening are understood as that which politically resolves the separation between nature and the human or the conflictive relations between humans, understood as part of the ecological crisis. This corresponds to a conceptualization of music as that which produces community and of listening as the much-needed suture for the torn relations both between humans and between humans and the environment. Allen, for example, develops this idea of the specificity of music:

The environmental crisis . . . is also a failure of holistic problem solving interpersonal relations, ethics, imagination, and creativity. In short, the environmental crisis is a failure of culture. Humanist academics (particularly philosophers, literary scholars, and historians) work to understand the people, cultures, and ethical situations that created, perpetuate, attempt to solve, and face this crisis. In such a context, musicologists have perspectives and insights to offer, especially because of the ubiquity of music, the importance that most

37. David Ingram, *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *JG*.

people accord to it, and the communicative and emotional powers associated with music and the communities who make, enjoy, and consume it.³⁸

Music, in such accounts, produces the bonding of a group through the feedback between culture as it resides in particular objects (such as music) and culture as constitutive of the social as such.³⁹ In this feedback, community is understood as that which is produced by the relation between identity (as the social dimension of music) and representation (as that which the cultural object provides). I have no doubt that music can potentially provide unique possibilities and tactics in the mobilization of the political. But the problem with many ecocritical accounts of the political in music is much deeper in that “the recalcitrance of nature,” on the one hand, and “the autonomy of the individual,” on the other, become the ground for understanding personhood, sociality, and the collective for all musics of all peoples.⁴⁰ Why has this understanding of music as embodying the Good in a notion of the political that reaffirms the transcendental autonomous individual and nature become so central to the utopianism of ecophilosophical speculation in contemporary Euro-America?

An initial answer might begin with the observation that the rise of musical ecologization coincided with an epistemic turn in the understanding of culture in the 1980s and 1990s. George Yúdice characterizes this epistemic turn as a new understanding of culture as a resource. This contemporary notion of culture as resource emerged in the interrelationship between multiculturalism, neoliberalism, and the fracturing of the political in the midst of the economic reorganization of late twentieth-century forms of globalization.⁴¹ As Yúdice stated in 2003, in the era of globalization, “culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for socio-political amelioration, that is, for increasing participation in this era of waning political involvement,”

38. Aaron S. Allen, “Prospects and Problems for Ecomusicology in Confronting a Crisis of Culture,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (2011): 414–19, esp. 414.

39. See Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For how this feedback is central to the notion of cultural policy, see Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

40. Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 21.

41. George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

and he argued that this shift “has given the cultural sphere greater protagonism than at any other moment in the history of modernity.”⁴² Through this shift, the political itself was displaced as a positivity associated with the idea of culture as diversity. Roberto Eposito has said that one of the major problems of modern political philosophy is that the very significance of the terminology of the political is taken for granted and normativized, paradoxically neutralizing the very idea of the political itself.⁴³ In this case, that which is increasingly taken for granted is the notion that the political increasingly resides in the cultural, thus giving rise to the idea of culture as capital. If we recall the different “ecophilosophical claims” of music analyzed by Ingram, we see, likewise, that the political properties attributed to music, sound, and listening in its engagement with ecology are all, by default, taken for granted as a self-evident positivity.

I would like to propose that during the second half of the twentieth century, as part of the rise of culture as resource, the link between different forms of “ecophilosophical speculation” and music, the expansion of cultural diversity understood as the preservation of multiple heritages, and the increased capitalization of culture as a mode of political action, a prevailing Euro-American ontology of music, sound, and listening has emerged in which these are understood politically as that which sutures torn relationships either between humans and the environment or among humans. This is an acoustic ontology that increasingly prevails in the conceptual order that defines the place of music, sound, and listening in the modern public sphere.⁴⁴ Here, the political value of music (understood as that which enables the social) gets enmeshed with the affective potentialities of sound (as a taken-for-granted positive political outcome of acoustic potentialities). To culture’s increasing enmeshment in “the immaterialization of capital”⁴⁵ correspond other forms of immaterialization and deracination as well, and sound/music is particularly suited for such immaterialization precisely because of the historical difficulty of grasping its “object,” as explored in the previous section.

Consider, for example, the enmeshment of the above with the difficulty of grasping “the object” of the environmental crisis, or the expansion

42. Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, 9–10.

43. Roberto Eposito, *Términos de la Política* (Barcelona: Herder Editorial, 2008).

44. By this I do not mean to imply that this is the only possible political imbrication of this relation. But it is a very strongly prevailing one in contemporary modern politics.

45. Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, 9.

of notions of immateriality associated with techniques of sound production—particularly those that increasingly define the practices of media production in the digital era—and the implications for sound/music becoming a central contemporary sphere of the arts under this emerging aesthetic/ecological regime. Both the general ecological aesthesis described by Ingram under the rubric of “ecophilosophical speculation” and the affective, aesthetic, and activist responses it generates are partially related to what Timothy Morton calls “hyperobjects.” A hyperobject can be anything from climate change to plastic bags, the biosphere to nuclear waste, the waterways altered by hydroelectrics to oil spills. Despite their many differences, hyperobjects share a number of properties. As Morton elaborates, hyperobjects are

viscous, which means that they “stick” to beings that are involved with them. They are *nonlocal*; in other words, any “local manifestation” of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. . . . Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*; that is, they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects.⁴⁶

Many of these properties are reminiscent of classical ideas associated with sound, primarily, those according to which sound’s potentialities are confused with its essence. Jonathan Sterne has exposed a number of these ideas as an “audio-visual litany,” observing the tendency to emphasize sound’s capacity to (1) affect beings by “immersing” them in its invisible reverberation, (2) alter a person’s sense of time and space, and (3) mediate between entities and between entities and the world.⁴⁷ To him, this is part of a long history of association between “sound, speech and divinity,” in short, of a cosmology that is confused with an epistemology (a way of knowing) and with the potentialities of an object.⁴⁸ Again, I do not deny these and other potentialities in the properties of sound. But recognizing potentialities is not the same as proposing an inherent ontology or political outcome in

46. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1; original emphasis.

47. See Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 16–18.

48. Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 18.

which such potentialities are prefigured as actualizations that only take one form: as a positivity of the political in music, sound, and listening.⁴⁹

It is not by chance that the historical period in question (the end of the twentieth century) is also associated with a media aesthetic that is more and more oriented toward sound, a media aesthetic tied—in Steven Shaviro’s terms—to a structure of feeling that is “expressive,” in the sense that “it gives sounds and images . . . to a kind of ambient, free-floating sensibility that permeates our society today, although it cannot be attributed to any subject in particular.”⁵⁰ With the word *expressive*, Shaviro “means both *symptomatic* and *productive*.” He elaborates:

These works are symptomatic in that they provide indices about complex social processes, which they transduce, condense, and rearticulate in the form of what can be called, after Deleuze and Guattari, “blocs of affect.” But they are also productive in the sense that they do not *represent* social processes, so much as they participate actively in these processes, and help to constitute them. Films and music videos are *machines for generating affect*, and for capitalizing upon, or extracting value from, this affect.⁵¹

For Shaviro, finally, these modes of production “generate subjectivity, and they play a crucial role in the valorization of capital.”⁵² Thus, at the same time that notions of the political become enmeshed with culture, the immaterialization of culture itself, the hyperobjects of environmental thinking, and the affective dimensions of cultural objects are increasingly understood as a problem of relationality.

But as Marilyn Strathern has taught us, the question of “relations” emerges as a much-needed value precisely (and perhaps only) when domains or entities are considered a priori as separate. This explains why the ecological appeal to positively constituted notions of music and listening “takes place in a cultural context where relations are imagined as existing *between* individuals,”⁵³ and *between* individuals and the environment.

49. As a contrast in the relation between speculative philosophy and the politics of the acoustic, see Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

50. Steven Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Ropley, UK: John Hunt, 2010), 2.

51. Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 2; original emphasis.

52. Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, 3.

53. Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship, Law and the Unexpected: Relatives Are Always a Surprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50; original emphasis.

Relationality emerges as an eminent *value* to be sought, cultivated, and restored primarily when the person is conceived as an autonomous individual and the separation between nature and humans is perceived as a problem to be resolved.

Moreover, conflict—which might otherwise be understood as an everyday feature of existence—is violently repressed as a constant feature of sociality. In the understanding of sound/music and listening as that which eminently enables (communitary) relations, conflict is excised from an imagined (musically) unified community, and by that fiat the political emerges as an outside of music. As noted by Samuel Araujo and the Grupo Musicultura, in both the musicological and ethnomusicological tradition, conflict and violence “signal either a social or personal disturbance of an implicit regular order, or an eventual denial of a given order,” instead of being understood as “conditions of knowledge production.”⁵⁴ Thus, in many historical studies of music, “all difference is read as opposition and all opposition as the absence of a relation: to ‘oppose’ is taken as synonymous with ‘to exclude.’”⁵⁵

Within this framework, non-Western cultures are frequently brought into the discussion of music and ecology as exemplars of those for whom such separation is not problematic. For example, what anthropologists have historically called “animism” is often appropriated by the acoustics of ecology (under multiple disciplinary guises) through the idea that indigenous cultures have an acoustic nondifferentiation between humans and animals that Westerners lack.⁵⁶ As Viveiros de Castro states,

In these post-structuralist, ecologically-minded, animal-rights centered times . . . savages are no longer ethnocentric or anthropomor-

54. Samuel Araujo and Grupo Musicultura, “Conflict and Violence as Theoretical Tools in Present-Day Ethnomusicology: Notes on a Dialogic Ethnography of Sound Practices in Rio de Janeiro,” *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 2 (2006): 287–313, esp. 289.

55. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Culture: The Universal Animal,” in *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, ed. Giovanni da Caol and Stéphane Gros, HAU Masterclass Series, no. 1 (2012): 83–103, esp. 93, accessed July 20, 2014, www.haujournal.org/index.php/masterclass/issue/view/Masterclass%20Volume%201.

56. For different versions of this idea with different political and musico-philosophical implications, see Bernie Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World’s Wild Places* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012); Tina K. Ramnarine, “Acoustemology, Indigeneity, and Joik in Valkeapää’s Symphonic Activism: Views from Europe’s Arctic Fringes for Environmental Ethnomusicology,” *Ethnomusicology* 53, no. 2 (2009): 187–217.

phic, but rather cosmocentric or cosmomorphic. Instead of having to prove that they are humans because they distinguish themselves from animals, we now have to recognize how *in-human* we are for opposing humans to animals in a way they never did: for them nature and culture are part of the same sociocosmic field. . . . [T]heir views anticipate the fundamental lessons of ecology we are only now in a position to anticipate. (*MC*, 95)

In this case, the complicated history of sound and music as phenomena that lie “between nature and culture” becomes entangled with the radically anthropocentric notion that animality is the common condition of the human and the nonhuman.

The history of Western music’s analytical categories—melody, rhythm, and, perhaps most crucially of all, the voice—is traversed by a zoopolitics of the acoustic that is obsessed with separating the human from the nonhuman.⁵⁷ Music, like language, has been a fundamental “anthropotechnology” used in projects that seek to “direct the human animal in its becoming man” and that are central to Western philosophy and to the establishment of the human as a separate political community.⁵⁸ But the relationship between the human and the nonhuman is not necessarily understood in the same way by different ontologies of the acoustic.⁵⁹ The challenge, then, is how to understand different modes of constituting what Roy Wagner calls “invention” (the made) and the related counterinvention of the “given” in sound.⁶⁰ As expressed by Viveiros de Castro, building on Wagner, “Cultures (the human macrosystems of convention) are distinguished by what they define as belonging to the sphere of responsibility of

57. See Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

58. Fabián Ludueña Romandini, *La comunidad de los espectros. 1. Antropotecnia* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2010).

59. As a general introduction in English to this idea and to different conceptions of personhood in the non-Western world, see Marshall Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature: With Reflections on the Long History of Hierarchy, Equality, and the Sublimation of Anarchy in the West and Comparative Notes on Other Conceptions of the Human Condition* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2008); and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*. The questioning of an ontology determined by subject-object distinctions is also a central topic of philosophy today. For an introduction to this topic, see *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Victoria: re.press, 2010).

60. Wagner, *Invention of Culture*.

the agents—the world of that which is ‘constructed’—and by what belongs (because it is counterconstructed as belonging) to the world of the ‘given,’ that is, to the non-constructed” (MC, 31). This is not an issue of how to “include” the human *in* the environment but rather of asking how the given and the made are conceptualized and thereby related to the reformulation of notions of production, habitation, the acoustic, and form.⁶¹

Although almost all accounts of ecomusicology reference Steven Feld’s work as an important antecedent, none, to my knowledge, has explored its full importance. My purpose is not to analyze Feld’s work in detail but rather to elaborate a key insight in his work: that exploring different forms of relationality and alterity is not about dissolving the human into the natural through a transhuman extension of music or sound but rather that such an exploration helps us arrive at questions about music and ecology through the exploration of different ontologies that do not take the idea of nature and culture for granted. Moreover, not only Feld but other authors who worked on questions of indigeneity in the 1980s began an exploration of the acoustic that established important links with structuralism as a key entry point into a heritage of thought that dealt centrally “with the problematic nature of the given.”⁶² Although in ecomusicology what is identified as the main political task is a form of political activism, it is important to note that for many involved in addressing the crisis of climate change, a crucial task is to take the time to *think* its political implications. Instead of dismissing the legacy of differently positioned ethnomusicologists and anthropologists who have been working with the problematic nature of sound and of nature since the 1980s, perhaps it is time we acknowledge that this is a history of thought that proposes a radically different set of possibilities than that proposed by ecomusicology today. It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze such literature. I simply wish to point to possible directions.

61. For anthropological work on recasting notions of production and creativity based on different understandings of the given, the made, and perception, see, among others, Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*; Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London: Routledge, 2011); and Viveiros de Castro, *Metafísicas caníbales*.

62. Patrice Maniglier, *La vie énigmatique des signes: Saussure et la naissance du structuralisme* (Paris: Scheer, 2006), 12–13. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as LVE.

Structuralism and Acoustemology: Steps toward an Acoustic Multinaturalism

Feld coined the term *acoustemology* to “shift attention” to “sound as a way of knowing . . . worlds.”⁶³ In the introduction to the third edition of *Sound and Sentiment*, he writes about his shift from an “anthropology of sound,” which appeared in the first publication of the book in 1982, to the development of acoustemology in the 1990s. I quote him at length:

I coined this new term to join acoustics and epistemology, to argue for sound as a capacity to know and as a habit of knowing. I needed a way to talk about sound that was neither a matter of critiquing the anthropology of music or language nor of extending their scope to include environmental ambiances and human-animal sound interactions. I wanted to have a new all-species way to talk about the *emplaced copresence and corelations of multiple sounds and sources*. I wanted to have a new way to talk about how, within a few seconds, and often in the absence of coordinated visual cues, Bosavi people know quite precisely so many features of the rain forest world, like the time of day, the season, the weather history. I wanted to link this kind of tacit knowledge, as well as active eco-acoustic knowing, to expressive practices, to the way Bosavi listening habits and histories figure in the shaping of poetic, vocal and instrumental practices.⁶⁴

Feld’s work emerged in the early 1980s, at a moment when questions about studying modes of artistic production—weaving, singing, making masks, and so on—and their relation to different understandings of the nonhuman were a central topic in anthropology. These preoccupations in anthropology grew out of structuralism’s emphasis on questions surrounding symbolism and myth. Also central to ethnomusicology in this period is Anthony Seeger, for whom questions about nature and culture and their relation to understandings of music were fundamental. In general, though, such questions were soon relegated to a secondary place in ethnomusicology, in large part because of the rise of popular music studies and

63. Steven Feld, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 7.

64. Steven Feld, “Introduction to the Third Edition,” in *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 3rd ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), xxvii; my emphasis. Orig. pub. 1982.

the problems posed by World Music. Simultaneously, in France, the decline of structuralism in philosophy was so dramatic that it was almost “as if it had never existed” (*LVE*, 8). Finally, the radical critique of anthropological structuralism in the United States resulted in its near expulsion from the American academy.

Interestingly, neither Feld (who initially proposed the notion of anthropology of sound) nor Seeger (who initially proposed the notion of musical anthropology) saw themselves as developing *new* fields; with those terms, they sought only to signal that they were reconsidering how to configure questions regarding sound. The problem that both of them (as well as others in anthropological linguistics) posed was how to conjoin the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure with the anthropological structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss with questions of sound/music.

It is important today to reconsider the legacy of this work in light of the renewed interest in the relation between ecology and acoustics. I would therefore like to close by making some suggestions as to why it is important to link the historical moment of structuralism with present-day rearticulations of ontological questions regarding the “given” and the “made” in issues of sound.

I see the legacy of these texts that sought to recast questions of expressive culture in relation to the nonhuman “not as heritages to either reject or preserve, but as tentatives, efforts, works, for questions that are perhaps still open.”⁶⁵ As is evident, today these questions are not only open but have gained increasing political urgency on the face of climate change. A crucial dimension of the structuralist legacy, and of Feld’s and Seeger’s work, is the way they have *posed* questions about the sounds they have worked with. Even if we disagree with their postulations, the important issue is the room they gave for a problematic to unfold as such—as a problematic that, rather than requiring a solution, requires time to (re)think how it is addressed as such.

For Patrice Maniglier, “the structuralist movement did not consist in attributing a common function (communicating) to an ensemble of heterogeneous phenomena (languages, rites, etc.), but in recognizing the equally problematic nature of the given in disciplines marked by the heritage of comparativism” (*LVE*, 16). Although Maniglier’s work is centered on a rereading of Saussure, what he says in terms of language can be appro-

65. Patrice Maniglier, “Introduction: Les années 1960 aujourd’hui,” in *Le moment philosophique des années 1960 en France*, 18–19.

priated easily for music, since, as Maniglier himself states, the problem ultimately “is posed equally in all the disciplines that have cultural facts as their object” (*LVE*, 16).

To summarize and simplify a complex issue that I can only begin to articulate here: It is “impossible to establish a strict criterion of analysis” with regard to sonorous domains because “of the liminal problem of individuation of perceptive phenomena” such as music, sound, or language. Neither the physical manifestation of sound, nor the performativity of sound, nor questions of formal analysis, nor questions posed solely as “social” questions of music resolve the issue of the liminal nature of the acoustic and how to analyze it. Such questions, moreover, are not solved either by a turn to sound or to a “sonic ecosystem,” because these commonly offered solutions ultimately leave untouched the central problematic regarding the taken-for-granted assumption about nature (as the given) and culture (as the made).⁶⁶ Thus, the appeal to structuralism (and to the questions opened by it) is one that insists on the openness of structure itself: “structure does not designate the form of a given totality, but, on the contrary, the means of making a diagnosis of real discontinuities behind apparent continuities. . . . It does not provide a common method, but rather a common problem that was constructed in different ways” (*LVE*, 17). In this way, “the structural disciplines are confounded with the movement of extension of the linguistic problem [hence, the comparison between anthropology of music and linguistics] not because these would define a unified empirical domain upon which would rest an exportable method, but because different disciplines, for singular reasons, proper to their history (in particular . . . the way they bring into evidence the comparative fact), found themselves confronted by a new type of positivity, a new way of being a fact” (*LVE*, 17). Thus, “the voyages of the structural method” (*LVE*, 17) pose crucial philosophical questions regarding the problem of difference at the center of acoustic entities.

Particularly important for linking acoustemology and structuralism is the latter’s rejection of “metaphor as the essence of representation” and a reorientation of thought “towards semiotic processes such as metonymy, indexicality, literality.”⁶⁷ Acoustemology’s own exploration of indexicality and

66. The idea of a “sonic ecosystem” is used by Tina Ramnarine. Although I find this particular term problematic, her work on postcolonialism, indigeneity, and music is crucial to any discussion of ecology and music. See Ramnarine, “Acoustemology, Indigeneity, and Joik in Valkeapää’s Symphonic Activism.”

67. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Intensive Affiliation and Demonic Alliance,” in *Deleuzian*

metonymy in sound, of different ontologies and understandings of alterity, and the link to the history of structuralism, in turn, leads us to thinking of acoustic multinaturalism. I will briefly provide one short example from the historical colonial archive as a way to close.

In his *Views of Nature; or, Contemplations on the Sublime Phenomena of Creation: With Scientific Illustrations* (1810), Alexander von Humboldt described his trip down the Orinoco, the Casiquiare, the Rio Negro, and the Apure, in what today is southern Venezuela and part of the larger Amazon region. Humboldt's travels through the Casiquiare and the Orinoco region in general made him acutely sensitive to the changing sounds of nature during day and night. Part of Humboldt's attentive listening became a general law, known as "Humboldt's acoustic effect," which describes the increase of the volume of a sound by night and in lower temperatures. More important for this essay, though, is the passage in which he describes his first experiences listening to human and animal sounds along the river on the banks of the Apure:

After eleven o'clock, such a noise began in the contiguous forest, that for the remainder of the night, all speech was impossible. The wild cries of animals rung through the woods. Among the many voices that resounded together, the Indians could only recognize those which, after short pauses, were heard singly. There was the monotonous, plaintive cry of the Aluates (howling monkeys), the whining, flute-like notes of the small sapajous, the grunting murmur of the striped, nocturnal ape (*Nycthipithecus trivirgatus*, which I was the first one to describe), the fitful roar of the great tiger, the cougar or maneless American lion, the peccary, the sloth, and a host of parrots, parraquas (*Ortalides*), and other pheasant-like birds. . . . If one asks the Indians why such a continuous noise is heard on certain nights, they answer, with a smile, that the "animals are rejoicing in the beautiful moonlight, and celebrating the return of the full moon." To me the scene appeared rather to be owing to an accidental, long-continued and gradually increasing conflict among the animals. . . . Further experience taught us that it was by no means always the festival of moonlight that disturbed the stillness of the forest; for we observed that the voices were loudest during violent storms of rain,

Intersections: Science, Technology, Anthropology, ed. Casper Bruun Jensen and Kjetil Rødje (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 219–53, esp. 221.

or when the thunder echoed or the lightning flashed through the neck of the woods.⁶⁸

While Humboldt sees conflict in the noise produced by the animals, an idea that he develops further in the text as reflecting humanity's own undesirable and problematic dispositions, the Yekuana, rather, hear the animals as celebrating the return of the full moon, having, as it were, their very own feast or ritual. In this cannibal order of things, a mouth is an organ that swallows as much as it emits sounds: this is why the function of a mouth is conceived not so much as distilling the essence of sound into abstract ideals expressed by a unique subject with a unique voice but rather as transforming them through acoustic digestion into vocalization. Indeed, as Anthony Seeger has shown, in the Amazonian complex, new songs are learned as part of interspecies communication, that is to say, from "outsiders" — be they foreigners, birds, or other nonhumans.⁶⁹ Hence, although both Western philosophies and Amerindian ones affirm that humans and nonhumans have voices, the nonhuman becoming of the human voice implies, in Amerindian ontologies, a radically different understanding of alterity.

Historically, the mode of understanding of Amerindian anthropomorphism has been the idea of animism. But a long lineage of primarily South American (or South Americanist) and Melanesian anthropologists has challenged the idea of animism by proposing the terms *perspectivism* and *multinaturalism* to explain the indigenous understanding of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman. The Brazilian anthropologist Tânia Stolze Lima summarizes the critique of animism and the proposal of perspectivism in this way: "A proposition such as 'the Juruna think that animals are humans,' besides deviating appreciably from their discursive style, is a false one, ethnographically speaking. They say that 'the animals to themselves are humans.' I could, then, rephrase this as 'the Juruna think that the animals think they are humans.' Clearly the verb 'to think' undergoes an enormous semantic slippage as it passes from one segment of the phrase to the other."⁷⁰

68. Alexander von Humboldt, *Views of Nature; or, Contemplations on the Sublime Phenomena of Creation: With Scientific Illustrations*, trans. E. C. Otté and Henry G. Bohn (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850), 198.

69. Anthony Seeger, *Why Suyá Sing: A Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Orig. pub. 1987.

70. Tânia Stolze Lima, "The Two and Its Many: Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tupi Cosmology," *Ethnos* 64, no. 1 (1999): 107–31, esp. 113.

It is thus possible to rewrite Humboldt's words. Instead of saying the Yekuana believe that the "animals are rejoicing in the beautiful moonlight, and celebrating the return of the full moon," we could say that the Yekuana think that the animals think they are rejoicing in the beautiful moonlight and celebrating the return of the full moon.⁷¹ Clearly, the acoustic order undergoes an enormous semantic slippage with this displacement.

In this perspectivist ontology, whether a sound is produced by humans or animals depends on the ear that hears it. While the animals of the rain forest hear their own sound as celebrations of the full moon as if they were human, and the Yekuana hear it as animals that think they are celebrating as humans, Humboldt hears it as noise that drowns conversation. Unlike Humboldt, who hears animal noise, the Indians, by contrast, recognize not only that there are animals that sound like peccaries, macaws, and monkeys, but also that they hear their own sound as human, since humanity, not animality, is the common condition that is shared.

In principle, then, what is common to animals and humans is the capacity to produce expressive sound. That is, all species have the capacity to think of themselves as social collectivities, as having homes, undertaking rituals, singing, and so on. It is the perspective according to which each species conceives of this voice that differs. If animals conceive of themselves as singing and having voices, this does not mean that all beings share the same point of view: "numerous peoples of the New World (very likely, all) share a concept according to which the world is composed of a multiplicity of points of view: all existents are centers of intentionality, that apprehend other existents according to their respective characteristics and capacities" (*MC*, 33). Thus, "a similitude of the souls does not imply that these souls share what they express or perceive. The way that humans see animals, spirits and other cosmic actants is profoundly different from the way that those beings see them and see themselves" (*MC*, 35). This "perspectivism," or "multinaturalism,"⁷² resides in the differences in thinking and sensing bodies—not so much as "physiological functions" but rather as "effects that singularize each species of body, its forces and weaknesses: what it eats, its forms of moving, of communicating, where it lives, if it is

71. Lima, "The Two and Its Many," 113.

72. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society*, trans. Catherine V. Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and also his *Metafísicas caníbales*; Lima, "The Two and Its Many," and her important work, *Um Peixe Olhou Para Mim: O Povo Yudjá e a perspectiva* (Sao Paulo: Editora UNESP; ISA, Rio de Janeiro: NuTI, 2005).

gregarious or solitary, timid or arrogant" (*MC*, 55). Thus, "the body, [understood] as a bundle of affects and capacities, lies at the origin of perspectives" and permits the generation of "relational multiplicities" (*MC*, 55).

So the fundamental insight, let us say, is not that the bird thinks of its birdsong as a song in a ritual feast, while a person hears that same birdsong as simply the sound of a bird. This would be a cultural relativism in which the idea of culture is simply extended to other species. Rather, the sonorous object (that is, ritual song / bird sound) does not have an essence but is conceived as a multiplicity through which a relation is constituted—as such, alterity is *inherent* to things or, in this case, to specific acoustemes. Alterity is thus understood "as a condition of the possibility of being."⁷³ Thus, multinaturalism is not so much "a variety of natures" (applying the notion of relativism to nature) but rather "variation as nature" (*MC*, 58). In this world, "nothing is created, all is appropriated."⁷⁴

The question of music and environmentalism rests, finally, on acknowledging the political importance of different ontologies across cultures and history, not on reaffirming the idea of nature as central to a new disciplinary subdivision, even if the political implications of ecological concern are the common cause of our shared interests. As noted by Lévi-Strauss, in mythical narration, "things that emit sound" (the things he refers to in this case are stones and wood) often act as "operators" that "possess other sensory connotations" and "express, as a totality, a set of equivalences connecting life and death, vegetable food and cannibalism, putrefaction and imputrescibility, softness and hardness, silence and noise."⁷⁵ The presence or absence of sound therefore stands as the very mediator of the presence or absence of life, showing us how myths (or cosmology) help tie events to structures. But the acknowledgment of such a relation, based as it is on admitting the agentive acoustic dimensions of nonhuman entities in the affairs of humans, hinges on an understanding of the relations between humans and nonhumans that unsettle the historically constructed boundaries between nature and culture, the human and the nonhuman in Western modernity.

73. Sahlins, *The Western Illusion of Human Nature*, 47.

74. Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—And Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 57.

75. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 153. Orig. pub. 1964.

By Way of Recapitulation

For the last few decades, the discussion of power-knowledge relations has transformed the way we practice social sciences and the humanities and is an intensifying discussion in the sciences, as well. Such a discussion has not escaped the industrial-technological complex's global lobbying efforts and their need to ally themselves with neoconservative scientists who have helped them in their political efforts by seeking to debunk the drastic political implications of climate change for humans as a species and for the world as we know it.⁷⁶ Such a perverse alliance is based deeply on sustaining the relation between modernity, science, and unfettered capital growth fueled by a debt economy, developmentalism, consumerism, and identity.⁷⁷ By contrast, we also find a growing relation between scientists and different fields in the social sciences and humanities that calls for a deep need to rethink this disciplinary division and ontological assumptions of this epistemological structure that has prevailed in our scholarship, giving rise to discussions on posthumanism and a post-social anthropology. These are not simply discussions about how to name changing academic disciplines. As has been recognized by many scholars who have denounced the entrenched alliance between developmentalism, disciplinary history, and Western ontology, one of the fundamental political needs posed by the existential implications of climate change—the end of humans as a species and of the world as we know it—is to take the time needed to think.⁷⁸ The way we engage with the politics of the knowledge economy, in other words, is a central aspect of what is questioned by the political urgency of climate change.

As such, one needs to question whether the central objective of sound/music scholars concerned with the environment is to create a sub-disciplinary field centered on the issues of “nature, culture, and music” or, to the contrary, to take the time to drastically rethink the political implications of keeping the underlying ontology that such a relation implies. Also, one cannot but help notice the radical absence, in the discussions in eco-musicology, of a broad transdisciplinary discussion on the great amount of

76. For a summary of the lobbying efforts of the “carbon lobby,” see Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*.

77. See Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*.

78. See, among others, Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*; Leff, “Sustentabilidad y racionalidad ambiental”; and Isabelle Stengers, *Une autre science est possible: manifest pour un ralentissement des sciences* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

literature that has emerged in response to such a crisis. Finally, perhaps it is time not only for a deep engagement with such a transdisciplinary discussion but also for a deep critical engagement with pioneering areas within musico-anthropological studies that have questioned our very concepts of sound/music. It is not by chance that such studies invariably have dealt with indigenous cultures in different parts of the world. This does not mean that suddenly it is time for all of us to “go native.” To the contrary, indigenous ontologies from different parts of the world provide models even if, and especially when, they do not resonate with our own categories of knowledge and being.⁷⁹

79. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, “Outros valores, além do frenesi do consumo,” *Outras palavras: Comunicação compartilhada e Pós-capitalismo*, September 20, 2012, accessed June 18, 2104, outraspalavras.net/posts/outros-valores-alem-do-frenesi-de-consumo/.