7 Otherwise than participation

Unity and alterity in musical encounters

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This chapter considers two distinctive musical orientations: towards unity (communion, empathy, comprehension, participation) and towards alterity (separation, evasion, infinity, striving). This much may sound far removed from playing instruments, singing and dancing. Let's begin, then, from a key practical concern of ethnomusicologists: participatory performance.

Participation

Feeling into a collaborative groove, joining one's voice with others, tuning in to a shared temporality: how could we ever make music together without these powers of participation? A capacity for shared, collective musical feeling allows harmony, unison, polymetre, friction, interlocking rhythm – everyday musical achievements that would be impossible for radically autonomous islands of subjectivity. It's not just that ensemble feels good. A properly well-adjusted modern self would seem to require such participatory capacities in their psychological repertoire alongside self-esteem, coping mechanisms and computer literacy. Think of an otherwise healthy young concert pianist at an American wedding who flatly refuses to join her friends on the dance floor. She is likely to be considered square, or uptight or self-conscious: not just technically lacking, but also, in a crucial sense, morally lacking.

Ethnomusicologists, more than anyone else, have reinforced the sense that participation is a weighty ethical and political matter. We read that 'we need more of this participatory consciousness if we are to get back into ecological synchrony with ourselves and with the natural world' (Keil, 1987, p. 276.) We read that the 'feelingful participation' of grooving is a 'positive physical and emotional attachment, a move from being "hip to it" to "getting down" and being "into it"' (Feld, 1988, p. 75). We read that participation allows people to be not just connected, but 'truthfully intimately connected'; That when 'the individual parts create a greater whole … participatory performance is good social life' (Turino, 2008, p. 136). Music educators (for example, Everitt, 1997; Odam, 1995/2001) often proceed with a 'missionary zeal' to encourage musical participation, which is 'essential to our well-being as individuals and social creatures' (Ede, 1997, p. 6). I, too, often find myself zealously insisting that my students get up from their seats in the lecture hall to sing along, dance along and get into the groove. We sweat, we smile,

we dance *dabkeh*. At some point in my upbringing, I too was given to understand that this kind of collective participation (social dancing in Eagles halls, community bands, hymn-singing in church) is not just fun, but also *good*.

Lately, though, I have started to wonder about participation. I'm not worrying about fascistic 'rhythmic obedience' here (Adorno, 1941) – advocates of participation are well aware of this danger, and warn us against the evils of statist participatory totalitarianism, highlighting the anarchic and anti-authoritarian potentials of small-scale, egalitarian participatory performance (cf. Feld, 1988, p. 84; Keil, 1987, p. 276; Turino, 2008, pp. 190–210). But the ascription of moral benefits to even non-fascistic participation are nonetheless textured by a distinctive set of economic and political conditions. Thomas Turino (2008) contrasts the virtues of participatory music-making to life 'compartmentalised in private homes, cars, classrooms, and stores' (pp. 156–157). Sian Ede's (1997) plea for participation as a way of nurturing a 'sense of belonging' is made against the backdrop of a 'disconnected society' (p. 6.) Charles Keil (1987) presents participation as 'the opposite of alienation from nature, from society, from the body, from labor' (p. 276). This may account for some of the historically specific ways in which, at least for those of us raised among televisions, fast food, and automobiles, participation intuitively 'feels so right' (Feld, 1988, p. 104).

This feeling of rightness is precisely what makes me wonder. The evident powers and pleasures of participation are indeed difficult to untangle from the question of its moral righteousness. We thus might do well to step back for a moment in order to see its metaphysical moorings a bit more clearly.

The metaphysics of unity

Participation, in the technical sense used by ethnographers of performance, does not simply pop out of ethnographic data; it is a concept with a venerable metaphysical pedigree. Its clearest origins are found in the work of anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl and anthroposophist Owen Barfield.[1] Levy-Bruhl used the term to describe a characteristic activity of '*la mentalité primitive*' in which a thing or a person is both itself and something else (for example, both a person *and* a bird) without contradiction (Levy-Bruhl 1910/1926). Barfield went further. In a series of increasingly passionate appeals, he reconstrued participation as a crucial, universal human faculty. Even moderns, according to Barfield (1957/1965), are capable of participation in which 'self and not-self [are] identified in the same moment of experience' (p. 32), so that, rather than standing separate from the world, 'the world itself [is] his self-consciousness displayed before him' (1977, p. 204). Nor, according to Barfield, is this just a momentary failure to distinguish subjectivity and objectivity. The unified, participatory interweave of self and other is a realisation of the universal ground of perception and action, 'built into the structure of the universe' (1977, p. 205). Charles Keil (1995), whose work positively hums with Barfieldian influence, expresses this vision of a unified cosmos in ecstatic musical terms:

> What is beyond our skin is primary reality from the mini-vibes of atomic quarks and mesons up through the molecular vibes of Brownian motion

> through the color vibes and life vibes into the James Brown vibes and on out to the galactic rumba but it is also inside us, in our body-minds, and that's why we can participate in it.
>
> (Keil, 1995, p. 3)

Surely, we know where he's coming from. Who has not felt, from time to time, some sort of intuitive musical communion in which we feel ourselves to be part of a grand cosmic Whole? But more is at issue here than a feeling. The metaphysical claims come the next morning, seated at the word processor, in construing such an ecstatic moment as a taste of what is *actually out there*: a primordial unity of vibes, or spirit, or energy, or elementary particles, or what have you. Though this metaphysics has some obvious affinities with certain traditions of practical mysticism, one need not undergo any monastic rigours to become a believer. Timothy Taylor's archive of Electronic Dance Music literature, for example, contains many such unitarian proclamations:

> As we raise our arms with an ecstatic cheer we feel our connection to each other as one tribe united in spirit – the power of the collective. This euphoric dance floor release is…our rite of passage into ecstatic oneness.
>
> (Decker cited in Taylor, 2014, p. 175)

Certainly, many of us can sympathise with a predilection for unity over duality, collectivity over individuality, togetherness over aloneness. But if we turn this into a basic claim about *what is*, if we start from the metaphysical axiom that everything inheres in a single, undivided primary reality, then separation can only appear logically negative (not-one) and morally deviant (alienated.) If face-to-face social life (full of encounters with independent individuals, sovereign interiorities, secrets, separation and duplicity) is taken to be a distortion of a primary unified reality, then the unity produced by participatory music-making would seem to be beckoning us back home. In the starkest metaphysical terms, the 'urge to merge' is calling us to be 'at one with the entire universe' (Keil, 1987, p. 276). Following Jonathan Weidenbaum (2013), I call this orientation the *metaphysics of unity*.

The argument so far is that claims about the moral righteousness of musical participation are grounded in a certain implicit metaphysics.[2] But I am not suggesting that we flee participation and set sail for some non-metaphysical utopia (right next door, perhaps, to that non-political utopia we've heard so much about). Nor am I suggesting that we need to stop dancing, stop singing, or stop participating – far from it. But I am claiming that the metaphysics of unity is a view from somewhere. If we want to reflexively understand the musical implications of this metaphysics, it may be helpful to stand elsewhere for a moment.

The metaphysics of alterity

This chapter focuses on one important *elsewhere*, which (again, following Weidenbaum), I will call the *metaphysics of alterity*.[3] There are numerous precedents for the critique of metaphysical unity from the point of view of alterity,

from many times and places (in the Arabic tradition, Ibn Taymiyyah's rejection of Ibn Arabi's panentheism in favour of a transcendent Creator absolutely separate from creation; in the Sanskritic tradition, Madhva's insistence on absolute separation of humanity and divinity as opposed to Shankara's radical *advaita*). But no one has done it more explicitly, at greater length, or with less confessional specificity than Emmanuel Levinas.[4] Levinas presents a metaphysics[5] that begins not from primordial unity, but from encountering a separate, never-fully-comprehensible Other, across a distance. We find ourselves thrown into a world full of such encounters. Even as I enter into various kinds of relationship, the Other remains distinct from me (Levinas, 1947/1987, p. 42). Perhaps I may, at times, join with them as one – through participation, through choreography, through deep empathy. But upon encountering an Other that I do not grasp, that I do not control, that I do not understand, joining is by no means the only (or the best) possibility. A free Other offers me the possibility of open-ended rapport with someone who is *not* me (in contrast to the autopoetic mutual maintenance of organs in a cosmic über-organism.) The 'urge to merge', from this point of view, is an urge to dissolve this separation, so that the face-to-face encounter is assimilated into a larger monad. Levinas points out that the assimilation of separation into oneness (which, like violence, is often suffused with power and pleasure) has the same metaphysical form as political domination: it 'establishes an order from which no one can keep his distance' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 21). To participate, then, requires that the delicate rapport between Self and Other be absorbed into a single Us: a totality.

If this account of alterity seems counterintuitive at first, it may be because the Levinasian Other is not 'the other' that has wide currency in the humanities[6] and even in everyday speech (for example, marrying someone from an-*other* race, listening to some *other* kind of music for a change.) This is an important distinction. Humanists and social scientists have long been concerned with the processes by which people are represented as 'others' – especially other than white, other than Christian, other than bourgeois, other than cisgendered, and so on. We think of Deep Forest selling albums with exotic, layered Pygmy voices; we think of Rajasthani folk musicians presented for European audiences in red lighted boxes; we think of white elementary school students mocking a new Asian–American classmate with stereotyped pentatonic melodies. Our usual analytic habits direct us to understand these as the results of representation – for example, the results of orientalist discourse (Said, 1979) or detemporalising ethnographic depiction (Fabian, 1983). This attention to representation, all the more urgent when illuminating stark power differentials between ethnographers and ethnographic subjects, continues to teach us a great deal. But it is an entirely different matter.

The Other that concerns us here is *not* the qualitatively different figure that we represent as exotic. We are concerned with the Other whom we meet face-to-face, who is always escaping representation, by whom we are called to responsibility. This Other certainly may *also* be an ethnographic subject who speaks another language, but they may just as well be a neighbour, a refugee,

a lover, a teacher, a student. Levinas's phenomenology of encounter is driven by a moral concern about the absorption of the Other into an overarching unity.[7] In this regard, at least, his concerns happen to accord with those of Edward Said and Johannes Fabian. But for Levinas, Otherness itself is not a problem to be solved. To encounter someone face-to-face is already to encounter an Other, in all of their strangeness and vulnerability. Starting from a metaphysics of alterity, the seductive, comforting move highlighted for critical consideration is not *othering*, but *totalising*: grasping the Other, making the Other a mere part of a totality, an appendage of Being, one more thing in our world that we use, know, feel, or encompass. This may, again, seem counterintuitive. It may seem as though our scholarly task is precisely to absorb our baffling musical encounters into ever-more comprehensive totalities. All the more reason, then, that while teaching, writing, and musicking, in distant lands or in our own neighbourhoods, a focus on metaphysical alterity may offer us something of great importance.

The task of this chapter

How might musical life appear to us if we begin from alterity rather than unity, if the formation of a unified totality stands out as a constitutive act rather than as an ontic foundation? This chapter aims to provide just such an account. This is by no means the first attempt at a Levinasian approach to music. Several other musicologists have recently taken up Levinas's ethical challenge – two particularly important examples are Marcel Cobussen and Nanette Nielsen's volume entitled *Music and ethics* (2012) and Jeff Warren's *Music and ethical responsibility* (2014).

Because of the particular arc of my own musical and speculative training, Levinas's account of coming face-to-face with an Other seems to me to *already* be a musical matter in the broadest sense – even if there is no singing or dancing involved. I thus tend to focus especially on the unfolding of rapport in time, and, more generally, on the phenomenological grounding of Levinasian metaphysics, rather than on its ethical and theological implications. This musical bias has led me to some Levinasian considerations of music practice that Levinas himself, for various reasons,[8] never explored. For example, I will attempt to transpose the *visage* (the 'face' of the other) beyond the merely visual, suggesting ways in which it might provide the ground for musical encounters. In the end, we will loop around again to the question of empathetic participation, and what it is that the 'urge to merge' may call us to renounce.

I myself have not signed on once and for all to a metaphysics of alterity. Instead, the line of critique opened by this account is intended to provide a counterpoint to the implicit metaphysics of unity that tends to dominate the human sciences. My aim is not to convert the reader to some kind of 'Levinasianism', or even to produce a prefigured dialectical synthesis between unity and alterity. Rather, I hope to open a speculative path, allowing us to discuss the risks of empathy, participation, and unity alongside their obvious powers and pleasures.

The *chez soi*

Levinasian metaphysics is founded on the radical distance between I and the Other. But this 'I' is no transparent eyeball floating in space. It lives and works in a world of activity, danger and possibility. The world of things and people, which at times can feel so foreign and threatening, is also actively constituted as a place to live, a place for enjoyment, a sensuous and intellectual extension of the Self. In such a world, the I must always exert power in 'recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it' (Levinas, 1961/1979, pp. 36–37). (It is here that the Heideggerian foundation is most obvious.)[9] Levinas often calls this place the *chez soi*, the 'at-home-with-oneself' in the broadest possible sense: the world of power, enjoyment, and comprehension (1961/1979, p. 37).

The *chez soi* is filled with activity: making my coffee, hearing my MP3 player progressing through a playlist, walking to get my daily doughnut around the corner, silently mulling over yesterday's argument with a friend. The *chez soi* is bound together by the constant efforts, big and small, by which I make a place for myself. Though I'm not omniscient, the *chez soi* is still coherent: it is fully available for me to exercise my powers over it. I may not know the exact temperature of my coffee, but I can grasp the handle of my cup; I may not know how this particular MP3 file was encoded, but I can sing along with Nina Simone; I may not know the precise gear ratios on my bike, but I can shift down to ascend a hill. Everything is in play, subject to my powers and my knowledge, so that everything is graspable even if not immediately grasped. I am constantly exerting power to re-organise my world into a totality organised around my needs, my enjoyment, my imagination: the coherence and continuity of my Being.

This is not a world of objects that a transcendental 'I' observes from the outside. Even basic acts of knowing are accomplished *through* it: streetlights, eyeglasses, guitar tuners, the Pythagorean theorem, computer screens, *righty tighty/lefty loosey*, phones, books, eardrums (cf. Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 153.) Nor does it simply consist of the things that go as planned. When a guitar string goes slack, I can tune it; when a headphone speaker is crackly, I can solder the loose contact; when I am perplexed by a disagreement with a friend, I can work to assimilate it theoretically (by bolstering or surrendering my position, by caricaturing or empathising with hers.) Even things beyond my immediate control are subject to my powers – when I am trapped by a Minnesota snowstorm, I can survey the situation, I can shovel my way out, I can complain, I can patiently wait for help. Sometimes my efforts fail; always my efforts consist to some degree in passively sojourning in the world I have constituted. But succeeding, failing, abiding in a world subject to my various powers of action and comprehension is what constitutes my *chez soi* – and the 'I' that dwells there.

The *chez soi* reaches far beyond my body. It is a seamless site of personal power, comprehension, and enjoyment ongoingly built by the 'I', a site of an egoism exerting power over a total, coherent lifeworld. When my MP3 player shuffles its way to a recording of Huun-Huur-Tu, I constitute it as 'Tuvan' music, even if I have never been to Tuva myself – even if I am mistaken. As far as my *chez soi*

extends its power, 'resistance is futile' – everything and everyone will be assimilated, if I so will it (Berman & Braga, 1995, p. 18.) This assimilating power extends far beyond the phenomenal body, far beyond the lived space of a house, to the speculative exploration of distant places I have never been: 'everything is at my disposal, even the stars, if I but reckon them' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 37).

Encountering the Other

But this coherent totality is not objectively complete. There is something beyond. Of course there are melodies I have never heard and places I have never heard of, doughnuts I have never eaten and buttons I have never pushed, even in my own apartment; these will offer little resistance to assimilation. But there also are moments when I encounter another person face-to-face who cannot merely be joined with the totality, who remains, for me, utterly Other.

Rushing along a city street, late for a meeting, dodging bodies, I hear a stranger call out to me. I turn to face him and he asks me for directions to the hospital. His confusion, his need, his vulnerability are apparent in his voice and face even if I do not know exactly why he needs to go there. Perhaps later, sitting on the bus, I will stare out of the window, weigh his needs against mine, figure out what a rational being in my position should have done. But right now I am not faced with a call to rational account – *I am faced*, as I might describe it to a friend, *with this guy*. His face and voice reach out to me from beyond the totality of my *chez soi*. Unlike any of the other conditional obstacles in my morning (a late bus, a locked door, a stubbed toe), this man's expression of need is an unconditional demand, utterly incommensurable with my everyday purposes. His call to me demands a response.

If you doubt the force of this demand, try facing someone as they greet you and remaining silent and still. What elaborate psychic feats must you carry out in order to manage *not* to respond? It's not that we must rouse ourselves from a prior unity to convince ourselves to act towards this separate Other. The demand for response – *responsibility* – stands out as quite different from other practical challenges.

But how, we might ask, could this helpless tourist be so strong? Can't I just choose to push him aside and continue on my way? I can. But doing so would be turning away from the encounter, exercising power over his flesh, constituting his body as another element of my world (an intractable algebra problem, a bus to catch, an irritating tourist). In that case I would no longer be faced by an Other. Less obviously violent would be to seal up the hole in my power by absorbing the Other into a theme I already comprehend: 'Ha! You New Yorkers are always getting lost.' This utterance could very well end the encounter; he might turn away in disgust, I might rush on my way.

But suppose the conversation continues; suppose he smiles with me at this unexpected caricature of New Yorkers. Or suppose he contests it, or suppose he points out that he is actually from Philadelphia, or suppose he simply laughs

with me, shaking his head: 'you got me there, buddy.' Whatever the theme 'New Yorker' may have been when I said it, no matter how much it may have seemed to account for the figure of this man, my interlocutor now stands outside of it, commenting on it, playing with it, even deliberately using it to grasp his own actions. In doing so, he is now the one deploying the theme rather than the one thematised. He is engaged in what Levinas calls *the saying* (*le dire*) rather than fully grasped in *the said* (*le dit*). This Other 'has quit the theme that encompassed him, and upsurges inevitably behind the said' (1961/1979, p. 195). His response calls for a response in turn. So the rapport continues.

Thus, the simple, everyday sense in which rapport with the Other is *infinite* has nothing to do with large numbers or mind-boggling spans of time or the far reaches of outer space. All of these are totalisable. The infinity at issue can be found in the indeterminate open-endedness of a conversation at the pub: for every *n* that is *said*, there is always an *n+1* in the possibility of *saying* (which, in turn, becomes a said). *The saying* is infinite not by virtue of how long we talk or how many topics we cover, but by virtue of always exceeding *the said* that came before. This is not happening through concerted intellectual effort, like a chess game. Inasmuch as we are in rapport, inasmuch as my interlocutor simply continues to be Other, he is constantly evading my grasp, and I his.

This dance by which the Other evades me now begins to appear in its musical dimensions. It has nothing to do with brute force, nothing to do with 'the hardness of the rock [or] the remoteness of a star' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 198). He 'opposes to me not a greater force', which would be, by virtue of being relatively *greater than* my own, 'an energy assessable … as though it were part of a whole' (p. 199). His freedom, the unpredictability of his needs, his inevitable upsurge behind any theme in conversation, stands radically outside of the sphere of my ability for power (my *pouvoir de pouvoir*). The Other greets me from the exterior of my *chez soi*, beyond my grasp and thus open to a mode of rapport that preserves the radical separation between the I and the Other. Without any pretense of total comprehension, I am called to responsibility.

It should be clear that such an encounter does not depend on any kind of qualitative difference; it is just as possible between first cousins as between mutual foreigners. The call of the Other demands a response, demands a kind of generosity. Responsibility to the Other 'opens a new dimension' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 197) orthogonal to the dimensions of my *chez soi*, orthogonal to my own purposes, enjoyment and comprehension. This, according to Levinas, is the unique dimension in which ethics might occur, prior to my exertions of power to generate and sustain totalities, in which the gentleness of dialogue can occur, in which we are called to ethical account for other people as Others rather than extensions of ourselves.

Totalising

The radical alterity of the Other, however, can be willfully dissolved in a totality. This person who a moment ago spoke to me from across an infinite distance may be reconstituted as one among many items in my total, seamless exercise

of power in the world. Physical force, as noted above, is one obvious form of violence. But totalising can take other forms as well: constituting the Other as an attainable object of desire, as a fascinating exotic to be known, as an instrument for my use, as a token of a type, as a theme.

Totalising thus includes not only 'othering' in the familiar representational sense (for example, racialist certainties about 'cunning Arabs' or 'passionate Latinos', saavy disdain for French philosophers or college athletes) but any encompassing comprehension (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 38). Even the warm embrace of a fellow citizen as *one of us* dissolves the asymmetrical rapport of the I and the Other into an overarching unity. In Levinas's pithy terms, 'the collectivity in which I say "you" or "we" is not a plural of the "I"' (p. 39).

The problem here is not that some particular qualitative distinction between Us and Them is inaccurate or demeaning or politically incorrect (and thus that some other system of difference is accurate or respectful or politically correct). The Levinasian line of critique sees *any* gesture that simultaneously constitutes Them and Us – no matter how empirically accurate or rhetorically convincing or expedient – as a totalising erasure of alterity. This erasure leaves us with a single encompassing totality and forecloses the possibility of rapport with an Other.

Teaching World Music

Shouldn't teaching World Music, then, by highlighting difference, by teaching us about those unlike us, restore the ground of alterity that affords ethical responsibility? Perhaps it should. But again, it is important to distinguish metaphysical alterity (which arises in encounter) from qualitative difference (which is produced in representation). Just as the metaphysics of unity does not require cultural sameness, the metaphysics of alterity does not require cultural difference. Levinas's defence of alterity against the 'imperialism of the Same' (1961/1979, p. 39) should not be confused with the defence of cultural diversity against 'cultural grey-out' that so concerned ethnomusicologists in the 1970s (cf. Lomax, 1972). World Music courses are intended in most institutional curricula to serve something like this latter end. Such courses aim to teach our students to hear and accept difference, to place the musics of colonial subjects on a level playing field with the musics of colonial masters, to provincialise our own listening habits, to teach me that I too, from an alien point of view, am alien too. All worthy goals.

But the Other we are considering here – the other we meet face-to-face – is not Other by virtue of having different traits, playing different music, belonging to a different place. A relationship with an Other that preserves alterity has nothing to do with enumerating her cultural traits ('my scale has twenty-two notes but hers has twenty-four'). Any such distinction, on the contrary, is a way of comprehending the Other in a theme.

Take *culture*, that all-encompassing theoretical recourse of undergraduate World Music textbooks. Leaving aside the question of whether this concept actually accounts for ethnographic data (cf. Gupta & Ferguson, 1991; Laidlaw, 2013, pp. 24–27), what are the implications of teaching our students to hear mbira

music as an expression of *Zimbabwean culture*? Why is it such a relief to students to explain away the sting of melodic perplexity by appealing to different *cultural* values? And why does recourse to culture shut down the ongoing, infinite *saying* of face-to-face encounter (in which our interlocutor escapes our every theme) so thoroughly into the seamless totality of the *said* (from which nothing escapes)? When we account for a musicking Other as an economic agent in a market, as an actor in a network, as a member of a society, as a token of a cultural type, we patch up the hole and return to our comfortable sojourn in a world maintained by our own powers.

Again and again, in World Music surveys, we bring students into perplexing encounters with surprising ways of musicking. But this surprise is easily assimilated: neutral thirds, nine-day rituals, asymmetrical metric cycles, feudal patronage. Any such marker of specific difference does its work within a genus: interval, ritual form, metre, patronage structures. Think of the ease and enthusiasm with which a budding jazz musician grasps an unfamiliar groove numerically as 'a seven' or 'an eleven'. Marking difference is not the same as preserving metaphysical alterity; on the contrary, it is a powerful way to render the Other digestible into the Same. As Levinas concisely puts it: 'The alterity of the other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity' (1961/1979, p. 194). A Tibetan monk chanting can strike my students as *different* only if they first recognise him empathically as a member of a genus: a man among men, a voice among voices. The off-balance disorientation we feel on hearing the play of two interlocking bell patterns rests on an intuition that there must be a pulse somewhere, feeling our way empathically to where a human might step or play. The sound that I constitute as 'chanting' would not strike me as a different voice, a different subjectivity, were it coming from my furnace; the sound that I constitute as 'bell patterns' would not seem to both invite and frustrate dancing were they coming from a melting glacier. Perhaps the sounds would cause me concern or curiosity (about the workings of my machines or the progress of climate change), perhaps I might even imaginatively constitute them as a kind of cosmic *musica universalis*, but unless I constitute them as a (specific) type of (general) music, they would not arise as exotic, as different, as a 'quality that would distinguish him from me'.

This felt exoticism is a particularly important affective resource in the age of nation-states, in which each person seems to require a nation and each nation seems to require a distinct culture, just as a census form requires each citizen to have unequivocal designations of gender, race, and citizenship. When a curious student asks what the music is like in Togo, our answer fills in just such a designative blank (cf. Weiss, 2014). However useful or accurate the answer may be, it also dissolves the student's curiosity within a totality.

For example, a teacher of a World Music class may feel compelled to lead a student from a conception of Asmahan as a *weird singer* to a *singer with an Arab aesthetic sensibility*. To be sure, this is progress along a certain dimension. It moves our students from a concentric view (radiating out from *us* to progressively more

exotic *them*-s) to a top-down global map in which each culture – including, necessarily, one's own – is notionally commensurable. It proceeds, in other words, from totalising ethnocentrism to totalising cultural relativism. From this bird's eye view of spatially bounded cultures, a man in Hanoi is *in Vietnamese culture*; any place and person must fall within boundaries, must have a place in a prefigured global totality. This totalising power need not be limited to nation-states; constituting a voice as 'Westernised', or 'working-class', or 'Latin', or 'folk' evokes a prefigured space of exhaustive alternatives, whether empirically accurate or not (for example, 'folk/classical/primitive/pop'). Any such map – oriented around class, gender, region, religion and so on – already comprehends 'us' and 'them'. It locates any musical utterance, any musician, within a prefigured totality from which there is no escape.

But the situation is not so grim as it might seem. Teaching World Music is not simply an exercise in caging alterity within totalities. Just as often, they are occasions for world-shattering musical encounter: with each other, with a teacher, and, perhaps most strikingly, with visiting masters.

Encountering a master

Encounters with such masters[10] have long been a key resource for ethnomusicologists. Many of us were disciples long before we were scholars, returning to our masters as ethnographers only after many years of training. They seem to differ from ordinary interlocutors; they have a special kind of authority quite apart from any *account* of that authority, such as the one I am about to hazard. Here, I will focus here on the master–student[11] relationships I know best, in the Hindustani vocal tradition. Methodological discussions of these relationships often consider ways in which responsibility to a master might skew ethnography or history away from disinterested, objective reportage (see Katz, 2010, p. 34). These concerns parallel the fascinating problematic of charisma and local truths, which has a long tradition in the social sciences (Faubion, 2011; Weber, 1922/1947; Worsley, 1957). Where an acoustician might see the essence of vocal instruction in vibrating air molecules, where a neuroscientist might see the reinforcement of vocal–neural circuitry, a social scientist tends to see various kinds of mutually constitutive structures of truth and power. It is understandable why the idea of writing from within these power structures would be troubling: if our goal is the constitution of an objective-in-principle, universally valid ethnographic account, we need data, not teaching.

For a disciple, the situation is reversed: I need teaching, not data. I am faced with a musical Other who, as a master, stands outside of my preconceived melodic totalities. Listening to a recording of a lesson after the fact, generating data, transcribing our vocal utterances in monochromatic ink as though they were all made of the same stuff: this is an entirely different kind of activity. Surely, at times, a student may step back and question the master, constituting an odd melodic phrase as data subject to dispute. But the moments of most intense instruction, when a lesson is really cooking, are not moments of assimilating

data. Likewise, far more is involved in encountering a master than the complex structures of status, semiosis, and authority (enfolded within a totalising cultural system) that are constituted by a social-scientific mode of inquiry. A different understanding of such a relationship is afforded by a metaphysics of alterity; it begins not perched at a distance observing a system, but sitting face-to-face with a teacher, *sina ba sina.*

Sitting face-to-face, my master sings a phrase, and I strive to sing it again. This striving goes beyond mere sonic imitation. I am called to respond. When my rendition falls dramatically short, he corrects me; when it is close enough, we move on to another phrase so the process can begin again. But even as I learn, even as novel phrases are called forth spontaneously from me, I never *become* him. I never accomplish the task of doing what he does or being what he is. Though rituals mark the beginning of the master–disciple relationship, there is no ritual celebration of a final, completed achievement of sameness. The teaching is *never* accomplished in principle, and thus it always generates movement. As one master once said to me, '*Always* I will tell the student to work harder. The guru can never tell you that you have it right.' One singer recently described to me the process of learning from a master like this: 'It's like the horizon. It keeps moving. You keep on going, but the distance is still there.' The distance between the I and the distant Other generates an unending pull.

The metaphysical distance afforded by master–disciple relationships is the inverse of the metaphysical equivalence afforded by participatory performance (Turino, 2008, 34). This distance is not merely (or even necessarily) a qualitative difference in ability or in musical wealth. Just as participatory performance does not depend in principle on everyone being equally competent (Turino, 2008, 132), rapport with a master does not require a vast difference in technical skill. It is a perfectly common thing for a young student with a brilliant voice to sit before an older master whose voice is ragged and worn. A student may know compositions unknown to the teacher, may have read more books, may even have performed on stage more often. But sitting face-to-face, the master calls to a student from beyond their comprehension and their expectations. It is in this sense–not a difference of any magnitude–that a teacher is infinitely beyond the student. This is no mere matter of technical competence.

Accomplished musicians whose own teachers are physically absent (in another city, in another country, or even long dead) continue to gaze across this musical distance. It is a routine matter to allow the teacher to come to mind before singing. This relation with an infinitely distant master has the same form as a metaphysical relation with an infinite Other that is, for lack of a better word, often called *music* or *sangeet*. When musicians speak of the ocean of music of which they have understood only a drop, they are not referring to some finite corpus of compositions, *raga*-s or techniques. There is no ratio between one's personal understanding and the vast ocean. To claim that music takes many lifetimes to master is not to claim that five or seventeen or a hundred and eight rebirths will be sufficient. Of course, such claims may, from a social-scientific perspective, be construed as functional performances of humility that grant ethical capital

(Laidlaw, 2013, p. 7). But they are also ways of making a key metaphysical distinction: between the totalising achievement of comprehension and an always-deferred, infinite striving. This distinction becomes especially poignant in the age of mass education in raga music, marked by successive examinations, achievements and certificates of completion. To invoke unfathomable oceans or innumerable lifetimes is to invoke a metaphysics of infinite separation, of a distance that *always* exceeds our attempts to span it, and therefore always calls us towards it. Striving, 'a desire that cannot be satisfied' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 34), an infinitely deferred comprehension, is the very condition of a musical metaphysics of alterity.

Of course, not all musical encounters, nor even all teaching, requires sitting face-to-face with another person. And even when we do face each other, visual perception itself is neither sufficient nor necessary. It thus will be necessary to develop Levinas's sense of the *visage* beyond its suggestion of visuality.

Improvisation and The Musical *Visage*

Levinas thematizes the constant evasion of comprehension in the *visage*, which is ordinarily translated as 'face'. But we should not confuse the *visage* with the visible surface of the nose, mouth, and cheeks. We certainly should not confuse it with a fixed image of another's face as it might be photographed or imagined to be. If we picture a face at all, we might picture someone rolling their eyes, breaking into laughter, raising an eyebrow or smiling warmly. The *visage* is always in motion as expression, always acting and reacting, freely surging beyond what we thought it was a moment ago. It is 'the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the [totalising] idea of the other in me'. It 'destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me' (Levinas, 1961/1979, pp. 50–51). It is the dynamic play of the metaphysically Other, so that the *saying* of each moment exceeds the *said* that came before.

As a practicing musician, this play of theme and evasion feels to me much like improvisation. It seems to me that the dynamics of the *visage* applies not only to face-to-face conversation, but also to a performance of a *taqsim* that playfully affords a glimpse of an unexpected maqam; to a shifting melodic flow that transcends any particular totalisation; to the kind of turbulent rhythmic carriage that one Hindustani vocalist described to me as 'drunken', a gait 'where no one can tell where he will step next'. Though this is clearest when applied to improvisation, it applies equally well to dynamic performances of composed 'pieces' of music that open texts to *saying*. I think of Bootsy Collins playfully mutating a slippery bass line; of Jon Barlow looking over at me and smiling as he finds a new way through a Chopin nocturne; of Essam Rafea taking an unexpected path to the taslim of a classic *semai;* of Padma Talwalkar brilliantly expanding a Hindustani *bandish*. Certainly any of these pieces may also be performed stiffly, so that they arise as a sequence of tones or a reproduction of a style. We may constitute them as mere material to be recorded and played back by a machine in a recognisable way. We may likewise constitute these unexpected moments

as tonal or rhythmic deviations, as 'participatory discrepancies' that invite us to join in (Keil, 1995, p. 2). But we may also encounter the musical *visage* of an ungraspable Other who is never quite what we think, with whom we never quite join. We may hear the moment-to-moment musical play between *said* and *saying*, between totality and infinity, between theme and escape.

Improvisation, in this sense, is not a willful expression of pure, active freedom to exert power as one pleases, free from repressive constraints or responsibilities. Even when I am engaging in 'free' improvisation with others, I need not willfully choose which notes to play, move by reasoned move, like playing chess. Nor must I sink into passive entrainment, allowing the 'charm of rhythm' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 203) to absorb me into a larger unity. We may instead hearken to a musical call from beyond the *chez soi*. Just as in speech, the *visage* of the Other addresses us from a great distance. Playing in ensemble calls us to respond without fully comprehending what we are hearing. Responsible musical action – even in the midst of a deep groove – may be called forth from us, as when a friend addresses us, or a stranger asks us for directions. Indeed, many of the freest occasions of free improvisation consist in responding to the musical demands of the moment. To respond in this sense is not to obey explicit commands (say, from an orchestral conductor or a square dance caller), nor to meld into a collectivity (where each and all is implicitly understood), but to answer to a call never fully understood, reaching us from outside ourselves.

Powers of empathy, powers of participation

Having outlined a musical metaphysics founded in alterity rather than unity, we can return to our original questions about participation and shared feeling from a different perspective. What do we make of musical empathy, of entrainment, of the realm of *einfühlung* and *einsfühlung*, of *tonglen*, of *hamdardi*, of spontaneously feeling for another as for oneself? Can we encounter another's need as an immediate heartfelt resonance, rather than as some perplexing call from a distant Other? Indeed, *we can* do this – it is very much within our powers. The full accomplishment of musical empathy, whereby we are fully joined together in a single feeling, subsumes the I and the Other. It delivers us from the incomprehensibility of the *visage* to the certainty of connection that 'seems to exclude any possibility of duplicity' (Turino, 2008, p. 136) leaving us instead with a completed unity.

As the other chapters in this volume make clear, the formation of these unities is a perfectly ordinary and widely attested human capacity. From polka parties to the 'muscular bonding' (McNeill, 1995) of military drills, fellow-feeling is all around us. Edith Stein, the phenomenologist of empathy *par excellence*, vividly describes the ways in which a 'we' may emerge as a 'subject of a higher grade [*Stufe*]' than the *I* and the *you*, so that we become suffused with feeling 'as members of a community' [*als Glieder dieser Gemeinschaft*] rather than as separate individuals (Stein, 1917/1964, p. 17). To be sure, this is the mode of feeling that enables musical ensemble. It also is the mode of feeling that enables the

solidarities of coordinated violence. There's nothing deviant or fallen or unnatural about it: there is suggestive evidence that empathic action understanding is shared with several species of primates (Iacoboni, 2009) along with fear, pleasure and aggression. The power of a rhythmically flexible orchestra, the power of a tight marching band, the power of a platoon of soldiers in step, the power of thousands of voices chanting slogans in unison – all of these have political and moral implications far beyond their undeniable pleasures.

Surely, we all have felt music taking us 'into deep identification, total participation, and past the logical contradictions of separation of the other' so that 'you now *are* the other, or the other is *in* you' (Keil & Feld, 1994, p. 168). But where a metaphysics of unity sees this identification as a praiseworthy return to a primordial state of oneness, a metaphysics of alterity attends to what is lost when radical separation melts into a comprehensive, finite unity, where 'the subject not only sees the other, but is the other' (Levinas, 1947/1987, p. 43). Fully accomplished, as a form of unifying comprehension, empathy does not hearken beyond the reach of the Same, but extends its dominion. Just as an electronic guitar tuner enables certain kinds of intonation, empathy enables certain kinds of ensemble, pulling individuals into unity, reaffirming the warm embrace of an extended, über-empathetic 'we'. In winking reference to Lucien Levy-Bruhl's account of participatory mentality among 'primitives', Levinas warns, cryptically, that 'a modern consciousness, at least, could not abdicate its secrecy and solitude at so little cost' (Levinas, 1947/1987, p. 43).

But what is this modern consciousness, and what is this solitude that participation calls us to give up? Is it an alienated, egotistical individualism produced by capitalism, propagated by 'power-tripping, control-over people still trapped inside civilization' (Keil, 1995, p. 4), which suppresses an ancient, morally correct regime of fellow-feeling? Is it radical alterity, the necessary condition of ethics, gentleness and responsibility, which hearkens to the call of a free Other outside the totality of the Same? Must feeling-for-others always exclude the possibility of letting others feel for themselves? Might there be modes of empathic striving that proceed through the infinite play of rapport with an unknowable stranger, rather than towards a perfected comprehension? This would seem to be the import of Stein's distinction between *Einfühlen* (empathy) and *Einsfühlen* (a feeling of oneness.) Levinas himself founds his metaphysics on a desire that 'is like goodness – the Desired does not fulfil it, but deepens it', of a mode of encounter that 'is not the disappearance of distance, not a bringing together [*rapprochement*] … [but] a relationship [*rapport*] whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation, for it nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger' (Levinas, 1961/1979, p. 34).

For now, we too remain hungry in the face of these questions. If we have learned anything about alterity, if we have learned anything from the infinite play of musicking, we will be glad to defer the satisfactions of conceptual perfection. Even carving up the world into unity and alterity, after all, is a way of totalising. For my part, I do not intend to renounce the participatory pleasures of dancing *dabke* or singing sacred harp music; I certainly cannot renounce the powers of empathy that make ensemble possible. But a critical consideration of

the metaphysics of alterity and unity should help us to feel through these potent musical technologies without conflating power or pleasure with moral righteousness. In this spirit, the questions raised here will be most fruitfully addressed not as problems waiting for solutions to be *said*, but as provocations to *saying*, in the uncertainty of face-to-face conversations and other performances.

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Notes

1 There are other anthropological precedents as well, as when Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1922/2013) affirms that 'dancing is a means of uniting individuals into a harmonious whole' (p. 253).
2 The claim here is *not* that Keil, Feld, Turino, or anyone else is explicitly or consistently committed to a metaphysics of unity in all of their work. Rather, I am claiming that this metaphysical orientation (even if adopted provisionally or implicitly) makes the moral stakes of participation appear obvious and closed to critique. For example, Turino's occasional descriptions of 'transcendent' (2014, p. 208, p. 212) experiences of pure Being, analogous to exalted meditative states available to Buddhist adepts (Turino, 2012), are enabled by his creative reorientation of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics towards primordial Firstness (pure, unitary Being without a second.) Thus, in such moments, 'the in-and-of-itself character of a First' leads him 'to identify it with "the real"' (Turino, 2014, p. 191). At other moments, however, his nuanced account of the musical 'balancing' of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness would seem to work against the axiomatic primacy of unity and connection – and therefore participation – at expense of all else (Turino, 2014, p. 213).
3 Alterity and unity are by no means the only possibilities; nor by any means am I suggesting that we swear eternal allegiance to either.
4 Though it's tempting to regard unity and alterity to be characteristic cultural orientations, each bound to a certain time and place (encouraged, perhaps, by Jacques Derrida's construal of Levinas as a Judaic alternative to the Greek tradition (1967/1978), this interpretive habit would obscure more than it would reveal. As noted, representatives of unity and alterity can be found in a range of philosophical and contemplative traditions. I focus here on two of Levinas's early works, *Time and the other* (1947/1987) and *Totality and infinity* (1961/1979), in part because his later works become more closely entangled with his Talmudic readings, and I do not feel I have the spiritual authority to address them fulsomely here. But if the reader is tempted to attribute Levinas's insistence on the primacy of alterity to his Judaic intellectual heritage, one well-known counterexample can be found in the legendary panenthetic mystical tradition of the Baal Shem Tov.
5 I have adopted Jonathan Weidenbaum's handy terms here, in accordance with the loose sense of metaphysics widely used in English – an account of the fundamental conditions of existence prior to (and constitutive of) empirical evidence. Levinas himself, however, uses the term *métaphysique* with somewhat more specificity: in reference to

relation with a transcendental Other, always 'turned toward the "elsewhere" and the "otherwise" and the "other"' (1961/1979, p. 33). Levinas considers what Weidenbaum calls the *metaphysics of unity* (particularly as developed in Heidegger), to be a kind of totalising ontology that privileges Being – but only an orientation to alterity to be worthy of the name *la métaphysique*.

6 Part of why these two concepts are easily confused is that they look identical in print – both take variants of the common word 'other' as a key term, often set apart from its standard meaning with a captial O and the Gallic definite article: '*the* Other'. To make matters more confusing, both traditions were inaugurated in books which had basically the same title: Levinas's *Le temps et l'autre* (1945) and Johannes Fabian's *Time and the other* (1983), though Fabian specifically disavows any connection (2006.) A depiction of my *oud*-playing cousin as a token of timeless Oriental culture thus could be critiqued in apparently contradictory terms: (after Fabian) as reducing a co-eval contemporary to a fictional other through representation –*or* (after Levinas) as reducing an Other to a mere object of comprehension.

7 It seems almost certain that Levinas's experiences as a prisoner of the Nazis informed his later philosophical concern with the moral consequences of unfettered totalising. His construal of Martin Heidegger's ontology, in which the assimilating work of Being functions as 'the imperialism of the Same' (not just totalising but totalitarian) might thus appear to require our allegiance in principle. But as illuminating as these biographical considerations might be, they are not sufficient reason to follow (or not follow) his lead. Just as the equation of Heidegger with Nazism fails to account for the divergent paths of thought that emerge from *Sein und Zeit* (including ardent anti-fascists like Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Levinas himself), Levinas's own various political commitments (for instance, his struggle against the Nazis in the 1940s, his Zionist apologetics in the 1970s, his 'Third-World decolonialism' in the 1980s) are only a few possible (and by no means necessary) paths to follow from an 'ethics of ethics' founded in alterity (cf. el-Bizri, 2006; Slabodsky, 2010). The sketches of musical alterity I present here should neither be taken as a series of propositions that must follow logically from a set of political axioms (*Alterity is true because not-imperialism!*) nor a system of axioms that must imply certain political imperatives (*Alterity is false because not-Zionism!*) I would hope instead that a careful consideration of alterity and unity might lead us beyond the comforts of slogans, the politics of exclusion, and State-centered political axiomatics.

8 Jeff Warren masterfully addresses Levinas's peculiar ambivalence towards music (2013, pp. 148–157). Levinas himself claimed to be an '*idiot en musique*' (Levinas in Warren, 2013, p. 148), and indeed tended to regard music rather narrowly as a matter of fixed composition, doomed to repetition despite its illusion of novelty, 'covering up the breach of otherness' (p. 150). I add to this Levinas's tendency to consider music categorically as 'art', and thus 'as "devotion" to the Neoplatonic ideal of the One' (1991/1998, p. 184). Despite his support for his son, composer Michaël Levinas (a student of Olivier Messiaen), the elder Levinas nonetheless tended to affect an ignorance of musical *action*. Warren's current work on musical life in the Levinas household should further illuminate these questions.

9 *Totalité et Infini* uses the phenomenological resources of *Sein und Zeit* both to foreground the limits of Being and to point beyond. The *chez soi* is already Being-in-the-World, already involved, already participatory. Levinas's point is that there is something beyond this. Though there is no evidence of Levinas having encountered Owen Barfield's work, Barfield's own account of participation between self and world in *Saving the appearances*– an important part of the ethnomusicological inheritance of 'participation' – bears close comparison to Heidegger's account of *In-der-Welt-sein* (see Terry Hipolito's *Before the new criticism* for more on the connections between Barfield and Heidegger).

10 This account is informed by my relationships with three masters in particular. In Delhi, L. K. Pandit (my music guru); in Minnesota, Johnny (Way-sa-quo-nabe) Smith (Ojibwa keeper of the drum); and in Connecticut, Jon K. Barlow, (speculative music theorist.)

11 The master–student dyad I am describing here (which typically stretches over many years of intensive training) is variously called *ustad-shagird* or *guru-shishya* in Hindustani languages. The lineage structures thus formed, if not actually congruent with blood relations, often take the form of virtual families. I have not explored here Levinas's subtle consideration of the special forms of alterity that obtains between parents and children (1961/1979, p. 278), though it may be relevant.

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