Theorizing Sound Writing

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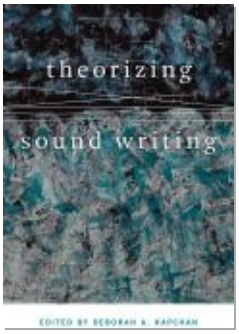

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3. Writing the Magnified Musicking Moment

In this essay I give some sustained attention to the significance of magnified musicking moments. These are the moments that crystallize, in heightened miniature, aesthetic and interpersonal sentiment fused with cultural and existential affect. In a flash they tend to multiply and refract centripetally and centrifugally. Then they pass. The sensation that they are fleeting is a part of their power and poignancy.

> Suddenly, there was room for a million different pronunciations of this moment and I could not tell where the kaleidoscope ended and the sound began. It seemed that each of us carried this instant in our mouths; singing our particular syllable, tinting the expression. We each gave the notes a different weight, so that some sailed through the space between us and others sank into our flesh or bounced off the yellowing plaster on the ceiling. The song became a communal narrative, originating in me. In Kelly. In Margot. In the teacher. There was no part of it that did not belong to each of us; to all of us. But it wasn't easy. Every hum was a negotiation. (Woodly 2001, 2)

At the end of this chapter I return to the longer piece in which Deva, my former student, describes further this magnified instance of singing. Moments such as this are familiar and often cherished by many people, but they are rarely addressed directly in musical scholarship. I suggest here that understanding better how to approach these moments in writing could be important for the continuing development of the ethnography of musical performance. We have not so far been well trained in the academy to address these moments as foci for the transmission of "sound knowledge" (Kapchan, this volume), while in fact they may provide a conceptual locus for informed understanding. I am advocating

here for the microevocation of minimalist sound events—for an ethnographic focus on microcosms of observed experience that when, perhaps *only* when rendered in poetic specificity, allow us to think and feel in depth about sound textures, musical interactions, and heightened experiences.[1] Digging down into the ethnographic at this microlevel can allow for greater socioaesthetic insights, that unfurl into multiplex meanings and implications when pulled from what was otherwise packed and hidden within a moment. I explore in this essay how such moments might be addressed, even written into identifiable form, by poetically hypersituating reactive and interactive routes arriving at a sonic, social, and sensual presence. This focus might, I hope, compel writer-researchers to critically ground themselves in the writing while taking the vulnerable turn toward poetics required to evoke emotional resonances. The concept I explore is not developed here into a full ethnographic rendering. Rather, I consider the kinds of moments and the kinds of writing that could become the focus of more extended treatment.

WHY MUSICKING?

Unlike the noun *music,* the verb *musicking* (after Small 1998) emphasizes that music is at once enacted and experienced. Musicking directly opposes the language and attendant ideology that encodes "music" as an object, and is especially appropriate given that this essay (and this volume) contributes to the broader project of destabilizing the objectification and reification of expressive life by carving out pathways of knowledge that have thus far been marginalized in academic discourse. What's more, musicking, as defined by Small, reminds us that music is always more than what is sounded. Musicking is an activity of consequence, where issues of broad socioaesthetic significance may be at stake.

I wish to focus specifically on moments of participatory engagement with "humanly organized sound," John Blacking's (1973) working definition for "music." As Blacking reminded us, "It is the human content of humanly organized sound that 'sends' people" (Blacking 1973, 34). Any sound that we as humans perceive is, in a sense, "humanly organized" by the very fact of and in the very moment of its perception. Therefore, my paradigm in this essay is in dialogue with the field of sound studies, which has opened a significant new frame of critical perception regarding what we might call "musicking." But I emphasize in this essay the concurrent experience of *making* sound (especially with others) as well as perceiving it. As one recent purveyor of community musicking explains:

> Music changes when other people enter the scene, often miraculously and for the better. The same note I was playing on the guitar by myself an hour ago sounds drastically different when it combines with a drummer's beats. The note I'm singing might sound like a different note altogether when somebody sings an unexpected harmony. Or, that note I played might gain a brand new energy when I know somebody else is listening or whispering "bravo"! Theoreticians describe the interactions of musical overtones, but mostly what I feel is the interactions of energies. Often these energies add up to much more than the sum of their parts. What's more, they create a combined, unpredictable magic that can only be experienced once, for next time it will change. Shared music, in short, is ephemeral, a product of the here and now. (Weisenberg 2011)

During these moments, sound enables mutual, if fleeting, connections and interactions between people that resonate on many levels. And although one can surely have a silent magnified moment of experience with memorable impact, sound tends toward synesthesia—the crossing of multiple senses and modes of experience—and as I will address, it can also stretch and alter the perception of time and of the copresence of living things in ways that are arguably particular to sound.[2]

AN APPROACH TO WRITING

Writing a magnified musicking moment is to explore overdetermined conditions and sudden correspondences, where multivocal meanings bubble to the surface, overflowing into a kind of transcendence. There is a special correlation worth keeping in mind between layered, textured, interactive musical practices and the rendered writing of layered microcosms that *emerge* intra-actively from such practices (Barad 2003). The writer delves into thick description (Geertz 1973), bringing readers along into her embodied consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962) by evoking the immediacy of intra-active sounding and listening. She takes care to describe the aural and kinesthetic, personal and interpersonal details that fleetingly crystallize emergent meanings. At first grounded in the writer's position, the metadescription can move concentrically outward into overlapping, widening ethnographic repartee, resulting in interpretive tension that multiplies into refracting, open-ended meanings that spin out from the momentary microcosm. The challenge is to both identify such occasions of heightened significance *and* to write them into a parallel palpability.

The approach I am outlining here assumes that the writer is in some manner a participant in the musicking that she also wishes to engage ethnographically. In several of the examples that follow I cite my own writing, clustering my examples around bluegrass and on musicking in the rainforest of central Africa, as these are the areas I am most experienced in and have written about. I also include writing by other authors on these and related genres, as it is crucial to offer a variety of voices. But each is from an experience-centered position, which invites personalized, vulnerable, and even playful poetic narrative that can bring readers into the frame while allowing for multiple interpretations.[3] I will often quote at length, because it is in the details and sometimes in the development of the cited writing that the examples of these musical moments become meaningful. As Susan Stewart notes, "Because of the correspondences it must establish, writing about the miniature achieves a delirium of description" (Stewart 2007, 46).[4]

MAGNIFIED MOMENTS BEYOND LINEAR TIME

The ethnographic effort I propose also falls within the movement toward embodied, multisensory research and writing that a number of ethnographers have been engaged in (e.g., Stoller 1989; Csordas 1994; Sklar 2001). They include contributors to this volume on sound writing and others, a few of whom I will cite in this discussion. But even within the subcategory of senses-focused ethnographic writers, attention to the significant but ephemeral microcosmic moments of performance has been slim. V. S. Ramachandran observes that "the most interesting aspects of human conscious experience have received the least attention" (1998, 1854—here he refers to research on the neurobiology of synesthesia, which I address later). One reason for this scholarly inattention is, I think, because topics such as synesthesia or musicking moments demand a kind of emotional and psychological labor requiring coaxing and courage—like facing the discomfort of recalling an elusive or disquieting dream. They demand conscripting into creative service the very consciousness that prefers to evade self-scrutiny, but which usually offers substantial rewards when we manage to lure it out of its cozy hiding places. Another reason people resist putting exceptional moments into writing is that these may be felt as exceedingly private, protected aspects of our lives. The idea of setting them out for strangers to scrutinize, the fear of reducing or trivializing a cherished and fluid memory that has become a part of oneself, can dampen an impulse to expose these moments in writing. And although there are "intense pleasures [in] moment chasing" (McKinney 2004, 1)—

these pleasures are felt during the musicking (and in freely remembering it), but maybe not again until the conceptual and perhaps painstaking part of a research and writing process is over and one has reentered the poetic domain. So part of the writing process I am advocating for here might become more uncomfortable than other kinds of writing.

One of my goals with this essay, then, is to encourage ethnographers (myself included) to push past resistance and devote to these moments the intellectual heart and creative mind required to render them with the life force that they merit. And right there is another key—ethnographic language moves, following convention, into hegemonic visual metaphors that so often imply, as I just have, that one is "rendering a scene" or giving the "big picture." But when the focus is devoted to one or a series of micromoments, suddenly the visual is no longer so predominant. This shift is important: breathing into and expanding those musicking instances brings kinesthetic perception, aural and tactile sensation, and memory into a present that bursts suddenly beyond linear time.[5]

An embodied radical empiricism (Jackson 1989) is the research medium and poetics is the rendering tool that grounds the ineffable as it flutters momentarily in our grasp. The poetic response might be in writing, or it could be through other expressive modes including more musicking—metamusicking. So right away we are at the edge of the conventional academic realm (Taussig 1992), even threatening to slide off that edge. But we urgently need to hang on, as scholars and not only as scholars, but as creative, ephemeral beings unfettered by an idea of "proper" discourse. In this realm, we might be not only moved to tears, but also compelled to understand and describe how and why we have been so moved, and why it matters.

WHEN SOUND AND SYNERGY MOVED THEM TO TEARS

Two well-known and innovative musical ethnographies of the late 1970s and early 1980s have elements that especially prefigure, I think, attention to the kind of moments and the kind of writing I am talking about. One is Paul Berliner's *The Soul of Mbira* (1978), and the other is Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment* (1982). By beginning to address, via their own writing, the transportive emotional power that the musics they are describing have on the people whom they write about—and on themselves—they moved musical ethnography a step closer to what we don't quite have yet, issuing a summons to write our way into the most

resonant occasions of performance. Berliner's book expressively and rigorously addresses Zimbabwean Shona *mbira* practices, bursting with musicking that lingers just beneath the text while thoroughly informing it. And he does not choose to delve as deeply as he might have into the particularity of the events that inform his rich ethnography. In a later chapter, when the focus is on spirit possession during religious ceremonies, most of the description, while elegantly written and nuanced, is also normative and generalized. But instances of spirit possession are notoriously difficult to describe ethnographically. They reside within the mysteries of human consciousness, and at a far point on the spectrum of transcendent musicking (to which I will return later). Berliner deserves to be lauded because this ethnography goes further than most had, or have since, toward grounding ethnographically the emotional complexities of trance-based musical experience.[6] But in fact, as Devin McKinney has observed, it is not possible within *conventional academic discourse* to address "some fleeting convergence of sound that excites terror, captures delight, opens the soul, tilts the universe." So the task we give to ethnographers cannot be to "define something whose nature it is to elude us" (McKinney 2004)—as that of a dream. The task is rather to inscribe it on another plane, to meet the magnified moment in the poetic realm in which it already exists.

In his now-canonical book *Sound and Sentiment* (1982) about Kaluli in New Guinea, Steven Feld approaches his topic near the end of the book in a way he had not done earlier, allowing himself to tumble, almost as an afterthought, toward poetics and metaphor in his own writing. Though he addresses metaphor as a topic of analysis throughout, until these final pages he does so mostly in dry, academic terms, by way of structural linguistics and formal analyses. But that approach renders the material relatively lifeless, because "metaphor not only pervades the language people use about emotion-laden experience, but also . . . is essential to the understanding of most aspects of the conceptualization of emotion and emotional experience" (Kovecses 2000, 20).[7] So when we ourselves engage in metaphoric communication as we write about metaphoric communication, we are both conceptualizing emotion and constituting aspects of our experience in the process—piecing together little metaphor dwellings in which to tuck and shape affective experiences that would otherwise remain abstract (see also Fernandez 1991). Feld's influential work is well known, especially for the Kaluli aesthetic of "lift up over sounding" (e.g., Feld 1982, Feld and Keil 1994). But *Sound and Sentiment* has not been cited or emulated as much as it might have been for the actual turn at the end of the book toward authorial poetics.

Referring to his artistic photograph near the end of the book, Feld writes, "The image is a man, a bird, a bird as a man, a man as a bird." He continues, admitting that he feels he has "picked these things to pieces" and now must "conclude by seeing them as one. . . . I wish this one to carry the 'underneath' that analysis must coexist with synthesis if ethnographers are to witness and feel the emotional dimensions of cultural form and expression" (238). With this statement he anticipates, and briefly realizes, the poetic turn I am calling for here. Feld's challenge—apparent in his willfully schizophrenic voices in the book—is recognizable in my paraphrase here of Devin McKinney, who is addressing pop music reception, but whose observations are broadly applicable:

> The most powerful [musical] moment flies past, feeds on memory, occupies the unconscious; but still, its parts are nameable. . . . The critic-mechanic dismantles the moment and names parts; the mysterian is appreciative that the moment is never reducible to those parts alone. In the fusion of the mechanical and the mysterious is the singular wildness of . . . music, its resistance to rational sense, coherent politics, systems of order—and there's the fix: as critics we rely on such things to order our own discourses. To the extent we define the . . . moment in these ways, we kill it; to the extent we honor it, we'll be unable to say, finally, what it is, to stamp it with any definitive meaning. Seeking to define the indefinable moment in terms that do it justice, then, means cruising a road to nowhere: loving the ride, savoring the moment, searching for landmarks, scoping the landscape—and avoiding the terminus of a definitive interpretation. . . . But therein lies the challenge of living up to this music. It's the road (real or metaphorical), not the house at the end of it. (McKinney 2004, 1)

Popular music scholarship, with some of its roots in journalism, has left room for writers such as McKinney to invoke poetics. This is also true of travel writing, another popular correlate to ethnography (see Pratt 1992). Both music journalism and travel writing are often denigrated by the academy, whether by musicology or anthropology, because such scholars may wish to distance themselves from relatively undisciplined, superficial, commercial, or indulgent journalistic productions. But if we are to continue to develop what Raymond Williams urged, that in the "practice of analysis we have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary, we have to discover the nature of a practice, and then its conditions" (1980, 47), then a different kind of ethnographic music writing should be added to our repertoire. A different approach to scholarship altogether is called for: a creative nonfiction

that overlaps with ethnography of performance, such as the sound writing suggested by this volume. Can a creative/poetic discourse be welcome as a legitimate (if antistructural) scholarly discourse? Can training in such skills find a place? I am not insisting that all musical scholarship heed this call—if it did our efforts would no longer be antistructural as they need to be. I am calling, though, for a healthy, supported niche for this kind of discourse so that when the material indicates, students and scholars, poets and performers are not hindered by a prejudice that favors by default the distanced approach of academic convention.[8]

BLUEGRASS: METAPHOR AND METAPERFORMANCE

Writing effectively about actively sounded, kinesthetic experience requires metaperformance, otherwise it necessarily falls flat—like a paper lantern that expands into shape only when infused with air and space, breath and dimension. Poetic metaperformance inhales the life into the ethnography of performance. Writing as metaperformance first must be rich, multilayered, personally invested description, insofar as vividly rendered, resonant micromoments can lead organically to analysis and synthesis, opening up layers of meaning beyond what a bare-bones description might offer. But effective writing in this magnified musicking mode is necessarily a multisensory evocation that is at once an aesthetic and intellectual poesis, theory and practice—research, writing, and performance together. And though I emphasize the transcendent category in the current discussion, mundane moments or failed musicking can be as equally if differently revealing.[9]

The examples I draw upon in the rest of this essay delve into poetic metaperformance located within a musicking moment. The following two examples focus on bluegrass. Writing from one's own experience, as I have noted, must of course be part of a grounded approach (Kisliuk 2008a)—writing that both stirs reader-listeners and generates unpredictably refracting new metaperformances in its wake.

I live in the foothills of the Blue Ridge—where many narratives place the birth of bluegrass—but my own bluegrass and old-time music education started in Boston, where I grew up. I learned from a range of people such as Joe Val (who spoke with a heavy Boston accent) and native northerners (Bela Fleck, Orin Starr, Stefan Senders, and members of the Boston Bluegrass Union). As a young teenager I was drawn to the uniquely intense, if temporary, feeling of community at bluegrass festivals, especially late at night in the campgrounds. So as a graduate student I pursued as a thesis topic the question of what makes

some jam sessions click, how jammers use a "special kind of courtesy" particular to successful jams. I recently began thinking about bluegrass again (Kisliuk 2010) in terms of the topic of this essay, returning to this particular moment almost thirty years later.

"LOVE ME, DARLIN', JUST TONIGHT"

Please come with me into the multisensory field of a late-night jam session. I leave out material leading up to and drawing from this moment (what Schechner 1985, after V. Turner, would call the warm-up and the aftermath, with their important fragilities and ambiguities)—readers can access these in the longer article (Kisliuk [1988] 2011). For now, let's jump to the core of it. The scene is Bill Monroe's Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival, summer 1984, sometime after midnight:

> "You're turning in?" Greg asks, keeping the beat. "That's un-American!" he jokes, in the spirit of all-night jam sessions. . . . Two of the older, neighborly spectators are getting ready to leave, and through the din of plucked strings one of them says to Greg, "I really liked your pickin', it was real good."
>
> Everyone plucks strings absent-mindedly, perhaps wondering if we can regain the precious tuned-in feeling. I start to fool with the beginning of a Ralph Stanley banjo tune in an attempt to keep up the Stanley idea. Everybody suddenly goes silent and Greg starts to back me up, stopping momentarily to be sure of the chords, but picking it up right away, putting in parallel runs and fill-in echoes. I stop short; Greg's backup is so nice that it takes me by surprise. I wasn't expecting such sudden attention. "It's just a Ralph Stanley banjo thing that I just . . ."
>
> " Oh," says Ron sympathetically in his quiet voice, "it's hard to do Stanley. I don't know why but nobody can do it just like him." Ron starts to noodle around. Greg follows him and soon they're playing a lively Stanley tune. They glance at me but I indicate with a head shake that I don't know the tune. Ron starts to sing it. I play some soft backup while Greg joins Ron for a high harmony on the chorus:
>
> Love me darlin' just tonight,
> Take these arms and hold me tight.
> Tomorrow you may hold another;
> Love me, darlin', just tonight.

Greg lets his voice trail off on the high part in classic "high lonesome" style. Ron plays a simple, clear banjo break, and then sings the next verse in a soft, raspy voice:

Tomorrow you say that you'll be leavin',
I hope you know the way that's right.
I pray to God that you won't leave me;
So love me darlin' just tonight.

This is one of the finest moments we've had all evening, and since it's so late the silence around us presses in, magnifying each sweet sound and heightening every feeling. This is the kind of moment jammers strive for. The song is about ephemeral love, but it has some unspoken correspondence to our more immediate situation: The delicate feeling with us now could pass or be disrupted at any moment, and even if we could sustain it, our jam session alliance is necessarily temporary. Like all powerful music, bluegrass can be a manifestation of pure love of life, and of course life itself is ephemeral too—ephemeral love, ephemeral jam session, ephemeral moment, ephemeral life. Although these metaphors may not be consciously apparent to us as we play, the feeling of them is apparent, as is the fact that Ron and Greg, both of them master jamming artists, are finally in control of the musical and social atmosphere. . . . For a moment Ron can't remember the last verse. Greg chuckles; it doesn't matter anyway. But then Ron remembers it:

Try to find true love in your heart,
Tomorrow we may not have to part.
But if you feel you must leave me,
Love me, darlin', just tonight.
(Kisliuk, [1988] 2011, 205–20)

This example brings us back to the topic of metaphor, and specifically to metaphoric processes in language. Lakoff and Johnson point toward this idea of refracting multiplicity, that is, when metaphors overlap and intercorrespond (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 97), such as when the lyrics of the song parallel the immediate aesthetic and social experience of the musicking moment. This overlapping recalls the Feld/Kaluli "lift up over sounding." We actually need this kind of layered metaexperience in order to grasp meaning in our lives.[10]

Moreover, there is an interdependent dialectic at play between quotidian/mundane experience and expression, and heightened/transcendent experience and expression—musical instances such as the jam session moment I describe can be seen as elevated pauses within everyday processes.[11] Jason Toynbee comments on this "oscillation between mundane and sublime":

> The concept of sublime helps us to understand precisely the duality of [musical experience], the fact that it may be both mundane and extraordinary at the same time. In popular music, voice and texture can suddenly tip over into the sublime, that is to say something awe-inspiring.
>
> . . . Far from being opposed to it, the concept of the sublime radically opens up our understanding of the everyday experience of music. (Toynbee 2004, 1)

What we are talking about, then, goes into and beyond the domain of metaphor, toward the more visceral aesthetic realm of synergy, correspondences, and synesthesia—this last being an actual perceptual effect, not simply a memory association, symbolic link, or analogy (Ramachandran 2001).[12]

Staying with the bluegrass theme—but with a difference—I quote Lee Bidgood from his 2011 dissertation on bluegrass practices in the Czech Republic. These are two contiguous excerpts of ethnographic sound writing that illustrate instances of unanticipated synergy. Bidgood describes his sensation of blurred physical, social, temporal, and spiritual boundaries with members of the Czech bluegrass band Reliéf. The second of the two excerpts is in the context of making live music in an unexpected place, while the first begins with Bidgood listening to his field recording:

> I played for the first time a live recording of Reliéf singing "There is a God" through the stereo system I had just set up at my desk. . . . It was only when I corrected for the low output of my computer and turned the volume dial nearly to its limit that I really heard it—the grinding of voice on voice, not just knowing that they are singing in close harmony, but feeling that process of "singing close" in my ears, in an electric sizzle down my neck and into that familiar warm resonance in my chest—that was it! . . . The powerful, intimate experience of Reliéf's singing is indeed transporting—both aesthetically, spiritually, and in the sense of place. Resonating with their quartet sound, we are squeezed into the matrix of their close-harmony sound, swept up from our intimate listening space to church, to the Southern United States. The shadows of our actual location fade, and we rest in a perfectly harmonized space of concord.[13]

> But in the gospel material they play with life-and-death words, with intimations of eternity. As they sing in "There is a God," they "see and know" the reason for their confident faith. The words still trouble me. It took an experience of my own to drive home the ways that singing can blend powerfully with the lyrical content of a song and, through performance, lead to something greater than their sum. (Bidgood 2011, 202–3)

Here Bidgood is offering a vivid example of those concretely physical sensations—the cross-activation (Ramachandran 2003) of the senses, a synesthetic correspondence—which magnifies the relationship between social and physical sensibilities, historical resonances, and spiritual and environmental surroundings. Residents of the former Soviet bloc, these Czech musicians are atheists who struggle to come to terms, in performance, with the religious roots of the music to which they are devoted. This tension serves as an unexpected route to a moment of transcendence. Bidgood continues:

> My singing moment happened on a trip outside of Prague in May, 2008. . . . On a Saturday morning, we went for a walk, and ended up at the Church of Saint Nicholas on the outskirts of town, a graveyard chapel built in the early 14th century. This church . . . had lived through the (proto-Protestant) wars of the 14th century, seen the counterrevolution and the 30-Year's War roll through. And now it welcomed us.
>
> The elderly caretaker gave Svatka the keys,[14] and we let ourselves into a dusty, deserted sanctuary that glowed as the morning sunlight filtered in. Our hushed voices and the clanking of the huge medieval keys echoed invitingly. Zbyněk snapped his fingers, appraising the acoustics. I was itching to make music with these people whom I had only heard . . . on stage. . . . That was [why] I had ridden with Zbyněk and Svatka all the way down from Prague. We stepped into a space that practically asked us to fill it with song. As we stood on the verge of song, the appropriate material immediately presented itself, both because of the place [church] but also because of the tradition of gospel a cappella singing. . . .
>
> As we sang, the spaces of the church building lifted and blended our voices, carrying them farther than we could have taken them ourselves.
>
> [This] moment flip[ped] my experience around . . . bridged language and other cultural divides, brushed aside . . . the complex history that distinguishes Czech from U.S. bluegrass, and crossed any number of other boundary lines. . . . The persisting resonances of this singing moment challenge my instinct to separate along [my] normal boundaries, and offers wider understandings that

might not separate "sacred" from "secular," but [rather] acknowledge that the two are seldom all that separate. (Bidgood 2011, 204–5)

The stakes become clearer if at this point we take into account the significance and power of transcendent musicking as potentially liminal, antistructural moments that can, sometimes in a flash, reshape social hierarchies and shake up the status quo whether in interpersonal, localized social dramas or potentially in larger, farther-reaching ways that challenge and rebalance social life. We can ask, are these moments latently or explicitly actually present in a particular scene, whom do they serve, and under what performative circumstances?

FEELING AND WRITING "CORRESPONDANCES"

CORRESPONDENCES[15]

Nature is a temple in which the living pillars
Sometimes emit confused words;
Man passes there through forests of symbols
That observe him with familiar glances.

Like long echoes that blur in the distance
In a shadowy and deep unity,
Vast as the night and vast as light,
Perfumes, sounds, and colors intermingle.

Some scents are as fresh as the flesh of children,
Sweet as the sound of oboes, green as pastures
—And others rotted, rich, and triumphant,

Spanning like infinite things,
Such as amber, musk, resin, and incense,
Singing the flight of spirit and senses.

CORRESPONDANCES

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme une nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme de chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
—Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.

Charles Baudelaire (1852–1856)

I first read this poem in a French class in college and was steamrolled flat by it.[16] This was at a time when I was also learning West African drumming and dancing,[17] and learning about interpretive anthropology (e.g., Geertz 1973).[18] This combination, with the idea of correspondences at the core, launched my interest in the transdisciplinary synthesis of the creative and intellectual, the spiritual and practical.[19] And as one poetic correspondence or synergy tends to spark multiple others, during this fertile time of cross-resonance in my early twenties, I wrote this poem about a magnified moment of Ewe drumming:

AGBADZA (A POLYMETRIC POEM)

Barrel, tilted, held between your knees.
Deer skin facing you. Two sticks,
To meet the skin with force
Answer a call
When the player beats the double bell

Ko dzi koko dzi ko dzi ko dzi

Vujo! Strength of ancient blood flows in
Blood! Yes, Agbadza is ours alone!
Kidiki! Kidiki! Your drum cries
Cutting through the mesh of beaded gourds.

Ko dzi koko dzi ko dzi ko dzi

Rumble, as the sogo plays a roll
Floating on the pattern of the bell
With kagan inside, a call begins
Now and lifts you out, around the drums.

Michelle Kisliuk (1980)

It is tempting to launch into a literary analysis of Baudelaire's "Correspondances" in relation to synesthetic experience, but a textual approach would distract from the topic and approach at hand.[20] Rather I will carry the themes of "Correspondances" into the remaining examples of magnified musicking—continuing to meet poetry with poetics—like answering transcendent moments with more metaperformance (see also Taussig 1993, xvi).[21]

SYNESTHESIA, KINESTHETIC EMPATHY, AND MUSICKING MOMENTS

Neuroscientist V. S. Ramachandran focuses on the phenomenon of synesthesia, which is currently drawing more attention in neuroscience and elsewhere than it has in the past, but that was first identified as a distinct process decades after the time of Baudelaire. Ramachandran explains that Frances Galton (1880) first reported a condition called synesthesia when he noticed a number of people in the general population, otherwise completely normal, who had experienced sensations in "multiple modalities in response to stimulation of one modality. For example, musical notes might evoke distinct colours" (Ramachandran 2003a, 49). Developing our understanding of the phenomenon of synesthesia is important, I think, for coming to understand the power of magnified musicking moments.

Trenley Anderson is a classical clarinetist, an aspiring musicology student, and also a sound-color synesthete, who responded to an earlier draft of this essay by describing a musicking moment of her own:

> The first two chords of the Eroica symphony can be shocking for anyone. Loud, sharp, and sudden, for decades they have caused thousands of concertgoers to jump in their seats. On stage playing my two opening notes, I did not jump in my chair, but I was "jumped" in a way similar to the way in which a car is jumped: as I emphatically belted these two notes on my clarinet, I felt the familiar white shock of the explosions of sound around me. My heart racing from the jolt, I could recover while the all-too-familiar opening theme spun its

orange thread through my mind—until it reached the unexpected C-sharp, a piercing green made even more agitated by a cellist's wrong note. . . .

Following our jolt we all moved subtly from side to side. The melody we played seemed to superimpose itself on our dance. Its arabesque curved to a point of emphasis, and at this point we all leaned forward together and then relaxed back to normal positions with the resolution of the phrase. We had not arranged this choreography in advance; it seemed to be a part of the music. It was our communal embodiment of the music and it functioned as expressive communication. We did not have to discuss which note of that phrase should be emphasized. Through body language we felt the music together and circulated its energy within and from our woodwind section.

As the first movement of the symphony passed by me I saw that my experience of time was suspended in a new and special way. . . . As if in a car watching blurs of color go by my window, I travelled across the landscape of the stage and through time. With my neighbor I moved in a gesture to express an accented note—a landmark. Perceiving the style of his gesture, I adjusted my next accent with more energy to match his. In a magical and timeless moment our synchronized accents perfectly matched.

His solo, which spun out of this accent, was a white ray of color sparkling with bright red, light blue, and gold—colors characteristic of his unique clarinet sound and of his personality. He danced and sang his monologue. Then he invited the rest of the section to join him, and suddenly in my mind timbre, pitch, color, and personality became one, first for each of us as individuals, then, as we blended, for the entire group. In that radiant moment we all blended perfectly and time, without any coloristic differentiation and measurement, seemed to cease.

That moment, while ephemeral, seemed to energize our performance for the rest of the evening. (Anderson 2012)

While a synesthete such as Trenley can offer particular insight, Ramachandran and Hubbard's research (2001, 52) suggests that under certain circumstances people who are not clinically synesthetes nevertheless experience synesthesia because of basic structural neural links in our brains. They explain that,

> In addition to clarifying why artists might be prone to experiencing synesthesia, our research suggests that we all have some capacity for it and that this trait may have set the stage for the evolution of abstraction—an ability at which humans excel. The TPO [junction of the temporal, parietal, and

> occipital lobes] is normally involved in cross-modal synthesis. It is the brain region where information from touch, hearing and vision is thought to flow together to enable the construction of high-level perceptions. (Ramachandran and Hubbard 2003b, 58)

This is where heightened magnified musicking moments come together with the structures of metaphor and the experience of synesthesia.

In the late 1970s neurobiologist Barbara Lex published related research that caught the attention of performance studies scholars at New York University at that time (including Richard Schechner, one of my mentors). Lex (1979) found that when people enter possession or trance, there is a sudden neural spilling over of interconnections back and forth between the right and left hemispheres of the brain that otherwise operate somewhat separately. During these trance states, the experience of time and memory is disrupted, and among other phenomena, boundaries between self and others are altered (similar to *communitas*—V. Turner 1969; E. Turner 2012; also Blacking 1973 as discussed earlier—and to the magnified moments that are the subject of this essay). Ramachandran and Hubbard's explanation of synesthesia refers to a cross-activation process (2003a, 51), wherein boundaries among senses are dissolved, where "a kind of spillover of signals occurs" (2003b, 59). Deep similarities among these processes emerge: correspondences, metaphor, synesthesia, gestalt, the spilling of memory into an expanded present, trance (left to right brain interplay). And the neurobiological research of Ramachandran and Hubbard among others "suggest[s] that the nonarbitrariness both of synesthesia and of metaphor . . . arise because of constraints imposed by evolution and by neural hardware" (Ramachandran and Hubbard, 2001, 51–52).[22]

CASCADING CORRESPONDENCES: ECHOES FROM AFRICAN FORESTS

Colin Turnbull, writing about musicking and communal experience in the Congo basin rain forest in the 1950s and 1960s, brought nuanced and evocative life to the singing and ceremonies of the BaMbuti pygmies. This writing engendered what could be considered an entire genre of writing and other productions about adventurous encounters with "pygmies."[23] Turnbull's most famously moving and detailed descriptions are of the Molimo ceremonies that he witnessed and took part in, and especially his captivating descriptions of musical sound, interactions, and transporting moments in *The Forest People* (1962). My own inspiration from Turnbull came first from reading his books as an undergraduate (at that same

fertile time in which I was reading Baudelaire, Feld, and Berliner), and later when he taught briefly in my graduate program in Performance Studies at New York University in the late 1980s. During that time Turnbull prepared an essay in which he responded to the innovative thinking of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, who were linking ritual studies in anthropology with theories and practices in contemporary theater (especially experimental or avant-garde). Embedded in his discussion, Turnbull offers a focus on sound that had not yet been articulated by Turner or Schechner, emphasizing that sound can provide "a royal road to the liminal condition, and the feelings it evokes can become highly significant for the fieldworker if he allows them, if not the sound itself, to move him both physically and spiritually" (Turnbull 1990, 77).

Perhaps if Turnbull had had access to the neurobiological underpinnings offered since by scientists such as Ramachandran, and if a poetic, experiential response to field experience had found its place in ethnographic training and reception at that time, his approach could have been more nuanced and more ethnographically persuasive during his own time.

I conclude this essay by sliding down a cascade of correspondences that flow first from Turnbull and the Mbuti, then to me with BaAka, and further from me to my students (and then onward and elsewhere along with them). I have sought in my ethnographic work to delve into the practical aspects of the musicking of Central African forest people, paired with a critical approach to embodied, evocative writing. *Seize the Dance!* (Kisliuk 2000) is focused on the lives of forest people from the Central African Republic—a region over five hundred miles away from where Turnbull was located (Ituri, former Zaire). In that book I include descriptions of flashes of musical insight, some very brief, leading to more extensive musicking episodes. This first example took place when I was practicing BaAka singing while taking a walk by myself in the forest. As I learned something important about BaAka singing, an echo of Turnbull too was mixed into the sound that the trees sent back to me with my own voice:

> After a while I thought I was getting the open-throated sound a little better: one should not taper off the phrases but project them out brightly, letting the notes ring through the trees while listening for the echo. I found that the close interaction of BaAka song with the surrounding forest weaves singing and listening into a simultaneous process . . . I never did hear BaAka discuss this experience overtly, probably because the melding of song and soundscape is so complete as to seem self evident. (Kisliuk 1998, 10)

Several months after this encounter with my own echo, I was living in a BaAka camp. At first I was just trying to get a handle on what to listen for during large dance events when many voices were elaborating on a song, the core of which was difficult to discern. The dance was a hunting dance called Mabo, and one of the most popular Mabo songs at the time was "Makala." One day I had an epiphany of sorts:

> I was walking to our camp on my way back from [Bagandou] village. Along the path I came upon Djongi's daughter, Mokoti, and some younger children. As they scurried along in front of me, Mokoti sang out the phrase of a song. I recognized then that it was the main theme of one Mabo song very popular at the time, "Makala." (Kisliuk 1998, 98)

These two incidents—hearing my own echo and then hearing Mokoti's young voice in the forest—helped build to this next one. It is no coincidence that the occasions that stand out for me are the ones in which I am fully participating, especially—as Turnbull notes—when dancing as well as singing, and often after long periods of waiting for the right time to join in:

> After a while the distracting novelty of my dancing seemed to wear off. The focus shifted from me to the whole group, or maybe I just relaxed to the point where I could notice the whole group. "Oka, oka!" people called out, meaning "let's go!" (literally, "listen!").
>
> My senses tingled: I was finally inside the singing and dancing circle. The song was "Makala," and singing it came more easily to me while I danced. As I moved around the circle, the voices of different people stood out at moments, affecting my own singing and my choices of variations. Ndami sang a yodeled elaboration I had not heard before. I could feel fully the intermeshing of sound and motions and move with it as it transformed, folding in upon itself. This was different from listening or singing on the sidelines because, while moving with the circle, I became an active part of the aural kaleidoscope. I was part of the changing design inside the scope, instead of looking at it and projecting in.
>
> The physical task of executing the dance steps melded with the looking, listening, smiling, and reacting that kept us all dancing. Since our camp was built on a hill, it took extra effort to dance the full-soled steps while going up or down hill. Running the bottom of my foot inchworm-like across the ground required the sturdy support of many muscles in my leg. All this while trying to stay loose enough to follow through with my whole body [as I had been

> instructed to do earlier by Ndoko] and keep up with the beat. As I continued to dance, trying to refine my step, I noticed more fully the inward and delicately grounded concentration of the movements, like the *mboloko* antelope. Someone cried out, "sukele!" ("sweet!" an interpretation of the French, *sucre* [sugar]). (Kisliuk 1998, 101)

A magnified musicking moment might be fleeting but memorable, or could last for minutes, or could surface intermittently over hours and days. The experience can be deeply personal or broadly collective. I witnessed the latter one day in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. The popular singer and composer Thierry Yezo (of Le Formidable Musiki) had just died of AIDS. The entire city echoed in memoriam with his song "Mami Wata." All day and into the night the song emanated in unison from thousands of transistor radios, wafting up with the smoke and ash of cooking fires from family compounds and the dust stirred by taxi tires (Kisliuk 2008b).[24]

STREAMS AND EDDIES

My students have taught me about the "twice behaved behavior" of performance (Schechner 1985), when a moment of musicking is infused with a presence from the past. Making music and dancing with students has also taught me fresh things about differing perspectives within a collective experience. This magnified moment in performance was poetically rendered by pianist and scholar (and my former student) Kelly Gross:

> Emphasizing the varying contours of vocal lines by singing different melodies from my neighbor feels so new to my body, as does singing in general. As a young pianist, I was urged to express myself musically with that instrument alone, and to leave the singing to others. Since learning to sing these beautiful and intricate BaAka songs of the Central African Republic, I have felt increasingly more comfortable in this newly acquired expressive mode.
>
> Now as my voice simultaneously blends and contrasts with my classmates, I smile as I sing. The polyphonic texture is so wonderfully lush and thick, that sometimes I can hardly differentiate the various parts we have learned. Many of us are creating new melodies and complementing the overall texture with improvised variations and yodels. The themes cycle again and again with some overlapping parts. After dropping down to a lower register (registers which tend to be neglected this semester due to our 21:3 ratio of women to men) I

hear the lower melody immediately resonate in my ears. I figure that someone nearby has to be singing the same line. My eyes search the lips of others until I find Laura's (one of the ensemble's most long-standing members) and find that she's singing the same melody. Her smiling eyes lock with mine. (Gross 1999, 2)

Kelly reappears in Deva Woodly's "sensational" (Hahn 2007) prose poem excerpted at the beginning of this essay and continued here. Deva illustrates just how much the interpersonal is synesthetically interconnected, while her piece brings together the themes I have explored in this essay:

MORE THAN MEASURE FOR MEASURE

The smell of things was human and I leaned against my friend Kelly, picking lint off my loose pants. The black cotton was soft and damply sweaty from the . . . dancing that had come before.

We were tired and the song started slowly.

. . . We swayed into one another and Bakele was gentle as it continued.

"Yo yaya eeha, eeyeh."

I smiled at Margot as she began to yodel, she was sitting across from me, her mouth open wide. She was small, her dark hair falling out of the careless knot at her neck. She pushed the tonal improvisations up from her center, the cries grew to twice her size after they passed her lips. Margot answered my smile, but the subtle expression around her eyes and mouth was not one of amusement. Something about her seriousness made me close my eyes. Concentrate. For a moment I was quiet, my hands pressed together at the end of a cycle of clapping.

At first, the song was little more than a collection of oddly pleasant measures that floated and spun on the air. I imagined lively cartoon notes drawn on a rebellious score. The lines of the bass clef wriggling and jumping to meet the treble clef, the tone and cadence flirting, playing, and then returning to its original place. I started singing again, extemporizing on the theme Kelly sang as she lightly tapped her bare foot on mine. The light syncopated touch fit in and under the rhythm of Bakele and I discovered that my body was part of the music. The song was not my voice or Kelly's. It was not even the sound of Margot grown double.

As I sat with my eyes closed, fingers pushed out straight and pressed together, I discovered that the music had color and shape. Not the animated approximation I had invented before, but a dynamic hue that began the same color as the dark behind my eyelids. And then, a wide white circle formed on the canvas

> on the back of my closed eyes. The faint, dull white that tumbles across vision truncated by a bright flash of light. The color of echoes. The circle grew thicker and brighter and the song went on. Loud and slow. We were taking our time. Kelly breathed deep beside me. A purple point formed in the center of the bright white circle beneath my closed eyes and almost immediately the spot of color bloomed into a kaleidoscope. The song separated into an infinite swell of rhythm and melody. Every tone was there, sung and unsung. (Woodly 2001, 1–2)

At this stirring juncture Deva informs us that I, the teacher, stopped to critique the singing and broke the spell. Deva writes, "Behind my eyes, fading, was the colorsound; the echoblush. I missed it already" (2001, 2). I was pitifully unaware of the feeling that was transpiring for others, if not for me. Despite what Blacking says about the sociality of musical affect, sometimes not everyone feels the same thing. The correspondence may not always transfer from one person to another. I have found that the role of instructor can be paradoxical, since "letting go" and being open is key, but is not usually the role of an instructor among students. I try continuously to level that field on the fly, to allow for moments of unanticipated combination and innovation, though only sometimes I succeed.

During the humid Virginia summer of 2010, a group of my former students gathered. We cooked meals together at my house—telling about individual pains and successes that had aged us. And we danced Elamba in our old classroom at the University of Virginia (the one I still teach in almost every day). Instruction was unnecessary; they were already experts. We sat on the ever-inadequate greenish linoleum floor. I sang close among them with my eyes closed, at once with them in the moment and also transported to other moments with BaAka: outside, on the ground, singing among the trees and loud insects, lifted out of time and place then as now, when suddenly Lamika tapped my arm. I opened my eyes to find her tying the Elamba skirts for dancing around my waist. I was not any kind of stranger here, this was a seamless letting go. Ordinary and extraordinary.

By delving into musicking moments as performing ethnographers, as scholars with freely poetic imaginations, we can train ourselves to better understand and be carried by the power of these moments: then dance them, play with them, sound them, and write them.

NOTES

1. Susan Stewart, theorizing on the phenomenon of the miniature, suggests that "the depiction of the miniature moves away from hierarchy and narrative in that it is caught in an infinity of descriptive gestures" (Stewart 2007, 47).

2. On the topic of copresence and sound, see the recent work of Jeff Todd Titon (2013).

3. While the limiting parameters of this topic are blurred, I keep my discussion focused mostly on the experience of participatory creation more than on reception.

4. The kinds of moments I address fall within what Victor and Edith Turner have pointed to in broader theories of liminality and communitas (e.g., V. Turner 1969; E. Turner 2012).

5. This is not the same kind of erasure of boundaries between past and present as in the infamous "ethnographic present" (Fabian 1983). The kind of past/present blur that I am speaking about, to the contrary, makes manifest the expansive unity of selves and others, pasts and presents, a theme I will take up again subsequently.

6. See Judith Becker's important comprehensive work (2004). For examples of recent and successful efforts in the ethnography of possession trance that venture into poetic realms, see the work by Katherine Hagedorn (2001) and Deborah Kapchan (2007), who also appear in this collection, and by Steven Friedson (especially 2009). We should also remember the pioneering work of Maya Deren in the 1950s, and of course the astounding life and work of Zora Neale Hurston in the 1930s.

7. This is reminiscent of Carlos Castaneda's parody of structuralism in Appendix B of *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968). Castaneda got the irony of trying to pin down the ineffable with inadequate and often pretentious academic tools (see also Turner 2012, 21).

8. Speaking to anthropologists, Colin Turnbull (1990) pointed in this direction decades ago, emphasizing the correlation between the depth of participation and the depth of understanding.

9. In a longer essay about bluegrass jam sessions, I have detailed several contrasting incidents that missed the mark and jams that failed altogether (Kisliuk [1988] 2011). Addressing a number of such differently affecting moments can work collectively within a musical ethnography to offer readers their own path of insight through layers of socio-musical description.

10. In terms of writing style, Lakoff and Johnson themselves might well have illustrated their findings more effectively had they tossed the academic rhetoric in favor of some more choice metaphors of their own.

11. This parallels Zen Buddhist philosophy and practice.

12. Unless we insist that (polysemous) metaphors (and metonyms), memories, and analogies are also, or at least can be, actually physically felt, physiologically manifested phenomena—as dreams are and as theatrical, musical, and spiritual experiences can be.

13. Readers can access a video of Reliéf singing "There Is a God" at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv8m-OMckgI.

14. Svatka is not a member of Reliéf, but Zbyněk is. Svatka is a bassist and singer; she has played in bands with Zbyněk in the past (Bidgood, personal communication, January 2012).

15. This is my own translation.

16. This was in a course with professor and poet Georgette Pradal, who was also my mother's mentor in French literature. I recently learned that both Victor and Edith Turner read Charles Baudelaire's poetry since before they were married in 1941 (Edith Turner, personal communication via e-mail, January 2012). The title of Victor Turner's book, *The Forest of Symbols,* is a reference to a line in "Correspondances."

17. This was with David Locke, in his ensembles both at Tufts University and in Boston. In a course on dance ethnology, Professor Locke also introduced me to the terms *synesthesia* and *kinesthesia,* which individually and in relation to each other intrigued me immediately. I touched on these ideas in an undergraduate thesis (and performance piece), but have not had a chance to truly explore them since until preparing this essay so many years later.

18. Also, I was reading and meeting Paul Berliner (and Ephat Mujuru) and Steven Feld, and studying Buddhism and aesthetic philosophy.

19. I am grateful to the late, wonderful theater artist Julie Portman for suggesting to me then that what I was struggling to articulate as my interest is called "aesthetics."

20. See Dorra (1994, 8–11) for a brief but effective analysis of this poem and the intellectual context in which it was written.

21. Alan S. Weiss has written about Baudelaire's idea of correspondences in relation to sound art and architecture (see Weiss 2002).

22. Kinesthetic empathy is yet another neurobiological element at play here. Ramachandran, in addition to his work on synesthesia, studies mirror neurons in the human brain that enable us to use our kinesthetic sense to empathize with the physicality of another being, to the point where our brains respond in the same way whether we ourselves are moving or when we are watching another living being move, touch, or be touched (Ramachandran 1998). I suggest that sound can also can have these kinesthetic qualities.

23. See, for example, Louis Sarno (1993). Turnbull's influence has been significant and widespread; Steven Feld mentions that as his teacher Turnbull influenced him profoundly (e.g., Feld 1990, ix). See also a recent feature film based on the life of Louis Sarno, *Oka!* (2011), which channels Turnbull's writing as much as it does Sarno's life.

24. You can hear the song at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUyoNx3vvK8 (see also Kisliuk 2008).

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