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# Musical feelings and affective politics

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Over the past two decades, scholars across the humanities and social sciences have homed in on affect as a crucial dimension of political life. This special issue argues that music – as sound and as practice – has an important role to play in this evolving academic conversation. While music can and does carry symbolic meanings, people are commonly drawn to music because of how it makes them *feel.* Moreover, these feelings have exceptional potency, enabling the emergence of new subjectivities, social collectives and political imaginaries. Building on recent developments and critiques of affect theory from within the disciplines of anthropology, cultural studies and ethnomusicology, this special issue seeks to push the conversation forward by better accounting for the musical life of affect. We begin this introduction with a brief overview of the relevant literature on affect in order to situate our own interventions, both conceptually and disciplinarily. We then explore the work that music does in responding to critiques of affect theory. Here, we propose the idea of 'musical feelings' as an inclusive conceptual framework for discussing the sensations and stories that endow music with social efficacy, thereby overcoming some of the theoretical impasses which, we suggest, may be discouraging broader engagement with affect among music scholars. Following this, we draw attention to the varied political projects that musically-mediated affects both augur and facilitate. In the final section, we examine the methodological challenges posed by the study of musical feelings, highlighting the affordances of ethnography and the necessity of multi-sited, multi-scalar dynamic research in accounting for musical feelings' social efficacy.

## Affect theory and its critics

While there are a number of theoretical lineages in the scholarship on affect, we draw particularly on the Spinozan theory of affect as articulated and developed in the work of Brian Massumi, where affect is understood as 'an ability to affect and be affected' (Massumi 1987: xv).[1] One important feature of this strand of affect theory, which we take up in this special issue, is the distinction between affect and emotion. For Massumi and other scholars working in this vein, affect is understood as embodied,

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[1]For overviews of these various lineages, see (Garcia 2020: 4, Rutherford 2016: 286, Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 5–9).

preconscious intensity – that which 'escapes' signification. Emotion, on the other hand, is affect as it socially surfaces in linguistic and signifying orders, becoming nameable and thus recognisable as one's own. Affects, in turn, circulate widely, drawing individuals into relation and constituting subjects, without necessarily emerging into the realm of signification.

Massumi's 'asignifying philosophy of affect' was a push to explore that which lies beyond the 'solipsism' of social constructivism in the context of the linguistic/discursive turn in social theory (Massumi 1995: 88, 100, see also White 2017: 175–176 and Rutherford 2016: 287–288). It is worth underscoring that Massumi's own writings are ambivalent and, at times, suggestively contradictory about the extent to which affect and emotion exist in distinct, even oppositional, registers.[2] For social theorists of affect, however, this distinction between affect and emotion has been productive in drawing attention to those aspects of subject formation that escape discursive capture, and which are nevertheless so powerfully efficacious in daily life (Mazzarella 2009).

Many scholars have critiqued Massumi's theorisation of affect for the ways it seems to reinscribe problematic dualisms – such as mind/body, meaning/materiality, intentional/unconscious – and for appearing to 'banish subjectivity' (Martin 2013: 149) in order to establish an account of meaning that does not originate solely from the subject.[3] Some have used this critique as a basis to question the usefulness of affect as a concept (Eisenlohr 2018, Leys 2011, Martin 2013). Others have returned to the relationship between subjectivity and affect to show that affects have a powerful subjectifying capacity that not only yields individuals, but which draws them together into collectives and publics (Ahmed 2015, Navaro-Yashin 2012, Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009). And, increasingly, scholars have rejected a stark division between affect and emotion in favour of examining the complex interplay and overlap between embodied intensities, subjective experiences and discursive practices (Ahmed 2015, Cvetkovich 2012, Mazzarella 2009, Navaro 2012, Newell 2018, Ngai 2005, Wetherell 2013, White 2011, 2017).[4] Indeed, as Sara Ahmed cautions, just because affect and emotion can be theoretically separated does not mean that they actually exist as distinct spheres of experience (2015: 210).

William Mazzarella, in turn, has critiqued what he calls the 'fantasy of immediation' implied in Massumi's work, the ideological fiction of an authentic domain of experience that exists prior to social processes of mediation. Mazzarella proposes instead that affect and signification are linked in an 'unresolvable dialectic' wherein affect lends force to narratives and ideologies while at the same time evading capture by them (Mazzarella 2009: 299). Thus, rather than focusing on affect in isolation, Mazzarella and others draw attention to movements and translations across what Daniel White has called the 'affect-emotion gap' (White 2011, 2017), those 'passages whereby affects acquire the

[2]In 'The Autonomy of Affect', for example, Massumi writes that 'The relationship between the levels of intensity and qualification … is one of resonation or interference, amplification or dampening', suggesting the possibility of interplay between affect and signification (1995: 86).

[3]The turn to atmospheres as a framework for analyzing collective feelings is one response to the mind/body distinction implied by certain theorizations of affect (Eisenlohr 2018, McGraw 2016 and this issue, Riedel 2019, Sprengel this issue).

[4]Feminist scholars have crucially pointed out that the claim of a stark separation between affect and emotion is a gendered one, for the framework of an 'affective turn' as conceptually separate from earlier scholarship has served to erase a much longer legacy of feminist writing on emotion, feelings, and sentiments (see Ahmed 2015, Cvetkovich 2012, Martin 2013, Warner 2008).

semantic density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions conversely denature into affects' (Ngai 2005: 27, cited in White 2011: 17).

This attention to processes of mediation is crucial to nuancing impoverished notions of affect that separate the body from the social and thus to understanding how affect might function in the world. As Ahmed cautions, how can we understand bodies as 'pre-social' when the contours of embodied experience are so profoundly shaped by social histories (Ahmed 2015: 212)? In a more pointed critique, Sasha Newell argues, 'In its effort to capture unstructured potentiality and pre-cultural forms of being, affect theory risks reducing the focus of anthropology to the points of contact between individual bodies and the material world' and thus losing sight of the social (Newell 2018: 13). Rather than signification being that which 'dampens' affective intensity, as Massumi suggested, Newell posits that it is the very unstable and provisional nature of signs – their materiality and vitality – that give power to the dialectical loop between signification and embodied intensity (Newell 2018, see also Mazzarella 2009: 302). Therefore, one important conclusion of recent anthropological work on affect is that in order to understand the social efficacy of affect, we must develop ways of attending to and analyzing the complex and varied ways that affect and forms of sociocultural mediation such as language, bodies, and, indeed, music, interact.

## Musical feelings beyond the affect/emotion divide

In an excellent literature review on ethnomusicology's 'affective turn', Ana Hofman outlines a long history of music studies' engagement with affect (Hofman 2015, see also Graber and Sumera 2020). Certainly, music should be a very ripe place for examining and theorising affect, for music and affect have parallel epistemologies as phenomena that seem to elude linguistic description or 'capture' while being attributed great potency (see Gray, McGraw, this issue).[5] Bearing this out, an array of more recent works attest to ethnomusicologists' increasing engagement with scholarship on affect (Abe 2018, Garcia 2020, Gill 2017, Graber 2020, MacMillen 2019, 2020, Meintjes 2017, Morris 2020, Seeman 2019, Sumera 2020). Nevertheless, we feel that insights from musical ethnography have a more important role to play in interdisciplinary conversations on affect than they have contributed up to this point. Both music studies and affect theory would benefit from a more sustained conversation.[6]

[5]There are multiple scholarly traditions that theorize the relationship between music and the affective-emotional responses it produces, both within and beyond western artistic and intellectual traditions. In western aesthetic philosophy, theoreticians have predominantly worked from the assumption that it is 'the music itself', as a sonic-material phenomenon, that produces affective effects. The primarily ethnographic literature that we draw on might be understood as a 'culturalist' response to this assumption, wherein ethnomusicology and other fields of comparative music study have worked to demonstrate that the affective potential of any given set of musical sounds is always cultural, socially and historically contingent. Our thanks to Shannon Garland for this excellent observation. On early antecedents to this culturalist approach to the study of musical affect, see Gray, this issue, and Martin (2013). For useful overviews of historical approaches to music and the affects in western aesthetics, see Goehr et al. (2001), Randel (2004) and Taylor (2017); this lineage is also briefly discussed in Hofman (2015). Steingo (2016) offers a provocative re-thinking of aesthetic autonomy and its political utility.

[6]Rather than understand 'music' as a delimited set of sonic phenomena, we conceive of it as encompassing practices, experiences and sounds, where the latter includes the spectrum from silence to 'noise' to speech to tuneful sonic output. Indeed, such shifting distinctions themselves are categorized and monitored as part of broader political and ideological projects (Attali 1985 [1977], Cruz 1999, Novak 2013, Ochoa Gautier 2014). Sprengel and García Molina explore these boundaries and their concomitant political and disciplinary implications (this issue).

Music is a productively complicated and complicating site for considering the production, circulation, translation and social life of affect. It carries affective intensity, which sometimes moves listeners to tears, and embodied force, which may compel them to dance. It can act as a site of signification, indexing a particular ethnic, racial or political identity. It can also function as a mode of social discourse, as when sounds act as forms of commentary or lyrics as a medium of critique. Moreover, and crucially, it can exist in these multiple modes simultaneously to function as a site of what Lila Ellen Gray calls 'interanimation', co-mingling and translating across registers and levels of feeling (Gray 2013: 7). Thus, while music has the potent ability to operate at the level of embodied intensity in ways that sometimes seem to bypass a cognisable sense of 'the mind' or even the self, few music scholars would claim that music exists before or outside of social processes, for it emerges fundamentally from social relationships and a socially configured sensorium.[7]

We propose the idea of 'musical feelings' as a conceptual umbrella that pushes beyond the overdrawn distinctions that have preoccupied critics of affect theory – between emotion and affect, mind and body, signification and intensity, potentiality and intentionality, pre-conscious impact and rationality, public and private and so forth.[8] In highlighting the affective dimensions of music, we contend that music acts on bodies and subjectivities in ways that are not reducible to semiotic mediation. In this sense, we follow the basic outline of Massumi's theorisation of affect. However, we also assert that fully understanding how music shapes social worlds requires attention to the processes by which affects become tethered to particular narratives, identities, imaginaries and projects. For, as Daniel White has written, 'Affect alone is not independently capable of power' (White 2017: 178). Instead, its efficacy is realised through acts of naming and narrativizing that seek to render it knowable. As such, our formulation of musical feelings insists on understanding affect, signification and subjectivity relationally, rather than in opposition to one another. In this way, we build on Ana Hofman's important observation that, for music and sound studies, '… the affective turn's productive potential does not lie in abandoning the semiotic, representational and discursive paradigms, but in the production of meeting points for the semantic and affective dimensions/venues at the site of the sound experience' (2015: 48). Musical feelings, as a framework, asks us to hold sense, sentiment and sound together to offer a more supple account of music's variegated role in the circulation and transformation of affects into and through signification. This framework seeks to account for the flow of affects, emotions and feelings in musical sound and practice and, simultaneously, to use music as a potent site for theorising the social life of affect more broadly.

The articles in this issue trace musical feelings as they circulate and surface across the registers of bodily sensation and discursive signification, between individuals and collectives, and between public and private realms. In so doing, they continue to trouble the putative distinction between embodied intensity and symbolic mediation in service of

[7]Gill makes a similar point in critiquing affect theorists' use of musical and sonic metaphors (2017: 188).

[8]Our use of feelings is in line with scholars such as Ahmed and Cvetkovich who embrace 'the undifferentiated "stuff" of feeling' as well as the vernacular and integrative connotations of the term (Cvetkovich 2012: 4). In this way, our usage differs from that proposed by Eric Shouse, in which 'feelings are personal and biographical, emotions are social, and affects are prepersonal' (2005: 1). See also Garcia's emphasis on the productive polyvalence of 'feeling' and their discussion of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorisation of 'feeling' as tactile and textural (Garcia 2015, Sedgwick 2003).

a richer understanding of the social effects that affects produce. For example, Brian Bond's article on Sindhi Sufi poetry performance in western India (this issue) conceives of musico-poetic performance as a multi-dimensional affective space, in which various forms of pain 'flow into and through one another' as historically constructed ethical emotion, as affect conveyed through musical performance, as embedded in poetic narrative and as a dimension of performers' life experiences. In her investigation of love in São Paulo, Brazil, Shannon Garland attends to the mutually reciprocal configuration of musically-mediated sensations and cultural-symbolic categories as a political process in which 'actors struggle to turn inchoate sensations into narratives which form the ontology of the world' (Garland 2020: 290). These recursive loops of discursive tropes, political fields of salience, historically constituted cultural categories and musical genre aesthetics produce an affective ball that defines both the feeling of love and the social relations it names (Garland 2020). Anaar Desai-Stephens' focus on the transmission of 'feel' in a Bollywood singing class shows that 'feel' is simultaneously a public trope and a desired affective state that is cultivated through both pedagogical exhortation and Bollywood songs' capacity to produce embodied subjectivities through singing. And in discussing carceral and liberatory atmospheres produced by musical experience in an American jail, Andy McGraw offers a close reading of Spinoza's concept of *affectus*, arguing that both music and affect are comprised of a mixture of sensations and experiences which are apprehended through a unified 'feeling/thought.' Collectively, the articles in this issue illustrate the recursive way in which sensory experiences beget narratives about the world, which in turn (in)form ways of acting and being.

## Affective politics and music's potential

In addition to rethinking the relationship between affect and signification through music, our inquiry into musical feelings also allows for a more encompassing investigation of music's world-making potential. What might musical feelings *do*? Here, we take inspiration from anthropological work that has highlighted the social utility and political efficacy of affect.[9] Central to Massumi's initial theorisation of affect was the claim that affect is crucial to rethinking the workings of power. Conceptualised distinctly from emotion and the discursive apprehension of feelings, affect was to provide a means for understanding 'the non-ideological means by which ideology is produced', that is, to apprehending processes of interpellation that were being disseminated and enacted in a fundamentally diffuse way (1995: 104). In concluding with a discussion of Ronald Reagan's voice as an affective political phenomenon, Massumi astutely diagnosed the rise of politicians who produce political effects less through their rhetoric than through their skills as master affecteers.[10] Reagan's performances were powerful, Massumi claimed, because they circulated *potential*, which was then qualified and

[9]For example, anthropologists have shown how the production, circulation and management of affect lend support to a broad range of social and political projects, from the creation of piously productive laborers (Rudnyckyj 2009) and compassionate volunteer-citizens (Muehlebach 2011), to the shaping of modern mass publics (Kunreuther 2014, Mazzarella 2013, Strassler 2020) and religious counterpublics (Hirschkind 2006).

[10]This is a reminder, as Daniel White has argued, that affect theory itself is ' … an effect of the world as much as a frame for viewing it' (White 2017: 176). It must accordingly be contextualized, its historical, political and social inheritances emplaced in relation to the world it sought to understand. See Hofman (this issue) for a related investigation of scholarly engagement with affect as a 'quest' for new forms of political potential and action.

actualised in divergent ways that nonetheless amplified his power (1995: 102–103). Massumi's example thus points to the political potency of the 'gap' between affective intensity and symbolic qualification. Even as anthropologists have pushed back against Massumi's affect/emotion dichotomy, they have also been drawn to this gap, as both 'an enormously productive site for intellectual, economic, technological, and most of all political investment' (White 2017: 177) and 'a condition of power's efficacy' (Mazzarella 2009: 299, also see Reisnour, this issue). This gap also seems to shape musical experience, as when music envelops listeners in a shared affect, while also joining affect to a multiplicity of divergent, often personal, meanings (see McGraw, this issue). Examining moments of musical affective attunement in a Hindu devotional community in Bali, Nicole Reisnour (this issue) shows how Balinese ISKCON devotees actively 'stitch together' musical affects and religious narratives, creating an affect-emotion feedback loop that sustains their attachments to ISKCON and furthers ISKCON's global proselytising project.[11] As this and other articles in this issue demonstrate, attending to how people work to close the gap between affective intensities and socially ascribed meanings is crucial to understanding how musical feelings yield social and political effects (see Bond, Desai-Stephens, Garland, this issue).

In line with these claims about the affective dimensions of power, scholars of public culture have further articulated the sentimental underpinnings and emotional consequences of actions, phenomena and moments that might be called 'political.' This body of work, particularly that of the Public Feelings group, emphasises the importance of the ordinary and the quotidian in understanding large-scale political economy. Building on Raymond Williams' notion of a 'structure of feeling', they propose that particular social-historical junctures *feel* a certain way, and that feelings are the grounds from which political transformation emerges. For these scholars, daily affective engagements are the stuff that the political is made of, even as they recognise the indeterminacy of how, and whether, affective responses might cohere into a political 'event' (Berlant 2011) and even as they caution against presuming a correlation between qualities of feelings, modes of political action and their outcomes, that is, between 'good' feelings and 'good' politics (Cvetkovich 2012: 3, Ngai 2005). Overcoming traditional dualities between public and private, they argue that attending to the sensory dimension of everyday life and its 'ordinary affects' (Stewart 2007) is a rich means of documenting both the coalescing of intimate affective publics and conditions of political economy – that which might otherwise be characterised as 'globalization', 'neoliberalism', 'fascism', and more.

Building on this sensuous and affectively imbued conceptualisation of politics, we suggest that music – as a medium in which the affective register is central – is a particularly effective site for the construction, implementation and animation of political projects and ideologies. For example, in line with scholars exploring affective cultural formations (Anderson 2016, Berlant 2011, Cvetkovich 2012), several of the articles here explore how musically-mediated affects allow for the sensing of emergent political possibilities well before movements, institutions and ideologies are ever articulated or instantiated. Darci Sprengel (this issue) focuses on the phenomenon of sonic absence in post-revolutionary Egypt, arguing that the 'near inaudibility' of the music and

[11] As Luis-Manuel Garcia has written in a recent article, experiences of musical affective attunement are shaped by shared sensory experiences as well as shared forms of cultural knowledge (Garcia 2020: 14).

sounds that previously accompanied the revolution is not merely a reaction to political exhaustion, but a means of working through it, a necessary space for the fomenting of alternative imaginations (see also Hofman, this issue). Similarly, Andrés García Molina (this issue) shows how the relative presence of street vendor songs in contemporary urban soundscapes in Cuba indexes the post-socialist state's neoliberal labour policies such that sound becomes central to the lived experience of economic and political change. This work reminds us that sound, too, in both its presence and absence, becomes an important sensorial and affective means of tracking political transformations.

Moreover, these articles suggest that music has the ability to act as a translational node that circulates affects across spatial, temporal, and social scales and registers. For example, the articles by Peter McMurray and Tamara Turner highlight how the affective potency of ritual and ritual music enables experiences that are intercorporeal, intersubjective and transtemporal. Turner's essay reveals how Algerian *dīwān* ritual links particular melodies with certain spectres to enable a musical-affective haunting that collapses the distance between present suffering and the sensations of historical violence, particularly those associated with the trans-Saharan slave trade. Here, history impinges on the present through music, which 'offers a sensory-rich medium in which pain can emerge without the need to "talk about it" or for it to be "coherent" or linear' (Turner 2020: 180). McMurray's essay examines how Turkish Alevi *semah* ritual facilitates a kinesthetic-sonic experience of flying such that participants become (like) cranes. In the wake of a pivotal moment of sectarian violence, he traces how *semah*, and the possibilities of crane-ness that it contains, becomes a crucial medium for the animation of cross-generational political identities and rituals. These articles illuminate the capacity of ritual and ritual music to affectively catalyse more-than-human becomings and inhabitations that, in turn, enable historical political experiences to be forcefully drawn into the present.[12]

In recognising the potential of musical feelings to connect with painful and violent pasts, this issue also engages with what Ana Hofman dubs the 'romance with affect', the assumption that music's affective valences are necessarily liberatory or moral or that the 'authenticity' of affect places it outside fields of power (Hofman this issue, see also Hofman 2015 and Tatro 2014). Both Sprengel and McGraw (this issue) echo these concerns, cautioning that neither conditions of diffuse agency nor the shared sensual order implied by an 'atmosphere' can be assumed to be utopian, solidary or liberatory. As scholars of music have amply demonstrated, affects can work to reinforce inequities and structures of power just as much as they might subvert them (MacMillen 2019, Tochka 2017). In exploring gendered relationships that arise around Mozambican tufo dance and performances of beauty, Ellen Hebden (this issue) shows that while dancing affords women forms of physical and geographical mobility, it can equally work to block mobility when negative affects are aroused. She thus argues that 'affect doesn't just create connections, movements or bind communities, but can complicate relationships, disrupt movements and destroy connections' (Hebden 2020: 211). Going further, Garland (this issue) contends that music's affective resonance is only politically

[12]In investigating music's affective sociality, scholars have demonstrated how the realm of the social goes beyond human relations to encompass the more-than-human, as beautifully illuminated in Steven Feld's classic *Sound and Sentiment* (2012 [1982]) (see also Ochoa Gautier 2014).

transformative when connected to broader programmes of structural change. In Garland's 'materialist account of affect', affect's power cannot be understood without examining the social relations that have historically constituted the mediating structures and materials through which affect becomes socially meaningful.

Hofman goes on to argue that the tendency to associate affect with resistance results from a tenacious liberal paradigm that undermines music scholars' efforts to adequately grapple with affect's political efficacy in the current historical moment. In concert, Darci Sprengel (this issue) contends that we must move beyond the assumption that sound and presence are necessary markers of the political realm. Instead, she calls for closer attention to sonic absence (or relative inaudibility) as a politically efficacious mode of action which attunes us to 'less visible forms of meaningful action in relation to the contemporary workings of power' (Sprengel 2020: 247). Following Hofman and Sprengel, our attention to musical feelings probes the increasingly diffuse line between 'the political' and 'the social' to question the very boundaries of what counts as political action. In this regard, our conceptual emphasis on the kinetic relationship between embodied and semiotic meaning has much to offer efforts to rethink political becoming and political efficacy.

## Musical feelings: theoretical risks and methodological approaches

Affect theory has often been critiqued for relying on an uncritically neuroscientific account of the human mind (Martin 2013) and for implying a singular, universal body with inadequate attention to the multiple sensory histories that create divergent conditions for the reception and production of affects (Gill 2017). In contradistinction, the ethnographic investigations of affective phenomena and experiences featured in this issue offer a grounding in local epistemologies and ontologies of feeling, thereby 'provincializing normative theoretical frameworks on affect and emotion' (Gill 2017: 188–189). Indeed, ethnographers have pointed to the risks of subsuming diverse experiences and terminologies under the term 'affect', a move that follows logics of commensurability characteristic of markets and systems of governance (Martin 2013: 157, Navaro 2017).[13] In a similar vein, Denise Gill argues (this issue) that music scholars' investment in, and mobilisation of, a canon of primarily EuroAmerican theorists of affect risks reinscribing entrenched inequities that accompany academic knowledge production rooted in colonialism, white supremacy and heteronormative patriarchy. Through reflexive analysis of her own scholarly habits, Gill highlights the fact that citational practices have their own affective dimensions, and she calls on ethnomusicologists to critically examine the affective politics of writing about affect. These critiques prompt a closer consideration of the work that 'affect', as a term, performs in both its presence and its absence (see Hofman, this issue), as well as the utility and limits of deploying this term in connection with music.

[13] In this vein, some recent music scholarship provides rich analyses of the 'terrain' of affect (Mazzarella 2009), but without foregrounding this term and its particular theoretical genealogies. For example, Louise Meintjes' ethnographic study of ngoma performance aesthetics draws attention to affective embodied phenomena that circulate with and become political realities (Meintjes 2017). Similarly, Gavin Steingo claims that the political significance of kwaito music lies in the ways it 'suspends ordinary forms of sensory experience', enabling participants to 'experience a world that does not yet exist' (Steingo 2016: 9).

While we engage affect as part of our theoretical apparatus, as a productive concept with a rich history and much to offer as a critical wedge, the array of ethnographic circumstances that these articles draw from lead to notably different windows onto the social lives of affect. Indeed, the very framework of 'musical feelings' arises from an ethnographic troubling of any experiential divide between emotion, affect and feelings. Mindful of recent calls to 'diversify' affect (Navaro 2017), the articles here share a commitment to socially situating affective circulations and their effects by attending to the ways in which the social position of individuals and groups make them more and less primed to respond to circulating affects and atmospheres. Crucially, McGraw shows that subjects (prison residents, correctional officers, musical instructors) situated within shared sonic and affective fields are nonetheless differentially disposed to be affected by particular sonic experiences by virtue of their social background. Meanwhile, Lila Ellen Gray observes that a multiplicity of possible meanings does not equate to 'unmoored potential', since these 'sonic-musical-affective meanings [are] always tethered in some way to the socio-cultural, historical and aesthetic worlds in which those meanings are embedded' (Gray 2020: 331). These articles are an important reminder that affects do not affect uniformly nor produce even results. Rather, such processes of production are dependent on historically sedimented conceptual categories and learned sensibilities that enable musics to circulate and affect listeners both within and beyond their original contexts of production (see Bond, this issue, Gray, this issue, Hirschkind 2006, Kapchan 2009).

Yet, how does one ethnographically study musical feelings? This question points to a range of methodological challenges, for musical feelings seem to both elude direct observation and exceed linguistic representation. Should we 'apprehend' affect as effect, as Massumi suggested, or in moments of linguistic 'capture' (1995: 93, 96)? Can we listen for affect, as Gray explores (this issue)? In what ways might affect be rendered palpable and audible as an object of analysis in the process of doing ethnography? What methods might we use and which sites might we turn to in order to discern musical feelings' complex circulations and efficacies? As Danilyn Rutherford bluntly states, 'it has proven difficult, and in some cases impossible, to capture affect ethnographically' (2016: 286). Yet ethnographers have increasingly emphasised the potency of ethnography's observational precision and embodied introspection in offering nuanced socially and historically grounded accounts of the social projects that affect is imbricated with (Gill 2017 and this issue, White 2017). The insights and interventions offered by each of these articles emerge out of deep ethnographic work, the affective complexity of which makes us necessarily attentive to embodied feelings *and* to how people describe what they 'feel and do' (Rutherford 2016: 287).

Several contributors deploy a vulnerable mode of reflexivity in narrating their own embodied abilities – and failures – to participate in affectively saturated moments and spaces. These essays remind us that the body of the ethnographer is necessarily implicated in the ethnographic investigation of affect, becoming a potent site of relational, theoretical insight (see Reisnour, this issue; McGraw, this issue; Turner, this issue). Simultaneously, while we emphasize that music makes and shapes bodies 'in ways more complex and ontologically distinct from the poetics on hand to describe it' (White 2017: 175), the contributors in this issue often return to language – both written and spoken – as a crucial means of attending to affect in ethnographic encounters. As Gray (this issue) points out, ethnomusicologists already have robust methods for

'understanding aspects of human experience that often exceed the signification of language, but nevertheless are constituted in relation to it' (Gray 2020: 330). Building on this, she proposes attending to the poetics of talk about music as one productive avenue for accessing affect ethnographically. In line with Gray's attention to poetically dense yet capacious terms like hibiki (Abe 2018), isigqi (Meintjes 2017), and saudade (Gray 2013), other contributors point to moments of terminological vagueness – 'feel' (Desai-Stephens, this issue), 'feeling something' (Reisnour, this issue), 'feeling the feels' (McGraw, this issue) – as sites where affect comes into view as a semiotic-embodied phenomenon.

Narrating and analytically accounting for musical feelings' unfolding efficacy necessitates careful attention to the interplay between various sites and modalities of 'affective apprehension.' These include quintessential sites for the ethnographic study of musical practice (singing lessons, recording studios, dance competitions) as well as sites where 'music' as such is less obviously foregrounded, as with street vendor pregones whose very status as music is contested by vendors and listeners alike (García Molina, this issue), or where music is present in its absence, as in the relative quiet that follows a sonically dense atmosphere of protest (Sprengel, this issue). These multi-sited methodologies also require particular emphasis on the myriad forms that enable musical feelings to circulate (see Berlant 2008, Gray 2013). Some of these articles focus on specific musical genres (such as Bollywood 'item numbers', Música Popular Brasileira, shāh jo rāg̈, Tufo dancing and street-vendor songs) as well as individual songs that become particularly resonant at certain historical junctures. But they go further in conceptualising affective networks that coordinate texts (novels, histories, scriptures), advertising media, political discourses, embodied gestures and habitus, and more. In this way, these articles necessarily draw together multiple nodes and mediums to trace the broad multi-scalar economies in which musical feelings circulate. And they illuminate how the very challenges of thinking affect beyond embodied intensity – and of conceptualising feelings, music and politics in simultaneity – play out in and configure our methodological choices.

Collectively, the articles presented here offer fine-grained insight into the manifold and dynamic relationships between affect and (its) signification. Closely tracking musical feelings as they circulate through sounds, images, words and bodies, our analyses cut across registers and sites to allow glimpses of emergent subjectivities, social worlds and political projects. In the process, we urge a re-thinking of the boundaries not only of 'affect' (and the theoretical conversation about it), but also of 'politics' and 'music' in ways that have far-reaching conceptual and methodological consequences. Responding to the call to '[reapply] theory to emerging horizons of affect's evolving arisings and appropriations' (White 2017: 178–179), we draw attention to music, that most potent and profound realm of cultural life, and the affective political work it makes possible.

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## Notes on contributors

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