

TEXT AND PERFORMANCE QUARTERLY

Formerly *Literature in Performance*, Founded 1980

VOLUME 22

APRIL 2002

NUMBER 2

Affect and Embodied Understanding in Musical Experience

D. Robert DeChaine

*This essay undertakes an autoethnographic excursion into the body to illuminate the power of affect as bodied forth in and as musical experience. My journey is guided by the assumption that to underplay the significance of the body in our efforts to account for the power of music does a great disservice to our knowledge of ourselves. Two questions spur the study. How might music and affect be profitably articulated across mind and body, across time and space? Limited as we are by language, what would it mean to describe the experience of music as an embodied practice? By attending to the embodied, performative practice of ethnography, I suggest openings for deeper and more multiperspectival narrative analyses that, in turn, allow for an articulation of music and bodies across lines of individual and social identity, across boundaries of culture and difference. **Keywords:** music, affect, embodiment, memory, communitas*

Are we condemned to the adjective? Are we reduced to the dilemma of either the predicable or the ineffable? (Barthes, Image 180)

TO attempt a journey into the body as a way of knowing is to invite a languor of the ineffable. In 1983, when I was a 21-year-old record store clerk, my boss gave me a pair of passes to a concert, at a small venue in Hollywood, by the musical group R.E.M. Outside their hometown of Athens, Georgia, and aside from disparate pockets of localized fans, the group was virtually unknown in the musical mainstream. This was to be their break-in tour of the West Coast in support of their debut album for a small independent record label. My insider status at the record store had given me a lead on the group, and I'd been listening to and ranting about their self-released single for the previous year. I'd taken it upon myself to champion R.E.M.'s new album, playing the advance promotional copy in the store whenever I could, proudly "hipping" customers and friends to my discovery. The chance to see R.E.M. perform was a dream come true for me. My previous experience as a

D. Robert DeChaine is a Lecturer in the Department of Liberal Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. A version of this essay was presented at the 2000 Western States Communication Association Convention, Sacramento. The author is grateful to Kirk Fuoss and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. The author extends special thanks to Katherine Hagedorn for her warmth and encouragement in the conceiving of this essay.

musician had convinced me that the group was on the verge of success, and I would be witness to the unfolding of history, along with a handful of other deserving, appreciative, “hip” fans. Here begins the difficulty:

It's the night of the show, and I'm standing in the middle of the audience, about fifteen feet back from the stage, and my eyes burn in the thick cigarette haze, and my skin is on fire, literally **on fire** in anticipation, while the hopelessly uncool house music pounds out sonic wallpaper, mingling and competing with the audience banter, and my thighs ache from the rhythm I pound with my hands, and I look around the hall, checking other faces for the same knowing grin as mine, and I notice a woman and a man conversing to my right with their backs turned away from the stage, and I just want to grab and shake them because they obviously have no idea of the miracle about to take place in here, and they don't deserve to be here with the rest of us, **no**, this is **our** night, **my** night, and now I glance to my left toward the front of the stage, and I recognize a *Los Angeles Times* music critic smashed among the tightly-packed bodies, and a shiver ripples through me and I notice the smell of clove cigarettes and sweat and the house music cuts and the lights dim and everyone around me is yelling and clapping and I'm doing the same and I lose myself in the darkness and in these people around me and now there are darting beams of flashlights on the stage and sharp squelching noises of guitar cables plugging into guitars and my thighs are **raw** and I don't know if I'm breathing and all those dreams of being an extra guitar player in the band and all the words and pictures and imaginings of tonight melt away into this exact instant and all at once the slash of a guitar chord **jabs** my gut and a sharp flam on the snare drum ripples up my back and the bass is in my groin and in my chest and in my fingertips and my head is tingling and crackling with a thousand tiny electric shocks and I'm twisting and writhing around and I'm literally **unable** to control myself and I feel this and **I FEEL THIS** and the music hasn't even started yet.

That night has haunted me in vivid detail for nearly twenty years. I recognize now, as I did then, that something crucial had transpired—in me, in the music, within that scene of performance. Far more than a critical attitude toward music, my experience at the R.E.M. concert awakened in me an intense desire, a struggle, to untangle the *why* of my musical passion, my musical taste, my musical meaning. How could music unleash within me such intense impulses? What led me to feel so simultaneously connected to those around me and yet so utterly cocooned in my own subjectivity? What kind of “timeless time” was I experiencing? I realized that night that I could never again think myself innocent in the passion, that there existed beyond the musicians themselves a great complicity of knowledge and emotions and ideology that effectively birthed this music, and that I was a part of the conspiracy. Now, all these years later, I add *bodies* to this mélange, as I've become increasingly convinced that the problem of talking about music—of being able to locate and articulate its power—is hopelessly, or gloriously, compounded by the body as a site of musical experience.

What would it mean to gain an embodied understanding of musical experience? Susan McClary perceptively writes, “By far the most difficult aspect of music to explain is its uncanny ability to make us experience our bodies in accordance with its gestures and rhythms” (23). Indeed, a number of scholars have remarked on the “uncanniness” to which McClary alludes. Lawrence Grossberg, for example, notes that music “has a unique and striking relationship to the human body, surrounding, enfolding and even invading it within its own rhythms and textures” (*We Gotta* 152), and Simon Frith describes feeling in popular music as “a physical as much as mental

experience" (141). The bodily metaphor McClary invokes seems apt. While music and its "gestures" may reach beyond physicality to be articulated within a complex ideological formation,¹ to underplay the significance of the body in our efforts to account for the power of music does a great disservice to our knowledge of our selves. Musical experience forces an encounter between mind and body, clearing a liminal space that is simultaneously charged with affect and fraught with tension. Musical experience *seeps*, exposing the arbitrariness of binary divisions between memory/imagination and subject/object. It marks out discursive territory even as it brazenly defies the very limits of discourse. Within the "poetic language" of music, we encounter the tenuous dialectic between what Julia Kristeva terms the "symbolic" and "semiotic" modalities of signification (23–24), the incursion into and subsequent "remodeling" of the discursive by the physical and visceral.

How might music and affect be profitably articulated across mind and body, across time and space? What would it mean to describe the experience of music as an embodied practice, a form of experience with the potential for yielding an enhanced form of self-understanding? Perhaps most immediately troubling to my sensibilities—doubtless a product of my Western epistemological bias and my carefully manicured scholarly training—how can I hope to bring together the depth, sensuality, and power of this affective experience in mere language? How best to capture and focus that which readily escapes "pure" rationality, discursivity, and cognition?

In this essay, I embark on a journey into the body—into *my* body—in an attempt to articulate affect in the embodied experience of music. Weaving somewhat circuitously through the realms of memory and (cognitive, psychic) space, pausing at points for theoretical reflection, I undertake an autoethnographic excavation of personal narratives, brought about in and through particular experiences of music and the musicality of sound. I take theoretical inspiration from philosophers, ethnographers, anthropologists and phenomenologists who privilege the body as a site of knowing. As opposed to the distancing and detachment that traditional social scientific research privileges as most accurately accounting for knowledge,² I share a view of understanding that looks to the textures of everyday life as they are "bodied forth" (Jackson). As Keith Ridler compellingly argues, "Fieldworkers impoverish their experience of the sensual dimension of the lifeworld by removing themselves from the sensate patterns and rhythms which furnish its texture and fabric" (248).

Moreover, I strive toward what Robert Krizek calls an "embodied understanding" of events, an understanding that "positions the event within the temporal span of one (or more) individual's life story" (27). Krizek's view seeks to account for the power of human narrativity to implicate researcher and subject as participants in the co-creation of knowledge, a knowledge grounded in lived as well as told experience (5). For the autoethnographer, embodied understanding represents an other awareness. It troubles tidy accounts of "my" experience and beckons me to push beyond strict empirical knowledge of "the way things are" to illuminate deep, meaningful confluences of cognitive, artistic, and sensory knowledges. For the student of performance, an embodied understanding can help to explain, in Victor Turner's terms, the liminal character of musical experience, bodies coming together in spontaneous *communitas*, the promise and risk of both individual and social trans-

formation, aided and abetted by the consciousness participants share and the spaces they inhabit. I make a case for the heuristic power of musical experience in its performative dimension, extending Carlson's view of theatrical performance by demonstrating the site of musical experience to be "one of the most powerful and efficacious procedures that human society has developed for the endlessly fascinating process of cultural and personal self-reflexion and experimentation" (199). My aim is not so much to *resolve* issues in any definitive sense as to bring them into focus, to trouble and provoke any simple understanding or sterile "account" of musical experience. By attending to the embodied practice of ethnography and its "intensely sensuous way of knowing" (Conquergood 180), I suggest openings for a multiperspectival narrative analysis, that in turn allows for an articulation of music and bodies across lines of individual and social identity, across boundaries of culture and difference.³

The Poetic Language of Music

Rather than trying to change directly the language on music, it would be better to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language. (Barthes, Image 180–81)

As I circle above my subject, I spy an opening, a way of working myself into its knotted threads. I begin with a recollection from my teens, one that seems to speak to an intimate yet elusive connection between music and the body:

On my way to school, cresting a hill on a freeway overlooking the expanse of Orange County. A warbly cassette tape of Neil Young's "Expecting to Fly" plays on my stereo. Rain is pinging like ball bearings on the roof of my ancient Volkswagen, forcing me to turn up the volume to a point that my cheap speakers are distorting and flapping sympathetically to certain tonal combinations. With headlights fighting the twilight, I am encased in a crackling cacophony of electricity and sound. I've heard this song a thousand times before in other contexts: staring up from my bed, at a party with my friends, behind the grill at the restaurant where I work. Now, suddenly, I'm struck by a powerful surge of—I'm not sure what—moving up through my body. First calves, now stomach, now shoulders, fingertips, earlobes. Intense shivers. My body is like a bell, resonating and shivering and in some strange way **becoming** a part of my car. Pull over fast. All the way to the shoulder. Focused on the blur of rain on the windshield, peripheral vision narrowing, I sit paralyzed, shivering and shaking. Neil's voice crests the hill of the second chorus, and suddenly I'm overwhelmed with a welling up of emotion. Utter bewilderment: why am I crying? Why can't I turn the song off? Transfixed, skin tingling, blind with tears. It's not until a minute into the next song that I can start off again toward school.

It is commonly said that music, at a most basic level, originates in particularly arranged constellations of sound. Ripe and replete with its timbral and tonal textures, sound comes first. Of course, the sonic content of music can be combined with other signifying elements such as language, melody, rhythm, and formal or generic conventions. Such elements and constellations are what help us to distinguish "music" from "noise," *pizzicato* from *forte*, a chorus from a bridge, and the blues from skapunk. But the essence of all music resides in its character as a sound-signifier. Thus, a thorough consideration of music demands a movement beyond its conventional purview as material, discursive, representational, commu-

nicative signification. A thorough consideration of music demands taking into account music's *grain*, the crackles and hums of its rarified sonic vibrations. "The grain of the voice," muses Roland Barthes, "is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (*Image* 188). The mouth sounds of the human voice, the textures of musical instruments, the belly-tickling deepness of bass frequencies, the distortion produced by a weak radio station signal as it infuses with sound, even the sympathetic flapping of speakers as they interact with the listening environment: these, I submit, are formidable constituents of music, to be counted as among music's "diction" (*Image* 182–83). Sitting utterly immobilized in my car at age 17—and again recently at a friend's house during an encounter with a piece of instrumental music—I marvel at the brute force, the "carnal stereophony" (Barthes, *Pleasure* 66) of music's paralinguage. Portent of a refashioned aesthetics (an erotics?) of music, issuing from "outside of any law, outplaying not only the law of culture but equally that of anticulture, developing beyond the subject all the value hidden behind 'I like' or 'I don't like'" (Barthes, *Image* 188), the grain of music is music's body or, more accurately, music's sound bodied forth.

To claim a certain "carnality" for music, however, means also to posit an alternative conception of the experiencing of music—an interdiction, an entrance of the body *into* the music, of the sound-in-music into the body, in synergistic combination. The bell-like resonance of my body in confluence with the Neil Young song suggests an instrument/al function for the body in music. I've experienced this same instrumentality at raves, standing close to the sound system or a giant wall of speakers—a sensation of being *in* the music, my body and the sonics intertwined, simultaneously engorged with euphoria and yet disquieted, jarred.⁴ The body offers itself up *in collaboration* with sound in the production of the musical text. In this way, it functions as both performer and instrument.

Kristeva moves us further toward a reckoning with music's em/bodied character. Cruising the contours of "poetic language" and its infinitude of linguistic possibilities, Kristeva offers a navigation of the dialectically charged interstices of what she terms the "symbolic" (i.e., communicative, intelligible, discursive) and "semiotic" (i.e., impulsive, resistant to the logic and abstraction of the symbolic order) modalities of signification. Woven together, sometimes tightly and sometimes loosely, the semiotic and symbolic modalities serve as threads or, better, as *arteries*, spanning the body of a particular signifying practice. Kristeva's long looks are reserved for the semiotic dimension. It is by way of this main artery and its incursion into literary practice, she suggests, that a "revolution" in poetic language has taken place, *is* taking place, providing spark and nourishment to linguistic expression. For Kristeva, semiosis represents a "rupture" or "transgression" of the symbolic: "Whether in the realm of metalanguage (mathematics, for example) or literature, what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic" (62).⁵ Further, the breach of the symbolic highlights the "musicality" of language. Language "tends to be driven out of its symbolic function (sign-syntax) and is opened out within a semiotic articulation; with a material support such as the voice, this semiotic network gives 'music' to literature" (63).

Kristeva's allusion to the music/ality of language is richly suggestive. It is the semiotic "music" of linguistic expression that, for her, holds the promise of challenging, disfiguring, and perhaps refiguring literary experience. In her discussion of

poetic “distortions of the signifying chain,” (50), Kristeva describes artistic practices as undercutting and even “destroying” the symbolic order. The emergent “genotext,” arising out of the semiotic plasma of human drives and impulses,⁷ represents a *process* endowed with a proclivity for escaping representation. In this sense, the poetic genotext is asymbolic, prediscursive. It acknowledges its place within the dialectical economy of signification even as it slips stealthily underneath the radar of “artistic communication.”⁷ Comparisons between the semiosis of musical and poetic practice are easily made.⁸ Just as certain spoken (or recited or sung) combinations of letters or words burst forth in language yet simultaneously manage to travel beyond its reach—one might think, for instance, of the poetic power of onomatopoeia, rhyme and rhythm in speech—music’s diction, its tonal combinations, and its rhythmic inflections likewise have an uncanny ability to breach the symbolic/ideological order of “musical meaning.” Certain dissonant notes from a solo piano send shivers up my backbone, and a deep tympani fills my belly, sending tiny but significant shocks outward to my fingertips, my forehead, the backs of my thighs. An arrhythmic snare flam or a “cracking” voice can trigger the shocks as well, a sonic equivalent to the involuntary reflex of a rubber mallet on the kneecap. These sounds don’t *mean* anything to me, which is not to say they don’t affect me. What’s more, the human voice, far from imposing an overriding discursivity on the musical genotext, only attests to the embodied character of music. The “scat” vocalics of Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald or Ken Nordine’s early experiments in “word jazz” or the vocalized poetics of rap music all aptly demonstrate my body’s compliance, its complicity. The elusive travel beyond discursive meaning, beyond the rules and convention of a musical *system*, a signifying of music’s unsignifiable: the poetic language of music is the uncharted territory of musical experience. *This is how music feels.*

Affect and Musical Experience

More than consciousness and more than emotion, it is affect that gives us our “sense of being” or, even better, our sense of “being alive.” (Seigworth 22)

I remember the feeling . . .

Eight years old, it’s my birthday, and I’m running recklessly down the middle of my street toward Gordon’s house with my brand new acoustic guitar in tow. Gordon is thirteen, and he’s amazing. He can play every song by the Monkees on guitar. He always told me, “When you’re old enough to have your own guitar, I’ll show you how to play.” I can’t wait to learn my favorite song, “Last Train to Clarksville,” and Gordon knows it. In a firm, fatherly manner, Gordon smiles down at me from his porch and tells me I’ll have to learn the basics first: how to tune up, some basic chords and fingering positions, theennnn I’ll be ready for the song. My heart sinks, but I agree. He positions me in a hard wooden chair in his driveway and sits directly opposite me. He tells me to place my right ear against the top of the guitar’s body and to strum. I feel the sounds entering my body, vibrating and tickling my skin. I smell the wood and lacquer of the guitar and the lemon oil on the fingerboard. Gordon reaches over and gently positions my left hand and fingers to form what I would later know to be a D7 chord. I strum. Gordon winces and tells me to push down harder. Sharp sensation of nylon strings against my fingertips. “Better,” he tells me. “Keep practicing until it doesn’t make that buzzing noise.” Fingers throbbing, body tingling from head to toe, face pressed tightly against the wood, I strum, strummmmm the D7 chord, never wanting it to end.

I remember the feeling: cheek on wood, Gordon's hand lightly tapping mine when I hit an errant note. G, C, D7 . . . G, C, D7 . . . my nightly exercises, my first successfully played song. Many times since, when listening to a song on the radio, I've imagined myself tapping on the guitarist's hand, just as Gordon did mine, scolding the musician for a buzz or an out-of-tune string. These sensual memories are still very much alive in my mind. Or are they alive in my body?

Here's an odd-sounding proposition: *thoughts feel, and feelings think*. By this, I mean that it makes no sense to analyze cognitive and bodily experience apart from one another. They simply don't operate in isolation. Perhaps the reason such a statement seems strange is that it rubs coarsely against the grain of our post-enlightenment epistemology. The Cartesian split between mind and body, between the faculties of the rational *cogito* and our brute, physical impulses, is taken as a modern fact of our existence. A traditional understanding of musical meaning dictates that a piece of music or a particular musical experience doesn't make us feel—rather, it makes us think, and it's the thoughts that cause our emotional responses. But is the route really so indirect? Could there be some deeper, more intimate circuit connecting music and memory, thoughts and feelings?

I suggest that the notion of a deep connection points to the power of *affect* to fuse our bodies and our senses and our minds. In advancing such a claim, I take issue with those who view the affective power of music as consummately ideological and, hence, underplay the role of the body. Simon Frith, in his discussion of intellectuals' explanation of rock music's pleasures in terms of *jouissance* (in the Barthesian conception), states that the assertion that such pleasures represent an escape from structure and reason "is not a musical (or empirical) judgment at all, but an ideological gesture, a deviant expression of respectable taste" (144). To assert, however, that musical meaning only exists in ideological terms elides any consideration of affect beyond its tethering to a Cartesian rationalism or any possibility that the body may in fact lead the mind in a *language of resonances*, playing with and troubling a (Western) language of form. Since Plato, we've been running scared in the West, largely unwilling to face up to our fear of "losing control," which always implies a surrender to the emotions. The sometimes startling, often palpable affective pull of music offers us a re-cognition of this fear. In relinquishing our ingrained orderliness to the disorderly grain of music, we summon productive energies to body forth a new articulation of self-understanding.

Think back to an experience you had at some point when you heard a particular song or musical experience that made you *feel* something. Perhaps you weren't quite sure what the feeling was—a slight shiver, a recognition that you couldn't quite make out, a feeling of warmth or happiness or sadness with no seeming point of origin. Surely, we have all experienced this odd sensation. What does it mean? Greg Seigworth points to such common occurrences as evidence of the power of affect in our lives. He describes an example of his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, still just learning to speak, being particularly attracted to the voice of Icelandic pop singer Bjork, who typically uses vocal inflections and nonlinguistic noises in a way that makes her words difficult to understand for English speakers. (Sometimes she sings in her native tongue as well). Seigworth's daughter is inexplicably drawn to Bjork's voice, smiling and gurgling along to the music in an English-Bjorkian hybrid. Seigworth believes that his daughter is attracted "not so much to what people say

but how they say it" (21). This is so, he believes, because she has latched onto "something more" than just the words or the meanings of the singer, an "excess of resonance" that includes not only Bjork's presentational style but something more difficult to pin down and talk about: an emotional resonance that affects the entire body.

Seigworth argues that "this 'other' language of resonances" (22) is prelinguistic, something we learn at an age when we haven't yet grasped the meaning-making process of words. He points to affect as the term describing this language of resonances, stating that "[w]ithout a doubt, affect is our first and remains our most fundamental relationship to the world around us" (22). Further, he adds, it's something so common and basic to us that, by and large, we don't even recognize its existence. Affect is the *intensity* that allows us to feel. It is something prior to conscious thought, a primary condition and conditioner of our ability to feel happy or sad or angry, for instance. Affect is a conduit between our bodies and our souls, and it represents an intersection of our bodies and the outside world. Seigworth asserts that affect can be clearly seen and felt in the experiencing of music and, specifically, that "the affective power of music lies in its ability to fold the space of lived contexts [. . .] into temporal moments in your lived history" (23). Granted such a spatializing agency, affect provides resonance to the feeling of "a particular duration or a whole entire time of your life" (23) rather than merely specific events or isolated emotions. Moreover, affect affirms the meaningfulness of the everyday experiences we think of as past history, insignificant, or "lost" to our selves. Seigworth writes,

Affect isn't always about such notable or "significant" events. Affect is *more* about the slow but steady, continual accumulation of seeming insignificances: the very stuff that slips underneath your consciousness because it's barely worth noticing, the stuff that registers without any particular emotion getting attached to it. It is these affective insignificances that make up more (much more!) of who you are and how you act than those other bigger events and powerful emotions that are supposed to mean so much. (23, emphasis in original)

Affect is thus the circuit through which the past and present, as well as imaginings of the future, become confluent. It enables the process of becoming, entangling our bodies, minds, memories, histories, thoughts, and feelings to the point where they can't be imagined apart from each other. Nodding to Kristeva and her semiotic modality, I describe affect as an amplifier for the "music" of poetic language. Thus conceived, affect gives us a way to understand how thoughts feel and how feelings think.

Perhaps one of the reasons it is so difficult to talk about affect or designate it as a coherent form of knowledge is that, by and large, we don't really have a way to signify something that doesn't signify *per se*. Our words fail us. Brian Massumi maintains that "there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect" because "our entire vocabulary has derived from theories of signification that are still wedded to structure even across irreconcilable differences" (88). While we recognize affect as a powerful kind of intensity that affects our emotions, we haven't developed a way to express the degree or force of that intensity in a way that short-circuits our accepted route through structure and signification. Affect, we

might say, is astructural or prestructural. If this is so, and if we agree that affect constitutes a large part of what makes us human, it may be worth the trouble, as students of ourselves, to develop a more nuanced understanding of affect in our future studies.

Re/membering Musical Experience

*And yet, I know this sound so well, from childhood,
That even now it calls me back to life. (Goethe 769–70)*

I feel the remembering . . .

In a remarkable essay recounting his experiences of Berlin, Walter Benjamin writes: “The *déjà vu* effect has often been described. But I wonder whether the term is actually well chosen, and whether the metaphor appropriate to the process would not be far better taken from the realm of acoustics. One ought to speak of events that reach us like *an echo awakened by a call*, a sound that seems to have been heard somewhere in the darkness of past life” (“Berlin” 634, emphasis added). Benjamin’s vision of those moments that serve as waking dreams for us seems all too real, and yet, how do we account for the shudder that accompanies every one of those “dead,” chimerical memories? If *déjà vu* consists of the evocation of events that have never really taken place, why and how are those never-experienced events so powerfully “real” for us? As haunting an enigma as this is, I think we have much to gain from our somehow similar experiences of those affective “shocks” that allow us access into our recognizable memories. For Goethe’s *Faust*, it is church bells that unlock a door into his past, into his very being. Who among us has not experienced numerous such shocks that take us back in time? Shot through with wishes and half-memories, these temporal transports make no linear sense but feel nonetheless intensely real. I suggest that the activities of remembering constitute, by way of affective musical experience, a poetic *re/membering* of events and histories that, if considered seriously, lead us to a fuller understanding of our selves.

Monday afternoon, between classes. My mind is in about twelve places: two hundred pages of reading to do, a lesson plan to prepare, a batch of papers to grade. I’m meeting Brian for coffee in a half hour, even though I know I shouldn’t waste time like that. It’s raining like hell, and my toes sting in my cold, squishing wet tennis shoes as I race, head down, across campus with no umbrella. “Just calm down,” I whisper to myself, voice shaking. I wish I could relax my neck muscles. Regular afternoon headache is sinking in. I jump in the car, turn on the radio, lurch cautiously toward the parking exit gate. My head’s tilted sideways as I squint. I can barely see oncoming traffic through the back-and-forth of my tattered wiper blades. The channel presets on my radio are making horrible crackling sounds. I really need to buy a new one—like I ever will. It’s getting dark, and my glasses are fogged up from the heater. I press my finger on the cold plastic “seek” button and lift it off. What . . . oh god. Oh shit. “Sara.”

It’s only about fifteen seconds into the song—I already know I’ll be listening to the whole thing. I can feel that peculiar warmth welling up, upward from my stomach to my neck and my face and my ears flash, **hot**. And now, suddenly, it’s five in the morning, and you and I are teenagers, huddled together, freezing, in the ripped passenger seat of your old, faded yellow Toyota. Parked, like we always do for hours, in front of your mom’s house, shivering and holding each other and laughing. You’re laughing at one of my stupid voice impressions again, the one I can’t—won’t—do anymore. It’s raining, cold, and still dark. I don’t want to go, but it’s time for work. I try to pull away from you, and in that instant,

as your face and eyes and cheeks plead with me for just another few minutes. I remember. I remember the little secret your best friend told me about you, the one I wouldn't believe until I saw you with him, after school by the band room, saw you give him **my** look, saw you kiss him, saw it all. And I sit in your car, motionless, stupid numb smile, sucking in the hurt, loving and hating you, ashamed for my cowardice. I know what you do. Everybody does. You even tried to tell me once, hugging under a blanket next to the winter mountain campfire, your eyes and cheeks glowing wet with tears. Your voice cracks. You're crying and shaking, but no noise is coming out. I stroke your forehead, feel your stuttering, warm breath on my neck, whisper to you it's okay, over and over. Your eyes are melting into the fire, dripping salt and makeup. And I feel a strange kind of . . . strange kind of **warmth** welling up. My stomach tenses, eyes blur, and I know I'm about to . . .

A hard shiver brings me back to your car. Crackle of the radio. I shake my head involuntarily. You tell me it's after five, and I'll be late for work. I fall again into your eyes. Our noses are icicles, touching and rubbing. You lurch back suddenly: "Turn it up! Hurry!" I don't recognize the song. You scold me playfully—I usually know ALL of them, you say. "It's 'Sara' by Fleetwood Mac. I LOVE this song!" you yell. We listen to it, silently, eyes closed, all the way through. "I love that song," you say again, softly this time, your warm breath on my cheek, as the song fades. I sit there, not knowing what to feel. I HATE Fleetwood Mac. I've always hated Fleetwood Mac. My friends and I make disgusting jokes about the band members of Fleetwood Mac. But now, something seems different, something's changed. It's not such a bad song, really, you know? That one guitar riff, the repeating one that modulates over the bass—that's nice, I have to admit. I try to imagine the chords in my head. I know I'll be learning it in my bedroom after work tonight; I'll surprise you with a rendition tomorrow.

"Sara."

We'll hum "Sara" together lots of times, buy the record, see the band live at the Hollywood Bowl next year. I'll keep the record for years, finally selling it accidentally at a garage sale, along with a picture of you as a four year old, squatting in front of a motel swimming pool in North Carolina. I tucked the picture in the record sleeve for safekeeping. I loved that picture, your quizzical frown, your puffy cheeks, and red sneakers. You looked like what I see now when I close my eyes and imagine the song that I hope I don't ever have to hear again.

Long shudder. We're still huddled together in your car, fifty yards from where we'll break up, forever, over in the middle of that church parking lot. I stumbled home that night, left my car parked sideways in the middle of the lot with the door standing wide open, you screaming and sobbing and begging me to stay.

Hard, cold.

Shake my body back to Monday afternoon. I'm trying to drive, and the rain is pounding, and my head is pounding, and it's "Sara" on the radio, and it's that middle guitar riff, and I can't move. Here it all comes. God damn you.

What, really, is memory? Throughout his life, Benjamin remained fascinated by "the mysterious power of memory" and its uncanny ability to invoke a feeling of nearness. He offers an example of a "room we inhabit whose walls are *closer* to us than to a visitor" ("The Great Art" 248, emphasis in original). Nearness to things but, more importantly, nearness to our selves: memory reveals crystallized formations and deposits that, though buried, can be warmed, activated, possibly called into service. For Benjamin, memory exists as a deeply sedimented "medium of that which is experienced" ("Excavation" 578), a medium that can be plundered, excavated. More often than not, its congealed surfaces and currents lay slumbering deep within human consciousness, holding captive the last remnants of the human faculty of mimesis, wherein resides the "lost and occluded symbolic dimension of language" (Wolin 104).⁹ By way of an acute jarring to consciousness, through what

Benjamin calls “shocks” of recognition, an excavation of memory can yield buried insight, can help to loosen the oppressive grip of the historical past as “the way it was” (“Theses” 255). Such shocks, he hopes, might enable a rupture of linear time and space and allow the astute archaeologist—the “historical materialist,” in Benjamin’s Marxist-inflected prose—to effect a return to wholeness, a mending of the broken vessel of human experience. A great storehouse of being, memory serves as a conduit, a vehicle, for the reintegration of mind and body.

Yet memory, as a “medium of experience,” is both conscious and involuntary. Benjamin is especially dazzled by the often jarring chance encounter with a particular sensation—a taste, a touch, and, in particular, a sound—that has a seemingly magical power to conjure an entire “forgotten” world. Drawing on Proust’s *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Benjamin identifies four characteristics of involuntary memory: first, it’s a spontaneous, non-purposive form of action that demands from its subject a certain state of consciousness or receptivity; second, its subject matter is most often plucked from the domains of the trivial and mundane rather than from the exalted and exceptional; third, involuntary memories occur not as drawn-out experiences but rather as sudden, instantaneous flashes of recognition; and fourth, the potency of such unintentional memory-shocks resides in the power of oblique, disjointed sensory experience to elude conscious capture or fixing by conscious means (McCole 260).

Looking back, my most intense musical encounters usually embody one or more of these characteristics. My memories are rarely consciously elicited in music. Rather, they surface, seemingly, by themselves. Moreover, in my most intense musical experiences, there’s often a state of *distraction*, of simultaneous psychic distance and acute awareness, a distraction that seems to welcome the play of memory as it wells up in my mind and body. Sometimes, I willfully attain such a state by pressing my ear close to the speaker of a radio. Sometimes, I unconsciously attain such a state through a repetitive sound (e.g., rain on a car roof, a sustained rhythmic pattern). Sometimes, the shocks of involuntary memory are fleeting or unrecognizable as coherent images, lingering instead as intensely felt traces or residues. Most often, they surface as memory-fragments from everyday activities: a walk through a familiar neighborhood, the flavor of a bitter candy, a friend’s playful scolding. Involuntary remembrances serve as a reminder that, hard as we may try, we each have a past that is less dead, less forgotten, less finalized than we could ever consciously imagine.

Benjamin’s excursions through the realms of memory and experience remind us that our memories are not only vital repositories of experience, but, more significantly, they are architectonic forces in our lives. In memory, we may “re-live” events, but this is a repetition with a difference. Like an ever-moving aperture, the composite of our cultural and somatic selves won’t accede to simple laws of chronology and causality or to the tyranny of “historical importance.” We’re thus engaged in a constant process of re/membling our experiences, creating new and shifting articulations of time, space, emotion, cognition, consciousness. Our memories are products of an activity in which our adherence to chronology becomes untethered, allowing us to engage in a kind of *bricolage*. This operation constitutes a powerful and poetic means of identity formation. As we order and reorder our memories across time and space, experience and imagination, they begin to con-

geal, if only fleetingly, in particular constellations that give our identities ground. Perhaps these constellations, these constructions, will prove hearty enough to conjoin with others, becoming part of what we popularly call our identities. Of course memory is also a *collective* activity, moving across social and cultural space, and signifying a shared sense of experience. Much has been written on the subject of collective memory that would prove relevant to an expanded discussion of the poetics of re/memembering,¹⁰ and further explorations certainly stand to benefit from a consideration of collective modalities of re/memembering.

Affect plays an instrumental role in the architectonics of re/membered experience. The undulations and crackles of affect are precisely what summons the “nearness” of past experience to which Benjamin alludes. Each time I hear “Sara,” whether in a car or in a supermarket, I’m “shocked” into a new recognition, launched on a new trajectory across time, compelled toward a new re/memembering. These affective shocks often occur when I least expect them, catching me off-guard, sometimes inducing elation or anger or clarity or bewilderment. I *play* memory, but I’m equally played by it. Why, though, is it *music* that so effortlessly triggers the affective shocks of re/membered experience? It seems to involve the *felt* dynamics of sound, be it in the form of a belly-filling bellow of a tympani or the shattering crack of a cymbal or the delicate, electrifying shocks induced by the grain of a singer’s voice. I still re/member the way my body involuntarily jerked, convulsed and submitted to the sonics of the R.E.M. concert. Somehow, music’s disquieting, exquisite sound qualities seem optimally suited to the body’s sensitivity to affect. Benjamin, referencing the *déjà vu* effect he claims sound can elicit, suggests that sound seems to be an involuntary trigger *par excellence*: “if we are not mistaken, the shock with which moments enter consciousness as if already lived usually strikes us in the form of a sound” (“Berlin” 634).¹¹ Perhaps music’s formal qualities mediate the experiencing of memory and our re/memembering process. According to Benjamin, the dialectic of form and content in art results in an “accumulation” of perception: “[c]ontent makes its way toward us. Form holds back, permits us to approach. The retarding (formal) elements of music probably dwell in the memory, where listening forms an accumulation” (“Currently Effective” 213). Perhaps the pull between the memory of a song like “Sara,” in its formal sense, and the affective presence of its content—that which constitutes its “nearness” to me now—is the “magic” of memory, a surprising or even shocking return to a deep, and deeply felt, perception, a perception within all of us. I’ve noticed my body to be most receptive to those musical experiences that *force* my body into the music, force it into nearness with its object, that impel its complicity. Volume and physical proximity to the musical source seem to be important in this regard.

I should also acknowledge that I’ve deliberately focused attention on the role of the sound of music in the re/memembering process rather than on music’s lyrical inducements. While there is certainly “power” in the capacity of language to trigger the making and remaking of experience, its *modus operandi*, its method of engaging the body, seems markedly different. Whereas linguistic signification can undoubtedly provoke emotions and meaning-full experiences, these appear to come by way of reflective cognition. One *thinks* language into meaning and feeling. Sound, by contrast, seems to find a path that traverses or short-circuits conscious reflection. Clearly, lyrics from a song may trigger memories and stir emotions. Indeed, the

logistics of the affective-experiential relationship between sound and language begs future illumination. In any case, sound—especially in its Kristevan semiotic sense—seems to enjoy an affinity with affect that eludes its lyrical complement. Sound *feels* more deeply, or at least more immediately, than language. But here, already, language fails me.

I've done my best, for a long time, to block out most of what I included in the "Sara" narrative. Much of it still isn't easy to talk or think about, but difficult as it is to revisit, my music-induced re/membering illustrates the affective force that a song, even a song one despises, can trigger. For me, "Sara" is a shock that invariably awakens dead dreams, memories and remembrances, both realized and unrealized. My re/membering beckons me to a place where memories still somehow live, in the past as well as in the present. My re/membering invests me with an agency to play, to tinker with beginnings and endings, to fill in the in-betweens with imaginings of what might have been, even as my involuntary remembrances force the doors of concrete, felt experience to remain open: open to the pain and exuberance and intensity of a life uniquely mine. But this is also a part of the magic of the operation. Most of all, through these musical shocks, I feel, for better or worse, the embodied force of my always-changing self. *I feel.*

Musical Spaces, Other Experiences

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. [...] In the realm of images, the play between the exterior and intimacy is not a balanced one. (Bachelard xxxvi)

What I have described thus far under the rubric of "affect and embodied understanding" primarily focuses on individual, as opposed to a social, experience. Each of us perceives, feels, re/members differently, and each of us will take our own journeys, find our own paths. However, to limit the power of musical experience to the realm of the isolated individual elides the obvious and immense phenomenon of bodies coming together in music as performers and spectators, interimbricated as participants in a social drama. It is in the communal experience of music, I maintain, that affective energies are most readily harnessed, most palpably catalyzed, and, potentially, most transformative. Identity is worked and power is wielded within the spaces of musical experience, and few who enter its rarified atmosphere exit unchanged.

I begin with an excerpt from field notes I gathered before and during a recent concert of Balinese gamelan music. While not my first listening experience with gamelan music, this was my first encounter with a live performance of it. The concert took place in a medium-sized concert hall at a college campus near my home in Southern California.

Lots of people here. . . . I wonder if they've ever seen or heard this before? Will this style of music seem exotic? What are the reference points? Looks like mostly student-types and faculty. Some friends of the orchestra, . . . anyone I recognize? [My professor] says this [performance] might be relevant to my study. . . . I'm feeling excited. . . . anticipation, or? I love the look of the instruments [assembled on the stage about fifty feet forward], beautiful! I recognize an old friend—Loren [sitting] just in front of me. He used to play in a gamelan ensemble. . . . [He] went to Bali and studied the form. Does he know someone

in the band? Maybe he's seen them before, . . . a sign that they're really good? [I'll] need to find him at the intermission. . . . [I] saw some of the performers preparing and changing into their costumes a few minutes ago, . . . beautiful, colorful outfits, very different from here. What do they think of playing here? What do they think of us, [the audience]? Do they think of us as spectators, of themselves as artists or subjects? Great acoustics in here, very live and reverberant. [The sound] should be thick all the way to the back. Some murmurs and now applause. . . . The orchestra is making its way to the stage, down the isles past me. . . . [I can sense] my heart rate increasing. . . . Everyone's hushing up, [and] this seems to make me more excited. I look around [at others] near me. . . . What are they feeling? Are they as excited? Do they care about this? I think some [of them] must. Big and beautiful rhythm, syncopated, lush, complex. I like this. . . . I see that Loren's eyes are fixed, maybe in deep concentration. Is he following the rhythm? People [are] bobbing their heads, smiling, looking serious. Everyone watching, no distractions. I think we all like this. . . . Lots of applause now. Everyone's really enthusiastic. A few people [are] looking at each other's reactions.

During my observation of the gamelan performance, partly due to my reflexive ethnographic charge of remaining aware of myself in the space of the performance, I found myself paying as much attention to the audience and performers—to *us*—as to the music. Despite my intentions, I found it almost impossible to remain distanced, objective, apart from the music and especially the people. I kept sensing in that space an odd kind of *solidarity*, a oneness with the audience, as though together we had found a way to clear a space for ourselves in the music. I kept imagining other listeners' reactions, thoughts, and feelings about what they were experiencing, projecting my own responses onto theirs and theirs onto mine. And as this was taking place, my excitement grew, sweeping me or jarring me back to other similar collective musical experiences, to the R.E.M. show, to an intimate acoustic folk music concert I had recently attended. What kind of solidarity was this? What kinds of imaginations are in play within the space of musical experience?

A first question to ask: what kind of space is "musical space?" Notwithstanding the numerous and varied theoretical accounts of space in contemporary scholarship, it is useful for our purposes to delineate two senses of space with regard to music—two domains that, while not mutually exclusive, expose a seam between materiality and performativity, between the physical and the psychic. First, there is the "space" of music as it congeals in/as a bounded site of performance and reception. Here, musical space meshes with the specificities of place, in its particular physical, sociocultural, historical, and political contexts. Clearly, these place-spaces bear on our experiences, make us aware of each other, and influence our relationship to the music. At the gamelan concert, for instance, I was acutely aware of the fact that the performance was taking place in a concert hall at an elite university, which caused me to project expectations of the audience as by-and-large learned, open minded, engaged, voluntary, and so on. I assumed that more similarities existed between spectators than differences. The differences became apparent as I read back through my field notes later.

There's another sense of space as well, one that accounts for music's *play*, its articulations *across* places, bodies, thoughts, and feelings. This space is not so place-bound in a physical-material sense. As music's re/membered experience cuts across and collapses diachronic time, the space of music in this second sense connotes the potentially liberatory impulses in the play of music and bodies and

minds, its character as a liminal space for social transformation. In this space, semiosis thrives. The tingly plosives and pops from the grain of voices and instruments dance here, move in and through and above my body, thread through other bodies and, on fortunate occasion, cause something important to happen. At the crescendo of a song at a Joe Jackson concert recently, I glanced to my right, to the person sitting next to me. He shared my look: sly smile, eyes slightly closed, head tilted back as though not so much listening as feeling the sound. He noticed I was looking at him and nodded to me. I nodded back. We knew. We knew a connection had been made, a formation of an *us*, however transitory, a coming together in music in the space of the performance. I've often wandered back to that night and others where spaces, places, bodies, and sounds mingle in affective conspiracy.

Turner's "communitas" aptly describes the atmospherics of this space. Communitas is *free*, insofar as it represents "an unmediated relationship between historical, idiosyncratic, concrete individuals" (*From Ritual* 45). Barriers are lifted and defenses are lowered in communitas. Turner suggests that as a "modality of human interrelatedness," communitas has the ability to "'play' across structural systems" (*From Ritual* 45) and, in its "spontaneous" form, to meld individual differences with collective "mutual understanding" (*From Ritual* 48). This was my feeling with the person next to me at the Joe Jackson concert: our "mutual understanding" seemed to unite us across our differences, whatever they may have been, to enjoin us in affective pleasure. In a passage highly evocative of Benjamin, Turner attempts to articulate the almost tangible "magic" of spontaneous communitas. He asks, "Is there any of us who has not known this moment when compatible people—friends, congeners—obtain a *flash* of lucid mutual understanding on an existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group which is felt (in the first person) as 'essentially us' could sustain its intersubjective illumination?" (*From Ritual* 48, emphasis added). Such flashes, like the flashes of re/membered experience, are rare and fleeting. But what moments they are! Turner adds that those "who interact with one another in the mode of spontaneous communitas become totally absorbed into a single synchronized, fluid event" (*From Ritual* 48). We lose ourselves in those moments, submit ourselves to the slippage from mind to body, body to mind, self to other. In Benjamin's parlance, spontaneous communitas congeals as a time-moment (*Jetztzeit*), a drawing together, a crystallization of communal affective energies and aspirations. Imagine the possibilities implicit in taking those powerful time-moments seriously, conscripting them in the service of social consciousness, harnessing their productive energies on a massive scale to trouble the self/other dichotomy.

Along with the freedom afforded by communitas, there is also an inherent *inclusivity* in its "dissolution of boundaries shutting people off from each other" (Schechner 141). Communitas is a kind of leveler. Turner writes that communitas "tends to be inclusive—some might call it 'generous'—social structure tends to be exclusive, even snobbish, relishing the distinction between we/they and in-group/out-group, higher/lower, better/meanings" (*From Ritual* 51). Communitas strips away such rigid distinctions, beckons its participants to recognize the contingency and constructedness of differences, invites new ways of having Other experiences. During the gamelan concert, my scholarly detachment gave way to an overwhelm-

ing feeling of communal subjectivity, as though we were all, performers and spectators alike, participating in the creation of the musical space, participating in the creation of our selves within the play of that space. Above all, glancing back to that feeling, we seemed to be *performing* its contours, performing our own collective consciousness. For that time at least, I felt transformed in some less-than-tangible way, and, significantly, I felt as though I had collaborated with the other participants in effecting the transformation. The space of musical experience is a deeply performative space. In its affect-charged play, we glean opportunities to tinker with identities, imagine new worlds, rework old ones.

Recently, I experienced another variation on the participatory “freedom” of spontaneous *communitas*, this time in a mosh pit at a punk concert:

This room is jammed with life: low ceiling and black walls, bodies packed tightly, smell of urine and leather and youthful energy. Ear-shattering volume drowns out all but occasionally screamed pronouncements and the playful “fuck you’s” exchanged between musicians and audience. I chuckle, flash back to a former experience at a punk show in my teens, and inch along, almost up to the pit now. I teeter here, on the periphery of an undulating, swirling sea of elbows, boots and fists, jockeying for position, yelling and smiling. Counter-clockwise movement of a saw blade expanding outward toward onlookers, occasionally imploding on itself. Boys and girls veer by, sometimes three across with arms interlocked in unity. Music is blaring, directing the speed and intensity of the nucleus of bodies. Like a giant human color organ, the moshers churn to the rhythm: mohawks and skins, Hispanic and Anglo, a seething, shape-shifting organism within an organism. A moshers swings around his partner and the centrifugal force throws him across the whirlpool, slamming into bodies like a pinball, crumpling to the ground. Three moshers immediately stop, pick him up, ask him if he’s okay, slap him on the back, push him back into the thick of it. My heart is racing. I move in closer, feel the occasional elbow as it flies past. A skinhead whirls past, locks eyes with me, and yells, “Comin’ in?” I nod tentatively, not wanting to appear afraid. But I am afraid, not for my physical safety, but for . . . for what? What’s the nature of this strange anxiety? My adrenaline’s really pumping now. Perched on a precipice, feeling myself sucked into the undertow, I start to shake, take a deep breath, throw myself in . . .

Liminality entails risk. Where excitement and anticipation mix with the fear of uncertainty, here, says Turner, are spaces of transformation. It was only after my experience in the pit that I understood my odd anxiety. I knew I was entering a liminal space and that something, something was happening to me there. I was betwixt and between identities—my seniority, my “unhip” fashion, my academic training, my whiteness, my maleness—all of these were swept up with me, spun out of me by the force of the spiral to mingle with others’ identity performances. There was a moment of profound bliss, as though I was losing my identity to this space. I slipped at one point and an arm steadied me. “Thanks,” I shouted at the woman who helped me. “Fuckin’ A!” she shouted back, grinning. The incredible sensation of camaraderie that I experienced with those venturing into and out of the pit, the freedom from the tyranny of difference (age, gender, ethnicity, moshing ability), the palpable invitation to transformation I received in that space—all of these things underscore the sense of “mutual understanding” emphasized by Turner in his depictions of spontaneous *communitas*.

However, this is a freedom with limits. *Communitas*, as “shared flow” within a liminal or “anti-structural” space, depends on structural rules in order for the

flowing to take place. Such rules or “framing,” Turner claims, issue not from without but rather from within the flow itself (*Anthropology* 133). In each musical space in which I’ve recognized a feeling of *communitas*, my first impulse has been to imagine an affect-saturated “cultural” bond with my fellow travelers, to want to designate the space as *our* space, a space of knowing, of acceptance and invitation, a “what if” within which our combined interests and passions are set off, if only temporarily, from the outside world. At the same time, however, I’ve recognized a jealous impulse to police this space, to guard it from “the undeserving.” One of my vivid recollections from the R.E.M. concert is this feeling of distinction—that only the “true” R.E.M. fans were to be counted as among “us.” A dialectical movement, perhaps, between inclusion (formation of a “we”) and exclusion (formation of a “We”)? Or perhaps an incursion of structure into *communitas*? Turner notes that *communitas* is a social-cultural modality that never achieves totality, that “is never quite being realized” because “individuals and collectivities try to impose their cognitive schemata on one another” (*Anthropology* 84). In this light, perhaps we should regard *communitas* not so much as a modality but as a *project*—an opportunity for reflection; a potential for change; a becoming; an instructive, collaborative energy that we breathe (or scream) into each other’s ear. In the space of musical experience, we foment transformation.

Postscript: Untie the Knot?

Each one of us, then, should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches; each one of us should make a surveyor’s map of his lost fields and meadows. (Bachelard 11)

My first attempt at this study included my wife, Cindy. My plan was to interview her about thoughts and feelings she experienced during particular experiences of listening to music. I had planned to conduct controlled listening experiments, using her as a subject, and then to undertake an analysis of her responses. It quickly became clear that my original plan was not to be. During one such experiment, I asked Cindy to pick out one of her favorite songs from our CD collection. She chose “Shipbuilding” by Elvis Costello. When I asked her what her regular listening situation was (i.e., in the den, in the living room, on the floor, on a couch, with headphones, through the speakers), she exhaled. “Whatever, . . . it doesn’t really matter.” Taking her response at face value, I asked her to plop down on the living room futon, and I played the song for her on our stereo, leaving the room as she listened in order to try to alleviate some of her self-consciousness. Rather than asking her to talk into a tape recorder while listening, I decided to ask her questions about her feelings after the song was over. I began by asking her what kinds of feelings she had experienced. “What do you mean?” she answered. “*Nothing*, really. . . . I mean, I don’t know. What is it you’re looking for out of me?” I recognized that she was not only bewildered but also somewhat frustrated. I told her I wanted her to try to identify any particular feelings that came to mind as a result of the song. “I dunno,” she answered, smiling and shrugging. “I’ll try it again, if you want.” I decided not to try it again, but instead to think about how my questions—or rather, my lack of direction and attention to the questions—had negatively impacted the experiment. By being so abstract, I hadn’t given Cindy an adequate context for

my expectations. By asking her to identify "particular feelings that came to mind," I was inferring (at least potentially) that there *were* particular feelings that *should* have come to mind, possibly adding to her frustration. At this point, I attempted to explain to Cindy what it was that I was trying to accomplish in the study. Her first response was to look down at her feet and shake her head. After a moment, she looked up at me and said, "You're just going to end up tying yourself up in a knot, you know."

At the time, I regarded her statement as a flaw that I must have overlooked in my initial motivations for the project. Wasn't my intent, after all, to *untie* the knot between these tightly cinched strands of musical experience I was attempting to explore? Isn't a researcher's goal to unravel the complexity of the object of study? Now, reading back through this essay, I think about this knot I've tried to expose, the intertwining of mind and body, memory and imagination, individual and collective. Without doubt, these are but a few of the many strands that might help to explain the affective musical experience, to illuminate the knot in all its enigmatic complexity. Perhaps others will choose to build on my travels, uncovering other routes and taking different turns, furthering our understanding of the intensity, the sensuality, and the significance of embodied understanding as it unfolds in the experience of music. For my part, I feel fortunate to have discovered—and made—the inroads I have. Leaning back from the computer, eyes closed, a favorite song dancing around in this space, I luxuriate in a clearing I've made for myself, from myself. The knot is in the center of this clearing, still gloriously tight.

Notes

¹Grossberg has called attention to the ideological dimensions of musical experience, arguing that a particular kind of music cannot ultimately be defined in musical terms, but only in its particular construction or "alliance" of sounds, images and practices, brought together by its listeners in a particular time and place. In his discussion of rock and roll music as an empowering discourse, Grossberg describes an "affective alliance" as "an organization of concrete material practices and events, cultural forms and social experience which both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world" ("Another Boring" 227). Grossberg further asserts that rock and roll "exists as a set of strategic responses to a particular historical context; it cannot be treated merely as a set of musical messages, for its power and identity [. . .] depend upon a complex set of differences that cut across generations, genders, time and space" ("Rock and Roll" 172).

²See Krizek (3–4) for a discussion of the effect of "normalizing narratives" on the research process. As I hope to show, an embodied analytic focus carries the possibility of revealing intimate, sensuous connections between music and the lived experience and identities of music listeners.

³My understanding of the embodied practice of ethnography and autoethnography draws on the views of a number of reflexive anthropologists and communication scholars. For a discussion of the personal experience of ethnography, see Crawford.

⁴Pondering this conflict, Barthes's counterposition of *pleasure* as a "filling" and *bliss* as an "unsettling" or "loss" comes readily to mind (*Pleasure* 14).

⁵Kristeva is quick to add that the musicality of language—that is, the effect of the "semiotization" or rupture of the symbolic order—"is not without signification; indeed, it is deployed within it" (63). Here, Kristeva makes reference to the "thetic phase" of human subjectivity, which, she asserts, underwrites the very possibility of signifying practice. See Kristeva (43–45).

⁶In explaining the relationship between the semiotic and symbolic dispositions as they are brought to bear on textual practices, Kristeva makes a distinction between the "phenotext" (the text guided by the symbolic modality) and the "genotext" (the text guided by the semiotic dimension). Moreover, Kristeva describes the genotext as a *process* that "tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral [. . .] and nonsignifying" (86). Despite existing in language, the genotext is nonlinguistic. Kristeva posits it as "language's underlying foundation" (87). For a more thoroughgoing explanation of phenotext and genotext, see Kristeva (5–6, 86–88).

⁷In his discussion of "the grain of the voice," Barthes takes up Kristeva's designation of "phenotext" and "genotext," similarly counterposing the discursivity of the former with the extra-discursivity of the latter. Invoking Kristeva's

language as a tool for analyzing a particular singer of a song, Barthes argues that the “*pheno-song* [. . .] covers all the phenomena, all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma [. . .] in short, everything in the performance which is in the service of communication, representation, expression [. . .] The *geno-song* is the volume of the singing and speaking voice, the space where significations germinate ‘from within language and in its very materiality’; it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression” (*Image* 182).

“Beyond comparisons, Kristeva herself establishes an affinity between certain artistic forms—poetry, dance, music—which are characterized by their “semiotization” of the symbolic modality, what she describes as a “flow of *jouissance* into language” (79). In poetry, she claims, the symbolic order is *lain waste*, “dismantled” by the semiotic (64). Moreover, music, as a signifying system that “confronts *order* at its most fundamental level,” is “always more or less linked” to poetry at a deep, ritualistic level (80, emphasis in original).

⁹Wolin is referring to Benjamin’s discussion of the task of philosophy, as outlined in his *Origin of Tragic Drama*: “It is the task of the philosopher to restore, by representation, the primacy of the symbolic character of the word, in which the idea is given self-consciousness, and that is the opposite of all outwardly-directed communication [. . .] Since philosophy may not presume to speak in the tones of revelation, this can only be achieved by recalling in memory the primordial form of perception” (*Origin* 36). See, also, Benjamin’s “On the Mimetic Faculty” and “Doctrine of the Similar.”

¹⁰For relevant discussions of collective memory and the emergence of memory studies within the academy, see Hutton and Zelizer.

¹¹See also Benjamin’s “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in which he attempts to chart “the passage from sensuous correspondences, where the faculty of *sight* remains predominant, to the sphere of nonsensuous correspondences, where the medium of *sound* is preeminent” (Wolin 244, emphasis in original).

Works Cited

- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1969.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill & Wang, 1994.
- *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill & Wang, 1994.
- Benjamin, Walter. “A Berlin Chronicle.” *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*. 595–637.
- “The Currently Effective Messianic Elements.” *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913–1926*. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996. 213.
- “Doctrine of the Similar.” *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*. 694–8.
- “Excavation and Memory.” *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*. 576.
- “The Great Art of Making Things Seem Closer Together.” *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*. 248.
- “On the Mimetic Faculty.” *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*. 720–2.
- *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Trans. John Osborne. London: New left Books, 1977.
- *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1934*. Eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith. Trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999.
- “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, 1968. 253–64.
- Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Conquergood, Dwight. “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics.” *Communication Monographs* 58 (1991): 171–94.
- Crawford, Lyall. “Personal Ethnography.” *Communication Monographs* 63 (1996): 158–70.
- Frith, Simon. *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Anchor, 1962.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. “Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of Everyday Life.” *Popular Music* 4 (1984): 225–58.
- “Rock and Roll in Search of an Audience.” *Popular Music and Communication*. Ed. James Lull. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992. 152–75.

- *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hutton, Patrick. "Collective Memory and Collective Mentalities: The Halbwachs-Aries Connection." *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 15 (1988): 311–22.
- Jackson, Michael. *Paths Toward a Clearing*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.
- Krizek, Robert L. "Representation of Self in the Ethnography of Events." Paper delivered at the Western States Communication Association Convention. Denver, Colorado, 1998.
- Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique* 26 (1995): 83–109.
- McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1994.
- McCole, John. *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993.
- Ridler, Keith. "If Not the Words: Shared Practical Activity and Friendship in Fieldwork." *Things as They Are*. Ed. Michael Jackson. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996. 238–58.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Seigworth, Greg. "Sound Affects." *13 Magazine* (1995, December): 21–3, 25.
- Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ, 1988.
- *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ, 1982.
- Wolin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.
- Zelizer, Barbie. "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995): 214–39.

Received October 15, 2001

Accepted March 13, 2002

Final revision received March 27, 2002

