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New Riffs on the Old Mind-Body Blues: "Black Rhythm," "White Logic," and Music Theory in the 21st-Century

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Tom Perchard

Abstract

Contemporary music historians have shown how taxonomic divisions of humanity—constructed in earnest within European anthropologies and philosophies from the Enlightenment on—were reflected in 18th and 19th-century theories of musical-cultural evolution, with complex and intellectualized art music forms always shown as transcending base and bodily rhythm, just as light skin supposedly transcended dark. The errors of old and now disreputable scholarly approaches have been given much attention. Yet scientifically oriented 21st-century studies of putatively Afro-diasporic and, especially, African American rhythmic practices seem often to stumble over similarly racialized faultlines, the relationship between "sensory" music and its "intelligent" comprehension, and analysis still procedurally and politically fraught. Individual musical sympathies are undermined by methods and assumptions common to the field in which theorists operate. They operate, too, in North American and European university departments overwhelmingly populated by white scholars. And so this article draws upon and tests concepts from critical race and whiteness theory and asks whether, in taking "black rhythm" as its subject, some contemporary music studies reinscribe what the sociologists Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva have called "white logic": a set of intellectual attitudes, prerogatives and methods that, whatever

the intentions of the musicologists concerned, might in some way restage those division practices now widely recognized as central to early musicology.

Histories of western music in the long twentieth century might not yet fully acknowledge it, but one of the period's most important movements was the spread and absorption of "black music" styles and practices beyond the African diaspora. It was in trying to account for the particular impact of the rhythmic techniques identified with those musics that, shortly before his death in 2002, the music scholar (and polymath) Jeff Pressing published a study of what he termed—with a nod to Paul Gilroy—"Black Atlantic rhythm." The article, which appeared in *Music Perception* and has been widely and favorably cited in the music psychology literature many times since, asks big questions: how does such rhythm work, and why has it appealed so widely?[1]

Pressing argues that Black Atlantic rhythm is founded on two main "approaches to time": groove, and speech rhythms. The latter, found in jazz singing, rapping, and elsewhere, "float above the regularity of the underlying rhythm section, giving aligning reference to it only at certain points." Meanwhile, groove, Pressing writes, is the foundation of any dance music style, including European forms ancient and modern. But whereas various other traditions make use of unequal pulse lengths and additive rhythms—Pressing cites the Balkan (3+2+2)/8 grouping—Black Atlantic music "overwhelmingly favors equal pulse durations" like 4/4 or 8/8, this regularity allowing for overlay of the speech rhythm syncopation already described, and, just as importantly,

A number of people read or heard drafts of this article, and their comments—often critical and testing as well as encouraging—helped immeasurably; thanks to them all.

[1] Jeff Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm: Its Computational and Transcultural Foundations," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 19/3 (2002), 286. Google Scholar listed sixty-four citations as of June 2014, but I have not yet found a critique.

for metric subdivision. So while "groove beat subdivision is based on a strong cognitive predilection toward simplicity—division of durations into 2, 3, or 4 parts,"

> [s]ubdivisions of greater complexity are produced hierarchically by subdivisions of subdivisions . . . For example, a triplet subsubdivision of triplet subdivision is used in some very slow gospel tunes, where each beat is effectively divided into 9 parts . . . Higher prime numbers (5, 7, 11) violate this predilection for simplicity . . . Thus, groove design presents a prioritization of rhythmic subdivision distinct from that generated by such attitudes as asymmetric Romantic expression (e.g., Chopin's piano music) or intellectual numerical extension (e.g., multiserialist techniques stemming from 1960s Western composers), and generally relies on hierarchical application of elements of length 2 and 3 to achieve complexity.[2]

Pressing is attempting to account for patterns that span huge swathes of geography and history, so it might be churlish to complain that "asymmetric Romantic expression" and prime-numbered "intellectual numerical extension" might not account for the rest of the world's music, or, indeed, to suggest that one doesn't have to think very hard before coming up with "Black Atlantic" musicians—Aretha Franklin, Louis Moholo-Moholo—who make use of those kinds of devices. Still, however generalized, this description is useful for many "Black Atlantic" styles' workings. But description is not enough: Pressing wants to explain why such rhythm has achieved such global popularity and presence, and to do so scientifically through the application of evolutionary psychology.[3] And it's here

[2] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 286-9.

[3] "If, as desired here, we are to make general psychological and transcultural claims," Pressing argues with unabashed circularity, "the ultimate causal sources must be relatively distal from specific musical details and intrinsic to nature." Ibid., 292.

that the cracks between the enormous totalities the writer has been trying to manipulate begin to cleave open.

Pressing suggests that for a groove to be successfully conceived, executed and, moreover, perceived by both musicians and audiences, it must call up a series of shared motor responses and musical interests or values. Groove is a social musical phenomenon, and "[s]uccess relies on shared or at least compatible conceptions of timing and accentuation by the performers."[4] Added to this notion of sociality is the claim that those devices that overlay the groove—here Pressing cites common (if ethnocentrically identified) techniques of syncopation, off-beat phrasing, polyrhythm, hocketing, heterophony, swing and call-and-response—cause a pleasing "perceptual challenge" to the musician or listener guided by the basic, unchanging and underlying pulse.[5] Perception is one of the "3 Ps" that have been taken as accounting for human cognition more generally; aside from that capacity ("how well the animal notices changes in its environment") are those of production ("how well the animal operates within and upon its environment") and prediction ("how well the animal predicts future events in its environment").[6] "My hypothesis is as follows," Pressing continues. "Musical rhythm arises from the evolved cognitive capacity to form and use predictive models of events—specifically, predictions of the timing of anticipated future events."[7] Those syncopating (or otherwise complexifying) groove overlays give pleasure owing to the cognitive dissonance that arises from a temporary upsetting of our capacities of prediction. The fact of this upsetting engages our interest because evolution has taught us to be aware of the environmentally unexpected for survival's sake. So Black Atlantic rhythmic

[4] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 290-1.

[5] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 291-2.

[6] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 294.

[7] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 295.

approaches are formed in the play of cognitive skills originally developed according to specific evolutionary needs; in a comparatively happy time for *homo sapiens*, Pressing asserts, the perception of present change, the production of motor action, and the prediction of upcoming change are shaped into musical skills used to groove rather than to remain alive.[8]

Black musical rhythm, then, is globally (or as Pressing's title has it, "transculturally") communicative because it is so basic to human experience; the logical ramification is that other musics must have evolved away from that fundamental state, making less use of the cognitive and perceptual skills learned in the jungle and on the veldt, acquiring in the process some kind of rarefied, non-popular "intellectual extension" opposed to the simple, immediate, embodied rhythm Pressing validates. "The clearest psychological distinction between [Western art] musics and those of the African and African diasporic traditions," the author concludes, "is the continued adherence to a relationship with the simple, direct experience of groove in the latter, with, it may be argued, concomitant heightened power to evoke emotion and affect in the nonspecialist."[9]

It doesn't matter that Pressing means it as a compliment. How much violence that notion of "continued adherence" has done through history: linking blacks with a supposedly unshakeable primality, separating whites from the same, here identifying black rhythm with the pre-reflective and bodily and some whiter kind of music with the mind (the latter apparently comprehended but not felt, perceived without perception). In the search for "hard," scientific, universal truths about musical practice and taste, the researcher rules factors of culture, history, learning, and environment out of bounds—at least once those ancient hunters on the lookout for rampaging wildebeest have had their

[8] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 308, 295.

[9] Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm," 308.

mention—and black music and rhythm are once again cloaked in the garb of primitivism.[10]

Pressing long worked and wrote as an advocate of “Black Atlantic” music. Yet his thinking here seems to participate in a fraught but centuries-long tradition of study that takes bio-cultural evolution as its subject and in which, among other disciplines, anthropology, philosophy, science, and musicology have all been implicated. This work has been the subject of extensive critique since the 1990s, so a survey of these appraisals will be doubly useful. Firstly, it will allow us to sketch a brief history of musical-evolutionary thought—in which race and intelligence, harmonic form and rhythm come to be mutually defined and musical difference pathologized—so as to set Pressing’s project in its scholarly *longue durée*. Secondly, though, it will give a sense of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” prominent, even dominant, in contemporary readings of old theoretical tracts, readings that were being published while Pressing was authoring his own study. In asking how far Pressing’s work was an anomaly in its early-century context, I will push beyond a history of race in musicological method and on to broader debates in critical race theory, lingering specifically on the problem of, and the literature on, “whiteness”—its conceptual formulations, its mooted histories, and its institutional logics. Using these ideas to divine the power dynamics of a specific contemporary academic discourse, I will consider how, Pressing apart, some schools of thought and method might still be seen to encourage and reward (accidentally) racialized analytical treatments of the human subjects of musical study. I will conclude by reflecting on the sometimes raced nature of scholarly identities in twenty-first-century music studies,

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[10] For studies of musical rhythm and human evolution that do not repeat these kinds of errors, see, for example, John C. Bispham, “Rhythm in music: What is it? Who has it? And Why?,” *Journal of Music Perception*, 24/2 (2006), 125-134; Ian Cross, “Music and Cognitive Evolution,” *Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Robin Dunbar and Louise Barrett (Oxford University Press, 2007), 649-667.

considering how writers on music might better acknowledge and come to terms with the roles they play in a pre-postracial world.

Race, Rhythm, and (Musical) Intelligence

Enlightenment concepts of "Man" the newly self-possessed subject were made in relation to the obvious contradistinction: beast. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant (in similar ways to Linnaeus and Hume before him) outlined his notion of the human being as a moral agent, "one capable of experiencing oneself as an ego, an 'I,' who thinks (self-reflects) and wills." This capacity, in Kant's words, "raises him above all other creatures living on earth."[11] As historians of philosophy and critical race theorists have shown, the question was where humanity stopped and animality began, and it was here that the modern humanities inaugurated their own racialization. Through the 1990s, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze collected and brought this philosophical tradition's ignominious moments to attention. Kant claimed that the "African has no feeling beyond the trifling"—the thinker thus denying that continent's people entry to the full, moral subjecthood that separated animal from human, the latter "at its greatest perfection in the race of the whites"—and Eze showed this assertion as chiming, among other writings, with Hegel's later positioning of Africans outside history. On the grounds that their supposed lack of writing doomed them merely to react to events rather than act with a teleological project of "becoming" in their minds, Hegel determined those

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[11] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," *Anthropology and the German Enlightenment: Perspectives on Humanity***,** ed. Katherine M. Faull, *Bucknell Review*, 38/2 (1995), 203; see also Warren Montag, "The Universalization of Whiteness: Racism and the Enlightenment," *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997), 281-293.

people to be outside full subjectivity, toiling in a "primitive state of nature" that was "in fact a state of animality."[12]

Such statements were symptoms of a wider metaphysical effort to parse humanity, and as that work progressed so did taxonomic studies and theories of race, developed in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by men like Cuvier, Gobineau and Blumenbach and generating figures like the "Caucasian" and the "Negroid."[13] A number of contemporary historians have reconstructed the tradition of anthropological race science, showing how such distinctions often relied on new techniques such as phrenology—in which types' characteristic skull shapes were linked to putative racial characteristics including beauty, enterprise, and intelligence (or their lack)—and eugenics, the discipline that, from Francis Galton's first work on "hereditary genius" in the 1860s, attempted to map individual and group genetic makeup onto cultural potential. Even though those methods fell from grace, the project continued; as critical studies by the anthropologist Alexander Alland and the theorist of education John White have described, the belief that the many varieties of human cognitive capacity were reducible to a single unit of measurement took hold in the early twentieth century, and

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[12] Eze, "The Color of Reason," 222; Immanuel Kant, "*Physical Geography* [extract]," *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (London: Blackwell, 1997), 63; G.W.F. Hegel, "'Geographical Basis of World History' [extract]," *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Eze, 128.

[13] Philip C. Wander, Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama, "Whiteness and Beyond: Sociohistorical Foundations of Whiteness and Contemporary Challenges," *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*, ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin (Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 1999), 15; *Race and the Enlightenment*, ed. Eze, 79ff. On the intertwined, conflictual social and genetic construction of "race", see Alexander Alland, *Race in Mind: Race, IQ, and Other Racisms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), and Ian Hacking, "Genetics, Biosocial Groups and the Future of Identity," *Daedelus*, 135/4 (2006): 85.

standardized intelligence tests—developed by western governments in an age of colonial expansion abroad and newly universal education at home—were employed as tools of anthropological exploration and pedagogical prediction.[14]

General theories of musical evolution, style, and value were developing alongside this work, and a number of scholars writing in the twenty-first century have made detailed critical studies of the (paradoxically) raced universalisms displayed in musical theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Peter Hoyt has shown that early theoretical treatises such as Jean-Philippe Rameau's work of 1722 presented rhythm as natural to all living beings. Hoyt argues that a rhythmic "savage" functioned as a point of reference in a number of the period's works of music theory, the supposed constancy of that figure's untrained responses establishing the ground level of musical function and affect.[15] The resonances with Pressing's conclusions of more than 250 years later seem clear.

Yet the common relative valuation between this ground level and some higher musical state was of course inversely opposed to Pressing's own: as Matthew Riley has written, a theorist like Johann Georg Sulzer could in the 1740s argue that human history represented the development away from that "state of nature" toward institutionally organized civil society, and that the cultivated arts were an important tool in this civilizing process.[16] Thinking was forever bound up with literacy and writing in these

[14] See Alland, *Race in Mind*, passim; John White, *Intelligence, Destiny and Education: The Ideological Roots of Intelligence Testing* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[15] Peter A. Hoyt, "On the Primitives of Musical Theory: The Savage and Subconscious as Sources of Analytical Authority," *Music Theory and Natural Order from the Renaissance to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. Suzannah Clark and Alexander Rehding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208.

[16] Matthew Riley, "Civilizing the Savage: Johann Georg Sulzer and the 'Aesthetic Force' of Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 127/1 (2002): 1-22.

evolutionary tracts, both scientific and artistic. In Europe, increasingly complex techniques of notation had helped produce music of formal sophistication, and a discourse of sophistication produced an outside world of naturally rhythmic non-sophisticates. As Gary Tomlinson has noted, Johann Nikolaus Forkel argued in his *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (1788) that the literacy of Western bourgeois society was a prerequisite for the compositional and evolutionary perfection of music, which still dwelt in its crude form "among many Asiatic, African, and American peoples, whom we also know to have made no progress for millennia in other branches of culture."[17] Similar arguments are found in Fétis' nineteenth-century work, along with the belief that bourgeois European practices represented the fulfillment of a universal historical destiny—in this case, tonality—that had simply not yet been reached by those Others.[18]

Later, as Ronald Radano, Ian Cross, and other writers on music have demonstrated, Darwinian and Spencerian ideas of evolutionary descent and teleology were employed to shore up music-theoretical imaginings and cultural hierarchies.[19] By hook or by crook, "primitive" rhythmicality was imagined out of an organizationally, harmonically complex Western tradition and practice. Work by Kofi Agawu and Radano

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[17] Gary Tomlinson, "Musicology, Anthropology, History," *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 37.

[18] Brian Hyer, "Tonality," *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). 726-752.

[19] Radano, *Lying up a Nation*, 249-251; Cross, "Music and Cognitive Evolution". For a concise gloss of the history of race science and 19th century music, see Derek B. Scott, "In Search of Genetically Modified Music: Race and Musical Style in the Nineteenth Century," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 3/1 (2006): 3–23.

shows how a penchant for rhythm was continually projected upon those outside that culture, usually as a mark of their animalistic inferiority.[20]

It was at this moment that new, and—setting sights now on this study's next stage—still-central analytical methods and attitudes emerged as part of an increasingly formalized discipline of musicology. Theoretical practice reflected the creative, and both had long proven inseparable from wider projects in aesthetics and pedagogy even as trends in philosophical, scientific, and artistic enquiry were converging in the notion of organicism.[21] Especially in Germany, organicist ideals were advanced by the most influential music theorists through the nineteenth century—Forkel, A.B. Marx, Nottebohm—and their basic assumptions were generally followed.[22] In its weaker strain, organicism was to many nineteenth-century artists and critics an account of total formal unity, one that described the ideal relationship between a work's parts and its whole. But in the fanatical form not unusually espoused by its theorist proponents, it became an ideology of integration that married the procedural and the ineffable.[23] For Heinrich Schenker, whose music-analytical work and method is still in the twenty-first century often considered central to that sub-discipline and its curricula, a musician's or listener's

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[20] Kofi Agawu, "The Invention of 'African Rhythm'," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 48/3 (1995): 380-395; Radano, *Lying up a Nation*, passim.

[21] While studies in the 17th-century divided the musical work into what were taken to be its rhetorical figures, those of the 18th parsed musical phrases and forms in search of balance, proportion and symmetry so valued in the "classical" era. Ian Bent with William Drabkin, *Analysis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 7-8, 12-3.

[22] Jonathan Dunsby and Arnold Whittall, *Music Analysis in Theory and Practice* (London: Faber, 1988), 18.

[23] Ruth Solie's skilful exposition of this subject was an early blast of New Musicology. Ruth A. Solie, "The Living Work: Organicism and Musical Analysis," *19th-Century Music*, 4/2 (1980): 147-156.

analytical consciousness of the unity of the musical work's relationships—its fore-, middle-, and backgrounds—was at the same time consiousness of tradition and teleology; the Hegelian theorist's contention that the tonal plan's "*goal* and the course to the goal are primary" was analogous to the consciousness of history and project of becoming that raised Hegel's European subject above the animalistic African.[24] Schenker inevitably decried what he called "the nature-music of the Negro" for its apparent emphasis on rhythm and its lack of tonal teleology: "Jazz stirs the bones, not the mind. But a mind that is forever empty totters like a senile old man," he railed, making a small contribution to what Radano has shown to be the musical-evolutionary discourse's "medicomoral" trope.[25]

"The science of race and the science of music," Philip Bohlman has written, "are sister discourses of modernity," and it's clear that theoretical writing on (black) peoples and (black) music authored by Europeans and their American descendants during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries functioned better in the construction of an "evolved" and notably "white" cultural and intellectual identity than it did as the committed study of different musical cultures.[26] But is something like that still the case in the twenty-first? It's important to recognize Pressing's piece for its problematic

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[24] Heinrich Schenker, trans. Ernst Oster, *Free Composition* (New York and London: Longman, 1979), 5; for an extended Hegelian explanation of this musical-traditionary unity, see p. 3, as well as Nicholas Cook, *The Schenker Project: Culture, Race, and Music Theory in* Fin-de-siècle *Vienna* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34.

[25] Heinrich Schenker, ed. William Drabkin, trans. Ian Bent, Alfred Clayton, Derrick Puffet, *The Masterwork in Music: A Yearbook. Volume III (1930)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 77. On the medicomoral, see Radano, *Lying up a Nation*, 235-36.

[26] Philip Bohlman, "Erasure: Displacing and Misplacing Race in Twentieth-Century Music Historiography," *Western Music and Race*, ed. Brown, 11.

construction of a certain kind of blackness, one projected from without. But rather than stopping at that level of critique, it will be telling to go further, and ask how far contemporary (white) theorists of black music like Pressing are, in following their forebears, unwittingly theorizing themselves.

Whiteness and "white logic"

That sweep from Kant to Galton forms an early part of several texts identifying with "whiteness studies," a sub-field of critical race studies that emerged in earnest during the last decades of the 20th-century, and the projects described above are susceptible to what Woody Doane has called that literature's "essential insight": that the scientific, cultural and colonialist endeavors of the modern period had generated a resilient idea of whiteness as "invisible," normative and ideal, while the non-white was always positioned as remarkable, troublesome.[27] If Pressing's study reverses those terms—for him, it is Black Atlantic rhythm that is the ordinary, and (white) Western art music the obscure—then in its appeals to the universal, in its racialized theoretical bifurcation, it seems all too readily to subscribe to that tradition's categorical norms; in describing natural black rhythm and developed white intellectuality, it helps shore up the same circumscribed notions of blackness and whiteness as did those earlier bio-cultural theories of music. For scholars working in critical race and whiteness studies, many of the canonic thinkers of the post-Enlightenment period are figured as the founders of an exclusive whiteness, and a form of white supremacy that endures as long as their disciplines remain ensconced. Relying as it does on bio-cultural argumentation familiar from 19th-century

[27] Woody Doane, "Rethinking Whiteness Studies," *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley "Woody" Doane and Eduardo Bonila-Silva (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 6; see also Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 39.

work, condoning as it does the early-20th century music-analytical attitude that pitted bodily experience against intellect and teleology, it may be tempting to take Pressing's 21st-century piece as evidence of the immutability of such methods and identities and leave it there.

But race studies' common and overarching narrative of the long life of whiteness has not always come with an acknowledgement that each of its chapters might be fraught with complexities that would render such a singular interpretative trajectory questionable. Whiteness studies was (and remains) a field largely defined by North American scholars in response to modern North American race problematics, and the central criticism of early work in this area—especially those many confessionals in which white authors recounted coming to an awareness of their "raced" identity—was that, mistaking the experiences of contemporary North Americans as those of "whites" in the world *tout court*, many writers masked what had in fact been a conglomeration of complex, localized discourses and social practices that worked to ensure the hegemony of privileged classes of different and developing groups of people. The whiteness this work portrayed—so the complaint ran—had been allowed to congeal into a timeless, universal category, the studies thus replicating the absolutism of the thing they critiqued.[28]

A history lining up Kant, Hegel, Galton, Schenker and Pressing as co-constructors of whiteness—indebted as their methods could be to philosophical and bio-cultural

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[28] Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *The Journal of American History*, 89/1 (2002): 154-173. Work on whiteness has continued to appear in the 21st-century—philosophers like George Yancy and historians like Joe R. Feagin have contributed conceptual nuance and historical detail, while Vron Ware, Les Back and others have examined varieties of whiteness outside the USA. But it's not clear that those early conceptual landmarks, and stumbling blocks, have been entirely surpassed: the field's primary concerns remain rooted in the North American experience, the term "whiteness" and its easy use still inspiring worries of incautious transhistoricism.

thinking that had done disservice to those not white—would thus be useful in part; the implication that any contemporary work making use of such thinking might be bound to reproduce historic bias would be worth exploring. But neither judgment nor hunch would respect the historical complexities at work, since specific political dynamics, and specific uses of intellectual technologies, have often been more significant than any simple, enduring notion of ethnic or cultural identity. Schenker's xenophobic advocacy of the Germanic tradition associated a certain set of transcendent moral-aesthetic values with a certain people—and was built on the backs of low and sometimes black Others to boot—yet this vision contrasted strongly with the treatment of the Jewish theorist's own works that was meted out by the Nazi arbiters of Aryanism.[29] Pressing's piece rests on old, raced divisions of mind and body, but it is couched in the advocational language and intent of a liberal academic culture in which black music cultures have come to be celebrated far more often than decried.

"Whiteness" waxes and wanes. But that fluidity might in fact justify the critical concept. Where earlier racial denominators were usually bound up in the essentialist language of being and spirit, this contemporary theoretical whiteness—the product of a post-structural age—is always positioned as a social signifier, one which, wherever it is temporarily held in place, is done so by linguistic, legal and political glue rather than ontological truth or genetic fact. In this way of thinking, whiteness is not equivalent to, and does not account for, white people; it is not a natural way of being. It is, on the contrary, a constructed way of being towards those constructed as not-white, a number of procedures and behaviours that may not be simply racist—they may even be instituted in the name of anti-racism—yet still act, whether purposefully or unwittingly, to maintain familiar hierarchies of status and power. Classic work by scholars like David

[29] See Ludwig Holtmeir, "From 'Musiktheorie' to 'Tonsatz': National Socialism and German Music Theory After 1945," *Music Analysis*, 23/2-3 (2004): 245-266.

Roediger has provided close historical descriptions of the ways that legal and rhetorical formations of white belonging and exclusion came into being, how categories of "Anglo-Saxon" and "Aryan" whiteness could, over time, shapeshift to include or exclude the poor, Jews, Irish or Italians as the particular social situation dictated. If anachronism and transhistoricism is the worry in conceptualizing a critical whiteness, then that writing shows that it is surely possible to make out a system of localized but extensively textualized institutional practices that come to produce and protect certain kinds of racial identities and privileges.

Building on that reading of Pressing, I want to test the extent to which antique race discourses and hierarchies are recognizable in contemporary academic work more widely. The findings of scholars like Roediger suggest a way to go about that investigation, but if such concepts as "whiteness" are going to be of any use here, then the demarcation of the specific institutional contexts in which they are operative—of specific textual procedures in which specific race-identity forms come into being—is necessary in order to avoid schematic grand narrative.

To begin with, we can draw a proper contrast between the theorists Schenker and Pressing, brought close here and perhaps representing some kind of methodological continuity, but surely also marking disciplinary change and difference. If opinions might have varied as to whether the "intelligence" behind the art music of Schenker's (very) long 19th-century belonged to composers, listeners or the musical *Geist* itself, it was in its teleological dimension that intelligence (and thus high-cultural value) was always seen to inhere, just as intelligence's opposite was presumed responsible for teleology's lack. But these views, where still deemed credible at all, are hardly hegemonic any longer.[30]

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[30] Julian Johnson's book *Who Needs Classical Music?* (Oxford University Press, 2002) restates those arguments for the present century. Yet treatises such as Johnson's have been subjected to numerous, and vociferous, attacks, not least from those working on and identified with the art music tradition such writing

Though the academic place, prestige and analytical potential of "intensional" rather than "extensional" popular music forms has often been put into question, analytical studies of (African American) popular music have, since at least the 1990s and the time in which Pressing was publishing, acquired a range of interests and investigative techniques that show teleology to be one among a great many avenues of exploration, and likely not the most important; the latter theorist's own non-teleological interests, and his references to the cognitive sciences, suggest some of the distance travelled by music studies during the 20th-century.[31]

And yet, as I will show, dividing practices more subtle are still much in evidence, just as abstractive musical intelligence is still implicated in racialized contexts. Now, though, that intelligence is not primarily positioned as something that black musical subjects forego—contemporary music theorists have no appreciable interest in the racist projects of the past—but as something that only academic analytical practices fully

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notionally defends. See Richard Taruskin, "The Musical Mystique: Defending Classical Music against its Devotees," *The Danger of Music and other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); also Robert Fink, "Goal-Directed Soul? Analyzing Rhythmic Teleology in African American Popular Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 64/1 (2011): 179-238. A 2014 debate, conducted between Robert Fink and John Halle on the blog of the American Musicological Society *Musicology Now* in part rested on the putative racialization of musical teleology.

[31] To cite only a few classic studies by other men named "Robert": Robert Walser, "'Out of Notes': Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis," *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, Lawrence Siegel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1997), 147-168; Rob Bowman, "The Stax Sound: A Musicological Analysis," *Popular Music*, 14/3 (1995): 285-320; Rob Van Der Bliek, "The Hendrix Chord: Blues, Flexible Pitch Relationships, and Self-Standing Harmony," *Popular Music*, 26/2 (2007). 343-364.

conjure into being.[32] The problems here attend less to "intelligence" as defined by psychology than they do "intelligence" as defined by government: rhythm is observed, encoded, reported and only then given a new strategic value within the institution.

The focus shifts from an analytical construction of race identity bound up with Romantic-Idealist notions of cosmic becoming, towards one working from the guidelines of contemporary technocracy. After all, during music's high-modernist period, compositional notions of development and narrative had been revolutionized: even if organicist thinking sometimes lingered, post-war analytical and theoretical vocabularies were often drawn from systems theory, quantum mechanics and other new scientific fields. As M.J. Grant has written, many of the theorist-composers of the serialist school were in the 1950s looking for ways to recover a sense of formal logic often lost in non-tonal (and thus often non-teleological) music, this leading to compositional and theoretical work in which the canons of western scientific methodology were picked at magpie-like. Beyond the metaphor of the totally unified creative organism—but perhaps not that far beyond—was the totally intrarelational system; the emphasis on part-whole relationality, on integral coherence and derivation, was now recast for the atomic age, and the location of music's intelligent creation shifted from development narrowly defined towards the systemic more generally.[33] Such was as true for analysts as it was for

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[32] That said, "race science" continues: see Richard Lynn, *Race Differences in Intelligence: An Evolutionary Analysis* (Augusta, GA: Washington Summit Publishers, 2006).

[33] M.J. Grant, *Serial Music, Serial Aesthetics: Compositional Theory in Post-War Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2000). This is arguably as true of music that appeared otherwise to challenge the aesthetic assumptions of an academically hegemonic modernist practice, even if John Cage would surely have baulked at the application of such a concept of "intelligence" in this musical application. Western art music, it goes almost without saying, was never a monolith: still, experimental efforts and traditions like

composers. The idea that deep and hidden compositional structures might be revealed by the analytical stripping away of layers of musical detail—that methods of reduction or transfiguration could turn musical notation into a diagrammatic sign of workings more fundamental—had come into its own by the end of the 19th-century. But that thinking remained just as crucial to the most influential late-20th century methods (Forte's set theory, Lerdahl and Jackendoff's theories of musical grammar) as it did to the lesser (Böker-Heil's information theory-informed, computer-plotted 3D charts of Palestrina madrigals).[34]

The appeal to scientific method and purpose made by a large number of theorists and practitioners in the postwar West was bound up with other cold- and post-war notions of research and knowledge production. And it was one made while a wider cultural paternalism was failing: Milton Babbitt's strange dream of lab-bound composer-theorists, published in 1958 as "Who Cares if You Listen," was over subsequent decades realized in institutes and (especially) universities across the northern hemisphere, as musical thinkers sought refuge, territory and status increasingly denied them in more public spaces. One of the most notable outcomes of this ongoing disciplinary repositioning was Pierre Boulez's Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), created in the mid-1970s and dedicated to the computational creation and study of western art music. As Boulez put it in some early publicity material for the Parisian institute:

> The creator's intuition alone is powerless to provide a comprehensive translation of musical invention. It is thus necessary for him to

Cage's—while looming large in many histories of twentieth century music—have not significantly rerouted the modernist analytical project as it flourishes in Western universities, and as is germane here.

[34] Ian Bent with William Drabkin, *Analysis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987), 100-101.

> collaborate with the scientific research worker in order to envision the distant future, to imagine less personal, and thus broader, solutions . . . At educational meetings scientists and musicians will become familiar with one another's point of view and approach. In this way, we hope to forge a kind of common language that scarcely exists at present.[35]

In view of those old universalist fascinations with the paradoxical Other, it was perhaps unsurprising that IRCAM had as one of the first projects a study of the "problem" of jazz swing, this subjected to an involved (though relatively low-status) research program during the 1980s. Swing, program director André Hodeir wrote in summarizing the program, was a quality subjectively known to all jazz musicians and educated listeners, yet it was one that analysis had found difficult to define. However, he continued, "persuaded as we were of the objective existence of the phenomenon, it seemed to us rational to use the modern technology available to researchers to evidence its laws. We turned towards the computer." Having produced computational analyses of solo lines from jazz recordings, a second stage of the project saw the writing of a program to simulate such swung phrases, this "an improvising machine" that was demonstrated in concerts at IRCAM and elsewhere.[36]

The project, led by a life-long adherent to jazz's cause, was no doubt born of genuine curiosity. Yet this might be the kind of work in which, as the sociologists Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva have argued, a kind of scientific whiteness is encountered—and if we are to think about the ways that musical research may or may not be said still to construct a kind of "white" academic identity through reflection on

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[35] Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 1993), 1.

[36] André Hodeir, "Deux temps à la recherche," *Musurgia* 2/3 (1995), 36, 35.

"black" musical materials, then we need to look at the ways that formulations of whiteness have been identified in immediately related institutional contexts.

Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, who have often written on the academic production of whiteness, launch numerous attacks on the social sciences' methods and policy impact in their 2008 book *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*. "That the founder of statistical analysis also developed a system of White supremacy is not an accident," the authors contend, gesturing towards Francis Galton's work in both those areas; defining their evidently provocative epithet "white logic," Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva write that

> [b]y speaking of *logic* we refer to both the foundation of the techniques used in analyzing empirical reality, and the reasoning used by researchers in their efforts to understand society. *White logic*, then, refers to a context in which White supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts. White logic assumes a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-Whites to perpetual subjectivity; it is the anchor of the Western imagination, which grants centrality to the knowledge, history, science, and culture of elite White men and classifies "others" as people without knowledge, history, or science, as people with folklore but not culture.[37]

Mandarin cultures of control surely antedate the methodological whiteness that the authors target. But those complexes of centrality and hierarchy we have seen at work

[37] Tufuku Zuberi and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds., *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2008), 5, 17.

throughout this article; moreover, despite the obvious good intentions (and long-standing anti-racism) of the IRCAM project's participants, it's difficult to know what else to make of that study, and its attempted transplanting of subjectivity with objective laws, the removal of problematic people and their replacement with an ideal machine, the institutional transformation of social practice into scientific fact.

If putative white logic might be read as informing the projects already detailed, then so it can other musicological and scientifically minded studies of "black" rhythm stretching back to the 1920s.[38] So it will pay to keep Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva's concept at hand, even though it is too early to deem it unproblematically useful: the staging of an imaginary face off between the always-white analysts of music and their always-black objects of study risks reductivism. Nevertheless the Western academy, including its music departments, is a place overwhelmingly populated by white scholars, some of whom (as we already know) can be seen to be broadcasting powerful and conflicted messages about black expressive culture. In light of this it may well be that Pressing's errors are not contained, but in some ways symptomatic of an unreflexive attitude easy to adopt in an area of music studies where—whatever the sympathies and cultural backgrounds of its practitioners, and whatever the contemporary analytical method and rhetoric—textual conversations tend to be about rather than with black music, musicians or theorists.

I began by wondering whether one problematic study represented wider trends in the racialization of music theory, and that query now finds its final focus. In the second half of this article I will survey 21st-century studies on African American rhythmic practices, these almost always authored by apparently white writers (and not by my selection or design). I will examine how the methods and resources of an

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[38] This tradition is described, and extended, in James Lincoln Collier's *Jazz: The American Theme Song* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 71-88..

institutionalized, postwar, music-analytical discipline—enacting familiar and yet specifically contemporary kinds of symbolization and intellectual abstraction upon sensory materials—have been mobilized in such work; in concluding, I will determine whether these theoretical discourses on notionally black music are the laboratories of a notionally "white" cultural and intellectual identity in ways redolent of their historical counterparts.

African American rhythm in 21st-century theory

Fernando Benadon and Ted Gioia's 2009 *Popular Music* investigation of John Lee Hooker's "boogie" establishes its premise—that the success of recordings like Boogie Chillen (1949) is a mystery that must, in their words, be "unravelled" through close, statistical analysis—by dotting around the opening paragraphs a number of insinuations about the music about to be operated upon. Successful popular songs have hooks, they write, but some of this music's "melodic and harmonic content is practically nil"; again, the division of musical practices into the rhythmic and the harmonic, the one black and the other not, is a necessary first move in the establishment of a properly analytical attitude, and the delimitation—inadvertent, certainly—of a racialized musical object. Neither can the song's lyrics have any communicative power, the analysts write, since Hooker's words here are "almost simple-minded."[39] Instead, meaning such as it resides in this work remains to be uncovered by those investigators who proceed to taxonomize and label Hooker's early recordings, and to describe the workings of his rhythmic body—hands playing the guitar, foot stomping time—by reducing it to a statistical abstraction of itself, as they do for Boogie Awhile (also 1949).

[39] Fernando Benadon and Ted Gioia, "How Hooker Found his Boogie: A Rhythmic Analysis of a Classic Groove," *Popular Music*, 28/1 (2009), 19.

Table 1. Durational ratios for 'Boogie Awhile' (see Example 1). The x:y ratio measures beats/upbeats between foot and guitar; the a:b ratio measures upbeats/beats in the guitar. Values above 1.0 denote long-short patterns.

Beat	Measure 1		Measure 2		Measure 3		Measure 4	
	x:y	*a:b*	*x:y*	*a:b*	*x:y*	*a:b*	*x:y*	*a:b*
1	1.6		1.2		1.1		1.5	
2	**2.0**	1.4	**1.9**	0.9	1.1	1.0	**1.9**	1.1
3	**1.7**		1.3		0.8		**1.9**	
4	**2.0**	1.2	**1.7**	1.3	**2.0**	1.3	**2.1**	1.2

Fig. 1: Benadon and Gioia's Table 1

Normally, if a rhythm's beat/upbeat pattern is long-short, then its upbeat/beat pattern should be the reverse, short-long. But not here. The duration ratios for Example 1 are shown in Table 1. Values near 2.0 represent a ternary long-short 2-to-1 ratio between two adjacent notes, values near 1.0 represent an even 1-to-1 ratio (two equidurational quavers), and intermediate values (such as 1.5) denote evened-out long-short patterns. Two concurrent relationships are at play: beat/upbeat (*x:y*) and upbeat/beat (*a:b*) pairs. The foot acts as a metronome that provides the beats; they are subdivided by the guitar's upbeats. These *x:y* ratios are usually tripleted (shown in bold type), but enough of them are not to preclude a tidy triplet feel from forming. Still, the overall feel produced by foot beats and guitar upbeats is long-short (*x* greater than *y*), as expected in compound time. But the guitar line in isolation reveals a puzzling piece of evidence. The *a:b* ratio measures the guitar's upbeats (*a*) against its—rather than the foot's—beat attacks (*b*). To agree with the long-short *x:y* ratio, the *a:b* ratio should be short-long and therefore less than 1.0 (a short upbeat followed by a longer duration on the beat). In other words, the value of *a* should be smaller than the value of *b*.

> However, in this case the guitar follows the opposite route: *a* is almost always longer than *b*, yielding *a:b* ratio values above 1.0. This occurs because the downward guitar slides lead to constant delays with respect to the foot. The result is a kaleidoscopic rhythm consisting predominantly of longshort patterns regardless of whether one listens to pairs of beats/upbeats (*x:y*) or upbeats/beats (*a:b*).[40]

The piece's title is "How Hooker Found His Boogie," but the analysts do not investigate how Hooker developed his rhythmic practice. Indeed, what is really "found" is a kind of read-out of what was once merely bodily, pre-symbolic. The significance the authors derive from this analytical operation is not clear until late on, when discussion of Hooker's "kaleidoscopic" pulse leads to a vague gesture being made towards ethnomusicological work on trance and shamanism; the statistical data and rhetoric so fetishized throughout is hastily discarded as insufficiently telling, and mathematical modernity is supplanted by an appeal to a generalized, non-modern Other that smacks of the primitivism Gioia has critiqued in other contexts.[41]

But the authors are clearly enthused about Hooker's craft and his music, and some of Benadon's other studies do a better job of exploring African American rhythmic practices analytically without calling upon these kinds of scholarly power. Whatever the (ironic) scientism of its title, Benadon's 2009 *Music Theory Spectrum* article "Time Warps in Early Jazz"—which describes metrical superimpositions and modulations found in solos by Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins and others—succeeds in detailing not just musical events, but also the ways these might be perceived and accounted for by both performer and analyst's subjectivities; there is a sense throughout that Benadon is

[40] Benadon and Gioia, "How Hooker," 22-3.

[41] Ted Gioia, "Jazz and the Primitivist Myth," *The Musical Quarterly*, 73/1 (1989): 130-43.

performing an analytical virtuosity out of respect for and in response to the music he engagingly describes, a kind of disciplinary translation in some way equivalent to the metrical substitutions under discussion.[42]

This discourse is not a dead loss. But neither are its problems localized, and issues similar to those found in Benadon and Gioia's piece are encountered in a 2004 *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* article by Lawrence Zbikowski.[43] Though, again, this analytical study of groove reads as a musicologist talking to music he cares deeply about, it is in the first instance authorized by the authoritative talking over of an expert practitioner. Zbikowski asks what it is that musicians and listeners "know when they know a good groove," and complains that those people's pre-analytical descriptions rarely provide a satisfactory answer. The jazz drummer Charli Persip's observations on the matter are cited as proof of this: "When you get into that groove," Persip says, "you ride right down with that groove with no strain and no pain—you can't lay back or go forward."[44] Though this is deemed not good enough, Zbikowski argues that it is important that musicologists learn to "think about musical knowledge as involving a network of information that includes assessments about bodily states or the possibilities of bodily motion."[45] For many, that would seem to be exactly what Persip's description does, and does with more much more precise affective description than Zbikowski himself arrives at. Because after 25 pages of analytical taxonomy—"G_2P1: The music has a double time feel"—the theorist's conclusions are very much of the no-kidding variety: they who "know" groove, he writes, "know what makes for musical rhythm, how the body

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[42] Fernando Benadon, "Time Warps in Early Jazz," *Music Theory Spectrum*, 31/1 (2009): 1-25.

[43] Lawrence M. Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove: Conceptual Structure and Popular Music," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129/2 (2004), 272-297.

[44] Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove," 272.

[45] Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove," 273.

might respond to rhythm, and the context within which large-scale, multi-layered patterns of pitch and rhythmic materials are produced. In short, they know music."[46]

Rather avuncular, perhaps, but this statement of what many musicians and listeners would find obvious is hardly dangerous in itself. Yet the feeling remains that however unremarkable the judgment, it is made from a place of particular authority, and Persip's verbalization stands for what we take to be a variety of less valuable understandings of what groove "is." Zbikowski acknowledges that, his study pivoting on the idea of "knowing," a reflection on what might constitute rhythmic epistemology is in order. But the opportunity is squandered, and rather than considering the differing status of academic and practitioner or everyday musical descriptions, the author mounts a rather solipsistic defense of the musical-analytical project. "If knowledge is indeed limited to that which is or can be written down," he writes, "then much of popular music is beyond knowledge: to ask what a listener knows when he or she knows a groove is to entertain a question that can have no answer."[47] Persip's comments have already suggested otherwise, but even if such a question could be incongruous if posed verbally, it would not if posed musically; if implicit challenges to groove are not clear enough, then explicit calls and responses to that effect litter African American music history.[48] This does not seem to interest Zbikowski, who determines that it would be "silly" to look too far into such epistemological concerns "as it places a vital part of contemporary life

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[46] Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove," 297.

[47] Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove," 295.

[48] Aaliyah's 1994 hit Back and Forth will do as an example: "see can you feel the groove," "let me see you go back and forth," the lyrics are, if we really must put it this way, a dialogue on rhythmic knowledge with the song's imagined listeners and dancers.

beyond inquiry."[49] He means paper-based, non-sounding academic enquiry; here again the confusion of scholarly knowledge, produced under certain conditions for certain purposes, with knowledge in general.

A very different approach is taken by Anne Danielsen in her book-length study of funk, *Presence and Pleasure* (2006). The author's own primary experience of groove, she relates, came as a performer; Danielsen argues that the situated, social knowledge she gained thereby—together with the European context of her own experiences—is crucial in her intellectual orientation towards this African American form, and the interplay of presumed closeness and presumed distance gives rise to both acute descriptions of various funk rhythmic techniques and suggestive ruminations on the final non-translatability of the groove experience. The book provides a nuanced study of funk rhythm's modes of timeliness and embodiment, and, highlighting also the music's socio-political contexts and meanings, calls for a "non-dualistic" approach to the style as both a "bodily" experience and "intellectual" skill or construct.[50]

But the eminently dualistic trappings of that infamous white logic seem set to be reintroduced by a 2010 collected volume edited by the same author, *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*. Whatever their respective weaknesses and strengths, all the studies discussed so far demonstrate a key strategy of any scientistic investigation: the early establishment of a lack of knowledge, and the promise that such a lack would be overcome, if only the right analytical techniques could be identified. So much is present here. "The neglect of rhythm and groove within musicology and its subdisciplines of

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[49] Zbikowski, "Modelling the Groove," 295. Opening out here are endless vistas that I will not explore: the history of epistemology ancient and modern, phenomenological and post-phenomenological notions of embodied knowledge.

[50] Anne Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 204, 210.

music psychology and music theory," Danielsen writes her introduction, in part "arises from the limitations of the notation-based analytical tradition." In this she is no doubt correct, since, like all methods, what it cannot account for, notation leaves unstudied.[51] However, digital recording techniques have

> allowed us to better capture, manipulate and systematically analyze rhythm and sound, particularly at the level of microrhythm. Through a combination of auditory analysis and visual interpretation via graphic representations of sound in sonograms and amplitude graphs, this book will help demonstrate these possibilities. Both sonograms and amplitude graphs help the scholar by "freezing" time and especially by detailing microrhythmic subtleties.[52]

So the Cartesian moment that is so meaningfully deferred in *Presence and Pleasure* is here brought about immediately, by this appeal to the "capturing" and "freezing" of rhythm, and by the several sonograms that show off the neutralized quarry. Danielsen's earlier reflections on the nature of musical knowledge were eminently subjective, but here the chapters are provided by a team of researchers working with seemingly impersonal, laboratory methods; it seems significant that these later essays result from a five-year research project funded by the Norwegian Research Council, bureaucratic bodies by their very nature both facilitating and privileging the objectively measured and measurable over the soft and philosophical. The volume threatens to represent institutional prerogatives in excelsis.

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[51] Anne Danielsen, "Introduction: Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction," Anne Danielsen, ed., *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 8.

[52] Danielsen, "Introduction," 13.

Yet little of that suspicion is borne out by the work itself, in which such issues of analytical power and politics are—unless one is predisposed to discount the entire music-academic project—essentially absent. The sonograms are generally used to measure time, but they also to show how different instrument timbres and frequencies impact on perceptions of timing, or the places where rhythm meets pitch, producing with it differing kinds of phenomenological affect; these kinds of concerns lead to a stressing not of so-called white logic's objectivity, but of experiential variance, and analysis is not applied to its primitive, mystical "folkloric" other, but put in the service of a constantly reaffirmed creative sophistication.[53] Danielsen's own chapter on D'Angelo's 2000 track "Left and Right"—which is based on a groove in which there are major discrepancies between bass, percussion and guitar demarcations of pulse—discusses ways that such loping incongruity can be lost over time as the listener becomes accustomed to the much wider notion of pulse, or "beat shape," that the groove teaches. This is engaged and convincing writing that seeks to understand musical subjectivity rather than institute analytical objectivity or authority.[54]

As so often, it's not so much the technologies that are significant as the uses to which they are put. Similar sonographic transcription methods are much in evidence in another article, as is another analytical tendency, one contrasting with both strong and problematic work discussed above: here, in a 2010 *Twentieth Century Music* essay by John Latartara, elements of what we might identify as "African American" rhythmic

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[53] Kristoffer Yddal Bjerke, "Timbral Relationships and Microrhythmic Tension: Shaping the Groove Experience Through Sound," 85-101; Hans T. Zeiner-Henriksen, "Moved by the Groove: Bass Drum Sounds and Body Movements in Electronic Dance Music," 121-140. Both in *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, ed. Danielsen.

[54] Anne Danielsen, "Here, There and Everywhere: Three Accounts of Pulse in D'Angelo's 'Left and Right'," *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, ed. Danielsen, 19-36.

practices are not emphasized, but screened out.[55] Latartara's study is of Merzbow, Oval and Kid606, the last-named of whom, at the turn of the 21st-century, labored under the generic banner of Intelligent Dance Music (IDM). As has been noted by numerous critics, that generic title enacted a racialized division between thinking (and very often white) musicians and audiences, and their presumably base, bodily, "Black Atlantic" sources: the style's mooted intelligence was in large part owed to the abstracting-out of rhythmic materials, the rolling funk breakbeats of hip hop and (the significantly named) jungle exploded digitally, groove and dance disallowed, rhythmic fragmentation celebrated.[56]

That cultural-political dynamic left richly significant rhythmic traces, but these are unaddressed by Latartara, whose Old Musicological purpose is to present and valorize his musicians as "composers" in the Western art music tradition (their educational and subcultural distance from that canon notwithstanding). Schaeffer, Varèse and Xenakis

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[55] John Latartara, "Laptop Composition at the Turn of the Millennium: Repetition and Noise in the Music of Oval, Merzbow, and Kid606," *Twentieth Century Music*, 7/1 (2010): 95-115.

[56] It is true that suggestions of a mind-body duality within electronic dance music were made across ethnic lines. Still, such mid-1990s attempts to divert the materials of drum 'n' bass away from earlier dancefloor norms were accompanied by the music's spread into "mainstream" musical culture and consciousness, and associated perceptions of changing (ethnic) demographics. See Chris Christodoulou, "Renegade Hardware: Speed, Pleasure and Cultural Practice in Drum 'n' Bass Music," Unpublished PhD thesis, London South Bank University, 2009, 140. For further, extended critiques of the uses and implications of the term "intelligent" as a genre marker in 1990s dance music, see Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Ramzy Alwakeel, "IDM as a 'Minor' Literature: The Treatment of Cultural and Musical Norms by 'Intelligent Dance Music,'" *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, 1/1 (2009): 1-21. Available at https://dj.dancecult.net/index.php/dancecult/article/view/268 [accessed June 2014].

are positioned as the orienting names in this investigation of technologically-abetted music making; terms as innocuous (and as germane) as loop and techno are called "colloquial" and sectioned off with scare quotes.[57] The critical context constructed, even the typographical conventions adopted, help claim extra-institutional music for academic study in the art music tradition. But this ownership is most strongly asserted in the sonogram transcription of the music under discussion. Latartara makes a lengthy defense of this method of illustration, specifically situating it within the lineage of Schenkerian visual modeling.[58] Though the piece comes to read as a celebration of that technique rather than of the music considered, the analyst's frequency snapshots can reveal little more than basic musical structure; as in the following diagram, Latartara simply bolts verbal description of audible musical events on to their clinical visual illustration.[59]

[57] Latartara, "Laptop Composition," 93, 92.

[58] Latartara, "Laptop Composition," 95-6. Latartara prefers "spectrogram" to "sonogram," but I am remaining consistent with Danielsen's early coining here.

[59] Latartara, "Laptop Composition," 100-1.

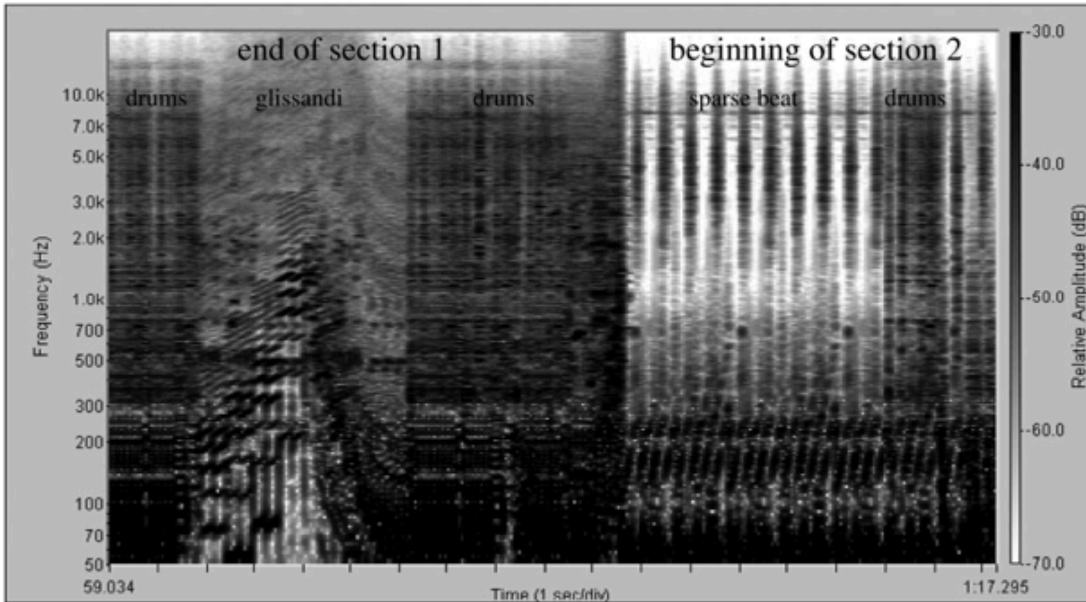

Fig. 2 : Latartara's sonogram of Kid606's "Powerbookfiend"

Clearly this kind of method cannot elucidate the critical censure to which Kid606 had, by 2003 and the time he released the music under discussion, already been subject: several writers and musicians identified a kind of race anxiety in his willful twisting and seeming ridicule of "black" rhythm and voice samples (the producer's response was incoherent and defensive).[60] Latartara's written commentary does no better. Kid606, the author writes, is "the most pop-influenced" of his studied "composers," and the track analyzed uses "pop drum samples"; these samples are in fact funk breakbeats derived from Amen, Brother by The Winstons (Metromedia, 1969), and Think (About It) by Lyn Collins (People, 1972), fragments of ubiquitous musical material that, in looped form, had defined jungle, and—once fragmented, critiqued—similarly separated off IDM from the "unintelligent."[61] Kid606's samples do not begin as neutral markers of pulse, and nor,

[60] See Peter Shapiro, "Beats and the Brat," *The Wire* 212 (October 2001): 36-43.

[61] Kid606's track Kidrush, from *Down with the Scene* (Ipecac, 2000), and Venetian Snares' track Remi, from *Doll Doll Doll* (Hymen, 2001), provide further examples of what was a widespread tactic.

in this analysis, do they end as such: Latartara writes that their more-or-less continual presence in the track examined "rhythmically unifies the entire composition," the analytical harking back to an old organicist terminology impossible to resist even as the sonograms enact a later stage of music-analytical thinking.[62]

Conclusions

Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva's formulation of white logic was challenging: "a historical posture that grants eternal objectivity to the views of elite Whites and condemns the views of non-Whites to perpetual subjectivity," giving "centrality to the knowledge, history, science, and culture of elite White men" while classifying "'others' as people without knowledge, history, or science, as people with folklore but not culture." That would be an overly forceful way of describing the work just criticized, and unfair towards writers who are clearly acting to support rather than detract from African American music: and yet. Surely some of those tendencies are detectable when, for instance, musical subjectivities are deemed lacking until translated into mathematical, symbolic or merely peer-reviewed representations of themselves, those representations apparently marking the only form of really meaningful knowledge; when analysts, blindly faithful to their methodology and scientific truth regime, ignore (or remain ignorant of) musical meanings absolutely present yet not contained by the sounding facts alone; where a cartoonish collection of scientific kit—symbolizations, sonograms, computers, improvising robots—acts as guarantor of a rigorous, objective, institutionally authorized knowledge beyond mere experience.

[62] Latartara, "Laptop Composition," 110.

But some of the work discussed above is persuasive. Besides, to suggest that analytical, scientistic intelligence about black music is necessarily "white"—a more properly "black" response presumably felt and instinctive—would be to reinforce that distinction between the rational and the sensual that I have been criticizing throughout, and to revisit old primitivist advocacies of supposedly extra-modern African American musical practices. It would also be to imply, absurdly, that Eileen Southern, Kofi Agawu, Guthrie Ramsey and other black music academics of mainstream institutional training and employ have somehow been the patsies of white supremacy. So this is certainly not to argue for the return to an anti-intellectual, mystified notion of "black rhythm"; I do not contend that African American music and musical theory or analysis are forever incompatible, or that to maintain some kind of inherent oppositionality such music should be kept and tended to outside the academy.

Given the sensitivities of these subjects, perhaps it's as well to spell out what else I do not conclude. I do not claim that any of the contemporary writers discussed in this piece are anything other than advocates of the musical traditions they consider; they are not conservative guardians of disciplinary rectitude, or—I hope I have underlined this—malign agents of prejudice. I do not claim that the apparent (if perhaps illusory) "genetic whiteness" of these writers on African American music simply invalidates their work, or renders it inherently besides the point (that would be rich, coming from me); I do not claim that there lies elsewhere a singularly correct interpretive system, but I *have* suggested, above and elsewhere, that the idiosyncratic interpretation of one set of cultural works within the analytical frameworks of another can be a productive as well as a problematic way of coming to terms with difference (indeed, it is probably the only way). However present that white logic or institutionally enacted whiteness can seem to be in some areas of music studies, such concepts need heavy qualification.

And as I've already noted, the difficulties here are not reducible to race alone. Were the history and politics of black-white encounters somehow removable from both world and work, many of the objections raised above would stand: the problems of translating vernacular styles into institutionally valorized symbols of themselves were some of the most extensively investigated in the early academic popular music studies of the 1980s, and in the ethnomusicological literature before and since.[63] Questions about such propriety, about who was asking what and why, were common in those disciplines which, in the post-Foucauldian and post-colonial era, had suddenly been confronted by questions of power's relationship to epistemology. But these questions might be asked less frequently now that moment has passed, and now that the place of popular (often meaning "African American") music forms in academic study is less frequently challenged, even though another reality stares us in the face: in terms of high-prestige posts and journal publications at least, those theorizing black music for a living are, more often than not, "white," their black would-be colleagues presumably either diverted into other professions or employed in less visible musical-pedagogical contexts.[64] It's time to ask again whether that issue of scholarly rightfulness—in which notions of the ownership and revelation of knowledge are constants—is not more alive than these contemporary writings on rhythm might allow.

But the present study focuses on a contemporary moment of great academic anxiousness around race, and, having focused on pieces that I claim betray under-examined attitudes towards racialized scholarly power, it's important to acknowledge

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[63] The classic statement of these problems is found in Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).

[64] The situation, it seems to me, has not much changed since Guthrie Ramsey addressed it in his article "Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade," *Musical Quarterly* 85/1 (2001): 1-52.

that music studies since the 1990s has also seen the self-conscious playing out of contrasting modes of what we might call scholarly whiteness. One rather defensive form can be seen in books by Richard Sudhalter and Randall Sandke, these arguing for the importance of white musicians in early jazz, figures supposedly marginalized because of the popular conception of that form as a black music. But most turn-of-the-century examinations or performances of scholarly whiteness have been in some way critical: such is shown in different ways, and in very different contexts, in work by Laurence Kramer on Charles Ives and Theo Cateforis on Devo, in which compositional and performance techniques are shown, respectively, to assert and to send up "white" subjectivities.[65] White writers of an ethnomusicological bent encountering practices and traditions identified as black—writers like Charles Keil—have sometimes chosen not to neutralize but to foreground their investigative roles and identities in their texts.[66] Even when the writer's identity is not directly addressed, it is unusual for contemporary, white-authored work on African American music to betray anything other than an empathetic, solidaristic attitude towards the subjects concerned; Ingrid Monson's

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[65] Richard Sudhalter, *Lost Chords: White Musicians and their Contribution to Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Randall Sandke, *Where the Dark and the Light Folks Meet* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010); Lawrence Kramer, "Powers of Blackness: Africanist Discourse in Modern Concert Music," *Black Music Research Journal*, 16/1 (1996): 53-70; Theo Cateforis, "Performing the Avant-Garde Groove: Devo and the Whiteness of the New Wave," *American Music*, 22/4 (2004): 564-588.

[66] Charles Keil, *Urban Blues*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), vii, 225-243; Charles Keil and Stephen Feld, *Music Grooves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-30.

ethnographic approach to her jazz musician informants, and Eithne Quinn's critical discussions of gangsta rap, can stand as examples.[67]

These diverse works show how whiteness has been asserted and denied, but more often challenged, ironized, and, even if indirectly, undermined: white scholarly identities could never be thought of as monolithic, and, in a moment and a field in which liberal attitudes towards race and identity are notionally preeminent, many areas of music study display the kinds of political care one might expect.[68] But the analytical studies discussed earlier suggest that, these values notwithstanding, certain kinds of more "scientifically" oriented academic method might be less responsive to or compatible with the relativisms

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[67] Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' But a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[68] The forms of writerly ironization referred to here are not entirely removed from those which, in an essay on Eminem, Loren Kajikawa identifies at work in a popular cultural space identified as African American. That rapper's success, Kajikawa writes, was predicated on the confrontation of his white incongruity rather than its denial; earlier white rappers who had attempted instead to immerse themselves in and identify fully with black cultural signifiers had quickly found those constructed identities destabilized by critical fans and commentators of all provenances. Scholarly writing has usually been too impersonal or else too reflective for that kind of immersion to be much present, but writers of para-academic seriousness working in popular contexts have arguably enacted a kind of whiteness in that way. In the period under study here, William Upski Wimsatt's work on hip hop did the job that Hugues Panassié's writing on jazz did in the 1930s, strongly identifying with African American affective and intellectual approaches so as to facilitate a critique of a "white" mainstream culture. Loren Kajikawa, "'My Name Is': Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race," *Journal of the Society for American Music*, 3/3 (2009): 341-63; William Upski Wimsatt, *Bomb the Suburbs*, second edition (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2000); Tom Perchard, "Tradition, Modernity and the Supernatural Swing: Re-Reading 'Primitivism' in Hugues Panassié's Writing on Jazz," *Popular Music* 30/1 (2011): 25-45.

commonly found in the postmodern humanities, and that such a lack of reflexivity might lead to the new articulation of old problems, of "old" kinds of whiteness, of forms that produce themselves silently (and often unthinkingly) through the bureaucratic institution of privilege and authority.

It's striking that an old race politics is more often found to linger when methods are redolent of technocratic rather than (auto)ethnographic thinking. But I've argued that studies both skilful and problematic make use of similar approaches and technologies, their differences lying in attitude and self-awareness rather than basic orientation. So this is not an assertion of righteousness, nor, really, an attack on those black musical advocates in whose work I have found fault. Rather, it is an affirmation that anyone working on musical topics must take responsibility for the racialized scholarly identities that they, we, can enact. In a different field, George Yancy has written that

> [i]t is one thing for white and Black philosophers to theorize race as an epistemologically bankrupt category. It is quite another for them to engage the issue of whiteness and Blackness in terms of what these social categories have come to mean for them personally, and how, despite their philosophical analyses of race, they existentially live the sociopolitical dimensions of their whiteness or Blackness.[69]

The same is surely true of musicologists eager to critique the solecisms of distant forebears, but apparently less willing to recognize similar problems in contemporary form. That might not mean the (white) analysts of (black) music must endlessly foreground their own cultural background or subjectivity. But it does mean

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[69] George Yancy, "Introduction," *White on White / Black on Black*, ed. Yancy (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 7.

acknowledging the tensions inherent in a western institutional practice so historically and politically encumbered, and that is still in the 21st-century so determinedly representative of a privileged tranche of what historically has been imagined as "white society."

That line of thinking is central to a competing trend in the study of African American music: this is work that, reading and respecting different forms and vocabularies of musical understanding in their respective socio-political contexts, engages musical-theoretical problems while remaining notably non-scientistic in outlook. Writers like Anne Danielsen, Matthew Butterfield, Robert Fink, Ingrid Monson and Guthrie Ramsey have been concerned to move the study of music and rhythm beyond the page and into a more social space, examining the ways that multiple musical subjectivities participate in the construction of swing or groove, and asking how social settings help construct for those musical practices what might (or might not) be thought of as "extra musical" notions of associated ethnic identities and histories. Perhaps such analytical sociality threatens at times to become as hegemonic a concept as Schenker's *Urlinie*. Nevertheless, in this way, Butterfield in particular has arrived at analytical descriptions of rhythmic techniques that recognize the historical "blackness" of their modes and meanings without resorting to the race fundamentalism of musical-evolutionary inherence, or performer (in)authenticity. This is "blackness as practice" rather than "blackness as essence," Butterfield writes, alluding to a distinction of Ramsey's.[70]

[70] Matthew W. Butterfield, "Race and Rhythm: The Social Component of the Swing Groove," *Jazz Perspectives* 4/3 (2010): 334. Ramsey posits a useful threefold concept of race in a musical context. These are social race (encompassing one's day to day experiences as racialized subject), cultural race (the "performative" aspects of in-group tradition and life) and theoretical race (speculative, theoretical and academic discourses as to meaning of race). Guthrie Ramsey, "Secrets, Lies and Transcriptions: Revisions

But if we are ready to accept that formulation, then we must also accept that, in an academic discourse for now dominated by white scholars, some aspects of black musical analysis can look like a corresponding "whiteness as practice." There's nothing essential about it, but when interested (white) academics participate in a tradition of musical theorizing without a keen critical awareness of that tradition's delimiting, exclusionary and racialized past, they can't help but revoice clichés of the rhythmic and the musical, bodily and the intelligent, folkloric and objective, black and white.

Also worth considering is how far musicologists "practicing blackness" have sometimes framed work by white scholars that has not fully respected familiar narratives of racial-musical becoming. Efforts on the part of white writers to unsettle historical black/white binaries—Brian Ward and Ronald Radano the most notable figures here—have on occasion been attacked by black scholars for that very reason; the academics' presumed cultural distance from their subject, their critics have variously charged, leads to findings either otiose or dangerous, these impositions of a race-criticality acting perversely, but once more, to make a claim on black cultural heritage.[71] Though working from different kinds of intellectual premise, the limited amount of close musical study emerging from the post-1960s Afrocentric intellectual tradition has also invested in the reinforcement rather than deconstruction of cultural-intellectual "blackness," and,

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on Race, Black Music and Culture," *Western Music and Race*, ed. Julie Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 36.

[71] See Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (London: UCL Press, 1998), and Robin D.G. Kelley, "A Sole Response," *American Quarterly*, 52/3 (2000): 533-545; Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Black Music and Writing Black Music History: American Music and Narrative Strategies," *Black Music Research Journal*, 28/1 (2008): 111-121; Samuel A. Floyd Jr. and Ronald Radano, "Interpreting the African-American Musical past: A Dialogue," *Black Music Research Journal*, 29/1 (2009): 1-10.

necessarily, its white foil.[72] Strategic, consolidatory maneuvers such as these, and reductive or regressive visions such as those studied earlier, are inevitable as long as musicological methods, literatures and institutions continue to inscribe and reward stagings of mythically "white" abstraction, absence, observerdom and objectivity and on the one hand, mythically "black" situatedness, presence and active subjectivity on the other; they are inevitable as long as Western music departments remain so monocultural in their course offerings and staffing, and perhaps as long as true social equality remains unrealized.

It's no use pretending that the grounds of this study, and the path away from it, are more sure than they are. But rather than stumble over faultlines of race, surely musicologists should install themselves firmly, knowingly within them—using analytical methods identifiable with a historical "white logic" perhaps, but always situating their products within that context, engaging with "black sociality" for sure, but without letting that concept become an explanatory panacea as totalizing as any other.[73] It's only in this way that the durable but false binary signaled in this piece's title will be collapsed. Music studies, especially those dealing with African American styles and such fraught categories as the body and intelligence, can never be sufficiently abstract to be removed from the historical and present realities of race, and musicologists cannot explore sounding practices without also reproducing stifled social relations. To forget that means acting old problems and scholarly identities. But to remember it will mean playing them out, and one day—long in the future—out of existence.

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[72] James L. Conyers, Jr., ed., *African American Jazz and Rap: Social and Philosophical Examinations of Black Expressive Behaviour* (Jefferson: MacFarland & Co., 2001) .

[73] This is a reframing of the basic problem of academic popular music study as formulated by Richard Middleton in *Studying Popular Music*.

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