

In Praise of Eclecticism: Relational Thinking and Theoretical Assemblage

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In this essay I trace a path through the intellectual history of the last thirty-five years by using the idea of relationality to connect widely different theoretical frameworks that have been used in the fields of ethnomusicology and musicology. These perspectives are all part of a generalized move away from the fixity of structuralism and towards more contingent, dynamic, and anti-foundationalist modes of understanding power, identity, embodiment, technology, and the sensory. Although philosophical perspectives must be addressed, I am fundamentally more interested in exploring the application of these ideas to empirical work—historical and ethnographic. To this end I sing in praise of theoretical eclecticism: the practice of selecting the most productive ideas from philosophy, social theory, and other fields, according to how well they can illuminate and frame an empirical project. To borrow a concept from a recently fashionable philosopher, I suggest that creating theoretical assemblages with clear points of connection to the principle topic of research might serve us well. Deleuze famously advocated for a rhizomatic rather than arborescent understanding of interconnection: “unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21). Or more pithily: “We’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much” (15). Assemblages, for Deleuze and Guattari, are non-hierarchical consistencies that develop among these connections and they may link different strata. After tracing an outline of the legacy of relational thinking I will show how and why I have applied an anthropological assemblage theory of ethics and morality to my work on Malian balafonist Neba Solo in conjunction with older social and cultural theories.

This essay also addresses the limits of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage, and philosophical perspectives more generally, as resources for socially engaged empirical musical studies. The need to engage issues of power, inequality, diversity, and gender inequality, I argue, requires engagement with the social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, and economics. Emphasis on these social theoretical resources encapsulates one historical difference between musicology and ethnomusicology in terms of relational thinking.

Relationality across the Theories

Since the mid-1980s I have witnessed the proliferation of interpretive theoretical perspectives known variously as the linguistic turn, poststructuralism, the new musicology, postcolonialism, the sensory turn, feminist ontology, phenomenology, sound studies, affect theory, intersectionality, the new neuroscience of the brain and consciousness, actor-network theory, and evolution. A close look reveals that many of these theoretical perspectives at the most basic level are talking about the same thing—the interrelationship of people, politics and sounds, the combination of multiple factors to produce a multilayered, polyphonic understanding of human life, the affective place of music in our lives, and understanding how social variables of many kinds inhibit movement and agency. Relational perspectives helped lead a revolt against structuralism in anthropology, ethnomusicology, and musicology by producing work emphasizing process over product, emergence over stasis, multiplicity over binaries, intertextuality, hybridity, contingency, indeterminacy, and inbetweenness. Relationality, in other words, has been a central preoccupation of humanistic and social scientific inquiry throughout the over thirty years I have been a part of academia.¹

Philosophical paradigms emphasizing language and semiotics as models of relational interconnection were deeply influential in the 1980s and 1990s (Derrida 1982 Silverstein 1976). Derrida, taking Saussurean semiotics as a point of departure (with its emphasis on signifier and signified), viewed the linguistic sign as becoming meaningful through a network of oppositions, which inscribe every concept “in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences” (1982, 11). Michael Silverstein, taking Peircean semiotics as a baseline—with its trichotomies of sign, object, and interpretant; icon, index and symbol²—theorized indexicality as a key process in the creation of social relationships through language. In a critique of structural linguistics and its prioritization of semantics, Silverstein (1976) noted that “the sign modes of most of what goes on in the majority of speech events are not referential” (15). Examining indexicality for both its context-presupposing and entailing aspects, Silverstein showed how people in conversation creatively deploy non-denotational aspects of language to create interactional (relational) flows (Silverstein 1993, 36; Silverstein 2003).³

While philosophers and anthropological linguists critiqued structural linguistics, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) critiqued the larger-scale issues of colonial power and the West’s orientalist representation of the Middle East. Postcolonial deconstruction of the binary of the Occidental and the Oriental and its critique of the colonial history of domination,

conquest, and racism became central to thinking about the imbalance of power on a global scale. Through the idea of the interstitial, Homi Bhabha, another theorist of the postcolonial, questioned binaries and fixity: “what must be mapped as a new international space of discontinuous historical realities is, in fact, the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the ‘in-between,’ in the temporal break-up that weaves the ‘global’ text” (1994, 310). Foucault (1972) also moved beyond the local semiotic scale to theorize larger *discourses* as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (49), that is, as something with greater force and power than language. Foucault’s emphasis on biopower in *The History of Sexuality v. 1* (1978) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975) emphasized the importance of controlling the human body as an aspect of power, in some ways linking his work to the emergence of ontological questions at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Anthropology in the 1980s developed practice theory, which emphasized the relationship between structure and agency in the unfolding of social life. Anthropologists sought to understand how structures and systems shaped social actors, while at the same time attending to the transformations that the practices of human actors created in the system. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) sought to develop an understanding of structures as emerging from human practices rather than the product of obedience to rules. *Habitus*, in his view, distills the regularities resulting from recurrent human interactions and serves to generate types of human practice without “being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor” (Bourdieu 1977, 72). *Habitus* in his definition is “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations” (78). Anthony Giddens’s structuration theory, central in anthropology’s development of practice theory, argued for a dynamic and recursive relationship between structure and agency where structural properties of systems “are the medium and outcome of the contingently accomplished activities of situated actors” (Giddens 1984, 191). Existing social structures both enable and constrain the activities of actors, but actors also create transformations of social structures through the intended and unintended consequences of their actions. Anthropologists in the 1980s also stressed the role of power in the constitution of social systems, some viewing power as pervasive and deep in the manner of Foucault, and others like Anthony Giddens and James Scott viewing the hegemony of power as partial (Ortner 2006, 7–8).

Practice theory has been central to my own work, especially *Freedom Sounds* (Monson 2007), in which I deployed the ideas of discourse, practice, and structure to explore how musicians and other participants in the

jazz world interacted with and understood the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, and African Independence. The specific interconnections and actions of particular musicians served as nodal points linking everyday life in the music world to larger changes in politics and aesthetics (Monson 2007, 23–26).⁴

Bourdieu, as a leading figure in French anthropology and sociology, has been the target of much criticism. Craig Calhoun (1993, 71) noted that Bourdieu's sociology tends to presume that practices are always motivated by interest in the accumulation of economic, social, cultural, or symbolic capital and as such actors and their actions are always strategic and self-interested. Others have noted that the concept of *habitus* is too deterministic despite its claims to the contrary (King 2000). The most withering critique, however, has been offered by Bruno Latour, who viewed the efforts of Marxist materialists, interactionists, and Bourdieu as not wrong, but “only primitive ways of packaging the bundle of ties that make up the collective. None of them are sufficient to describe the many entanglements of humans and non-humans” (Latour 2005, 84). Latour, arguing that the social cannot be conceived as some glue holding things together, asserts that sociology should not be the science of the social, but rather the tracing of associations or connections (relations) among heterogeneous elements (Latour 2005, 5), as if practice theorists did not trace such associations. Although Bourdieu is at least mentioned in *Reassembling the Social* (Latour's key work outlining Actor-Network Theory) there is no discussion of practice theory or Giddens's concept of duality of structure, both of which were widely known and deeply concerned with how the social and structural emerge through links between human action and its intended and unintended consequences.⁵ The networks Latour proposes in Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and the relational, multiply mediated links employed by practice theorists (often conceived as articulations between actors and larger structures [Ortner 2006, 2]) are not so different as it may first appear. Where Latour is original is in claiming agency for objects (Latour 2005, 63–86) and its implications for the relationship between humans and non-humans, as well as his emphasis on ontology. A deficit in Latour, in my opinion, is his clear lack of interest in questions of power and history.⁶

Bourdieu's emphasis on bodily hexis and phenomenology as integral to *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 87), like Foucault's emphasis on biopower, seems to contain the seeds of the later theoretical turn to the sensorial (Howes 2003), the embodied (Hahn 2007), and the ontological (Gumbrecht 2004). Sound studies, with focus on sound, relational listening, and hearing broadly conceived, has been widely embraced by musicologists and ethnomusicologists (Sterne 2003; Erlmann 2010; Stanyek and Piekut 2010; Born

2012; Ochoa Gautier 2014). Questions of ontology and sensory experience have gained prominence while those of epistemology, meaning, and politics have receded somewhat.⁷ In addition, relational thinking was extended not only to the relationship between the body and the world, but to the indeterminacy of the mind and its improvisational capacity to navigate the world (Edelman 2004; Noe 2009). Studies of music cognition and perception have stressed the centrality of embodied cognition (Iyer 2002, 2016) and the role of auditory and musical perception in creating expectation and anticipation (Huron 2006).

I view these theoretical streams as linked and potentially compatible through their common emphasis on emergence, changeability, mediation, process, interrelationship, multiplicity, agency, and the explication of the multiple interconnections of ideas, bodies, sensory experience, collectivities, and the natural world. In my graduate teaching I encourage students to discover the resonances between their historical or ethnographic projects and the wide variety of intriguing interpretive ideas available. It makes no sense to choose a theoretical perspective as a point of departure based on its cultural capital (or theoretical fashionability).⁸ Rather, the choice should arise from how well various perspectives enable the author to illuminate what is intriguing and potentially significant about their project.

We all enter the scholarly enterprise at a certain historical point in what Foucault would call discursive formations. The frameworks scholars encounter first (usually in graduate school) are likely to serve as a point of departure and home base for critical thinking. For me, practice theory, poststructuralism, and postcolonial deconstruction served as my home base. For many of my younger colleagues the most influential discursive formations seem to be Latour and Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), sound studies, and media theory (Stanyek and Piekut 2010; Sterne 2003; Rehding, Kreutzer, McMurray, Krämer, and Moseley 2017). I'm not convinced that these new theories always provide better views of relationality, but they do provide new points of entry for scholars who, in turn, have done impressive work with them. Piekut's (2014) careful explanation of both the strengths and weaknesses of Actor-Network Theory articulates a similar set of concerns that I do here, but with ANT as a home base. My point is to encourage advocates of newer relational perspectives to realize that many of their concerns share links to a longer history of social theoretical thinking.

In my view, all theoretical perspectives are partial and incomplete including the argument in this article, and this incompleteness creates the space for critical dialogue. Like the practice theory that shaped my training and early career, I am far more interested in what authors *do* with the theo-

retical ideas available to them than in arguing that a particular philosophy, critical theory, or type of theoretical question is adequate or superior.

Assemblage and the Anthropology of Ethics and Morality in Mali

I have recently finished a book manuscript called *The Voice of Kenedougou* about Malian xylophonist Neba Solo (Souleymane Traoré). My fieldwork in the early 2000s took place during an optimistic and heady moment for Mali. It was widely considered among the most successful democracies on the African continent and its musical scene was a strong, if not dominant, presence on the international world music market. Three of the most famous international music stars in the 1990s and 2000s were Malians—Salif Keita, Ali Farka Touré, and Oumou Sangare. If Mali's neighbors and former parts of the historic Malian Empire are included (Senegal and Guinea most centrally), two more world music stars must be included—Youssou N'Dour and Baba Maal. Neba Solo's virtuosity and innovation on the Senufo balafon made him a national star in Mali after the release of the album *CAN 2002* (2001). Bamako's recording studios attracted many Western musicians (Bela Fleck, Roswell Rudd, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Hank Jones) who were interested in collaborating with Malian artists, and international music festivals such as the Festival sur le Niger and the Festival of the Desert drew thousands of international tourists. Many Malians expressed optimism for the development of Mali, but it all came crashing down after a coup d'état in 2012 that deposed President Amadou Toumani Touré, who was accused of corruption and failure to resolve tensions with the independence-seeking Tuareg in Northern Mali. Two weeks after the coup, a coalition of Tuareg groups and Islamist groups took control of the northern two-thirds of Mali and held it until January 2013. The headiness of the 2000s has yet to return.

To participate in music in Mali is to enter a world of songs laden with exhortations to be a good person, to live up to idealized Mande values such as *hɔɔnya* (nobility), *danbe* (dignity), *tilennenya* (integrity), and *hine* (compassion). *Mɔɔya*, the Mande conception of personhood, emphasizes the importance of understanding human relationships and caring for family, neighbors, and community. Mali, like many other African countries and cultures, has stressed “wealth in people” (Guyer 1993; Miers and Kopytof 1977) over material wealth in its understanding of what it is to be a good person.

Ryan Skinner's excellent *Bamako Sounds* talks about music as “a privileged mode of moral expression in Bamako today” which enacts a “situated, value-inflected” set of encounters he calls an “Afropolitan ethics” (2015, 1). He follows Achille Mbembe's concept as developed in *Sortir de la Grande*

Nuit (2010). Skinner describes the lives of urban musicians and their attempts to be both global and local, as well as their navigation of Mande and Islamic ethics. Achille Mbembe defines Afropolitanism as “the awareness of this imbrication of here and elsewhere, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, this relativization of roots and primary belongings and a way of embracing, fully cognizant of origins, the foreign, the strange, and the distant” (quoted in Skinner 2015, 1).

By comparison, the story I tell about Neba Solo, a Senufo balafonist from Sikasso, Mali, the capital of Mali’s agricultural heartland, might be called “agropolitan,” since it navigates the cultural distance between rural and the urban, as well as Mali and the global market. The Senufo are first and foremost farmers, whose most esteemed mythical figure is the Hero Cultivator. They are not considered to be a Mande ethnic group, as their language is part of the Gur branch of the Niger Congo languages, while the Mande languages are not. More importantly, since the Senufo and their near relatives, the Minyanka, converted to Islam at a much later date than Mande groups such as Malinke and Mandinka, the Senufo have been considered to be less Muslim and, hence, less respectable than their Mande neighbors—with the exception of the Bamana, who have also been considered to be less than fully Muslim. Indeed, historian Brian Peterson (2011) notes that many people in southeastern Mali used the words Bamana and Senufo interchangeably to refer to people who have not embraced Islam—in other words, as a religious rather than ethnic or linguistic marker.

Throughout my research I had difficulty making sense of the boundaries between Mande, Senufo, and Islam as so many things seemed to overlap. I learned that I was partially battling the colonial categorization of ethnic groups as mutually exclusive and an anthropological presumption that the animist power associations such as *Komɔ*, *Wara*, and *Koreduga* were always ethnically Mande (Gagliardi 2010). My Senufo interlocutors noted that their villages too had these power associations and forms of divination, which coexisted with Senufo associations and ritual practice not shared by Mande groups. They also described their simultaneous practice of Senufo, Mande, and Islamic cultural practices as *parallelism*.

I struggled with how to think about their navigation of these multiple cultural arenas. Words such as *hybridity*, *syncretism*, and *cosmopolitanism* didn’t fully resonate, as the centrality of ethical and moral exhortations in these three cultural categories is absent. About that time I encountered Jarrett Zigon’s (2014) work advocating an assemblage theory of ethics and morality, and it immediately resonated with what I saw in my ethnographic and historical materials.

Zigon’s assemblage theory of morality and ethics calls for the relational

<p><i>La ilaha illallah Muhammadura rasulu l-lah (Arabic) Jabaru Masa Dale Masa (Bamana) Ko be gundo dɔnbaga ye ala ye</i></p>	<p>There is only one god Mohammed is his messenger King Jabar, King of Creation The knower of all secrets is Ala</p>
<p><i>Ni ye duniya sofa nafolo la Don dɔ i be taa ka duniya to Ni ye duniya sofa villaw la Don dɔ i be taa ka duniya to Ni ye duniya sofa musow la Don dɔ i be taa ka duniya to</i></p>	<p>If you spend our life amassing wealth One day you will leave this world If you spend your life building villas One day you will leave this world If you spend your life chasing women One day you will leave this world</p>
<p><i>Ka n'i waso fangantan lu la k'i ele ye waritigi ye duniya na Ala min ye ele ke waritigi ye O Ala kelen b'i se k'i ke fantan ye I miiri o la e kana yada, yada</i></p>	<p>Do not show off among poor people that you have money and riches in this life God is the one who you made you rich Ala can also make you poor Think about that do not be arrogant</p>
<p><i>Ka n'i waso denwtan n'u la K'i ele ye dentigi ye duniya na Ala min ye i ele ke dentigi o O Ala kelen be se k'i ke dentanya ye I miiri o la e kana yada yada</i></p>	<p>Do not boast among those who are childless that you have children in this world God is the one who gave you children God can also make you childless Think about that do not be arrogant</p>
<p><i>Sɔɔ sabu be Ala le fe Ala k'an son Sababu juman na Keneya juman sababu ala de fe Ala k'an son Sababu juman na</i></p>	<p>The cause of providence is God May God give us a good fortune The reason for good health is God May God provide us with good fortune</p>

Figure 1: *Sababu*, excerpted lyrics. Neba Solo (2008).

construction of ethics and morality through social relationships characterized by attunement and fidelity. Zigon, of course, took the idea of assemblage from Deleuze and Guattari (1988), who argue that assemblages are characterized by relationships of exteriority in which the parts may interact with things outside of the whole. In other words, says Zigon quoting Manuel DeLanda (2006, 10), “a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different.” Wholes, in this view are contingent rather than necessary consequences of the parts, and can undergo processes which either stabilize (territorialize) or destabilize (deteritorialize) their internal consistency and power over time (DeLanda 2006, 12).

These ideas immediately brought a song to mind—Neba Solo’s *Sababu*, which in its instrumental and textual parts layers together aural signs of Senufo and Mande animist practices, as well as a normative Muslim lyric. The bala part incorporates a Senufo melo-rhythmic pattern (Ncintoigre) called *ceefee nminike*, which is associated with divination and the moment of animal sacrifice in traditional Senufo rituals. Neba Solo’s camouflaged rendition of this sacred melody in the bala parts is likely recognizable only to Senufo; the rattle part (sn: *cinkanjukue*) on the first two beats of every four also refers to divination, but to divination as it is practiced throughout Mali by many ethnic groups, not only by the Senufo. Although the aural signs of traditionally African forms of spirituality suffuse the musical texture, the lyrics begin with the *shahada* (the Muslim profession of faith) sung in Arabic. “*La ilaha illallah, Muhammadura rasulu I-lah*” (There is only one God. Mohammed is his messenger), followed by ethical exhortations consistent with both Muslim perspectives and Mande and Senufo ethical values.

The idea of the coexistence of Senufo, Mande, and Muslim sensibilities as an assemblage that need not form a coherent and stable whole seemed to describe what I was observing in Sikasso. The fit with the philosophical concept is not complete because the assemblage of perspectives—Senufo, Mande, and Muslim—cannot be completely non-hierarchical in the situated social and cultural world of contemporary Mali. In terms of power and cultural prestige, Islamic ethics come first, Mande ethical principles are second, and the Senufo come last. Although assemblage describes the fluidity with which individuals navigate the cultural landscape (their social practice *pace* practice theory) and the equal importance many attach to the contrasting cultural perspectives, its differently empowered components cannot fit the Deleuzian desiderata of non-hierarchy, and consequently shows a limit in applying this abstract philosophical principle to an actual situated social and historical example.

Zigon argues that an assemblage concept of moral and ethical behavior provides a means for understanding moral experience that includes partial connections and disjunctions among seemingly incompatible positions as they are used to construct and maintain affective relationships. In his view “morality and ethics need not necessarily be conceived in terms of judging, evaluating, and enacting the good or the right, but instead to be about the making, remaking, and maintenance of relationships” (Zigon 2014, 21). My interest in the concept of assemblage to describe the relational combination of ethical practices I’ve observed in Sikasso and its surrounding countryside lies in its ability to think of the parallel practices of Islamic and traditional ethics as something other than hypocrisy or ethical compro-

mise. Indeed, in my view the heterogeneity of perspectives in daily practice are generative of the tolerance that so many Malians prize in their cultural life, and which has been under attack by the more Islamist perspectives that have grown since the coup d'état.

The literature on the anthropology of ethics and morality, however, is not only concerned with interpersonal processes of ethical assessment, but also with everyday ethics as a component of social and political action. Michael Lambek's book *Ordinary Ethics* (2010) argues that anthropological concern with structure, power, and strategic action has often obscured the centrality of ethical judgement in the living of everyday life. Like other theoreticians of anthropological ethics such as James Laidlaw (2010), Lambek argues against the idea of morals as first principles that must be obeyed, and for a conception of ethics as action resulting from the exercise of situated ethical judgement, that is, for ethics as a kind of situated practice. Both Lambek and Laidlaw are interested, however, in moving beyond Bourdieuan practice theory, in which everything done by actors is presumed to be strategic—in service of empowerment, or the accumulation of various kinds of capital—social, economic, or cultural. For Lambek, practices have both external and internal dimensions, both interested and disinterested motivations, not captured by practice theory (2010, 22). Laidlaw argues that practice theory's presumption of individual agency is far too limited to describe how agency and the assessment of moral responsibility operate. In his view they are aspects of the "situations in which people may find themselves" (Laidlaw 2010, 147), which extend beyond the individual. In so doing, he makes one of the more compelling arguments I've seen for Latour's idea that agency extends to things and social configurations that embed the person in a set of relations. As one example, he offers the moral responsibility attributed to a person as the result of property they own. For example, a vase knocked out of a window by a gust of wind that causes injury to a passerby on which it lands. The owner is held responsible, even though nothing in her individual action caused the event (Laidlaw 2010, 151). Laidlaw notes that practice theory's attempts to reconcile structure and agency is not dissimilar to the moral philosopher's attempt to reconcile determinism and free will (154). That reconciliation, in his view, requires a third term, in which ethical responsibility is assessed relationally, as the product of acts that may be the product of a network of agencies of various kinds (including those of things, law, and statistics). He belabors this point to emphasize that the moral and ethical are not simply located inside individuals. Laidlaw, in other words, is interested in a kind of distributed agency (Laidlaw 2010, 153).

Practice theory advocates might counter that Laidlaw is simply de-

scribing aspects of structure that practice theory analysts have often used to temper a fetishized concept of individual agency. But I find something new in Laidlaw's position that helps me to think about the sense of collective responsibility or guilt, shame, and embarrassment that many of us feel, for example, about the rise of Donald Trump. We may not be individually responsible for his election, as most of us in universities did not vote for him, but our sense of membership in the group comprised of citizens of the United States, makes many of us feel tainted as well as outraged by the state of affairs. In Mali, similar feelings of outrage and shame have arisen in the wake of the coup d'état in 2012, and the state of perpetual crisis that has predominated ever since. During the first months of the Trump administration, as I was feverishly working on my book about Neba Solo, I often found myself comparing US headlines about Trump's latest ethical outrage to those in Mali after the coup d'état. The common thread in these expressions of moral and ethical discourse is the feeling that something fundamental to the society's sense of itself has been outrageously violated.

In Mali, the outrage has been directed at other Malians, who have failed to live up to the ethical values of *Maliba* (Great Mali). In the United States, the hateful expression of racism and prejudice toward African Americans, immigrants, Muslims, women, make many of us who are white feel a special (distributed) responsibility for reproduction of structural white supremacy in generation after generation. Regardless of our individual merits, white Americans will certainly be held accountable for their response to this particularly ugly moment of racist backlash. To address the persistence of racially based hierarchies in American history seems to require balancing relational analytical understandings against the tenacity of structural inequality. We must remember that no matter how relationally social structures are created and reproduced, no matter how contingent or fluid is their stability, structures (institutional, policy, law, economics) change much more slowly than practices or discourses.⁹ Sociological statistics on racial disparity in income inequality, wealth, and education in the United States make this manifestly apparent.¹⁰ Social structure and power are not simply abstract concepts that have carried too much explanatory weight in sociological thinking (*pace* Latour), but rather real forces that have left their imprint on human lives. What social scientists have had to say about them is deeply relevant to socially engaged musical studies.

Conclusion

In *The Voice of Kenedougou* I've made use of the concept of assemblage to help me describe a flexible theoretical practice, which has enabled me to find many reasonable paths through interdisciplinary interpretive ideas,

whether from philosophy, anthropology, ethnomusicology, or musicology. I've shown how I've applied an anthropological idea of ethics and morality as assemblage to my own work and made it stronger. I am not, however, embracing the entire philosophical perspective of Deleuze and Guattari.

The idea of assemblage, as Georgina Born (2012) has argued, has many felicitous possibilities for discussing improvisational music such as jazz, but that does not mean that Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of music isn't often highly problematic. Both Michael Gallope (2010) and Martin Scherzinger (2010) note Deleuze and Guattari's overreliance on European high modernist works and composers (especially Boulez) as exemplary of their philosophical desiderata of deterritorialization (Gallope 2010, 95). Gallope argues that there are two philosophies of music in Deleuze and that the far more compelling one is the metaphysical (almost utopian) idea of the refrain, with its bubbling mixtures and life-affirming embrace (2010, 87). I'm intrigued by the critique of the Hegelian dialectic—which argues that the thesis-antithesis-sublation in its inner workings is inherently negative (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 3, 5; Colebrook 2002, 50)—but not satisfied with the solution, at least with respect to my own work. A very abstract idea of becoming emerging from difference takes the dialectic's oppositional place. It is meant to affirm the constant forward flow of life and has an almost religious quality in striving for continuous becoming (virtuality, potentiality), which takes us beyond the only human (Colebrook 2002, 129, 146; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 232–309). The Eurocentrism in the thinking arrives when the exemplary artworks cited as approaching true becoming are all European high modernist works.¹¹ In this Deleuze and Guattari are not unlike Adorno. Both argue for the philosophical loftiness of music; both view the technical qualities of music as being critical to their philosophical significance; both idealize the likely unreachable utopian possibilities of music whose best exemplars are high modernist European music.¹² Yet one philosopher arrives at his position through an emphatic embrace of dialectics and the other through its critique.¹³ Inconsistent philosophies, in other words, can sometimes arrive at similar points of convergence. My path to theoretical eclecticism has arisen partially from such conceptual ironies.

The creation of theoretical assemblages (what eclectics do) selects relevant parts of a wide variety of perspectives and develops them for application to an author's specific empirical project, which may, in turn, generate new ideas and assemblages. In my extremely interdisciplinary field of ethnomusicology, this is precisely what so many of my colleagues do: become their own eclectic sort of cultural and critical theorist in dialogue with their research interlocutors and the specific cultural and social situa-

tions in which these interlocutors live. Here I reveal my field's and my own bias towards empirical socially grounded work.

Eclecticism, in philosophy, often leads to the charge of conceptual inconsistency, but it is apparent to anyone reading philosophical literature that pointing out inconsistencies and contradictions is one of the primary activities of philosophical writing! The philosophical project of creating wholly consistent original conceptual frameworks often leads to finely parsing extremely abstract ideas in order for an author to distinguish his or her view from all others. Although arguments frequently echo one another, they often do so without citation—to me a striking feature of philosophical writing. Rather than stress the connections and overlaps with other ideas in philosophy, attending to the unique trajectory of the whole argument seems preferred. In my more eclectic view, theories, like Bakhtin's discourse in the novel, are often dialogic (relational). An idea

enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex inter-relationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (Bakhtin 1981, 276)

The process of finding the analytic frameworks appropriate to an author's empirically based musical research project can be very much like this rough and tumble process. Eclecticism works, in my view, because, as Bakhtin has also noted, "the word in language is half someone else's" (Bakhtin 1981, 293).

Notes

1. The following book titles provide some evidence of the high profile of the term "relationality" in academic writing: Ganguly (2008), Lejano (2017), Myhre (2016), Berger (2017), and Bottero (2009).
2. On Peircian trichotomies and music see Turino (1999).
3. Keith Sawyer (1996, 276–279) and I (Monson 1996, 185–191) applied this idea to jazz improvisation.
4. I have not mentioned cultural studies in this summary, but the works of Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and others are certainly relevant. I explain my view that cultural studies was pre-saged by African American writers such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Amiri Baraka in *Freedom Sounds* (Monson 2007, 20–22).
5. Latour does mention both Bourdieu and Giddens more positively in a footnote where both are praised for their "clever attempts" (Latour 2005, 169n218). Nevertheless, the omission of Giddens, Bourdieu, and Foucault in Latour's account of the social leaves readers familiar with this literature with the impression that in the interest of proclaiming a new

theory, Latour has failed to acknowledge the overlap of his ideas with those of his most prominent predecessors. Here the proclamation of a new theory begins to resemble plagiarism.

6. Latour argues that deploying words like power, structure, and context are too often deployed as explanatory causes for large numbers of potentially unrelated things, whereas ANT requires demonstrating the presence of these forces in each network (Latour 2005, 22, 53, 58).

7. Hans Gumbrecht (2004) famously argued against the questions of meaning that were then dominant in interdisciplinary literature. There are clearly works in ethnomusicology with a strong ontological and sensory orientation that engage substantially with political questions (Ochoa 2014, Meintjes 2017, and Weidman 2006), but there are other writers explicitly questioning the prominence of politics and resistance in work on music (Steingo 2016).

8. Bourdieu's essay "Forms of Capital" (1986) developed the concept of cultural and social capital.

9. A longer treatment of structure can be found in Monson (2007, 25–26).

10. Some examples include Soss, Fording and Schram (2011), Bobo (2004), and Stiglitz (2012).

11. The musical references can be found primarily in chapters ten and fourteen of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987).

12. My thinking on Adorno is based on Paddison (2004). My position on Deleuze and Guattari on music is based on Gallope (2010) and Scherzinger (2010).

13. The articulation of an abstract ideal that can be approached asymptotically, but never reached reminds me of Paddison's (2004) discussion of failure in Adorno. The irony of arriving at similar place with and without the dialectic should be noted.

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