

# Performing Social Relationships: The Materialism of Collective Music-Making

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Introducing their essay collection, *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, published in 2000, Mark Franko and Annette Richards wrote:

The exuberant presence of performance masks an intrinsic absence. Necessarily temporal and temporary, performances are always in a state of appearing and vanishing; by definition transient, they are immediate yet quickly become historical. Performances of the distant past, however, those precluding personal or collective memory, raise with particular urgency the issue of absence.<sup>1</sup>

Referencing Jacques Derrida's concepts of 'trace', 'mark', 'absence' and 'remainder' in his framing of language as (in their words) 'one of many forms, of communication [that] remains and continues to communicate in the absence of its original interlocutors', Franko and Richards continued:

The term *absence* calls forth the notion of remainder inherent in the mark. This remainder of the past, unlike the dematerialization suggested by the term *disappearance*, hints instead at the nagging presence of something material.<sup>2</sup>

In Derridean terms, the 'intrinsic absence' of early modern music – its silence – is the fundamental condition common to every surviving 'mark' left behind after the disappearance of its original 'trace'. The absence of both music's sound and 'its original interlocutors' constrains both music historians and performers in their pursuit of 'the exuberant presence' of that once-sounding past to engage in what the musicologist Carolyn Abbate calls 'searching for immanent supra-audible contents in musical artefacts from the past',<sup>3</sup> and the specific class of artefacts to which both groups naturally turn first are, of course, surviving written and printed works of music. They reason that musical notation most obviously embodies Derrida's specific 'written sign ... [that] is therefore a mark which remains ... [and] which can give rise to an iteration both in the absence of and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it'. Just as the words of a play-text, however long ago they were set down, become live acoustic sound as soon as they are read aloud – and when they are spoken by actors, seem able to conjure up a real sense of their original 'exuberant presence' – so notation is considered by musicians to be a more-or-less transparent medium through which they will be able to reanimate with voice or instrument the 'music' it once did, and therefore must still, represent. Meanwhile, the scholarly

edifice of historical musicology is built upon those same notated sources, which it deciphers, edits, taxonomises, and critically analyzes in order to produce its own 'readings', the ultimate goal of which is, in the words of another musicologist, Katherine Bergeron, 'comprehension of the music itself'.<sup>4</sup> Such orderly methodological processes suggest that musicology wears the white coat of scientific detachment and logic, while performers are more likely to be associated with – indeed, to wear with pride – the mantle of subjective 'interpretation'.

Yet both professions – historical performers and musicologists alike – are caught up in what is essentially a trick of the eye and the ear, by which the two earthly states of Boethian music – *musica humana* (its mathematical, theoretical form) and *musica instrumentalis* (its aurally perceptible form when sounded by voices and instruments) – pass, as it were, through a looking glass, appearing to effect a seamless transmutation of one form into the other at the surface of the musical page. In this way, notational symbols seemingly become sound, and vice-versa. Thus, notation itself (and the imputed meanings it ostensibly bears) comes to be construed as the same thing as 'the music itself'. However, there is a third group of investigators of music's past, among whom I count myself, and these are cultural historians for whom music happens to be their principal focus. While they may well draw upon – and even at times prioritize – the evidence of notated music, they are also likely to harness a whole mass of other 'remainders' of the past to try to understand and then tentatively reconstruct the complex mental, social, physical, spatial – as well as sonic – networks and assemblages that once constituted the dense phenomenon of 'music' in the early modern world.

Let's go back to Franko and Richards' slightly unsettling reference to the remainder of the performative past that 'hints ... at the nagging presence of something material'. As we have seen, for those narrowly focused on reconstructing 'the music itself', whether as performances or through analyzing its texts, there is little mystery about this 'something material' – it is quite simply the dormant repository of ciphers, 'freeze-dried' and warehoused in the notational record, awaiting reanimation as sound, or analysis on the musicologist's workbench. What, however, if the lingering 'materiality of music' (in the full cultural-historical sense I just described) is, in fact, more intricate, more nebulous than just 'vanished sounds', and instead something that might also be lurking in other kinds of 'marks' of music – for example, literary texts or visual images – that were neither originally intended to, nor capable ever of 'becoming sound'?

With this provocation in mind, I now present several literary descriptions and visual representations of scenes of late sixteenth-century collective music-making in England and Italy, some of them quite well-known to music historians. By attending to their various hints at 'the presence of something material' other than 'the music itself' I want myself to hint at a broader

possible conception of music's materiality. Perhaps surprisingly, given everything I have said so far, all my examples in fact feature musical notation in one way or another; but here I am suggesting that books containing notation constitute only one kind of material among others, which collectively shape and animate the larger 'social materiality' of situations in which music is the focal subject.

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The typical rhetorical strategy of many heavy-weight sixteenth and seventeenth-century treatises and instruction manuals dealing with anything from utilitarian technical topics to esoteric philosophical arguments, is to cast them in the form of dialogues between two or more fictional characters, who deliver the content in the form of a kind of theatre script. This is presumably to make the facts and debates more engaging and digestible. Dialogues often begin with a brief fictional anecdote that sets the scene and provides a framing narrative for the ensuing conversation. Probably the best-known example in an English music treatise is the famous opening scene of Thomas Morley's *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, published in 1597. Morley offered a fictionalized cautionary tale that, like much effective advertising, plays on the potential purchaser's anxieties about status and fitting in. The scene is set at that quintessential location for the enactment and celebration of bourgeois codes of social interaction, and for the testing of aspirants for membership – a London dinner party. The young candidate, Philomathes (literally, 'Lover of Learning'), having more-or-less successfully negotiated the challenges of the dinner-table conversation that had threatened to reveal his complete ignorance of music, might perhaps have been feeling quietly confident of acceptance into his hosts' milieu. But then disaster strikes, as he is subjected to a clearly unexpected final test, and his utter humiliation at failing it is mercilessly exposed:

supper being ended, and Musicke books, according to the custom being brought to the table: the mistress of the house presented me with a part, earnestly requesting me to sing. But when after many excuses, I protested unfainedly that I could not: everyone began to wonder. Yea, some whispered to others, demanding how I was brought up.<sup>5</sup>

Philomathes's ineligibility fully to enter the group in which he aspires to membership is probably confirmed even before he is forced to admit that he can't read music at sight, simply by the fact that he had not realized that dinner would be followed 'according to the custom' by communal singing around the table from part books.

Sets of part-books were the standard format for polyphonic music, where each participant can see only his or her 'part', and not the complete score. 'Cues' are in the form of signs for beats of silence, which the performer must assiduously count to be sure of rejoining the polyphony at precisely the correct moment. The ability to read all this accurately – notes, rests, words and so on

(often at first sight) and sing or play an instrument at the same time without getting lost and making a complete idiot of yourself, especially in a company of strangers, presupposes considerable technical skill and experience, not to mention a certain amount of self-confidence. For professional musicians, part books were simply the most economical and convenient way of conveying the essential information they each needed in order to execute their own part in a performance, usually without rehearsal. For amateurs, reading fairly simple pieces from part-books also provided one of the few opportunities for men, women and children to sit close together and collaborate on an equal footing in a mutually enjoyable creative pastime, particularly in domestic settings.<sup>6</sup>

We get an idea in this idealized scene featuring an elite family disporting themselves in a formal garden in a display of conspicuous *otium*, painted (rather appropriately in the context of Philomathes' particular situation) onto a richly decorated Limoges-ware fruit-platter (Figure 1).



Figure 1. 'May'. Painted copper and enamel fruit dish (detail). From the workshop of Pierre Raymond, probably Limoges, 1570–1580. London, Wallace Collection

Abraham Bosse's famous image of Hearing ('Les plaisirs de la musique') likewise shows a scene of family music-making in a domestic setting (Figure 2). Again, everyone is seated around a table, which pulls them together physically, as the harmonious music they make does so sonically. The table surface is deftly negotiated by the two instrumentalists, so that they can both play and still remain in close proximity with one another; their part books lie open flat on the table while the singers hold their copies up, perhaps to make more space, but also the better to be able to read, sing

and engage in visual contact, all at the same time. Indeed, their postures, facial expressions and gestures convey the ease of their relationships.



Figure 2. Abraham Bosse, *Les plaisirs de la musique* (c. 1635–1638): 'L'Ouïe' (detail). Etching and engraving. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Figure 3. 'Four children making music', Master of the Countess of Warwick (fl. later 1560s).  
Previously Weiss Gallery

Philomathes' education had clearly not prepared him to participate in anything like this; unlike the three older of these four young siblings from a wealthy English family, painted in 1565 (Figure 3). Their serious and unflinching collective gaze at the viewer seems to capture the self-control and decorum befitting the social status and Protestant piety into which they have been inculcated, and which the depiction of their suitable music education is intended to demonstrate. The two boys in the middle, aged 12 and 13, hold part-books (one of which, thanks to Kerry McCarthy's detective work, has been identified as a precise rendering of a psalm motet by Josquin Despres<sup>7</sup>) and their sister, aged 10, has her fingers placed precisely on the keyboard, while their little brother stands confidently alongside, perhaps waiting for his own music lessons to begin.

But let's leave the chastened Philomathes whose abortive non-performance spurred him to hasten off the following day enrol in a course of self-improvement – which, if he were ever to get through Morley's punishingly comprehensive course in music theory would probably qualify him to become a professional composer – and move across Elizabethan London, and into the pages of another manual of self-improvement. Claudius Hollybande's *The French Schoolemaister*: 'wherein is most plainly shewed, the true and most perfect way of pronouncinge of the French tongue, without any helpe or Maister or teacher', published in 1573, proceeds, after a pronunciation guide, grammar and vocabulary, to its celebrated final section, a parallel text phrasebook, English on the left, French on the right, designed to get the student to practise speaking the language in real-life situations. Hundreds of short phrases are arranged in the form of 'familiar talkes no lesse pleasant than profitable ... for to speake in all places', illustrating scenes in a typical day of a London household. These include a chance encounter between two young friends outside St Paul's Cathedral, who discover they have both been invited to dine at 'Maister Chancelours of London'. Before setting off to dine, the two decide to try to get into the cathedral, even though the 'churche is all full of folkes'. As they enter, they are thrilled to hear the sound of music, which as we have already discovered from earlier exchanges, they both love:

'Escoutes, i'oye une douce musique: ie n'oui iaimais la semblable' ...

'Harken, I doo heare a sweet musick: I never heard the like.'

They decide to try to get to the front, the better to hear the singing:

'See whether wee may get to the quier, and we shall heare the fairest voices of all the cathedral churches in England.

I believe you: who should have then if Londonners had them not?

I thinke that the Queenes singyng men are there, for I now heare her baase.

That may be: for, to tell the trueth, I never heard better singyng.

Harken, there is a good versicle.

I promise you that I would heare them more willingly singe, then eat or drinke’.

To which comes the reply:

‘I am not of your minde: for mee thinketh that I would heare them more lively, if I had well dined...shall wee go?’<sup>8</sup>

I find this vivid glimpse of late-sixteenth century listening riveting, not just for the many historical details it reveals but also its encapsulation of an almost uncannily recognizable sense of a shared adventure by two adolescents, opportunistically grabbing a serendipitous chance to enjoy a musical experience, which then seamlessly weaves itself into their informal banter. Reading the passage, I fleetingly indulge the historian’s ultimate fantasy of being present in a past place and moment, as though I had been sitting in the pew in front of the two lads, casually eavesdropping on this intimate exchange – and temporarily joining their company and sharing, if only vicariously, their few minutes of musical pleasure. Such rare glimpses of the social experiences of music in the sixteenth century provide welcome balances to our otherwise relentlessly notation-oriented encounters. The two lads may be, in fact, only avatars in a virtual phrase-book world, but meeting them inside this Renaissance Second Life seems real enough: let’s follow them.

At the dinner table, chatter about the day’s news and discussion of the food and wine is interlaced with the host’s commands to the servants, providing an unprecedented ‘fly-on-the-wall’ ‘reality show’ of a family meal shared with friends. Once the dessert is on the table and the company pretty well tanked up, the host suggests some music:

Roland, shall we have a song?

Yea Sir: where bee your bookes of musick? for they bee the best corrected.

They bee in my chest: Katherin take the key of my closet, you shall find them in a little til [*drawer*] at the left hand:

behold, therbee faire songes at four parts.

Who shall singe with me?

You shall have companie enough: David shall make the base: Jhon, the tenor: and James the treble.

Because each singer only has sight of his own part, it is not at first obvious who should start, but Roland assumes it will be the treble:

Begin: James, take your tune: go to: for what do you tarie?

I have but a rest.<sup>9</sup>

This little hiatus draws attention to the sheer fun of the exercise, rather like playing a collaborative board game round the table, whose pleasure comes from each participant trying correctly to read the signs and symbols on the page to produce the harmonious result of creating a part song

together. There is absolutely no sense of a sudden change to a more serious register that signals 'performance', but rather singing from the books runs seamlessly with the generally relaxed banter at the table:

Roland, drink afore you begine, you will sing with a better corage.

It is well said: geve me some white wine – that will cause me to sing better.

You must drink greene wine ['du moust']. Yea trulie to cause me to lose my voice.

Oh see what a fonell, for he hath powred downe a quarte of wine without anie takinge of his breath.

I shold not bee a singing man except I drink well: and for fear we shold have the throat drie, we weat the mouthe often: and among us singers, wee have a good recept for to be never drie.<sup>10</sup>

Exactly half a century later, in 1623, we have Gerrit van Honthorst's painting (now in the National Gallery) of a group of men and women making music with voices and, in this case, also instruments from part-books (Figure 4). These are again laid on the table around which the musicians cluster while a happy couple and another onlooker with a glass of wine watch proceedings, conveying both the relaxed concentration and collaboration involved, and also the sheer pleasure of the kind of occasion described by Holybande 50 years before.



Figure 4. Gerit von Honthorst, 'The Concert' (1623). London, National Gallery



My next example returns once again to the 'scene setting' of the fictional dialogue that structures another famous work of music theory, this time Italian. It occurs at the start of the first salvo fired in the iconic war of words known so well to anyone who has ever taught or taken a standard music-history course on the early modern: the so-called 'Artusi-Monteverdi Controversy', held up today as a critical hinge-point articulating the passage from 'Renaissance' to 'Baroque music'. It is normally portrayed (if mistakenly) as merely a 'war on woke' pitting in one corner, the conservative forces of mainstream musical orthodoxy against, in the other corner, the iconoclasts of the new avant-garde. It kicked off in 1600 when the priest and defender of music-theoretical doctrine, Giovanni Maria Artusi, published 'Of the Imperfections of Modern Music', a blistering attack on the as yet relatively unknown Claudio Monteverdi, for what he regarded as the composer's egregious violation of the rules of Renaissance counterpoint.

This background is germane to the fictional scene-setting of the debate that follows it. The story is related by one 'Luca', an Austrian visiting Ferrara in November 1598, reporting to 'Vario', described as 'a gentleman from Arezzo who is very skilled in music' (a thinly disguised Artusi):

Yesterday, sir, after I had left Your Lordship and was going towards the piazza, I was invited by some gentlemen to hear certain new madrigals. Delighted by the amiability of my friends and by the novelty of the compositions, I accompanied them to the house of Signor Antonio Goretto, a nobleman of Ferrara, a young virtuoso and as great a lover of music as any I have known. I found there Signor Luzzasco and Signor Hippolito Fiorini, distinguished men, with whom had assembled many noble spirits versed in music. The madrigals were sung and repeated, but without giving the name of the author. The texture was not displeasing. But, as Your Lordship will see, insofar as it introduced new rules, new modes, and new turns of phrase, these were harsh and little pleasing to the ear'.<sup>11</sup>

Luca's 'as Your Lordship will see' cues us into the serious matter of the book, a detailed critique of the 'madrigals [that] were sung and repeated' (Luca claiming to have written them out from memory after the event – they were at this point not yet published). Vario proceeds to dissect the faulty ideology and technical incompetence of these examples of modern music, deploring in particular the complete unacceptability of Monteverdi's unprepared dissonances. Luca, however, seems to come to the defence of the composer by pointing out the key role played by expert singers in nuancing dissonances when they naturally improvise expressive alterations to the written notation (as he says: 'things left implicit') as they read them in the moment of performance. In his opinion, this 'renders a pleasing harmony at which I marvel'. However, in the second volume of Artusi's attacks, published in 1603, the Vario/Artusi character will have none of this, maintaining that however

skilfully singers might apply affective ornaments in performance, this does not change the fact that the composed dissonances:

always are and [always] will be grating, crude, harsh and insupportable to the ear. And when this song is taken from the hands of these singers, it will inevitably [still] be [insupportable] and will remain thus, *because in sum, that is what it is* [my emphasis].<sup>12</sup>

Artusi's almost throwaway comment about the song being 'taken from the hands' of the singers once their performance is finished is for me an arresting one: it's an evocative image of a literal separation between the notation of the song (which for him – as for a contemporary musicologist – is 'what it is') and its anonymous executants, as the five professional singers, their own agency in the music apparently entirely irrelevant, leave the part books on the table as it were, and disappear, never to appear again in the treatise.

The whole 'event' that opens Artusi's attack on modern music may well be entirely fictional, invented to provide some colour to brighten up his dry paper analyses of music excerpts from the madrigals. Maybe because I myself have 'lived experience' of being an anonymous performer roped in on many occasions to illustrate an otherwise theoretical musicological presentation, I have always wondered about the five singers in this story. What did *they* consider to be the function of, and their relationship with, the notes from which they read before they were 'taken from their hands'? What, indeed, are the 'materials' of such a performance? Are they simply the abstract notational code which it is the musicians' job to execute as analogue sound, or do they extend, say, to include the physiological processes of singing – and, by implication, of listening? The acoustical effects of the structure of the room on the sonic experience? Visual aspects of performance such as expressive facial gestures exchanged between singers and audience? And how significant are the relationships between the singers and the other people present at this event – the nobleman host and the other 'distinguished ... and ... noble spirits versed in music'? All of these intangible remainders of a once 'exuberant presence of performance', I want to propose, are what make up the full 'materiality' of any musical event, and which potentially still lingers as a presence even in these piecemeal 'remainders' of the distant past.

To put this way of thinking about historical music in a nutshell, I defer to the great music sociologist, Christopher Small, who asked:

What does it mean when this performance ... takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants? Or to put it more simply, we can ask of the performance, any performance anywhere and at any time, *What's really going on here?*<sup>13</sup>

Small famously insists that music is not a thing, but a process – something *you do* – coining the neologism 'musicking' to describe it. Further, he proposed that:

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.<sup>14</sup>

To which he added that ‘participants’ includes anyone who contributes to making the performance happen’. But what Small goes on to say (and what is often forgotten) is critical both to his entire thesis and also to what I want to suggest could be a fruitful way of understanding early modern ensemble performances that takes us beyond traditional musicological concerns:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are commonly thought of as the being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as a metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be.<sup>15</sup>

It seems a reasonable expansion of Small’s list of participants to include not just the people taking part, but also *all* relevant ‘materials’ – animate and inanimate – in the New Materialist Jane Bennett’s words, the ‘vibrant matter’: objects (tables, chairs, books of music, wine glasses and so on); embodied actions (Small includes dancing, but we could add playing instruments, singing, drinking, exchanging looks, gesturing, embracing, and so on); environmental spaces and acoustics (domestic interiors, gardens, palaces, taverns, and so on); and of course, sounds (even if our only access to them now is through recreationist simulacra), all of which are critical to the dynamic network or ‘assemblage’ in any act of musicking, and which contribute to create its overall ‘musical meaning’ through the relationships established.

Let’s test this out on one last literary scene of sixteenth century musicking, definitely a work of fiction, but no less worth exploring for that. Tomaso Costo’s *Il fuggilozio* (first published in 1596) is in the tradition of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, addressed to ‘anyone who needs to escape damnable idleness’.<sup>16</sup> Eight gentlemen and two ladies go to visit Prior Ravaschiero at his magnificent palazzo in the Naples suburb of Posilipo, overlooking the sea. The prior is suffering from gout, so they decide to cheer him up, and for the next eight days they hang out together, exchanging hundreds of jokes, witty anecdotes, and pithy epigrams. At the end of each day, they relax by playing games, fishing and, what they all love doing most of all, making music. Each evening, other Neapolitan grandees come out in their boats to enjoy the air and to eavesdrop on the music. Thus, at the end of the first day:

Because boats had begun to appear, it was decided that they should bring their discussion to a close for the day and the viols be prepared in order to sing something beautiful. It was a good idea to tune up the instruments, as countless boats were already coming; ... [soon] three beautiful and highly decorated *filuche* (as these boats are called) arrived; in the first of them, accompanied by many other ladies, was the Duchess of Montalto, Donna Maria della Zerda, most noble and most important noblewoman ... and in the other two, many gentlemen of her household, with several musicians, who came playing and singing to give her pleasure.<sup>17</sup>

They are soon joined by other boats with numerous knights and gentlemen on board.

(Paul Bril, *Musicians in a boat*, 1598)

It then seemed to Ravaschiero, the good company having taken the instruments into their hands, that he would play and sing something beautiful: some madrigals were sung, and among them, the following was the most notable:

‘Esce splendor da gli occhi di mia Diva / Ch’or m’abbaglia, or m’alluma’ [Splendor flares from the eyes of my goddess / which now dazzles me, now lights me up].

[...]

This madrigal was excellently sung, at which all those Lords and Ladies made their boats stop and were very intent, taking no small delight. Better still, almost in competition, they got their musicians to sing the following madrigal:

‘Se gli atti, o Donna, le parole, e’l viso / D’angelo havete, e un’angelo sembrate [if, Lady, you have the actions, the words and the face of an angel, it is an angel you resemble]’.<sup>18</sup>

In a purely musicological investigation, we might, for example, extract from this passage the information that in turn of the century Naples, madrigals could be sung solo together with instruments, including viols; and also, that madrigals might be performed both by amateurs and professionals, at the same event. In fact, this is precisely how such texts are normally used by scholars of historical performance practice, although others have warned that ‘novelistic’ descriptions like this, just like images, do not necessarily represent actuality.<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, thinking about the totality of this musicking moment as Costo describes it in terms of the ‘extended materiality’ I am proposing, would involve noting not just the viols (and their tuning up) and the other, unspecified instruments played by the household musicians in the duchess’s three *faluche*, but also the acoustical make-up of the sounds emanating from the room in the palazzo through its open window and on the water beneath. No less (or more) material, is the intensity of the listeners’ attention and even the mechanics, technology and skill of handling and holding the boats still. If we

add in the social dynamics at play during this act of musicking, we note that its participants include not just the leisured dilettantes in the palazzo and their upper-class visitors, but also the Duchess of Montalto's servant musicians performing to order, and the oarsmen crewing the boats. We may well then conclude, picking up on Christopher Small's construction, that they did not necessarily bring into being a *single shared* 'model, or ... metaphor of ideal relationships' in this musicking. Clearly participants in a single act of musicking can have variegated conceptions of the meaning of what they are doing, depending on the physical, environmental and social circumstances.

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My final image is a small, hand-coloured, mass-produced print stuck into a 'Stammbuch' or 'friendship album' that belonged to Anton Weißenmayer, who became mayor of the town of Lauingen on the Danube in the early seventeenth century (Figure 5)



Figure 5. David Brentel, *Der Venediger Lust Bracht und Herligkeit* (1585), detail. Stammbuch of Anton Weißenmayer (1582–88). Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum

It's a kind of sixteenth century postcard, perhaps a memento of a visit, and depicts three finely dressed women and three men in a Venetian gondola, caught in an act of musicking. Once again, their relaxed demeanours and the coordination of their endeavours suggest that the experience is a mutually satisfying celebration of the relationships they are modelling. As Christopher Small says:

The fact that those who enjoy the event do not feel constrained but rather that they are behaving in a way that is natural and normal suggests once again that a musical performance, while it lasts, brings into existence relationships that model in metaphoric form those which they would like to see in the wider society of their everyday lives.<sup>20</sup>

Various material objects enabling this particular musicking are carefully depicted: the woman front left plays a lute and the man front right holds what could be a cittern; all seem to be singing, while the woman in the centre holds a book; the man to her right gestures with his left hand – perhaps directing the ensemble. On the table are a fringed cloth, plates and a knife ready for a picnic. When I zoom out to show the whole card (Figure 6), we can read the motto underneath ‘Der Venediger Lust Bracht und Herligkeit’ (The Venetian Love of Display and Magnificence). But what of the two gondoliers, or *traghettatori*?



Figure 6. David Brentel *Der Venediger Lust Bracht und Herligkeit* (1585). Stammbuch of Anton Weihemayer (1582–88). Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum

They are Africans, and as we now know from the work of the historian Kate Lowe, they are almost certainly freed slaves working as freelance gondoliers for hire by the hour (rather than members of the guild which controlled ferry traffic across the Grand Canal).<sup>21</sup> What is the nature of *their* participation in this musicking? And what is the significance of the raised arm gesture of the gondolier on the left which seems to mirror – coincidentally or not – the gesture of the man in the tall hat? Is he signalling his physical entrainment with their music, or is he maybe mocking his passengers in a private exchange with his mate? Do the gondoliers have any sense that they are

contributing to the six musicians' almost palpable shared <quote> 'model in metaphoric form [of] those relationships which they would like to see in the wider society of their everyday lives'?

I leave these questions open, and merely conclude by reiterating my proposal that we expand our field of exploration of the meaning of any 'immanent supra-audible contents in musical artefacts from the early modern past' beyond our usual narrow focus on what they might tell us about 'the music itself'. Rather, we should *always* begin by posing Christopher Small's core question: 'What's really going on here?' and consider the totality of the materiality of any instance of music-making. This consists not only of *all* the human participants, but also all relevant material components, including everything from notation (if used), the musical instruments and other physical objects, to gestures, sounds, actions, and interactions that make up the dynamic assemblage of relationships – the 'vibrant materiality'<sup>22</sup> – that constitutes the sociality of each act of musicking. Only then will we be in a position to reanimate and recontextualise 'music' not as something separate and complete in itself, but fully entangled in, and productive of, the fabric of history.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Franko and Annette Richards, 'Actualizing Absence: The Pastness of Performance,' in Franko and Richards, eds., *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Franko and Richards, 'Actualizing Absence', 5 (original emphases). Their reference is a paraphrase of Jacques Derrida's statement; 'A written sign, in the usual sense of the word, is therefore a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription, and which can give rise to an iteration both in the absence of and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it'. 'Signature Èvènement Contexte,' in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1972), trans. Alan Bass as *Margins of Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 317.

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Enquiry* 30/3 (2004): 505–36, 516.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Bergeron, 'Elite Books, Popular Readers, and the Curious Hundred-Year History of the *Liber Usualis*,' in Kate van Orden, ed., *Music and the Cultures of Print* (New York: Garland, 2000), 42. See also Scott Burnham, 'Theorists and "The Music Itself"', *Journal of Musicology* 15, no.3 (1997): 316–29.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Morely, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London: Peter Short, 1597), 1.

<sup>6</sup> For expanded discussion of these points, see Richard Wistreich, 'Music Books and Sociability', *Il Saggiatore Musicale*, 18 (2011): 230–46.

<sup>7</sup> Kerry McCarthy, 'Josquin in England: An Unexpected Sighting', *Early Music* 43/3 (2015): 449–54.

<sup>8</sup> Claudius Hollybande, *The French Schoolemaister* (London: William Howe, for Abraham Weale, 1573), 75–5.

<sup>9</sup> Hollybande, *The French Schoolemaister*, 126–8.

<sup>10</sup> Hollybande, *The French Schoolemaister*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Maria Artusi, *L'Artusi, overo Delle imperfettioni della moderna musica* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1600), fol. 39r–39v: 'Heri dopò ch' io lasciai Vostra Signoria verso la Piazza inuiatomi fui da alcuni Gentilhuomini, invitato à sentire certi Madrigali nuovi; così trasportato dalla amorevolezza de gl' amici, et dalla novità delle Compositioni, andassimo in casa del Signor Antonio Goretti Nobile Ferrarese, giovane virtuoso, e amatore de' Musici, quanto ogn' altro, che per ancora habbi conosciuto: là dove ritrovai il Signor Luzasco, e l' Signor Hippolito Fiorini, huomini segnalati, che con loro s' erano ridotti molti spiriti nobili, et della Musica intendenti: Furono Cantati una, et due volte; ma tacciuto il nome dell' Auttore: era la tessitura non ingrata, se bene come Vostra Signoria vedrà, introduce nuove Regole, nuovi modi, et nuova frase del dire, sono però aspri, et all' udito poco [-f.39v-] piaceuoli'.

<sup>1212</sup> Giovanni Maria Artusi, *Seconda parte dell'Artusi overo Delle imperfettioni della moderna musica* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1603), p. 10: 'sempre sono, & saranno aspre, crude, dure, & insoportabili all'udito. Et quando

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sarà quella cantilena fuori delle mani di così fatti Cantori, bisogna che sia, & appaia tale, perché in somma ella è tale'.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan, 1998), 10 (original emphasis).

<sup>14</sup> Small, *Musicking*, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Small, *Musicking*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Il Fuggilozio di Tomaso Costo Diviso in otto griornate...* (Naples: G. I. Carlin and A. Pace / repr. Venice: Barezzi Barezzi, 1600, fol. A5r. 'ciascuno il dannosissim' ozio doversi fuggire'.

<sup>17</sup> Costo, *Il Fuggilozio*, 67. 'Ma perché erano cominciate a comparir delle barche, fu concluso, che per quel dì si facesse punto al ragionate, e si mettesse a ordine le viole per cantar qualche cosa di bello. Si pensò buona pezza ad accordar quegli stromenti, ond'erano già venute infinite barche; ... Giunte le tre faluche (così dette quelle barche), nella prima d'esse venuta, accompagnata da molte altre Signore, la Duchessa di Montalto Donna Maria della Zerda, Signore nobilissima, e principalissima, che allora per indisposizione stanziava al buon' aere di Chiaia, e nell' altre due molti gentilhuomini suoi creati, con alquanti musici, che venivan [sic] sonando, e cantando per darle piacere'.

<sup>18</sup> Costo, *Il Fuggilozio*, 67–9. 'Parve allora al Ravaschiero, ed alla bella brigata, che dato di mano a gli stromenti si sonasse, e cantasse qualche cosa di bello: furon cantati alcuni Madrigali, e fra gli altri fu il più notabile questo, che segue: 'Esce splendor da gli occhi di mia Diva / Ch'or m'abbaglia, or m'alluma" ... Fu questo Madrigale eccellentemente cantato, a che tutti que' Signori e Signore, fatte fermar le barche, stettero intentissimi, e n'ebbero non picciolo diletto, anzi fecero, che quei lor musici quasi a gara di questi cantassero il seguente Madrig: "Se gli atti, o Donna, le parole, e'l viso / D'angelo havete, e un'angelo sembrate"'.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Cathy Ann Elias, 'Musical Performance in 16th-Century Italian Literature: Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*', *Early Music* 17 (1989): 161–73; Maria Giovanna Miggiani and Piermario Vesco, "'Al suono d'una suave viola": convenzione letteraria e pratica musicale in ambienti accademici veneziani di metà Cinquecento', *Recercare* 5 (1993): 5–32.

<sup>20</sup> Small, *Musicking*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Kate Lowe, 'Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice', *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): 412–52, at 438.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vital Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), viii.