

Alongside articles, the journal also publishes a number of 'fifth columns' – short and provocative pieces that might either frame/reference a number of the articles in the volume or raise issues relating to the scope and terms of musicology as a discipline. These 'fifth columns' should not be seen as 'editorials'

Musicology, Torture, Repair

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When I was invited to contribute this issue's Fifth Column, I hesitated – thinking that if there was one thing I wanted never to do again, it was to meditate publicly on the nature of musicology, much less the possibility for radical musicologies. But then I thought that I might use this space to draw attention to the use of music as torture, and to reflect publicly on the relationship of my (admittedly intermittent) research on this subject to our discipline. So I shall. I begin by acknowledging, in response to one on-line critic, that this kind of work may *not* be musicology, because current practices of using music as torture all but shatter the fantasies about 'music' on which our musicologies have been based. I go on to argue that the shattering of those fantasies reaches into the subjectivities of we who have chosen to make 'music' central to our lives, and to suggest that the narcissistic wounds wrought by those personal shatterings impel some of us, at least, to public protest against musical torture. I end with a reflection inspired by rereading an essay by Eve Sedgwick in the full flush of what I call 'the Obama moment' – suggesting that new -ologies of human acoustical practices might be pieced together from the shards of 'music', 'musicology' and musical subjectivities that thinking about torture leaves behind.

1. 'Yes, but is this musicology?'

I was, at first, surprised by how often I was asked this question in 2006 and 2007, when I took advantage of a sabbatical leave to bend my scholarly skills toward a politically useful end. Surprised and confused, since I approached the subject as taxonomically as I could (in admittedly mischievous homage to Guido Adler), and with the ferocity of an unrepentant archive rat keen to find and corroborate every conceivable source. Yet I have come to understand that regardless of my epistemological approaches to the subject, the acoustical practices in detention camps so challenge our discipline's beliefs about music that my work might *not* be musicology after all.¹

First, it is not at all clear that the music aimed at prisoners in detention camps has functioned as *music*. Rather, it has more often functioned as *sheer sound* with

which to assault a prisoner's sense of hearing; to 'mask' or disrupt a prisoner's capacity to sustain an independent thought; to disrupt a prisoner's sense of temporality (both in terms of how much time had passed and in terms of the predictability of temporal units); to undermine a prisoner's ability to sustain somatic practices of prayer (both through behaviour at the hours of prayer and through abstinence from musical experiences considered sinful); and to bombard the prisoner's body (skin, nerves and bones) with acoustical energy.

Yet, whether the sounds used in detentions camps functioned as music or not, among the most horrifying aspects of these practices is the degradation of the thing we call 'music'. We in the so-called West have long since come to mean by the word 'music' an acoustical medium that expresses the human creativity, intelligence and emotional depth that, we think, almost lifts our animal selves to equality with the gods. When we contemplate how 'music' has been used in the detention camps of contemporary wars, we find this meaning stripped away. We are forced, instead, to contemplate 'music' as an acoustical medium for evil. The thing we have revered for an ineffability to which we attribute moral and ethical value is revealed as morally and ethically neutral – as just another tool in human beings' blood-stained hands. This feels like the stripping away of a soul from a body, and therefore like some kind of violent, violating death. It is, therefore, as horrifying *for us* as it is for its obviously intended victims (though not as painful), tearing away parts of the collective subjectivity – the culture – we have for so long taken for granted, and subsumed under the heading of 'Western values'.

Further, and in large part because the music so often functions as sheer sound, the 'meaning' of individual musical texts is not relevant, or only occasionally relevant. Thus, the hermeneutic strain of musicology, so fashionable in recent years and so closely associated with so-called 'new musicology,' proves all but impotent as a means to analyse the phenomenon. We are, therefore, forced to confront the extremely unwelcome possibility that 'new musicology' cannot address nor illuminate very well what is surely one of the most striking musical phenomena of our time. Paralysed, we find it hard even to imagine what we might usefully say, as musicologists, about a rapidly globalised musical practice that is widely perceived to be an artefact of 'Western culture,' but that fills us with multi-layered horror.

Nor can we turn for help to the older musicologies from which the new ones have derived. Studying the use of music as a means of torture cannot be reconciled to Guido Adler's project of tracing human genius in its evolution, so as to discern the universal principles of art. Nor can we study this use of music from inside the fantasy world made of (and by) 'music lovers' in modernity—the fantasy that imagines 'music' as a means to attain positive, blissful transcendence; music as a means to reaffirm one's class (and raced? and gendered?) position through participation in 'ineffable', intellectual or emotional experience. We cannot study music-as-torture from the fantasy world that imagines 'music' as an audible consumable commodity. We cannot study it for signs of subcultural resistance. As scholars we approach the *aporia* toward which former Guantánamo detainee Ruhul

Ahmed gestured when he said about his experience

[...] after a while you don't hear the lyrics, all you hear is heavy, heavy banging, that's all you hear. Um, you can't concentrate on the drums, or what the person's saying, all you hear is just loud shouting, loud banging, like metal clashing against metal. That's all it sounds like. *It doesn't sound like music at all.*² (italics added)

To think about the many different, site-specific ways that music is used in detention camps is to think about a sonic culture that is dominated by electronically reproduced sounds. Now dominating musical behaviours in the so-called developed world, this culture allows most residents of that world to indulge in the extreme privatisation of musical experience, and of musicality. There is no longer any need to find public spaces in which to make or to hear music, no need to seek sociality for the sake of having acoustically rich experiences, no need to negotiate our musical likes and dislikes with our neighbours. Strangely, this kind of radically privatised musical experience now fills the space occupied by novel-reading in the nineteenth century. Listening, not reading, is our way of withdrawing from those around and next to us, retreating into fantasy worlds of our own choosing. Although we have seen it coming for many decades, the new sonic culture has radically and irrevocably altered what we might mean by the word 'music': never again can it mean what it meant for our grandparents; only fragments of the old meaning remain. 7

Mp3 players focus the radical privatisation of 'music' that we have come so to cherish right down to the ears, into the ears, inside the ears. Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan rewire their helmets so as to take advantage of this most drastic privatisation, rewiring their helmets so as to have a music channel flowing into one ear and the channel bearing their officers' commands into the other.³ Thus, they have access to a privacy made of personal musical choices even in a crowded Humvee, even as they hear the warnings and orders that signal danger ahead. Even in the moment of explosion. In the moment when death meets the auditory bliss in your left ear. Nothing could be more private. 8

It is these very technologies of musical privatisation that have enabled our extremely flexible capacity to use the amplified sound of any soldier's mp3 player, wired through powerful speakers, against individual prisoners' whole bodies – not just their ears. Such amplified sounds project an invisible presence that irresistibly occupies a space – a threatening ship at sea, a city like Fallujah before the November 2004 assault, a prison's holding cells – before the invading troops roll in. The superstate uses amplified sound from any soldier's private iPod to occupy enemies' thoughts, or erase those thoughts, and thus to deny enemies the right to privacy. To silence the capacity for intelligible speech; to foreclose the possibility of either silent or spoken prayer, or of solidarity with others; and yet to make prisoners long for access to speech – for the ability to contribute to the acoustical 9

environment over which they have had, for so long, no control, with the presumably truthful revelations of compulsive talk.

That is, we use the new technologies of the private to produce extremely dystopic ways of denying others' right to privacy, and to create a dystopic public from which no one with hearing (or with resonating bones) can escape. Saturated with the products of US commercial industry – the popular musics on guards' and interrogators' iPods – this dystopic public space is created in the image of the US's national fantasy that our commercial products will occupy the globe. It is as if the fantasy of global domination symbolised by Coca-Cola's international success during the Cold War has been fused, on the one hand, to the cultural warfare waged by Dizzy Gillespie's State Department tours, and on the other to the military doctrine of 'shock and awe'.⁴ 10

This is not a territory for which 'musicology' prepared me. And yet, sometimes the manipulation of sound *as sound* in detention centres seems to have effects that can be understood to be musical. For example, according to released prisoner Donald Vance, in the section for high-value detainees at Baghdad's Camp Cropper, the music that blared all day, every day through the block-and-concrete corridors would unpredictably 'jump' between styles.⁵ Prisoners could not settle in to resist, say, the sonically vivid rage of songs by Nine Inch Nails, or the maddening repetitions of songs like Queen's 'We Are the Champions', for the one would suddenly interrupt the other, preventing entrainment and therefore preventing resistance. Yet the ruptures between styles seem to me to have produced something as much as they prevented something. They produced something like the manipulation of affect by the manipulation of style across time: this is a something that cries out to be thought, and to be analysed, as music, as a musical effect. Camp Cropper, then, is a place where the concerns of acoustemology (a discipline born in the same century that gave rise to the new sonic culture) and those of musicology (born in the nineteenth century's fascination with 'music') meet. 11

2. Speech from the Shattering

It seems to me that even if it leads us to places like Ruhai Ahmed's torture cell, where music is not 'music' at all, to study the use of music in contemporary detention and interrogation is to use some of the techniques of musicology in a way that has political consequences, albeit limited ones. Every word spoken or written about this practice enhances public awareness about late modernity's newest forms of torture, and every word increases the size of the group who vehemently object. 12

No speech about the use of music as torture has been more controversial than the institutional speech of three US-based professional societies devoted to the study of music. As readers will surely know, in the course of 2007-2008 the boards of the Society for Ethnomusicology, the Society for American Music, and the American Musicological Society passed differently worded resolutions opposing the use of 13

music as torture. Some critics have dismissed these resolutions as ineffectual vainglory, 'feel good' gestures that served only to substitute public sanctimony for real political action.

I want to acknowledge here an element of narcissism that is present in my own, 14
personal reaction to the use of music as torture – and, I suspect in the reactions of
many people, musicians and not, who have learned about it from someone's
musicological speech. I have felt compelled to speak against musical torture as a
musicologist because I have a strong conviction that music is somehow 'our stuff',
and therefore our special responsibility. What do I mean by 'our stuff?' I mean that
we who are musicians and scholars of music have chosen by years (even decades)
of practice, playing, listening, writing, to make 'music' – whatever we understand by
that word – intrinsic to our very selves (to our subjectivities, self-images and social
identities). The effect of that choice over time is that we have mutually constitutive
relations with 'music,' relations that we renew with our every musical act. As a
result, I think, some of us feel directly involved in the moment of torture, and *not*
only because we can imagine more vividly than most what it would be like to be
forced to listen to unwanted music; forced to respond to it cognitively, affectively,
physically, through whatever our cultural habits might be; battered in every possible
register of human perception until we reached a moment when it would not 'sound
like music at all.' We feel directly involved because something we have chosen to
make part of our selves – music – has been weaponised, used to harm others, and
even, in the course of that use on prisoners like Ruhai Ahmed, to be damaged
beyond recognition as the thing it was. As the thing we so loved that we made it
part of our selves. However dimly, we are aware that we, too, are harmed, and not
only because as citizens we are unwitting accomplices to the torture inflicted by the
state in our name, not only because we feel that a part of ourselves has been used
to torture. Insofar as we have chosen to have mutually constitutive relations with
the thing that batters a person until it is, itself, destroyed, a psychologically real
part of our selves is rendered unrecognisable, destroyed. Both 'music' and the part
of us that has been made out of our relationship with 'music' shatters like glass.

How could we not speak out, as musicians, if only in symbolic protest? (When did 15
we, as musicians, begin to despise the symbolic?) Our lives (as well as our cultural
notions of 'music', as well as the lives of torture's targets) are at stake. Even if it is
ignobly true that some such narcissistic response has, for some of us, been the
spark that ignited a wider moral and political distress, that distress has, in turn,
provoked us to speech that has slowly spread and fuelled the smouldering fires of
outrage. Those fires now burn in many a classroom, and therefore spread to many
a dorm room, apartment or hangout. They burn on many a website, perhaps
especially those which have objected to the narcissistic element behind
professional societies' resolutions. They cannot help but produce political
awareness, and, eventually, they will produce political effects.

3. Stumbling Toward the Reparative

Although I had accepted the challenge of writing this Column about a month before, I first found time to gather my thoughts on the very day Barack Obama was inaugurated as the United States' forty-fourth president. In a new political moment, when my country finds itself awakening from several overlapping national nightmares (spitting up 'the bitter swill of slavery and segregation' no less than the bitter pill of having our nation disgraced by its public practice of torture), on the very day that our new President ordered Guantánamo and the dark prisons closed, I found myself obliged by a student to re-read Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 2004 essay 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading'.⁶ The result was that my mind went all aswirl. 16

Aswirl because so much of what I have always known, and known how to do, seems on the cusp of profound epistemic and institutional change. I am swept up in a radical, reparatory, joyous moment, after a lifetime of deepening paranoia that has substituted controlling, unmasking, defensively deciphering knowledge for joy. As if the dark place to which Carolyn Abbate's brilliantly provocative essay 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?' withdrew in 2004 had suddenly burst open to release the promise of light (not death) and love (not fear) in a new world that will succeed the often bitter decades of musicological hermeneutics and critique that have been my scholarly adulthood.⁷ 17

In her essay, Sedgwick used the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein to elaborate a distinction between two positions from which we might respond to the world at the turn of this new century – positions Sedgwick (following Klein) calls 'paranoid' and 'reparative'. 18

For Klein's infant or adult, the paranoid position – understandably marked by hatred, envy, and anxiety – is a position of terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that one defensively projects into, carves out of, and ingests from the world around one. By contrast, the depressive position is an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting: this is the position from which it is possible in turn to use one's own resources to assemble or 'repair' the murderous part-objects into something like a whole – though, I would emphasise, *not necessarily like any preexisting whole*. Once assembled to one's own specifications, the more satisfying object is available both to be identified with and to offer one nourishment and comfort in turn. Among Klein's names for the reparative process is love.⁸

Sedgwick went on to argue that the critical practices that result from the paranoid position are infused with negative affect. They aim to forestall pain by anticipating it in various ways, including the articulation of 'strong theory' that has wide-ranging explanatory power. As a result of the aim behind paranoid critical practices, they 19

are closely linked to hermeneutics. The paranoid, she showed, believes in the efficacy of knowledge, exposure and demystification. By contrast, the critical practices that result from the reparative position aim to toward 'a sustained *seeking of pleasure*.'⁹ Reparative critical practices produce weak theory with only locally applicable explanatory power, and they are easy to dismiss (from a paranoid position) as 'merely aesthetic' or 'merely reformist'.¹⁰ And yet, Sedgwick concludes, the reparative is 'no less realistic, no less attached to a project of survival, and neither less nor more delusional or fantasmatic' than the paranoid. Unlike the paranoid, however, it leads us toward moments when joy (not 'gotcha!') can be a guarantor of truth, when practices that are weak, sappy or anti-intellectual may bespeak the spiritually and psychologically healthy reclamation of sustaining pleasure from a world that may not have intended to sustain us.

If the reparative is a reconstruction of shattered objects so that they can bring us pleasure, and if the reparative's affect is love – then a reparative musicology (a post-Obama musicology?) would restore love for music; would reconstruct musical experiences so that we could love them (which is more than to appreciate them, more than to understand their functions, more than to feel their performative power or their saturation, with social, political, economic forces.) This was, I think, the work toward which several alternative musicologies (especially queer ones) aspired in the last decade. 20

Yet I, for one, have stumbled as I tried to imagine a reparative musicology, because I am a person of a certain age, raised in a time and place in which the paranoid was not just a psychological precondition to maturity through which all children passed, but the position in which adults were encouraged to dwell forever. Raised to duck and cover, raised to fear our own premature deaths in nuclear war, raised to fear and hate a vast conspiracy (be it communist or right-wing, fundamentalist or FemiNazi), we were raised to stay in the paranoid for our own safety. We became geniuses of protest and strong theory, of deconstruction and critique, unable to celebrate (or even to admit) when our labours bore the sweet fruit of love. 21

Nothing could be more paranoid (or less reparative) than my torture project. Accusatory in its taxonomies, brimming with conscious and unconscious projections of fear and rage toward practices motivated by exactly those affects, and so obviously premised on the paranoid's belief in the power of exposure and demystification, it is the ultimate in paranoid musicology. I am intrigued that, deeply paranoid as it is, this is a project in which the epistemological premises and techniques of both 'old' and 'new' musicologies can comfortably converge, and in their convergence contribute to more self-evidently political projects like the work of Reprieve, Cageprisoners, Amnesty International, and so on.¹¹ 22

However perversely reconciling of disciplinary squabbles and however politically useful such a convergence of old and new musicologies might be, the entrapment of this project in the paranoid seems to me a dangerously un-radical thing. By definition it is only from a reparative position that one could repair the shattering of 23

collective and individual, public and private musical subjectivities, only from the reparative position that one could create from the shards of our disillusionment new wholes. It seems to me imperative to find a way to turn the conundrums exposed by this research toward a reparative project – perhaps even one that can contribute to an -ology of humanly-designed acoustical experience that would better suit the musics and musical subjectivities of our time.

Sedgwick's essay implies that the ability to hold both paranoid and reparative positions, as appropriate, characterises psychological and spiritual health. So it is, I think with my torture project. However great the promise of the Obama moment, there is still a need for appropriately paranoid vigilance in response to the 'wiggle room' left by the President's executive orders on torture, for appropriately paranoid interrogations into the long history of acoustical violence, appropriately paranoid interrogations of the extent to which the thoughts and speech of ordinary people are 'masked' every day by often-unavoidable manipulations of our acoustical environments. Yet a reparative position beckons, one that can recuperate Ruhai Ahmed's experience of music's dissolution into sheer sound to Carolyn Abbate's vividly drastic hearing of Ben Heppner's vocal crack, to the newest research in acoustics, cognitive science and philosophy. A reparative that might piece together from these shards of a torture-shattered world new ways to think humanly organised acoustical experience, in relation to human needs to know ourselves in time, space, embodiment, relationality and in relation to our vibrating world. 'Not necessarily like any previously existing whole', these ways might lead to new sonics and a new -ologies 'available both to be identified with and to offer [...] nourishment and comfort in turn'.¹²

Notes

¹ For an overview of acoustical practices in 'war-on-terror' detention camps, see my "'You are in a place out of the world": Music in the Detention Camps of the "Global War on Terror"', *Journal of the Society for American Music*, Vol. 2 (2008), 1-27.

² Ahmed's full interview is available on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EullAiFWQc>.

³ I am grateful to my colleague J. Martin Daughtry for sharing this information from his ongoing ethnography of listening practices in Baghdad during the Iraq war.

⁴ For an introduction to the use of jazz in the cultural Cold War, see Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World. Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵ Donald Vance, responses to e-mail questionnaire, December 29, 2006.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,' in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 123-151. I am grateful to Emily Wilbourne for first pointing me to this essay, to Margaret McFadden for several close readings of it, and to Clara Latham for returning it to my attention.

⁷ Carolyn Abbate, 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?' *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2004), 505-536.

⁸ Sedgwick, 128.

⁹ Sedgwick, 137, italics original.

¹⁰ Sedgwick, 144.

¹¹ Founded by human rights attorney Clive Stafford Smith in 1999, Reprieve is a non-profit organisation dedicated to using the law to support the rights of prisoners around the world Its website (www.reprieve.org) currently includes a link to www.zerodb.org, a project protesting the use of music as a

form of torture. Cageprisoners (www.cageprisoners.com) is a UK-based organisation that advocates especially for Muslim prisoners detained worldwide in the so-called 'war on terror.'

¹² Sedgwick, 128.

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