“Singing I Go Along Life’s Road”: A Musician’s Grapple with Theory and Surrender to Practice

by

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ABSTRACT

I would like the reader to accept the word "grapple" as the key piece of the title of this thesis, or at least as the most succinct and accurate descriptor for what it is and what it does. It applies reflection and storytelling to lay bare a research process that became the topic of the research project.

Throughout the course of the work, I came to realize that as a musician I wanted to understand exactly what music means to me, why and how it is unequivocally part of "who I am," and why that fact has caused me so much pain. As a musician, I wanted an answer to this question so that it might put an end to my pain. (And it has.) As a music scholar I wanted to find an answer to the question in academic literature, and the surprising places where I found promise led me to the argument that a fruitful and rich understanding of "what music even is" can be found in understandings about reality that are fundamentally relational, in which the universe is made up of dynamic relationships that move through time.

But having come to this argument is not the point, because it is not new; I am not saying anything new. Now that I have the understanding I have come to have, I recognize it everywhere—particularly in the embodied understanding of my fellow musicians, and of countless other people who know how to live musically, whether they would describe it in those terms or (most commonly) not. If there is value to be found in this thesis, it is less in its conclusions or argument than in its story.

THE REQUIRED PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Dana Wylie. The research projects, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A Trace of Musical Self-hood: Conversations with musicians about identity,” No. Pro00061876, February 3, 2016, and Project Name “The Musical Life of a Member of England’s Horsedrawn Traveller Community,” No. Pro00056089, April 7, 2015.

For Chris Wittman—
on a level the words can't get to, you are in and through and all over this thing.

After you climb up the ladder of time, the Lord God is near
Face to face in the vastness of space, your words disappear
And you feel like swimming in an ocean of love, and the current is strong
But all that remains when you try to explain is a fragment of song.
— Paul Simon, "The Afterlife"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm sure it's common, upon finishing a work like this, to feel like anything short of thanking everyone you've ever met in your life would be inadequate. That's how I feel. So I will try to keep it simple. My deep and enduring gratitude goes out to Gareth Austin, Bob Tildesley, Paul Mayer, Matt Blackie, Lindsay Woolgar, Terry Morrison, and Ben Sures—friends and peers who generously gave their time and honestly shared their experiences for the benefit of my own understanding, and this thesis. I am similarly grateful to my supervisors: to David Gramit, for expertly guiding and supporting this work in its early stages, and whose faith and open-mindedness were indispensable; to Patrick Nickleson, for reflecting my ideas back to me from a perspective that got me excited about the work all over again; and to Julia Byl, for generously taking the reins and challenging me to carry this to the line with a strong a finish as possible. Thanks also to Scott Smallwood for serving on the exam committee, and to Brian Fauteux for chairing. Really, I'd be remiss not to thank everyone from whom I took classes in the Department of Music for the duration of my undergraduate and graduate studies—Michael Frishkopf, Regula Qureshi, Federico Spinetti, Brenda Dalen, Mary Ingraham, Christina Gier, Henry Klumpenhouwer, and Maryam Moshaver—for shaping a very rich, exciting, and healing time for me. Thanks to my kids, Anna and Grayson, for being music too. Thanks to Andie Palmer for Tim Ingold. And finally, thanks ever and always to Carl Urion, for his patience, kindness, wisdom, and friendship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEGINNING AT THE END—THE REAL PREFACE (SEPTEMBER 2017)

This thesis must be told as a story. Or, in any case, it is going to be. I believe it has to be told as a story because it has no topic, or rather, its topic is nothing other than the research journey that has led me to tentatively begin to type these words; put yet another way, the topic of this thesis is nothing other than the story of the path to its own creation. This may sound impossibly and/or pointlessly circular, but actually it is more of a meander: a winding, curious, and somewhat messy path through a series of research questions, conversations, conundrums, musings, and a body of literature diverse enough that it is only really a "body" insofar as it constitutes the literature that I fortuitously (and often accidentally) engaged with and struggled with as I wended my way on this circuitous path.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold—one of the scholars whose work I feel most fortunate to have come across in this journey—draws an apt distinction between sketch maps and cartographic maps, the latter resembling, and indeed deriving from, a contemporary Western approach to knowledge integration and, in my view, research dissemination. A cartographic map circumscribes a particular territory and provides a detailed illustration of what exists—statically and permanently, it would have us believe—within that territory. Sketch maps, however, "are not generally surrounded by frames or borders":

> The map makes no claim to represent a certain territory, or to mark the spatial locations of features included within its frontiers. What count are the lines, not the spaces around them. Just as the country through which the wayfarer passes is composed of the meshwork of paths of travel, so the sketch map consists—no more and no less—of the lines that make it up. They are drawn *along*, in the evolution of a gesture, rather than *across* the surfaces on which they are traced.[1] (emphasis in original)

[1] Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 84–5.

Rather than a study of a bounded and defined topic, this thesis can and should be read as a sketch map of a particular and unique journey (or more accurately, a fragment of the journey of my own life), the destination (or current resting point) of which is simply a question, a question that not-accidentally parallels the structure of this thesis: what could it mean to study music from the basis of what Ingold calls an ontology of the line? Put another way, what could we come to understand about what music is, what it does, what it means to humans if we come at it through an ontological orientation that is based in and on relationships, rather than subjects and objects—an understanding of reality as nothing more or less than a meshwork of iterations of one process, i.e. life itself?

I of course have no intention of attempting to fully or even partially answer this question, though I will engage with it on at least two levels. The first is best described by a honing of the question to a more specific question, in a way that makes it marginally more possible to actually engage with: what does music mean to me in this particular place and time? In order to engage with *this* question, I have found it necessary to engage with the daunting if ever-present question of what we mean by the term "music," a word of which we ask far too much, in terms of what it is meant to encompass. Again, my goal is not to attempt to answer such a large and baffling question—indeed, the question was what was waiting for me at the *end* of this particular re-search journey—but simply to share whatever insights I—a unique individual led unapologetically by my own passions, priorities, and biases—have managed to stumble upon while carving a searching path through its jungle.

Ultimately, the reason that this thesis must be told like a story, or drawn like a sketch map, is because I seek to propose a way of studying music's meaning for people that entails a different sort of knowledge-seeking process than is generally undertaken in music scholarship, and really, a different way of understanding reality. If I have an argument to make, it is this: I believe there is a fundamental aspect of music's meaning for human beings that cannot possibly be found in the study of subjects' interactions with bounded musical objects, whether those objects are "works," songs, CDs, mp3s, musical events, moments of "musicking," or entire musical cultures. Even if it is largely true that, as David Toop put it, "the objectification of sound was an overwhelmingly successful twentieth-century project,"[2] it is not *entirely* true; there will always be something of sound and music that defies objectification, and therefore it can only be a worthwhile undertaking to dive into, rather than skirt, its inescapable temporality, ephemerality, relationality, and contingence on immediate context. Ultimately I am arguing that music itself has a kinship with sketch maps, which though they can be (and often are) concrete objects—lines drawn on a piece of paper, for example—they as often are characterized by impermanence or even ephemerality—lines drawn in the sand, or in the air by a gesturing hand. To draw again from Ingold, the line of inquiry of a study like this "must consist not of the relations *between* organisms and their external environments, but of the relations *along* their severally enmeshed ways of life."[3] As begins the old gospel hymn, "Singing, I go along life's road."

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[2] David Toop, "Each Echoing Opening: Each Muffled Closure," in *Sound Studies*, ed. Michael Bull (London: Routledge, 2013): 35.

[3] Ingold, *Lines*, 103.

ADDENDUM TO THE PREFACE (NOVEMBER 2023)

Re-reading this preface several years after I wrote it, I am surprised and pleased at how accurately it reflects my goals and priorities for, and my orientation in, this thesis project as I return now to complete it. (The first half of this thesis will nest sections of commentary made in 2023/24 on the work I did in 2016 into that original unfinished draft.) Very soon after I wrote the portion of this paper that you have begun reading, and that you will continue to read below, I withdrew from my MA program and left my thesis unfinished. The reasons for this were largely personal and practical—i.e. my circumstances at the time simply did not make available to me the time and other resources I required to finish it—but there was also an undeniable sense that my research project had defeated me, at least for a time. I had followed my passions and the questions that arose from them so far off the path I had originally set off on that I found myself lost and stranded and wanting out of the woods.

When I dropped out, I was by no means sure that I would return to complete the project at some point, but certainly hadn't discounted the idea. And here I am. It occurs to me now that if the purpose of the above preface is to let you know that you are about to be told a story rather than presented with an argument, then *this* section can and should serve as an introduction to the story, or perhaps a table of contents in narrative form. I'll start with the trajectory in broad strokes: I began with a question about musical practice and marginality—about the ways in which dedication to musical practice (particularly for one's livelihood) inherently places one at the margins of contemporary society—which I sought to pursue in an individual case study. I was then thrown a curve ball that led me down the garden path of "identity." Better put, I found myself in the weeds of "identity" as I became concerned with struggles and complications I had

both observed and experienced around the notion of identifying as a musician. (Marginality was of course still a present and relevant factor here.) Happily, I emerged from these weeds relatively unscratched and found myself in the midst of a more fundamentally philosophical concern about music, musical practice, and being human. I discovered that much of the literature in music's various disciplines that reached into this concern—which is to say, the literature I found myself engaged with as I began to ask myself, "What is it about music as a way of being who one is, why is that so important to me, and why has it caused me so much pain?"—didn't reach quite as far as I wanted it to. My struggle to articulate why I felt this way provided something of a framework for my exploration of this concern, difficult as it was to define it.

My grapple with the literature is implicitly threaded through what is now down on these pages, though you won't hear from that literature to the extent that, or in the same way as, you'll hear from the non-music scholars whose work stoked the fire in my belly. (From the benefit of my current vantage point I'd like to call it a "dance," but "grapple" is admittedly a more accurate descriptor for how I moved through the process.) In them, you will meet my musician friend Gaz, who for a decade lived as a Horsedrawn Traveller in England's West Country and was the subject of the thesis I thought I was writing about music and marginality. You will meet some of my musical peers in and around Edmonton, Alberta, who individually and collectively formed a sounding board for my grapple by generously and forthrightly sharing experiences of their lives as musicians, past and present, and by reflecting on my questions. It was their honesty and insight that helped me realize that it wasn't really identity that we were talking about. And you will be let in on some of my own experiences, as a musician and as a graduate student—those that have most directly led me to where I am now, as regards the intellectual orientation of this work.

Some of what you have read and will read was written several years ago, when I was younger than I am now and was immersed in academia—in academic pursuits and "Academese"—trying to figure out where and how my own deep "kens" and "yens" might fit into that world, and in a rather immature stage of attempting to talk that talk and walk that walk. But much of what you will read was written over the last few months, by someone who is not actively participating, nor pursuing a career, in the academy, and is fairly firmly entrenched in middle-age—a time of life which for me is characterized by an overriding desire to trim the fat from pursuits, interactions, and communication. This is to say that you may perceive an inconsistency of voice through various portions of this work, a point that I am simply noting, because it would be both difficult and disingenuous to try to remedy it.

Throughout, I will highlight the work of Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero on identity, relationality, and storytelling, Tim Ingold's (already-cited) explorations of an ontology of meshwork, relationship, and process, and Hannah Arendt's assertions of the space of "the political" as an irremediably "in-between" space, and the implications of this understanding on creativity and the lives of artists. Part of the grapple you will witness in these pages consists of my attempts to understand and to articulate why I believe these scholars come closer to providing me a way to intellectualize my embodied knowledge about music's meaning—and practice in my own life—than any scholarship I have come across that deals directly with music.[4]

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[4] I should clarify that I am not arguing that there is no musicological or ethnomusicological literature that has adequately addressed the issues I will discuss through this paper. I don't know that, and in any case, for me it is not a matter of adequacy. I wish to simply note that the music literature I came across as my question formed (and fell apart and re-formed) often helped shape my thinking in negative terms, as well as positive, particularly as I brought it into dialogue with the work of Ingold, and other scholars outside of music. This is simply what happened.

As regards that musical scholarship, later on you'll read a bit about how I interacted with the work of Thomas Turino, but I will place Christopher Small's important concept of "musicking" right up here at the front. Small's argument that music is always a process and a performance, which occurs in and for a particular length of time and consists as a set of relationships at it base, was indispensable to me as I came into an awareness of my desire to get around the objectification that inevitably occurs whenever one studies anything.[5] It is not my understanding that Small took any issue with objectification in general, or with the idea of studying texts, an idea that I was eventually to take issue with rather strongly. Still, his assertion that to study an instance of musicking rather than a piece of music allows one to acknowledge the living, breathing, throbbing, vibrating, and dynamic nature of any musical happening got me a good way down my road of inquiry.

The point at which I came up against the limits of musicking got me even further down the road, as I experienced a fruitful frustration with the term as a gerund—i.e. where the verb is turned back into a noun. This frustration helped me articulate that I wanted to find a way to stay in, and speak directly from, the processes and relationships, from the never-ending and "nothing but" nature of those processes and relationships. To foreshadow, I was to find a way to stay in the realm of the verb in Ingold's concept of "humaning," an obvious parallel to musicking, and yet not, because it evades of the possibility of being turned into a gerund.[6]

Since the meat of this work consists of turning points in my thinking, I'd like to make note of two memories of happenings that catalyzed the most profound of these turning points. I will

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[5] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 218.

[6] Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines* (New York, Routledge, 2015), 115–8.

share one of those now, and the other a bit later. The story of this thesis will inevitably contain several smaller stories, and here is the first: through 2014 and 2015 I had the good fortune of working as a research assistant for Dr. Carl Urion on a project on Western Canadian gospel music, which he was undertaking as part of a fellowship for folkwaysAlive! (now the Sound Studies Institute). I attended several gospel music events with Carl as part of this work, one of which was a Gospel Jamboree held in a small conference room at the Sands Hotel on Fort Road, here in Edmonton, at which the majority of the musicians and participants were Indigenous. It was the first of this type of event I had ever attended, and much about it was striking. My main observations, put bluntly, were that the sound system was not very good and nor was the sound person, that the level of musicianship of the acts performing on the small platform stage was for the most part not very high—there were a few stand-out exceptions to this—and that the wedding-style lighting rig that the A/V company had set up (and which was being used in addition to the room's fluorescent lighting fixtures) was in my view not doing any favours to the event's atmosphere. I should note that I knew even at the time, thanks to Carl's wisdom and patience in communication and his expertly subtle means of preparing me for the experience, that if I could manage to bypass my multiple professional and cultural alarm bells I would be able to understand and witness that under it all something very real and rooted was going on. If memory serves me, the way I shared my observations with Carl in the moment was to say that I felt like the setting and infrastructure of the event seemed to be working against whatever that "real thing" was. That infrastructure, of course, was simply the standard infrastructure for musical performance in this part of the world—a stage at one end of the room, audience seating facing the stage, an amplification system and all the accompanying "gear" (microphones, cables, guitar

amps, speakers, etc.). My feeling was that that infrastructure was getting in the way rather than facilitating, which is something I have experienced often enough myself, as a performer.

After a few hours during which a large number of musical groups (mostly duos and trios) performed short sets of two or three songs, a Dene pastor from Hay River named Alex Sunrise took the stage to deliver a sermon. He talked for a quite a while, maybe forty-five minutes, and his sermon was unlike any I have ever seen any clergy-person give. First of all, his appearance was remarkable. As the daughter of a Saskatchewan farmer, I can say with some kind of authority that he was dressed quite like a Saskatchewan farmer—in jeans and a casual button-up shirt (with the top button undone). Not only was he not wearing any of the usual garb that normally distinguishes clergy-people from the rest of us, but nothing about his dress or appearance set him apart in any way from everyone else at the event. If anything, he was dressed more casually than most, but he still fit right in.

It was the content of his speech that was most remarkable, particularly in terms of his utter lack of concern for setting himself apart from the rest of us. All of these years later, I remember very few details about his words—only that he shared that he had found his faith after a long struggle with alcoholism. But I remember that I was very moved by his humility and his honesty—and not only the honesty in his words, but the honesty of his presence in the room. He was not "rising above" his everyday self in order to perform compellingly, which most performers and (in my limited experience) many preachers do. He was simply a man standing in a room, speaking openly and with true vulnerability—with a command that can only come from and with vulnerability—to some other people, and not a huge amount of people—there were perhaps 50 in attendance.

At several points in the sermon, he did adopt the rhythmic and melodic cadence that an outsider like myself would identify as the almost stereotypically "performative" outcries of an evangelical preacher. And yet it could not have been less performative. It seemed to me that he wasn't *doing* anything. He had simply opened himself up to something that was now carrying him along. He finished off his sermon with the a capella singing of the gospel hymn "O I Want to See Him," going on for several verses and several minutes, putting so much of himself into the act that his voice sounded increasingly raw as he became increasingly impassioned. At the end of the second last chorus, he had to stop entirely and take a big glug of water from the bottle he had held throughout his speech; he stopped for so long that the audience began to clap. He stopped them, saying "one more verse, one more verse," and then he put his microphone and his water bottle down on the ground and sang that last verse with his arms outstretched and his un-amplified voice filling the room with what would not be inaccurately described as a bellow. (I mean this in only the most complimentary terms, keeping in mind that the word is most often used with a not-so-complimentary connotation.) Everyone in the room stood up and joined him in singing the last verse and chorus.

Throughout the course of all this something happened to the room, to all of the in-frastructure that had been "getting in the way." It was all still there—he was still on the stage, speaking into the microphone (until he threw that away), the stage lights were still focused on him (there may have even been a disco ball), the sound quality was still not good—and yet somehow it all went away. All of the things that had been getting in the way were suddenly not getting in the way anymore. That "real thing" that I had known was there (largely because Carl had told me it was) had come to the fore and was swirling around unhindered. I remember think-

ing that everything had suddenly, impossibly become a circle, though I couldn't have described exactly what I meant by that. I realized I had tears in my eyes, and when I looked over at Carl I saw that he did too. Then he looked over at me, and his face seemed to say to me "Ok, good. You get it now." My thought in that moment—a new thought for me—was that whatever had just happened was music, not simply in the sense that it qualified as music, but more that it exemplified, engendered, expressed what music is and does.

INTRODUCTION (SEPTEMBER 2017)

I am a musician. I have always been a musician. I was a musician before I ever sang or played a note, or at least my memory allows me to access a belief from early childhood, a feeling really, that I was somehow meant to make music; my memory also contains not a few moments of surprise and frustration upon discovering, in some particular situation or other, that I didn't have the ability to make come out of me what I knew was inside me, musically-speaking. I have those moments still, though less often, thanks to thirty-six years (and counting!) of practice. I have always wanted music to be "what I do" with my life—a desire that inevitably becomes entangled with notions of "success" of various kinds, and with an industry long driven by non-musical priorities—but far beyond that, I have always been driven by a strong belief that music is in some way constitutive of who I am. That it has a sort of fundamental role to play in my very existence. I suppose what I am describing is that which is often called a musical "gift," and certainly, all of the six musicians I spoke with as part of this thesis project feel that music is a gift they have been granted, though each has a different "take" on the notion, and a different relationship with his or her gift with regard to responsibility, entitlement, ambition, motivation, etc.

At the point in my research journey when I decided to speak to some of my musical peers, what I wanted to talk to them about was this musical "gift" as a location of tension between the "what I do" and the "who I am" of a musician's musician-ness. I thought at the time that this question had to do with identity—that this tension is the result of, or at least indicative of, a precariousness in a musician's identity as such—based of course on an understanding of identity as a social construction, a "work-in-progress" requiring ongoing and active maintenance. I have since, however, come to think of "identity" as something of a red herring, and that is a point to

which I will return. Indeed, to steal a turn of phrase from French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, I will return to nothing but that.[7]

This thesis owes much of its theoretical grounding to the work of Nancy—who has, in my view, boldly taken his critique of subjectivity into the realm of sound and music. I also draw deeply from the work of Adriana Cavarero, an Italian feminist philosopher whose distinction between *what* someone is and *who* someone is resonates strongly with me in terms of my own discomfort surrounding my musical "gift"—or put bluntly, surrounding crises resulting from my own failure to make music "what I do" (i.e. build a successful and/or sustainable career in music) despite my persistent belief in its fundamental role in my very constitution. Cavarero draws deeply from Hannah Arendt, who argues that "the saving grace of all really great gifts is that the persons who bear their burden remain superior to what they have done, at least as long as the source of creativity is alive; for this source springs indeed from *who* they are and remains outside the actual work process as well as independent of *what* they may achieve."[8] For Cavarero and Arendt, this *who* that remains independent from the *what* is an inherently political being, in a very particular sense retrieved by the latter from its definition in ancient Greece—for Arendt, the political lies (in Tim Ingold's interpretation of her) "in the reality of 'men acting and speaking to one another,' and that in-between wherein they find their *inter-ests*, and in which is woven 'the

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[7] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 7. This requires some explanation. It was truly just Nancy's turn of phrase "will return to nothing but that" that in the moment of writing I was inspired to echo. The topic to which he would "do nothing but return" was what he calls the "inside" of the subject as a resonant being, a chamber through which the ever-referral of sound moves (and of course never arrives)—an image with which I richly engaged as I began to realize that my interest lay with and in the unpindownable nature of humans as musical beings. I clearly only included this passing, cryptic reference to him as an avenue to mention him early on in the thesis. My inclusion of his almost-quip is perhaps made doubly weak by the fact that all these years later I have "returned to" an awful lot more than the discovery that identity is a red herring—that discovery turned out to be merely one leg of the journey. I'm choosing to leave it in now, simply because I can think of no other means to draw him in at this point.

[8] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 211.

"web" of human relationships."[9] By taking the word "interest" literally, Arendt places focus on that which "lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together."[10] Placing emphasis precisely on that in-between of human interaction rather than on an apparently objective reality that is contained in that in-between, Arendt exposes human existence as irremediably relational, and within the "space of appearance" that is the political realm of this existence, action and speech constitute a "mode of being together" that exists only in actuality and leaves behind no products.[11] The argument that human existence is intrinsically political in this Arendtian sense therefore stands in opposition to an understanding of people as producers and consumers of objects. Or in other words, who we are can never be encompassed in what we do, make, or achieve.

Though it is not true of Arendt herself, the contemporary scholars who draw from her (namely Cavarero and Ingold) reject the notion of the modern individual (as a political entity, in the common contemporary sense) and the classical subject (as a philosophical entity). This body of work, and my journey through it—as part of a larger journey from a concern with individual identity to one with relational reality—will be detailed later on. For now it must suffice to say that I have come to a place where I believe that the only key to gaining insight into my own or anyone else's musician-ness is to acknowledge that there is something about music's meaning that lies beyond and/or between a reality defined by a subject/object dualism. At some point I became overwhelmingly concerned with the qualities of sound and music that fall between the cracks of that dualism (and many other dualisms that spring forth from that original one). I will

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[9] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 20.

[10] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 182.

[11] Ibid., 208.

ultimately argue that what is found between those cracks is the fact that music and music-making is always political, in this peculiarly Arendtian sense – that it is an exemplary expression of all that is relational about human existence. And if this is true, then it is also true that much that is pertinent about music's meaning exists (again in Arendt's words) "only in sheer actuality" and cannot be found in the results or products of musical activity.[12]

[12] Arendt, *Human Condition*, 208.

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT METHODOLOGY (SEPTEMBER 2017)

I begin with a "laying bare" of certain "facts" about myself because the formation of the research questions central to my inquiry, and the way I chose to explore those questions, have sprung directly from my personal experience. To lay bare these aspects of my relationship to music and musical practice is to lay bare my research motivations and processes, and to do so is not without methodological precedent; according to Nehiyaw and Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach, for many Indigenous researchers, this sort of "self-location" is essential preparatory work—it leads the researcher to a responsible level of awareness with regard to why she is doing the research she is doing, and why she is doing it in the way that she is doing it.[13] It is "relational work"—having to do with a researcher's responsibility to herself, to the reader, and to participants in the research process—a part of the process that does not necessarily have to be included in the research *product.* I feel it essential to incorporate this relational work into my own ideas, however, partly because I am seeking to engage with music's most relational aspects, and am doing so by drawing from scholarly work that seeks to understand all of reality as relational.

At the point in my research journey in which it was beginning to dawn on me that my interests were much more integrated with my personal relationship to music than I had realized, I happened to become acquainted with a small body of work on Indigenous research methodologies in a musicology seminar. Work in this area has been flowering over the last few years, particularly in Canada and New Zealand, where Indigenous scholars have been attempting to make space in academia not only for Indigenous people, but for knowledge-seeking processes based on what Kovach calls "tribal epistemologies"—systems of knowledge that flow from the social

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[13] Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 3.

relations and traditions of Indigenous communities.[14] Kovach's term deliberately implies the plurality of Indigenous ways of knowing, and yet there is an ontological commonality found across Indigenous contexts and taken as a foundational given by researchers working in this realm: that Indigenous epistemology grows from an ontology in which relationships, rather than objects, are the basic unit of reality; reality is therefore fluid, multiple, dynamic, and contingent.[15] This fundamental difference with a dominant Western epistemology based on a subject/object binary goes some way to explaining problems that have persisted in research conducted in Indigenous contexts, even as the academy has tried to reverse and atone for its racist and exploitative history. As Cree researcher Shawn Wilson puts it, "basic to the dominant system research paradigms is the concept of the individual as the source and owner of knowledge. These paradigms are built upon a Eurocentric view of the world, in which the individual or object is the essential feature. This premise stands in stark contrast to an Indigenous worldview, where relationships are the essential feature on the paradigm."[16]

Wilson views an Indigenous methodology as one that prioritizes what he calls "relational accountability"—a term that, as well as entailing respect and responsibility in research practices (particularly field research), also encompasses an interdependence, if not a symbiosis, of methodology, epistemology, ontology and axiology.[17] For Wilson, as an Indigenous researcher concerned with research practices in Indigenous communities and contexts, this interdependence

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[14] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 20.

[15] Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2008), 77.

[16] Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 127.

[17] Ibid., 77.

is key for developing methodologies rooted in Indigenous ontological understandings and epistemological traditions, which are therefore morally and ethically (i.e. axiologically) accountable in those contexts. My own research is formed in symbiosis simply because of the circuitous route I've taken through the process, and the stance on musical understanding to which I have been carried by it—and these things are really one and the same. In other (more specific) words, a surprising and self-determining research process has led me to what Tim Ingold has coined an "ontology of the line," an ontology in which there are no objects, and therefore no subjects, but rather lives and processes laying down lines—a reality in which the notion of subjects and objects *interacting* is replaced by that of lines *corresponding*.[18] My journey to this ontological understanding has somehow simultaneously enabled and resulted from a growing hunch that there is great potential to be found in the exploration (development?) of an epistemology of music that is rooted in such an ontology. To explain what I mean by this is the goal of this entire thesis, but perhaps these words of Ingold's will prevent, or at least mitigate, confusion in the reader at this point, and also give an initial hint as to why I believe this sort of ontology is ideal for thinking about sound and music:

> The living being, swimming in the atmospheric medium, alternately forges ahead along its lines of propulsion, and pulls up behind in its absorption of the medium. Inhaling the atmosphere as it breathes the air, on the outward breath of exhalation it weaves its lines of speech, song, story and handwriting into the fabric of the world.[19]

If the ontological and epistemological aspects of my research are thus interdependent, I have probably made clear already (if only in the number of times I have so far used the words

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[18] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 16.

[19] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 87.

"journey" and "process") that my methodology for approaching my topic has also developed simultaneously with the topic itself, and this is the main reason I feel it appropriate to draw from some of the methodological literature of Indigenous scholars: all of these scholars took on the task, not of developing and outlining a particular research methodology or even methodologies, but rather of exploring ways that methodologies can and must be developed anew with each research project, and indeed must be determined by (and allowed to grow within) particular research contexts. Wilson, for example, prefers the term "strategy of inquiry" to describe an open-ended process in which the journey can change to meet the goal, and the goal can (and probably will) change to meet the context.[20]

Since my methods for getting this thesis from its initial pondering to the point at which I am typing words onto a page have been determined on an ever-changing basis by the ever-changing requirements of the ever-changing questions and priorities of the research journey, my drawing from the methodological work of these Indigenous scholars is admittedly retrospective.[21] This work provides a means by which I can discuss (and legitimize, perhaps) a methodology that I developed and applied concurrently to a similarly developing topic of study. I discovered somewhat after the fact that my means for going about writing this thesis shares three fundamental aspects with methodological priorities explored by three particular Canadian Indigenous scholars—Margaret Kovach and Shawn Wilson (both of whom I have already cited) and Kathleen Absolon. These three shared fundamental aspects are: the belief that a necessarily

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[20] Wilson, *Research is Ceremony*, 40.

[21] I should note, since I referenced Tim Ingold in this section, that he is not one of those Indigenous scholars (he is a British anthropologist), and I consider his work to be theoretically foundational to my work, rather than methodologically so.

transformative research process should constitute part of the research *product*, the strong self-location of the author in the work, and a relational approach to fieldwork that stems from and relates to engagement with a relational view of reality. These aspects are themselves interdependent, or perhaps it is better to say that they are not discrete aspects of this approach at all—each bleeds into the others to the point where it is difficult to draw boundaries between them.

For Kathleen Absolon, as for Kovach and Wilson, making the research process a substantial element in the research product is about keeping a certain tension at the forefront—tension between the oral integration of knowledge stemming from the narrative traditions of Indigenous communities and the dominant tradition of written knowledge transmission, which is of course also inevitably the medium of the research product. In Indigenous contexts, as Absolon puts it, "how we come to know is living and fluid, not concrete and fixed like typeset words."[22] Kovach puts it another way, one less tied to a specific cultural context, by arguing and seeking to expose that *all* research products are the result of a personal journey undertaken by the researcher. To include this journey in the text, rather than just its cognitive result, is simply to acknowledge this fact.[23]

This thesis is truly nothing but process, and there are a few reasons why I could see no other way forward: firstly, I share with these researchers that I do not view the "conclusions" I have come to through the research process to be conclusions at all, but simply transformations in my questions of inquiry leading me to my current point of perspective with regard to musical mean-

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[22] Kathleen Absolon, *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 10.

[23] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 15.

ing, a point which is much more a jumping-off point than a resting point.[24] Since written texts like this one work against that kind of dynamism, I am simply doing what I can to subvert that. The explicit laying-out of process is also necessary in this work because that point of perspective at which I currently sit is one that is fairly critical of much musicological literature. Since I am a musicology student, my struggle with that literature has brought me to where I am now. That struggle defined the argument I intend to make regarding musical meaning, and therefore that struggle must be the topic of this work.

The primacy of process feeds directly into the strong self-location of the author in the text, and this is what distinguishes the notion of self-location from the "reflexivity" often employed in contemporary social science research. In these reflexive methods, there is generally an acknowledgment of the researcher's presence in the field of study, and of the relationship between the researcher and the object(s) of study, but as Kovach puts it, they don't tend to allow for (or perhaps acknowledge) the transformation of the author through the research process, and don't give agency to the objects of study.[25] I would frame this last point slightly differently, and say that perhaps true self-location of the author in the research will not so much give agency to the object(s) of study as establish a relationship that is truly relational, one that shows (to draw again—and ever—from Ingold) "how knowledge grows from the crucible of lives lived with others, in the in-between," and refutes the "commonplace fallacy that observation is a practice exclusively dedicated to the objectification of the beings and things that command our attention and their

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[24] Absolon, *Kaandossiwin*, 17.

[25] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 26. It is my current understanding that Kovach's assessment of dominant reflexive methods is out-of-date. I leave this reference in here now as a record of the way it shaped my thinking about process back in 2016.

removal from the sphere of our *sentient involvement with consociates* (my italics)."[26] This belief—that knowledge and understanding do not come from studying objects, but must rather be sought in one's self, in one's own dynamic relationship with a world filled with other dynamic beings, defined by one's path through this world—is in essence what separates "reflexivity" from an approach that locates the author at the centre of the work.

Ontological assumptions always flow into methodology; Indigenous researchers are simply brought face to face with that fact and forced to explicitly acknowledge it because their methodologies flow from ontological understandings outside of those that are dominant and taken as given in Western academia. The classical anthropological approach of defamiliarization/refamiliarization, for example—which is based on a belief that the field researcher must (as Regula Qureshi puts it) create "space for otherness to reveal itself on its own terms" by deliberately moving "away from personally and intuitively based interactions" with the object(s) of study—clearly derives directly from the objectifying understanding of knowledge acquisition that dominates contemporary Western ontological assumptions—inside academia and out, I would argue.[27]

It is precisely this dominant ontological assumption that has made autoethnographic literature largely unhelpful to me, even though it may seem an obvious choice. It is only fair for me to note, however, that Kovach, whose work makes a pragmatic attempt at identifying established research methods that can "speak to" those she seeks to develop, *does* find in autoethnography

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[26] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 157.

[27] Regula Qureshi, *Master Musicians of India: Hereditary Sarangi Players Speak* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 9. My own understanding of Hegelian objectification comes primarily from J. B. Robinson's succinct and helpful explanation of it in his translator's preface to Dalhaus's *Foundations of Music History*. My knowledge of it is therefore by no means comprehensive, but it is rooted in the musicological tradition.

qualities that move toward a "self-in-relation" approach.[28] Autoethnography is generally defined as "a research method that utilizes the researcher's autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions,"[29] and involves a conscious practice of collecting "data" from one's self the way an ethnographer does from "others."[30] It distinguishes itself from other types of "self-narratives" in that it attempts to go beyond the mere narration of one's own experience into the realm of cultural analysis and interpretation.[31] Essentially, the autoethnographic methodology attempts to apply to one's self the defamiliarization/refamiliarization process of the ethnographic tradition. If anything, I see a self-in-relation approach as being the inverse of autoethnography; I am placing myself at the centre of my work and looking out, rather than attempting to step outside of myself in order to turn myself into an object of study.

This staunch commitment to relationality distinguishes self-location from reflexivity (and what I am doing from the autoethnographic method), and this bleeds into the third aspect of the work of these Indigenous scholars that is relevant for me, namely engagement with a relational view of reality. If one is to give precedence to the relationships that facilitate the formation of concepts or ideas, process must be primary simply because you cannot show relationships without showing process, because they are inherently dynamic (and often transformative) and operate through time.

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[28] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 33.

[29] Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008), 9.

[30] Ibid., 59.

[31] Ibid., 43.

What I will attempt to do throughout the course of this work is to chronicle how my dynamic relationships with the six musicians I interviewed in early 2016 (and my ongoing relationship with the transcripts I made of those interviews), and with the literature (musicological and otherwise) that I have grappled with, have led me to an understanding of music as the expression *par excellence* of our relationality as human beings, and to an argument that what our musical disciplines need to do in order to finally come to terms with the ever-becoming, temporally-stretched nature of sound and music is to do away with the musical object—at least sometimes.

LATER THOUGHTS ABOUT METHODOLOGY (NOVEMBER 2023)

I must note that one text I have engaged with and returned to many times over the course of the last several years is a masters thesis written by the late Walter Lightning in 1992, which was given to me by Carl Urion, who was Lightning's supervisor. It is not a work whose intent was to offer a methodological model—it rather undertook a detailed and multifaceted translation, and offered a dynamic and humble interpretation, of a text about the nature of the mind written by Cree Elder Louis Sunchild—and it was written nearly twenty years before the flowering of Indigenous methodological literature of which the above noted monographs were a part. And yet, Lightning's thesis employs and exemplifies all of the methodological principles I have identified as most resonant for me. More than any other work I have come across, it highlights the fact that knowledge and learning must occur at an emotional as well as intellectual level, that learning is a layered process that takes a long time, and that intellectual inquiry is always a collaborative process.[32]

When I first read Walter Lightning's thesis, concurrent with my engagement with the methodological literature, it struck me as remarkable how Lightning very simply, and seemingly as a matter of course, undertook his work in a way that put process and relationship at the forefront; he makes it very clear throughout that his sole responsibility was to the text with which he had been entrusted, and to his Elder Louis Sunchild, who had entrusted it to him for interpretation. He also had a responsibility to all of the Elders who had offered their wisdom and stories for his increased growth and understanding, and to the truth. He did not express concern about how and where the work will fit within academic discourse.

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[32] Walter Lightning, "Compassionate Mind: Implications of a Text Written by Elder Louis Sunchild" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1992), 15, 31, 64.

Having come back to this work most recently just a few days before writing this, the following passage struck me in a way it had not before: "[Learning] is a product of creation and re-creation, in a mutual relationship of personal interaction, of information. It is not just a cognitive (mental) act, but an emotional—thus physical—act. Learning is felt. It is a sensation. It is something that involves emotions."[33] Earlier in the work, he notes the importance of timing and synchronicity in the "regulation and realization" of a wholisic comprehension, and that the wisdom and expertise of his elders allowed them to teach him, through story, via a complex and layered system of metaphor that "cut across barriers of time":

> The stories were structured in such a way that each story's meaning got more and more complex and rich as I thought about it. The Elder knew that I was not ready to understand the deeper systems of meaning and could not take it in all at once, so he constructed the story so that its meaning would continue to unfold. It was not just the individual stories that did this, but the stories were all structurally, related to each other, even though I did not necessarily realize that when one was told. It was more than being 'connected.'[…]In a fundamental way it is all the same story.[34]

Walter Lightning's words are working inside of me as I seek to finish what I started years ago, particularly with regard to the notion that as one is able to open the door to a deeper level of knowledge and understanding, more doors are revealed in terms of what one cannot yet understand. This helps me articulate first of all why I could not have finished this thesis when I started it several years ago—why I feel compelled now to bring my current level of understanding into dialogue with the level I had back then, and to highlight that this thesis represents nothing more than what I am able to understand right now about what it means to be alive, and how music en-

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[33] Ibid., 64.

[34] Lightning, "Compassionate Mind," 15.

genders, embodies, expresses, talks to, dances with, that meaning. Nothing less than that largest of all questions, but nothing more than what I can say about it right now, which is very little. Also, Lightning's assertion that learning and intellectual inquiry is always collaborative both allows me to, and requires that I, acknowledge that regular face-to-face meetings with Carl Urion—these are not "meetings" in the formal sense in the word; we just regularly get together for coffee—are woven deeply into the fabric of this work, and into the life of learning of which this work is a small flowering. I regard Carl as an Elder in my own life and context, in a way and to an extent that Walter Lightning's descriptions of his relationship to his Elders feels very familiar to me.[35]

To put a cap on this section as it touches on timing and synchronicity, on the largest of all questions that folds all other questions into it, on the collaborative nature of all inquiry, I'll tell another small story: today I am writing from a small cabin on Jackfish Lake in Saskatchewan, thanks to a neighbour here on Delorme Beach who offered it to me any time over this winter of 2023–24 that I needed a working retreat (because my family's cabin, next to this one, is not winterized). Her name is Judy, and when I arrived yesterday she inevitably asked me what I am writing about. (The dreaded question!) I never know what is going to come out of my mouth when I am required to answer this question, but I think I simply said that it's about music, and/but that it's a rather philosophical take on the whole enterprise. And she said, "Oh! Well, aren't we lucky, those of us who just know we have music in us." And then she told me about coming home from her first ballet class at the age of six and saying to her mother, "Now I know why I was born!" She then said that she feels she taps into the same thing now when she goes cross-country skiing.

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[35] My feeling of familiarity is certainly deepened because Carl was Walter Lightning's supervisor.

There was only one possible response to the succinct and rich understanding that her sharing encapsulated: “Yes! Whatever that is, that’s music.”

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY (SEPTEMBER 2017)

It is all part of "telling" this work as a story. At the time of writing—a time in which I happen to have just finished reading Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*—I am thinking of myself as something of a Dickensian narrator. David Copperfield narrates the entirety of his own life to the reader, and as a narrator he is always at the centre of the story he is telling; Dickens never takes the "bird's-eye" omniscient perspective of a third-person narrator. And indeed, at regular points in the tale he reminds us of how the imperfect workings of memory are shading and colouring the story he tells us (and it is a lovely particularity of Dickens that he interacts reflexively with the reader *through* his protagonists/narrators in this way). And yet, though the story is inevitably about David Copperfield, it is not as if we are trapped inside the inner experience of an autonomous individual. On the contrary, a full, rich, and seemingly complete world is revealed to us as he moves through it, and we come to know the book's characters and locales through his dynamic relations with them. What the reader is party to is not David Copperfield's "experience," but the world *through* his experience.

Think of me as a David Copperfield. My ongoing negotiation with music as "who I am" vs. "what I do" is indeed central to this story. And yet, if the story has a beginning, that is not exactly it. The particular line of inquiry driving this work begins with my friend Gaz. This thesis was originally meant to be *about* something; indeed, it was meant to be about him.

I met Gaz—Gareth Austin is his full name—in England in June of 2005. It was summer solstice, and I had moved to the UK about two weeks before that to start a band with my then-boyfriend (an Englishman who I had met in Taiwan). I was still very much in culture shock, and when Jez (my boyfriend) suggested that we go spend the solstice in the West Country with a mu-

sician friend of his who was a "Horsedrawn Traveller" and lived in a wagon, I had absolutely no frame of reference for understanding who this person might be or what kind of experience I was letting myself in for.[36] Whatever the case, I remember feeling more trepidation than excitement prior to the trip—I probably felt like I was far enough outside my comfort-zone as it was, trying to adjust to a new country that was much less like Western Canada than I had been expecting—and certainly, nothing could have prepared me for such a profoundly unfamiliar and unforgettable experience.

When we arrived at the spot where Gaz and his mates were "parked up," at the edge of a Wiltshire village with the quintessentially English name of Maiden Bradley, I was nothing short of astonished. Parked up on the verge of a road simply called "Back Lane"—which was on a bit of high ground facing east, with a breathtaking view of the surrounding countryside—were two beautifully crafted traditional bow-top wagons, beside which three horses, tethered to old oak trees, were grazing contentedly on the grass. (Years later, the memory of that moment still moves me.) I was introduced to Gaz, who was very happy to see us and clearly considered Jez to be a dear friend, and to his girlfriend Corinna, her two young daughters Emily and Anarchy Rose, and the family of four that Gaz and Corinna were parked up with at that time—Tom and Becca, and their kids Osean and baby Kitty. Gaz instantly showed himself to be an unforgettable character: forthright and opinionated, and also a born entertainer—the kind of person who can effortlessly

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[36] It's important to note that England's rather tiny community of "Horsedrawn Travellers" is not part of, or related to, any ethnic Traveller or Romany communities or lineages. They are rather a subset of a subculture commonly known as "New Age Travellers," which includes anyone who decided at some point in his or her life to forego traditional housing in favour of living "parked up" in a trailer or camper van. Horsedrawn Travellers are those who live in bow-top wagons rather than motorized vehicles, and keep horses to pull their wagons when movement is necessary. While Horsedrawn Travellers have never been a large enough community to attract academic study, the small pool of work on New Age Travellers has been done almost exclusively by Kevin Hetherinton (1998, 2000) and Greg Martin (1998, 2000, 2002, 2014). For what is in my view an almost comically romanticized look at the Horsedrawns of the mid-aughts, see fashion-photographer Iain McKell's *The New Gypsies* (New York: Prestel, 2014).

and single-handedly keep a room full of his friends laughing for an entire evening. He was also handsome enough, if impishly so, to feel confident shunning all concern for his physical appearance—I have particularly vivid memories of him putting out his cigarette butts by rubbing them on his jeans—and it was my impression that he has always taken pride in his genuine lack of concern about what anyone thinks of him. That night—the shortest of the year—Gaz and Jez and I sat around a campfire and played music until dawn, and an intangible but unmistakable bond of mutual understanding and admiration was forged between us. As fascinated as I was by the fact that these people I had met were self-identified Horsedrawn Travellers—a small and amorphous group of people in England who live in bow-top wagons and keep horses as an alternative to "mainstream" existence—the friendship that was forged between me and Gaz during that trip was, and still is, primarily about music.

Jez and I visited Gaz regularly throughout the two years that I lived in England. We were cutting our teeth as full-time musicians, and spent as much time as we could travelling and playing, so we often found ourselves a stone's throw from wherever Gaz was based at any given time. My respect and admiration for him grew throughout this period; I came to recognize him as a unique talent, and one who took music as seriously as I did. We were both in our mid-twenties at the time, and were in a period of rapid growth and development. I had just taken up guitar, and was improving quickly and experimenting with alternate tunings; I was working daily on the craft of songwriting, and was immersing myself in anything that anyone told me was good music—iconic songwriters like Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, foundational British folk-rock bands like Fairport Convention, old bluesmen like Mississippi John Hurt, contemporary darlings of alt-country and Americana like Gillian Welch and David Rawlings. Gaz was in a similar stage in his

musical life; every time I saw him he was better at guitar (and he is now a decent clawhammer banjo player as well), his songs were impeccably crafted, and they rang so exquisitely true in his at once raspy and bell-like voice that I sometimes felt a bit jealous of him. He was also "hoovering" influences at the time, especially early blues and Americana, and he had a particular fondness for Canadian singer-songwriters—a rare point on which our tastes diverged, even though I am a Canadian singer-songwriter myself.

It is in light of the similarities in our musical goals and priorities at that time that the main *difference* in our approach to our musical lives comes to the forefront. For whereas I was actively attempting to build a career as an independent singer-songwriter in a manner that at least somewhat resembled what was at the time a conventional one, Gaz was tackling his life from an entirely different angle, and this difference had everything to do with him being a Traveller. Whereas Jez and I were constantly on the phone and on the internet, researching venues, and booking and promoting shows, Gaz was building himself a busking circuit between the Southwest and the East Midlands, walking with his horse and wagon from village to town to village, playing for change, and picking up impromptu pub gigs along the way by knocking locals' socks off when they invariably coerced him into giving them a song as he sat drinking pints at the bar. He had this routine down to a subtle art and a foolproof science.

I was trying to get myself to a point where I could make my living playing music by building a reputation for myself as a bona fide professional—a process which obviously entailed doing all of the things that professional independent musicians do, such as making and maintaining a website, designing gig posters, promoting shows with local media, and recording albums and trying to get them played on the radio. Gaz also wanted to make his living playing music, but

both the demands of his lifestyle and the opportunities it enabled made it inevitable that he go about it in an entirely different way. Travelling is an all-encompassing way of life; on a day-to-day basis it requires a substantial amount of labour, even in periods between travel. Even if Gaz had wanted to pursue a "career" in music the way I was, he would have struggled to find the time and resources to do so. But because of what was *enabled* by his way of life, he felt no need whatsoever to do *any* of the things I was doing (as he attested to me years later). There was no need for him to *try* to be a musician, because he was simply doing it. He always did very well busking because he was as keenly aware of how to make "audience" perceptions work in his favour, which is to say that he never hesitated to play the "gypsy" card, so to speak. This was of course supplementary to his unmistakable talent and charm. And he was able to survive on what he made busking because there was a very low overhead on his existence; any "rent" he had to pay to park up for a length of time on someone's land was often paid in labour rather than money. He wasn't participating in any aspect of dominant society, so why would music be different? It simply never struck him as desirable or necessary to pursue a conventional career. It seemed to me—years later, having sought refuge from the music industry (and my own failure within it) in university and in my new identity as a student of music and culture—that Gaz had built a life for himself as a musician that flew in the face of the music industry (and the whole idea of what a musician is in this day and age), one defined and determined by a lifestyle that equally flew in the face of dominant templates for existence in early 21st-century Britain.

I decided then to write my masters thesis on Gaz, for a few reasons: one was simply that I wanted an excuse—and ideally some resources—to return to England and see him, because I missed the place badly and wanted to catch up with an old friend. Also, I believed his life as a

Traveller and a musician inherently interesting and unique enough to make for a valuable and compelling individual ethnography. The seemingly intrinsic link between Gaz's travelling and musicking struck me as an extreme example, and therefore perhaps the epitome, of something I felt was the case for many musicians that I know—that the desire to lead a creative lifestyle leads people towards extreme and "alternative" lifestyles, ones that often prove unsustainable in the long term. In the end, this wasn't exactly the point. I knew from the start that Gaz—and particularly the interdependence of his travelling life and his musical life—epitomized *something* that resonated with my first-hand experience as a musician and my experience with many of my peers in music, though I spent many months even after my fieldwork with him trying to put my finger on what it was.

I went to the field in the spring of 2015, which is to say I stayed with Gaz and his girlfriend Fiona for a few days, literally in a field: Gaz had stopped travelling a couple of years prior, but he was not exactly living a typical sedentary lifestyle; he and Fiona were living in a small trailer in a makeshift courtyard with a few other trailers in a field next to a farmhouse. What I was doing was never really ethnography; since Gaz was no longer a Traveller, it was really more of an individual oral history I was gathering. Within a lovely weekend of playing and talking about music, and drinking pints in the local pub, we spent only one long afternoon on the "interview" process. Gaz very graciously told me all about his travelling life while it had lasted—how he came to it almost accidentally, and how it became intertwined with the musical ambitions that had preceded it (i.e. how his typical teenage dreams of "getting signed" transformed into a passionate relationship with music as a means of survival). His story is one of someone who was

forced early on in his travelling "career" to become almost entirely independent and self-sufficient.

Unfortunately (or not), I am unable to provide many of the details of the story Gaz shared with me that weekend, because the digital file of the audio recording I made of our interview was permanently lost when my personal laptop was destroyed due to extreme water damage a few months after I returned from England. Why I had not managed to find the time in the interim to transcribe the interview, I don't know. Why I failed to back the file up is an even greater mystery to me. In any case, I was left with no "data," and only my memory of our conversations. I suppose I should have felt in that moment like I was left with no topic, and yet what I did feel was that I had been brought face to face with an altered topic, one that had been sneaking up on me since my return from the field, based on the two particular points that dominated my memory of my conversations with Gaz, and which I had in fact been unable to stop thinking about for months. The first of these points is that my pre-fieldwork hypothesis that Gaz's travelling life and musical life were inextricably linked was completely correct, much more so than I had anticipated.

The second point that remained with me, and that had particularly dominated my thoughts, came not from my conversations with Gaz, but rather from one I shared with Fiona the night before I left England. Gaz had stayed in the caravan that evening, leaving me and Fiona to join a small campfire gathering hosted by their landlord (who lived in the farmhouse next to their trailer). As we were chatting about the weekend we had spent together, she confided to me (probably against Gaz's wishes) that he had told her that talking to me at length about his previous mode of existence had made him feel quite depressed. I was of course very sorry to learn this—I certainly

hadn't travelled halfway across the world to make a dear friend I hadn't seen in years feel terrible—but I realized even in that moment that I wasn't particularly surprised. Even if it was clear to me that his passion for music was as strong as ever—he seemed to relish having a musical friend around with whom to play songs and share YouTube videos of his current favourite performers—he was also clearly a bit starved for musical connection. The 32-20s, the band he had started while still travelling—which was in the midst of its heyday on a previous visit in 2011, and which I liked very much—had made several recent attempts at emerging from hiatus, all unsuccessful due to the demands of full-time work and domestic commitments. Talking at length about a time in his life that was defined not only by musical practice, but by *being* a musician, understandably made him question whether he is indeed still a musician. It is also understandable that this would be an upsetting question for him to contemplate—as I witnessed, he remains as talented and passionate as ever, and his frequent if frustrated attempts to get his band going again indicate that his drive to pursue performance opportunities also remains.

THE PART OF THE STORY WHEN I THOUGHT I WAS WRITING ABOUT IDENTITY (SEPTEMBER 2017)

It is clear enough to *me* that Gaz has always been and will always be a musician, no matter what the external circumstances, but I intimately understand the doubts he had in this regard because I have felt them myself. Admittedly, this is precisely why I became so preoccupied with Fiona's confession about Gaz's reaction to our interview. I know that struggle, that conundrum, that schism so well, and it has haunted me too. I am also self-aware enough, as a scholar, to understand that my preoccupation with this peripheral aspect of my fieldwork indicated that the burning itch driving my research had much more to do with myself than it had to do with Gaz. For all I know, *his* moment of existential crisis went no further than a quick mention to his most intimate companion immediately after the fact. *I* was the one who could not stop thinking about it for several months.

To lose my interview data, then, was actually rather fortuitous, because it brought me face to face with a question that was not truly about Gaz or his Traveller-ness, but had more to do with (as I was able to understand and express it at the time) my own challenges with my identity as a musician and the precariousness of that identity, something I already knew was an issue for many of my musical peers. The extreme nature of Gaz's travelling and musical life simply brought that precariousness to the forefront, because he lived his life as a musician in a way that left little concrete evidence behind. Very few musical products, and scant documentation, resulted from his time of full-time music making, so when he moved into the next phase of his life it was as if the previous phase had never happened. And yet this crisis, expressed in panicked self-questioning along the lines of "Am I really a musician? Was I ever a musician? Who am I any-

way?" is as present with those for whom evidence of their musician-ness is plentiful, i.e. those who have produced and released albums, have been written about in newspapers, have won awards for their work, etc. This point was brought into sharp relief for me when I described Gaz's crisis, and my thoughts about this precariousness of identity, to a friend of mine who has been a professional musician for nearly thirty years, has released several albums, and tours regularly. His response was something like, "Oh yeah, I know that panic. I feel that way every time I come off the road for a few weeks." I of course knew this panic too, despite the fact that I had also left a concrete trail of evidence behind me in my time of full-time music-making.

I decided to talk to more musicians about this topic, and not only about the precariousness of their identities as musicians, but also about other related themes that had been thrown up in my mind in the wake of my fieldwork—particularly the ephemeral nature of musical connection and communication, the fleetingness of musical "moments," and the effect of this on those whose sense of identity is beholden to something so ephemeral. It seemed a promising direction in which to head, because countless casual conversations about these themes that I had with musicians during this period invariably led to exclamations along the lines of, "I know exactly what you're talking about! You should interview me!"

I had a particular interest in the effect of the ephemerality of music and sound on the insecurity of musicians' senses of self because I felt it might provide a path to a difference between musicians and other types of artists and creative people that I suspected exists (though I was by no means sure). Common sense and everyday experience told me that much that would apply for musicians would apply for all artists and creative people with regard to fragility of ego and the vulnerability that comes with placing one's art in the public realm for scrutiny and possible re-

jection. And as I made a preliminary foray into literature on modern notions and expressions of "the self," it quickly became clear that I could easily place the experiences of contemporary musicians within sweeping historical narratives that have contemporary artists of all kinds unwittingly playing out the cultural inheritance of romantic expressivism and subjectivism.[37] A historicizing approach held little appeal for me, however. I wanted to accept the experiences of musicians as real, and to delve into them rather than explain them away. I also had a growing hunch that there is much more going on there, more than the playing out of historical-cultural narratives. It began to seem to me that there is something going on there that is much more fundamental to the experience of being human—something that has to do with sound, the way it moves us and moves through us, and its tendency therefore to subvert stability of any kind.

The work of two authors aided my thinking about these themes even before I was able to interview any musicians. I was introduced to the work of the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero when I happened upon her book *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* in the midst of a veritable spree of keyword searches in the university library's online database. I was immediately struck by her overriding argument: that the true identity of any human being—*who* someone is—can only be found in his or her story, not only because we are dynamic beings that are inconsistent and change over time, but mainly because placing identity in a person's life story—which will inevitably be different from any other person's life story—is the only way to take into account that every human being is unique. Any defining exercise, she argues, will have a universalizing, generalizing, and categorizing function that can only ever speak to *what* some-

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[37] Timothy D. Taylor, *Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 31–4.

one is.[38] Uniqueness lies in the narratability of all "selves" because one's sense of her own uniqueness, which comes from her sense of her own story as unique, allows her to recognize that all others also have a story that is theirs and no one else's.[39] One can only be narratable to another. Thus, the key to our uniqueness lies in our relationality, a relationality stemming from an innate desire to be narratable to another, an other who is equally irremediably relational. For Cavarero (drawing from Hannah Arendt), "being and appearing coincide," on an ontological—and not merely phenomenological—level: appearing is "not the *superficial* phenomenon of a more intimate and true 'essence.' Appearing is the *whole* of being, understood as a plural finitude of existing," and personal identity "far from being a substance, is of a totally expositive and relational character."[40]

Cavarero illustrates this by recalling a scene from *The Odyssey*, in which Ulysses is seated, incognito, at the court of the Phaecians while a blind rhapsod sings a song of the Trojan War and of Ulysses's own deeds and exploits. Hearing his own story told by another, he for the first time becomes aware of its significance, and "hiding himself behind a great purple tunic, weeps."[41] It was of course not that Ulysses had been unaware of the story's events, of his own actions, but "when he had lived them he had not understood their meaning. It is as if, while acting, he had been immersed in the contextuality of the events.[…] But now, in the tale of the rhapsod, the

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[38] Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), *passim.* Perhaps incidentally, touring musicians often come to confront the truth of this expositive and relational character. As one friend put it to me, the reason touring life became unsustainable for her—far beyond financial precariousness and the lack of creature comforts—was because she began to feel like she didn't know who she was in the prolonged absence of those who truly know her, and whose role in her life it is to reflect that knowledge back to her.

[39] Ibid., 34.

[40] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 20.

[41] Ibid., 17.

discontinuous times of that happening come together in a story."[42] Reading this passage for the first time, I immediately identified a parallel in my experience with Gaz. Though it was not that I had narrated his story to him, I did make him aware of its significance by asking him to share its contents with me, and really, by co-(re)constructing it with him through our dialogue, especially since I had been present with him for some of the events that made up the story. Like Ulysses, Gaz was moved by the totality of the story of his travelling years, by *who* he was through that particular period of his life, and by the unique path he had carved through the world. But for the sudden awareness of his story's significance to lead to the question "If that's who I was then, who am I now?" indicates a move towards the realm of the *what*, which according to Cavarero is to be differentiated from the *who*. The *contents* of the story that Gaz and I co-narrated, like the story of Ulysses's exploits in the Trojan War, may lead one to try to pin them down with an identifier: Ulysses was a war hero; Gaz was a musician, and a traveller. Since one can never look back on the entirety of his life story (which is only completed with death), to have the opportunity to look back on a particular chapter of one's story—particularly one so easily set apart from its preceding and succeeding chapters—and to give in to the temptation to define its protagonist with an identifier that no longer applies in the same way is to look back on one's past somewhat like a ghost, and to wonder, "Do I still exist?"

Following an understanding of identity as nothing other than "that which a singular existent designs in her uncategorizable uniqueness," a question such as that should never come up.[43] Cavarero's argument is that the fact that it does come up is a tragedy borne of metaphysics and

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[42] Ibid., 18.

[43] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 73.

all of our Western intellectual traditions based thereon. She asserts that "philosophy asks after man as a universal"—a universal which "applies to everyone precisely because it applies to no one. It disincarnates itself from the living singularity of each one, while claiming to substantiate it."[44] Any act of definition, therefore, is similarly indifferent to the uniqueness of each existent; it is an act of "name-calling," and does a violence to that uniqueness by attempting to define the indefinable. Here Cavarero draws from Arendt: "the moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a description of the qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a 'character' in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us."[45]

Of course, we all inhabit a multiplicity of *what*s throughout the courses of our lives, and this fact is deeply implicated in *who* we are. For Cavarero, Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* engenders the extreme tragedy of this implication: that Oedipus knew *what* he was (ie. a man and a king) but did not know *who* he was (ie. he did not know his own story) led to his downfall, and indeed make him the epitome of the tragic figure. He is also part of a narrative tradition that immortalizes heroic figures for their deeds and actions, a narrative tradition in which the text—ie. what those deeds and actions were, and how "great" they were—is central. Cavarero contrasts this tradition—or better, the "self-immortalizing" tendency that comes with it, leading "poets, artists, navigators [,] industrial leaders or university professors […] to perpetuate the virile habit of measuring themselves against death"—with a unique existent that desires to be narratable simply here and now, and simply because she confirms her existence in an other's knowledge of

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[44] Ibid., 8–9.

[45] Ibid., 73.

her.[46] Here, the text is inessential; it is only the existence of a story, rather than the contents of the story, that make a narratable self.

This is an enlightening conceptual framework in which to consider the word "musician." As a descriptive title, it can of course only reach *what* someone is rather than *who* she is—in its claim to engender all musicians, it engenders none. But even more revealing is the fact that those of us who call ourselves musicians hold ourselves up against standard narratives of musician-ness, and we fall victim to the narrative tradition that derives from and upholds the (tragic) heroic tendency to desire to project ourselves beyond death. Joni Mitchell, in the song "Hejira," described it as "chicken scratching for my immortality."[47] Mike Featherstone, in his discussion of contemporary conceptions of "heroic life" (in opposition to everyday life), points out that human lives are always enacted narratives, and that we celebrate those who seem to achieve a unity of identity by living out coherent, consistent narratives, because they appear to "follow some higher purpose rather than merely letting [their lives] drift capriciously."[48]

Anthropologist Mary Margaret Steedly refers to this phenomenon as "narratability," arguing that "conventions of narrative expression, emplotment and plausibility not only construct events […] but also construct the exclusion of events from the field of narrative plausibility."[49] An event that is not narratable is therefore a non-event; it falls through the cracks of convention and falls victim to a socially-produced ephemerality, and a gendered one at that. Drawing from

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[46] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 76.

[47] Joni Mitchell, "Hejira," recorded 1976, track 5 on *Hejira*, Asylum Records, compact disc.

[48] Mike Featherstone, *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity* (London: Sage, 1995), 60.

[49] Mary Margaret Steedly, *Hanging Without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 30.

Renato Rosaldo's work on Ilongot hunting stories, in which "the experience of hunting becomes narratable when it reenacts what could be called a hunting plot," and which exclude entirely the experiences of the women who remain in the domestic hearth, Steedly notes that "the ephemerality of Ilongot women's experience is not a 'natural' feature of their repetitive daily routine but rather a social effect of narrative forms shaped to the (equally repetitive) dimensions of masculine prowess."[50] Cavarero frames the same notion inversely. For her, women have the advantage of escaping the bonds of universalization because of their exclusion from the realm of the narratable, and it is this "aptitude for the particular" that characterizes a distinctly feminine sphere where we can access and begin to explore the relational uniqueness of human beings. The "feminine paradigm of the narratable self" therefore stands in contrast to the classical (male) subject.[51] Cavarero's unique existent "does not display any of the general characteristics of traditional subjectivity: interiority, psychology, agency, self-presence, mastery and so forth."[52] In a reality populated with a plurality of unique existents, there are no selves without others: every self must be narratable to an other, and desires to be narratable to an other.[53]

Cavarero's drive to dismantle the subject in order to get at the unique existent would become central to my developing notion about what makes music special, what makes it different from other creative practices. (It would not surprise me, though it would aid me immensely, to discover that her follow-up work to *Relating Narratives* is dedicated to upholding the voice as

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[50] Ibid., 30.

[51] Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 53, 75.

[52] Paul Kottman, translator's introduction to *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, by Adriana Cavarero (London: Routledge, 2000), x.

[53] I consider "an other" conceived of from a relational perspective to be a different notion altogether from "the other" conceived of from an objectifying perspective. This is really Cavarero's point. The latter upholds distance and the former requires and implies intimacy.

exemplifying human relationality and constituting the deepest expression of one's uniqueness. I would be further emboldened by the fact that Jean-Luc Nancy has also made discussion of sound central to his own critique of the subjectivity. More on this later.)[54]

For now, however, as I entered into the process of interviewing musicians, I was preoccupied with the notion of narratability, and particularly the exclusionary tendencies of narrative plausibility as discussed by Steedly. For me, it touched on a very sensitive but vaguely formed idea I had had for some time about a mysterious quality some performers seem to have that makes them narratable to audiences, that makes audiences accept them as legitimate, or better, makes audiences feel that they are *experiencing* something legitimate in the presence of those performers. Something seems to "stick" about these performers, allowing them to build audiences and careers to an extent that other performers of equal or greater levels of musicianship and performance ability find extremely difficult to achieve. When I began my interviews I was still having trouble articulating my thoughts about this issue, and at first they seemed not to resonate with my first correspondent, Ben Sures. When I probed him on his own thoughts about the "cohesiveness" of some performers' identities, he simply said, "On some levels, those people are referred to as masters. Because they hone in on one thing and do it well. […] I think people find their thing, and go with it. And some people are able to continue that. And then other people are eternally dissatisfied and need to evolve." He also referred to the notion of an intangible *duende* that some performers simply have.[55] (And I find no argument with either of these points.)

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[54] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

[55] This term, now quite common in Spanish expressive culture, is widely attributed to Federico Garcia Lorca, and Ben himself mentioned Lorca when he brought the notion into our conversation.

But as we continued along this line of conversation for a few minutes, thinking he was veering off topic, Ben described something he refers to as "folk festival syndrome":

> When people go to a folk festival for the first time, they have this feeling. And it's emotional, and maybe it's because they're eighteen when they go for the first time, or fifteen. They have this feeling, they have this experience, and…they are so determined to have that experience again, that every following year that they go, they tell themselves they're having that experience. And they miss out. (laughs) […] It teaches us, you know…like, on one hand you just, I think in my ideal sense it's great that people fall in love with the folk festival and they go every year, and that's it for me. But it's a little bit like the people that go to the Louvre to photograph the Mona Lisa, without actually looking at it. […] A person's individual experience…or followup decision to have an experience…it can be a rained out, terrible folk festival, with all music that is just badly (indecipherable)…(laughs)…and if a person is determined enough, they will still think they had a similar…. They won't have the same experience. 'Cause you can't remember that actual feeling…. You can have hints of it, you can get a little shiver of something that reminds you of something, but you can't put your finger on it. You don't know exactly what it is. It's…it's gone.[56]

He then went directly on to say the following about musicians:

> I'll have the same experience with music. Someone new comes on the scene, a folky singer-songwriter or whatever, and I'll…I'll get a feeling. […] And in that moment, it's special. It's meaningful. And they're special and meaningful. And I'll find them trying to recreate themselves that way. People do it too. They tap into something in themselves, and then, they try to recreate that thing. I've done it a million times. People go, Oh, I love that song, "Any Precious Girl," that's an amazing song, that's an amazing song, that's an amazing song…. Uh…so, so then, I'll think, Well, I need to recreate that! But I can't. But some people will. They'll fashion it. For some people…you love some artist because you just love what they're about. Their style, or whatever. And then, you know, it's probably that some people are…like, there are probably different levels of dissatisfaction…or different levels of needing to evolve…Or…some of us that aren't allowed to kid ourselves in any way, so we have to have this constant crisis. Then in order for us to be in this constant crisis,

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[56] Ben Sures, interview by author, January 11, 2016.

which is our function to evolve, then we also have to be rejected by the world constantly.

Dana: Yeah! That's exactly the narratability I'm talking about. Because if you *could* do that, if you were not you, and therefore you could just keep writing "Any Precious Girl" over and over again and everybody would love you and love you, then you would be narratable.

Ben: Yeah.

Dana: You'd be totally narratable. You know, but you're not, so…

Ben: (sighs)

Dana: So, what is…do you think if you *were* like that, that you would have less of a constant crisis going on with your identity? Would you just kind of buy into…

Ben: I think if I had sex appeal, I would have less of a constant crisis. (laughs)

Dana: (laughs) About your identity?

Ben: If there were certain elements of my identity that I could just keep in a box, that were always consistent, that had appeal…

Dana: So, something you could compartmentalize.

Ben: Yeah.

CARRYING ON (NOVEMBER 2023 – JANUARY 2024)

Before I abandoned ship and dropped out of my MA program in late 2017, my plan for the rest of this thesis was to provide a description of my interviewees (better referred to as correspondents for reasons that should be obvious by this point), and a summary of the conversations I had with each of them, and to note that the key insight I gained from the conversations as a whole was that the issue at hand was not "identity" at all, but rather a more deeply rooted struggle with a number of dualisms, of which the "musician" vs. "not musician" dualism inhered in the identity issue was only one. The endeavour of keeping an intellectual handle on all of it was proving a struggle for me, because I was experiencing the rub of the same web of dualisms in the musicological literature with which I was engaging in an attempt to frame and theorize the questions growing inside me around the significance of the conviction that one is a musical being, and of the priority to live a life in and through music and musical practice.[57] As I wrote in my journal in the spring of 2016:

> I've just finished reading the interview transcripts, and I'm not quite sure what to do with them, honestly. My journey through the literature has ended up being defined by finding a way to subvert, upset the notion of the musical object, to find a way to access the aspects of music's meaning that evade objectification of any kind, and to find a way to explore what can be learned about music when engaging with authors who argue for a relational understanding of human existence. I have strayed a long way from the notion of identity, and toward a basic relational ontology of which sound and music is a fundamental and indispensable expression. But I had all of these conversations with these musicians,

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[57] I will discuss in more detail later on my grapple with Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). I was also deeply engaged with the following works: Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). Since, at the time, I was casting a wide net in a search for work concerned with music as process, philosphy, ontology, and the self, I also engaged with work by Jeff Todd Titon, Georgina Born, Charles Taylor, Stephen Davies, Jerrold Levinson, and even Edward Said and Roland Barthes, as reflected in my bibliography. This work is not directly referenced in this thesis, and it's very difficult for me to say now in what ways and to what extent my engagement with it has influenced my thinking, either positively or negatively.

> which I incessantly steered toward identity. It was precariousness I was concerned about and maybe that's the key. Maybe that precariousness is not so much about "identity," but more about the challenges of these musicians (all of whom hold music as sacred and indispensable in their lives, and believe they have a musical gift for which they are responsible) in continuing to engage meaningfully with musical practice through a constant struggle against and/or negotiation with the same dualisms, conflations and contradictions that I have been struggling against, and negotiating with, throughout my research journey. So they are central to this process. They are not the topic of this "study." They are my correspondents on a meandering journey from one research question, unhelpfully universally oriented—"What constitutes the identity of musicians, and how/why does it always seem to be precarious?" to a much broader and yet narrower (not to mention completely different) question: What does music mean, for me, right now? (Or is this the question?) The particularities of the stories of these musicians, and the way they tell them, are explainable in the context of cultural paradigms—in the fact that we as artists still swim in the wake of romantic expressivism, in the fact that we operate within an inescapable Neo-liberal superstructure (or is that the right word?), in the fact that (for those in my generation) we were raised by a generation of socially and economically-mobile baby boomers who taught us that we could "be whatever we wanted to be." But what is shared (the lifelong dedication to music, and the discomfort of the friction of this dedication with the specificities of history and culture—the industry, the priorities of Western advanced capitalist society, etc.), asks for a philosophical exploration. The social/cultural/historical explanations are there to be found, and they are both valid and important. But there are places they cannot reach. Places in between. In between Bourdieu, Marx, and Adorno.[58]

The dualisms I was referring to in the above reflection included distinctions made in the literature, and the worlds and industry contexts in which my colleagues and I operate, between "amateur" vs. "professional," "commercially-produced" vs. "socially-produced," "presentational" vs. "participatory," "production" vs. "consumption." All of these dualisms spring from the more generalized and universal dualisms "individual" vs. "collective" and "subject" vs. "object." One thing that was proving particularly frustrating to me was the inevitable objectification that

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[58] My notes, May 3, 2016.

characterizes any study of music—even ones that aren't concerned with "texts" in the traditional sense. This objectification is of course understandable—one has to study *something*. But the main *something*—i.e. some essential quality of "musicianness"—that was holding my interest was hard to objectify. At some other point in 2016, I wrote down the following:

> Having wended my way through a variety of musical literature from various branches of the discipline, and feeling more and more driven by the conviction that what I have been referring to as "precariousness of identity" among musicians I know was really more of a conflict, or conflicts, caused by the very dualisms that made it so difficult for me to find musical literature that speaks to my concerns—professional/amateur, commercial/participatory, production/consumption, individual/collective, subject/object. I felt more and more driven by the notion that there is something *in-between* that holds the key to a relationship to music that reaches down to the level of ontology, and that can't be found in any conception of a subject interacting with musical objects. The musical object had to be done away with.[59]

I'd like to share another story that sheds light on what I was experiencing in my life as I was grappling with dualisms and objectification in my scholarly work, and aided me in expanding the learning I was doing at the time into the realm of my body and my emotions and therefore brought me fully into the magnitude of what I was considering. It is only from this years-on vantage point that I can recognize that I needed time to integrate that learning, not only into my body and my emotions as well as my mind, but into my life. I have now done so to the extent that I can return to intellectual engagement with this learning.

Here is the story: from late 2015 to 2020 I was part of a tribute band, which came together to perform songs from Joe Cocker's 1970 live album *Mad Dogs and Englishmen.*[60] The album

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[59] My notes, sometime in 2016. (I didn't put any date on this page of notes, which betrays my characteristically disorganized work practices and also my lack of anticipation that I would end up citing my notes directly. I am now only able to make a solid guess about the year I made these ones based on what their contents indicate about where I was at in the process.)

[60] Joe Cocker, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, recorded March 1970, A&M, vinyl.

has always been an iconic and important piece of Cocker's discography, and was famously accompanied by a film of the same name, which documented the rather heightened, rushed, frenetic, and serendipitous (and very "1970") way that the album and a subsequent US tour came together. *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* remains a beloved album in musician circles because of the work of its music director/pianist Leon Russell, as well as other well-known side players like drummer Jim Keltner, saxophonist Bobby Keys, and keyboardist Chris Stainton, and also because of the undeniable raw energy of the recordings.

The *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* tribute project was initiated by local Edmonton blues/rock singer and harmonica player Dan Shinnan and drummer Emmet van Etten. In the fall of 2015 they booked a date at Filthy McNasty's pub on Whyte Avenue for early December of that year, and began putting a band together for it. They asked me to be a member of the "hippie choir" (the album had so many backup singers on it they were quite accurately described as a choir), and I was surprised and thrilled. I was surprised because I didn't think I was on anyone's radar having been hiding away in graduate school, and thrilled because I had spent many an hour with friends and bandmates listening to *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* during some of the most formative years in my musical life.

That first show at Filthy's was electric, intense, undeniably magical, and extremely loud. The small stage at the end of the narrow bar was not nearly big enough for the 12-piece band that we were—this included two drummers and two drum-kits; *Mad Dogs* is quite famously a double-drummer album—but we squeezed ourselves onto it, with me and the other four or five backup singers standing on a bench that was built into the back of the stage and sharing microphones, hovering somewhat dangerously over the drummers directly in front of us. It is a chal-

lenge to describe what happened at that show. Musically-speaking, I'm sure that it had as many rough moments as polished ones. The band was made up of some fine musicians, but we were under-rehearsed, we had never played together as a band before, and—I will note again—we were extremely loud. But all of the people in the bar that night, many but not all of whom were our friends, seemed unable to contain themselves. There was an energy in that room that made everyone present feel extremely excited. It's difficult for me to remember details all these years later, but I will never forget what it felt like. I want to be careful about the language I use to describe that feeling that had saturated the entire place by the time we finished playing, because many of the words that come to mind, and are indeed apt—words like "elation" or "buzz"—tend to connote temporary and often artificial states, as in those induced by use of intoxicants. (Not to say that the use of intoxicants was not present at, and therefore part of, this event. Of course it was.)

Indeed, my desire to use care regarding the extent to which the language I use connotes temporary states of "elation" or "buzz" or even "flow" derives from the central point I want to engage and communicate regarding what music opens up: that from a relational ontological orientation, these "states" are not merely temporary, except insofar as everything is temporary. Rather they involve accessing or "tapping into"—even Judith Becker's notion of entrainment could work here[61]—a reality that is no more liminal, and no less real, than that which is reified by the ontological vocabulary that constitutes not only academic discourse but really our entire contemporary Western worldview. It is key to my thinking that when *music is really happening* (and I am obviously applying my own criteria here in terms of defining when music is "happen-

[61] Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 127–30.

ing," acknowledging that pinning this criteria down is as difficult as defining something like "authenticity"—one simply knows when it is present, and when it is not) there is something being *accessed* that is not only real but essential, rather than something being escaped or transcended.

To move toward engaging with exactly what that "something" is that is being accessed when "music is really happening," I turn ever to the work of Tim Ingold, who begins his 2015 work *The Life of Lines* by invoking Marcel Mauss's *Essay on the Gift*:

> Real life human beings, [Mauss] insisted, inhabit a fluid reality in which nothing is ever the same from one moment to the next and in which nothing ever repeats. In this oceanic world, every being has to find a place for itself by sending out tendrils which can bind it to others. Thus, hanging on to one another, beings strive to resist the current that would otherwise sweep them asunder.[62]

In this "oceanic world" that we all inhabit, in which nothing is static and permanent, which is in fact made up of nothing but process and movement (a reality that physicists would describe as background-independent),[63] Ingold prefers the term "correspondence" to describe the way beings come together, because it is a term that implies and encompasses the process, movement, impermanence inherent in the coming-together. My argument is that music, as a way that we *correspond* with sound, is possibly the deepest, truest, and most essential way that we as human beings acknowledge through engenderment and embodiment this paradoxical truth about our reality as beings—that our connections, our "correspondences," are given their very substance, and are made more powerful, by their inevitable impermanence, their ephemerality. Around the

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[62] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 11.

[63] Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), *passim.*

time I happened upon Ingold, I also happened upon Jean-Luc Nancy's *Listening*, whose philosophical orientation frames these same thoughts about sound thus:

> The sonorous present is the result of space-time: it spreads through space, or rather it opens a space that is its own, the very spreading out of its resonance, its expansion and its reverberation. This space is immediately omni-dimensional and transversate through all spaces: the expansion of sound through obstacles, its property of penetration and ubiquity, has always been noted.[64]

When we are together with sound, we interpenetrate one-another and engender what our bodies know to be true: that the connection that we require in order to resist being swept asunder exists in and through (and only in and through) the very movement, the ever-becoming and never-being, that would (and will eventually) sweep us asunder.

At that first Mad Dogs show, we all felt—we knew—that we had not so much performed a set of music that night as opened something up; we had tapped into and unleashed some sort of energy that now had its own momentum. And we would follow that through the next several years—until Covid stopped it in its tracks along with everything else—through dozens and dozens of shows in bars, theatres, festivals, and once in the centre of a pow-wow roundhouse, where inevitably every space we played in would open up (the way the conference room at the Sands Hotel had opened up for Alex Sunrise at the gospel music jamboree I had attended in 2014), all of the usual performative infrastructure would fall away, and performers and audience-members alike would be swept up and carried along. We often played for two hours or more without stopping. Through this period, we all felt like a bit like what the I imagine the Grateful Dead felt in their heyday, when they clearly had unwittingly initiated and were swept up in a

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[64] Nancy, *Listening*, 13.

phenomenon much larger than they were, individually or collectively. There were many people who made a point of coming to all of our shows, and they came to feel and to know that they were a part of the whole thing. They *were* undeniably a part of it.

It would do an injustice to whatever it is that happened through the years that the Mad Dogs Experience was a going concern, to place it in the realm of the temporary or artificial. This is point I will return to more substantively later on, but I believe that a disservice is done to heightened musical moments—moments that I would describe as "when music is truly happening," when it has opened something up that seems to rise above the mundane—when primary focus is placed on liminality, on the "rising above" aspect of it. I contend that it is no less real, no less a part of reality, than what we might think of as more quotidian states. My further argument is that from an orientation based in a relational ontology, this point is simply self-evident.

THE INTERVIEWS

During the period that the Mad Dogs Experience a newly going concern (and during which time I did not yet know the implications that experience would have for my intellectual pursuits and queries), I conducted interviews with six of my peers, broadly speaking—that is, six musicians who I know and respect and consider to be colleagues and members of one of the severally overlapping local music communities of which I am also a part in some capacity. As mentioned, this group was largely self-selecting, though I did try to achieve a modicum of variety in terms of my correspondents' ages, their musical backgrounds, and the nature and scope of their involvement in music as a profession, and I decided beforehand that six was a reasonable and manageable number to work with, since I wanted to consider the conversations in depth—and bring my own thinking into dialogue with those conversations—rather than attempt to amass reliable data around certain specific questions.

These are the people I spoke to:

> Ben Sures—an Edmonton singer-songwriter, in his late 40s at the time of our conversation.
>
> Paul Mayer—a pianist and keyboard player, originally from Ontario, in his late 30s at the time of our conversation.
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> Lindsay Woolgar—a jazz-trained double-bassist, originally from Edmonton and living in Winnipeg, in her mid-20s at the time of our conversation.
>
> Matt Blackie—an Edmonton-based drummer, originally from Ontario, in his late 30s at the time of our conversation.
>
> Terry Morrison—a singer/songwriter and long-time mainstay of Edmonton's roots music scene, now living in Nanton, in her early 60s at the time of our conversation.

> Bob Tildesley—a jazz trumpeter, originally from Calgary and a fixture in Edmonton's (and Canada's) jazz scene since the 1970s, in his early 60s at the time of our conversation.

Returning to my transcripts of these interviews after many years, I find that my primary response is gratitude to and for these musicians, for their generosity with their time and their perspectives. They were all very open and honest about their lives, their stories, their challenges, and they all entered wholeheartedly into the questions that I had brought to them, even though it is also clear from the transcripts that at that point I had not even clearly articulated my question(s), to them or to myself. I am also taken back to Walter Lightning's work, and his discovery over time that the stories his Elders had shared with him were layered in such a way that as he returned to them at different points in his life and growth they had something more to offer him, based on his ability to integrate their lessons.[65] I feel this way returning to these conversations. They are of course not traditional stories with generations of wisdom woven into their structures, but because my correspondents generously engaged in the process so completely and so truthfully, there are deep and layered lessons to be found in the sharing of those truths.

My re-engagement with the conversations are helping me understand why they were key to the part of the journey that led me away from using "identity" as a framework for understanding their musician-ness. This was precisely because of the way most of my correspondents related to a general sense of their identity as musicians. To be clear, not all of them did relate to the notion of identity as relevant, and this would prove a key point. For those who did engage directly with their identity as musicians, or had done so in the past, this was invariably a point of suffering, of incongruence, of existential angst. This was of course not surprising to me. My own suffering

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[65] Lightning, "Compassionate Mind," 15.

around my identity had led me to ask questions about it, after all. The two correspondents for whom the idea of identity meant very little—to the extent that they did not seem clear what I meant by the term—were Bob and Terry. They had both certainly experienced stress and upset in their various working endeavours, i.e., participation in music as an industry and as a profession, but it was simply never about identity for them. For example, Bob experienced a lot of pain—so much so that he quit playing professionally for a few years—during a period in his career when much of the work that was sustaining him financially was playing in marching bands for events like the Canadian Finals Rodeo and the Shrine Circus, where neither the environment nor the repertoire reconciled with his relationship to musical practice, which is overtly spiritual. Bob's stories about those gigs are quite funny in retrospect—particularly one in which his bandleader was urinated on by a tiger immediately before his cue to count in a breakneck-paced Sousa march—but the experiences drove him away from music-making, at least temporarily. However, the sense of incongruity that overwhelmed him at this time had nothing to do with what I will call the "nags" of identity—ideas around "who I feel I am as a person" and "where I feel I should be at this point in my life"—but simply that what he was required to do and participate in was an engagement with music and sound that offended his deep, and yet clearly articulated, beliefs about what music is and does. As shared with me during our conversation, Bob understands music as a "vibrational" language that allows us to "get back […] to a consonance […] in our existence."[66] He explained his understanding of "consonance" as something like an embodied

[66] Bob Tildesley, interview by author, February 22, 2016.

realization that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual domains are not separate, and that we as living beings are not separate from the rest of existence.[67]

Terry expressed the experience of a similar stress that eventually led her away from six-night-a-week gigs playing cover music: "I stopped doing it when I felt like I was kind of killing my soul by, you know, by playing 'Take Me Home Country Roads' over and over and over, you know what I mean?"[68] Years later, after she had released a number of records of her own material and had become a respected member of Western Canada's roots music scene, it was the vagaries of the music industry that were a source of stress, frustration, and annoyance, particularly the extent to which the industry requires that artists prove themselves again and again simply in order to access work (i.e. performance opportunities) and other forms of support, like grant funding.[69] However, she has not felt stress around her growing unwillingness to participate in the industry—which is to say she is comfortable with that unwillingness—and her ongoing discovery that she simply did not have the "hunger" to push herself to achieve more within it. This point does not seem to have ever led her to question the constancy of music in her life. This perspective was woven through our whole conversation, but is summed up well in this statement:

> The business of music sometimes kills the music in a certain way, you know? And whereas… The music is the easiest thing about all that. And I, you know, I feel like I've…I feel satisfied that I've created a body of work that is out there. It's out there in the world, right? And I feel, in that way, I feel fulfilled, I'm…and I'm not stopping; we're about to record another album, uh, live…you know, with our… with The Pleading Hearts, with our country band, right? And John and I just put an album

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[67] Incidentally, Walter Lightning makes a similar argument in his thesis—that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual "domains" are not separate. Bob is of course not familiar with Lightning's work. Lightning, "Compassionate Mind," 64–5.

[68] Terry Morrison, interview by author, March 22, 2016.

[69] Terry Morrison, 2016.

> out last, this past year, and it's like, you know, you don't stop creating. But, yeah, I'm not trying to make a living out of it anymore.[70]

The only thing Terry had to say about identity, when I brought it up directly as something that is problematic for some musicians, is that she unequivocally self-identifies as a musician, that she feels satisfied with what she has accomplished and the recognition she has gotten for it. Her own musical practice, through multiple changes in the way it is woven into her life, and through various other changes in life circumstance, is an unquestionable constant.

Paul Mayer's experience lays at the other end of the spectrum as regards "the identity rub." At the time that Paul and I spoke, he had recently moved to Edmonton from Grande Prairie (where he had been working 60 to 80 hours a week as a welder), and had begun playing piano again, giving up on the conviction to swear off music altogether which had accompanied and motivated his move from Toronto to Grande Prairie three years prior to that. Paul had shown early promise as a pianist as a child, and pushed himself through an undergraduate degree in classical music, before ending up in Toronto leading a busy life as a live musician—playing in a "stylish" pop band and a fusion rock band, both of which had residencies at a few Toronto venues. Paul makes it clear that he had pursued a career in music because it was what he most loved to do, despite growing up in an environment where certain types of careers, and all of the status-markers that come along with them, were prized as indicating "success" in life. Paul entered into his music career with an ideal musician in his mind, which was the antithesis of the "eighties yuppie" ideal that had permeated his imagination as a child. This ideal was a version of a legitimately poor Bohemian artist, who is not a "dilettante," and is committed to the life of poverty

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[70] Ibid.

that being an artist entails. During this time he was "always busy and never had any money," though he and his bandmates would supplement their playing income with lucrative work as test subjects for medications about to be approved for market. (My spontaneous response to the sharing of this in the moment was, "Perfect job for a musician!")

As Paul reached his late twenties, the various notions he had held regarding an ideal life and identity were in conflict, and caused a crisis: "I started to freak out about the fact that I didn't have a wife and a mortgage and kids and stuff. And, uh, I felt like I didn't know how I expected those things to happen making music as a living, but somehow when I didn't have them, it was kind of like, I don't have my shit together, I, uh…what am I doing with my life, you know?"[71] He felt the weight of this crisis so keenly that he comprehensively altered the shape and content of his life. He moved from Toronto to Grande Prairie, learned the trade of welding in a job that would consume the bulk of his time, and told himself that he was finished with the piano, and with music, forever.

My interpretation of this major event in Paul's life is filtered through my own, inevitably. I, like Paul, had come to feel as I entered into adulthood that my aptitude for music (particularly as reflected back to me in the form of praise and other rewards), combined with my deep love for it, was the thing that set me apart from other people. It made me feel like *me*, and it made me feel special. It gave me a sense of uniqueness that helped me feel assured that I would achieve whatever vague notion of "success" I was able to hold in my view at that time. And I had a similar crisis to Paul, also in my late twenties, in the midst of which I felt that whatever promise I had shown in this regard was not coming to fruition. My parallel to Paul's drastic life-change was

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[71] Paul Mayer, interview by author, February 24, 2016.

enrolling in the undergraduate program that has ultimately led to my writing this thesis, and while it is an arguably less extreme reaction, I understand Paul's total rejection of music in that context. I understand pursuing a career in the realm that you feel constitutes and expresses *who you are*, and I understand how complete the rejection of self when you feel you are being denied that career, that life you envisioned for yourself—however vaguely formed and unrealistic that vision was. Though I never stopped playing music through this difficult and confusing period of my life, I feel acutely the pain and sense of betrayal that led Paul to attempt to swear off music for good. (Terry and I happened to discuss a couple of other examples of this among our peers—one who, like Paul, simply stopped playing his instrument entirely for several years after becoming disillusioned with the music industry, and another who actually threw his banjo into the North Saskatchewan River.)

The great benefit of having had these conversations with my peers, and then of transcribing the recordings of the conversations, and then of engaging curiously with those transcriptions is that I was able to recognize that insofar as "identity" as regards "musician-ness" was a relevant concept to my peers, it was as a painful illusion, a fantasy and a fallacy that would inevitably lead to crisis when brought to bear on one's sense of a basic right to be a musical being, to live life musically. In the end, it was what came through these conversations regarding that inherent musicality, i.e. what remains when the illusion had done all of the damage it could do and had destroyed everything it could destroy, that was most interesting to me. It was more than interesting to me. It was, and is, everything to me.

One nuance of this that Lindsay and Matt both identified is that music seems to work better in their lives when it is balanced with other activities, interests, roles, and even jobs. Through the

intensity of jazz school in Lindsay's case, and of the "road-warrior" touring lifestyle in Matt's case, they both felt their love of music-making slipping away from them, as well as their general sense of purpose. At the time of the conversations, both were working "day jobs," and both felt that this had helped them re-orient their relationship to music in a beneficial way. This paralleled my own experience as well; Lindsay shared with me an anecdote about Joni Mitchell's practice of "letting some fields lie fallow"—i.e. finding a creative rhythm between periods of painting and periods of writing—that was already a cherished anecdote for me. Both Matt and Lindsay were also able to articulate something I had been struggling to at this time—that when you're making music with others, and it's really "cooking," the "something" that is opened up in that moment lives beyond that moment, and continues to echo through your life. Lindsay expressed this in a story about a late-night jam at a music festival:

> My other really powerful musical experiences have been at festivals, jamming around a campfire, at like three in the morning, you know, with like, ten people who you know, like, like, going to Ness Creek a couple years ago with, uh, you know, Cam's thing, right?[72] Like, that was so great. Like, you know, by about three in the morning everyone in the band had ended up back around our campsite and our campfire, and we had a great jam for about three hours, and, you know, the next night we played our set, and then after that we went and played just a jam on the main stage after everyone had left the festival. Like, those experiences are really special. You know, I'm like, Wow, this music really brings us together. Um, and like, you know, Jordan, I see her, like I don't know, like, four times a year.[73] I still consider her a close friend, just because of those experiences we shared musically, you know? And because of that, we can just be open with each other on a, you know, on a…same with us, right? It's like, Well, I trust you because I know we have so many of the

[72] Cam is a mutual friend of mine and Lindsay's, a fiddle player who leads a band called The Gadjo Collective.

[73] Jordan is Cam's daughter, who was also playing in his band at that festival.

> same experiences. And I know the work that you're doing, right? So I'm like, ok, like we have this in common, Like, we can share that.[74]

Matt put it like this:

> If the band's cooking, and everyone's on the same page, and it's just an unbelievable feeling. Um…yeah, you just feel like a team, and there's this…this…form of communication, this unspoken bond between everyone when it's really working that's, that yeah, it's the closest thing to magic that I've ever come across. And I think that's what drew me to music in the first place, it, uh, watching music videos and bands and stuff that had that, you know. And I was like, I want that, you know? And that's still true, that, um, one of my best friends that I grew up playing with, um, we could still jump into a room together and there'd be chemistry there, you know?[75]

Ultimately, what I "got" out of these conversations was exactly what I wanted to get from them, i.e. the direction I felt compelled to move in as a result of my multi-layered interactions with them are my own responsibility. I do not think of them off as containing "data" that justifies where my thinking went next. I am framing them after the fact as "the thing that got me beyond the identity (non)issue." Coming back to them now I have found that there is much in them that speaks directly to the way I am currently trying to articulate my thoughts about "what music even is," which I was not yet able to articulate in 2016. I could say that I am using a different interpretive lens now, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that I *am* a different interpretive lens. And the person that I am now is inclined to lump together and share the following of my correspondents' thoughts, as the ones that are currently resonating the most strongly for me. I will begin with Paul, who described to me why and how he came back to playing music after moving to Edmonton from Grande Prairie to take an advanced welding course:

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[74] Lindsay Woolgar, interview by author, March 7, 2016.

[75] Matt Blackie, interview by author, January 9, 2016.

I started going out to shows again, you know, I wasn't working 60 hours a week or more, so I actually did have time, so while I was in school I was out, checking out shows and going to this and that, everything, just by myself, on my bike, you know, and just, uh…and that was great, I just felt like this part of me that had been missing for a while was starting to get fed again, and um, I just, I just decided that, whether I wanted to or not, I just… I couldn't turn that part of myself off, um…no matter how much I wanted to…be a quote-unquote normal person, I just, Uh, I would never fully, you know, just …I'd never feel passive and not invested, um, in music, I would never not feel passionately about it, you know, um…and uh…I just decided that I did…whether I like it or not, I needed music to be a part of my life. […] I can't live without it. I can't. I've tried, for three years, and uh…I just can't…I just can't do it. I don't know.[76]

Bob: Music is so much a part of us, because…um…it's the path back to…uh, creation or whatever. Because it's a vibrational language that we all understand at some level. Or many levels, right? So that's why we go with it. Because we have to. Right?[77]

Lindsay: It's like, to be able to have that and access that, and be able to channel that, right? 'Cause I mean, I feel like it's something that I channel, like, I don't feel like it's something that really comes from me, you know? Like, um, so I don't know where it comes from.[78]

Terry: I keep playing music 'cause I feel like…it's the only constant in my life. You know? I mean, there are other things that are, but it has always been the one thing that's carried through from the time I was a little kid 'til now. Everything else changes, right?[79]

Matt: You feel like it's your truest self. […] And you're just in the moment, and you're not, you're just kind of observing, you're not judging, or trying to be someone else or anything, or say the right thing, or…it's just happening without a compass, you know? And it's, it's just sort of the ship that's sailing towards, um…I was going to make a really cheesy

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[76] Paul Mayer, 2016.

[77] Bob Tildesley, 2016.

[78] Lindsay Woolgar, 2016.

[79] Terry Morrison, 2016.

> sunset metaphor, but I'm not going to. […] It's just sort of drawn towards your truest self and is the easiest thing in the world.[80]
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> Bob: Music's like that too, right? Where you have music that's…um… whatever your intent is, or your perspective – it can be very spiritual, right? Or it could just be emotional. Gee, I lost my baby. Or, you know, my dog died, or something, or, you know, um…something political, maybe, or…there's a lot of different levels, right? So, uh…but it's all, you know, an attempt to, to, to make sense, and get back to some type of consonance, you know, in our existence, maybe. […] It's always looking for that consonance. Which, you know…in the greatest music or art, or whatever…that consonance comes out, right? Like it just makes sense, right?[81]

Ben Sures gave me nothing along these lines that I could quote. We had a fascinating and wide-ranging conversation during which he was in some ways more "objective" than I was about the topics in which I was interested. He had some truly insightful things to say about how people mediate their experiences through their expectations based on previous experiences (as noted in the anecdote about "folk festival syndrome" shared a few sections back), and the ways that some musicians (particularly front people) have great career success exploiting (intentionally or not) that phenomenon. He contextualized his own life and career within this as well, and in this context he can only deem himself a failure, or at best "confounded by a set of Western values" that reward activities and qualities that at times he thinks he would happily undertake and attempt to embody, but finds over and over again that he is unable to. (I incidentally have the same inability to "play the game," and have had many arguments with a colleague over to what extent that inability is actually "unwillingness." It is not unwillingness. Or, at least, it is not that simple.) As I look back at the transcript of our conversation, I can see that I was trying rather desperately to

[80] Matt Blackie, 2016.

[81] Bob Tildesley, 2016.

get Ben to admit that his relationship with music goes deeper than all that, that he has a sense of himself as a musical person that transcends those reified but somehow false phenomena. (And I still believe that, really, he does.) He came close a few times. He said:

> On some levels, on some level, we know. In some moments, we go "This is important to me." Or in some moments, "This is my conviction." Or in some moments, "This is my desire." Uh, or in some moments, "I'm good at this!" Or in some moments I have something for somebody else. And in other moments, it's like, "I don't have any money!" Or, "Aaaaagh, I don't sing that well. If I sang better, I would do better."[82]

Later in the conversation, he said: "Our biggest struggle in life is to be accepted, or included, or to feel relevant, or, basically, we're not designed to be alone. One-hundred percent, we are not designed…so, our whole goal in life is to not be alone. Whether we know it or not. And so, we latch onto things."[83]

Ben and I talked for a very long time—the transcript of our conversation is forty pages long—but looking back, he encapsulated the "identity problem" as it flowed through all of these conversations, within the first minute or so: "I cling to the idea that I'm a musician. And I cling to the idea that my being a musician has meaning. Both are precarious. And occasionally I try and remove myself from that idea, just in my head, and I feel empty and scared."[84] I am considering these various thoughts now—the "knowing" that enables and accompanies the dedication of one's life to musical practice, and the ways that this deep sense of "rightness" is reinforced in particular moments of music-making (which always inheres connection to one's fellow musicians and/or audience members, i.e. it is an embodied experience of "not being alone") and is

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[82] Ben Sures, 2016.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ben Sures, 2016.

thoroughly compromised in other moments—in relation to Ben's insistence that if he were just able to do certain things at a higher level, he could attain a level of career success that would resolve this conundrum, and permanently banish all of the fear and emptiness. He noted many of these "things" as we spoke—if he could sing better, if he had sex appeal, if he could hone in one skill area and truly master it, then he wouldn't be in a constant state of crisis. It causes me no end of frustration to know that Ben knows very well that this isn't true, and yet I understand his tendency to circle back to them because I also know it's not true and am still at times in danger of falling prey to those narratives.

The alienation and isolation that stands in contrast to the belonging and acceptance found in deep musical connection can feel like a deep betrayal. The fact of this is well known—and is perhaps epitomized in pop culture in the trope of the publicly adored but personally isolated rock star—but the reasons for it are as complex and multiple as they are little understood. Within this complexity I feel confident asserting that one contributing factor is that those moments of true connection occur in professional contexts that deny that connection by placing value and focus elsewhere—on the aspects of musical performance and presentation that can be easily identified, compartmentalized, packaged, bought, and sold. For this group of my peers that I spoke to, what they most value about music, and what they understand about what music *is*—as a practice and a "constant" in their lives, and as a gift to which they feel they are responsible—is almost by definition everything that falls away as soon as compartmentalization occurs, all of the parts of the enterprise that cannot be bought or sold. It occurs in the flow of life as it is lived, and cannot be bottled up, or pinned down, or guaranteed. This does not make it less real. It makes it more real. It just seems less real because it slides away as soon as any interpretive frame is placed on it.

RED HERRING

By the time I had finished having the above conversations, I already knew "identity" was not the point, not truly what interested me. A few things were clear to me: firstly, that my correspondents' pain stemmed from a disconnect between what they knew to be of great value to them as regards musical practice, in a "what life is all about" sense—in other words, what they knew to be real and true and enduring—and what aspects of that musical practice the world in which they live is capable of valuing, and which it isn't. It was also clear that connection and connectedness is inextricable from that deep value placed on music as a way of life. As mentioned, Adriana Cavarero's exploration of identity as wholly relational and related to story gave me a helpful framework in which to conceive of a sense of a Self that is constituted entirely in connection to others.

It was at this point that I became fixated on the need to "do away with the musical object," and fell into a grapple with the various dualisms that seemed to both require and uphold objectifying processes. The work and the working lives of myself and my peers, as well as our ongoing negotiations with our deep relationship to musical practice, clearly cut across delineations that were made in musicological literature focused on music as a social practice. It seemed instructive for a time to engage with the interpretive frameworks provided by these works as unable to recognize my concerns, because it paralleled the way in which the same cut across delineations that exist out in the "real world" around how, where, when, and by whom music gets made. I had to fight with the literature for a time in order to articulate to myself that what I was interested in was, by definition, everything that falls through its cracks.

I find this very difficult to explain even now. An overt example is Thomas Turino's *Music as Social Life*, which offers an overarching assertion that "musical participation and experience are valuable for the processes of personal and social integration that make us whole."[85] Turino is informed in this work by his own experiences of music-making as providing a sense of deep connection, of being "in sync" with others, of *communitas*.[86] He draws a line through Gregory Bateson's conception of the arts as a special form of communication, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*, and Peircean semiotics to argue for musical engagement as an attempt to approach what he calls "the Possible," or the temporary realization of a personal or societal ideal, as opposed to "the Actual," or the habits and routines of mundane existence.[87] He also outlines four distinct "fields" of music-making—participatory and presentational (as live musical practices) high fidelity music and studio audio art (as recording practices)—to offer a means of taking into account differentiated values, responsibilities, practices, and conceptions of music in various contexts, and to therefore break out of the notion of music as a unitary act.[88]

The relevance of Turino's work to my own is clear, and this is precisely why the ways in which his theoretical frameworks fall short of speaking to my concerns were also immediately clear to me. The concept of "the Actual" vs. "the Possible" is not only dualistic in a way that sets music-making apart from "real life," but it is also implicitly hierarchical. It's right there in the labels—if the former constitutes reality then the latter can only be a temporary escape from it.

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[85] Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1.

[86] Ibid., 18.

[87] Ibid., 16-17.

[88] Turino, *Music as Social Life, 20-21.*

Feeling into the depth of my opposition to this hierarchical dualism helped me articulate my conviction that whatever is "opened up" when music is really working is as real as anything else, and should not be viewed as ontologically subservient to a more mundane level of reality. (Conversely, it is also my experience that what Turino calls "the Possible"—the sense of connectedness, of being "in sync" with others—can also be accessed in the undertaking of the most mundane of activities.)

The dualism thrown up in the concept of the fields, particularly that of participatory vs. presentational music-making contexts, mirrors dualisms and categories for practice that are upheld in the "real world" as well, in a plethora of contexts and mechanisms that separate "professionals" from "amateurs" and perhaps particularly those who participate in the industry of music and those who do not. My conversations with my peers, as aligned with my own experience, make it clear these categories and distinctions—while wholly reified and therefore needing to be reckoned with on an ongoing basis—actually have no true relevance to our lives in music, our lives as musical beings. They at best ignore and at worst erase the dynamic and ever-changing, and yet constant and fundamentally unshakeable nature of our relationships to and in music. They are in fact the cause of the pain, frustration, annoyance, anger, and outright crises that I discussed in the previous section. In other words, I realized that the inability of these theoretical constructs to take into account my growing notions about "what is really going on" with music, and the frustration that was causing me, was equal to the inability of the containers and contexts of the music industry and the entire "set of Western values" of which Ben spoke to hold the fundamental content and meaning of our lives in music. "What is really going on" was falling through the cracks, to the extent that I began defining it that way. What music is, and what I am

interested in for this thesis, is whatever is falling through those cracks. There is a nuance here too, that whatever falls between those cracks also has the power to undo or subvert the constructs that create those cracks, just as I experienced during Alex Sunrise's sermon and every show I performed with the Mad Dogs Experience.

My rub with Turino's use of Peircean semiotics as a conceptual framework for understanding the multiple ways that music works (though I fully take on board its clear value for analysis in specific contexts) helped me define my desire to somehow get beyond a functionalist approach as I sought to get inside of musical lives.[89] As he outlines, to view and analyze music semiotically is to think of musical sounds and whatever comes along with them—gestures, bodily movements, facial expressions, clothing, album artwork—as vehicles for signs. This means that each and any element of a musical product or happening is a sign, which is either iconic of or indexes something else, a personal or cultural identity, for example .[90] For Turino, this is a rich way in which to dig into "the idea that the arts are essential for human survival because they serve the function of integrating different parts of the self and integrating individuals with each other and their environment."[91] While much about this orientation rang true for me, there is something about the notion of music working on selves, or selves using music, that separates the music from the selves—to speak on an ontological level, it separates subjects from objects. Objectification. I knew that if I thought and spoke in terms of what I and my peers *use* music to do

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[89] I use the term "functionalist" here to refer to understandings of music in terms of its function, ie. the ways in which it is "used" for some particular purpose to refer to something "extramusical." I am not invoking or referring to the anthropological theory of functionalism.

[90] Turino, *Music as Social Life*, 10-12. An iconic sign relates to what it points to via resemblance, and an indexical sign does so by repeated association. As Turino notes, there is a third type of sign, the symbol, which is perhaps less useful in a musical context because it has an abstract connection to that to which it refers.

[91] Ibid., 12.

—that we use it to access the sense of connection we seek, and/or to feel like our truest selves—that the understanding I sought would again fall through the cracks. It seemed to be the objectification of music—its separation from those who spend their lives in dynamic relationship with it, which is to say everyone—that would inevitably lead to a functionalist orientation.[92]

[92] At the time that I was most overtly grappling with the seeming inevitability of this kind of instrumentalist orientation, I was most drawn to works like Crafts, Cavicchi and Keil's Music in Daily Life Project, because of the way it allowed the sharing of people's stories about their relationship to music to simply stand on their own terms. I was also interested in Tia deNora's *Music in Everyday Life*, but did find that her work was overwhelmingly about "use" of music, i.e. music is a tool people use to express or release emotion, solidify a sense of identity, etc. As I returned to this work in 2023, however, I was pleased to discover a much more recent assertion by deNora that music "can be seen as a way of being together," and that as an object is it "flexible" and "emergent." Tia deNora, *Music Asylums: Wellbeing Through Music in Everyday Life* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 2, 136.

A GIFT

Somewhere in the flow of life, maybe a month or so after I submitted my application to return to university and complete this thesis, I unknowingly gave myself a gift. I ordered a book on Amazon in the spur of some moment—in which perhaps I was reading a Substack that made reference to said book, or heard about it on a podcast—that failed to enter into the archive of my memory after the fact, and also failed to re-enter it when a couple of weeks later I got an email saying my purchase was out for delivery ("Oh! Did I order something?), and it did not even come back to me when the book arrived and I learned that I had purchased something called *The Gift* by Lewis Hyde. (I actually guffawed aloud in this moment, and continue to marvel that I still have no memory of learning about and buying this book.)

The Gift appeared as a gift, not only because I was surprised to receive it, and not exactly because it provided me an interpretive framework that doesn't as a matter of course erase everything in which I am interested (though it does provide this), but because it enlivened my thinking about how music weaves through life, how life is indeed made of music. This is to say it helped me, just as Cavarero, Ingold, Arendt, and Nancy had done several years earlier, engage intellectually with lessons I was and am carrying in my body, after some years of integrating the swarm of thoughts and feelings, and beliefs and convictions, that I couldn't quite tame into a cohesive thesis project but I *could* breathe with and live with.

The basic assertion of *The Gift* is that works of art are gifts, not commodities, and that in a thoroughly capitalist society such as this one, they tend to exist simultaneously in two distinct economies—the market economy and the gift economy.[93] Originally published in 1983, this

[93] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (New York: Vintage, 2019). Hyde of course draws heavily from the work of Marcel Mauss and Marshall Sahlins, among others.

book is a "classic," according to Margaret Atwood's foreword to the 2012 and 2019 editions, and though I have no memory of ever coming across it before it showed up on my doorstep, it makes sense to me that artists have gravitated to it as they try to understand why they are compelled to give much of themselves to artistic practices that are so little, or at best ambiguously, valued in Western contemporary society.[94] Hyde's work offers me a succinct and apt way to talk about capitalism, which is helpful because I don't particularly want to talk about capitalism—which is to say that I am interested in getting at the precisely the aspects of lives in music that are *not* susceptible to capitalistic processes—but feel I have to address it at a basic level. This is because the "whatever falls through the cracks" that has become central for me as "the real thing that is going on," as well as being something that falls through the cracks between ontological distinctions between subjects and objects it is also something that falls between the cracks of a transactional system of exchange. My friends wouldn't necessarily relate to the idea of their alienation resulting from "subject-object dualism," but they understand deeply and articulate well the alienation that comes from the transactionalism that permeates their lives as musicians—through commodification, most obviously, but also in the prevalence of music-making contexts that are structured to reify a distinction and separation between producers and consumers.[95]

Hyde marks a basic contrast between market exchange and gift exchange thus: "A market exchange has an equilibrium or stasis: you pay to balance the scale. But when you give a gift

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[94] Margaret Atwood, foreword to *The Gift*, by Lewis Hyde (New York: Vintage, 2019), xv.

[95] I should note that Timothy D. Taylor's *Music and Capitalism* provides valuable insights on the ways in which musicians navigate a Neo-liberal capitalist system that is "in people's heads as a cultural system, a set of ideologies, an ensemble of practices." (p. 181) I don't address his work directly simply because I am only concerned with addressing capitalistic processes in a "bare bones" definitional way, i.e. the way they would render all exchange transactional (rather than in Taylor's historical and historicized way), and to highlight what is therefore missed when a capitalist lens is applied.

there is momentum, and the weight shifts from body to body."[96] At several points in the book he refers to this momentum as "gift increase." In a market economy, bodies are not part of the exchange, there is no contact. "There is no motion or emotion because the whole point is to keep the balance, to make sure the exchange itself doesn't consume anything or involve one person with another."[97] Later, he puts it like this:

> It is characteristic of market exchange that commodities move in between two independent spheres. We might best picture the difference between gifts and commodities in this regard by imagining two territories separated by a boundary. A gift, when it moves across the boundary, either stops being a gift or abolishes the boundary. A commodity can cross the line without any change in its nature; moreover, its exchange will often establish a boundary where none previously existed (as, for example, in the sale of a necessity to a friend). *Logos*-trade draws the boundary, *eros*-trade erases it.[98]

If the former of the above two quotes establishes that music is always a gift (because surely there can be no instance of musical engagement where bodies and people do not become involved with one another), then the latter illustrates beautifully the capacity of musical engagement to resist transactionalism, its capacity to erase the boundary between "producers" and "consumers" that is often built into the physical structures of contexts for musicking. As I currently understand it, this is what happened when the obstructive infrastructure at the Gospel Jamboree I attended seemed to dissolve throughout the course of Alex Sunrise's sermon. This is what happened at every show I did with the Mad Dogs Experience—whether we were playing a bar, a festival, or a soft-seat theatre—where it ceased to matter who was playing and singing and who was

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[96] Hyde, *The Gift*, 11.

[97] Hyde, *The Gift*, 12.

[98] Ibid., 78.

listening and dancing. We were all doing the musicking. Conversely, when music is for whatever complex of reasons unable to erase the boundary, it then stops being a gift. It stops being music. I'm inclined to think it doesn't happen very often, but I am also willing to argue that if and when music does become wholly commodified, it ceases to be music.

The other notion from Hyde that has been helpful to me is that of a "double economy," for which he draws from examples of communities in which goods, services, and energy flow as gifts within the community and as commodities at the boundary of the community. His use of the term in discussion of the contemporary scientific community, in which ideas are offered as gifts in the form of writing pieces for scientific journals (for which contributors receive no monetary compensation, but do receive status and other expected benefits of participation in community), and as commodities in the form of text-book contributions (which pay well, but sometimes have a negative value in terms of one's place within the community).[99] Though this example doesn't parallel my own music sphere exactly, it gets close to the dual nature of professional or semi-professional (this is a spectrum) musicians' participation in a sphere that is both a community and an industry. Every musician I know is in a never-ending negotiation with, in, and around this duality, always assessing on a case-by-case basis when and to what extent it's appropriate or favourable to offer your work as a gift (and this may mean being paid less than you would require in other circumstances rather than not being paid at all), and when it's necessary to consider remuneration above all or most other factors. (This is of course a highly complex and individual negotiation, which necessitates taking into account multiple considerations—some of which will overlap and some of which will be at odds.)

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[99] Hyde, *The Gift*, 100-101.

None of my colleagues spoke specifically about this in the interviews—I didn't ask about it—but it is certainly a source of stress to varying degrees for all of us, just as are all of the other dualities I've discussed. One of my current bandmates has an interesting and quite brilliantly simplified approach to this negotiation, in which he has upset the goodwill-based participation in community vs. putting a price on one's labour duality by turning it into a triangle, at the points of which are "money," "people," and "music." He will always and automatically accept any gig for which there is a reasonable chance that the quality of a minimum of two of those three points will be high. So, if the money is good and the people are nice, he can deal with the level of musicianship not being of his usual standard. Or if the level of musicianship will be high and the money is good, he will put up with working with people he doesn't like. Etc. Chances are he has taken gigs where only one of these conditions was satisfied, but that would require more consideration, which is to say it can be complicated even for someone who has streamlined the process.

I have had many conversations with friends about this, and even my very practical friend above knows that there is inevitably a level of intuition that comes into play within this dance with duality, and that as you hone and learn to trust that intuition you can somehow coax transactionalism into behaving like reciprocity. You come to develop a deep trustworthy sense that simultaneous to offering services and providing labour in a market, you are participating in a flow of energy in and through community, multiple overlapping communities—it can become one and the same thing—and that the reciprocity inherent in this will buoy you, materially and spiritually.

HUMANING, WITH SOUND

So then, how does one get around the transactionalism, the functionalism, and the objectification, and therefore get *at* all of the stuff about music that is residual when these processes are applied on any level, be it the conceptual or the practical—which it to say, the stuff about music that is resilient and resistant to these processes? I believe it is in this "residual" space that music is actually happening. This is where music lives, not only in moments and contexts in which music is being made and/or engaged with, but through our lives as musical beings.[100]

The answer is that I don't know how to get at the music, by which I mean (at least in part) that I know that the very notion of "getting at" anything inheres a pinning down. As my friend and mentor Carl Urion said in a recent publication, "No doubt about it, observing is an act of objectification."[101] I have found myself interested in something that I have now identified and defined as impossible to "get at." Since I gave my punch line away from the outset, it is already clear that I have found the most promise in literature that works from an ontological basis of a reality that exists (or rather moves along) purely relationally, a reality in which everything that occurs does so in an in-between, and in works that explore the ways in which sound is a particularly apt medium for allowing humans to acknowledge, embody, and celebrate the in-betweenness of everything. To say that I have found the most promise in this literature is to say that it is the literature that has made me feel most excited, most alive, as I've grappled with my questions and concerns. It has made me feel like music makes me feel.

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[100] I was perhaps first encouraged to begin conceiving of music this way by bassist Victor Wooten's book, which incidentally, Gaz gave me when I visited him in England in 2015 to conduct my "field work" with him. Victor L. Wooten, *The Music Lesson: A Spiritual Search for Growth Through Music* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006).

[101] Carl Urion, "Some Precepts Taught by Two Cree Elders," in *The Routledge Companion to Ethics and Research in Ethnomusicology*, Jonathan P.J. Stock and Beverley Diamond eds. (New York: Routledge), 31.

I will finish off this thesis by taking a final wander through some of that literature. But first, one more story. In May 2023 I went to Austin, Texas for the first time, for just a few days, to see the Tedeschi Trucks Band, who were playing at the Moody Amphitheater as part of a US tour. That I ended up going to Austin to see them was not a matter of specific desire or deliberate intent; I wanted to travel somewhere to see them, and their Austin date happened to align with a gap in my schedule. The city is of course known for its live music scene, and yet I had no particular excitement about or expectation for my trip there. I was tired at the time, and certainly experiencing burn-out (though necessarily not acknowledging the full extent of this), so my anticipation surrounding the trip revolved mostly around a great desire to rest. I gave myself advance permission to spend the majority of my time in Austin sleeping in my hotel room rather than pressuring myself to experience the local music scene. I think I was also wary that narratives around legendary scenes can be overblown, and that the scenes themselves can over time become sites of tourism more than anything else. I was tired, and I was perhaps cynical.

Then I got to Austin. My plane arrived at around 6 p.m., and I took a city bus from the airport into town. I was somewhat surprised to be the only traveller taking this travel option; as I sat at the bus stop, the only people waiting with me were two airport employees who had just finished their shift. As I listened to them talk to each other about the length of their respective trips home and the chores that awaited them when they got there, and to the dark brown birds (unfamiliar to me) that were squawking away in great numbers in the trees (also unfamiliar to me) across the laneway, and as I breathed in the rich, humid air and felt the heat that such humidity can hold (in great contrast to the air in Edmonton), I felt something stirring inside me. I realized I was holding back tears, and though I didn't know why, the accompanying thoughts in

my head had something to do with realizing that I had come to a place. I had been focused on getting *away*, and I suddenly remembered that I had come to a place, a place different from the one from which I had come, a place that has its own life. I felt reinvigorated by it. That I also felt moved by it perhaps had something to do with literal movement—travel—and how it can bring us into great awareness and appreciation of emplacedness. This is difficult to articulate, even now.

By the time I arrived at my hotel sometime later—after the bus's milk run into town and a walk of a few blocks from the bus stop—there was no question in my mind that I was going to go out to hear some music. A music venue called the Continental Club had been recommended to me by a friend—a professor here at the University of Alberta—who had done his PhD in Austin. ("You have to go there; I proposed to my wife there!" he had said.) The listing on the club's website told me that someone billed as "Barfield, the Tyrant of Texas Funk" would be playing at 10:30, and that his band was made up of some of the best side players in the city. Well, that's perfect, I thought.

The Continental Club is on South Congress Avenue, and I walked there (about 35 minutes) from the Holiday Inn Express in which I was staying, on the other side of the Colorado River. (I was to learn soon after that the river is dammed up so that it is wider and more reservoir-like in the city centre, and that it is locally known as Town Lake.) At around 9:30 on a Thursday night, the downtown streets and the South Congress Bridge were full of pedestrians—groups of people walking and talking, and darting around on those electric scooters that are now ubiquitous in every North American city. The moon was nearly full, about halfway up the eastern skyline an hour or two past sunset, and reflecting beautifully on the river's surface, and I stopped on the

bridge to attempt a couple of photos. The temperature was still quite hot into the evening, so the breeze that could be felt over the river was welcome, and was another reason to linger on the bridge. Many others were doing so as well.

The Continental Club is exactly the kind of place that I like. Not too big, not too nice, not too fussy. Not too much seating either. There is a small-ish stage in the back of the main room with ample space for dancing in front of it, and then a few small high tables and a bench along the side of the room. I got there a half-hour or so before the set was to start, found a place to sit at the end of bench closest to the stage, and watched the place fill up, so that it was pretty full by the time Barfield got up on stage. I would describe Barfield as unfussy as well. He was just there. As his band got up on stage and got themselves ready to go, he told the audience that he had just found out that his neighbour's cat had died, and that he was feeling pretty torn up about it, and that he really needed the music tonight. I could tell he meant it, that this was not some kind of "schtick"; I think he was trying not to cry. Then he said, "I love that fucking cat," and the band kicked into the set in top-gear. And people immediately started dancing. And I jumped up and started dancing. And music happened. Just as it did with Alex Sunrise, and with the Mad Dogs Experience. We were all doing it. Actively sharing the space, weaving our lives together, giving Barfield the catharsis he needed, giving me the reinvigoration and reorientation of perspective I needed. Two hours later, Barfield and the band were still going. They hadn't stopped to take a set break at any point, and they were showing no signs of stopping. I found I had to leave before they finished, though I didn't want to. At 12:30 a.m., I was tiring after a long day of travel and knew I had another 35 minute walk back to my hotel. I left a scene that was very

much still in process, with a pleasant feeling like I was exiting something that would just keep going forever.

Whatever opened up to and for me that night stayed with me. It is still with me. The next morning I woke up from a disturbing dream, one in which I had discovered after the fact that I had done several things that had deeply hurt many of the people I care about—not maliciously, just carelessly and selfishly—and which at a basic level brought me face to face with my deepest fears of alienation and isolation—alienation and isolation of my own making. The dream hovered over me for quite a while after waking, sat in the pit of my stomach as I pottered around my hotel room figuring out what I was going to do with the day. And then I walked. There was a tiny little coffee place in East Austin that had been recommended to me by another friend (who grew up in the city and still keeps an apartment in East Austin), and so I left my hotel and went east. I walked for the better part of an hour as the sun rose higher and it got hotter, still under the spell of my dream, until I arrived at Fleet Coffee on Webberville Road, feeling somewhat wrung out and also amused that I had made such a pilgrimage to what is essentially a little kiosk.

I also realized that I was very hungry. I got an Americano from Fleet, which especially because I drink it black did not provide any relief from a now-blistering sun, but was very tasty and welcome nonetheless. Then I wandered to the end of the road and found a beautifully welcoming "trailer court," a conglomeration of food trucks around a small tree-shaded plaza, with picnic tables and lights strung through the tree canopy and music pumping out of an unseen speaker. It was getting close to noon, and the trailer court was bustling—many of the trucks had long lines, and the picnic tables were full of people chatting. I found a place to sit down, grateful for the shade and a bit of breeze and and to be among people, and I went to the truck that had the short-

est line and ordered my first-ever kerlaches. They were delicious, and as I sat down to eat them I pulled out Tim Ingold's newest book, *Correspondences*, which I had recently bought upon deciding I was going to apply to return to my MA program and finish this work.

I was drawn to a chapter entitled "On Flight." In it, Ingold attempts to shake up how we think about movement and stillness. He contrasts the way humans achieve flight, the way we conceive of flight, to what birds do. Ingold wrote the following while sitting on an airplane, as I had been doing just the day before:

> Don't get me wrong. An airliner is a marvelous thing, an object of beauty, a triumph of the techno-scientific imagination and a testament to the extraordinary twentieth-century history of aviation—a history that has combined ingenuity, endurance, and courage with incendiary violence on a previously unimaginable scale. I am thankful that the plane I am on will get me safely to my destination within hours (else you will not be reading this), where in olden times I would have had to suffer weeks at sea followed by a treacherous journey overland. My argument is not against airliners. It is rather against the idea that airliners can fly, or that people can fly in them. Yes: they get off the ground. And yes: they are propelled through the air. But the same might be said of many other things, from cricket balls to cannon shot, most of which come under the general category of missiles. […] The trajectory of the missile is determined by a compound of the force of gravity and the thrust and direction of propulsion. It may be guided from feedback by a target. But to fly is not to surrender to such mechanical determinations, nor is it to draw an arc from a point of origin to a destination. It is rather to find one's way, and one's being, amidst the currents and circulations of atmospheric air. Flying, in short, is not mechanical; it is existential. Birds fly, because to *be* a bird is at once to be a bird of the air. [emphasis in original][102]

Ingold notes (truly, Ingold is constantly noting) that these two modes of travelling through the air denote two contrasting worldviews. (In another work, he similarly contrasts two modes of

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[102] Tim Ingold, *Correspondences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 67-68.

over-ground travel—transport vs. wayfaring.)[103] In the former mode, movement is not about movement at all, but is simply about getting to a destination. Ideally, one could beam herself from one place to another. In the latter mode, we can see that movement is all there is. We are moving even when we are not moving, because there is an inherent "moving along" to everything, to life itself; perhaps ironically (though perhaps not), it is when we are not moving, i.e. we are not propelling ourselves forward either with or against whatever other currents of various kinds are at play among us, when we "escape the determinations of origin and target,"[104] that we are most able to feel in harmony with this movement-as-all-there-is. Ingold says it better: "[T]his stillness is not an absence of movement. Absolute immobility would be tantamount to death. A living body has to breathe, its heart has to beat; blood has to circulate in its veins. We experience stillness when these bodily rhythms are in tune with the movements around us."[105]

After leaving the trailer court, I began the long walk back downtown, stopping for a pint at Zilker's Brewery (on the patio of which they have fans with small water hoses affixed to them so they can periodically spray thick mists of water onto sweaty patrons on hot days, as this one was) and buying a ball cap from their gift shop to protect myself from the sun. I continued through downtown until I was down at the river, on the walking trails around Town Lake. Feeling led down some stairs from the concrete path closer to the water, I came across a very large flat stone right at the edge of the shoreline. And I laid down on it. And I felt the breeze evaporating the sweat on my skin, and listened to the water lapping against the stones at the river's edge, and

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[103] Ingold, *Lines*, 79–80.

[104] Ingold, *Correspondences*, 69.

[105] Ibid., 73.

watched the upper branches of the cypress trees waving back and forth. I laid there for a long time, until the spell of my dream finally lifted off me, somehow (it seemed to me) in the same swirl of catharsis that Barfield had kicked up the night before, that I along with so many others had danced to, and through, and away; the thought I had fancied while leaving the Continental Club, that the band would continue playing infinitely, suddenly struck me as more than just whimsy, because in some way some part of it *was* still going on, still moving. It was working its way through me, and out of me, and the movement I felt lying still on that rock was the same movement Barfield gives himself to every Thursday night. It's all music.

In "On Flight," Ingold invokes the 5th-century BCE Graeco-Sicilian philosopher Empedocles, who postulated that the cosmos is formed of two opposing principles, Love and Strife. "Love, in its purest form, is spherical. Within the sphere, all the elements are in accord with one another; only at its surrounding surface does Strife come into play. But it is Strife that—by tearing the elements apart, mixing them and forming new combinations thereof—gives rise to the material phenomena that we observe around us."[106] I am conceiving of this truth now as allowing me to invert the conundrum in my thinking. I have been trying to get at that about music in all its forms which is residual, which escapes us, when we look at it as a material phenomenon. But if I define music as everything that exists within Empedocles's Sphere—elements in complete accord—then everything we *call* music, the very material and messy and human expressions manifest as music, becomes the residue. The residual (and no less real or powerful for it) expressions of a larger "music" that lives and flows through and among us, through everything, or better, that

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[106] Ingold, *Correspondences*, 72.

is that flow and that life. Surely Louis Armstrong had a deep understanding of this when he said that "music is life itself."[107]

None of this is to say that music, as we make it and hear it, as sound swirling around in the material world, is not really the thing, or is not relevant in and to the way I am seeking to understand it. Now that I've been swimming around in all of this for quite some time—sometimes flowing with the currents in the medium and sometimes struggling against them—it seems self-evident to me that sound is the vehicle (for the current lack in my ability to come up with a better term) *par excellence* for bringing us into embodied awareness of a reality made up of relation and movement.

This is where Ingold comes into dialogue with Jean-Luc Nancy. For Nancy, it is sound that undoes both static notions of the "self" or subject and everything that is defined by being outside of that self. If meaning if always found in "referral" (as semiotics would have it), then sound works in a space-time of resonance in which it can only be true that referral is all there is.[108] Cavarero, in her argument about the fundamental relationality of human identity, similarly refers to Nancy's work; she and Ingold both draw from Arendt as well. (This was a happy discovery for me as I worked: that the two scholars—Cavarero and Ingold—from whom I had drawn the most inspiration, but who work in entirely different disciplines and whose work I had come across in unrelated contexts, both make pointed reference to the work of Arendt and Nancy.)

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[107] This is a quote that is widely attributed to Louis Armstrong. I am not aware of the original source.

[108] Nancy, *Listening*, 8-13.

Ingold, in his assertion that the world is made up of lines laid down by lives and processes that *occur* rather than *exist*, would like to turn the word "human" into a verb.[109] And the quality of humans that make "humaning" distinct from the way other animals lay down their lines—different from the way, say, a bird "birds"—is in the way we strive and struggle in a temporally-stretched way of perceiving of our lives and the world.

> The fulfilment of human being is always deferred, always not yet: "man" […] is a "not yet being" or, in a word, an "aspiration." […] By comparison to the animal, in whose horizon there is no past or future, only and ever-evolving now, the movement of human life is temporally-stretched. Out in front is the "not yet" of aspiration, bringing up the rear the "already there" of prehension. At once not yet and already, humans—we might say—are constitutionally ahead of themselves.[110]

I have come to think of music as an essential way that we human, that we engage deeply and bodily with the temporally-stretched nature of the way we perceive and lay down the lines of our lives in a reality fundamentally comprised of relationships in movement. There is struggle inherent in this humaning—Strife—as well as surrender to and flowing with the complex and multitudinous relationships and processes with which we co-occur—Love. When this humaning is done as musicking, the products—residue—of it are the tender, marvelous, and truly miraculous things of beauty we call music. This seems like a good place to stop, for now.

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[109] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 115.

[110] Ingold, *Life of Lines*, 118.

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