

AMS Annual Meeting Model Submission Abstracts Session Panels

Proposal Title: American Contact: Intercultural Encounters and Musical Material Texts

Topics: 1650–1800, African American / Black Studies, Latin American / Hispanic Studies

Keywords: Colonialism, material culture, American music

Session abstract:

This panel considers how material texts have facilitated communication across cultural divides, the creation and transmission of knowledge, and the performance of both colonization and resistance in the Americas and the Caribbean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When the aural and musical intersected with and/or were represented in the textual or material, what resulted were examples of writing that reveal hybridizing or creole cultures in which sonic knowledge was perpetuated alongside the literate practices. Each paper addresses this topic via a different type of material text and context. [Redacted]'s paper reports the political drama that resulted from a 1772 set of printed rules for Spanish colonial liturgical music. The extension of metropolitan power via print is a well-known imperial tactic, [Redacted] uncovers an important counternarrative of resistance. By tracing the rules' printings, [Redacted] reveals how those who wanted to institute them were very much at odds with those in the Guatemalan capital who were supposed to follow the rules. As [Redacted]'s talk explores, the very paper that was available in colonial settings carried racialized meaning. Invitations to balls were de rigueur in eighteenth-century British Antigua, and these bits of ephemera by their very nature do not often survive. [Redacted] excavates an invitational practice that in turn reveals the flourishing of both white and black balls, and in doing so, asks us to consider how we can work with extremely fragmented archival sources. Finally, [Redacted] and [Redacted] will jointly present a paper that reckons with the imperialist agenda undergirding printed musical transcriptions from the American west and south in the antebellum period. In an era of national expansion, printed notated music of African Americans and Native Americans served as a form of data that governmental and non-governmental agents could point to as evidence to justify white domination. A comment from Ronald Radano will pull out the themes of music, race, materiality, and encounter that emerge across the papers.

Paper 1: Regulating Guatemalan Voices: The Colonial Politics of Order in 18th-Century Choir Rules

Reglas y estatutos del coro de la santa iglesia de Santiago de Goathemala (1770/1772) was one of the few texts regarding music printed in colonial Guatemala. Compiled by the Spanish Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz (1712-1787), it outlined rules for cathedral singers in the colonial capital of Santiago de Guatemala. This rulebook reiterates standard Tridentine choir regulations expected across the Spanish empire, and, as such, it has been taken as an accurate representation of liturgical practice in the region. My paper, however, constructs a contextual history of *Reglas y estatutos* that exposes it as an instrument of colonial erasure. Using extensive archival documentation from *Archivo General de Indias* and *Archivo Histórico del Arquidiocesano de Guatemala*, I show how this printed text was the archbishop's way of eliminating "immemorial practices," variations that had evolved in local liturgical practices.

The printing of *Reglas y estatutos* sparked fervent outrage in the Guatemalan capital, escalating into a political maelstrom that required extensive transatlantic mediation—a process that cannot be inferred from the printed text alone. Exploring the material nature of colonial bureaucracy, my talk examines the textual and material traces of revising these choir regulations into a second printing in 1772, a negotiation process that occurred on the local, regional, and imperial levels. Along with showing how liturgical practices varied dramatically across the empire, I explore how the printing of these choir rules was integral to the larger colonial project to impose order over an “undisciplined” Spanish colony. In probing the implicit authority of printed texts, I ask how sources like *Reglas y estatutos* continue to regulate the way we understand musical practice in colonial places.

Paper 2: “...Paper which had once been white”: Searching for Absent Invitations in the Colonial Caribbean

Material culture relating to dances in the British colonial Caribbean is rarely preserved, even in the case of the most elite gatherings. One survival is an invitation to a dance, “A Ball by Mrs. Lindsay,” in honor of the arrival of the Governor, printed in Antigua in 1768 on a press supplied by Benjamin Franklin. Africans and their descendants in the British colonial Caribbean also used paper invitations for their dances. An anonymous white woman writing about “negro balls” in Antigua described the invitations shared by black hosts, “written upon paper, which had *once* been white, but, alas! too many touches have tarnished its fair character.” Her description, written in mocking jest, implies that black people in Antigua carefully preserved and reused scraps of paper for their invitations. In the absence of the survival of those invitations, in this paper I explore how the invitation to Mrs. Lindsay’s ball is connected to, and might even stand in for, all those well-used pieces of paper that black people, enslaved and free, circulated to spread information about their festivities. I argue that black invitational practice was not a docile mimicry of elite European dance culture and etiquette, but an assertion of the legitimacy of black dance practices, and even a playful and knowing counter to the rigid construction of white womanhood in the colonial Caribbean. In order to focus on these acts of invitation, I consider the paucity of material culture and archival records relating to black joy in colonial archives. Drawing upon musicologist Glenda Goodman’s proposed method for witnessing lost materials through acts of gathering materials that resonate with that which is lost, I create a constellation of materials and references that illuminate those invitations lost to use and time. In so doing, I argue for the necessity of a creative orientation towards the lost and irrecoverable in the study of the musical culture of survivors of the middle passage and their descendants in the British colonial Caribbean. Such an orientation follows historian Marisa Fuentes’s ethical call for historians to actively counter the violence of the colonial historical record.

Paper 3: Printed Musical Notation as Imperial Evidence in Antebellum America

This paper investigates what it means to treat nineteenth-century printed transcriptions as evidence not primarily of musical sound, but of U.S. imperialism. We consider notated songs in printed travelogs from the antebellum period, one example from the Native American west and one from the African American south, two regions that endured different but important processes

of imperial expansion and domination: Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838...1842* (1845) and James Hungerford, *The Old Plantation and What I Gathered There in an Autumn Month* (1859). Our examples were created by white men who were writing about groups to which they did not belong. Extracted from their original contexts, we argue that such examples served a broader impulse in governmental and non-governmental national expansion: collecting and sharing data on the cultures the new nation encompassed.

Music scholars have long grappled with the limitations of western staff notation in ethnographic and performance contexts, but the role of print in propagating transcriptions has received comparatively little attention. We argue that print turned musical examples into reproducible and interpretable segments of data about Native Americans and African Americans. We start from the premise that music notation functioned as a tool of European expansion: the attempted capturing of sound in script was part of the larger goal of cross-cultural domination and destruction, and we argue that print was integral to this process. These songs did not matter to the travel writers and their white readers solely because of how the music might have sounded, and our interest is not whether these materials represent musical practices “authentically.” Instead, we argue that the printed songs reveal a broader agenda in acquiring and categorizing knowledge and domination via a technology of reproduction—print—that allowed for widespread dissemination to readers who could then imagine using the sources to become armchair authorities on that music. Engaging with scholarship on print history, notation, imperialism, and data, we propose a new way to understand the entanglement of music and imperialism: not as a sounding practice, but as an abstracted representation of mastery.

Proposal Title: **Labor Economies of Music in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction**

Topics: 1900–Present, Science / Medicine / Technology, Material Culture / Organology

Keywords: gender roles, human-machine interaction, domestic musicianship

Session abstract:

Sound reproduction is generally conceived as a singular concept in musicology, as the mediated repetition of musical events via mechanistic processes of recording. Historiographically speaking, it is often tied to automated playback in a teleological trajectory, beginning with the phonograph and reaching closer to a Lacanian real with each technological advancement. Within this narrative, new instruments—even those conceived primarily for active musicianship—are evaluated by their potential for shared labor, not only of facilitating effortless listening, but also of simplifying ways of writing, reading, or playing music.

Precisely this linkage between the desire of automatic reproduction and an attendant ideology of economizing labor will be at the center of critical inquiry in this panel. Close study of three select instruments that counter the above teleologies will allow us to deconstruct origin myths and question the claim of efficiency that served to market new apparatuses. Special attention will be placed on the domestic realm, which is particularly suited to rethinking the category of sound reproduction in terms of its relationship with conceptions of labor. As Marie Thompson and Eric

Drott have recently pointed out, considering music's function as a form of social reproduction means we must expand the concept of musical reproduction to include human labor.

In line with this approach, we attend to interaction and collaboration between human and technological agents in different contexts of music-making. Rather than positioning human capacities against mechanical or automated processes, we interrogate how the interaction with new media shapes not only the experience, but also theoretical conceptions of music. Our analyses examine the societal expectations and gendered roles attached to the different contributions in these encounters, as well as the aesthetic ideals of music-making that they imply. Lastly, the presented lineage of case studies—the Pianola, Theremin, and audio cables in modular hi-fi settings—aims at diversifying narratives around the phonograph as the discursive benchmark in scholarship on musical (re)production.

Paper 1: Shared Labor and Human-Machine Interactions in Pianola-Playing

In the early 1900s, the Pianola dominated bourgeois markets of new musical instruments around the world, envisioned to replace the piano as the foremost domestic instrument. Its promise of simplified music-making relied on sharing the labor of playing between the pneumatic mechanism and human performer. While the instrument's simplification of performance cohered with the oft told desire of an economy of musical production, the Pianola at once vehemently countered the vision of fully automated reproduction as found in the phonograph. Unlike the later reproducing piano, it was meant to help its users create their own interpretations of the music. The Pianola's linkage between mechanistic support and traditional performance aesthetics thus offers an idiosyncratic perspective on conventional narratives of musical reproduction in the early twentieth century.

Revisiting the logics and logistics of the instrument and its marketing, this presentation takes a closer look at the intricate constellation of shared labor in pianolistic music-making. This will provide the basis not only for a nuanced account of the breadth in musical reproduction around 1910, but also for an analysis of the dynamics at play in the interaction between human and mechanism. In particular, I will focus on the notational interface of the perforated piano rolls as one of the main sites of encounter between the two performing agents—instrument and player. The proto-digital pattern of the holes ensures the readability and reproducibility of the musical parameters by the instrument's mechanism. As a form of visual representation of the music, however, this code was soon acknowledged to transcend the purely technological realm and thereby provoked copyright concerns. Weighing the arguments of these litigations against public presentations of the instrument's musical and socio-cultural affordances, I seek to refine previous scholarship on the question of the rolls' readability and status as media objects (Gitelman 2004). I moreover contextualize this discussion by considering additional notational layers of the piano rolls that bypass machine readability on the one hand and the ways in which the mechanism in turn imposes certain limitations of engagement for the human players on the other.

Paper 2: Instrument or Appliance? The RCA Theremin, Gender, Labor, and Domesticity

This paper explores the relationship among domestic music making, technological innovation, and labor through a case study of the marketing of the RCA Theremin in 1929. Shortly after the arrival of Russian inventor Leon Theremin in the United States in 1928, plans to develop the

Theremin as a mass-produced musical instrument for the home quickly took shape, aligning it with other commercialized domestic appliances. But the nature of the labor that marketers of the Theremin promised was different from the vacuum cleaner or electric lightbulb: it promised to perform musical work. Advertising materials for the RCA Theremin promoted the instrument as a labor-saving device, claiming in its brochure:

“Without keys, or bow, or reed, or string, or wind, without material media of any kind—*anyone can make exquisitely beautiful music with nothing but his own two hands!*”

I argue that this promise implicitly reveals the labor of domestic music making, which, like other forms of domestic labor, has been historically rendered invisible within a capitalistic system that values productive labor over reproductive labor. I contextualize this analysis in more comprehensive changes to the domestic sphere, where new appliances promised to assist housewives in middle class American homes. This involved changes in audio culture as well. Many forms of musical listening were moving from a public to a domestic sphere via the introduction of the phonograph and radio. The phonograph afforded housewives the convenience of playing Saint-Saëns in their parlors without the labor of practicing the piano, just as the electric light saved them the effort of attending to oil lamps. Through its particular design, the case of the RCA Theremin offers yet more intricate perspectives on shared labor between humans and machines. Comparison with other contemporary music technologies moreover allows me to speculate how the example might give insight into broader definitions of musical labor.

Paper 3: Tangled Technologies: Audio Cables and Scientific Masculinity in the Early Cold War U.S.

In 1952, a contributor to *Audio* magazine declared, “I’m a hi-fi man of sorts...I *like* bare wires and I enjoy hooking things up.” A “hi-fi” (short for high fidelity) was a modular home audio system assembled by consumers in pursuit of perfectly reproduced sound. Sound quality, however, was not the only appeal of component home audio. “Hi-fi men”—in the 1950s United States, usually depicted as middle-aged, middle-class, white men—relished the work required to assemble a system. Among the various parts of a hi-fi, audio cables came to represent the masculinized labor associated with home audio technologies and define them against feminized consumer electronics such as televisions and console radios. Audiophiles enacted hi-fi by soldering, twisting, and testing cables, turning their living rooms into laboratories and aligning their work with the realms of professional science and engineering. Such practices valorized technical competence: a strategy common in U.S. Cold War rhetoric that masculinized technological progress and framed “tinkering” with home audio as an expression of patriotism, self-improvement, and a productive use of a man’s leisure time.

Drawing on contemporaneous consumer magazines, trade publications, patents, and industry engineering records, I argue that 1950s cable discourses exemplify the attributes of what historians Erika Lorraine Milam and Robert A. Nye call “scientific masculinity.” Informed by historian of science David Shapin, and music technology scholars Eric Drott, Tara Rodgers, and Keir Keightley, I contextualize the hi-fi hobby within the post-war professionalization of applied

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science and rise of the military-industrial complex. Through thick description of archival materials, I demonstrate how electronics manufacturers capitalized on the cultural energy generated by the federal investment in scientific research to position hi-fi as means for self-education in skills deemed useful to the U.S. as it vied for global technological superiority. By pointing to the networks of power that informed audiophile consumption practices, I tease out the embedded contradictions between labor and leisure, and individuality and mass-production in 1950s hi-fi culture.