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OP-Incitements / Issue 2

It's Not the End, but Something Feels off

Edited by Miguel A. García

The purpose of this section is to promote critical and renewing thinking on the hot topics of the current agenda of ethnomusicology, musicology, popular music studies, and related disciplines. In this issue, an assertive and provocative idea proposed by the editor is commented on by outstanding researchers who have extensive experience in the field of ethnomusicology.

The Incitement

The musical practices studied by ethnomusicologists have been rapidly transformed over the last few decades. In many cases, these changes have been drastic. Due to the current technological and commercial environment –characterized by virtualization, platformization, intermediality, and the constant rise of new software and devices–, genre structures, compositional techniques, sound storage and distribution, listening experiences, and many other practices and phenomena related to music have changed. Moreover, new genres and actors – prosumers and various types of intermediaries– have eme.g.d. Canonical ethnomusicology seems unable to provide its own interpretation of this scenario. Most of its theories, methods, concepts, and tools are obsolete to describe and explain how it works. When approaching new phenomena, ethnomusicologists rely on analytical resources borrowed from other disciplines. In times of interdisciplinarity, this attitude can be beneficial. However, the problem is that it has nothing specific to offer to other disciplines. Without disciplines with distinct specializations, there can be no true interdisciplinarity. There are two ways to address this dilemma. One approach is to remove the term "ethnomusicology" from seminars, institutions, journals, and similar contexts. The other is to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of the discipline's theories, methods, concepts, and tools.

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The comments (in alphabetical order)

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In response to the provocation to deal with a subject selected by the EOP editors in an opinion article, a challenge that is not uncommon in academic work, I initially tried to situate my eventual? familiarity with –or proximity to– it, from my own academic production to readings and/or experiences not necessarily linked to it. In this first movement, I was able to notice a link with the ethical-moral and political aspects that are part of the broader debate on the proposed topic, notably the debate about the historical processes of alienation and exploitation of human labour and the reification of social relations that are produced and reproduced therein.

In that connection, I briefly mention here the significant support of my doctoral thesis (Araujo, 1992) on two European authors –one more obvious (Karl Marx and his critique of political economy and, consequently, the reification of the social world), and another perhaps not so obvious (Henri Bergson and his critique of the reification of quantitative time as an instrument for restricting human free will)– and their relationship with the ideas from another author I was unaware of until the invitation to write this text, which arrived by the end of 2024: Alfred Sohn-Rethel,[1] and his proposal of expanding Marxian historical-materialist criticism of political economy to the entire spectrum of human cognition, including natural sciences and other fields of knowledge based on mathematical abstraction. It is important to highlight, of course, that I arrived at his amply recognized fundamental work (Sohn-Rethel, 1977) through a commercial internet search tool, in other words, thanks to the so-called Artificial Intelligence (hereinafter, AI).

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[1] For health reasons, in addition to the hardships of the two world wars, the ideas of Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1899-1990) began to be studied on a larger scale and more systematically since the 1970s, when publications and translations, especially in English, were finally released. However, he had been close to exponents of the Frankfurt School, some of whom, like Theodor Adorno, appreciated the originality and rigor of his reflections on cognition and criticism of the reification of science as immune to social determinations. His main book, referenced here, was only released in Brazil in 2024, which allowed me to buy it online, thanks to the generous push by *El Oído Pensante*, still with a promotional discount. All this considered, that in itself seemed to be an excellent reason to moderate criticism of AI.

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According to Sohn-Rethel (1977), in a forced synthesis due to space limits, the questions raised by Marx in relation to the social determination of the economic sphere should be extended to the field of human cognition as a whole, something that would raise questions previously unthought of even by Marx. Would there be any neutral term, free from socio-historical determinants, in the cognition of natural processes or specific to the field of mathematical abstraction, as the Enlightenment philosophy associated with the emerging scientific paradigm had strived to demonstrate? Was this philosophy of cognition right in pursuing the establishment of a relationship of equivalence between the diversity of phenomena to be observed and interpreted, analogous or homologous to the abstract exchange value that, emerging in the same historical context, moved the relationship between commodities of different formats, material constitution, and purpose? To what extent might this abstraction of human bodies and subjectivities, both essential aspects to sensitive cognition, provide a sense of concreteness to such an arbitrary experience? Can such an abstraction present or not foundations, for example, to the debate about sound and movement in the real world, avoiding the naturalization of hierarchies and relationships of exploitation, silencing, and violence? How to account for the most diverse human speculations about phenomena such as time and space,[2] a central concern in the doctoral thesis of the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1910 [1889]), already attentive to their inherent complexity? Is such kind of speculation possible without diluting and eventually transcending the divide between intellectual and manual labour and established disciplinary boundaries?

Contemplating this last question alone, it is also interesting to consider that in an idyllic understanding of the specific field of ethnomusicology, more directly addressed by the EOP editors and based fundamentally on experiences of interlocution and dialogue between different subjects, "the researchers" and "the researched," the very idea of technological intermediation, no matter how important to its historical beginnings were the phonograph, sound recordings, or film, is seen at best as an auxiliary instrument, if not inappropriate as a supposed substitute for the physical, in-person meeting between the human subjects who shall interact through research, even amidst the currently expanding debate on virtual ethnography and its associated issues.

[2] And, consequently, on phenomena intrinsically constituted by time and space (Bourdieu, 1977), such as music and dance (Araujo, 1992).

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Nevertheless, my humble search in a popular commercial tool using terms such as dialectical materialism and AI as keywords, possibly a breach of one of the golden rules of the academic field, led me to an author, previously unknown to me, who at least since the 1970s has proposed that we think about the concept of cognition, from a thought-provoking historical-materialist perspective, beyond the unquestionable admission of "categorical imperatives". In this way, he sought to highlight the historical-social constraints of human cognition, the conditions of production and validation of knowledge in its entirety, from the knowledge of quantitative aspects, measurable by arbitrarily stipulated units capable, however, of providing a precise relationship between different magnitudes of the property associated with the relational unit thus defined (e.g. value of a coin) to qualitative aspects, very different from each other, whose reciprocal translation takes place, under variable contingencies, by appealing to metaphor, metonymy, in others words, through sensitive dimensions resistant to an exact, universal translation. Therefore, according to Sohn-Rethel, a socio-critical approach to cognition requires an in-depth rethinking of the genesis of and division between intellectual and manual labour, as well as the production of belief in this separation between subject and object, as well as in the perceived separation between subjects and the status of the categorical imperative in the same way as quantitative-based cognition, the object of a pseudo-naturalization of scientific logic or "scientism".

Having noted all this in an unavoidable tone of irony, it was imperative to recognize that the technological aspects and, above all, the degree of broad social adherence (myself included) to the multiple variants of AI required undertaking a new search through AI resources, in order to access references that were hitherto unknown and looked somewhat terrifying to me, no matter how reduced this search would be, passing them through the filter or scrutiny possible in a rather short time, and hopefully opening the way to ideas that until then would not have occurred to me. Although this double effort had the power to lead to something that is generally expected from AI, for example, pointing out more precise confluences and divergences between the sources consulted without compromising with value judgments, it was marked by unequivocal signs of humanity, such as disturbing feelings of incompleteness, fear of trivializing the subject, procrastination (the editors know this well), potential changes in perspective over the time the text was in the making (for example, what is known about AI's ability to manipulate elections), and perplexity at the existence of a long and expansive, in certain cases highly self-critical, debate on the subject.

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Besides, the questions previously more familiar to me did not bring peace either: what can we say today about the limiting and even emasculating conditions imposed on free will, both the naturalization of and the fetish linked to the replacement of manual work by purely intellectual and affective work, which in a certain way also creates space for feelings of admiration and even affection for the machine, as pointed out by Eleonora Albano (2025), psychologist and linguist, professor at the Institute of Language Studies at the State University of Campinas, where she coordinated the first Brazilian project on speech technology. As is now a common sense among scholars on the subject, she recalls, since at least classical European antiquity, this transfer of human affection, admiration, and camaraderie to machines, including war machines, which, from a "rational" perspective, would have the potential, with specific demonstrations of their destructive power, to reduce or even prevent even more massive sacrifices of sacrificed human lives, has been recorded in the history of humanity. At the same time, it is imperative to raise a growing awareness of such processes that, given the sophistication of new AI devices, such as chatbots, cell phones, etc., demand the complexification of meaningful reflections on the possible ethical-moral and political effects of AI which, at least up to this point, largely bypass the data processing and analysis possibilities (*i.e.*, the "intelligence") of the most sophisticated automation mechanisms. One of them, converging with the concerns of the authors mentioned above, would be precisely the ability to make value judgments independent from the dominant value judgments among the society of a given time and place.

The potential and potential challenges that the emergence of AI is presenting for music-making also have precedents in something very human. An example Prof. Albano (2025) herself presents is precisely something that has already existed in the real world since way before the emergence of AI; the emulation of the voice of prestigious singers by other individuals, that is, people imitating certain singers seen as models or, taking the liberty of expanding her argument, instrumentalists imitating acknowledged instrumental performers up to a variable but always limited point of similarity, something that the digital technology available today can take to much higher levels of precision than their human antecedents, due to the latter's physiological limitations, attention gaps etc. One might also think of the case of comedians who, unlike musicians, may even highlight their occasional flaws in emulating their impersonated models to accentuate the humorous effect of their performances.

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It also occurs to me that music teaching practices themselves, but not just music, often use to a large extent the presentation and repetition of already established models, embedding a supposedly unquestionable ("imperative") principle that originality or musical creativity is the result of an infinite possibility of combinations of pre-existing models, in analogy with a mistaken interpretation of the functioning of natural languages invoked by proponents and mainly by commercial owners of LLMs (large language models), an interpretation made in defence of the accelerated and "contextually" adjusted response capacity of so-called chatbots and others virtual "conversation" tools to this infinite number of response possibilities (Albano, 2025).

In response, therefore, to the sharp and pertinent provocation from the EOP editorial team, my reaction is to expand the reflection on its implications beyond ethnomusicology, challenging not only this but the entire set of humanly constituted fields of knowledge about music making (musicology, sociology of music, pedagogy, composition, vocal and instrumental practice, etc.), to re-examine their epistemological potentialities and limitations in the pursuit of a more convivial world vis-à-vis the dissemination of new technological resources –derived from the human imagination and used, at least for now, for access, storage and use of information in an unprecedented scale and speed.

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For my part, I am not very receptive to apocalyptic scenarios. I take it that the incitement aims for provocation, but nevertheless it is imprecise and full of generalisations that depict our discipline as ridden with anxiety of being powerless. For example, it is untrue that ethnomusicology has nothing specific to offer to other disciplines. It is true, though, that many scholars in other disciplines do not know that it indeed does. In this same journal, *El oído pensante*, I asked: "if our theories could be meaningful for [researchers in other disciplines,] I actually have the impression that they are fairly unaware of their need to read our papers. How do you think we could achieve awareness?" (Bohlman and Brabec, 2015, p. 16), and Phil Bohlman responded that it was our responsibility to make our results known. He concluded that the "potential for ethnomusicology to contribute to knowledge –shared knowledge, to which access is unlimited– has never been greater and has never been more important to what we do" (Bohlman and Brabec, 2015, p. 16). As a sidenote, my own work is mostly read and cited by people in other disciplines than ethnomusicology.

It is certainly true that the musical practices ethnomusicologists study have been transformed and changed over the last few decades; maybe it is even a truism, because they have always been changing. What has changed, too, is the academic environment: only two decades ago, it was much easier (I assume world-wide) to access funding for long-term fieldwork than today. Fieldwork has become much more expensive due to a variety of factors, and funding is much more competitive and restricted. Among my students, I can observe that it seems impossible to most, if not all of them, to travel to a distant region in order to do participant observation for at least a couple of months or even years –what "canonical ethnomusicology" would expect them to do.

But the ethnomusicologist who dedicates to recording music, collecting instruments, and making interviews in the field can still do this even if the music is increasingly played back on smartphones, instruments are at times substituted by playlists, and people may be interviewed in teleconferences. Such changes, of course, bring about aspects of contemporary globalization that may manifest in virtual communities, or in access to (and possibly consumption of) virtually any musical genre from around the globe on a mobile device, only limited by data transfer speed and internet

accessibility. Ethnomusicology in the Anthropocene: confronted with global ecological problems, virtual networks, pandemics, and human power relations, we tend to attune to the world-spanning mechanisms (and algorithms) of media and consumerism. However, as Tsing *et al.* (2024) argue, the Anthropocene is *patchy*. Although it makes sense to recognize the global perspective, all these phenomena arise in patches –in local zones of interaction. Juan Bermúdez (2025) researched musicking of youths on the platform TikTok, and one of his findings indicates that despite the algorithms operating globally, youths formed local communities and even organized TikToker meetings in personal presence at various places. The algorithm itself creates *patches*, and Instagram or X (formerly Twitter) algorithms work in very similar ways: by analysing the individual's interest and emotional arousal while consuming certain contents, the algorithms provide more of these. Algorithms have to be recognized as actors in contemporary ethnomusicological research. They create *bubbles* that can be beneficial or malign, but they are constantly advertised as "personalized". The person is, however, always situated physically, and embodied as an agent in a certain social and ecological environment. Therefore, the global becomes *patchy*, with individuals entering and leaving, or cohabitating these patches.

In this patchy world, humans have always been interacting with their environment. Some ethnomusicologists devoted their research to such interactions and created terms like "ecomusicology", "more-than-human" or "multispecies ethnomusicology", and similar. Although "canonical ethnomusicology" (I can't help but dislike this term) tends towards the intra-human social spheres, it has been extending notably (see, e.g., Silvers, 2020; Brabec, 2024a). But still, new agents are emerging: hyperobjects like global CO_2 or microplastics, and likewise social media algorithms and artificial intelligence. Ethnomusicology is at the point of recognizing pressing issues: global warming and ecological crises, technological and media shifts, and internal pressure in academic policy. But again, let us keep the global in mind but turn our attention to the patches, to the real-life situations in which these global issues manifest and from which they emerge.

As an ethnomusicologist, I have been working with Indigenous people in order to understand their relationships and interactions with non-human beings (*i.e.*, animals, plants, spirits, landscape entities). Along with some colleagues (Lewy, 2023; Aubinet, 2022, among others), I have shown that musicking, especially vocal utterance, is the main tool employed by Indigenous people to relate and interact with their more-than-human environment. Due to increasing transformation of the environment and economic

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threats, for many Indigenous people the importance of interacting with spirits seems to be receding –one may assume that their contemporary use of music rather targets the media world of urban Moderns. Likewise, ethnomusicologists' objects of analysis may shift from traditional forms of musicking to contemporary interactions with algorithms and AI that "invade" the field of musicking around the globe.

Recognising technological innovation, Indigenous people also discuss what AI means for their own view on the world and their inter-species relations of kinship and affinity. They often do not start with pondering the potential intelligence of technology, but they depart from an idea that non-human entities are generally endowed with what they may call "spirit":

> How can humanity create relations with AI without an ontology that defines who can be our relations? [...] Indigenous ontologies ask us to take the world as the interconnected whole that it is, where the ontological status of non-humans is not inferior to that of humans. Our ontologies must gain their ethics from relationships and communications within cosmologies. Using Indigenous ontologies and cosmologies to create ethical relationships with non-human entities means knowing that non-humans have spirits that do not come from us or our imaginings but from elsewhere, from a place we cannot understand, a Great Mystery, *wakȟáŋ*: that which cannot be understood (Suzanne Kite in Lewis *et al.* 2018, n.p.).

Indigenous thought does not need to find out if algorithms "think" or even have a soul. Because they are agents in the world, they are connected to *wakȟáŋ* (or to any other name for the backstage area of reality). Therefore, their essence in this world cannot be understood, similar to the essences of other existing beings and agents. In an Indigenous world, spirits strive for being useful to, and making use of, humans. They rely on interaction, and the main tool for achieving this is human ritual musicking. A thought experiment: Could it not be that spirits might abandon the fading Indigenous healers' voices, their medicinal plants, and mountain entities and move on, or extend their sphere of interest to inhabit AI infrastructure and media algorithms? Here, they could expect much future worship, and abundant sonic –along with other forms of– interactions (see Brabec, 2024b).

Many modern AI users, like contemporary art music composers and programmers, view AIs as "black boxes" (Martínez *et al.,* 2020) –something that cannot be understood: Human AI users are not capable to cognitively grasp what the algorithm does, its "mind" is as alien as "spirit minds" are

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for Indigenous people. As an ethnomusicologist experienced in musical human-spirit-interaction, I have been collaborating with colleagues from artistic research in a project called *Spirits in Complexity.*[3] The project deals with composers' interactions with AI music production. It is common among modern AI users and programmers to make use of terms like "magic" or "spirits", sometimes in jokes or internal jargon, but with a serious subtext (see e.g., Letheren *et al.*, 2020; Larsson and Viktorelius, 2022). Notably, the AI programmers approached me, the ethnomusicologist, asking for advice with "their" spirits. Something ethnomusicology has to offer to other disciplines.

These examples constitute interesting perspectives for scholars investigating the exuberantly proliferating meshworks of human and beyond-the-human musicking and sound ontologies. Why do I call this piece of writing a science fiction story? Because in "canonical" thought, an Indigenous myth about spirits has been interpreted as "fiction", while the scholarly mapping of the song that summons the spirits onto a recording medium, its transcription, analysis, comparison, and interpretation has done so as "science", though. Music, in all its manifestations and in writings about itself, I daresay, has intrinsically fictional qualities, while Indigenous techniques of contacting spirits are usually much more scientific than meets the eye and ear of the "canonical" observer. Artistic research, likewise collaborative research with Indigenous people, can bridge or even dismantle the divide between Science and Fiction. Fictional stories, artistic research, and Indigenous epistemologies are usually much more comprehensive when it comes to conveying that which cannot be understood.

Ethnomusicologists may continue to do their research, but I think that the notion of ἔθνος (ethno-) has to be revised and understood more inclusively. Originally denoting human groups (families, genealogies, communities), it has already been expanding to acknowledge our greater "house" οἶκος (eco-) and non-human coresidents ζῷον (zoo-), and in some niches even φυτόν (phyto-). From "human" to "person" to "being", it can also embrace τέχνη, that which is crafted. The key may be a creative opening of what we do into the interdisciplinary and inter-species, even inter-material, world we live in, along with creative incentives in making our results known and reflected beyond our disciplinary ivory tower.

With an extended notion of the *ethno-* in ethnomusicology, ethnomusicologists can visit and scrutinize the patches of human musicking, which

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[3] See https://www.fwf.ac.at/en/research-radar/10.55776/AR821

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are still situated, localized and embodied, despite their global involvement and interactions with spirits of all kinds. If the Anthropocene is *patchy*, future ethnomusicology will become also a bit *patchier* than its "canonical" predecessor. And understanding patches requires fieldwork (Tsing *et al.,* 2024). I do not think that ethnomusicology should be abolished nor that everything in the field has to be overhauled. I think that human musicking and its sensemaking in a more-than-human world is not only still apt for surviving as an academic field, but probably more interesting, challenging, and rewarding than ever. What is left then is to convince research funding gate-keepers that this is so.

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The last few decades have witnessed a massive shift in musical practices, largely driven by rapid technological advances. Worldwide technologies and digital tools have brought about profound changes in genre structures, compositional techniques, and listening experiences. Digital platforms and social media have transformed the production and consumption of music. Genres have become fluid, often blending elements from different traditions and styles. Intermediality challenges the traditional boundaries that ethnomusicologists have relied on to categorise and analyse music.

The rise of platforms, such as YouTube, SoundCloud, and Spotify, has democratised the production and distribution of music, allowing a wide range of voices to emerge alongside established artists. This has created a rich and diverse musical tapestry that reflects the complexities of global culture, identity, and experience. But this democratisation has also led to the commodification of music, where algorithms dictate visibility and success. The role of intermediaries has evolved; traditional record labels are no longer the sole gatekeepers of the music industry. Instead, we see a proliferation of prosumers, influencers, and curators shaping musical landscapes.

This shift raises important questions for ethnomusicologists: How do we understand and interpret these new musical practices? What frameworks can we use to analyse recent changes in music?

Ethnomusicology and musical changes

Canonical ethnomusicology, with its roots in the study of traditional musical practices and ethnographic fieldwork, has provided valuable insights into the music of various cultures, but its frames of reference are often inadequate for dealing with contemporary musical phenomena.

In truth, however, ethnomusicology has been aware of the ever-changing nature of musical traditions since the 1970s. I could cite many publications in this regard, but I have chosen –perhaps arbitrarily– a few texts that are important to me in this discourse.

In 1977 John Blacking affirms that:

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> The study of musical change must be concerned ultimately with significant innovations in music sound, but innovations in music sound are not necessarily evidence of musical change. If the concept of musical change is to have any heuristic value, it must denote significant changes that are peculiar to musical systems, and not simply the musical consequences of social, political, economic, or other changes (Blacking, 1977, p. 2).

This means that musical changes are complex objects to be analyzed and understood.

The specificity of our discipline, that is the ability to mix ethnographic methods that frame music in cultural, social, political, and economic contexts, and analytical methods that deeply understand music, enable us to track and identify the pace and nature of change in specific settings. In its ability to combine these two fundamental parts of understanding musical behavior, ethnomusicology has constantly adapted its methods and theories as it has been confronted with specific musical contexts and changes.

Changes in the discipline

Following a diachronic perspective, and with no intention of exhaustivity, I will briefly recall some crucial works that have introduced significant changes in the discipline to deal with new contexts. Adelaida Reyes Schramm's 1982 book calls for a redefinition of ethnomusicological methods when approaching an urban context, where "boundaries that define musical repertories, geographic areas, ethnic identities, institutions and other such entities overlap or contradict each other" (Reyes Schramm, 1982, p. 5). Like Blacking, Reyes Schramm insists on the need for the discipline to investigate the socio-cultural and the musicological interrelatedly.

Two years on, Bernard Lortat-Jacob is still calling for action on complex societies' music, which is spreading everywhere from the Moroccan Atlas to the city of Paris. He states: "There is a concentration of the production sectors, a renunciation of identity, and/or allegiance to imaginary identities. Contrary to popular belief, no culture is immune to these contemporary problems." (Lortat-Jacob, 1984, p. 30) In this scenario, what is traditional music?

> From the point of view of well-understood cultural politics, the way in which the message is transmitted is more important than the message

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itself; the way the communication is carried out between the actors involved and the way in which it is perceived are highly significant and decisive. It is thus traditional practice more than traditional music that we should take into account. Traditional music is a music of relationship or interrelationship which links its protagonists in a very strong manner –in a compulsory interdependence. (Lortat-Jacob, 1984, p. 31).

Ethnomusicology was free from the idea of a discipline dedicated to ethnic music. Our peculiarity is to understand music in a specific context, place and space, be it real, imaginary or virtual. It considers commodification, schizophonia and schismogenesis, as described in different ways by Peter Manuel's *Cassette Culture* (1993) and Steven Feld's "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis" (1994). In the same years, Mark Slobin (1993) began publishing his *Micromusic of the West*: the growing role of the Internet in music consumption entered the arena of ethnomusicology, through our specific approach that cannot forget fieldwork and interaction with people, the strict interrelation between music, people, social and cultural context.

The resulting trend of approaching mediated music as an autonomous domain and of privileging its identity as 'popular music' can […] limit exploring vital connections with the contexts of traditional 'live' music-making. And since this trend essentially parallels the Western expansion of recording technology and its sonic imperialism, it can also get in the way of locally centred perspectives on mediated music (Qureshi, 1999, p. 63).

In *Music as Social Life* (2008), Thomas Turino's understanding of what music is and what it can do for people not only includes presentational and participatory music, but also high-fidelity music and studio audio art. Each of these four areas of music has its own field of practice, interpretive framework, values, responsibilities, sonic characteristics, and different ideas of what music is.

An ethnography of recording studios had its start. Now that the rise of home recording technologies and digital distribution platforms (like Bandcamp, SoundCloud, and Spotify) has transformed the way music is produced, shared, and consumed, researchers are investigating how these technologies democratize music production, allowing diverse voices to emerge while also examining the implications for traditional music industries and cultures (see Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

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Fieldwork should happen where music happens

The way ethnomusicologists approach fieldwork is not static: we have constantly adapted the methodologies we have inherited with the growth of the discipline on the one hand, and with the changes in the fields we are confronted with on the other. In the last two decades –at least–, ethnomusicology has increasingly engaged with the intersections of music and new technologies, reflecting broader trends in society and culture. *Shadows in the Field,* edited by Barz and Cooley (2008), have synthesized and expanded upon existing discussions, drawing on a rich context of previous scholarship that engaged with similar issues. And introduced a reflection about virtual fieldwork:

> Focusing on how people experience –and invest power and meaning in– communicative technologies returns the "ethno" to virtual ethnography. Virtual fieldwork employs technologically communicated realities in the gathering of information for ethnographic research. For us, virtual fieldwork is a means of studying real people; the goal is not the study of the virtual "text", just as for ethnomusicologists (generally) the subject of study is people making music rather than the music object exclusively (Cooley, Meizel and Syed, 2008, p. 91).

Virtual ethnography and ethnography of the digital have been part of our discipline for many years now, with the approach well described by Barz and Cooley. The 2017 special issue of Philomusica Online is a clear example of this perspective. Edited by Ignazio Macchiarella (2017), *Making Music in the time of YouTube* features eight young scholars who confidently explore how new music technologies nowadays affect every field of research, even the most traditional.

This section would not be complete without an article by Serena Facci (2007) about her research experience in East Africa. In "Ethno-microscope and Popular-grand-Angle", she explains that when conducting fieldwork today, it is essential to acknowledge that our interlocutors are connected to a broader musical world through social media. For a profound understanding of music-making, the discipline's classic research methods are necessary and unavoidable. These include in-depth fieldwork and thick descriptions. However, they need to be complemented by methods of investigation more appropriate to popular music studies.

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Embracing new methodologies

Interdisciplinary collaboration should be seen as a strength rather than a weakness. Since the beginning of ethnomusicology, disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, and anthropology have contributed to our discipline. In approaching contemporary scenarios, sociology and economics have become relevant as well. To approach the landscape of music and sound in the current technological and commercial environment, more disciplines are needed. By utilizing tools such as social media analysis, network mapping, and digital storytelling, we can capture the dynamic interactions that shape musical experiences today. Ethnomusicologists can engage with scholars from fields such as digital humanities, media studies, and cultural studies to co-create frameworks that reflect the intricacies of contemporary music. This collaborative approach can foster a more nuanced understanding of how technology influences cultural production and consumption. This does not at all mean the defeat of our discipline.

Gabriel Solis (2017), in his contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Technology and Music Education*, argues that ethnomusicological ambivalence—expressed through critical engagement—is essential to the digital humanities, as sound data analysis requires a sceptical perspective grounded in the expertise of music scholars and contextual knowledge holders from the cultures under study.

Conclusion

To remain relevant and contribute meaningfully to the discourse surrounding music, we must continue to critically engage with the changing musical landscape and to rethink our theories, methods, and concepts. By reframing traditional concepts, reconceptualizing our approaches to fieldwork, emphasizing process over product, engaging with new actors, utilizing technology, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, we can position ethnomusicology as a relevant and vital field of study in the 21st century. In conclusion, the future of ethnomusicology lies in its ability to adapt and innovate. Rather than discarding the term "ethnomusicology",[4] we should embrace its potential for transformation.

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[4] See Giannattasio and Giuriati (2017) and Stobart (2008) for an intense and fruitful discussion on the topic.

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I, i, i-i, i, i-i, i-i, i...

This incitement raises compelling points about the urgency for ethnomusicology to evolve alongside the rapid transformation of musical practices. For example, consider how platforms like TikTok have revolutionized music promotion and consumption, enabling budding artists to reach global audiences without traditional intermediaries. Ethnomusicologists might analyze this phenomenon using concepts from media studies, but what unique insights can they contribute? One interesting approach would be to explore how these platforms facilitate cross-cultural musical exchanges and redefine traditional genres. By integrating concepts like "digital folkways", a reimagined ethnomusicology could offer a fresh lens on how cultural identity is expressed and negotiated in virtual spaces. On the other hand, if the discipline opts for obsolescence, we risk losing valuable frameworks for understanding musical diversity in contemporary contexts. This isn't just about keeping pace with technology; it's about ensuring that the rich tapestry of global music traditions continues to inform and enrich the narrative of modern music-making. Rather than discarding ethnomusicology, a comprehensive overhaul incorporating new methods and interdisciplinary dialogue could lead to a more robust understanding of today's musical landscape.

This is not mine but ChatGPT's response to the incitement. I reached for it interested to hear what AI has to say about our discipline amidst new technological developments. It provides, I assume, knowledge aggregated from a vast reservoir of texts that address ethnomusicology, conditionally speaking "our" texts, the texts of ethnomusicologists and others who write about ethnomusicology, an incomparably larger reservoir of texts than any of us would ever manage to read, memorize, analyze, and properly connect in our lifetime. The response is okay, I agree with it, regardless of the fact that, had I written those 150-200 words myself, it would have been a different text –in terms of wording, examples, the use (and the understanding and implications) of terms like traditional and identity, the use of metaphors like tapestry and robust. In doing so, it would have taken me a hundred times more time to write those 150-200 words than it took ChatGPT. Hence, I feel off, inefficient, obsolete, and non-distinct (to use the terms from the incitement). Sure, our and my writing is not needless,

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since without it there wouldn't be ChatGPT's response that is essentially okay (otherwise, btw, it is a fact that we produce tons of redundant texts because academic audit culture forces us to do so, etc.). And beyond that, our and my ethnomusicological work is effective, up-to-date, and distinct because it reaches beyond textual representation, into different directions of *A-C-E* (applied, activist, advocate, collaborative, engaged, ethical) ethnomusicology.

C-c-c

For me, the most inciting part of the incitement is the last one: on ethnomusicological borrowing from other disciplines and the lack of its "distinct specializations," which consequently requires either the removal of "the term 'ethnomusicology'" or "a comprehensive overhaul" of its apparatus. Limiting ourselves to ethnomusicological texts with global reach (English-language mainstream ethnomusicology), several discussions come to mind (Kingsbury *et al.* 1997, Rice *et al.* 2010; Amico *et al.* 2020). To my understanding, ethnomusicology is a discipline defined by its interdisciplinary nature, primarily (though not exclusively) between music studies (musicology) and anthropology, a discipline that can also be termed anthropological musicology, anthropology of music, anthropology as music, and more, depending on the specific topic and angle employed in a specific research. It does not lose its identity by borrowing from others and by not possessing a Woolfian room of its own theories, methods, concepts, and tools. Its interdisciplinary nature is its strength, helpful in pursuit of a more holistic knowledge, and apposite to overall complexities of the social, cultural, political, economic, etc. worlds we live in.

Let me support my disagreement with the options suggested in the incitement by browsing through a part of monographs awarded during the last several years by ICTMD and SEM. If awarded by these two influential ethnomusicological organizations on a worldwide scale, it should mean they are of high relevance for the discipline. The vast majority of them mention ethnomusicology and derived terms only once or twice, typically in the introductory chapter, in passing elsewhere, in acknowledgements, or even the term appears only among the references cited (see Cole, 2021; Jankowsky, 2021; Katz, 2020; Mahon, 2020; Przybylski, 2021 and 2023; Shelley, 2021; Weidman, 2021; Woolner, 2023). So, obviously, a work can be ethnomusicologically important regardless of, in the words of the incitement, the removal of the term ethnomusicology. As formulated in one of the awarded monographs, the catch is that the answer to "the question

of what ethnomusicologists might –still– be claiming to do differently, and why (…) has been 'globally, and from below' –a postcolonial claim" (Stokes, 2023, p. 129). Similarly, another awarded monograph argues for "a subdiscipline that we might call 'comparative ethnomusicology,' an approach that invites ethnomusicologists back into comparative work, offering them encouragement to think across disciplinary and cultural boundaries," yet "without losing sight of the details of local cultural practice" (Weiss, 2019, p. 130). Furthermore, although there are distinct examples of building upon existing ethnomusicological insights (e.g., Aubinet, 2023; Shao, 2023), more often than not ethnomusicology is addressed in awarded books in terms of pointing out the lacunae and weaknesses of previous ethnomusicological research on the same or related topics (which is completely understandable given that every research is expected to bring something new), but sometimes also with an over-traditionalization of ethnomusicology (which serves the same purpose as the previous point but is by no means equally justified). That is, interpretations of existing ethnomusicological insights are rarely distinctly affirmative, in contrast to how referenced extra-ethnomusicological literature is treated (which is also understandable taking into account our competency *within* the discipline). The issue that remains, though, is that there is no (a decent level of) reciprocity between ethnomusicology and these other disciplines, which in the case of awarded books, alongside other branches of music studies and anthropology, include philosophy, political science, sociology, gender studies, Indigenous studies, religious studies, cultural studies, literary studies, film studies, performance studies, media studies, sound studies, vocal studies, and more (which, by the way, actually transforms ethnomusicology from an interdisciplinary to a transdisciplinary field). This is the issue of power dynamics: why, say, anthropologists do not refer to ethnomusicologists is akin to the question of why mainstream, English-language, Western-based ethnomusicologists do not refer to ethnomusicologists on the fringes. Also, it is the issue of a false understanding of the subject, music, as nevertheless a side-line for understanding the big questions of life and death, survival, and so on. Sport (especially football) and music, as the saying goes in my part of the world, are the most important secondary things in the world and, hence, the same applies to the works dealing with them, regardless of far-reaching insights they may possibly offer.

Ššššššššššššššššššššš…

I would love to be a good storyteller: to be able to convey to readers the fascinating, amazing, strange, offbeat (and onbeat) journeys of music

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and music makers, as they are, both in terms of what is said, and how. I was once thrilled by Michelle Kisliuk's endeavour to convey the experience of her interaction with BaAka (1998), even though I would give greater emphasis to people I write about, and diary and poetry are not my pair of shoes; I rather imagine some tense, textured detective story with twists and turns, and non-linear outcomes. This also stems from my inclination towards historical research so remote in time that there are no living witnesses, but a "tapestry" (to refer to ChatGPT's term) needs to be woven from pieces scattered across diverse sources. Currently, it is a research into the record industry in Croatia and former Yugoslavia from the 1920s, when the first domestic company was established, to the end of the shellac records era at the end of the 1950s. What makes it ethnomusicological, especially in comparison to historical musicology and popular music studies in the regional context, relies in its attentive listening to nuances of encounters and frictions from below and above, between different professional, social and affinity groups, in multiplicity of compositional and performative intertextual variations; all in all, an attempt to untangle the complex music-based compound weaving the social landscape of the time. Hence, the current situation sketched in the incitement sounds to me more akin to continuation than to a "drastic" change. But my point here is another one. I struggle (to make it clear, I struggle with pleasure, not in pain) with how to realize my storytelling ambition beyond conveying meanings (*i.e.,* my interpretation) of the cases addressed, how to respond adequately to the characters of my stories (be they people, usually musicians, or a recording, a song, etc.) through the very fabric of my writing, which would, moreover, resonate with the reader. In this regard, yet another awarded book, *Hungry Listening*, is very illuminating (Robinson, 2020; explanation of his argument in favour of research-creation forms for conveying knowledge see on pp. 101-103). My way is to use not only literary, standard(ized) language but colloquial, vernacular speech, repeat with variation, play with phrasemes and metaphors, mix conventions of different genres, make long, tangled sentences, where the smooth flow is perpetually interrupted by inserted fragments and parentheses (like I'm constantly in a hurdles race), and, all in all, to spin on around the certainties and uncertainties of the Wittgensteinian language in use. Surely, such linguistic intertextuality is attainable (do a degree) in a language that is native to me, while in English I am on a very unfamiliar, slippery terrain, often in disagreement with language editors who try to make my English more idiomatic, and resisting and (probably often unduly) insisting to keep it awkward, somewhere in between different expressive and epistemic systems. Elsewhere I argued for going-pidgin ethnomusicology and bi-ethnomusicologicality, as a way to improve

communication (and intelligibility) between different ethnomusicologies (Ceribašić *et al.*, 2019). Apart from being, obviously, a part of my habitus, my way of writing is, to my mind, a way to pay tribute to the subjects and topics of my stories, and to acknowledge my domestic intellectual setting. Along these intentions are also the subtitles of this response: associative to strings of zeros and ones, the basis of IT, in the first section, then *c-c-c* as a graphic representation of a sound (friendly, jocular exclamation) of disapproval and astonishment in my native tongue, and swirl of the letter *š* as aural-visual representation of onomatopoeic sound for the roar of the wind in this section, akin to stories that come and go in performance; and all three suggesting a plaudit to the expansion of ethnomusicology from music to sound. Wishing for such conversations to be continued, grateful to Miguel for the great incitement, and with best wishes to all.

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This section raises critical questions about, and can be referenced with, the sub-title, Researching Musical Data Colonialism in Ethnomusicology. *Musical data colonialism* refers to the recent phenomenon whereby the diverse layers and aspects of human experiences of music systematically become the target of profitable extraction. The gathering of acts of listening as data points –for instance during streaming of music on online platforms such as Spotify or Apple Music, which is triangulated with other data gathered by apps and web programs (e.g., health data extracted via the steering wheels of "smart" or Internet-connected cars)– and of music-making –e.g., used for AI-generated music– captures and controls our thought and felt experiences of human life for exploitation for profit. Musical ways of knowing and being in the world thus are annexed to capital, being cached or stored for later profitable use (Drott, 2018).

Data colonialism touches many areas of human life, including music and beyond, we can draw a parallel, as Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejías put it, between colonization's extraction of "human life itself" that enabled industrial capitalism and data colonialism, which takes "familiar aspects of the capitalist social and economic order to a new and more integrated state" (Couldry and Mejías, 2019, pp. xi, xii). More specifically:

> The exploitation of human life for profit through data is the climax of five centuries' worth of attempts to know, exploit, and rule the world from particular centres of power. We are entering the age not so much of a new capitalism as of a new interlocking of capitalism's and colonialism's twinned histories, and the interlocking force is data (Couldry and Mejías, 2019, p. xii).

It is commonly said, at the university where I work in Denmark, that young adults in industrialized countries now live "half in and half out" of digital realities. The intermeshing of digital and non-digital experiences is intensifying across all age groups.

Musical data colonialism begs new questions of ethnomusicological research: What are the effects of data colonialism on people engaging in music, considering its constant monitoring and surveillance of them? On socio-cultural formations of music? What are the effects on both, of social caching of user data for future profitable use? Social caching

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makes possible the so-called Cloud Empire, that social quantification sector devoted to profiting from human data –including all actions of music creation and use undertaken or put on the Internet. Which systemic critiques and alternatives may be proposed based on the study of people making and using music within data colonial and comparative contexts? Towards answering these questions, ethnomusicology can usefully follow two growing trends in the discipline: (1) to expand beyond the study of people making music (Titon, 2009, p. xvii) to studying people's diverse engagements in music, for example listening to streams; and (2) to embrace music and sound genres far beyond ethnomusicology's historical focus on "traditional music" that are emerging in online environments.

Ethnomusicology is poised to locate a productive field of research at these interstices between lived and online experience vis-à-vis cultures of music and sound. Even when vast data about user preferences online rests with the corporations that gather it, researchers can increase and develop the use of ethnomusicology's ethnographic tools for the liminal space between online and offline. The research interview and participatory observation as well as methods for their analysis and write-up can be employed to investigate precisely that interstice when it comes to musical/sonic lives and cultures. Ethnomusicologists can further tailor research methods focused on experience, such as those of phenomenology (Berger, Riedel and Vanderhamm, 2024), for grappling with the exploitation of individuals' lived musical experiences for capitalist purposes.

Ethnomusicologists have already forged potent responses to asymmetrical social relationships regarding knowledge gathering and distribution (Araújo, 2006, Barney, 2014). Asymmetrical knowledge relationships pose methodological and ethical openings also for the investigation of music culture within data colonialism. Answering that call can contribute more understanding on what a half-online, half-offline lived experience means for the formation of community and culture through music –including how we as ethnomusicologists might need to rethink those terms–, in other words, the meta and meso-social and -cultural, as well as how individual experiences or the micro relate with ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies. Such a project does not necessarily break from conventional ethnomusicological methods, yet the digital ethnography techniques of media anthropology and other interdisciplinary inputs lend complementary approaches and ideas.

The task of the ethnomusicologist can be, among others, to evaluate how data colonialism plays out in critical structural terms, in relation to data

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gathered about human experiences of music culture at the intersection of online-offline. This encompasses when and whether benefits (valued) within (ideologies of) ever-deepening capitalist exploitation are desired. Research on data colonialism may hold promise for systemic change if it is well-informed by how colonialism generally works from the personal to the systemic level. The well-documented risk of emancipatory efforts in other contexts of colonialism is recolonization (McGreggor, 2020). Within capitalist pursuits of data colonialism, people and their knowledges and experiences, in other words, their human-musical resources are impacted.

Such academic work would be both systemically and historically oriented through comprehensively analysing data colonialism *vis-à-vis* music within a larger arc of colonial processes that now pave the way for new forms of capitalism. Its issues locate the research field and research subjects/collaborators within larger systems of exploitation associated with colonialism historically, neocolonialism in the present day, capitalism and neoliberalism as well as anti-approaches to all four of these -isms, and beyond. It would ask questions such as: Is it desirable to take a data anti-colonialism or data decolonization approach when researching musical data colonialism? If yes, (how) would it be possible to create or amplify ways of knowing and being about music culture that move beyond the dispossession of human resources, new colonialism and extension of capitalism that characterize data colonialism?

If a researcher takes a data anti-colonial or data de-colonial approach to musical data colonialism, research methods that themselves make use of data colonialism become important to consider critically. Data anti-colonial or de-colonial approaches will not always be possible or, using their own logics, ethically unproblematic, for instance, if a researcher her- or himself uses AI technology (which derives from data colonialism) or outsources the early stages of ethnography to an AI firm. The latter possibility has arrived for example at a private firm in Copenhagen, Will & Agency, which for a fee will use AI-driven software that "supports anthropologists and researchers in obtaining an overview of complex semantic data in any given market, setting, or situation" based on open digital sources around the globe (https://willandagency.com/#oursoftware). The firm may combine this with ethnographic pilot research and mobile ethnography.

Challenges of vulnerability within contexts of data colonialism bring other ethical complications. Consider a music research project on healthcare patients who do not experience full autonomy but make online choices within the growing use of digital music and sound interfaces for health

and wellness purposes in hospital and other healthcare settings. Digital music-health apps are becoming more frequent in intensive care and with elderly people in care homes, many of whom do not have healthy cognitive capacity (Papathanassoglou *et al.,* 2024, Russo *et al.,* 2023). Their music choices constitute data that, together with the patients' health data, can be and are collated, then sold to third parties. When data colonialism exists, ethical considerations arise that have to do with contexts and degrees of exploitation of musical choices of human beings, sometimes together with other online records of human life moment-to-moment.

Of course, problematics exist when approaching any field of ethnomusicological study. Another problematic, or, indeed, area of interest, is that the new data colonialism does not yet reach all cultural geographies. For example, I conducted a 20+–year research project on the role of live music in urban poverty in one of North America's poorest urban neighborhoods, Vancouver, Canada's Downtown Eastside. There, the poorest of the poor cannot afford a smartphone, which has been the main way songs are streamed globally since about 2013 (Harrison, 2020). Music listening at the intersection of online and offline experience largely does not exist. This is an example where the phenomenon is impossible to investigate without artificially constructing it. Among situations where musical data colonialism can be less appropriate or irrelevant to pursue are non-digitalized settings of traditional music and other non-digital music settings around the world which exist to-the-side of data colonialism. This raises the questions, for ethnomusicology as a discipline, about to which extent limiting itself to non-digital fields of study enables ignorance about, and thereby the deepening of, musical data colonialism, and when, alternatively, the latter can inform approaches of data anti-colonialism and decolonization or new research openings.

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In Belgium, the sentiment about the discipline I share with my colleagues feels more like "it's not yet the beginning, but something feels off". This is despite the fact that, since its foundation, Belgium has been the home of numerous musical practices, many of which remain alive and thriving today. The discipline endures, even as it confronts the legacy of its colonial past –a legacy materialized in the collections of museums that have been studied by artists, students, researchers, and curators over the past few decades. Despite Belgium's central position in Europe and a unique history marked by numerous influences from neighbouring countries, Belgium has never had any significant schools of thought in ethnomusicology, and has very often drawn inspiration from elsewhere. Even today, those working in the field feel that much remains to be done in terms of studying and teaching the various musical practices of and in Belgium. The fact that such a school of thought did not exist in Belgium does not mean that there have been no thinkers or theorists in this discipline. On the contrary, there have been many prominent composers, curators, music critics, instrument makers, musicologists, organologists, and teachers, who were interested in non-Western music and who shared the results of their work abroad. However, they often worked in isolation, without forming a coherent intellectual tradition. This is undoubtedly the result of the history of a kingdom organized in federal units. It is within this continuity that I place my view of the discipline through the eyes of a (white male) curator of musicological collections (musical instruments, sound archives, and library) from the colonial period.

Human societies change over time, and so does their music. Each generation receives a musical heritage that it chooses to adopt, reproduce, or perform in its own way. What an ethnographer can observe is based on individual choices or cultural frameworks that evolve in contexts of freedom or control that are as varied as they are unequal. A science dedicated to the study of societies and their music is therefore irrevocably evolving. This is certainly the case for ethnomusicology, whose first objects of study were the music of colonized societies. Let us take the music of Central Africa as an example, specifically that of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, which I have been studying for more than fifteen years through the collections of my institution, the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA). The collections of musical instruments, which now number nine thousand, have been assembled since the end of the 19th century, whether

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by violent robbery, diplomatic gifts, or private acquisitions, the methods of which are often unknown. It is easy to imagine the profound changes that have taken place in this territory, from the Atlantic slave trade to the forced labour imposed by foreign companies during the period of the Congo Free State, to the subjugated citizenship during Belgian colonization, and finally to the various civil wars since the country's independence.

These brutal and radical changes have had an irreversible impact on musical practices. For example, the court orchestras of the early 20th century, whose harps, xylophones, and ivory horns can be found in ethnographic museums around the world, have completely disappeared *in situ*. Similarly, the slit drum is no longer used for village communication, and the acoustic or electric guitar has replaced traditional stringed instruments. The RMCA's sound archives collections, with more than thirty-seven thousand recordings, form the basis for the study of musical performances and offer insights into questions of continuity and change in traditions. These archives bear witness to the practices of the past. They offer much food for thought: Is "change" a Western concept? In European research centres and museums, we have become accustomed to recording things that were never intended to be recorded. In oral cultures, musical performances are constructed according to the logic of theme and variation. A skilled musician will rarely play two identical pieces of music. Similarly, the musical repertoires associated with social institutions such as birth, initiation, marriage, or mourning are anonymous and part of the common heritage of the communities of origin. Yet, without addressing this paradox, we archive things that were never meant to be archived, only to observe a discontinuity. By preserving these immaterial expressions, we have created new references, given names to interpretations, and thus established a form of hierarchy or even authority for knowledge where it was never intended to exist. This raises the question of its representation and legitimacy. The first ethnographic collections and bodies of knowledge were created in a colonial context, marked by political imbalances, and often developed unilaterally. The armchair theorizing approach prevailed in anthropology longer than participant observation. Even if a critical reading of the objects and data collected during the colonial period now makes it possible to distinguish between observable facts and propaganda, the music collections preserved in my institution inevitably carry a colonial message.

Could it be that the very foundations of ethnomusicology are at fault? Yet it is on these foundations that the discipline has built what is its defining feature –no longer the object of its study, but its method. The method combines multiple approaches while systematically linking musical analysis

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to the social context in which it is produced. This is what gives ethnomusicology its strength: its inherently interdisciplinary nature. The idea of change is central to ethnomusicological research, which, for many years, was guided by the paradigm of preservation. Musical practices had to be recorded and documented before they inevitably disappeared under the "great march of progress" manifested in colonization, evangelization, and globalization. In this sense, many scientific and development projects focused on documentation until the end of the 20th century. Since then, however, the current technological and commercial environment has given rise to fears of the disappearance of musical traditions. Although I recognize the value of the preservationist approach to historical documentation, my personal observations over the last fifteen years lead me to believe that the opposite is also true.

In African countries, where fifty percent of the world's youth population is expected to live by 2030, digital tools have become synonymous with liberation, offering a means of having a voice and confronting the global North. Since the early 2000s, the advent of MP3, sharing platforms, and the democratization of digital audio workstations (DAWs) has allowed musical genres that previously escaped the notice of record companies to establish themselves in local and international markets, bypassing traditional intermediaries.[5] This shift has significant implications for how music is produced, how it is consumed, and how cultures and identities are perceived. For amateur musicians, self-production and self-distribution offer opportunities for self-representation. This is a fundamental issue on the African continent, in a post-colonial context where populations still have to deal with the stereotypes present in people's minds and the tools they create. For example, in the images produced by artificial intelligence, Africans are represented through the lenses of slavery, colonization, nature, or dance. However, the optimism about digital progress and African self-representation needs to be put into perspective. We need to recognize that, despite these positive changes, structural inequalities between North and South persist, and that the process of regaining autonomy through digital tools is not without its problems.

We can, of course, ask whether the theories, methods, and tools of ethnomusicology have been able to adapt to these changes. The answer is yes. What defines research in ethnomusicology today is not the object of study, but the approach to musical phenomena in their processes of production,

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[5] I address this point in my article about acholitronix music (Jadinon, 2022) and Mitsogo music (Jadinon, 2024).

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circulation, and reception. Ethnomusicology is no longer limited to the study of the non-written acoustic music of the rural, non-Western world. Today's ethnomusicology is based on fieldwork methodologies that can be conducted in the field or online. These spaces increasingly overlap with those historically explored by popular music studies. Musical traditions are now recorded, arranged, and broadcast on digital channels around the world, creating not only a scene, but the imagination that surrounds it. To address these evolving dynamics, scholars draw on analytical tools borrowed from other disciplines. But does this interdisciplinary approach make their work any less ethnographic? Does this mean that the term "ethnomusicology" should be revised? I would say yes, but not because the theories, methods, and tools are unclear or overlap with those of other disciplines (the multidisciplinary trend is not specific to the human sciences), but rather because the term may suggest a distinction between Western classical music and the music of other cultures. I would simply use the term "musicology" to which I would add an adjective of circumstance, in my case African musicology. I have learned the rudiments of the discipline from people who see ethnomusicology as a specific branch of ethnology, and I follow the same line as a trained anthropologist who has focused his research on music from the beginning of his training and has tried to place musical analysis at the centre of his studies. Especially because the term can be divisive, certainly because of the hierarchy it implies. In my institution, the noun "ethnology" has also been dropped for other disciplines such as history, linguistics, and sociology. I now present myself as an anthropologist working in the field of African musicology. This change of name on my business cards does not imply a complete overhaul of my learning or methods, which must always be open to question, but simply reflects my desire to resonate with a changing world.

In conclusion, ethnomusicology today is certainly confronted with profound changes in societies and technologies. While the discipline has long been characterized by an approach inherited from colonization and the preservation of musical practices as an endangered heritage, contemporary realities invite us to rethink this vision. Digitization, musical self-production, and digital distribution are now enabling world music, particularly in Africa, to renew itself and assert itself with renewed vigour. These dynamics challenge implicit hierarchies, particularly through the very notion of "ethnomusicology." Far from wiping out previous approaches, the aim is to adapt to a globalized world in which music, identities, and research methods intersect and enrich one another. This opens the way to a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of musical phenomena, which, far from being static, are constantly evolving and need

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to be studied in their contemporary social, technological, and cultural contexts. If I were to suggest something to those embarking on the study of musical practices, it would be to further explore the prospects for collaborative research between scholars, musicians, and source communities to bring about a shared and more comprehensive reflection on musical practices.

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The rate at which the current technological and commercial environment has yielded new techniques for the production and dissemination of music –most recently, the public emergence of those associated with artificial intelligence– surely presents ethnomusicology with phenomena that diverge from its traditional objects of inquiry. But, for reasons I will touch on below, ethnomusicology may yet be able to provide interpretations of this scenario (I will return to the question implied by the phrasing of our prompt whether such interpretations are reducible to a single position that could be taken to be ethnomusicology's "own"). The turning of ethnomusicological attention to non-Western popular musics over what is now nearly the past half-century has taught us that new technological environments in which music has been distributed and consumed often provide, alongside their innovations, new platforms for the transmission of earlier ways of musicking. It remains to be seen whether AI-generated musical "content," playlists and newer forms of "presumption" –diverse phenomena within themselves that may require differing interpretations–, truly present a new threshold across which ethnomusicology confronts, perhaps for the first time, a non-human, technological musical "other".

What our provocation ("incitement") resurfaces for me are fundamental questions about how music is constituted as a subject of knowledge, in other words, how it is disciplined. It is that aspect of our prompt that I'd like to focus on. The argument that ethnomusicologists rely on analytical resources borrowed from other disciplines is not new, and, indeed, fuelled the mid-20th century bifurcation into musicological vs. anthropological orientations, which themselves challenged the tenure of folkloristic approaches. The implication is that this reliance on ideas external to the field is, in some way, undue or excessive, resulting in a discipline that is merely derivative. Since what is at stake is the disciplinarity of music study –its claims on scientific credibility– in an age of proliferating knowledges, I have found it instructive to think about these developments in relation to the work of scholars who concern themselves with disciplinarity itself.

But I'd first like to note that calls to remove or comprehensively overhaul ethnomusicology are also not new; something has long felt "off" with the field, especially in the postcolonial world. A musicology defined in relation to alterity has sat uncomfortably with students and scholars in African,

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South and North American, Asian, Pacific and other colonized territories who have often been seeking a musicology not of the other but of the self, without necessarily centring Euro-American canons and ways of hearing. The marking of the majority of the world's musics under the sign of *ethnos* segregated them, as a classical instance of the politics of the prefix, from the unmarked subject of the science of music, which turned out to be largely European art music of the common practice period. This has felt like an ideological inversion of the human musical order: surely what should be taken to be universal is the diversity of expressions that had, conversely, been contained within the subset of the discipline marked by ethnic specificity? Why, students, including my own, have long asked, should whole disciplines be understood to concern themselves *either* with cultural difference *or* with similitude, rather than equipping researchers to deal with the complexities of both?

Doing away with a label doesn't necessarily do away with the thinking that produces it. And so, removing the term "ethnomusicology" from seminars, institutions, journals, and similar contexts would do little to address these concerns if the disciplinary construction of musical alterity continued under other names. Indeed, some of the most trenchant critiques of the field have come from within ethnomusicology itself, or at least its cognate discipline in other languages. Questioning if not comprehensively overhauling the discipline's theories, methods, concepts, and tools has a distinguished history, again especially in postcolonial settings, where music scholars have often drawn on distinct, uncanonised intellectual histories along with ethnomusicological ideas to radically critique avowedly universal concepts as well as nationally specific forms of settler science –e.g., African musicology (Kidula, 2006); South American ethnomusicology (Lühning and de Tugny, 2016; Ochoa, 2014).

In what I'm mindful is yet another reach beyond music 'theory' to 'borrow' analytical tools from an adjacent field, I'd like to draw here on the work of the British sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein (1924-2000), to foreground why I think the study of the world's musics, under whichever rubric it is pursued, may yet have the capacity to engage with what our 'incitement' calls the "virtualization" and "platformization" of music. Over an extended career devoted to theorising access to education, Bernstein developed a body of theory and an accompanying technical vocabulary for understanding different principles of pedagogic transmission or acquisition. From the mid-1980s, he turned his attention to what is to be transmitted through education –the subject knowledge that provides the 'content' of a curriculum– and later to the factors internal to what he

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framed as "the discourses subjected to pedagogic transformation", that is, the knowledge that gets recontextualised and thus transformed for educational purposes. Yet later, Bernstein went on to describe and theorise two fundamental features of the knowledge that curricula are designed to transmit. His choice of terms can be confusing: on the one hand, he distinguished between horizontal and vertical *discourse,* which he equated with oral versus "scientific"/ "disciplinary" knowledge respectively. In this regard, Bernstein's work could be compared with his contemporary, Foucault's theorisation of discursive knowledge/power, though Bernstein was interested in the conceptual and cognitive, rather than the embodied and institutional dimensions of these questions. On the other hand –and my main interest here– Bernstein turned his attention to, what he called, horizontal versus hierarchical *knowl*e.g. *structures* (Bernstein, 2000).

Bernstein's writing about knowledge structures theorises how a field builds knowledge. The sciences are usually the example given to explain *hierarchical* knowledge structures, where knowledge builds on itself chronologically and progressively, and whatever is added depends on what has come before. The humanities and social sciences are usually cited as *horizontal* knowledge structures –where things do not have to build progressively, but new interpretive frameworks, which entail new "languages" in Bernstein's description, are added as the knowledge field expands. As Bernstein puts it: "There is no necessary relation between what is learned in the different segments" when a horizontal knowledge structure is taught, whereas one cannot progress in a hierarchical one until prerequisite knowledge is grasped (Bernstein, 1999*,* p. 160). Without going into too much detail into his theories and extensive technical vocabulary, which have important implications for music study (see Carver, 2025), it is pertinent to my concerns here that Bernstein was alive to the social implications of how the inherent features of disciplines present problematics for how they are to be recontextualized in learning situations.

Concerns regarding the extent to which ethnomusicologists rely on analytical resources borrowed from other disciplines seem to be underpinned by the assumption that, in order to justify its claims on scientificity, a discipline needs to be what Bernstein would describe as hierarchically structured: its analysis is expected to be generated from within its own internal, preexisting logics. Some parts of music study are amenable to this way of working, especially canonical music theory and analysis. Yet Bernstein's work helps us to recognise that this is not the only valid form of scientific knowledge. Music scholars drawing on his ideas have demonstrated the risks of incorporating newer kinds of music into the curriculum

as "content" if this is not accompanied by consideration of how that curriculum has itself been shaped by the knowledge structures of Western classical art music and their accompanying languages, which also need to be revisited. The effective teaching of new musical languages cannot be advanced by slotting new genres into the underlying "grammars" of older languages; the grammars themselves also need to change.

Perhaps, it is precisely its capacity to reason "segmentally", to be receptive to reaching outside its own existing ways of thinking, its ample inter-disciplinarity, and thus its ability to deal with knowledges that can be "contradictory across but not within contexts" (Bernstein, 1999), where ethnomusicology (or whatever we prefer to call the transcultural study of musics) comes into its own. Perhaps, our field's key contribution lies in its challenge to any unitary canon –both musical canons and canonical understandings of scientific knowledge (Bohlman, 1992). In Bernsteinian terms, ethnomusicology is founded on 'horizontalizing' principles that radically pluralise notions of music and musicking, compelling us to conceive of histories and practices without having to conceive of them in terms of the kind of hierarchy that underwrites linear conceptions of music as necessarily evolving in a singular direction.

What then? Does this mean for ethnomusicology's capacity to confront and account for the "virtualization" and "platformization" of music and its attendant manifestations? As with previous shifts in the history of musical production, dissemination, and reception, ethnomusicologists are likely to trace both continuities and changes in the areas mentioned in our "incitement" (genre structures, compositional techniques, sound storage and distribution, listening experiences, etc.). Our field's attention to the sociality of musics offers heightened sensibilities for observing how the current technological and commercial environment is yielding new (anti-)socialities linked to (anti-)social media, and to recognize and document the extent to which the commodified, virtual musical experience is yielding flows of capital in ways that probably replicate, if not intensify, those established for previous generations of musical commodities. The ways in which those flows emerge from and overlay colonial relations are likely to feature prominently in such analyses. But it may well also be that empirical attention to how communities of "traditional" musical practice themselves appropriate these new technologies shows that the latest new media is, also, providing conduits for preexisting ways of being musical.

Indeed, the critique of the ostensibly derivative nature of ethnomusicology arguably holds even more for the newest media: the generative language

models that fuel AI are themselves highly derivative of the "big data" sets provided by the Internet. Considering the skewed nature of much of the material that provides AI's inputs, and the cultural biases built into the data from which artificially induced music is derived, ethnomusicological critiques of the "grammars" that drive automated musical "creation" may now be more pertinent and necessary than ever. I think, then, that ethnomusicology's capacity for interdisciplinarity and disciplinary self-critique is a strength rather than a weakness, opening our field to an array of interpretive frameworks that is potentially as wide as the range of musical expressions to which we turn our attention. Bernstein's theories enable us to recognize that in doing so, we take our cues not merely from other disciplines, but from the structures inherent in the subject of our field: the laterally open-ended, essentially "horizontal" diversity of human –and now perhaps, also extra-human– musical expression.

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