

# Music, Myth, and Ritual



Among the Moken Sea Nomads

Christian Koehn



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University of Music  
FRANZ LISZT Weimar

Chair on Transcultural  
Music Studies

Erstgutachter/Betreuer:

Prof. Dr. Tiago de Oliveira Pinto

Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar-Jena,  
Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar

Zweitgutachter:

Prof. Dr. Martin Pfeiderer

Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar-Jena,  
Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar

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Vorsitz:

Prof. Dr. Jascha Nemtsov

Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar-Jena,  
Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar



# **Music, Myth, and Ritual** **among the Moken Sea Nomads**

On the Contiguity of Aesthetic and Religious Experience  
in the Life-World of a Maritime Hunter-Gatherer People

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# **Music, Myth, and Ritual** **among the Moken Sea Nomads**

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by Christian Daniel Koehn

born on October 21, 1972 in Hamburg

2021

In memoriam

**EBAB DUNUNG, *KLATHALAY***

c.1950 - 2013

ในความทรงจำของ

**เอbbieดุนุงกล้าทะเล**

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## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| i.i Subject and Scope of the Present Thesis.....                                  | 6  |
| i.ii Determining 'Music's Place' within the Cultural Fabric.....                  | 16 |
| i.iii Formal Structure of the Present Thesis.....                                 | 21 |
| Part I .....  | 27 |
| 1. Empirical Observations: Fieldwork among a 'Submerged People' .....             | 27 |
| 1.1 Approaching the Moken World: Some Prose.....                                  | 27 |
| 1.2 Main Collaborators.....   | 30 |
| 1.2.1 Dunung.....   | 31 |
| 1.2.2 Alia.....   | 33 |
| 1.2.3 Salamah.....  | 34 |
| 1.2.4 Djepen.....   | 35 |
| 1.3 Personal Experiences and Initial Difficulties.....                            | 36 |
| 1.4 Field Method .....  | 41 |
| 2. A Brief Ethnography of the Moken.....  | 45 |
| 2.1 Summary of Prior Publications.....  | 45 |
| 2.2 Hypotheses on the Origins of Demonyms; Ethnolinguistic<br>classification..... | 49 |
| 2.3 Semi-Nomadic Way of Life.....   | 51 |
| 2.4 Social Order.....   | 53 |
| 2.5 Genealogy and Kinship.....  | 55 |
| 2.6 Subsistence; Material Culture.....  | 56 |
| 2.7.1 The Settlement Oma:g Latá.....  | 60 |
| 2.7.2 Adjustment of Traditional Subsistence Strategies.....                       | 62 |
| 2.7.3 Recent Population Development.....  | 63 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 3. Music among the Moken.....                                    | 65  |
| 3.1 Prior State of Research.....                                 | 65  |
| 3.2 Contemporary Significance of Traditional Music.....          | 67  |
| 3.3 Terms and Concepts.....                                      | 68  |
| 3.4 Specialization.....  | 69  |
| 3.5 Song Types .....   | 70  |
| 3.5.1 Mythico-Historical Significance of Various Song Types..... | 73  |
| 3.6 Musical Instruments.....                                     | 79  |
| 3.6.1 The Bowed Tube Zither Katiŋ Gá'un.....                     | 79  |
| 3.6.1.1 Instrument Body.....                                     | 84  |
| 3.6.1.2 Bridge.....  | 84  |
| 3.6.1.3 Strings.....   | 85  |
| 3.6.1.4 Bow.....   | 85  |
| 3.6.1.5 Bow 'Hair'.....  | 86  |
| 3.6.1.6 Bow Resin.....   | 86  |
| 3.6.1.7 Similarities to Designations in other Languages.....     | 86  |
| 3.6.2 The Drum Bá-Nà.....  | 87  |
| 3.7 'Tonal System' and 'Scales'.....                             | 88  |
| 3.7.1 Method of Analysis .....                                   | 91  |
| 3.7.2 Discussion of the Analyses.....                            | 94  |
| 3.8 Summary: Music in Moken Life.....                            | 95  |
| 4. Myth and Ritual Among the Moken.....                          | 99  |
| 4.1 Moken Mythology and the Work of Jacques Ivanoff.....         | 99  |
| 4.2 Religious Beliefs and Practices.....                         | 103 |
| 4.2.1 The Concept of Soul: Gelò.....                             | 103 |
| 4.2.2 True Names and Protective Names.....                       | 104 |
| 4.2.3 The Spirit World .....                                     | 106 |

|              |  |     |
|--------------|--|-----|
| 4.2.4        | Believe in a High God.....   | 108 |
| 4.2.5        | Religious Specialists.....   | 110 |
| 4.3          | The Ancestor Worship Ceremony Né'èn Lobo:ŋ; Sequence and Structure .....             | 112 |
| 4.3.1        | First Day.....   | 113 |
| 4.3.1.1      | Early Morning; Invoking the Ancestral Spirits.....                                   | 113 |
| 4.3.1.2      | Late Morning to Noon; Appeasing a Tree Spirit.....                                   | 115 |
| 4.3.1.3      | Afternoon; Carving the Spirit Poles; Animal Sacrifice.....                           | 117 |
| 4.3.1.4      | Nightfall; Arrival of the Ancestral Spirits.....                                     | 121 |
| 4.3.2        | Second Day .....   | 124 |
| 4.3.2.1      | Morning; Construction of the Sacrificial Boat.....                                   | 124 |
| 4.3.2.2      | Afternoon; Ritual Transformations of the djjanŋ.....                                 | 126 |
| 4.3.2.3      | Nightfall; Full Moon; Climax.....  | 127 |
| 4.3.3        | Third Day.....   | 128 |
| 4.3.3.1      | Morning; Launching of the Ceremonial kaba:ŋ; Departure of the Ancestral Spirits..... | 128 |
| 4.4          | Summary.....   | 129 |
| Part II..... |  | 132 |
| 5.           | Myth and Ritual as Analytical Concepts.....  | 132 |
| 5.1          | Are Myth and Ritual Distinct Phenomena or are they “One and the Same”?.....          | 133 |
| 5.1.1        | The Post-Enlightenment Crisis and the Emergence of the Humanities.....               | 138 |
| 5.1.2        | Early Works.....   | 141 |
| 5.1.3        | Sociological Theories.....   | 145 |
| 5.1.4        | Anthropological Theories.....  | 147 |
| 5.1.5        | Philosophical Theories.....  | 162 |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 5.2 Myth and Ritual as an Interpretive Framework for Music.....                                    | 174 |
| 6. The Implicit Presuppositions of 'Music' in Western Thought.....                                 | 183 |
| 6.1 C. Seeger: The Musicological Juncture .....  | 184 |
| 6.2 Particulars, Universals and the 'Essential Properties' of Music.....                           | 186 |
| 6.2.1 Wittgenstein: Family Resemblance.....  | 198 |
| 6.2.2 Searle: Brute Facts and Social Facts.....  | 200 |
| 6.2.3 Rosch: Prototype Theory.....   | 201 |
| 6.3 Properties and Attributions, and the 'Lowest Common Denominator'<br>View of Human Culture..... | 203 |
| 6.4 'Music' is not a Ubiquitous Category.....  | 206 |
| 6.5 The Pythagorean Myth.....  | 214 |
| 6.6 The Study of Non-European Music and the Burdensome Legacy of<br>the Pythagoreans.....          | 221 |
| 6.7 The Emergence of Aesthetics, the modern Concept of Art, and the<br>Musée Imaginaire.....       | 240 |
| 6.7.1 The 16th to 18th Centuries.....  | 241 |
| 6.7.2 The 19th and 20th Centuries.....   | 244 |
| 6.8 A Unifying Perspective: Music and Notions of External Agency....                               | 250 |
| 6.8.1 Music and the Belief in Supernatural Intermediaries.....                                     | 251 |
| 6.8.1.1 Ancient Notions of Spirit Possession: Hesiod's Proemium to<br>the Theogony.....            | 254 |
| 6.8.1.2 Modern Notions of Spirit Possession: Aesthetics as<br>Transformational Process.....        | 260 |
| 7. Synopsis and Conclusions.....   | 265 |
| Postscript: Against Scientific Parochialism and In Defense of a Humanistic<br>Study of Music.....  | 279 |
| Bibliography.....  | 294 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Appendix A: Sonograms and Tonometrical Analyses..... | 317 |
| Appendix B: Illustrations.....                       | 366 |
| Appendix C: Audio (tracklist).....                   | 399 |
| Appendix C: Audio (hyperlink).....                   | 400 |
| Appendix D: Video (hyperlink).....                   | 400 |

## i. Introduction: Why “*Music, Myth, and Ritual*”?

*[E]VERY HEALTHY AND ADEQUATE SYMBOLISM MUST HAVE ITS SYMBOLS OF SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, BOUNDLESSNESS, AND INEXPRESSIBILITY.*

- HENRY D. AIKEN (1962: 326)

*THE RECESSES OF FEELING, THE DARKER, BLINDER STRATA OF CHARACTER, ARE THE ONLY PLACES IN THE WORLD IN WHICH WE CATCH REAL FACT IN THE MAKING.*

- WILLIAM JAMES (1902: 389)

### i.i Subject and Scope of the Present Thesis

The present thesis is a study of how our own beliefs and conceptions about a particular domain of the social world – in this case, about music – affects our ability to understand other peoples' beliefs and conceptions about what we generally take to be ‘the same’ domain of the social world in the context of a different culture. It is an investigation of how we consider what is ‘own’ and what is ‘other’, and of how our beliefs and conceptions about what is ‘own’ and what is ‘other’ affect the trans-cultural study of music.

For music is a strange thing - if it can be called a ‘thing’ at all. Its nature seems to be ambiguous, Janus-faced: at the same time ubiquitous and self-explanatory, yet peculiarly outside of the scope of the general concepts and actualities of quotidian reality; combining within itself “*the contradictory attributes of being intelligible and untranslatable*” (Lévi-Strauss 1967:18), i.e. being intuitively accessible yet impossible to speak about without constantly recurring to metaphor and imagery;<sup>1</sup> part of our daily experience yet lacking any commonly accepted, general definition;<sup>2</sup> allegedly a universal trait of human

1 Or to the comprehensive technical vocabulary that is a particular characteristic of Occidental art music.

2 But a plethora of legitimate and meaningful definitions of particular aspects or isolated



culture, yet at the same time a token of differentiation so powerful that traditional societies and urban subcultures alike embrace their preferred musical styles as important symbols of collective distinction, and that entire nations, for similar reasons, identify with their respective national anthems.

Though we have a single term for it, it seems impossible to conceptualize music as an isolated, clearly defined, autonomous object (cf. Turino 2008: 23). Thus, every investigative foray into the world of music is, at least subliminally, concerned with making sense of what (if anything) constitutes the root of the matter of this peculiar phenomenon; with 'what it is' we are actually designating when speaking of 'music': "[T]here are no musicologists who have not asked themselves 'What is music?', even if the question is rarely formulated explicitly." (Nattiez 1977: 92).

That area of the study of music that has traditionally been concerned with such fundamental theoretical issues regarding the ontology of music, with 'what music 'is'', 'does', and 'means', i.e. with what the term itself ultimately denotes, is part of the philosophical sub-discipline known as the *aesthetics of music*.<sup>3</sup>

The term aesthetics itself, however, is so squarely and firmly rooted in Western intellectual history that applying it to the creative expressions of cultures outside of the European sphere borders on the nonsensical. In its modern usage in the philosophical discourse about music the meanings associated with the term aesthetics are indissolubly intertwined with the thought and the terminology of Shaftesbury, Baumgarten, Kant, Schiller, Burke, Hegel, and Schopenhauer; of Hoffmann, Hanslick, and Nietzsche; of Adorno and Dahlhaus. It is fraught with ideas of 'beauty' and 'taste'; of 'art' and the 'artist', of the 'virtuoso' and the 'genius'; with the notion of the 'musical work'; with elements that we perceive as being part of the phenomenon as a whole.

3 I shall be using the term 'aesthetics' here in its modern, comprehensive sense as it has been most generally employed since Hegel, i.e. as *the critical theoretical reflection of the fundamental philosophical, social, and cultural ideas and conceptions about the nature of art and music*. This is also somewhat closer to the meaning of its Greek root, αἰσθητικός (which we today would translate as 'perception' or 'sensation'), than its limited eighteenth century meaning as 'the evaluative study of beauty and taste', as it had been used by Baumgarten and Kant. While several authors and many university courses have, for some reason or other, settled for rather unwieldy constructs like "*aesthetics and the philosophy of art and music*", I shall, for the argument put forth in the present thesis, consider the term 'aesthetics' and the term 'philosophy of art and music' to be equivalent.

conceptions of 'theory' and 'analysis'; with the trained specialist, the concert hall and the opera house; with music criticism and the commercialization and medialization of music - ideas that are, for the most part, so thoroughly 'Western'<sup>4</sup> that they are largely untranslatable into the ideational and conceptual worlds of most societies outside of the Occidental cultural field.

The term 'aesthetics' as it is commonly understood today, i.e. its particular hereditary semantics and scope of reference, appears neither suitable nor adequate to meaningfully relate to the imaginative worlds and creative expressions of peoples who do not use a semantically equivalent term in their respective language. Hence, we are faced with a basic dilemma: while most other cultures do not have a philosophical aesthetics in our sense of the term, they nevertheless doubtlessly have an, in lieu of a better wording, 'aesthetic sentiment', an "*unvoiced esthetic*" (Sieber 1959; quoted from Keil 1979: 26):<sup>5</sup> certain attributions concerning the domain of what we call music that are both culturally and psychologically real, yet often radically different from our own. A range of ideas and practices that determine the way they make music, that shape their collective and individual attitudes and valuations towards certain forms of sound production; that characterize music-making as important and worthwhile; that bestow meaning<sup>6</sup> and purpose to it; that define a sense of what is genuine and what is false.

In contrast to the law-governed, mechanical world of matter, "[m]an finds himself living in an aleatory world" (Dewey 1958 [1925]: 41). Hence, all human societies through all ages appear to have developed imaginative, expressive, and creative means to confront the unpredictable whims of fate and the primal

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4 And, considering their dominance in the enumeration of influential aestheticians given above, perhaps even, at least to some degree, particularly German.

5 A 'differently voiced aesthetic' is perhaps closer to the truth (ibid.).

6 'Meaning' (or 'meaningfulness' in the sense of the German *Bedeutsamkeit*) is a much-maligned term with regard to music and art, and it certainly is not, and cannot be, a perfectly fitting one to convey what lies at the heart of creative expression of any kind. To replace it with 'significance', 'import', 'purport', 'sense' or any other closely related concept, however, merely shifts the same problem towards a different semantic. The point is to acknowledge that non of these terms are a perfect match. We are trying to understand certain creative expressions that grasp the world in particular ways other than denotative language and, hence, denotative language allows for but a rather loose grip on these matters.

*ur*-fact of mortal existence itself. Historically evolved and culturally acknowledged forms of reflection and affirmation of communal life and individual being. Expressions of the extraordinary ideational powers of man that allow us to affirm our place within reality (cf. Bruner 1986), to develop the belief in an afterlife, and to reconcile the finite existence of the individual with the continuing existence of the community; an elementary *Daseinskritik*: those manifestations that in Western modernity became subsumed under the terms *religion* and *art*.

In the present thesis I shall propose that any approach towards what could be called a ‘trans-cultural aesthetics’<sup>7</sup> is at its core concerned with those phenomena that inform and shape thought, judgment, and conduct within these particular domains of human world-making.

Valid theoretical contributions to anthropology (including what Alan Merriam [1964] termed *The Anthropology of Music*) are, according to Clifford Geertz, generally tied to specific case studies, as purely systematic approaches abstracted from particular, concrete examples usually yield results that are either “*commonplace or vacant*” (Geertz 1973: 25). In [ch. 2], [ch. 3], and [ch. 4] I shall, on this account, present as my case study an investigation of several central aspects of the musical culture of an ethnic group that is in many ways fundamentally different from my own, ‘Western’ musical and intellectual imprint: that of the Moken sea nomads of the Eastern Andaman Sea.

The Moken sea nomads produce sounding expressions that we would readily and without much hesitation label as music. The Moken themselves, however, do not have a word for ‘music’ in our sense of the term; no generic conceptual category; no linguistic expression that takes as its referent a coherent, autonomous domain of ‘*Tonkunst*’ (or something to that effect).<sup>8</sup>

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7 On the concept of trans-culturality, cf. Pinto 2016, 2018. This endeavor seems particularly appealing in the light of the foundational role some thinkers have alleged with regard to aesthetics: “*Indeed, when the topic of aesthetics has been sufficiently explored, it is doubtful whether there will be anything left over for discussion.*” (Whitehead 1968[1938]: 62).

8 From my first stay with the Moken in 2007, this fact struck me as quite remarkable and interesting and, hence, I have always highlighted this case when giving presentations on my fieldwork. What seemed almost equally remarkable were the diverse reactions and proposals I received from teachers, colleagues, and friends on such occasions: from precociously shrugging it off (“there doesn’t have to be a word for everything, does there?”), to delegating the issue to a different scholarly field (“that’s a problem for linguists to solve! Don’t bother!”), to disbelief and questioning of my efforts (“there certainly *must* be a similar concept! You just



The ideas and beliefs that the Moken associate with sound-making are rather different from how 'Westerners' generally view the phenomenon - and 'sound-making' is itself not employed as a common, essential referent in their conceptualizations. This poses a bit of a dilemma to me, having to write a thesis in the field of musicology: while the Moken do not have a word that is equivalent or at least reasonably similar to our concept of music to be translated thus, I have to somehow refer to what they are doing in terms and categories that are familiar to myself (and the reader), as I have no others at my disposal. I can't help thinking of, say, the rhythmical clapping of hands or of particular vocal expressions that differ from 'normal' language in a certain way, as naturally belonging to the category 'music' (and, therefore, being of interest to me as a musicologist). This dilemma – being a musicologist studying a peoples' music who themselves do not have a term for, or a concept of, 'music' in their language and thought – permeates this entire thesis.

In attempting to get to grips with this problem in terms of the written presentation of my thoughts I have, in lieu of any better idea, settled for referring to the Moken's creative sounding expressions simply as 'music', implicitly asking the reader to acknowledge that this is a foreign appellation to which they themselves do not have an equivalent concept; or else, by resorting to rather clumsy circumlocutions (such as 'creative sounding expressions'). I am, however, quite confident that the elementary differences between our conceptualizations with regard to what we call music and the Moken's conceptualizing their world along quite different lines will become more transparent over the course of my argument. Hence, these differences in the ways music is (or is *not*) conceptualized will form a central, guiding theme throughout the present thesis, being an attempt to get to grips with the fundamental diversities and dissimilarities that make us discern our 'own' from 'other' aesthetic worlds.

I shall, therefore, invest the majority of the second part of the present thesis (particularly [ch. 6]) into attempting to elucidate the underlying societal,

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missed noticing it!"), to diagnoses of deficit ("if they don't have a proper term for it, then they have not yet understood what music *really* is!"); the latter having been by far the most frequent comment. While all of these statements were certainly much more considered and sincere than they might appear in such a brief rundown, none of them seemed to hold prospect for a convincing explanation. And hence, the problem stuck with me.

historical and cultural frameworks that led the Occident (as well as those parts of the Orient that, during antiquity, were under Greek cultural influence) to conceive of an encompassing category concept, 'music', that refers, intelligibly and with only academic dissent as to its boundaries,<sup>9</sup> to a part of reality as we perceive it – while among the Moken entirely different category concepts take priority, leading to their getting along perfectly well without a conceptual or semantic equivalent to our term 'music'.

In the world of the Moken sea nomads what we call 'music' is tightly interwoven with, and in a sense subordinate to, those cultural spheres that we would refer to as 'myth' (i.e. something like 'foundational, meaning-endowing traditional narratives') and 'ritual' (i.e. something akin to 'the communal symbolic enactment of collective beliefs') - yet, the Moken do not have strictly equivalent terms for these concepts either. How the interrelationships between these domains present themselves to the outside observer will be described in [ch. 4], using the example of the Moken's annual ancestor worship ceremony, *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ*. A detailed analysis of the terms 'myth' and 'ritual' as used in scholarly discourse will be given in [ch. 5].

With regard to these conceptual matters, I shall try to propose an interpretive framework to elucidate some possible reasons underlying the fact that the Moken as well as many other, perhaps even most, cultures around the world do not conceptualize the phenomenon we call 'music' in the same way we do.<sup>10</sup> In [ch. 6] I will further submit the more general (and certainly not new) question whether music (and what we call 'art' in general) may be meaningfully addressed in terms of concepts and categories at all.

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9 For example the discussions among their respective contemporaries about, say, Cage's 4'33" or the *musique concrète* of the 1950s - i.e. works that deliberately and explicitly raise the question of the limits of what can be considered music.

10 And this might even be extended to individual subcultures within our own societies. It occurs to me that, say, a musician in a philharmonic orchestra might conceptualize 'music' quite differently than one in a punk band or a rap DJ – perhaps even in a case where the same person is all three things herself.

American composer-theorist, Norman Cazden notes:

“Properly scientific study of a range of phenomena would have to begin ... with an informed description of its relevant universe of discourse, in our case with the observed musical practices of human social groups.” (Cazden 1972: 232).

While I do not consider the present thesis a “*scientific study*” but a humanistic inquiry, I will, with Cazden's request in mind, nevertheless attempt to describe how the phenomenon we call music is contextualized within the world view of the Moken, within their particular “*universe of discourse*”. I shall attempt to describe how the “*observed musical practices*” are embedded within their life-world in such a way that many of the notions we perceive to be self-evident and integral to our own understanding of the phenomenon of music are in fact secondary if not altogether irrelevant to them.

Acknowledging John Blacking's demand that “*ethnomusicologists have yet to produce systematic cultural analyses of music that explain how a musical system is part of other systems of relationships within a culture.*” (Blacking 2000[1973]: 25), I shall treat ‘music’ not primarily as a distinct, isolated, clearly defined cultural fact in its own right (which would meet with considerable difficulties with regard to a society that does not recognize a similar conceptual category),<sup>11</sup> but as being determined by its *relational proximity* to those domains that, among the sea nomads as well as in our own cultural sphere, are linked by common bonds, such as mutual semantic references and co-occurring forms of activity; i.e. by similar vocabularies and conjunct actions (which are empirically observable) and which thus, presumably, are based on similarly collective ideations (which are not empirically observable, but have to be deduced hypothetically from observation).

In avoiding the ontological ultimate of asking “what music *is*”, I will attempt to break my initial proposal down into more concrete and manageable

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<sup>11</sup> Which would inevitably lead either to a mischaracterization of their worldview or, worse, to the insinuation that ‘we have a name for it (‘music’) because we have understood something about the world that they haven’t’; a fallacy that has, at least implicitly, permeated much of early (ethno-)musicology. I shall address this issue in [6.3] of the present thesis.

conceptions, posing a set of deliberately naïve<sup>12</sup> initial guiding questions, viz.: (i) “*where is (what I perceive to be) music ‘located’ within the web of cultural reality?; where is it identified as naturally ‘belonging’?*” and (ii) “*which domains is (what I perceive to be) music seen as being directly related to or interrelated with?*”.

In short, I will be inquiring after the cultural ‘situatedness’ of music, in the form of its ‘relatedness’ and ‘about-ness’ with regard to other socio-cultural beliefs and practices and their according behavioral, ideational and conceptual spheres, asking, with David McAllester, “*what music is conceived to be*” (1954: 4); and, with Anthony Seeger, “*Why perform music at all in a given situation in a society?*” (1987: xiii). It is my conviction that it is these fundamental issues that have first to be addressed if we are to understand the aesthetic worlds of others.

To come to terms with the Moken not having a conceptual equivalent to our term music I will have to also take a look at what this particular conceptual category means to us. I shall, therefore, discuss several fundamental notions that have been constitutive of the concepts of music, art, and aesthetics in Western thought. I shall attempt to investigate whether, or to what extent, these notions are applicable with regard to societies outside of the European sphere in general, and to the sea nomads in particular. My argument, therefore, takes the form of what could be called a ‘trans-cultural dialectic’.

Discussing Hans-Georg Gadamer’s dialectical hermeneutics (1985 [1960]) American philosopher, Richard Rorty writes:

“[G]etting the facts right (about atoms and the void or about the history of Europe) is merely propaedeutic to finding a new and interesting way of expressing ourselves, and thus of coping with the world. From the educational, as opposed to the epistemological or the technological, point of view, the way things are said is more important than the possession of truths. Since ‘education’ sounds a bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use ‘edification’ to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking. The attempt to edify (ourselves and others) may consist in the hermeneutic activity of *making connections between our culture and some exotic culture* or historical period.” (Rorty 1979: 359f.; second emphasis mine).

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12 E.g., Anthony Seeger, in his seminal study of the Suyá, has shown that naïve questions can lead to profound answers; see Seeger 1987: 13 and *passim*.

This short passage contains several remarkable statements with regard to the overall approach I will be pursuing. I find it telling that the very first example for the application of such a hermeneutic-dialectic process that comes to Rorty's mind is *"making connections between our culture and some exotic culture"*. Leaving aside the somewhat dated adjective *"exotic"*,<sup>13</sup> this is very much what I am going to attempt over the course of the argument put forth in the present thesis: trying to make better sense of the world (whatever that might be) by consciously stepping back and forth between one world and another, very different one (or, in fact, several different ones); attempting to render another peoples' ways of understanding reality more accessible and transparent by drawing (hopefully) meaningful connections to my own (i.e. 'Western' and '[post-]modern') ways of understanding reality.

This dialectic attempt to *"edify ([myself] and others)"* (ibid.) was not so much planned from the outset but gradually emerged during my struggling to understand the Moken world for more than a decade. In the end, this led me to recur to such seemingly disconnected topics as Moken ritual, classical metaphysics, analytic philosophy of language, Greek mythology, and the history of European modernity in an attempt to meaningfully contextualize the challenges that the Moken world posed to my own modes of understanding. I am, however, quite confident that my reasons for taking this, perhaps somewhat unorthodox, approach will become apparent over the course of my argument.

In doing so I will, following Rorty, not primarily be concerned with *"getting the facts right"* with regard to the Moken's music or music in general - as I find it rather difficult to ascertain what proper 'facts' could be with regard to music in the first place.<sup>14</sup> Rather, I shall attempt to find *"new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking"* about music in an attempt at *"coping with the world"* of the Moken (and my own). I shall try to elucidate what the sea nomads

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13 While the original *εξωτικός* simply means 'from outside', i.e. 'foreign', 'exotic' has become a problematic term, associated with the exoticist movement in art, with colonialism, with mass tourism, and with ideas of 'cultural appropriation'. Furthermore, the 'exo-' prefix accentuates the view onto something 'outside', something inherently 'other' and 'different', obscuring the fact that the 'exo-' in the active necessitates an 'exo-' in the passive (and *Vice versa*); i.e., the fact that the situation is one of perspective and is always mutual: a stranger can always meet but another stranger.

14 In [app. A] there are given extensive computational analyses of sound recordings of Moken sound-making. Whether these constitute 'facts' about 'Moken music' will remain open for discussion beyond the scope of the present thesis.

are doing, thinking, and believing with regard to the phenomenon of music by contrasting it with what in my own, European or 'Western', culture is generally done, thought, and believed with regard to the phenomenon of music – trying to find out why what to us is a meaningful conceptual category is not semantically summarized in any similar way among the Moken, and what this fact might tell us about their aesthetic imagination and what beliefs and attitudes inform it.

In return, I shall also scrutinize our own ways of perceiving and conceptualizing the phenomenon of music by having them diagnosed in the light of the sea nomad's understanding of the phenomenon - further posing the question whether there is some actual, clearly circumscribed, autonomous phenomenon to refer to in the first place. The key term here is 'understanding' in the sense proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey (1883) in his famous distinction between "explaining" ("Erklären") natural laws of cause and effect on the one hand, and "understanding" ("Verstehen") of the life-worlds of actual people in their particular cultural and historical situatedness on the other.<sup>15</sup>

To explain my understanding of this basic opposition between 'explaining' and 'understanding', allow me to draw the following comparison: In today's mathematical physics there are formal concepts far too abstract and outside our experiential horizon to truly *take them in*, as they say; that is, to be *understood* in a way resembling the intuitive, empathetic connotation that the term 'understanding', as commonly used, carries with itself. They can only be *explained* using complex mathematical symbolisms.<sup>16</sup> I shall argue, in somewhat the same vein, that there are phenomena regarding the human condition that are so tightly and inextricably woven into actually lived lives, into society, culture, history, and biography and, hence, so rich in implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions that they cannot be meaningfully *explained* in any technical sense, but only *understood* by truly taking them in (or, perhaps, by being taken in by them).<sup>17</sup>

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15 A distinction that eventually led to the division of German faculties into *Naturwissenschaften* (sciences) and *Geisteswissenschaften* (arts and humanities).

16 The field of non-classical physics is perhaps the most obvious example. As American physicist, Richard Feynman remarks: "*I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics*" (1995: 129; my emphasis).

17 This general attitude, of course, traces back to the thought of (besides Dilthey) Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Simmel; i.e. to what has commonly been subsumed

I shall consider those phenomena that we refer to as 'music', 'myth', and 'ritual' to be of the latter kind.

### **i.ii Determining 'Music's Place' within the Cultural Fabric**

Allan Merriam opens the first chapter of his seminal study on the musical culture of the Flathead Indians by stating the following fundamental assumption:

"All people, in no matter what culture, must be able to place their music firmly in the context of the totality of their beliefs, experiences, and activities, for without such ties, music cannot exist. This means that there must be a body of theory connected with any music system – not necessarily a theory of the structure of music sound, although that may be present as well, but rather a theory of what music is, what it does, and how it is coordinated with the total environment, both natural and cultural, in which man moves." (1967:3).

I, likewise, shall proceed from the assumption that in every society music has its 'place' (or its 'places') within the richly textured fabric of culture, both as a concept, or set of concepts (though these concepts might not at all be the same as ours), and as an activity, or range of activities (though these activities might not resemble our activities). I shall further assume that there are spheres or domains within each particular culture that music is more easily associated or more directly connected with than others: "*Any ethnomusicological study of music*" writes Anthony Seeger,

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under the term '*Lebensphilosophie*'. This general direction of thought (it's individual proponents being much too different in their respective philosophies to speak of a 'school') attempted, in contrast to both scientific positivism and the rationalistic philosophies of Locke, Hume, and Kant, to integrate also the irrational and creative aspects of man in all their ambiguity, inconsistency, and vagueness into their attempts at a more holistic view of the 'human condition' (though I shall strongly doubt that such a thing as a universal, essential, supratemporal *conditio humana* actually exists). While this program never attained widespread support in academic philosophy, it has left noticeable traces, both implicitly and explicitly, in the arts and humanities. I will attempt to maintain this general outlook without having to buy wholesale also the numerous theoretical problems inherent in the pursuit of a 'philosophy of life' (cf. Scheler 1972[1913]; Cassirer 1929).

“should begin by examining music in relationship to other art forms, because nothing simply exists in itself. Everything is always partly defined by what it is not - by the other members of a set which usually are systematically related among themselves.” (A. Seeger 1987: 25).

And John Dewey observes, much earlier, but in the same vein:

“In order to understand the meaning of artistic products, we have to forget them for a time, to turn aside from them and have recourse to the ordinary forces and conditions of experiences we do not usually regard as esthetic. We have to arrive at the theory of art by means of a detour.” (2005 [1935]: 2).

And the “*detour*” I will be taking is the following: In sea nomad culture there appears to be a particularly close affiliation between the realm of music and, while not strictly “*art forms*” as understood in the West,<sup>18</sup> those cultural phenomena generally referred to as ‘myth’ and ‘ritual’. I shall, therefore, argue that among the sea nomads of the Andaman Sea creative sounding expressions, myth, and ritual represent congeneric modalities of referring to particular, and often rather fundamental, qualities of experiencing reality. They are held together by a common bond, mutually constituting each others frames of reference and their according implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions. It is within this nexus that those attitudes towards the world that we might term the *aesthetic sentiment* and the *religious sentiment* emerge as an integrated, holistic phenomenon out of a reciprocal interplay between these spheres as a unified mode of the immediate experience<sup>19</sup> of being, as a *religio-aesthetic sentiment* - a concept that, with regard to our own cultural traditions, harks back to the ancient Greeks (found, for example, in the original notion of μουσικός [adj.] and μουσική [noun]; see [8.1]),<sup>20</sup> and has also permeated modern Western

18 For ‘art’ is precisely one of those particular spheres that we tend to associate music with.

19 The term ‘direct’ or ‘immediate experience’ has been used, with somewhat different purport, by Bergson, Dewey, Cassirer, and Wittgenstein, among others. I will not yet nail my flag to the interpretative mast of any particular one of these authors, being quite confident that it will become clear what I am going to mean by the term over the course of my argument.

20 While these terms constitute the etymological root of our modern term ‘music’, there has been a significant change in meaning over the course of the past two-and-a-half millennia. As the trained philologist, bHeidegger (2012 [1935-6]: 8) puts it (with regard to the translation of Greek ideas into Latin-Roman thought): “*The translation of the Greek names into the Latin language is by no means the inconsequential process for which it is still believed today. Rather, the apparently literal and thus preserving translation hides a translation of Greek experience into another way of thinking. Roman thinking adopts the Greek words without the corresponding, equiprimordial [gleichursprüngliche] experience of what they say, without the Greek word. The bottomlessness of Western thinking begins with this translation.*” (My transl.;



aesthetic thought since Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757).<sup>21</sup>

I shall, finally, argue that it is in this unified domain of music, myth, and ritual that, among the sea nomads, those oppositions that fundamentally constitute the experience of being: that between *self* and *world*<sup>22</sup> on the one hand; and that between *present*, *past* and *future* on the other,<sup>23</sup> are - first - experientially *emphasized*, to be - then - temporarily *suspended* (or at least attenuated), to - subsequently - be actively *renegotiated*, *transformed*, and *reinstated*.<sup>24</sup> The ways in which this process presents itself among the Moken will be explicated in [4.3].

To summarize: in terms of theory and method my approach is decidedly not one of analytically reducing the empirically given phenomena into supposed 'underlying structures', 'mechanisms' or 'causal relations' of a lower order (i.e., not an attempt at *explaining*), but rather one of interpretation by contextualization (i.e., an attempt at *understanding*). A certain amount of analysis (i.e., the dissecting of a given phenomenon, concept or term into its constituent phenomena, concepts or terms, or their respective intensional characteristics) appears to be unavoidable in some cases; this, however, will be exclusively employed as a means in eventually trying to reach a synthetic interpretation (i.e., the conflation of a given number of phenomena, concepts or

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emphases in orig.).

21 Herein, while for the first time explicitly setting these concepts analytically apart, Burke traces the ideas of the sublime (i.e., ideations of things overwhelmingly greater than man, such as the idea of God) and the beautiful (i.e. what is harmonious, well-ordered, well-proportioned and therefore pleasing and, hence, inspires affection and attachment) to the same fundamental human impulses: the instinct for self-preservation and the instinct for sociability (ibid.). Burke's ideas had a considerable influence on Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which will feature rather prominently later in the present thesis.

22 Or between *individual* and *society*. For, like among many small-scale societies, there is also among the sea nomads no strict, analytical compartmentalization of external reality into a 'natural world' on the one hand and a 'socio-cultural world' on the other. What we call the 'natural world' is largely conceptualized in socio-cultural terms.

23 I.e. those fundamental realities that are solely and exclusively the domain of conscious human beings, of *persons*: the observing, first-person '*I*', confronting a world of observed, second-person '*Thous*', and the experience of tensed time, with the '*I*' defining the present tense, looking back into a past and anticipating a future. See Bergson's *Time and Free Will* (1950 [1889]) and Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962 [1927]) for two influential treatments of these fundamental issues of the 'human condition'.

24 A process that bears a certain resemblance to, again, the ancient Greek notion of κάθαρσις, the idea of purgation and purification that eventually formed the core idea in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

terms into a unified, comprehensive perspective; into “*new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking*” [Rorty, loc. cit.] about these matters).

The present thesis is, in large parts, a study of the socio-cultural contexts, the conceptual frameworks, and the epistemic coherencies in which the phenomenon we call music arises among the sea nomads (who, to reiterate, do not recognize such a conceptual category themselves) - and such approaches have met with their fair share of criticism. Contextual studies are, according to Joseph Kerman, “*usually tilted much too far towards the consideration of contexts. They usually deal too little with the music as music*” (Kerman 1986: 180; my emphasis; cf. also Solis 2012).<sup>25</sup> This notion raises, at least as far as I am concerned, several basic comprehension questions: how can the one be clearly and explicitly separated from the other? What, precisely, does “*the music as music*” mean? Is there a natural, matter-of-course separating line between music-*in-itself* and music-in (-or-as) -context? Is it even possible to conceive of music as an entirely isolated, autonomous, uncontextualized entity? This seems not at all evident to me, particularly when trying to understand music from outside of the European tradition. I, therefore, shall align myself with Austrian philosopher, Alfred Schütz in assuming that “[*m*]usic is a meaningful context.” (1977: 106; my emphasis; cf. also Schütz and Luckmann 1975).

This debate about the ontology of music, the question of *what music really is*, reaches back at least as far as the competing theories of Pythagoras and Aristoxenos and has as yet yielded rather few insights.<sup>26</sup> It is, therefore, a central assumption in the present thesis that the dividing line between music and context, between what counts as ‘music proper’, what merely informs this sphere, and what has to be considered entirely ‘extra-musical’, is not an a priori given, but culturally determined; neither arbitrary nor fixed by mere stipulation, but conventional and, hence, historically contingent. And as such it cannot serve

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25 To do Kerman justice I have to clarify that his critique is aimed at contextual studies with regard to the Western musical tradition and practice, i.e. at what has been termed the ‘new musicology’ of the 1980s and ‘90s.

26 For the question “*what is music?*” is itself intrinsically fallacious and, hence, misled, as we shall see below.

as a basis for any discussion of 'music-*in-itself*' (whatever that might be), but belongs precisely to those things that have to be identified and clarified as the result of the study of a particular society and culture.<sup>27</sup> Hence, with regard to the music of the sea nomads, I will be just as much concerned with what I learned about their music as with what I learned from them about what I consider music to be by entrusting my personal, culturally inherited modes of thought about music to their diagnosis.

The prolonged fieldwork that much of the present thesis is based upon was conducted in Southeast Asia, in Thailand and to a much smaller extent in Myanmar, among an ethnic group whose members identify themselves as *Moken*. Travel guides still habitually refer to them as 'Sea Gypsies', presumably because the fact that they are (or used to be) marine *nomads* suggests some sort of semblance with the Romani and other traveling peoples. The Moken are hunter-gatherers, their subsistence being based upon spearfishing (which is a form of hunting) and foraging. They received some media attention after the 2004 Sumatra-Andaman tsunami, as their knowledge of the sea - passed on in the form of mythical tales, a central part of their extensive corpus of oral history and literature - enabled them to, in time, seek shelter on higher ground. Consequently, there were only very few casualties among the Moken, despite the fact that the tsunami affected their entire settlement area. The Moken people have become increasingly sedentary over the course of the past decades, settling on the mainland due to enforcement of national border policies between Thailand and Myanmar (they are stateless beings and hence, with few exceptions, do not possess documents). Encroachment of economic and political interests (e.g. fisheries, pearl farming, tin mining, tourism), but also the establishment of national parks and wildlife reserves, have also been impinging on their traditional nomadic way of life. Their religious beliefs<sup>28</sup> center

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27 I am certainly not the first one to argue in this vein, the ethnomusicological literature in particular provides quite a number of examples that are at least not in direct opposition to my theoretical standpoint (e.g., McAllester 1954; Merriam 1964; Blacking 1967, 1973; Keil 1979; Feld 1982; Stone 1982; Basso 1985; A. Seeger 1987; Small 1998; Turino 2008).

28 For now, I am using the term 'religion' / 'religious' in its colloquial, non-technical, pre-philosophical sense. The notion of 'religion' has in general been a problematic one when used to indicate phenomena from outside of the sphere of the Greco-Roman-Abrahamic complex (cf. Goody 1961: 142 [paraphrasing Harrison 1912: 29]).

around what in anthropological literature is usually subsumed under the term ‘ancestor worship’ (or ‘manism’; cf. Jones [ed.] 2005:320-31). The realm of the ancestral spirits and tales about the mythical past are central, formative, and meaning-endowing elements in their view of the world and in defining their ethnic identity as marine nomads, with all the considerable hardships that come with a life at sea. These harsh circumstances of life demand an extraordinary degree of explanatory framing and validation. Moken culture provides resources for the perpetual confirmation of their particular way of life in the form of several modes, closely intertwined in terms of content as well as context, of what can be designated narrative, performative, and expressive strategies. All of these strategies are intimately interrelated with, and closely linked to what we refer to as music.

### **i.iii Formal Structure of the Present Thesis**

The core argument put forth in the present thesis is broadly structured into two main sections ([Part I] and [Part II]), inherently different in both their respective subject and the manner in which it is approached methodologically. The first section is mostly descriptive and interpretive in nature and is based on empirical ethnographic observation. It discusses the ‘situatedness’ of the phenomenon we call music within the life-world of the Moken sea nomads and, in particular, its ‘aboutness’ and ‘relatedness’ with regard to the domains of religious ritual and within the conditions of an inherently mythical understanding of reality.

The second section is mostly theoretical in outlook. It is primarily concerned with the central terms ‘music’, ‘myth’, and ‘ritual’ on a conceptual and category level, i.e. with their development in the Western intellectual tradition, with their meaning and use in contemporary academic discourse, and with the difficulties that arise when applying these concepts to foreign cultures.

To approach the questions of ‘where music ‘belongs’’, where it is ‘located’ within a given culturally patterned worldview, and where its contiguities with other domains of social life lie, the main argument of each of the two central sections is arranged around respective key propositions or focal examples. Each example illustrates a range of core concepts and beliefs, fundamental to a

particular culturally legitimized notion about the nature of the phenomenon of music and its respective 'place' within socio-cultural reality. Much of the argument in between these key examples will be concerned with correlating and contextualizing seemingly opposing and contradictory perspectives on what constitutes 'the nature of music' and to work out the congruities that might connect them.

The first section takes the form of a concrete case study, based on a total of eighteen months of field work among the Moken sea nomads. It is primarily devoted to the annual ancestor worship ceremony, *né'èn lobo:η*, the Moken's most important religious celebration, and also the principal occasion for music, song, and dance. By means of this example I will try to give an interpretive account on how those spheres that the Western intellectual tradition have been compartmentalized into the distinct concepts of 'music', 'myth', and 'ritual' form an integrated whole, a *religio-aesthetic sentiment*, in the world view of the Moken.

What I above have called the 'situatedness' of music and its relational proximity to other domains of a foreign culture appears difficult to elucidate in-and-out of itself, without recourse to pre-established notions about what "*music is conceived to be*" (McAllester, loc. cit.) in the world view of the observer. In the second section I will, therefore, try to propound some observations with regard to how 'we', i.e. those that were, like myself, brought up in the 'Western' tradition, locate or identify the phenomenon of music within the referential framework we use to navigate our cultural and social worlds (making some unavoidable oversimplifications and over-generalizations along the way), and how they historically emerged and developed. I will argue that these ideations about music are the result of a particular historical development, harking back to the thought of the ancient Greeks and having acquired there current conceptual form during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and that the resulting predications are neither universal nor normative in any general sense.

Since the second half of the 1990s, a general attitude in academic (ethno-)musicology appears to once again have come to the fore, in which the tenet of *cultural relativism*<sup>29</sup> seems no longer to be seen as a significant and

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29 i.e., the considered opinion, harking back to Herder, that there are no universal, immutable

necessary advancement from earlier Eurocentric, theologistic,<sup>30</sup> and scientific<sup>31</sup> views (e.g. Herskovitz 1958; Diamond 2014 [1974]: 110 and passim). Cultural relativism has been criticized as a form of 'post-modern' indifference to the idea of universal values and, hence, as a disguise for moral relativism.<sup>32</sup> In recent years cultural relativism has also occasionally been rejected in the field of (ethno-)musicology on the grounds of being an inconvenient hindrance to the newly rehashed 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of 'grand theories' of culture in general and of music and art in particular, again aspiring to 'discover', once and for all, the essential universals, the ultimate ground of being, the immutable 'music-*in-itself*', the 'first principles' allegedly underlying all of the manifold, diverse

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absolutes with regard to human values, beliefs, morals, and social practices, but that these are only to be adequately understood and evaluated within their respective cultural framework and particular historical horizon (see e.g. Boas 1963 [1911]; Benedict 1959 [1934]; Kluckhohn 1944; Kroeber 1948; Herskovitz 1956, 1958; for a critical roundup see Geertz 1984).

30 'Theologism' denotes the extension of theology beyond its proper domain of explanatory competence, that is, beyond the philological and philosophical interpretation of the teachings of scripture (i.e., with regard to human culture, the notion, prevalent in the West in medieval and early modern times, that other, non-Christian, peoples are first and foremost pagan savages, heathens or devil worshipers to be evangelized to save their souls from eternal hell fire, or otherwise to be slain as 'enemies of God'. The European conquest of the Americas might be seen as an example of 'ethnographic fieldwork' of the theologistic creed).

31 'Scientism' denotes a philosophical hypothesis that belongs to the domain of epistemology, i.e. the study of the nature of knowledge. Scientism itself is not a scientific hypothesis, but a philosophical hypothesis *about* the sciences. The hypothesis in its strong form expresses the view that the only real knowledge is scientific evidence. Questions that cannot be answered by the means and methods of the natural sciences are either mere pseudo-questions or are irrelevant to an understanding of reality (i.e. with regard to human culture, the notion that the vast differences and idiosyncrasies in man's ways of life are merely superficial epiphenomena, and that all these variations have to be reduced to common, universal workings of the human organism and the ultimate mechanics of the world it is interacting with and, hence, explained solely as scientific laws of cause and effect). A formal problem of strong scientism is the fact that its basic assertion is self-refuting: (a) The philosophical hypothesis of strong scientism is itself not an object of scientific evidence; ergo, (b) if all true knowledge is scientific evidence, it follows that (c) the philosophical hypothesis of strong scientism itself has no legitimate claim to being an object of true knowledge (cf. Voegelin 1948: 462-94; Nagel 1986: 9; Feyerabend 1993 [1975]; Haack 2003).

32 Likewise, the principle idea of cultural relativism constituted an obvious insult to Western self-understanding and self-confidence, being in opposition to a firm conviction held by broad sectors of Western society for centuries: viz. that the Occidental heritage as a continuation of Greco-Roman culture and the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition (and often disregarding the immense debt owed to the medieval Islamic world) was both the true origin of, and the de facto standard for, 'civilization', objectively exceptional and self-evidently superior to other types and forms of society, past and present; the pinnacle in what was conceived of as the progressive 'ascent of man' (cf., again, Geertz 1984), eventually culminating in a science-based mastery of everything there is, including a science-based understanding of man himself. This widespread conviction, i.e. that the obvious Occidental exceptionalism with regard to scientifically founded technology leads also to an equally evident supremacy in social, moral, and political terms has, over the past decades, suffered a certain setback by the fact that 'Western civilization' has now, for the first time in the history of *Homo sapiens*, brought humanity itself to the brink of extinction, either as the result of a collapsing ecosphere, or by means of thermonuclear self-annihilation.

phenomena that came to be referred to as music (e.g. Honing 2004; Leman 2008; Savage *et al.* 2014; Bader 2021).

The present thesis, thus, attempts to probe how that strand of philosophical inquiry into the being of music and art that in the West came to be called aesthetics might be systematically expanded to address the creative sound-making of other cultures. It appears, therefore, appropriate to include a critical, compilatory survey of some key figures of thought that have their roots in antiquity and have taken their current form in this particular discourse in the course of, roughly, the past two-and-a-half centuries ([6.7]) - and to point out why the formulation of careful generalizations that transcend particular observations in individual cultures, and the informed presentation of regularities and commonalities of one kind or another, are in no way conditionally dependent on the idea of 'musical universals' ([6.6]).

It is customary to refer to occidental thought turning from μῦθος (*mythos*) towards λόγος (*logos*)<sup>33</sup> as a fundamental turning point in Western intellectual history, the transition from the concrete to the abstract as the pivotal point of thought. If such a development can be reasonably stated with reference to a historical date at all, it presumably occurred between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE in Greece and is mostly associated with the names of Homer and Hesiod on the one side of the divide, and Plato and Aristotle on the other, with the semi-mythical figure of Socrates<sup>34</sup> marking the separating line.<sup>35</sup> With regard to music,

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33 Both terms, μῦθος and λόγος, share the literal meanings 'word', 'speech' and 'narrative', among others. Over the course of history, however, the terms have undergone a semantic shift that set them apart, even to the degree of denoting opposite spheres of ideation: *mythos* referring to the eidetic, experiential, irrational sphere; and *logos* to the rational, analytic, abstract and discursive faculties of the intellect. Max Weber (1904/05) used a rather similar, yet not precisely identical, distinction between 'ethos' and 'ratio'. While I will be discussing the Aristotelian concept of *ethos* (with regard to music) below, I will for now stick with the mythos/logos dichotomy, not least because it spares me opposing a Greek term with a Latin one. For an influential treatment of this opposition in German philology, see Nestle's *Vom Mythos zum Logos* (1940).

34 Though it is plausible that Socrates was an actual historical figure, he left no first-hand sources. All that we know about his thinking came down to us in the form of Plato's early dialogues (*Charmides*, *Kriton*, *Euthyphron*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*) and to a lesser degree through the works of Xenophon and Antisthenes.

35 I am drawing with a very broad brush here. Of course the development towards what we

this revolution in ancient man's relation to the world is commonly regarded to have occurred even earlier, in Presocratic times, and is generally associated with the figure of Pythagoras of Samos.

Hence, I am going to begin my observations in this regard with Pythagoras's theories about musical intervals and consonance that mark the beginning of Western thought about music as being primarily a rule-governed ordering of particular kinds of acoustic phenomena ([6.2]). While this school of thought is commonly associated with the rise of *logos* as the paramount mental attitude towards reality, I will argue that the Pythagoreans' obsession with numbers and proportions that fundamentally shaped the European understanding of music is, just like that of the Moken, in fact deeply rooted in essentially mythical and mystical beliefs.<sup>36</sup>

Following this first recourse to the Greek foundations of Occidental thought, I shall continue by giving a brief, synoptic overview of several developments in European societies, intellectual, political, and economic, since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century that led to the ascendancy of a set of interrelated concepts and beliefs that collectively have formed our implicit presupposition and, hence, had a profound influence on the way we understand music until the present day: the concept of 'art' (in the singular, as opposed to the older notion of the 'fine arts', or the still older notion of the '*artes liberales*'); the concept of the autonomous 'musical work' (and the 'work of art' in general) as an expression of 'individual genius'; and the philosophical concepts that, in the wake of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks* (1711), Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750-58) and Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), became subsumed under the term 'aesthetics'.

I shall then return to the domain of mythical thought in outlining a different, non-Pythagorean perspective on the phenomenon of music that also

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today understand to be the distinctly Occidental creed of rational reasoning was a long process, starting with the earliest of Presocratic philosophers (i.e., those that we still know about: Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes) and extending to the beginnings of historiography with Herodotus and Thucydides and beyond. On the other hand, Plato himself still employed mythical poetics as a means of philosophical inquiry in his dialogues, most notably in the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*.

36 And I am certainly not the first to do so: see e.g. Cornford (1912), Dodds (1951), Burkert (1972), Lloyd (1979).



has its source in archaic Greece, yet has largely been overgrown<sup>37</sup> in the Western intellectual tradition by the previously described modes of thought ([ch. 7]). I will develop this argument by recurring to Hesiod's *Prooemium* to the *Theogony*, which will again lead us to the *etymon* of our term 'music', i.e. its original meaning as μουσική. This alternative *Interpretatio graeca* of the phenomenon of music shall serve as an argumentative stepping stone, allowing me to come full circle, to the synthesis of my 'transcultural dialectic': from the world of the sea nomads to the European intellectual sphere and, finally, towards a more comprehensive perspective; to what might connect their implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions with regard to music, their locating this phenomenon in their world, with our own – thereby, hopefully, allowing for a more profound understanding of another peoples' aesthetic worlds.

Finally, underlying both parts of this thesis is an ongoing strand of speculative thought<sup>38</sup> in which I attempt to work out possible answers to the question "*why is this so?*", contemplating why man localizes certain forms of expressive behavior within particular spheres of socio-cultural life and uses certain words to name these phenomena (or, to the contrary, refrains from doing so). By tracing these thoughts through both, my empirical observations among the Moken and the historical-theoretical reflections on my own, 'Western', cultural background, I hope to be able to propose at least some tentative solutions to these problems.

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37 Or became exclusively associated with the particular movement of (mostly German) 'romanticism'.

38 To appeal to a statement by American philosopher, Thomas Nagel: "[T]he world is a strange place, and nothing but radical speculation gives us hope of coming up with any candidates for the truth." (1986:10).

## PART I

### *The Life-World of a Sea Nomadic People: their Beliefs, their Music, their Myths, and their Rituals*

#### 1. Empirical Observations: Fieldwork among a 'Submerged People'

*WHAT EMPIRICAL METHOD EXACTS OF PHILOSOPHY IS TWO THINGS: FIRST, THAT REFINED METHODS AND PRODUCTS BE TRACED BACK TO THEIR ORIGIN IN PRIMARY EXPERIENCE, IN ALL ITS HETEROGENEITY AND FULLNESS; SO THAT THE NEEDS AND PROBLEMS OUT OF WHICH THEY ARISE AND WHICH THEY HAVE TO SATISFY BE ACKNOWLEDGED. SECONDLY, THAT THE SECONDARY METHODS AND CONCLUSIONS BE BROUGHT BACK TO THE THINGS OF ORDINARY EXPERIENCE, IN ALL THEIR COARSENESS AND CRUDITY, FOR VERIFICATION.*

- JOHN DEWEY (1958[1929]:36)

##### 1.1 Approaching the Moken World: Some Prose

Two days after the annual ancestor worship ceremony had ended, *eba:b* Dunung and I were again sitting on the bamboo floor of the stilt hut that the wiry old sea nomad inhabited with his caring wife, *ibu:m* Muki. The oppressive heat of the day had begun to slowly cease. The laughing and shouting of children filled the damp afternoon air, accompanied by the ever-present drone of the long-tail-boats' diesel engines. I was, once more, asking questions.

For the second time I had been given the opportunity to participate in the celebration of *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ*, the annual ceremony of the spirit poles, in which the Moken sea nomads sing, dance, and make votive offerings and animal

sacrifices, all to honor the spirits of their ancestors, pleading for their favor and benevolence.

“If you don’t play the drums...?” I asked; “...then the spirits won’t come!” Dunung finished my sentence, answering my question in the same breath.

We were watching the playback of the video footage I had filmed during the three days and two nights of religious ritual, singing, drumming, dancing, and trancing on my digital camcorder’s tiny built-in screen. It showed, faint in the twilight of dusk, the moving images of men and women with sarongs slung about their waists, dancing counter-clockwise around a small, candle-lit altar amid a group of tall, carved wooden effigies of stylized anthropoid form. Some of the older men wore strips of white or black cloth wound turban-like around their heads.

In the foreground, three younger men could be seen, two of them playing a cyclical rhythmic pattern by beating a pair of huge blue plastic barrels, welcome (though, in the eyes of some elders, inadequate) substitutes for the traditional drums that, except for a single one, were lost in the 2004 tsunami – together with their entire fleet of *kaba:ŋ*, the traditional house boats that used to be not only the cherished home of each Moken nuclear family, but were also considered to be living beings.<sup>39</sup> The third man seemed to be clapping his hands; only a recurrent, piercing, metallic sound coming from the small loudspeaker indicated that he was keeping meter with the *ching*, the small, cup-shaped bronze cymbals typical of Thai and Khmer music. Their performance was accompanied by the soft murmur of the Andaman sea, the shoreline being only a few steps away.

Even in the diminutive scale of the display, the facial expressions of the dancers could now and then be recognized: alternating between wild grimaces and vacant stares; their steady, rhythmic circling occasionally interrupted by sudden, unbridled gesticulation and unintelligible exclamations. On the ground around the altar, sitting on the soft sand of the island beach, further shadowy human shapes were vaguely perceptible, monotonously rocking back and forth

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39 Viewing nautical vessels as more than dead matter appears to be a widespread belief among seafaring peoples, including in our own culture (i.e., we give them a personal name, usually the prerogative of human beings and other living things close to us, like pets and domestic animals – and also of mythical entities like spirits and deities; see also [8.1]).

to the pulsating beat of the plastic-barrel drums.

*“The katoy have entered them,”* my host and main collaborator explained, additionally drawing on the Thai term for spirit beings, *phi*, to substantiate his assertion. He pointed at the rough-hewn wooden figures surrounding the altar, the effigies of the mythical ancestors; their serene carved features with the dark, painted-on eyes seemingly watching the dancers from some other, distant realm. *“Once the katoy are in your head, all goes dark around you. You can’t see anymore. That’s when you have to get up and dance to the playing of the drums. Then you will encounter the spirits of the deceased”*. Dunung emphasized what he had just said by briefly half-rising from his squatted position, alluding a few terpsichorean motions.

The rapid nightfall of the tropics soon made the dancing figures on the screen vanish as they merged into the nocturnal shadows. Only now and then twisted silhouettes appeared for moments against the dim pool of yellowish candlelight around the sacrificial altar. The drumming, dancing, and singing, however, was to continue into the early hours of the next morning.

The ceremony recounted above took place in April of 2010. Three years after the described event, however, *eba:b* Dunung, my main collaborator and informant on Moken culture in general and their music in particular, past away in his mid-sixties.<sup>40</sup> Since then, several more of the Moken elders, who were the primary keepers and guardians of both the religious and musical traditions, transmitted orally and by example and imitation (and being so tightly intertwined as to count as being aspects of one single, coherent phenomenon among the Moken),<sup>41</sup> have likewise joined their ancestors.

Hence, what once had been a stronghold of Moken culture (cf. Ivanoff 2009:106) is currently in the midst of severe cultural crisis. The intrusion of monetary economy is rapidly replacing traditional subsistence strategies. Environmental protection laws that are being enforced by national park

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40 My estimate; the Moken do not practice the counting of their years of age.

41 I.e., the initiates to the religious customs and traditions are, as a matter-of-course and without exceptions, also those that are most adept and knowledgeable with regard to music and song (and vice versa).

authorities put further constraints on the Moken's mobility and their hunting and foraging activities, their basic means of subsistence. Like many small-scale societies that live at the outer margins of industrialized nation states, the Moken are caught in a state of limbo; their traditional ways are slipping away from them, yet no valid alternative seems to be in sight.

## 1.2 Main Collaborators

The data underlying the present thesis has been compiled with the support of numerous members of the Moken community of Ko Surin. I have had informal conversations and conducted guided interviews with members of both sexes<sup>42</sup> and across all age cohorts, especially during the second and third fieldwork stays. Nevertheless, in the course of all visits, four people were very closely involved in the research project from its beginning and, hence, have had a considerable influence on its final outcome. All four belong to the genealogical and social stratum of 'elders', being addressed by the honorific '*eba:b*' or '*ibu:m*' ('grandfather' or 'grandmother'), respectively, by other members of the group. All are considered to be adepts to the mythical and religious lore of the Moken. One of them, *ibu:m* Alia, being the acting *djijan* ('shaman') of the community, her senior brother, *eba:b* Salamah, acting as her main aide. Accordingly, all four are also considered to be authorities with regard to music, song, dance, and epic poetry; *eba:b* Dunung being regarded the best player (and sole maker) of the bamboo tube zither *katij gá-ùn*, *eba:b* Djepen being regarded the best player of the drum *bá-nà*. All have a profound knowledge of the sacred ritual chants and the sung mythical tales of the Moken. So, before I turn to further details about the Moken sea nomads, I should like to briefly introduce them individually as my central collaborators and main sources of information and to expressly emphasize their significant contribution to the present thesis.

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42 I have to acknowledge the considerable assistance I have received from both my wife and my daughter (and also my son, during our first stay in 2007 still being breast-fed) in this regard, enabling me to also make statements about the life of Moken women, a part of society that would not have been readily open for investigation by a single male.

### 1.2.1 Dunung

*eba:b* Dunung [Fig. 39], who was host father to my family and myself during our first and second long-term stay, and also acted as my main informant and principal language and music teacher, was one of the most respected elders of the community. In addition to the *potao* of the group, *eba:b* Salamah (see [1.2.3]), Dunung was among those whose word and opinion was given the most weight within the community. The fact that Dunung was far better in control regarding his daily alcohol intake than most of the other men of his generation earned him the respect, appreciation and trust of all members of the community, especially that of the younger women, who, though not at all averse to alcohol themselves, usually disapprove of their spouses' often excessive drinking.

Dunung, born around 1950, was a quiet, considered, and restrained man, carrying an aura of great personal dignity, his wiry, muscular cast bearing testimony to a life of hard physical labor. In former times his subgroup used to sail the waters around the island of Ko Phayam, some 30 nautical miles northeast of Ko Surin, where they also set up camp during the rainy season. Dunung was the last of the group of Ko Surin who was still able to build the traditional bamboo tube-zither *katiŋ gá'un*, knowing not only how to construct it (which is a comparatively simple affair considering the generally very high level of craftsmanship among the Moken)<sup>43</sup>, but also knowing the sacred invocations necessary to 'do it properly'.

Together with his wife, *ibu:m* Muki, Dunung took great care of the well-being of my family and me during our first two prolonged stays and supported my work with tireless patience. Despite many misunderstandings and communication difficulties, Dunung never - not even once - became impatient with my endlessly repeated questions. He always allowed himself plenty of time to explain to me his point of view, from generalities of everyday life to complex concepts of the cosmology of the Moken. Here, Dunung showed an admirable

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43 The Moken (men and women) are highly adept at making the items of daily life from the raw materials supplied by their natural environment (hardwood, bamboo, vines, leaves, shells and nacre, coral, tortoise shell, sharks' teeth etc.). Despite the increase of monetary economy and main land contact, these traditional skills underlying their material culture (with the important exception of boat building which hasn't been properly practiced and taught for almost a generation by now) appear not to decline at the same rate as the entirely 'intangible' knowledge of the community, i.e. music, song, epic poems and mythical tales, religious rituals etc.

ability to empathize with my, for him rather alien, worldview. He always tried to make the world of the Moken accessible to me through easy-to-understand examples and witty metaphors and allegories. Dunung's contribution to the realization of this thesis can, therefore, not be overestimated. Even more importantly, he had become a very dear father-friend to my wife and myself, and a beloved step-grandfather to our children.

In his capacity as *ula' puti* (initiate to the traditional ways) Dunung was also considered one of the most competent healers in the village. He was consulted almost daily by men and women suffering from all sorts of ailments, for him to, under whispered incantations, 'pull malevolent spirits from their bodies' (*maket há*; pain not; i.e. relieve/remove pain). I had the opportunity to convince myself first hand of the efficacy of his therapy: one evening, in April of 2010 (only a few nights after the event described above), I suffered from such severe abdominal pain that I thought I had an acute appendicitis - a thought that, a two-to-three days' journey away from the nearest hospital, genuinely scared me stiff. The otherwise distinctly shy Dunung, now in his official capacity as traditional healer, was all calm competence and serious authority, which alone had a most comforting effect on me. He massaged my abdomen and neck, stroked my arms and legs, and finally, under murmured evocations of the mythical ancestor, *Sibían* (see also [4.1]), sucked the 'malevolent spirits' out of my body. After about forty minutes (and some serious flatulence), the pain had eased completely. My awfully painful 'appendicitis' had apparently been merely a, perhaps diet- or stress-related, intestinal colic. Dunung, in the terms of his own professional view on such matters, had made a sufficiently correct diagnosis and had applied an effective therapy.<sup>44</sup>

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44 The lively discussion about the legitimacy, efficacy, and limits of 'traditional' healing practices is one I shall not take part in here. Suffice it to say that for, e.g. the treatment of cancer, HIV, hepatitis, acute bouts of malaria, or the dressing and care of major injuries (limb amputation or severe head or facial lesions due to physical contact with running boat propellers or motor parts are not uncommon) the Moken, too, do seek medical help at a mainland hospital as quickly as possible (all other forms of discrimination aside, Thai hospitals often offer many 'standard' treatments to "new Thai" citizens, i.e. members of ethnic minority groups, either at a significantly reduced fee or even entirely free of charge). For minor injuries, pre- and post natal care, diarrhea, rheumatism, tooth decay, mild and transient forms of depression or psychosis, and other rather minor ailments their traditional methods seem to suffice. Common pain medication (Ibuprofen, Paracetamol) is generally available in the village, as are iodine solution, cough linctus, and contraceptives. Antiserums for the treatment of the 'most common' poisonous snake bites (snake bites are actually very rare) is usually available at the main park ranger post (they have to be refrigerated and replaced at regular intervals).

Dunung passed on to the realm of his ancestors in 2013.

### 1.2.2 Alia

*ibu:m* Alia [Fig. 40] is a *sití*, a “sacred maiden” (J. Ivanoff 2001:29). In her function as *djinaŋ* (J. Ivanoff: “shaman”) she is the leading religious officiant of the group, one of the few distinct social specializations recognized among the Moken. Born around 1947, Alia is the youngest daughter of *djinaŋ* and *potao* (elder, spokesperson) *eba:b* Madah, who had died in the mid-1980s and was highly regarded by the community as well as among other Moken groups. In her capacity as *djinaŋ*, Alia is primarily responsible for maintaining contact with the otherworld of the Ancestors, especially during the annual ancestor worship ceremony, *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ*.

Alia devoted great effort to describing and explaining to me the religious beliefs of the Moken and their relation to the mythical past. During my stays in 2007 and 2010, she took me, as it were, ‘by the hand’ to experience the rites of the ancestor worship ceremony *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ* up close and even encouraged me to actively participate on multiple occasions. Even in this for her extremely demanding context, she found time to reflect on her own actions as well as that of the other persons involved in the ritual and to explain references to related mythical tales about the ancestors. This allowed me to study the complex interdependencies and ideational and conceptual permeations existing between sung invocations, drumming, dance, social interaction, ritual alcohol consumption, animal sacrifice and other sacrificial acts, and the attainment of trance states by the participants in great detail, so that the interrelationships between all these phenomena ultimately formed the core of my research.

Alia is widowed and does not have any monetary income. Until a few years ago, it was a matter of course that the younger members of the community, within their means, cared for the well-being of the elderly. For example, they carried out the annual maintenance work on their huts (formerly also on their *kaba:ŋ*). Today, however, the young men are regularly demanding payment for their work in compensation for their temporary loss of earnings as national park aides, to be able to satisfy the increasing consumption needs of



their families.

Unable to raise the necessary money to repair the roof of her hut, Alia spends the rainy seasons regularly with one of her daughters from her first marriage on the coastal island of Ko Prathong<sup>45</sup> in a largely uninhabited housing project built with funds from the Lions Club after the devastation caused by the tsunami.<sup>46</sup> In private conversation Alia repeatedly remarked that, once her expertise as *djjnarj* would no longer be appreciated, it would be time to end her own life, not to be a burden on the community. At my worried response Alia explained that it was not unusual for widowed Moken women to commit suicide once they were no longer able to care for themselves. As of March 2019, however, she has not yet put that plan into practice.

### 1.2.3 Salamah

eba:b Salamah [Fig. 41] is Alia's senior half-brother and was, after their Father's death, the long-time spokesman (*potao*) for the group. Salamah is a difficult-to-describe and complex personality. He is a heavy drinker and is often intoxicated already early in the day, whereupon he totters through the still sleeping settlement, scolding and swearing. However, if one meets him sober, he is a highly intelligent, sensitive, humorous and exceptionally charismatic conversation partner with a comprehensive knowledge of, and a great love for, the culture of his people. Salamah, like his junior half-sister, Alia, is severely embittered by the rapid vanishing of Moken traditions and blames himself for not having stopped what he perceives to be an irreversible cultural decline and thus having personally failed as a *potao*.

Salamah, in contrast to the generally restrained to timid Moken, is remarkably extrovert and has no inhibitions in dealing with strangers. He has worked on Thai and Burmese fishing vessels for several years and, hence, is somewhat more urbane than the other members of the community. After a bar

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45 Thai: เกาะพระทอง

46 The fishing villages on the coast of Ko Prathong were completely destroyed by the tidal wave. Over half of the islanders, a total of around 400 people, perished. The survivors mostly resettled to the nearby mainland.

brawl in Port Blair in the Andaman Islands in around 1980,<sup>47</sup> he spent several months in an Indian prison (personal communication, but see also Ivanoff 2001: 31) where he internalized a few English terms and phrases.

After the death of his father, *eba:b* Madah, Salamah, although initially chosen by the ancestral spirits (i.e. having shown a particular talent for entering trance states as a youth; see [4.3]), renounced the demanding and rather thankless office of *djijan* in favor of his younger half-sister, Alia. However, due to his self-confident demeanor and his experience in dealing with the Thais and the Thai authorities, Salamah was given the office of *potao* by the community.

For many years it had always been Salamah that strangers in the village (including myself) would first be referred to, and also the staff of the National Park always turned towards him in official matters. However, Salamah's self-confidence in dealing with strangers, combined with his fondness for booze, regularly led him to, rather unabashedly, beg tourists and other visitors (again, including myself) for liquor, or for money to purchase alcoholic beverages. This behavior has been, over and over again, perceived as undignified and shameful by the other members of the community and had increasingly undermined the group's trust in him as their representative. In recent years, therefore, the tasks traditionally associated with the office of *potao* have been gradually transferred to several younger Moken men and women, all of them 'school educated' and, hence, fluent in Thai: among them one young woman being the first Moken to earn a bachelor's degree from an internationally accredited Thai university.

#### 1.2.4 Djepen

*eba:b* Djepen [Fig. 42] belongs to the same generation as the three informants already presented. He, too, does not know his exact year of birth. Because of his, even by Moken standards, extremely restrained and quiet manner, I became only gradually aware of Djepen's considerable knowledge of the traditions of the sea nomads. Often it was he who corrected the others, including Alia, Salamah, and Dunung, when he believed a song was recited incorrectly or incompletely; or a melody was false; or the occasion was

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47 A rough estimate. Salamah himself is not sure about the exact year of his detention and the according paperwork has long been lost.

somehow inappropriate.

Occasionally, in situations where the rest of the informants were uncertain or disagreed about a particular song *eba:b* Djepen, who otherwise usually kept in the background, often and without further ado took to the drum to perform the song in question in its entirety. *eba:b* Djepen is recognized as the best drummer in the community. During the rites of the ancestor worship ceremony, it is usually he who accompanies *ibu:m* Alia in her invocations on the drum *bá-nà* (see [app. D], DVD-Video, 02:32 – 03:47 and *passim*).

### 1.3 Personal Experiences and Initial Difficulties

After arriving, together with my wife and our two children (then two and nine years old) on the islands for the first time in early January of 2007, we first camped in our tent on the grounds of the the Mu Ko Surin national park's ranger station on the northern of the two main islands.

By the middle of the month, several visits to the settlement of the Moken on the neighboring island had given rise to encouraging conversations, especially with the *potao* (elder or spokesman) of the group, *eba:b* Salamah. We could communicate quite well in Thai (with the occasional help of gestures and grimaces) and I was able to express my interest in the language and the culture of the Moken in general and their music in particular (using the Thai term *dontree* [ดนตรี], which is reasonably similar to our own concept of 'instrumental music' and was readily understood). Our efforts met with reactions that I thought were rather positive and encouraging. The fact that I did not appear as a single 'white male' but was accompanied by my (half-Thai) wife and our children, the latter quickly having found playmates their respective age, seemed to somewhat counteract mutual shyness and insecurity.

To our surprise and regret, however, on February 2., 2007 I was told by a member of the Moken community, the late *eba:b* Haeng (who had made the boat trip between the two islands just to deliver the message; the man with the broad smile playing the drum in [Fig. 61]), in the most shy, subservient, and conciliatory way imaginable, that *eba:b* Salamah had asked for us not to visit the settlement again. We were both dismayed and embarrassed, fearing that

we had behaved, inadvertently, in such an inappropriate way that this had warranted such a reaction. Yet we could not think of anything we had said or done that could have caused such a direct repudiation (but then, what did we know what is considered proper conduct among the Moken?). Nevertheless, we had no choice but to respect this decision. So we spent the next three days and nights in our tent, downcast, angry of helplessness, pondering gloomily over our alleged misconduct and planning our departure from the islands in utter and total defeat.

Four days later, however, Salamah, on his own accord (as far as I can tell) and noticeably abashed, approached me (that is, first our son who took him to our tent) and declared that he had been very drunk and downcast and argumentative on the respective night, and had “*only been joking*” (พูดคุยเล่น; *phud khuy lèn*; “talk play”). He was really sorry; and we were still welcome in the village and could even stay as guests within the community for the duration of our visit; and, also, it would be great if we could provide beverages in exchange...

What had happened? It took me many conversations to realize that it wasn't at all about 'getting one poured' (certainly, it wasn't *only* that). I had, most inappropriately, being a total stranger, asked them to share something with me that touches the very core of their most intimate beliefs, of what lies at the center of their very identity; what constituted a central pillar of their very world and, hence, was certainly none of the business of some obscure 'tourist' (wife and children or not) from where-do-they-know. I had confronted the Moken and their world from out of a naïve conviction of 'music' being some kind of 'universal language', or at least universal and innocent enough to freely and unprejudicedly talk about it. To the Moken, what I conceptualized as 'music' was, however, something decidedly different: inseparable from their most sacred mythical tales, from their fundamental religious beliefs, and from their core concepts of identity about what it essentially means to be Moken.

It had become obvious that the Moken did not at all regard me and my intentions (and my family) as impartially and openly, and did not accept my presence as simply a matter of course as I had hoped after the first

conversations. Not at all.

As a consequence of this episode, while contemplating my own now obvious inadequacies, I also began to realize, for the first time, another serious problem in its entire scope: the severe level of alcohol abuse that has become widespread among the Moken. During the following months of my first stay, and also during subsequent visits over the course of the following twelve years, the everyday communal life and particularly the recording of music and conducting of interviews was repeatedly made difficult by the often heavy drunkenness of performers and bystanders. The persons concerned, however, never became aggressive, not even mildly impolite towards me or my family, even when in a total stupor. Yet, they often sank into depressed resignation or evinced exaggerated gestures of fraternization, which on the next day inevitably led to noticeable embarrassment and avoidance behavior on the part of those concerned.

My rejecting the frequent requests to buy rice brandy for individuals or the community<sup>48</sup> often met with uncomprehending disappointment and reproachful frustration, in particular on occasions where interviews were to be conducted or music was to be performed and recorded. One exception were the young women and mothers, who, hinting (toward my wife) at domestic violence as a result of drinking, encouraged me in my deprecating attitude towards unrestrained consumption of alcohol. Finally, and not without a bad conscience, I pleaded: what the people concerned would do with their pay following the collective recording work was none of my business; I would, however, not contribute alcoholic beverages and would also not tolerate the participation of evidently heavily inebriated members of the group. In some such situations, which I found to be extremely distressing, I, regrettably, lost my temper, harshly reprimanding those members of the community who interfered with my work because of their drunkenness; a demeanor on my part that afterwards made me writhe with embarrassment, recognizing that 'having a few' was simply just as common among Moken singers and drummers than it was among musicians practicing in the abandoned bunker around the corner in my hometown. This certainly was highly inappropriate behavior towards my hosts. Fortunately,

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<sup>48</sup> In the beginning however, I was not as consistent and unambiguous as I should have been in this regard.

those concerned were never resentful, and they always let the matter rest with a shared laughter about our respective weaknesses.

The relationship with the Moken community developed increasingly positive over the course of the following months. Despite our somewhat bumpy start, Salamah in particular turned out to be an outstandingly helpful, caring and affectionate person – getting used to my staunchly refusing his persistent requests for alcohol, simply giving up after a while. After a few weeks he began, upon being asked who we were by Thai tourists and officials, referring to me and my family simply as his “children and grandchildren”; we had been accepted as a (temporary) part of the community.

My data collection was quick and productive. A census on the general population and settlement structure was prepared and the daily life in the village was extensively observed and documented. My family and I learned the basics of the Moken language and put together a list of words, which grew over time to around five hundred terms and phrases. There were many occasions where I could not only observe and record music, singing and dancing, but could also actively participate in music making. By the end of April, we were officially invited by Salamah and Dunung, in the presence of the national park's officer in charge, to attend the annual ceremony to honor the ancestors, *né-en lobo:ŋ*. We regarded this as a great honor and privilege, for the national park administration, according to the wishes of the Moken community, strictly prohibits strangers visiting the settlement during the three days of the ancestor worship ceremony.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, there were also conflicts within the Community caused by our presence. The fact that we offered our hosts, Dunung and Muki, monetary compensation for food and lodging, understandably aroused a certain eagerness among other members of the group. We were, therefore, occasionally urged by others to stay with their respective families for some time, in return for payment. After careful consideration, however, we decided to reject such offers, so as not to alienate Dunung and Muki who had treated us with utmost hospitality, and not to run the risk of being passed around the village and

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<sup>49</sup> We actually witnessed, on more than one occasion, ‘ethno-tourists’ who had clandestinely come to the Moken village during the celebration being banished from the islands and deported to the mainland by the authorities

reduced to the role of 'cash cows'. Likewise, my practice of reimbursing participants for interviews and musical performances (the much-debated 'pay-for-play'-approach) gave rise to the problem that, occasionally, men from the village, who otherwise did not appear as active instrumentalists or singers nor stood out as initiates of the traditions, began, in a heavily intoxicated state, to pound around indiscriminately on objects, shouting, and afterwards demanding pay for their 'musical performance'.<sup>50</sup>

However, such incidents made it obvious that in such a small community tensions arise when only a select minority, because of their role as specialists, benefits from my work. Instead of the pay-for-play-approach, I eventually decided to pay a sum assessed by the elders as appropriate, to the village's 'community fund'. This fund was, at the time of our first visit, administered by *khun* Thaksin, a researcher from a university in southern Thailand, as money management, in particular the saving of money over longer periods, is still something quite unfamiliar to the Moken. As of 2018, the Moken are themselves in charge of their communal budget. The revenue is intended to be used for acquisitions and projects benefiting the entire community. This solution was widely accepted by the group, but it could only partially prevent the begging for alcohol.

In retrospect, this general experience of intruding, uninvited, into the lives of people who have to deal with serious everyday problems and severe uncertainties in the satisfaction of their basic needs remains deeply unsettling to me. More than once there occurred to me serious doubts with regard to the whole endeavor of ethnomusicological fieldwork. It might be a legitimate academic concern to investigate the music of a foreign culture. I realized, however, that my justification towards the members of the Community, "*I would like to know about your culture and your music, as I consider it important that the members of my group also learn about it*" although inherently true and honest, also did not lack a certain degree of hypocrisy. I could just as sincerely have argued: "*I would like to examine your culture and your music, for I will, within my own group, receive appreciation and respect for doing it. This report*

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<sup>50</sup> At first, I was not quite sure whether these were, perhaps, particularly strange and 'exotic' expressions of Moken music; But the imminent misunderstanding was quickly and unambiguously clarified by the elders of the community.

*might earn myself reputation and privileges, and access to a degree of economic prosperity and social security that you will never be able to achieve”.*

Ethnographic field research is - and before this first prolonged stay, I was aware of this fact only in the form of a very abstract acknowledgment – *never* mere scholarly interest in the culture and society of a people foreign to the researcher. Rather, and above all, it means exacting other people's time and labor to achieve, in essence, self-serving goals (even if it is only the satisfaction of one's own striving for knowledge), irrespective of how honestly well-disposed the person concerned might approach the respective ethnic group and its culture. In particular, the fact that I, as a traditionally sedentary central European, just because of my relative economic independence and the possession of a German passport, am enjoying an incomparably greater degree of personal freedom of movement than the traditionally nomadic Moken, in whose ethnic self-understanding the element of mobility is *the* central, constitutive and meaning-endowing aspect, gave me the bitter and disturbing realization to appear as a beneficiary and a privileged ambassador of a global political and socioeconomic system that is fundamentally flawed.

This essay, above all, is thus testimony to my own benefiting from a deeply unjust world order within which I was merely fortunate to be born on the ‘winners’ side’. It is, therefore, in essence another “*report on the poor to the powerful*” (Keil 1979: 4).

#### **1.4 Field Method**

When I look at my first written sketches from my field journal of December 2006 today, I read that it was my original intention: “*to study and to document the music of the Moken, both in the narrow sense of the word, as well as in the wider sense, i.e. in its general meaning, its position and function for the individual, ... and in society and culture in general ... in the context of the ethnic self-image and their general way of life, furthermore in its role in oral transmission of cultural expressions in a society that does not use any written language, as well as in its role in religious and spiritual life*” (own journal entries, Dec. 07., 08., and 13., 2006; transl. from orig. German).



As if these intentions were not already ambitious enough for a first long-term field trip, I, so my self-imposed aspirations, claimed to “*also provide insights into the musical instruments in use, the tonal system and the ... scales employed, and their application in musical practice. Also, the occasions to which music is played, as well as the role of musicians ... and listeners, individual and collective behavior in the musical context, forms of musical structure and category formation as well as possibly other socio-cultural phenomena, which directly or indirectly relate to music-making ... [shall be] observed, documented, analyzed and subsequently described*” (ibid.).

In hindsight this reads like a list of keywords from the collected ethnomusicological literature of the past sixty years, anxiously striving for completeness. This is not to say that most of these intentions aren't still valid (and most of the objectives stated at the time will also be covered, or at least touched upon, in what follows). However, more than a decade after this somewhat presumptuous ‘mission statement’, it seems appropriate to reflect on, and to put into perspective, these self-imposed claims with regard to what has actually been achieved.

The Moken are a people about whom, from the point of view of general ethnography, rather little is known, and previously virtually nothing was known with regard to ethnomusicology. There are no publications that allow for a self-study of the Moken language in advance, nor is the Thai language, which serves as a *lingua franca*, sufficient to deal with issues that go beyond the most basic matters of everyday life. The already sparse literature at best conveys a vague impression of the actual socio-cultural reality. The coarse, catchword-like categorization of individual aspects of Moken culture and society that I had read often proved more of a hindrance than an aid in everyday observations and often caused considerable confusion in view of the complex, differentiated tissue of actual Moken life. This high degree of unfamiliarity, uncertainty and indeterminacy initially caused feelings of complete helplessness and disorientation on my part.

In retrospect, therefore, the intention of an exhaustive treatment of all the above-mentioned aspects on the basis of an ‘ethnomusicological laundry list’ appears naïve and presumptuous. The above list of research objectives, written

down before I ever even had seen a single sea nomad in real life, shows one thing above all: that I assumed that a set of criteria adopted from my own experiential and conceptual world would be readily transferable to a foreign culture, and that the contextual dependencies of making music, their basic patterns of ontological reference, would be readily comparable. I had formulated conditions of knowledge a priori, without knowing whether the underlying categories, which I assumed reflected a universally valid paradigm of empirical music research, would even find any correspondence within the reality of the Moken's musical life-world.

It soon became apparent, however, that the existential frames of reference among the Moken differ considerably from those that gave rise to the above-mentioned framework of criteria (that is, those of 'Western' culture in the broader, and my personal cultural background in the narrower sense). Also, the denotative and connotative scopes of concepts, insofar as they are transferable at all, are inherently related to predicates and attributes that often differ considerably from those of 'Western' usage. The fundamental question as to which ideations and characteristics best represent a Moken cultural and musical typology, and how these can be conceptually abstracted and presented in writing, therefore took up considerable space, especially in the course of the first fieldwork. I became increasingly aware of the fact that an effort to understand the life-world and the culture of strangers first of all requires critical reflection and examination of one's own localization within one's own life-world and culture.<sup>51</sup> This dialectical tightrope walk between the necessity of constructing a common semantics as the basis of cultural translation on the one hand, and the shifts and distortions occurring when approaching a foreign cultural, conceptual, and semantic structure with the means of one's own vocabulary on the other ultimately leads to the present work inevitably, at least in part, possessing the character of the metaphorical. In the course of both fieldwork and data analysis and writing, the arbitrariness of my initial theoretical and methodical eclecticism gradually condensed into a single, causal question (which, however, is by no means less ambitious than the one described above - on the contrary - it can only be expressed more concisely): "From the

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<sup>51</sup> These deliberations gave rise to the theoretical thoughts expounded in [Part II] of the present thesis

consideration of the conditions of existence of the Moken sea nomads in general, and the investigation of the actual conditions and overall cultural references of the manifestations of music-making in particular, can statements be derived as to which causal driving forces determine the musical will to express?" Or, in short: "Where, in the life-world of the Moken, is music seen as belonging? Where is it located within the patterns of society and culture as a whole?"

Between the beginning of the first field research (2007-08) and the end of the third, most recent prolonged stay with the Moken (2018-19) lay more than ten years. Scholarly works that have influenced my thinking at the beginning of this period have been superseded by other, some more recent, some older, publications. My personal ideas of how to carry out ethnomusicological research, which goals it pursues, and the methods by which these can be adequately achieved, are therefore no longer the same as they had been at the beginning of the project. This is of course not conducive to a consistent and coherent written presentation. The fact that the presentation of insights *ex ante* and *ex post* can no longer be clearly kept apart is, however, the result of a sincere effort to develop an approach that deals with the collected material in a differentiated and, hopefully, appropriate way.

Some very general methodological principles, however, have been adhered to right from the beginning of my collaboration with the Moken. As a general tenet, I have refrained from actively inviting people to sing or play, as it was a central to my approach not to reduce the music of the Moken merely to, as Stephen Davies famously puts it, "*the noise it makes*" (1994: 326), and to return with some recordings of exotic, uncontextualized sound. To obtain a genuine impression of what "*music is conceived to be*" (Blacking, loc. cit.) among the Moken, where to them it 'belongs' and what role or purpose is attributed to it, I considered it essential to observe music making solely within its uncontrived socio-cultural context. I initially restricted myself to general expressions of interest and active attention in situations in which members of the group played and sang on their own initiative. This method of 'passive encouragement' proved to be quite fruitful, since they made music being aware of my interest, yet not *for me* specifically, the respective members of the group

were able to determine the place, time and setting of the recital according to their own criteria and motivations, in accordance with their everyday life and taking into account their religious customs. In short, they simply notified me when there was some occasion for music making, singing, or dancing anywhere in the settlement.

## **2. A Brief Ethnography of the Moken<sup>52</sup>**

### **2.1 Summary of Prior Publications**

The Moken are an ethnic group about which comparatively little has as yet been published in the field of anthropology, and even less with regard to ethnomusicology. *“It was not easy for me or any other investigator”* notes French anthropologist, Jacques Ivanoff *“to learn something about Moken society from books as so little has been written about it.”* (2001:1).

Literature on the Moken is indeed not extensive – a situation J. Ivanoff himself contributed more than anyone else to remedy. Among the sea-nomadic peoples of Southeast Asia, however, they must now be regarded as belonging to the comparatively well-documented groups (cf. Sather 1995:249f.), mostly due to the efforts of J. Ivanoff and Thai anthropologist Narumon Hinshiranan.

In the Calcutta Government Gazette of March 2, 1826, sea nomads roaming the Mergui archipelago are reported for the first time (cf. Ivanoff 1997:10). Sea nomadic peoples existed as culturally independent groups until the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Today, through ever-increasing external influence, and (partially forced, partially voluntary) assimilation into the cultures of the mainland, they remain only as vestigial survivals (cf. Warren 1983; Sandbukt 1984).

Those ethnic groups that have been studied so far speak Austronesian languages and can roughly be classified into three cultural and linguistic groups (cf. Sather 1995: 240ff.; Endicott 1999: 279; Sopher 1965): The Moken and

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<sup>52</sup> The ethnographic information given about the Moken has in part been propounded previously as part of my M.A. thesis (Koehn 2015, unpublished). It is given here in abridged form, translated into English from the original German.

Moklen in the Mergui archipelago and on the west coasts of Burma and Thailand, the Orang Suku Laut along the Malakka straits (East Sumatra and South Johor) and around the Lingga group off Singapore, with an exclave around the islands of Phuket and Phi-Phi in the south of Thailand (the *Urak Lawoi*), as well as the Sama-Bajau, the largest of the groups, settling on the east coast of Borneo, the eastern part of Sulawesi, Flores and the Moluccas. Whether all the marine nomadic groups mentioned share a common cultural history (cf. LeBar *et al.*, 1964: 263 ff.; Sopher 1965: 47), or whether they developed marine nomadism independently of one another (cf. Bellwood 1985: 136; Ivanoff 1997: 106ff.), has not yet been conclusively clarified. A comparatively recent connection between the Moken and the (sedentary) Jakun, as well as the (sea-nomadic) Orang Laut of Malaysia, seems, however, at least probable (cf. LeBar *et al.* 1964: 264 and passim; Levinson and Hockings [eds.] 1992:231; see also Carey 1976). Although their belonging to the Austronesian family of languages makes a close culture-historical association unlikely, the Moken were often regarded, especially by the early chroniclers, as being related to the 'Negritos' of the Malay Peninsula (who speak Austro-Asiatic languages) due to relative physiognomic similarity (cf. White 1922; H. A. Bernatzik 1954 [1938]; see also Schebesta 1947). Today, the Moken are generally classed with ethnic groups whose common ancestors are referred to as *proto-malays* (LeBar *et al.* 1964). The original settlement areas of these Austronesian speaking peoples are assumed to have been in what today is Taiwan and the southern coast of China (*ibid.*). Around c. 3.000 BCE these peoples first settled parts of the Philippines, between c. 2.500 and c. 1.500 BCE Sulawesi and Borneo, as well as the coasts of New Guinea and parts of Melanesia, and about c. 1.000 BCE the Malay Peninsula (cf. Diffloth 1974). Bellwood (1985, 1999: 287) assumes that the new arrivals had already been practicing shifting cultivation. Later, however, some groups probably returned to foraging due to displacement into fringe areas („*respecialized foragers*“; Bellwood 1985, 1999; see also Endicott 1999:275).

The historical horizon of the Moken's origin myths presumably dates to the time of the arrival of Islam, introduced by Arab traders between the 12th and 14th centuries CE (cf. Ivanoff 2001). At this time the ancestors of the Moken

probably settled on the coasts of the southern Malay Peninsula, in the Riau and the Lingga archipelagos, and on the northeast coast of Sumatra. Their subsistence was presumably based on fishing or fish-hunting and on swidden horticulture (yams). However, at some point they abandoned their sedentariness and began to follow a nomadic way of life, taking to the coastal waters on small houseboats. Some authors (such as White 1922; H. A. Bernatzik 1954: 23; LeBar *et al.* 1964: 264) assume that in the following centuries they were increasingly pushed northwards into the remote, inaccessible island world of the Mergui archipelago, probably due to regular attacks by Burmese war bands as well as Malay pirates and slave traders, who still play a prominent role in the mythical narratives of the Moken (cf. Ivanoff 2001: 115). Ainsworth (1930: 21f.) reports the following account from a group of Moken elders as an explanation for leaving the mainland:

“Generations ago, ... our fore-fathers lived on the mainland of Burma and the northern shores of the Malay Peninsula. They had settled homes there. Then came the fierce Burmese hill tribes from the north and the piratical Malays from the south, both of whom were wild and lawless. They drove us Mawkens out of our settlements, robbing and killing whenever they came. We were not fighting people, so we left our inland settlements and moved towards the sea coasts, eventually crossing the shallow waters to the various islands in the Mergui Archipelago, making one or two settlements on the larger islands, such as St. Matthews's and St. Luke's. But again we were persecuted by Malay pirates, who robbed, killed and enslaved some of our people during the north-east monsoon weather, when these Malays could sail about and commit acts of piracy on the seas and around these islands. Our people could not bear these attacks and decided to build boats large enough to take their families, and in which they could escape hurriedly during the fine weather season when they were open to attack from the Malay pirates. Finally, our people found residence on the islands impossible, so they took to living in their boats entirely, as we do now.”

Eight years previously, White (1922:57f.) had already published a very similar report:

„Many generations ago their forefathers lived upon the mainland of Burma-Malaya. They had settlements with houses and cultivated lands. They were a quiet and peaceloving people. They were happy and contented. Then came downward sweep of hordes of war-like men, the T'now (Burmese), burning and plundering. They drove these defenseless people before them. The Batuk (Malays) troubled them from the south also. Being driven to the coast, they crossed the shallower waters to the Islands of the Mergui Archipelago and made several large settlements .... Further troubles overwhelmed them.

The Batuk raided from the south. Acts of piracy were frequent. Their plantations were robbed and destroyed, and many of the people were carried off to become slaves. It became necessary to build ships so that they might take to sea and flee from danger.”

J. Ivanoff (1997, 2001, 2005), on the other hand, argues for an inherently independent, “*ideological*” (ibid.) or identitarian justification of the nomadic way of life of the Moken in a habitat chosen on their own authority, as opposed to theories of displacement and models that assume heteronomous ecological and economic niche settlement (such as White 1922; H.A. Bernatzik 1954; Sopher 1965). According to J. Ivanoff the rejection of the accumulation of material goods goes far beyond a pragmatic measure of limitation to the essential objects of everyday use, as is frequently observed, for obvious reasons, in nomadic societies. The fact that the Moken have rejected, until very recently, the catching of fish by netting, angling or trapping - though long known to them and also producing higher yield than spear hunting - is seen by Ivanoff as further evidence of an underlying “*nomad ideology*” (cf. Ivanoff 1997: xx; 2005: xxiii and passim). My own informants' reports contain both mythical as well as historical and economic explanations for marine nomadism. With cultural development, migration and settlement processes taking place over such long periods of time in such a vast geographical area, an intermingling and mutual influence of various causative factors seems, at least to me, more plausible than a monocausal justification. An idealization, occasionally to the point of ‘ideologization’, of sea-nomadism, however, is unquestionably an integral part of the self-understanding of the Moken – at least among those belonging to the generation that has still grown up following the ‘traditional ways’.

Already during the period of the British colonial occupation of Burma in the 19th century, the ongoing process of settling on the mainland began. Frequently, the indigenous population of the northern Malay Peninsula was employed for labor services, especially in the production of raw materials, but also as general ‘coolies’ (indentured laborers) as well as in the colonial military forces.

## 2.2 Hypotheses on the Origins of Demonyms; Ethnolinguistic classification

In the early reports, the sea nomads of the Mergui archipelago are generally designated by the Burmese term *Selung* or its various Latin transliterations (i.e., *Selong*, *Salones*, *Silongs*, *Chalomes*). The origin of this exonym has not been conclusively clarified, but presumably derives from a former Malay name of the island of Phuket, *Ujong-Salang* or *-Chalang*, which in the 16th century was altered first to the Portuguese *lunçalaõ*, later to the English *Junk Ceylon* (cf. Sopher 1965). In Thai, the various sea nomad groups are collectively referred to as *chao 'leh*, (ชาวทะเล, 'people of the sea'). The self-designation *Moken* appears for the first time in 1848 in *A Primer of the Selong Language* (American Baptist Missionary Press [eds.] 1848). Several authors (such as White 1922; Ainsworth 1930; H.A. Bernatzik 1954; Levinson and Hockings 1993) assume this word to be a compound of the Moken-verb (*le-*)*mo* (to submerge, to sink), and their term for salt water, *oke:n*. It is thus interpreted as meaning “*submersed people*” (Ainsworth 1930) or “*sea-drowned people*” (White 1922):

„Learning by their sad experience, the shipbuilders added to the freeboard by building up the layers of palm stems to an additional height of about nine inches, or the full span of a hand. This added piece of freeboard is, up to the present day, marked by a bamboo rib, running from bows to stern, on each side of the boat, where the gunwale formerly was. The people took to calling this the *maw* or 'drowning', as without it the boats would be speedily swamped in rough weather. In their language *l'maw* means 'to drown'. *O'en*, in the purest dialect, is their word for fresh water taken from the springs, while *o'en-ken*, abbreviated into *o'ken*, means salt water. The word for 'drown' and the word for 'salt water' have been coalesced to make the new word *Maw-ken*.” (White 1922:60).

While this explanation might make for a fitting description of the Moken's way of life, J. Ivanoff (1997, 2001, 2005) emphasizes repeatedly that the above-mentioned etymological derivation was wrong. According to his mythological analysis the name derives from the mythical female ancestral figure, *Kèn*. She is chased away from her sedentary group on the grounds of an adulterous love relationship with her brother-in-law, her sister's, the mythical queen Sibían's, husband, thus being condemned to endure a nomadic life at sea. He refers to



the canon of mythical tales which he himself compiled and translated (J. Ivanoff 2001: 150-203; 2005), citing the following passage from the epic narrative *Gaman the Malay*:

„My younger sister has stolen the dish of her older sister, the bowl of her older sister. She tore out the hair on the head of her older sister. You, young sister, who lives on the boat of which the bulwarks of the hull are made of stipites, reflect well. I condemn my younger sister to fall into the sea. May she become immersed in it, she who is called Kèn! ... Never come back again to my land. Take the entire Group with you, ... I forbid you to live here any longer.” (2001: 180)

J. Ivanoff's analysis of Moken oral literature is comprehensive and his interpretation is compelling. My own informants, however, when asked what 'Moken' means, always referred to *oke:n*, ocean water, as the root of their autonym. Perhaps even more importantly, etymology in general seemed to be a matter of little concern to them. The, by far, most common explanation may be summarized as "*Moken? That is us!*".

In Moken mythology, the role of the Malay seafarer Gaman, that J. Ivanoff refers to above, is nevertheless of utmost importance as it is that of a *culture hero*. He teaches the Moken the preparation of rice, which replaces yams as their main staple (cf. Ivanoff 1985, 2002b). In [4.1] of the present thesis I will be discussing some of the central names, ideas, figures, and tropes of Moken mythology in more detail.

The Moken language is generally classified as belonging to the West-Malayo-Polynesian subgroup of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian family of languages (see Lewis 1960; Veena [unpubl. MS] 1980; Larish 1999). Hogan (1988) further subdivides the austronesian sea nomad languages (Proto-Orang Laut) into the language of the *Urak Lawoi*, sea nomads living in the far south of Thailand and in Malaysia, as well as the subgroup Proto-Moken-Moklen. To this subgroup belong, according to Hogan, the languages of the Moken as well as that of the *Moklen*, another group of (former) sea nomads, which became increasingly sedentary around the beginning of the 19th century and live on the mainland as day laborers, fishermen and small farmers, in former times presumably also as slaves of Siamese nobles.

The language of the Moken exhibits a number of congruities with the

Malay language (Bahasa Melayu). There is, however, no immediate mutual intelligibility between Malay and Moken.

### 2.3 Semi-Nomadic Way of Life

After they had finally made the transition to marine nomadism, the Moken traditionally spent the greater part of their lives on their houseboats. These houseboats, called *kaba:ŋ*, varied from approximately seven to eleven meters in length (cf. J. Ivanoff 1999: 6) and were the living quarters of a nuclear family of parents and children. I was also told that there once were very large boats with room for up to twenty people. Such large boats are also mentioned in some of the mythical tales. I am, thus, not entirely sure whether these large ships actually existed, or if they appeared only in the my informants' narratives. What is known about the social structure of the Moken leaves little room for large, communal vessels. They might have existed during the early phase of nomadism, i.e. before the known way of life in small extended-family-flotillas had been fully developed; this, however, has to remain speculation.

The main supporting structure of the *kaba:ŋ*'s hull, the central beam that lies mostly below the waterline, is made out of a single, solid, hollowed-out tree trunk, spread apart by applying heat and the use of wedges. The *kaba:ŋ*, therefore, is inherently a *monoxyton*, or dug-out (ibid.). To increase freeboard above the waterline, the hull sides are raised by adding parallel lengths of 'planking' (*koma:n*) made out of the leaf stems of the Salacca-Palm (*kibuang*), laid on top of each other and tied together with rattan (cf. Sopher 1977: 186-7). Because of this method of construction the vessel has a very narrow beam of no more than about twenty per cent of the overall length.

Diesel engines became increasingly common from the early 1970s onwards. As this added significant weight to the boats, making them sit deeper in the water, the traditional palm leave hull sides had to be exchanged for wooden planks. As long as sail and oar were the main means of propulsion, rocks used to be loaded into the lowest portion of the hull to serve as ballast, with the dual purpose of lowering the center of gravity and increasing the metacentric height, making the boat easier to handle under sail in rougher

conditions. The kabangs' draft is, even with the added ballast of a diesel engine, very shallow, so as to be able to navigate the coral reefs and tidal flats surrounding the islands. J. Ivanoff (1999) gives a comprehensive account of the Moken boat, not only from a technical perspective, but also with regard to its symbolisms and its mythical role. Of particular symbolic significance are the semicircular cutouts in the bow and stern of the monoxyulous part of the hull. While, technically, these are used as footboards when climbing aboard after diving, they also carry deep symbolic meaning:

“The Moken boat is a duplicate of the human body; it has a mouth and an anus. The boat is the image of the Moken who do not accumulate but live in a symbiotic relationship with an environment adapted to their needs. The hold of the boat, or ‘belly’, must be emptied so that a social system based on nomadism and non-accumulation remains protected, so guaranteeing their ethnic identity ... The boat, therefore, bears within it the destiny of the Moken. It is the mobile support and symbol for Kèn, chased away and immersed in the sea. Kèn has become the image of the transposition of a humanity for whom water has become the source of life and the condition of nomadism. The boat itself is invested with humanity because it is a symbol of the Moken who has become a simple mortal being, it has ‘mouth’ which eats (forward notch) and a ‘backside that defecates’ (back notch) ... it has now become the equal of the Moken men, emerged from the myth.” (J. Ivanoff 1999: 109).

Groups of several *kaba:ŋ* representing an extended family typically merged into flotillas of up to thirty or more boats, which, as required, temporarily split into subgroups, but could also temporarily merge with other large groups (LeBar *et al.*, 1964: 264; Endicott 1999: 279).

During the time of the southwest monsoon (from April to September) the Andaman Sea can get quite rough. Sailing becomes rather dangerous and the maritime cruising radius is thus usually restricted to day trips along the Islands' coasts. At this time of the year the Moken erected pile dwellings on the islands' beaches, which were repaired each following year and then reused. Often, only the cabin of the *kaba:ŋ*, made of pandanus leaves, was lifted from the boat's hull and transported to the beach where it served as a simple shelter (cf. White 1922: 45ff.). Each of the Moken sub-groups used their respective island settlements for many years, often for several generations. Hence, the members of the individual flotillas regarded themselves as originating from a native island and were also regarded thus by other groups. Strictly speaking, the Moken thus

followed a *semi-nomadic* way of life, characterized by a cyclical alternation of nomadism and sedentariness.

## 2.4 Social Order

The social order of the Moken has been, and continues to be, largely egalitarian. Specialization and division of labor occurs only to a small degree, mostly determined by gender, age and experience, and individual interest and talent. Commonly acknowledged functions exist most notably in the sphere of religion and ritual. Socioeconomic stratification used to be hardly perceptible, even as late as my first prolonged stay in 2007. Political hierarchies based on the economic power of individuals have therefore not developed until very recently. Solely the roles of *potao*, the 'elder' or 'spokesman' (Ivanoff 1997: 134), and *djijanə*, the foremost religious specialist of the group, represent a rudimentary form of political organization.

The *potao* is always a particularly respected and experienced male elder of the group.<sup>53</sup> He represents 'his' flotilla when encountering other Moken groups as well as towards strangers, which are generally viewed with anxiety and suspicion, even today. The task of communicating with the otherworld of the ancestral spirits is the responsibility of the *djijanə*. The task and domain of activity of the *potao* is, therefore, primarily directed outwards, towards the non-communal social environment; that of the *djijanə* is directed inwards, into the community, including the deceased and the yet unborn, and towards maintaining social cohesion as well as cultural identity and meaning.

Sedentary life in larger groups was limited to the monsoon season, when the Andaman Sea becomes too rough for extended voyages. With the end of the rainy season the group partly dissolved, taking to sea for the duration of the dry season in loosely connected, constantly shifting sub-flotillas. In the next rainy season, the group reunited in a slightly different community structure, due to exogamous marriage, deaths or other causes for inward and outward migration. This appears to be the main reason that no hierarchical political

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<sup>53</sup> As noted above, this role has changed over the past decade, at least among the group I visited. Today several younger Moken, including women, act as spokespersons for the community.

structures and institutions aimed at the long-term administration of a permanent society have emerged.

Individual, predominantly elder, members of the group, men as well as women, exert a certain degree of authority within the community, based on age, experience, personal integrity and character, and knowledge of traditional beliefs, myths, and rites. Women take a prominent part in solving internal conflicts; and it is mostly the women who decide general directions in decisions affecting the entire group. They are also instrumental in performing the traditional rites and ceremonies.

The Moken are mostly monogamous and usually take a partner for life (see White 1922:199; Bisht and Bankoti 2004: 538). Presumably due to the flexible structure of the flotillas, no exacting matrimony rules (e.g. strict endogamy or exogamy) exist. Owing to the decrease in mobility (allowing for only few opportunities to meet potential spouses from outside the own group) endogamy seems to have become predominant. Both, choosing a partner from within one's own group as well as from another flotilla (or even from another ethnic group from the mainland) was and is quite common. If the couple originates from different respective subgroups, virilocal residence (i.e. living with the husband's family and sub-group) seems to be the more frequent arrangement, but not mandatory.

Based on his analysis of Moken oral literature, J. Ivanoff concludes that formerly a different social order used to be the norm:

„[T]he modern system of alliance shows a patrilocality and endogamy of the sub-groups. But a mythico-historical analysis reveals another model: the exogamy of the islands and uxorilocality which are the two pillars of the Moken social structure“ (J. Ivanoff 2001: 2; also 2002a).

Pragmatic, often economic, considerations were and are always included in such decisions. In earlier times elder women often acted as mediators in the initiation of a marriage (see White 1922: 203). Today the Moken generally choose their partners independently.

A matrimonial ceremony (i.e. some form of ritualized 'wedding') *sensu strictu* is not conducted. The recognition of a life partnership by the extended family was expressed in the collective construction of a new *kaba:ŋ* for the

bridegroom-to-be. Today, due to almost complete sedentariness, a hut is built instead.

## 2.5 Genealogy and Kinship

Kinship terminology always distinguishes the age of the person designated relative to Ego. For example, older or younger brother (*aká teng'rá* or *luùy teng'rá*), wife of the younger or wife of the older brother (*lúa* or *wa*), etc. (cf. White 1922: 209f.; Ivanoff 2001: 32). This mirrors a general societal hierarchy based primarily on seniority. Respect and reverence for the elders lies at the core of Moken communal life. Age is tantamount to life experience, and wisdom based on experience is considered the most valuable personal trait in the non-literate society of the Moken. The honorific appellations *eba:b* (grandfather) and *ibu:m* (grandmother) signify the most senior rank in the social hierarchy.<sup>54</sup>

The genealogical depth in which deceased ancestors are individually recollected by name comprises three or four generations. Ancestors from earlier times collectively become part of the realm of the mythical ancestors.

## 2.6 Subsistence; Material Culture

The Moken spend their whole life on and by the sea, yet they are not fishermen in the technical sense. While the methods of fishing with nets as well as with hook and line have been known to them for a long time (Moken men have occasionally been working as deckhands on commercial fishing vessels for several generations), these techniques had not been adopted until fairly recently, and even then only as an occasional substitute. Albeit being comparatively arduous, low-yielding, and dangerous, Moken men prefer to *hunt* for fish and turtle<sup>55</sup> using their two to three meter long spears. This menacing

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<sup>54</sup> Hence, we felt more than just a little honored when several of the Moken youths that had known my family and me from an early age began, in 2018, addressing my wife and me as *ibu:m* and *eba:b*, respectively, despite us not actually having grandchildren yet. It also showed that people in their forties are considered 'old' among the Moken.

<sup>55</sup> Mok.: *peɲui*. In the waters around Mu Ko Surin three species of marine turtle are common: the green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), the Hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and the leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*). Today, all of them are strictly protected by marine conservation laws which the Moken equally strictly adhere to (more out of fear of legal

device is composed of a bamboo or hardwood pole of the stated length with a pronged tip of three to seven pointed spikes, each about fifteen to twenty centimeters long, with barbs on each of their sharpened tips. These spear tips are, like all metal utensils, bought (formerly acquired by barter) on the mainland.

Moken hunters cull their quarry either while walking along the coral reef at low tide, while standing at the bow of the boat, or while diving. Moken men are expert divers, able to remain under water for several minutes. Immersion times of three to four minutes while intensely swimming are not uncommon. The Moken use neither ballast nor flippers while diving (some have recently started to use the latter). They wear only simple goggles that do not enclose the nose and thus do not allow for pressure equalization. Traditionally, these were made out of carved wooden frames with fragments taken from glass fishing floats set in, affixed with resin. Today, factory-made plastic goggles have largely replaced those of their own making (and scuba masks have also found their proponents). Salamah and some of the other traditionalists however, still cherish their ancient wood-and-glass specimens, some of which have allegedly been handed down to them by their fathers. Another reason, however, might be that “old ‘sea-gypsy’ wearing primitive goggles” has become a favorite photo motif among tourists and, hence, an opportunity to generate a little cash.

When hunting for fish, the Moken prefer small to medium sized animals up to about four pounds for ease of preparation, rather catching several smaller ones than a single big one too unwieldy for their small wood-burning stoves. Parrot fish (*Scaridae*; Mok.: *ega:n dili*) is a favorite, as it is abundant, delicious (though somewhat bony), and comparatively easy to catch. It also feeds on live coral. The Moken know very well that the coral garden is the fundamental unit of tropical marine ecology and that the parrot fish has to be kept from overpopulating the reef as its main natural enemies, white- and black-tip reef sharks, become increasingly rare due to industrial fisheries. The Moken are certainly not exempt from the general human trait of cultivating the natural environment, even if it is, in their case, more of a ‘counter-cultivation’, a necessary reaction to the over-usage of the environment by outside societies.

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retribution than for the sake of the government's ideas of ‘conservation practices’; the Moken know quite well how to use their environment responsibly and sustainably). Hence, turtle hunting is no longer practiced in Thai waters.

Among the pursuits of everyday life, spear hunting is the one activity that is most highly regarded by the men. While everything concerned with seafaring and the ocean is of outstanding importance to the Moken's self-conception, spear hunting is considered to be most genuinely and most profoundly 'that what real Moken men do' to contribute to their family's subsistence. The first successful spear-hunt is, accordingly, an incisive event in the life of every male Moken youth and, though not explicitly ritually framed outside of the act itself, a kind of rite of passage. Especially hunting for turtle is regarded as an act of almost mythical proportions, as the turtle is indeed of all animals the one that carries the greatest mythico-religious significance. The fact that turtle hunting has been outlawed, and thus is no longer being practiced (to repeat myself: the Moken strictly comply with Thai laws even if they are opposed to them in principle, out of fear of retribution), perhaps even added to the glorification and the mystique that surrounds these animals in the Moken's imagination.

At low tide, women and children gather shellfish and crustaceans, sea cucumbers, sea urchins, small fish, and other edible marine animals. Ringed worms (*Anellidae*; Mok.: *wát*), dug out of the sandy tidal flats, cut into fine rings and cooked in spicy sauce, are something like the 'national dish' of the Moken. Shipworms (actually a clam of the genus *Teredo*), found in the dead-wood of mangrove trees, are considered a special delicacy and also play a role as ritual meal and as sacrificial offering during the annual ancestor worship ceremony (see [4.3.1.3]).

The Moken thus were, and for the most part still are, a marine hunter-gatherer culture. ("*Broad spectrum foragers*", Endicott 1999: 279; see also Hutterer [ed.] 1977; Engelhardt 1987; on wildlife conservation in the tropics in general, see Headland 1987; for a historical perspective see Headland and Reid 1989).

Their gathering activities are, however, not limited to securing their own subsistence. For many generations the Moken have also exploited the natural resources of their marine environment to obtain mainland goods through barter. Among the cliffs of the rocky islands on the Burmese side of the marine border, the nests of the edible-nest swiftlet (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*) are collected from the walls of caves, a particularly dangerous occupation. The swiftlets' nests are



in particularly high demand on the Chinese (including the large Chinese diaspora in all of Southeast Asia) market, as they are the basis for the traditional bird's-nest soup (Chin: 燕窩; *yànwō*). On the Chinese markets in Bangkok, Yangon and Singapore, a pound of bird nests can fetch several thousand Dollars, even more in Hong Kong, Shanghai or overseas. The Moken (as well as people from other ethnic groups) that gather them get, perhaps unsurprisingly, only a vanishingly small fraction of this for their high-risk work.

Mollusk shells are collected underwater for their precious nacre ('mother-of-pearl'). Here, simple forms of surface-supplied diving have become frequent since the 1970s. The use of cheap and often unreliable air compressors built from scrapped car engines (or even simple foot-operated pumps), and a simple 'garden hose'-type umbilical combined with large amounts of concrete or rock ballast makes this occupation particularly hazardous. Working from between ten to thirty fathoms below the surface, any technical failure means almost certain death.

The products of their marine environment are either sold or bartered for rice, metal tools, and fuel for the *kaba:ŋ*, which were increasingly motorized from the 1970s onwards, and formerly also for opium (due to Thai and Burmese anti-drug legislation now almost completely substituted for with alcoholic spirits).

Within this complex web of different trade connections, the *taukay*, the Chinese (occasionally Malay) intermediary, traditionally played a central role. He accompanied a Moken flotilla, often taking a Moken girl as his wife, and controlled all business contacts with the outside world (cf. White 1922: 106ff.; Ivanoff 2001, 2005). This prominent position granted the *taukay* considerable influence within the group and, due to the ignorance of the Moken about the actual trade value of their goods on the mainland, substantial profits.

From the early twentieth century onwards, the Moken have also increasingly been employed as day laborer 'coolies', for example as divers in pearl farming, in tin prospecting and mining, in tropical hardwood lumbering, as well as in collecting bark from mangrove trees for the production of tannin. Triggered by these developments, the Moken increasingly began to settle on the mainland, along the southwestern coasts of Burma and Thailand.

The Moken are skilled artisans and boat builders. They use the various tropical hardwoods of the islands, as well as various types of bamboo, leaves and bark, as materials for the production of their boats and huts, everyday objects, musical instruments, and ritual and magical objects, such as the spirits poles, *l̥bo:ŋ*. The house boat, *kaba:ŋ* was the central object of the material culture of the Moken and, moreover, a living member of the family and also part of the mythical ancestral world. Metal processing is carried out only to a very small degree. Metal tools, particularly metal cooking utensils, axes and chippers, as well as the wrenches and screwdrivers necessary to service the boat engines, are either bartered or, more recently, purchased. 2.7

The traditional settlement area of the Moken spanned six latitudes: from Elphinstone Island in the northern Mergui archipelago through the island world and along the western coasts of Burma and Thailand to the southern exclave, Ko Lipe in the Thai province of Satun, just north of the maritime border to Malaysia. Governmental pressures, economic interests, competition from fisheries and industry, the progressive destruction of the ecosystems of the islands and coasts (but also the efforts to protect them by the creation of national parks), and, more recently, tourism has led to an increased, partly forced, partly also more or less voluntary,<sup>56</sup> resettlement from the traditional marine habitat of the Moken to the mainland. Like the majority of the sea-nomadic ethnic groups of Southeast Asia, these sedentary Moken were successively assimilated into the respective majority cultures. This generally included accepting the respective dominant religious affiliation, i.e. Islam, Buddhism or, in this case usually through active missionary work, Christianity.

For most Moken, however, this meant giving up their traditional ways and much of their ethnic identity without really becoming part of mainland majority society, neither culturally nor economically. A considerable number of former sea nomads today lives in precarious and impoverished conditions. Those Moken that remained on the islands, holding on to restricted forms of semi-nomadism, have, however, preserved a comparatively high degree of their traditional way of life and their traditional models of explaining the world (see Endicott 1999: 279, Ivanoff 2009: 106).

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<sup>56</sup> In the sense that the 'voluntariness' is strongly encouraged by economic constraints, population pressure, and general lack of prospects.

### 2.7.1 The Settlement *Oma:g Latá*

oma:g Latá (“house/settlement [on] Mu Ko Surin”) is located in Ao-Bon Bay, on the southerly of the two main islands of the Surin archipelago. Originally, this village was but one, albeit the largest, of a total of six settlements scattered over the islands. Jacques Ivanoff writes “[T]his island was at the crossroads of the Burmese, Thai, Malay and Moken social territories”. He adds, however, that “[s]ince the National Park authorities had taken over the island, Surin became another cultural zoo.” (2001: 34).

Ao-Bon Bay is formed by an approximately 800m deep and 500m wide recess within the island's coastline, facing east-northeast. The narrow strip of beach on which the huts are built is only some thirty meters wide at high tide, confined to the east by the shoreline and to the west by the steeply rising, densely wooded slopes of the hills that form the interior of the island. This sheltered site offered protection during the southwest monsoon, and the shallow bay was a safe haven for the flotilla of *kaba:ŋ*. In the dry season, during which the Moken used to live on their boats, this former advantage turns, now that they spend the entire year there, into a considerable disadvantage: on the beach it is often completely calm, and thus it gets unbearably hot already early in the day.

The village was built in its present form after the destruction of the original settlements by the tsunami<sup>57</sup> triggered by the Sumatra-Andaman-Earthquake on December 26., 2004, funded by the Thai government. In return for the rapid and comparatively unbureaucratic help of the authorities a number of quite nonsensical provisions had, however, to be implemented in the course of the reconstruction. The traditional huts used to be built on the foreshore, on wooden stilts up to three meters high. This allowed for stove ash and kitchen waste to be flushed into the sea with the outgoing tide, while a generous, shaded living area was available below the dwelling at low tide. The new huts were now built on merely one meter high stilts with concrete foundations. Because of the lower construction, the houses had to be erected a considerable distance away from the shoreline, crammed together in two to three rows, close

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57 Jap: 津波, harbor wave

to the foot of the hills. The huts were even assigned house numbers, with Arabic numerals, illegible for the overwhelming majority of the community (see [Fig. 38]).

As a result of these measures, living conditions in the settlement are now cramped and oppressive. Even according to the comparatively modest criteria of the Moken there is barely a minimum of privacy for the individual families. The shaded area below the huts, the only protection from the heat of the day, offers at best sitting height, in some cases not even this. The sand of the beach is dyed a dirty dark gray by the ashes of the charcoal-burning hearths, no longer being washed away with the receding tide; the fine ash-dust sticking to clothes, skin and hair even after only a brief stay.

Also the entire fleet of traditional *kaba:n*, with the exception of one boat, was completely destroyed during the 2004 tsunami. The traditional house boats, which were of central importance for the way of life, the cultural identity and self-understanding of the Moken, could not be replaced as the national park authorities did not allow the required trees to be logged. Currently the Moken use motorized 'long-tail' fishing boats,<sup>58</sup> on loan from the national park. They thus enjoy at least a limited degree of mobility within the island group.

In February of 2019, the entire village fell victim to a nightly fire that destroyed all huts and the few remaining traditional artifacts that the tsunami had spared. Fortunately, there were no casualties. It is to be hoped that, in rebuilding the settlement, the authorities will learn from the mistakes of the past.

### **2.7.2 Adjustment of Traditional Subsistence Strategies**

Maritime hunting and, in particular, gathering activities continue to be central to the Community's subsistence. In the recent past, however, employment and trade have also grown significantly in importance. Since especially spear-hunting is quite an arduous occupation, fish and squid are now regularly purchased directly from commercial fishing vessels anchoring around the islands, especially during the dry season (November-April).

Only relatively recent developments, in particular the possibility of

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58 Thai: เรือหางยาว; *reua hangyaw*

earning money in the national park, as well as the emerging trade of everyday items, sweet tidbits, and other bits and bobs within the group, have caused a marginal, yet slowly increasing, wealth gap (or, better, poverty gap) between individual families. In the past, there had been no need for formal social regulations to counterbalance any uneven distribution of resources within the community, as there simply was very little personal property and, hence, little material inequality. A loose system of mutual obligation and reciprocity based on kinship and comradery had proven to be sufficient to maintain group cohesion and the overall common good. The fact that especially the younger men today are expecting some degree of pecuniary compensation for performing labor tasks within the settlement is becoming increasingly problematic. The elderly in particular suffer from this denial of voluntary assistance. They often cannot meet with monetary demands, as they themselves have little opportunity to earn an income. The Moken are facing the rapid advance of monetary economy without possessing culturally evolved measures to cope with the new situation.

Monetary earnings, however, are still mostly limited to small sums for occasional work as day laborers in the national park during the dry season, mostly as kitchen aides or boatmen. Only a few of the younger Moken men have managed to find better paid jobs in Thailand's booming tourism sector, for example as scuba-diving instructors. In addition, the proceeds from the sale of wickerwork and carvings to the increasing numbers of tourists who visit the village contribute to a family's income. The national park closes from May to October. During this time the already low income ceases entirely. Money saved over the period of the dry season usually does not last long, especially as a considerable share is spent on alcohol and tobacco.

The Moken have so far been denied active participation in Thai society, not least because Thai citizenship, and thus an official work permit, is still withheld from a majority of the Moken. In this regard, however, there seems to be a gradual realignment of policy on the part of the Thai authorities, not least as a result of the long-standing, relentless efforts of numerous researchers and non-governmental organizations. So called 'zero-number identity cards', a kind of revocable third-class citizenship, are increasingly being awarded. However, every Moken must still notify the authorities immediately after arrival on the

mainland and state the reasons for the entry as well as the length and duration of the stay. (Narumon Hinshiranan, personal communication, April 2010.)

Although there are occasional reasons for optimism, the everyday life of the Moken of Mu Koh Surin is nevertheless characterized by overpopulation, relative poverty, lack of perspectives, advancing loss of ethnic identity, and severe alcohol abuse.

### **2.7.3 Recent Population Development**

The number of people who designate themselves as being Moken is not exactly known. Estimates in this regard vary greatly. Thai anthropologist, Narumon Arunothai estimates the number of Moken in Thailand at about 800 (now mostly sedentary).<sup>59</sup> The district administration of the Burmese division Tanintharyi (formerly Tenasserim) states the number of 'Selung' living in their administrative area at about 2000 individuals.<sup>60</sup>

In the settlement on Mu Ko Surin lived 220 persons at the time of my first census in February 2007. At the time of the census of March 2010, there were 244 persons. In February of 2018, there were some 320 people living within the settlement. The constant rise of population numbers is mostly due to the birth rate being greater than the mortality rate. Another factor is influx from both Burma and the Thai mainland, as the standard of living is considered to be somewhat better, and the general way of life more traditional, on the islands than on the mainland. Additionally, with regard to the stated numbers, a relatively high degree of fluctuation – due to seasonal labor migration, temporary return to nomadism, and other forms of transient change of residence - has to be taken into account.

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59 Pers. comm.

60 Pers comm., Mr. U Htay, Kawthaung immigration bureau, May 2007.

### 3. Music among the Moken

#### 3.1 Prior State of Research

The music of ethnic minorities of the Malay Peninsula and neighboring areas has been investigated only to a small extent and at long intervals, at least compared to the folk, religious, and court music of the majority societies of the region. No study on the music of the Moken has so far been published. E. Bernatzik (1979: 64) presents a half-page short summary, based on fieldwork in the years 1936-7, writing:

“Sacred ceremonies, in which flat hand drums are being used, indicate foreign cultural influences. The two-string tubular zither made of bamboo is decorated with geometric patterns.<sup>61</sup> Signaling horns made from snail shells drilled open at the end are held upwards during blowing ... so that the sound reaches far.<sup>62</sup> Individual singing at work, while rowing, during the leisure time - accompanied by swaying body movements - is common as a sign of well-being. They are melodies without words,<sup>63</sup> but also with improvised texts, in which statements are made about current events.”(1979: 64; my transl.).<sup>64</sup>

J. Ivanoff (2001: 349-70) names several categories of songs and presents thirty-nine mythical stories in English translation (from his original French transcripts), also providing some information about the performance context:

“The most important narratives are the epic poems that circumscribe the canons of Moken culture; they are sung because the Song transcends the spoken word. Certain epic poems are so powerful that they are difficult to listen to and to record. Song has the power to unite or to re-join the dissociated elements of the universe ... The Moken have many songs and not a day passes (and often a night) that someone whose ‘soul is oppressed’ and who wants to free himself of his feeling of anguish, starts to sing and

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61 The *katiŋ gá'un* in use in ‘my’ group had no decorations. E. Bernatzik's description is the only mention of the *katiŋ gá'un* in ethnographic literature.

62 The conch (shell-trumpet) is no longer in use in the group that I investigated, as a result of the fact that its main function as a signaling device at sea has become obsolete.

63 I did not observe purely onomatopoeic singing. In the performances that I documented, the semantic content of the texts always formed an integral part of the musical performance.

64 „[S]akrale Feste, bei welchen flache Handtrommeln verwendet werden, weisen auf fremde Kultureinflüsse hin. Die zweiseitige Röhrenzither aus Bambus ist mit geometrischen Mustern verziert. Signalhörner aus am Ende angebohrten Schneckengehäusen werden beim Blasen nach oben gehalten ... damit der Ton weithin reicht. Einzelgesang bei der Arbeit, beim Rudern, während der Mußezeit ist – begleitet von wiegenden Körperbewegungen – als Zeichen des Wohlbehagens allgemein üblich. Es sind Melodien ohne Worte, aber auch mit improvisierten Texten, in denen über aktuelle Ereignisse ausgesagt wird.“ (ibid.).

invites the other members of the group to join him.<sup>65</sup> Echoes of a solitary song are sometimes heard and the alternate song begins. Those who are listening can easily join in ...They judge them [i.e. the singers] by their ability to touch the feelings of the 'adversary' by the choice and accuracy of the metaphors used. The quality of the voice is very important, but the content of the song is just as important." (2001: 349f.).

J. Ivanoff also refers specifically to seven "*Moken sacred songs*" (ibid.: 353). Although all the chants mentioned<sup>66</sup> are considered magically powerful, my informants could not confirm this clear classification in the form of a binding canon. Some of the songs mentioned by J. Ivanoff are also considered the personal property of deceased members of the group and are therefore no longer in use.

In the course of the profound changes in the Moken's way of life that have occurred over the course of the past decades, the traditional songs and tales that had been handed through generations increasingly become forgotten, and many of the traditional melodies are now only known in part or have already disappeared entirely. Confronted with this rapid decline of traditional Moken culture, a major objective of, especially the first, field research was to document the music of the Moken as comprehensively as possible, and, in the face of the increasing alienation of the young generation from the traditional cultural achievements, to preserve it in the form of audio-visual recordings. Thus far, I have only been able to meet this claim in part; my collaboration with the Moken community of Ko Surin remains a work in progress.

### 3.2 Contemporary Significance of Traditional Music

The sound and video recordings of music-making I have made during my prolonged visits I owe almost entirely to the elders of the group. Many of the recorded songs and melodies are no longer known to the younger people, and even among the older informants, disagreement about the precise meaning and the correct execution and interpretation of a particular song was not uncommon.

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65 This nightly regularity of making music together, which Ivanoff still observed in the 1980s and 90s, no longer existed in this form at the time of my stays.

66 1) *ibu:m ébab*, 2) *bia:y chichum putiak*, 3) *lu'uy mebam bia:y wasin*, 4) *bia:y djoda lu'uy mari*, 5) *bia:y buyung lu'uy ijoh*, 6) *bia:y dawi lu'uy manyu*, 7) *bia:y koro lu'uy tchiling anat tchumi* (correct: *tchuni*) (cf. Ivanoff 2001: 253-54).



In the case of some songs or sung epic poems, they were only still remembered by the 'title' they used to be referred to by long-deceased elders; or else, by the names of the mythical protagonists of the respective sung narrative. Oftentimes, there was no one in the group who was still able to sing text and melody of a particular song, or someone could only muster disjointed parts thereof.

The younger people (those now younger than, say, thirty-ish) take rather little interest in the traditional music. Karaoke DVDs from Thailand and Malaysia, and, more recently, the diverse entertainment media provided by 'smartphones' (which most of them have been given by well-meaning tourists) are generally met with greater enthusiasm. During my recent visits, however, there appeared to be a certain increase again in interest with regard to everything 'genuinely Moken', including music and song. For example, some girls aged about twelve to fifteen had themselves devised and rehearsed several new dances. In these dances the movements of the traditional dances of the Moken are combined with elements of classical Thai dance. The contents of a sung narrative describing typical activities of Moken daily life are portrayed by the girls in a mixture of dance and pantomime, e.g. "*Hunting for Turtle*" or "*Collecting Oysters on the Rocks*". In the future, the girls would like to present these performances to interested tourists to contribute to their families' income. This undoubtedly constitutes a distorted 'folklorization' and exploitation of the traditional expressive forms, as it can be observed in many parts of the world where international tourism burst into the life of traditional societies.

However, to bemoan a lack of authenticity in these attempts, complaining about the disappearance of true and genuine cultural expressions (as has often been the case in anthropological writing), I can not help but to consider somewhat arrogant. These developments are, at least as I see it, reasonable reactions and adaptations in the face of profound changes in the systemic structure of social and economic processes. It is an act of reclaiming at least some autonomy and self-determination in a situation where autonomy and self-determination are increasingly being wrested from them. In any case, such an active adaptation of traditional expressive forms to a rapidly changing social framework does, at least to me, not appear to be worthy of condemnation, particularly when considering the only obvious alternative: the irretrievable

turning away altogether from their traditional culture on the part of the younger generation.

### 3.3 Terms and Concepts

As has been said before, the Moken do not have a semantic equivalent to our term 'music' in their language. In their conceptual and ideational world, the many different instances of non-linguistic sound making are not imagined as belonging to a common category, but are seen as belonging to distinct, respective spheres, according to particular context and reference. The common denominator of 'making sounds (that are different from speech or signaling)' alone does not suffice to bind these different occurrences to a common concept.

The Moken term *yiné* refers, as a verb, to the activity of singing, the reciting of mythical texts as well as the invoking of otherworldly entities in a ceremonial context. As a noun, *yiné* refers to the different types of songs and chants, to sung epic poems and mythical tales, and to ceremonial invocations. There also is no cover term for 'musical instrument' in the Moken language. The different sound-making devices are always referred to individually. Likewise, the act of playing an instrument always requires particular reference, expressed by the generic verb for 'doing something', *èn* (e.g. *èn bá-nà*; 'doing the drum'). Tube zither, drum, gong, and cymbals are not conceptualized as belonging to a common, overarching category (like 'musical instrument') but are seen as separate things, each with its individual meaning and function.

The Thai term (*siang*) *dontri*<sup>67</sup> is also generally understood and occasionally used. This term corresponds approximately to our term 'instrumental music'. The Thai term for 'singing', *plaeng*,<sup>68</sup> or the verb for 'to sing', *rong plaeng*,<sup>69</sup> is also occasionally used, albeit mostly in conversation with foreigners.

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67 Thai: (เสียง)ดนตรี

68 Thai: เพลง

69 Thai: ร้องเพลง

### 3.4 Specialization

As in many societies with a comparatively low degree of economic complexity and little division of labor, singing and making music is, as are many everyday activities, a matter for everyone in the community. Nevertheless, particularly talented individuals, both in the field of singing, which in addition to an expressive and powerful voice is particularly linked to the ability to memorize a great variety of traditional texts, and in instrumental playing are recognized as particularly good singers or drummers. Accordingly, these members of the group appear more prominently on occasions when music is being made. The playing of the string zither *katiŋ gá'un* is regularly practiced by only one person, *eba:b* Dunung, although when playing music together other people occasionally seized Dunung's *katiŋ* and were able to play it quite well.

The role of the recognized musician is therefore somewhat that of a specialist, but without this leading to professionalism. There also is no formal training for musicians. Like all knowledge and skills of everyday life, the knowledge about songs and poems as well as about instrument making and playing is passed on from the elder to the younger. Dunung, for example, stated that he had learned to build and play the bowed tube zither from his father. The assessments of musical talent and ability of individuals by other members of the group did not always coincide with my own judgments. In the case of singing, in addition to knowledge of the text and, in the case of improvised singing, ingenuity and humor, expressiveness, dynamism and perceived loudness of the voice seem to be particularly important aesthetic criteria. There appears to be no pronounced sense of pudency or 'stage fright' associated with singing in front of an audience, not even in the presence of strangers, although some members of the group tend to act somewhat shyer than others in this regard.

When playing back my sound recordings, my informants were able to reliably identify both their own performance and that of other group members, despite the poor playback quality of the video camera's integrated loudspeaker. During my stay with another Moken-community on the island of Ko Payam (*pulao Piya:m*), some 40NM northeast of Mu Ko Surin, I played the sound and video recordings I had made to the local group there. This met with great

interest, since the two flotillas had been out of contact for several years. It was immediately answered with a spontaneous half-hour-long sung greeting (to the common melody *yiné chichum pùtiak*) to the Moken of Mu Ko Surin, which I recorded and brought back to 'my' group to everyone's delight ([app. C], audio CD, track 4).

The Moken in some cases recognize the ownership of a song by a specific person. While the majority of the chants represent collective property, the origin of which is rooted in the collective mythical past, certain chants are believed to be bestowed by the ancestors on specific individuals and, hence, are not readily transferable to others. Therefore, I could not record some songs of the *lu'uy-ku-bia:y* type, the name of which I knew from the publications of J. Ivanoff, since these belonged to the late *potao* and *djijanə eba:b* Madah (father of Alia and Salamah), and hence could not be sung by other members of the group without fear of significant sanctions from the ancestral realm.

### 3.5 Song Types

The Moken themselves loosely name different types or classes of songs. However, there was also a certain overlap between categories and occasional disagreement among my informants regarding the 'correct classification'.

According to my current understanding, the following categories of chants can be distinguished without imposing too many external criteria of classification :

- i) Sung myths and epic ancestral tales with great magical power (*yiné batak*; lit.: "Malay songs"; cf. J. Ivanoff 2001: 145f.; 349f.).<sup>70</sup> They are performed to the accompaniment of the drum *bá-nà* and the gong *khong* and often last for entire nights. Hence, when reciting these long stories, the sung presentation might probably also serve as a mnemonic device in addition to the obvious dramatic element. These epic songs relate to the mythical past when the Moken's ancestors settled on the mainland as horticulturalists. They also

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<sup>70</sup> The name *ula' batak* used by the Moken to refer to all Malays and Indonesians probably stems from the Malay-Indonesian collective name *batak* for the ethnic groups of Northern Sumatra who live in the provinces of Riau, Sumatera Utara and Aceh, allegedly a former settlement area of the ancestors of the Moken.

contain occasional reminiscences to Malay Islamic culture, such as the occasional use of the Arabic salutation *as-salāmu ‘alaykum*.<sup>71</sup>

ii) Alternating songs performed by each a male and a female singer about mythical ancestral couples and events associated with them (*yiné lu'uy ku bia:y*), whereby each singer personifies the respective part of the ancestral couple. These chants tell of the origin and the early days of sea nomadism. They convey core aspects of cultural identity and reveal the basic structures of the Moken's life-world as sea nomads. The *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* are accompanied by the bamboo tube-zither *katiŋ gá'un*.

iii) Alternating songs which are based on the above-mentioned alternating songs of mythical content, but addressing everyday events and conflicts (*yiné lawan*). These alternating songs often take on the character of sung arguments, with accusations, contradictions and humorous ridicule. These songs, by merging the form of the mythical alternating songs, *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* with the addressing of everyday troubles, worries, and conflicts thus form a link between the mythical past and life in the present.

iv) Work songs; 'repetitive songs': Seafaring, hunting and gathering songs, describing and accompanying the activities of traditional everyday life (*yiné denang-denang*). These songs typically follow a repetitive verse-refrain scheme, returning to a fixed chorus after certain lengths of spoken narrative and sometimes improvised verse.

v) Chants and invocations in the 'spirit language' (*makao katoy*; also 'sacred language', *makao puti*) during religious rites, especially during the annual ancestor worship ceremony *né-èn lobo:ŋ* (*yiné puti*; cf. J. Ivanoff 2001:362).

vi) Love and courtship songs. In particular the song *yiné chichum pùtíak* (song bird white) is one of the most popular and most frequently intoned melodies of the Moken. The melodic motif of this song (see [app. A]; Fig. 4-

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71 Arab.: السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ ; "peace be upon you"

16) forms the basis for a large number of other songs and sung stories. Songs of this type usually address everyday life, in particular the separation caused by the daily division of labor between collecting (women) and hunting (men), the longing of lovers and the anticipation of seeing each other again in the evening. The song *yiné chichum pùtiak* and its diverse variations are usually accompanied by the zither *katiŋ gá'un*.

Categorization in relation to songs is therefore primarily context-dependent. Based on mythical reference, social function, as well as the circumstances and the occasion for which music is being played.

Songs usually consist of iterations of one-to-two-bar melodic motifs and mostly one-bar rhythmic patterns. Rhythmic variations on the prevailing 4/4 or 2/4 meter often result, for example in improvised songs of the *yiné lawan* type, from the different number of syllables in the verses, with the rhythmic accompaniment (drumming or clapping hands) adapting to these variations. The chants are always in unison (with the exception of parallel octaves when men and women sing together). The accompaniment to the vocal melody on the tube zither is likewise largely in unison to the vocals. By introducing melismata into the singing and adding ornamentation to the accompaniment, however, a certain heterophony often arises here, as is also the case when singing together in a group.

The Moken distinguish different forms of articulation and vocal - and, with regard to the playing of the *katiŋ*, instrumental - expression. A distinction is made between *okang lanió* ('word far away'), a soft, introverted *sotto voce* presentation, *ling* (powerful, strong), *legai* (slow), *wai* (fast), *datá* (long, legato) and *balui* (short, staccato; cf. J. Ivanoff 2001: 353-4).

Especially in the case of improvised chants, in which a large number of members of the group are involved, the chanting often gives way to a spoken dialogue for longer periods, in which what has previously been sung is briskly and astutely commented on. Laughter and interjections of encouragement, approval or disapproval by those sitting around are also an integral part of singing together. Making music and singing are therefore above all communal activities, lacking the strict performer/audience opposition typical of European

art and entertainment music.

Making music individually, just for oneself, is much rarer but not entirely uncommon. For example, I once heard my dear host father, *eba:b* Dunung, late in the night - we were already lying in his hut on our bedstead for the night and he believed us, I think, to be asleep - quietly singing to his wife, Muki, who was resting with him, while accompanying himself on the tube zither, *katiŋ gá'un*. The intimate intensity of this experience defies formal description.

### 3.5.1 Mythico-Historical Significance of Various Song Types

The chants and the invocations addressed to the ancestral spirits by the *ulá puti*, the healers and spiritual mediums of the group in particular during the annual ancestral festival, are fundamentally different from other forms of singing. These sacred verses (*yiné puti*) are uttered in a special secret language, the 'spirit language' (*makao katoŋ* or *makao puti*, 'sacred language'). The *djijaŋ* recites these verses alone, sometimes accompanied by a single drum *bá-nà*. The sacred invocations, which often last for many hours, are carried out with the greatest concentration, while the other members of the community watch from a distance in respectful silence. This hour-long recitation of the sacred invocations usually leads to a trance state on the part of the *djijaŋ*. These sung invocations are believed to have great magical power and are considered potentially dangerous, especially for those inexperienced in the discourse with the world of the spirits.

The sung epic poems are accompanied by the drum *bá-nà* as well as the gong *khong* and the brass cymbal *ching*, the latter two adopted from the mainland cultures. The mythical alternating chants are always sung to playing of the *katiŋ gá'un*, less often accompanied by all the instruments mentioned. The seafaring and hunting chants are accompanied by the drum *bá-nà* or by clapping the hands, as are the, often improvised, dance chants. The ritual invocations to the ancestral spirits are performed by the *djijaŋ* either without instrumental accompaniment or to the drum *bá-nà*. If necessary, the percussion instruments mentioned can also be replaced by everyday objects that are

currently available, such as tinplate pots or plastic barrels (Fig. 55). The *bá-nà* or its substitutes are always played with the hands, without the help of mallets.

A distinction is made between ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’, i.e. magically powerful, chants; but it is not clear-cut, more gradual than in principle, and largely situation-dependent. The respective context often decides to what extent a performed song is considered to have a mythical-magical connotation. However, some chants are considered more powerful and potentially more dangerous than others. The *yiné batak* in particular are only performed on occasions that require a close connection with the spirit world and a deliberate re-actualization of the mythical past. In comparison, the rowing and hunting chants (*yiné denang-denang*) have a comparatively lesser relation to mythology and the world of the ancestors. However, even in these the reference to the spirit beings, especially the malevolent *katoy alá* (see [4.2.3]), is never entirely absent, since it is often among the intended functions of a *yiné denang-denang* to appease or banish these entities.

There is no principally separate, in our sense ‘profane’ area in the Moken's life-world;<sup>72</sup> they perceive their surroundings as being extensively co-inhabited by numerous types spirit beings. Hence, such a strict dichotomy between ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ repertoires is also not found in the Moken's music.

The songs about the mythical ancestral couples, *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* (‘Songs [about] the Younger and the Elder’), have a certain elevated position in Moken music practice (cf. Ivanoff 2001: 350f.). These songs are initially sung quite often in everyday life, when coming together in the evening hours. Oftentimes, these songs offer, through thematic reference, the introduction to improvised alternating songs, which, mostly in a humorous way, deal with everyday topics and conflicts and often assume the character of a tool for collective conflict resolution (*yiné lawan*; ‘Song opponent’;<sup>73</sup> ‘*conflict song*’, *ibid.*).

The protagonists of the legends sung in the *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* are always

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72 Though they make a difference between ‘ritualized’ and ‘non-ritualized’ forms of communal interaction.

73 Cf. Malay *Lawan* = opponent, adversary



lovers who enter into a relationship that is negatively sanctioned by the group: adulterous, incestuous or (pseudo) zoophilic.<sup>74</sup> This problem already arises from the precise genealogical terms: *lu'uy* in the genealogical terminology of the Moken means in the narrower sense the (to Ego) “younger or youngest daughter”. However, the term is also used in a more general way as “slightly (less than a generation) younger (to Ego) person of female sex”, roughly corresponding to the (gender neutral) title *norng*<sup>75</sup> (younger sibling; slightly younger person) in Thai. In the narrower sense, *bia:y* refers to the “(to Ego) husband of the older sister”<sup>76</sup> or more generally “slightly older (to Ego) person of male sex”. Again, the (again gender neutral) Thai term *phi*<sup>77</sup> (older sibling; slightly senior person) is similar in meaning.

As a result of their (mis-)behavior, these ancestral figures bring forth the sea nomadic way of life and thereby create the life-world of the Moken. By being condemned to a nomadic life at sea, expelled by the mythical group of origin, or by bringing about particular aspects of sea nomadic existence, these ancestors are the personified primal cause of the ethnic self-understanding of the Moken, of their identity as marine nomads, and of the basic conditions of life in the surrounding maritime habitat. In everyday life, these formative tales about the mythical ancestors are compared to, and interpreted in the light of, current issues within the community. The *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y*, thus, form a central regulatory element in conflict management within the community.

Due to their outstanding mythical significance, the *lu'uy ku bia:y* chants are an integral part of the rites of the annual ancestral ceremony *né-èn lobo:ŋ*. A large number of these chants are performed in as much detail as possible with the participation of many older members of the group, thereby recollecting, confirming and consolidating the Moken's ethnic identity, which is fundamentally rooted in the mythical world of the ancestors.

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74 Motifs that are found in a very similar way in classical Greek mythology (Aphrodite and Ares; Leda, Europa, etc.); see e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1975b.

75 Thai: น้อง

76 Since, as mentioned above, the Moken usually bind themselves lifelong and monogamous to a partner, I use the term ‘husband’ borrowed from our cultural tradition, although the Moken do not ritually sanction the civil partnership.

77 Thai: พี่; not to be confused with the phonetically very similar word for ghost or spirit, ผี.

Ivanoff (2001: 353) aptly describes the category of the *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* as “*Moken sacred songs*” and specifies seven of these chants. According to Ivanoff, if one of these chants is started, all others, at least in excerpts, must also be sung. This was especially true for the performance at the ancestor worship ceremony.<sup>78</sup> I did not find such a commandment confirmed, but I cannot rule out that this may have well been the case in the past.

*yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* are undoubtedly considered to have extremely powerful magical efficacy, corresponding to their central formative meaning as a link to the mythical past and the otherworld of the ancestors. The ancestral myths not only form the narrative context of the chants, but melodies and rhythms are believed to also stem from the realm of ancestors.

By performing these magically potent chants in the right context in accordance with the traditions, the Moken seem to be able to actually experience a kind of fusion of mythical time with the present into a transcendent ‘meta-time’. Here, individual and collective contact with, and participation in, the otherworld of the ancestors is believed to occur. I have no doubt that these experiences are psychologically real to those participating in the rites – perhaps even more so than any other aspect of their life-world. It is a fundamental truth among the Moken that only by means of these experiences, by re-actualizing the mythical order of the world through collective song and dance, the cultural identity can be perpetually re-validated and the continued existence of the community ascertained.

Performing these songs in the wrong context can, however, sometimes lead to negative sanctions from enraged ancestral spirits.

The performance of the *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* is largely free-form and partly improvised, yet always within the framework of the conventions prescribed by the mythical narratives. There is an acute awareness among the Moken elders

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78 „An alternate song has the power to evoke strong emotional forces [...]. It happens that personal dramas are brought out after an alternate song has been sung. The songs do not form part of the tales and can be divided into seven categories, which serve as sources from which the men and women draw their inspiration. The song has deep significance and power and for this reason can be dangerous. Moreover, one must make every effort to sing the seven songs, even if only one or two verses of each, so as not to alien-ate their animating spirits. They have the power to awaken the ancestors, the best-known lovers, adventurers, mystery and the past. Thus the songs are considered to be sacred, and this seven sources are invariably present in their entirety during the most important ritual ceremonies, especially the one of the Spirit Poles.“ (J. Ivanoff 2001: 352-3)

of how far a singer may further interpret the mythical basis. This often leads to lively discussions during singing about the right/good or wrong/bad way of singing (*yiné amɔ:n* or *yiné amɔ:n hà*), i.e. the correct form of textual, vocal, and instrumental performance.

The tube zither *katiŋ gá'un* has a central function in accompanying the *lu'uy ku bia:y* chants that is musical as well as mythico-symbolic. Even if these chants are occasionally performed without instrumental accompaniment, my informants have always emphasized that for the traditionally correct way of performance accompaniment with the *katiŋ* is mandatory, while the hand drum *bá-nà*, the gong *khong* and the cymbal *ching* are not necessarily to be used in this context. Like the chants themselves, the *katiŋ gá'un* provides a connection to the world of the mythical ancestors, through both sound and symbolism. The duochordic construction is of particular importance here: the two strings of the instrument symbolize the ancestral couples of the mythical narratives, *lu'uy* and *bia:y*. The higher-tuned of the two strings, the actual playing string, represents *lu'uy*; the 'drone string', tuned approximately a fourth lower, represents *bia:y*.

The playing on the tube zither *katiŋ gá'un* therefore represents a 'dialogue' on several levels: between the individual protagonists of the chants, *lu'uy* and *bia:y*, as well as between these representatives of the mythical otherworld, the player and the listeners. The outstanding place that the *katiŋ gá'un* occupies within the world view of the Moken thus explains itself through its position at the intersection of music, myth, ritual practice and material culture.

The creative nucleus of all Moken chants always stems from the mythical otherworld of the ancestral spirits, is therefore literally *inspired*, i.e. 'breathed in' by the spirits. In particular, the chants of the types *yiné batak* and *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* each represent distinct mythical-historical epochs; they are expressive re-actualizations of mythical figures and of events of central, formative importance for the ethnic and cultural identity of the Moken; they form the central link between the most important periods of the mythical past and the present.

The distinction between the spheres assigned to these chants finds special expression in the choice of instrumental accompaniment: the *yiné batak*, representing the ancient Malay world and a life as sedentary

horticulturalists, are sung to the accompaniment of drum and gong; the *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y*, representing the emergence of marine nomadism, are sung to the accompaniment of the bowed bamboo tube zither *katiŋ gá'un*.

In summary, the act of external 'inspiration' believed to be effected by the external agency of the otherworld of the ancestral spirits, actualized in the ritual act and manifested in music, song, and dance, reflects back into the individual and collective experience of a specific cultural identity. Music, song, and dance confirm the social realities within the community by re-collecting and re-actualizing the mythical past. They are an expression of the Moken's fundamental system of reference within their life-world.

the core aspects of the relationships between the basic categories of the life-world and the areas of the mythical and the musical among the Moken that have been discussed so far may be represented in the following way:

| <b>&gt;&gt;&gt; Mythico-Historical Time &gt;&gt;&gt;</b> |                                |  |                                   |
|--|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Epoch:   | Malay Era                      | Transitional<br>Period<br><br>(historical dates<br>unknown; anywhere<br>between the late 14 <sup>th</sup><br>and early 19 <sup>th</sup><br>centuries): | Moken Era                         |
| Mode of Living:  | Sedentary                      |  | Semi-Nomadic                      |
| Habitat:   | Mainland Litoral               |  | Sea, Islands,<br><i>kaba:ŋ</i>    |
| Subsistence:   | Yam (Horticulture)             |  | Marine Foraging;<br>Rice (Barter) |
| Song Categories:   | <i>yiné batak</i>              |  | <i>yiné lu'uy ku bia:y</i>        |
| Musical<br>Instruments:                                  | <i>Bá-nà, Khong,<br/>Ching</i> |  | <i>Gaman-Epic</i>                 |

### 3.6 Musical Instruments

There are four different types of musical instruments in use in the Moken community on Mu Ko Surin, all of which have been briefly mentioned above: the tube zither *katiŋ gá'un*, the hand drum *bá-nà*, the hand gong *khong* and the brass cymbals *ching*. Of these, two instruments, *katiŋ gá'un* and *bá-nà*, are made by the Moken themselves. The other two, *khong* and *ching*, including the terms used to name them, have been adopted from the mainland. I no longer found the conch trumpet that was once in use (cf. E. Bernatzik 1979: 64).

Due to the above-mentioned role of the bowed bamboo tube zither *katiŋ gá'un* as a central means of interpretation within the music culture of the Moken, it is described in some detail below. The design features of the drum *bá-nà* are briefly summarized thereafter.

#### 3.6.1 The Bowed Tube Zither *Katiŋ Gá'un*

The *katiŋ gá'un* is the only melodic instrument in use among the Moken. It is a two-string chordophone that, based on its morphological characteristics, belongs to the group of heterochordic tube zithers (Sadie [ed.] 1984: 670) or to the heterochordic tube psalteries (Sachs 1964 [1913]: 307), respectively. In contrast to the majority of Southeast Asian tube zithers, which are either plucked or struck with sticks or mallets, the *katiŋ gá'un* is played with a bow. It therefore belongs to the very rare class of bowed tube zithers (“*Streich-Röhrenzithern*”; Hornbostel-Sachs classification: 312.121-71). Today, the instrument can be found with only a few of the Moken groups living in Thailand. It is, however, not known to me whether or to what extent it is still in use in the Burmese north of the Moken's settlement area.

The *katiŋ gá'un* is, by unanimous verdict, the musical instrument that is most defining of Moken music, despite - or perhaps because of - being played only within a particular context and repertory and, hence, only infrequently. During our first stay, the *katiŋ* was only built and, apart from a few spontaneous exceptions, played by a single member of the community, the late *eba:b* Dunung, our host father and main informant. Already at the beginning of my first field research, when I first expressed my interest in the music of the Moken to

*eba:b* Salamah, the latter emphasized the exceptional role of the *katiŋ gá'un* in the music culture of the Moken and, thus, referred me to Dunung, the group's expert in this respect. During our stays, the otherwise rather taciturn Dunung often told me, until late at night and with great patience and seriousness, about the *katiŋ gá'un*, the melodies and chants associated with it, and its symbolic meaning with regard to the mythical realm of the ancestral spirits.

Dunung stated that the Moken had “always” (*salalu*) played the *katiŋ*. He emphasized repeatedly that he was the last in the group to still regularly play this instrument, and that with the knowledge about the playing of the *katiŋ* an essential part of Moken identity was on the brink of getting lost. Over the course of our collaboration it became a personal concern of Dunung's to preserve the traditional melodies for the younger generations. He complained, as did other members of the group, that the monotonous indifference of everyday life offered the Moken little opportunity for singing together, and greeted the intensified incentive to make music by my expressions of interest, especially as my evident interest also partly affected the curiosity of the younger people with regard to traditional music.

In the other Moken groups I had visited, the *katiŋ* was still known, but had not been in use for more than one generation. This, of course, poses the question *why?*, as the purely technical challenges involved in making the instrument are, especially in light of the generally high proficiency in workmanship among the Moken, certainly rather trivial. The reasons for abandoning the *katiŋ*, formerly an important symbol of Moken ethnic identity, therefore, have to be sought in the socio-cultural developments of the past decades.

The repeatedly emphasized role as a particularly meaning-endowing instrument in the self-understanding of their music culture, however, stands in a certain contrast to the far more common use of drums and gong in everyday music practice. Gong and drum often appear also in the stories and myths translated by J. Ivanoff (2001). This applies particularly to those narratives that have a strong connection to the mythical past, in which an idealized representation of pre-Islamic Malay culture as the original home of the Moken is of central importance (cf. J. Ivanoff 2001: 45ff., 78, 84ff. , 88f., 114). The

elementary meaning of *katiŋ gá'un* appears to be derived primarily from other, 'extra-musical', criteria and not primarily from its function in the context of everyday music-making.

Tube zithers can be found within almost the entire geographical area of extension of the Austronesian language family: from Mindanao in the east to the Malay Indonesian archipelago and the Andamans and Nicobars to Madagascar in the extreme West of this area. In *The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (Sadie [ed.] 1984), 76 instruments are classified as 'tube zither'. Of these, 49 originate from insular Southeast Asia, 14 from mainland Southeast Asia, seven from India, five from Madagascar and one from East Africa (Tanzania). The 'Aeolian tube zither' is not classified geographically. Among the instruments dealt with in literature, the Malagasy *valiha* is the most extensively described and at the same time the most technically elaborate specimen of this genus (cf. Sachs 1938; Wegner 1984).

A distinction is usually made between full-tube zithers in which the body forms a closed cylindrical duct and half-tube zithers with the body halved lengthwise. Furthermore, tube zithers can be divided into idiochordic (stem-stringed) types, in which the strings are formed from material detached from the body's outer layer, often from the hard outer skin of bamboo cane, and types with heterochordic strings, made of plant fibers, wire<sup>79</sup> or, as in the case of the *katiŋ gá'un*, nylon string. According to the systematic of Hornbostel and Sachs, both types are usually assigned to the chordophones (Sachs 1923, 1929, 1938; Kolinski 1930; Norlind 1939; Blacking 1954-5; McPhee 1966; Oesch 1973; Sadie [Ed.] 1984; Kartomi 1985; see also Elschek 1969; Elschek and Stockmann 1969). Roseman (1998), on the other hand, classes the idiochordic tube zithers as idiophones.

There have been certain difficulties in the past with the clear delimitation between tube zithers and stick zithers within the system of Hornbostel and Sachs (cf. Sadie [Ed.] 1984: 670; Marcel-Dubois 1980). The tube zithers described so far are usually either plucked or struck with a small mallet, far less often bowed. The Aeolian tube zither (Sadie [Ed.] 1984, vol. 1:29) is made to

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<sup>79</sup> In parts of the world with restricted access to specialized materials, mostly unraveled Bowden cables salvaged from bicycles or mopeds are used (cf. Emoff 2002 [on the Malagasy *valiha*]).

sound aleatorically by the wind.

Bamboo tube zithers were presumably already in use by the Austro-Asian *orang asli*, which are believed to be the autochthonous *Homo sapiens* settlers of the Malay Peninsula (Bellwood 1985: 69-75; Carey 1976), when the first Australian-speaking groups of peoples around 2000 B.C.E. migrated to the region. From here, the tube zither was probably distributed into the adjacent areas of South and Southeast Asia and Melanesia as well as, via Madagascar, to East Africa (cf. Fischer 1958: 36, 40; Wegner 1984: 39). Norlind (1939) specifies the core area of distribution of the tube zither as Indonesia and Madagascar, but notes that earlier the tube zither “*was more widespread, especially in Indochina, and forerunners can even be found in Europe.*” (1939: 69; my transl.).<sup>80</sup>

The idiochordic tube zithers are generally considered to be among the cultural-historical ancient stringed instruments, although due to the impermanence of the materials used in their manufacture this has not yet been substantiated by archaeological findings. The heterochordic all-tube zither is considered a more recent development:

“The simplest types [of tube zithers] are among the oldest stringed instruments ... The strings of the instruments in this family are initially cut directly from the epidermis of the body ... In a higher developmental form, they are fitted and attached to the body.” (Norlind 1939: 69-70; my transl.).

Heine-Geldern (1923, considered the founder of Southeast-Asian Studies; cf. also Kolinski 1930: 592), on the other hand, takes the view that the heterochordic zithers are to be regarded as the older ones, because “*especially the zithers with attached strings occur among primitive tribes, also on the nicobar islands*” (ibid.; my transl.).<sup>81</sup>

Sachs (1929) states the West of the Malay Peninsula and the neighboring areas as the traditional main distribution area of the heterochordic tube zither. It provides a description that in this form essentially also applies to

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80 Norlind 1939:81-2; Fig. 79 shows a Serbian “*reed zither with ‘bow’*” (“*Schilfzither mit ‘Bogen’*”) as example.

81 Kolinski adds: “*This consideration [i.e. that of Heine-Geldern] is in any case not mandatory; because the primitives probably took over all or most of their instruments from neighboring peoples of higher culture, and it could very well be that the borrowing took place at a time when the zithers were no longer idiochord.*” (Kolinski 1930: 592; my transl.)



the *katiŋ gá'un* of the Moken sea nomads, who belong to this cultural geographic area:

“The typical heterochordic tube zither is at home in Malacca ... although it retains cane [fibers] as string material, it does not take it from the bamboo itself, but from the rotang. The upper ends of the two or three strings are carefully wrapped around the instrument's body, curled up in a volute and knotted; among the Semang, the lower ends are also tied around the body in, among the Tumior [Temiar] they are fixed in incisions and knotted or led together through a hole into the interior and knotted here, in Sumang they individually drawn through holes into the interior ... In the archipelago - the Philippines excluded ... - wherever one wants to replace the stem's own string, it is immediately changed to thin wire [Moken: nylon string].”(Sachs 1929: 218; my transl.).

Similar descriptions can also be found in Kolinski (1930: 59), Norlind (1939: 83-9), and Kunst (1946).

The *katiŋ gá'un* represents, by addition of a second object as an exciter, the bow, a comparatively complex sound generator compared to the quite often described idiochordic, plucked or struck, zithers. In contrast to this, the Moken do not use any external exciters, such as mallets, to beat the drum *bá-nà*; only the gong *khong* is occasionally made to sound with improvised mallets - sticks, stones, knives - but more often simply with the knuckles. There is no straightforward explanation for the occurrence of a comparatively complex string instrument among the Moken. The Moken never used the hunting bow, which could have explained a development out of everyday objects. There are also no structurally simpler sound generators made of bamboo (pan pipes, xylophones or even idiochordic zithers) that could indicate a systematic development of musical instruments made from bamboo.

The Moken for a long time have engaged, albeit mostly indirectly, in barter with the coastal populations. The bowed lute known in Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and Sumatra could therefore have served as a model for the *katiŋ gá'un*. However, since the Moken have otherwise generally and stalwartly refused to adopt cultural assets from the mainland populations, such as net and line fishing, firearms, or money economy, it is not immediately obvious why they should have made an exception in this case.

### 3.6.1.1 Instrument Body

The body of the instrument (*gá'un katiŋ*; “bamboo [tube for the] katiŋ”) is formed by a bamboo tube about 600mm to 650mm long (*gá'un ba-tung*; “straight bamboo”).<sup>82</sup> The length is chosen so that the tube comprises two internodes. As a rough measure, the span from the armpit to the tips of the stretched fingers is used in the construction.

The outer diameter of the tube is about 60mm in the middle of an internode, correspondingly a little more at the nodes. The bamboo cane is chosen with great care so that it is as thin-walled as possible in relation to the diameter. According to *eba:b* Dunung, the wall thickness should not be more than about 5mm. The tube is cut off at one end in such a way that the node wall remains intact and closes the tube off at this end. The two nylon strings are later attached in two incisions in the short overhang left between the section and the node wall. At the other end, the bamboo tube is cut shortly before the node, so that an opening is created. The remaining sodium, which now divides the body into two sections of approximately the same length in the longitudinal direction, is pierced by a red-hot iron mandrel, creating a continuous tube that is closed at one end. This forms the starting material for further processing of the instrument.

### 3.6.1.2 Bridge

The material for the bridge (*dabín*), which is pushed between the strings and body in order to stand out from the former, is carved from the wood of either the deciduous tree *ga-e ma-khaen* or *ga-e dalai*.<sup>83</sup> The same wood is also used by the Moken to make oar blades. A smaller chip of the same material is used to lift the string's knots from the body when the strings are fitted.

### 3.6.1.3 Strings

For at least two generations, polyamide monofilament string has been used exclusively as material for the strings (*soloí katiŋ*). This material found its way

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82 Family *Poaceae*; Subgroup of the Bamboo Family (*Bambusideae*); probably subtribe *Bambusae* (cf. Farelly 1984).

83 Probably genus *Zathoxylum limonella* of the citrus family (*Rutaceae*).

into Southeast Asian fisheries after the Second World War, mostly in the form of long-lines for catching squid. As frequent flotsam, it was adopted by the Moken as a versatile, multi-purpose material. Large bundles of nylon string are washed up on the beaches of the islands together with other waste from industrial fishing. They are picked up by the Moken and sorted according to the intended future use.

The most common material thickness today is 0.8mm – 1mm. Dunung judges this to be “far too thick”, of poor sound quality and therefore unsuitable for use as string material. In the past, the diameter of the fishing lines found as flotsam had been significantly smaller and, hence, more suitable for making instruments. Here, a causal connection between the steadily increasing yields of the fishing industry along the Thai West coast and the associated need for bigger nets and stronger lines seems obvious.

Traditionally, the string material for the *katiŋ gá'un* was made from fibers of the various rattan<sup>84</sup> (*kuai*) and creepers (*lalad*) that occur on the islands. Prior to the introduction of synthetic fishing line, these were also used in house and boat building. The details of the time-consuming and labor-intensive manufacturing process have now been forgotten. Dog, pig or shark intestine might, according to Dunung, also have been used as string material. It seems unlikely that steel wire had been used to make strings prior to the introduction of the nylon string (cf. Sachs 1929: 218). My informants excluded the possibility that the *katiŋ* had once been made in idiochordic form.

#### **3.6.1.4 Bow**

Bamboo is also used for the construction of the bow (*gidjaé*). An approximately 6-8mm wide strip of the same length as the body of the *katiŋ* is split out of the wall of a bamboo cane. The segments of the nodes on both ends of the bow will later serve as a support when attaching the bow ‘hair’.

#### **3.6.1.5 Bow ‘Hair’**

To obtain the material for stringing the bow, a strip of fiber is separated from the outer layer of a particular species of rotang palm (*kuai djalae* or *kuai bu-bon*)

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84 Genus Rotang palms (*Calamus*) of the palm family (*Arecaceae*).

and made supple by repeated pulling over a blade. It is then knotted to the ends of the bow. The necessary tension for the bow 'hair', two fingers of the playing hand are put between the bow and the rattan fiber and adjusted until the desired tension is reached.

### 3.6.1.6 Bow Resin

As bow resin (*od dja-koh*), the Moken use the resin-like substance that some types of stingless honeybees<sup>85</sup> excrete to build their nests. The Moken collect this blackish-brown wax from abandoned nests in hollowed-out, dead trees. Various types of tree resin are also sometimes used as substitute.

### 3.6.1.7 Similarities to Designations in other Languages

When looking up organological reference works (e.g. Sadie [ed.] 1984) it appears striking that there are certain phonetic similarities between the term *katiŋ* and the respective terms for the tube zither in other Malayo-Polynesian languages of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. In order to derive hypotheses about a possible common cultural-historical past (i.e. beyond the distant past in which the common Malayo-Polynesian language was formed), I lack the knowledge of the language and culture of the peoples concerned. The similarity of the designation could also be explained by onomatopoetic formation, in which case cultural contacts would not be required. Due to the striking similarities of the instrument names with the name *katiŋ* used by the Moken, they shall be mentioned here for the sake of completeness. It appears conspicuous (at least to me, being a laymen in phonetics and phonology) that the phonetic similarities seem to decrease with increasing distance to the Moken's current settlement area; non of the following is a bowed instrument::

*Kerantiŋ*; struck bamboo tube zither, duo-heterochordic (wire strings), Semog-Beri people, West Malaysia (cf. Blacking 1954-5: 35-52).

*Keteng-keteng*; struck bamboo tube zither, duo-, more rarely tri-idiochordic, Batak-Karo area, North Sumatra, Indonesia (cf. Kartomi in Sadie [ed.] 1984:

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85 Probably tribe *Meliponini* of the *Apidae* family, genus of bees and digger wasps.

379).

*Kedingding* (also: *teleng*); plucked bamboo tube zither, octa-idiochordic, Alor Island, Indonesia (cf. Kartomi in Sadie [ed.] 1984: 537).

*Guntang*; struck bamboo tube zither, mono-idiochordic, Bali, Indonesia (cf. McPhee 1966: 249f .; Kartomi 1984b)

*Gondang buluh*; struck bamboo tube zither, tri-idiochordic; Mandailing area, North Sumatra, Indonesia (cf. Kartomi 1980, 1984a).

### 3.6.2 The Drum *Bá-Nà*

When *oma:g latá* settlement was completely destroyed by the tsunami of December 2004, all but one of the traditional drums were washed away. Since the materials used to produce a *bá-nà* according to the method of construction prescribed by tradition (i.e. rosewood<sup>86</sup> for the body and the skin of the common water monitor<sup>87</sup> for the membrane) are subject to the strict conservation laws of the national park, the drums could only be replaced by substitutes (cheap drums from the mainland, cooking pots, plastic barrels). The last remaining traditional instrument is therefore only played on special occasions, such as during the rituals of the ancestral ceremony *né-èn lobo:ŋ*.

The cylindrical body of the last traditionally crafted *bá-nà* (Fig.:67) has a diameter of approx. 320mm and a height of approx. 245mm. The bottom end is open. The monitor skin used as the drum head is fixed, with the scaled side outwards, using nylon cord tied onto a bamboo tube bent into a clamping ring of the same diameter as the open underside of the body. The necessary tension of the drum head is set using several wooden wedges driven between the clamping ring and the body. The *bá-nà* is always played with the hands, never with mallets.<sup>88</sup> Not only the drum head but also the body is used for sound

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86 *Dalbergia*

87 *Varanus salvator*

88 The more recent substitutes, pots and barrels, on the other hand, are occasionally struck

generation.

### 3.7 'Tonal System' and 'Scales'

The scholarly engagement with non-European music has always been faced with a demanding task: finding a form of representation of the actual sound event that explains the respective musical idiom in a way that does justice to the original performance, yet also remains intelligible and comprehensible to the fellow academic musicologist, who generally is a cultural outsider with regard to the society under scrutiny.

The assumption that 'what one hears' in a musical performance may be analytically reduced to a set of 'auditory parameters'; and that these parameters may, furthermore, be translated into, and be represented to the eye by, graphical-visual parameters that are essentially limited to two dimensions - such as in Western notation - has long since been considered problematic (cf. Seeger 1958: 184 and passim); let alone the question whether 'what one hears' is the central issue at task in the first place.<sup>89</sup>

In any case, the traditional analysis of a non-European piece of music requires the consideration of individual attributes (pitches and intervals, amplitude, meter, tempo, timbre, etc.), the selection and delimitation of which in relation to the overall musical event actually experienced already represents an artificial reduction. More often than not, such a dissection into abstract parameters is entirely alien to the thinking of the people whose music is being examined.

The investigation of any 'tonal system' and of any 'rules of scale formation' in

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with the help of sticks, knives, ax shafts, etc.

89 The paradigm prevalent in academic musicology appears to, essentially, represent 'hearing music' (as a particular) as subordinate to a more fundamental process, namely that of simply 'hearing' (without hearing something in particular); i.e., an activity that is basically reducible to a creatural faculty or potential, to a specific organic function. This paradigm suggests that 'hearing music', 'hearing one's own language', 'hearing a foreign language', 'hearing traffic noise', and 'hearing the voice of a loved one' are all formations of the same fundamental process: hearing; *sound perception* (or, ex negativo, the lack thereof, for the deaf can perceive non of the before). In our everyday experiences within the auditory domain, however, we never seem to be hearing 'potentially' or 'contingently' or 'abstractly' – we are always hearing *something concrete and particular*; we hear something *as something*. These issues will be discussed further in [ch. 6], below.

other peoples' music is therefore always faced with the discrepancy that exists between living musical practice and theoretical construction: *"The scale is not the norm that the melody obeys, but the law that we experience in the fullness of the melodic manifestations as that which is permanent"* (Hornbostel 1912, quoted from Wiora 1975: 36; my transl.).<sup>90</sup> And, like all forms of experience, such a judgment is largely based on experience, on previously learned customs and conventions. Whether what 'we' perceive as *"that which is permanent"* has any meaningful relation to what 'they' perceive as *"that which is permanent"* cannot be evaluated easily – let alone the question whether 'permanence' represents an epistemological criterion of the same order among the Moken as among Europeans. The tonal system and the scale are not immediate carriers of musical reality, but mediating constructs. They serve as the translator's tool to illustrate and to *explain* particular foreign sounding structures. Whether they contribute to the *understanding* of other peoples' creative expressions is at least debatable.

Since the earliest works (Ellis 1884; Gilman 1892; Filmore 1894; Stumpf 1901; Abraham and Hornbostel 1909), the general focus had been on describing the tonal material used in foreign music cultures and the principles underlying its organization - the intervals, the scales or modes, and their systematic ordering into the form of a tonal system. The underlying motivation was above all to (a) either prove that the diatonic-chromatic-enharmonic system of European modernity is founded on natural laws and must therefore be regarded as absolute and normative; or (b), on the contrary, to find confirmation in the large number of different existing tonal systems that all these systems are primarily culturally shaped and are consequently to be regarded as historically contingent and, hence, relative (cf. Dahlhaus 1984: 94; also Kollinski 1961).

In addition to the problem of adequate representation, a measurement methodology was required with which the fundamental pitches (generally seen as the quantifiable 'essence' of the musical tone, with timbre being a secondary quality) could be determined as precisely as possible. Depending on the respective question and the respective state of technological development, a variety of methods and means were employed over the years: from the trained

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90 *"Die Skala ist nicht die Norm, der die Melodie gehorcht, sondern das Gesetz, das wir in der Fülle der melodischen Erscheinungsformen als das Bleibende erfahren."* (ibid.).

ear, often with the help of tuning forks or the monochord, to measurement with the *Tonmesser* or, later, the oscilloscope, to the current methods of digital signal processing the aim was to measure the fundamental pitch of instrumental or vocal tones with ever greater precision. Besides these scientific approaches, the classic method of transcription served as a means of presentation for a long time, occasionally until today. This meant a multi-step process: taking temporal sequences of instrumental or vocal sounds (usually from recordings, in the early days also from listening to the immediate performance), reducing them to discrete fundamental pitches on an educated-guess basis, and to fix them in writing within the European five-line system, sometimes with additional symbolisms to illustrate deviations from Western conventions (similar to diacritics in phonetic spelling; see Abraham and Hornbostel 1909). While the allure of this formalistic approach to the Western-trained musician or musicologists is quite understandable, already Ellis (1884) called his contemporaries' efforts to express foreign cultural, especially non-harmonic, scales in the intervals of the European tonal system "*utterly delusive and misleading*" (Ellis 1884: 368). Hood (1971) employs a common proverb and speaks of "*the process of fitting square pegs into the round holes of western notation*" (Hood 1971: 85). C. Seeger likewise recognizes the fundamental problems inherent in using a system developed for prescriptive notation for the descriptive representation of (non-European) music:

"In employing this mainly prescriptive notation as a descriptive sound-writing of any music other than the Occidental fine and popular arts of music we do two things, both thoroughly unscientific. First, we single out what appear to us to be structures in the other music that resemble structures familiar to us in the notation of the Occidental art and write these down, ignoring everything else for which we have no symbols. Second, we expect the resulting notation to be read by people who do not carry the tradition of the other music. The result, as read, can only be a conglomeration of structures part European, part non-European, connected by a movement 100% European. To such a riot of subjectivity it is presumptuous indeed to ascribe the designation 'scientific.'" (1958:186f.).

Following this insight, a variety of alternative methods of graphical representation have been developed in order to better do justice to the musical performance actually observed through greater transcription accuracy, often merging the results of measurements with standard notation. Initially, these



were usually based on oscillograms or similar metrological protocol records, supplemented by musical notation symbols, such as bar lines or accents. Generally, the principle of display of the Western system of notation with the coordinate axes 'pitch' and 'time' remained. This makes such a graph more or less intuitively readable for the Western-trained musician or musicologist.

The quasi-logarithmic division into the discrete tone levels of the chromatic scale came subsequently to be replaced by a representation of much finer division, the exact frequency of a tone in Hertz (Hz, cycles per second) or its distance from a fundamental frequency or between the pitches of a given interval in absolute *cents* ( $1/100^{\text{th}}$  of an equally tempered semitone, Ellis 1884). The division of the time axis of the bar system, in which the tone and duration are represented by fractions of a whole, often gave way to a linear time scale (i.e. in minutes, seconds,  $10^{\text{ths}}$  of seconds etc).

Comparatively recent developments in digital signal processing opened up further possibilities for analyzing the organization of pitches within a given non-European musical utterance. The statistical assessment of the frequency distribution of individual tone frequencies (or frequency groups, so-called *pitch classes*) and their representation in the form of histograms with the coordinate axes 'pitch' and 'accumulation'. This method allows for the statistical representation of longer sections of sound recordings, up to general overviews of complete corpora of (field) recordings, giving a 'general picture' of the pitches and intervals used.

### **3.7.1 Method of Analysis**

In the attempts to describe and interpret the tonal systems and scales of Southeast Asia, special attention has always been paid to the diverse range of metal bar, wood bar, and gong instruments of the region (Ellis 1884, 1885; Stumpf 1901; Kunst 1934, 1946a, 1946b; see also Vetter 1989). The metallophones of the Indonesian *gamelan* and the xylophones of the Thai *phipat* were representatives of a concept of tonality that was obviously alien to the European concept of tonality. Due to the largely fixed tuning of the individual

bars and gongs,<sup>91</sup> they allowed supposedly clear statements to be made about the scales used, and about the aesthetic ideations they were a manifestation of.

However, the complex, strongly inharmonic overtone spectrum of the bar and gong instruments of Southeast Asia renders it questionable whether the reduction to a measured fundamental pitch can be considered an adequate and sufficient 'essence' of the perceived quality of their actual sound. Whether the one-dimensional attribute 'fundamental pitch' can be seen here as a measure of order of the same significance as had been attributed to it in European 'common-practice' music is, therefore, debatable. Not surprisingly, there are numerous different definitions of Southeast Asian musical scales based on different methods of measurement and analysis in literature. This is particularly the case for the two main Indonesian modes, *slendro* and *pélog*, many of their respective local and regional forms differing considerably from one another (see e.g. Ellis 1884; Art 1934; Jones 1963; Rahn 1978; Polansky 1985; Vetter 1989).

The Moken sea nomads do not use any instruments with fixed, discrete pitches as found with the bar and gong instruments of the mainland and Indonesia.<sup>92</sup> Both the singing voice and the bowed tube zither *katiŋ gá'un* are capable of continuously changing pitch. Hence, an analysis of any assumed 'tonal system' cannot be based on a measurement of individual instruments, as is may be possible in the case of xylophones, metallophones or flutes.

As the basis of my own analyses I had to rely, therefore, not on laboratory measurements of material sound generators, but solely on recordings of actual musical performances. It is thus difficult to make conclusions about 'scales' with any claim to exactitude, validity or permanence beyond the description of an individual performance. For this reason, I endeavored to computationally analyze as many recordings of individual pieces

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91 Both types of instruments are in fact fine-tuned to match local aesthetic preferences and specific repertory by both original manufacturers and individual players with variable added weight applied to the sounding material, using pastes based on bees' wax or rice glue.

92 Each individual *khong* and each individual *ching* might, of course, be represented by a fixed fundamental frequency (though this is non-trivial due to their complex and largely inharmonic overtone structures, and hence in any case somewhat artificial). The Moken, however, never use any of these instruments in multiples, play melodic lines on them, or make prior decisions as to their consonance or dissonance with regard to the performance as a whole.

of music from the Moken's repertory as I could – to see whether I end up with some actual scale(s) supported by the methods of computational sound analysis available. Such a construction of an underlying scale is in any case a *statistical projection*, and not a direct representation, let alone some alleged 'essence' of 'Moken musical thinking' or anything to this effect.

In the analyses of the sound recordings presented in [app. A.], two different digital tools were used, both of which use an auto-correlation algorithm in periodicity detection to determine the fundamental frequency of a given sound.<sup>93</sup> The following applies to both types of autocorrelation algorithms used: the higher the degree of periodicity (i.e. the greater the harmonics-to-noise ratio) of the examined signal, the more reliable and precise the determination of the fundamental frequency. The sound of the tube zither *katiŋ gá'un* has, as might be expected with a vibrating string, a high degree of periodicity and a largely harmonic overtone spectrum. In spite of a relevant noise component (due to the roughness of the surface of the bow 'hair'), quite detailed pitch contours of sections of the melodies recorded with the *katiŋ* could be represented. Vocal recordings with the simultaneous performance of several singers, as well as recordings in which the vocals were recorded accompanied by either the tube zither or by drums, resulted in far less detailed analyses.

### 3.7.2 Discussion of the Analyses

The exemplary tonometrical analyses given in [app. A] clearly show the

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93 The analysis takes place in the time domain. Two terms of a given observation series, which are temporally shifted (*lag*), are compared with each other. The autocorrelation function represents a measure of the periodicity of a signal. The fundamental frequency  $f_0$  of the signal can be determined from the periodicity of the maxima of the autocorrelation. The algorithms used differ primarily in preprocessing (filtering, weighting criteria), in the selection of the window function used in each case and in the heuristic evaluation of the analysis data. The software package *Praat* (Boersma and Weenink 2004-13) was developed at the Institute for Phonetics at the University of Amsterdam. *Praat* allows a very detailed, high-resolution observation of the pitch intonation and is particularly suitable for the exact observation of individual intervals and interval sequences of short duration. The software package *Tarsos* (see Six, Cornelis and Leman 2013) developed at the Institute for Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music (IPEM) at the University of Ghent offers the user a whole range of different pitch detection algorithms (time and frequency domain). A default setting is a variant of the YIN autocorrelation algorithm (Cheveigné and Kawahara 2002), which was also used in the following analyzes. *Tarsos* allows the frequency distribution of the determined fundamental frequencies to be viewed in pitch classes and their representation in the form of a histogram. In particular, this method allows for a statistical representation of the pitches and intervals within longer sections and entire recordings.

fundamental difficulties that arise when trying to reduce actual, living music-making to an abstract, static, and generic 'system'. There is a significant discrepancy between the richness and fullness of sonically highlighted occasions of intense communal life I experienced among the Moken on the one hand, and the lifeless, stale and sterile measurement protocols and statistical tables that represent my analyses on the other – to the degree that, to me, it has become difficult to reconcile the one with the other in any satisfactory way. An elementary musical scale which could be regarded as some kind of 'essence' of the 'tonal imagination' of the Moken cannot be readily derived from the analyses given. Their thoughts regarding music are, or so it occurs to me, occupied with less formal and more pertinent, life-related issues.

Exact intonation obviously does not represent an aesthetic criterion of the same importance as in European music. An, according to the traditions, legitimate performance context, as well as knowledge of the sung narrative and expressiveness and loudness of voice are more important. On the one hand, this makes the analytical reduction into an underlying 'scale' both more difficult and less epistemologically appealing. On the other hand, it also renders it questionable whether an exact tonal system, in the sense of the Western notion of a musical scale, corresponds to the 'musical thinking' of the Moken at all – at any rate, sound making is not a matter of intellectual contemplation to them.

The majority of the songs, especially the love chant *yiné chichum pùtiak* ([app. A]; 2.1), which is by far the most common melody type among 'my' group, shows an interval structure consisting of tone steps in the space between the three-quarter and the whole tone, with a statistical mean nearby the ideal interval of equidistant heptatonic. However, especially the song *yiné o adey* ([app. A]; 2.4) shows a completely different structure, which is quite close to our notions of diatonic major.

It is not uncommon in Southeast Asia to find different scales or modes for different repertoires within a single musical cultural sphere (in Thailand and Cambodia, for example, a predominance of seven-tone scales in court and temple music, a preference for five-tone scales in folk music; the *slendró* and *pélog* modes in the Music of Indonesia etc.). Among the Moken this difference in scale can, however, be found within one and the same genre of song, the

work chants *yiné denang-denang*. It cannot be conclusively clarified whether the song *yiné o adey*, which is very different tonally from the other chants of the same repertory, is of a different origin than the other songs, whether this is an independent development of a Moken subgroup other than the one primarily examined here. A borrowing from mainland cultures seems unlikely - traditional tonal systems that are similar to the European diatonic major scale do not occur there.

Common to the majority of the melodic samples is a core tonal range of about a narrow fourth, which is usually only exceeded briefly, in the form of ornamentations or accentuations. The octave is not reached in any of the examples.

In the typical melodic *Gestalts*, the distinct reference to a fundamental tone, which is rather unusual for the music of Southeast Asia, appears striking. In the traditional music of mainland Southeast Asia, which is usually based on (according to Western understanding and in very rough approximation) anhemitonic five- and single-semitone seven-tone scales, the weighting of individual tones within a piece is not very pronounced, at least always ambivalent. As a rule, there is no distinct tonal center as understood in Western harmonic music. However, the examples presented in [app. A.] generally show a self-contained musical form with an explicit dependency of the melody-line on the fundamental tone that introduces and concludes the individual motifs and phrases. The return to the 'tonic' usually takes place via the second degree, which, hence, often has a certain leading-tone character.

### **3.8 Summary: Music in Moken Life**

Among the Moken creative sounding expressions are, as perhaps in all human cultures, a complex, multifaceted phenomenon not easily reducible to the neat categorizations of Western theory. They are as much articulations of the movements of the individual's soul, raised above everyday language, as they are expressions of communal life, raised above the banalities of everyday chores. They are expression of the sublime; of that which cannot be adequately expressed in words and gestures alone. Singing and sound-making create an

inner echo that makes the experience more lively for the individual and the community than the mere spoken narrative.

All forms of music and song are, among the Moken, directly related to the world of mythical ancestral spirits and to their central, meaning-endowing role as the founders of marine nomadism.

The Moken themselves classify different kinds of chants according to their respective textual subject matter, the occasion of their performance, and their associated social or religious function: seafaring, hunting and collective chants, love chants, arguments and ridicules, sung epics and myths, and prayer-like invocations.

In addition, a gradual distinction is made with regard to mythical meaning or magical efficacy, i.e. according to the 'proximity' of a song to the domain of the ancestors. For example, the chants of everyday life are less strongly associated with the otherworld of spirits (and therefore less powerful or dangerous) than chants with strongly mythical content.

The form and content of the important song types *yiné batak* and *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* can be assigned to the distinct mythico-historical epochs of Moken cosmology which together form the basic ontological framework of Moken ethnic identity: (i) previous sedentariness as horticulturalists; (ii) the transitional period, exemplified by the epic poem about *Gaman the Malay*; and (iii) marine nomadism as hunter-gatherers. This distinction is also reflected in the musical instruments used: the stringed tube zither *katiŋ gá'un*, with its strings symbolizing the mythical ancestral couples *lu'uy-bia:y*, is the instrument that signifies the era of sea nomadism.

In principle, every member of the community can take part in singing and playing music, and at least in the generation over the age of 40 many regularly do so. An exception to this are the chants with a strong mythico-religious significance, in particular the sung invocations made during the annual ancestor worship ceremony. Performing these is the responsibility and prerogative of the religious specialists, the *ula' putí*.

Knowledge of special musical skills, such as playing the *katiŋ*, is taught by the elders, usually passed on from parent to child. A certain specialization

arises through individual interest and talent.

The melodies are always characterized by a clear reference to a fundamental tone and a gradual development of the melodic motif.

The most common 'tonal system' of the Moken can be approximated as a quasi-equi-heptatonic scale, the frame tones of which correspond to a (usually diminished) fourth, yet this analysis has a certain artificiality to it. The Moken themselves do not have a concept corresponding to our notions of 'tonal system' or 'scale'.

The Moken do not conflate a specific range of certain forms of sound-making into a single, generic conceptual category, as we do with the term 'music'. They do, nevertheless, still 'locate' those phenomena that we would call music within a particular sphere of their social and experiential reality; it has its proper 'place' within their world. Certainly the most conspicuous display of 'where music belongs' within the life-world of the Moken can be observed during the annual, three-day ancestor worship ceremony, *né'èn lobo:ŋ*. Here, singing, drumming, and dancing form an integral part of communal rituals. They constitute a way of communication, of making contact with the otherworld of the ancestors, of permeating the barrier between the world of the living and that of the dead.

Sounds are, however, not the only means to bridge the divide between the worlds. Several other things are believed to be intermediary go-betweens, transmitters capable of establishing a connection with the other side: the smoke of incense; strips of cloth fluttering in the breeze; candle flames; perfume; a Chinese fan, perforated and hence semi-translucent, used in divination; evaporating alcohol (that even we ourselves refer to as 'spirit'); animal blood, seen as carrying the invisible essence of life. All these items appear to share a certain quality, or set of qualities that they have in common with musical sounds: they are somehow ephemeral and intangible; seemingly not wholly part of this world and hence imagined as partially belonging to an ulterior domain; as links between the realms to which the barrier in between is permeable. They are transitory like life itself and, hence, reminders that all things must pass on to the otherworld; that all things of this world, in a sense, are already promised to the otherworld.

It is this transcendent, intangible domain that the Moken refer to as *putí*, as 'sacred'. And it is within this domain that what we call music is most generally imagined as naturally 'belonging', where it is thought to be 'located' - a belief that perhaps even bears a distant resemblance to ourselves naturally 'locating' music within the equally ephemeral and intangible domain of 'art'.

Hence, what we call music is, among the sea nomads, located within a larger domain of phenomena, all deeply rooted in mythical beliefs, and an integral part of these beliefs being symbolically enacted in rituals. In the following I shall, therefore, take a closer look at the religious beliefs and practices, the myths and rituals, of the Moken.



## 4. Myth and Ritual Among the Moken

### 4.1 Moken Mythology and the Work of Jacques Ivanoff

In the following I shall attempt to apply the theoretical outlook developed above to the mythical world of the Moken with particular consideration of the work of French ethnologist, Jacques Ivanoff. I will try to present J. Ivanoff's findings from the 1980s and '90s together with my own from the 2000s and '10s, contrasting them where I deem appropriate.

The Moken know a plethora of mythical narratives and legends (*sérita*;<sup>94</sup> cf. Ivanoff 2001: 17). These tales are passed on orally from one generation to the next and represent the collective wealth of mythico-historical lore. It is these narratives that provide the common references underlying the Moken's ethnic self-understanding and their cultural identity as sea nomads. As such, they form the foundation of the traditional customs, *adat*.<sup>95</sup> To every thing, being, or deed in the Moken world there exists some form of tale to describe its meaning: from animals (fish, turtle, coral, dugong, crab, monkey, snake, dog, etc.), to plants (rice, yams, bamboo, trees, medicinal and magical plants) to places (particular islands, bays, or mythical places connected to the otherworld), to actions and activities (hunting, gathering, diving, boat building, marriage). French ethnologist, Jacques Ivanoff (2001) has published over fifty of these stories, translated into English. Ivanoff analyzes Moken “*mythico-history*” (ibid.) by reference to the symbolic meaning of the narratives recorded by his father, Pierre Ivanoff, and himself, starting with the elder Ivanoff's work in the 1960s.<sup>96</sup>

According to Ivanoff's and my own conviction, the epic saga about Gaman the Malay (*sérita* [also: *yiné* = song] *lu'uy batak Gaman*) occupies a particularly central position in the mythical canon of Moken (J. Ivanoff 2001: 145-204). This narrative describes the breakaway from the Malay cultural sphere and the transition from sedentary life on the mainland littoral to marine nomadism. This radical change is caused by the repudiation of the ancestral

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94 cf. Malay *cerita* = story, tale.

95 cf. Malay *adat* (from Arab. عادات [ *ādāt* ] = trad. order; custom. rule).

96 Sadly, P. Ivanoff's work on the Moken remains mostly unpublished, most of his manuscripts being kept (as to my knowledge) in the archives of the CNRS.

figure Kèn by her betrayed sister, the queen *Sibían* due to the adulterous relationship between *Kèn* and the queen's husband, the Malay seafarer *Gaman*. This transitional process finds its expression in the change from yams to rice as a staple food, the preparation of which the Moken are taught by the figure of the Malay culture hero, *Gaman*. It is not difficult to see in this tale the fall-and-repudiation mytheme, the idea of the 'original sin' so often found in mythologies all over the world, including the Book of Genesis. This notion of a case of fundamental wrongdoing (in this case adultery) in the ancient past is still invoked today to explain and to justify the hardships and deprivations of sea-nomadic life. The mythical memory of a more prosperous sedentary life on the mainland is hence still kept alive in the Moken's collective imagination. J. Ivanoff, therefore, stresses the close ties to Malay culture, the Moken having "*hardly left the Malay chrysalis*" (2001: 2), arguing for a fairly recent emergence of Moken society (i.e. only within the last couple of centuries; *ibid.*).

At the time of J. Ivanoff's research in the 1980s and '90s, there were still successors to be found among the younger generations to carry on the traditions when one of the important storytellers had passed away. Nevertheless

"The imaginary world of the Moken has now become fragmented and only small portions of the epic poems still remain alive in their normal consciousness; oral literature no longer has much meaning for them." (J. Ivanoff 2001: 3)

Echoing Lévi-Strauss, J. Ivanoff sees a central task of oral texts in resolving the antagonisms and paradoxes inherent in Moken culture (he cites especially the refusal to fish with net or line and hook, and the only occasional growing of rice, and that solely for ritual purposes). The mythical narratives, according to J. Ivanoff, provide meaningful context and symbolic justification for these apparent paradoxes.

J. Ivanoff also presents several observations with regard to the particular expressive power of oral recitals, noting that the immediacy of narration becomes lost when captured in written language. He gives the following account of how the act of narration touches the very core of the Moken's mythical world view:

"The narrated texts inspire emotions which are incomparably more intense

than when they are read ... The spoken word gives a fuller and deeper resonance to our imagination, it frees it from the material constraints imposed by writing; it gives it volume, sensation, emotion. The spoken word makes the imaginary voyage easier and facilitates the transition from one world to another. The passage from the oral to the written word is delicate and may even violate the oral text ... as soon as I started making my irksome transcriptions, the text became very uninteresting, full of errors in construction, even hard to believe as far as its internal organization was concerned ... The Moken tales also seemed to me at times to be empty and dull once I had translated them. The power of the words lost their effectiveness when their magic quality, derived from the human environment, has disappeared ... By preserving the historical data of the past, which is always present and by transforming the perilous events of history into a semantic and fundamental unity of myth or epic figures, they integrate the differences while at the same time preserving them ... I consider oral literature to be a privileged way of discovering a people, or rather the idea they have of themselves." (J. Ivanoff 2001: 9-12).

It is, I think, almost needless to say that the "*loss of effectiveness*" that J. Ivanoff perceives to accompany the translation from oral recital to written text mirrors my own feelings with regard to translating living musical reality into audio recordings and descriptive language.

J. Ivanoff arranges Moken oral literature into distinct categories: sung epic poems, tales, myths, and songs; "*These texts underline four distinct time periods: historical, identity, daily life, mythical, but in fact these periods are closely tied to each other*" (2001: 17).

The *sung epic poems*, which can take many hours to perform, are the grand foundational narratives within which the most important societal models of marine nomadism are constructed: "*The epic poems are the prototypes of the Moken imagination from which they draw their identity references*" (ibid.: 19). They often refer to the (mythico-historical) Malay cultural sphere and contain numerous borrowings from the Malay language.

The *tales* constitute short stories, fables and aphorisms of mostly moral, educational character.

J. Ivanoff uses the term 'myth' mostly in its narrower sense of 'origin myth' or 'cosmogony', i.e. in reference to those tales that explain the genesis or first occurrence of the central constituents of the Moken world:

"[The myths] represent a cosmic night where time and space have no limits

... They cause man to remember the origins of humanity by using a distant and dangerous past, when the frontiers between vegetable, animal, mineral and human realms had not yet become defined” (ibid.: 21)

The category of *song* remains rather vague in J. Ivanoff's account, though he gives the texts of several of them. I understand him as relegating to the category 'song' all those sung utterances that are not strictly of an epic or mythical nature, and hence are deemed less close to the otherworld of ancestors. He, nevertheless, attributes to them a great degree of socio-cultural importance:

“The Moken learn the songs from their early childhood and consider that they enrich and give beauty to their lives; they value them above all their other activities ... The songs are the means by which they assume their destiny.” (ibid.)

With regard to the style of delivery of tales with epic or mythical content, Ivanoff's observations concur with my own in that “*shamans*” (i.e. *djijanə, ula' puti*) sing more often than they orate, while story tellers who have no religious office orate more often than they sing (ibid.: 22), emphasizing the supernatural power and efficacy of the sung word. While “[t]he Moken have been well able to make the distinction between an epic story and ritual and religious ceremonies” (ibid.: 26), epic poems, myths, and ritual as well as song and dance, share the same common points of reference: the realm of the ancestral spirits and the mythical past.

## **4.2 Religious Beliefs and Practices**

Knowledge of at least the fundamental concepts and entities of the Moken's collective religious beliefs is essential to an understanding of the manifestations of music discussed. All music making, whether in a ritual context or in everyday life, is always a living dialogue with the mythical past and the transcendental otherworld of the ancestral spirits. In anthropological literature, there is so far no treatise that deals adequately with the religious beliefs of the Moken. I shall, therefore, give a brief account of the central religious concepts and their respective meaning contents as described by my informants.

### 4.2.1 The Concept of Soul: *Gelò*

The metaphysical foundation of the Moken worldview can be described, roughly, as a form of mind-matter dualism, distinguishing, like just about all cultures around the world, between a material this-world and a spiritual otherworld. What the Moken refer to as *gelò*<sup>97</sup> corresponds approximately to that what in the terminology of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is called the *immortal soul*; what in the Vedic tradition is named *puruṣa* (Skr. पुरुष); or what in the idiom of Cartesian dualism is called *res cogitans*; viz. that which is generally identified with consciousness, the self, thought, sensory perception, and emotion; and what is, in some form or other, believed to survive the body's death.

Body and soul are thus conceived of as separate yet interrelated entities. *Gelò* is the vital force inherent in all human beings. Even though animals, plants and inanimate things are perceived as potentially enlivened,<sup>98</sup> *gelò* is only associated with humans. In sleep, in ritual trance and after death, *gelò* is separated from the body and enters the Otherworld, the realm of the ancestral spirits. Hence, *gelò* is that which the living and the spirits of the dead share, what they have in common, and what thus allows for establishing contact between this world and the realm of the ancestors. And it is also *gelò* that is considered to be that part of the person, living or dead, that relates and responds to music and song. Music and song are, therefore, the primary means of communication between these two realms that constitute the Moken world.

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97 Occasionally, the Malay term *semangat* (spirit, soul), often shortened to *'maṅat*, is used

98 What we call 'inanimate nature' is not principally understood as animated or sentient among the Moken. However, everything carries with it the potential of unfolding or being granted an inherent vital force, for instance through a special event or a mythical connection to the realm of the ancestors.

## 4.2.2 True Names and Protective Names

I HAVE CALLED YOU BY YOUR NAME; YOU ARE MINE

- ISAIAH 43:1

THE NAME IS APT TO EXPRESS THE ESSENCE<sup>99</sup>

- J. W. GOETHE (*FAUST*, ACT 3; TAYLOR'S TRANSL.)

Personal names play a particularly important role in the worldview of the Moken. It also affects their interactions with foreigners in a specific way. The true name of every Moken is, strictly speaking, the name belonging to his or her *gelò*, i.e. to the non-corporeal part of a person. Like *gelò*, the true name of a person is believed to transcend this-worldly life and to continue to exist after bodily death. As the true name is considered to be indissolubly intertwined with the essential being of each individual, the Moken believe that someone who knows the true name of a person has a certain power over this person's innermost self and can potentially influence or harm it.<sup>100</sup> Once the true name of a Moken becomes known to somebody, this person may use this knowledge to hurt or even kill the name-bearer by means of malevolent magic.<sup>101</sup> Hence, revealing ones true

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99 Orig. Ger.: „[Bei euch, ihr Herrn, kann man das Wesen] / Gewöhnlich aus dem Namen lesen“.

100 The idea of the magical efficacy or power of command associated with 'true names' is by no means alien to Western thought: from the 'ineffability' of the *tetragrammaton* (יהוה), to the widely held belief among devout Catholics that the invocation of a saint's name on his or her respective feast day allows for a particularly potent way of intercession, to the fairy-tale of Rumpelstiltskin (Ger.: *Rumpelstilzchen*; cf. J. and W. Grimm 1812: "Ach wie gut das niemand weiß / Daß ich Rumpelstilzchen heiß!" ["Ha! glad am I that no one knew / That Rumpelstiltskin I am styled."; Raine Hunt's transl.]), to Mephistopheles withholding his true name from Faust: "I am the spirit that denies!" (*Faust*, act. 3; Taylor's transl.; cf. also the above epigraph), to Puccini's *Turandot*, to the belief that in the act of baptism the child is made part of the christian congregation the very moment it is given a name (cf. also the above epigraph), we find this figure of thought in many and varied forms throughout the intellectual tradition of both, the Occident and Orient.

101 While the fear of 'black magic' is not a dominant force in Moken everyday life, believe in such powers is common. Salamah has repeatedly expressed his conviction that his son, Djok,

name towards somebody else, especially to a non-Moken, is a decision not to be taken lightly. It is a sign of trust and friendship.

Towards strangers, the Moken at first always introduce themselves by an *alias*, a protective name, while keeping their true name a secret. Our host father, *eba:b* Dunung, first introduced himself to us by the Thai-icised name *lung*<sup>102</sup> Bulung. The spiritual leader of the community, *ibu:m* Alia, is known to non-Moken as *bâa*<sup>103</sup> Missia. Only after several months, once my entire family had become more intimately acquainted with our hosts, did my informants tell me their true names and clarified its relationship to *gelò*, to the innermost vital force of every Moken.<sup>104</sup> The younger members of the community do, for the most part, no longer use protective names in the traditional sense but have adopted the Thai custom of choosing a *chue lèn* (ชื่อเล่น, 'name play'), a nickname. By this, usually monosyllabic, sobriquet they are called and do refer to themselves in everyday communication, both within the group and towards strangers.

#### 4.2.3 The Spirit World

The physical reality of the material world - the domain of the tangible body - and the transcendental realm that is home to the ancestral spirits - the domain of the intangible *gelò* - are the spheres that together constitute the reality within which the Moken live. They are conceived of as distinct and separate realms, yet the separating boundary between these realms is transparent and permeable.

The firm belief among the Moken in the existence of spirit beings as a normal part of reality is manifest in quotidian life - a belief they share with the Thai, Malay, and Burmese populations on the mainland, although these beliefs take very different expressions. This belief finds its most distinct expression in the worship of the ancestral spirits that are personified in wooden spirit poles,

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who had died in 2012 (officially from cancer) in his mid-thirties, had actually been a victim of malevolent witchcraft. He never, though, named a suspect, at least not towards me.

102 Thai: ลุง; uncle, parent's senior male sibling.

103 Thai: ยี่; aunt, parent's senior female sibling.

104 Although I have been given the express permission of my informants to report on these matters in the context of scholarly work, their names (both real and *alias*) are given here in slightly modified form for the reasons stated.

*lɔbo:ŋ*. Spirit beings, *katoy*, permeate the entire life-world of the Moken, who experience their environment as being populated by manifold otherworldly entities; hence, they experience reality also as a constant dialogue with the otherworld.

The most important category of spirit beings, those that are most regularly addressed, invoked, and referenced, are the ancestral spirits. These are imagined as those Moken who, in earlier times, from the mythical past up until recently, had completed the path of earthly existence to go over to the otherworld. The remembrance of deceased ancestors, who are perceived as a natural, matter-of-course part of the community, is collectively externalized. The ancestral spirits are present in the *lɔbo:ŋ*, and sometimes also in certain features of the natural environment, in particular trees, rocks or bays. In particular, those deceased members of the group who, during their lifetime, had made notable contributions to the community as religious specialists or eminent elders, are remembered by name for several generations. They continuously exert their influence on the fate of both the group and the individual. Hence, the ancestors are ever present, as equal counterparts and counselors, alongside the living - relatives, friends, and elders.

The ancestors are collectively referred to as *eba:b-ibu:m* (grandfather - grandmother) and made visible in the spirit poles, *lɔbo:ŋ*; these carved wooden poles are likewise depicted as male or female, respectively. The term *katoy* denotes the totality of all beings of the otherworld, and includes the ancestral spirits, *eba:b-ibu:m*, which are considered to be generally benevolent. However, some of the deceased may, in particular circumstances, also turn into malevolent, vengeful spirits, *nangú*. These malicious revenants are thought to bring misfortune and harm, even death and destruction, to the community. Adherence to the traditional customs, referred to by the Malay term *adat*, is believed to provide protection against both evil spirits and black magic. Hence, hauntings by malevolent spirits are believed to occur especially as a consequence of committing acts that are deemed *sekèn*, i.e. misconduct and offenses against the traditional order. Whether a person becomes a malicious spirit is closely related to the concept of 'dire death' that is widespread in Southeast Asia (see Jensen 1992 [1951]: 421-28): if a Moken perishes



prematurely, by accident, through sudden illness, violence, or black magic, or if the funeral rites are not carried out properly, i.e. in accordance with *adat*, there is a danger that the respective person will haunt the living as restless, sometimes vindictive, *nangú*.

Less personal than the *nangú*, but equally malevolent, are the unpredictable and insidious spirit beings that cause harm to the hunter in the jungle<sup>105</sup> and bring doom to the sailor on the open sea, the *katoy alá*. These do not represent ancestral figures, but may perhaps be interpreted as the intense, immediate experience of the blind forces of the natural environment, mythically personified. If a Moken comes to grief while hunting or foraging at sea or in the forest, this is always attributed to the mischievous acts of the *katoy alá*.

These coherencies between the different kinds of spirit beings, the traditional customs of *adat*, and the topography of the Moken's natural environment give rise to a second division into two distinct spheres, this time separated along the boundary line between order and disorder: The uncultivated, unprotected, and uncontrollable areas of the deep forest and the open sea on the one hand, and times of social insecurity and violations of cultural norms on the other, offer the malevolent presences, *katoy alá* and *nangú*, the opportunity to carry misfortune and harm into the, now spiritually defenseless, community. By contrast, the generally benevolent and salvific ancestral spirits, *eba:b-ibu:m*, belong to the cultivated, protected, and controllable area of the boat, the settlement, the hut, and the village shrine (*lobuy*) where they are made visible in the form of the wooden ancestral spirit poles, *lbo:ŋ*.

Through these effigies and the spiritual beings they represent the connection to the mythical past is maintained; they are the visible symbols representing the ancestral guardians of the social norms and cultural values of the Moken. The spirit beings are thus equally mediators of positive participation in the otherworld as well as admonishers and punishers in the event of non-observance of social norms. They thus constitute an integral part of the Moken's social order and their particular understanding of the world.

Beside the Moken's autochthonous spirit beings, foreign supernatural

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<sup>105</sup> The Moken occasionally hunt for wild pigs in the forest.

presences likewise populate their world: Malay *jin*, Thai *phi*, and Burmese *nat* (cf. J. Ivanoff 2001: 3). While these are conceived of as distinctly “the others’ supernatural beings”, they are by no means seen as less real. Due to their being strange, foreign and mysterious to the Moken, they are considered to be potentially dangerous and malevolent presences. The realm of the ancestors is conceived of as a faraway island, where the Moken of all flotillas are united after death. This netherworld is in many ways a mirror-inverted image of the this-worldly life of the Moken: the dead are always sedentary, they only eat raw foods, the elders are young, the cardinal points are reversed, what is ‘up’ in this world is ‘down’ in the afterlife, and so on. However, much of the everyday tasks and activities (community life, food procurement, etc.) are imagined to be largely identical in the realm of the dead to that of the living (cf. Ivanoff 2001: 234, 265 and passim).

#### 4.2.4 Believe in a High God

The Moken also believe in a supreme being, *Thida*, a kind of *deus otiosus*, a concealed supreme authority who seldom intervenes, if ever, directly in the life of the Moken (see Carrapiett 1909). Thida is a somewhat indistinct deity. He makes no appearance in the mythical tales of the Moken and is rarely, in any case not systematically, addressed during the ritual invocations of the ancestor worship ceremony. There seems to be no organized, ritualized worship of Thida besides his rather marginal presence during *né’èn lɔbo:ŋ*. Nevertheless, the central importance of Thida in the Moken’s religious worldview has been stressed repeatedly by several of my informants. Dunung, for example, states that during divination ceremonies using a Chinese fan, the ancestral spirits use said fan as a “book” in which they “write about Thida”.<sup>106</sup> The ancestral spirits mediate the decision who’s time in this world is nearing its end; Thida thus seems to be the final arbiter on life and death (see [app D.]; DVD-Video, 08:20 – 09:15 and passim).

According to White (1922: 119), the belief in a supreme being is “adopted from the Siamese”. H. A. Bernatzik writes:

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<sup>106</sup> Certainly an analogy Dunung employed to translate the phenomenon into my conceptual world, i.e. that of someone from a literate culture.

“[W]e could clearly say that a High God is known only to the Moken in the immediate vicinity of Mergui, who are in close contact with the Burmese. Of the latter, they have heard the name of the Buddha and have integrated it, slightly altered, into their language.” (1954: 30; my transl.)

This is in clear opposition to the information given to me by my Moken collaborators who unanimously agreed that all Moken sub-groups worship Thida.

Alia, however, also refers to the Buddha in her portrayal of Thida: “*Thida is in the ancestral poles, lobo:ŋ ... We Moken worship Thida, just as the Thais worship the Buddha*” ([app. D.]; DVD-Video, 28:35 .29:09); while Salamah explains: “*Thida is everywhere between heaven and earth, all around us, but invisible.*” ([app. D]; DVD, 29:07- 30:22). Whether the belief in a high god actually represents a attitude of faith taken over from Buddhism (to which, strictly speaking, the idea of a high god is foreign) or Islam (to which such a belief is essential), or whether it is an original, autonomous component of the religious conceptions of the Moken must remain unexplained for the time being. It is, however, indisputable that Thida constitutes a culturally and psychologically real aspect of the Moken's religious world view.

#### 4.2.5 Religious Specialists

To the Moken, the being of all appearances within reality is connected to the otherworld. From the conventions that guide social order to which kinds of plants have medicinal properties, everything is in some way or other associated with the realm of the ancestors. Whether through mythical tales, traditional songs, or the experience of communion with the ancestral spirits during ritual trance, the dialogue with the otherworld is considered to be of utmost importance, an integral part of life. If this regular contact is being neglected, misery looms. The central role ancestor worship and the spirit belief plays among the Moken becomes obvious by the fact that the only form of dedicated specialization that had developed in Moken society is with regard to religious functions.<sup>107</sup>

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107 The only other ‘professional occupation’ being that of *taukay*, or trade intermediary, a position always assigned to a non-Moken.

The facilitators for the maintenance of contact between the world of the ancestral spirits and the community of the living are the *ulá*<sup>108</sup> *putí*, the healers and spiritual media of the group. Especially the *djijan*,<sup>109</sup> the spiritual leader of the community,<sup>110</sup> is devoted to the task of maintaining contact with the otherworld and associated duties, especially intercession and divination. The distinction of the actual tasks of *putí* and *djijan* is not particularly clear cut; their duties are largely overlapping. However, the *djijan*, as a *primus* (or *prima*) *inter pares*, takes a leading role in performing the rites at the annual ancestral ceremony, *né'èn lobo:ŋ*, in funeral rites, and other religious activities that concern and affect the whole community.<sup>111</sup> As privileged mediators in dealing with the powers of the Otherworld, the religious specialists also have a central socio-political function: they are responsible for the “*management of meaning*” (Cohen and Comaroff 1976), the interpretation and explanation of the present, of why the world of the Moken is as it is, that is perpetually renegotiated and confirmed in the discourse with the entities of the beyond.

If someone, in the context of the communal rites, exhibits a natural propensity for establishing contact with the otherworld early in life, or otherwise shows a striking affinity to ghost vision or divination, he or she is recognized by the older religious specialists as being chosen by the ancestral spirits to become *ulá puti*. This vocation is followed by many years of training by experienced elders. Anyone who opposes the choice of spirits must fear negative sanctions from the powers of the otherworld, including general misfortune, illness, insanity, and even death. Despite these potentially harsh ramifications, in recent years those young people who showed to have an

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108 cf. Mal.: *orang* = people, person.

109 cf. Malay: *cenayang* = psychic, medium, shaman

110 Commonly in literature, somewhat inaccurately, referred to as “*shaman*” (H.A. Bernatzik 1938; LeBar et al., 1964; Ivanoff 1997, 2001). There are a number of fundamental similarities between the cosmology, religious beliefs and religious practices of the Moken and those of the pastoral and hunter-gatherer cultures of North and Central Asia. For an in-depth look at the religious worldview of the Moken the concept of the shamanism is at least too undifferentiated. It implies aspects of the interpretation of the world that are not found in this form among the Moken at all, or only to a small extent. Other manifestations of the cosmology, beliefs, and religious practice of the Moken, especially with regard to ancestor worship, which are central to them, are largely unaffected by the concept of shamanism as derived from central Asian societies (cf. Eliade 1980; Jensen 1992).

111 When acting as the master of ceremony, the respective person is also referred to as *léphèng*; cf. Ivanoff 2001: 458

affinity to entering trance states have refused to become religious specialists. The duties of an *olang puti* or *djijanŋ* are seen as overly time-consuming and strenuous. Many of the younger Moken feel that the social and cultural burden associated with becoming a religious specialist will detract them from generating a monetary income, as such a traditional office is, of course, purely honorary.<sup>112</sup>

The most important task of the *djijanŋ* is to maintain the connection between the otherworld of the ancestral spirits and the this-worldly realm of the Living. The current *djijanŋ*, ibu:m Alia, performs the invocations to the ancestral spirits, *eba:b-ibu:m*, for many hours on ritual occasions ([app. C] audio CD, track 11). During the *lbo:ŋ* ceremony she assists the other members of the congregation in entering a trance state. In this state the participants of the ritual are able to see the ancestral spirits as giant beings, to absorb them (*ŋam katoy*; “taking in [the] spirit beings”, in the sense of “becoming one with the ancestors”) and to enter into dialogue with them (*meyin katoy*). ibu:m Alia controls the participants' trance states through repetitive, formulaic phrases, by breathing onto peoples heads and faces, and by touching them with a Chinese hand fan that is deemed spiritually potent. This fan also serves her for the purpose of divination (*tili'*): If one of the fragile slats of the fan breaks off during the ritual, Alia considers this to be an omen that a member of the community is going to die within a year. Finally, Alia leads those members of the congregation who had entered a trance back to the waking consciousness of this world, caressing them while softly articulating incantations in the ‘spirit language’, *makao katoy* or *makao puti* (‘sacred language’; for specific ceremonial idioms in other societies, cf. e.g. Belo 1960, Kartomi 1973, Rouget 1985, Becker 2004). The spirit language is only used in a ceremonial context and only by the religious specialists. Although the invocations in the spirit language repeatedly contain borrowings from Malay, including phrases from the Arabic of Islamic liturgy,<sup>113</sup> it is said to be essentially untranslatable into everyday Moken language or any other this-worldly idiom. Both Alia and Salamah, who usually assists his

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112 Though it is customary to compensate the traditional healers for their efforts with a small gift in kind.

113 For example, the Arabic salutation *as-salāmu ‘alaykum* (السلام عليكم ; may peace be upon you) is uttered several times during the course of the *lbo:ŋ*-ceremony.

younger sister during the rituals, stated that they understand the meaning of what they say in the spirit language only in the very moment the utterance is made, as it is “*not really themselves speaking*”.

Alia also recites the sung epic poems about the mythical ancestral couples, *yiné lu'uy ku bia:y* ([app. A], Fig. 4-16), supervises the carving of new ancestral poles, *lɔbo:ŋ* and performs the animal sacrifice that constitutes the ritual climax of the ancestor worship ceremony. In all these tasks, she is assisted by the rest of the *ulá putí* (see [app. D], DVD-Video).

Thanks to ibu:m Alia's willingness to allow me to attend, and to actively participate in, the ancestral ceremony twice, I had the opportunity to observe the central aspects of the ritual in some detail.

### **4.3 The Ancestor Worship Ceremony *Né'èn Lɔbo:ŋ*; Sequence and Structure**

The ancestor worship ceremony, *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ*, is the most important religious celebration among the Moken. It is also the most important occasion for drumming, singing and dancing.

The date of the *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ* ceremony today is determined in reference to the Hindu-Buddhist lunar calendar, taking place prior to, and during the night of, the full moon of the fifth lunar month. I am quite certain that this is a comparatively recent development. It seems unlikely that the Moken made use of the (extremely complex) religious calendar as used, loc. cit., in Thai Buddhist monasteries. The ancestor worship ceremony marks the transition from marine nomadism to temporary sedentariness during the rainy season (on the Andaman coast approx. from May to October). I think it probable that, traditionally, the timing of *né'èn lɔbo:ŋ* was imagined as marking *the last full moon of the dry season*, this being more in line with the general ideations of the Moken than any strictly calendrical definition.

Below, an overview of the chronological sequence and the ritual structure of the ancestor worship ceremony is given, with particular consideration of the

role of music, song and dance.<sup>114</sup>

### 4.3.1 First Day

#### 4.3.1.1 Early Morning; Invoking the Ancestral Spirits

The ritual festivities commence on the morning of the second day before full moon, around sunrise. Alia, the *djijan* of the community, as well as other elders, especially those considered *ulá puti* (i.e., initiates to the religious traditions), gather around the small village shrine (*lobuy*) that serves as a sacrificial altar to the spirits. Strings with small strips of cloth attached to them are stretched between surrounding trees, spatially demarcating a sacred area around the shrine.<sup>115</sup> The shrine is made ready for the ensuing ceremony by placing candles, incense sticks, packs of loose tobacco (called *yasen* [ยาเส้น] by Moken and Thais alike), betel leaves and areca nuts, and bottles of rice brandy beneath and in front of it, indicating that a ‘home’ for the ancestral spirits (*oma:g eba:b-ibu:m* = house for grandfather-grandmother) is about to be prepared. This parallels the (former) erection, at this time of year, of temporal huts for the Moken themselves. While during the dry season the ancestral spirits are symbolized by a carved wooden pole supporting the coach-roof of each individual *kaba:ŋ*, during the rainy season they move, like the Moken themselves, into a ‘hut’ (i.e., the shrine), assigning to them their rightful place within the spatial structure of the settlement.

Rice spirit plays an important role during the ceremony, both as a votive offering and for consumption. It is, however, one of several modern substitutes the Moken had to arrange with. Alcohol has, since the 1970s, successively replaced opium as the, besides betel and areca, most common ceremonial and recreational drug among the Moken. While many of the elders still fondly remember the opium days, and also consider it to be much less harmful to both individual and society than alcohol, Thai drug policy is very strict and

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114 I suggest that the reader watches the video documentary (i.e. [app. D]) before continuing to read to obtain a general impression of what will be discussed below.

115 These demarcations, however, do not define a strict border around the shrine. They mark the ritual sphere in the way that, say, tiki torches mark the ‘garden party sphere’, without precisely defining an exact line that separates ‘inside’ from ‘outside’.

punishment for drug possession is harsh. Among Moken groups in Burma, however, opium is said to still be widely consumed.

After the shrine has been properly prepared, Alia initiates the ceremony by lighting the candles inside the shrine as well as a bundle of incense sticks. She then begins to enunciate invocations to the ancestral spirits, particular calling upon her (and Salamah's) deceased father, *eba:b* Madah, the still highly regarded former *djijanə* of the group.

Soon Alia's prayers take on the form of a repetitive chant while she addresses ancestors, both deceased members of the community as well as mythical figures; this is the time that one or several men take up a drum to accompany her. This chanting and drumming continues for several hours. It is during this time that, according to Alia, she begins to "*feel the spirits*", still at a distance, but approaching. Much of Alia's ritual performance in this opening stages of the ceremony is intended to guide the spirits on their way to the spirit poles, the shrine, and the realm of the living, making sure that they do not lose their path between the worlds.

As the morning progresses, more and more members of the community begin to gather in the ritual space around the shrine; but it is mostly the elders, and particularly the older women, while the younger Moken carry on with their everyday activities or watch from a safe distance.

Once Alia is certain that *eba:b-ibu:m* have heard her invocations and are approaching the realm of the living, she, assisted by her brother, Salamah, and the other *ulá putí*, begins to offer the first votive gifts. The rice brandy, tobacco, betel leaves and areca nuts are taken from beneath the shrine. The bottles are opened and the remaining offerings are carefully arranged in a small wattled basket, decorated with burning candles to be placed inside the shrine. The rice brandy is poured into small bowls from which it is then scooped with equally small glasses or saucers, to be both, sacrificed and consumed (see [app. D]; DVD-Video, 04:21-05:30). The male participants begin to wrap white or black cloth turban like around their heads, indicating both their ceremonial role and the fact, that the ritual has finally begun in earnest. Now that the spirits draw closer, they are increasingly addressed in the 'spirit language' (*makao katoy*). This sacred language uses many borrowings from Malay, yet is said to be



untranslatable into everyday language. Alia and Salamah both say that they themselves only truly understand it the very moment it is uttered. At this stage of the ceremony Alia is, occasionally and very suddenly, being overtaken by the harbingers of *eba:b-ibu:m*; entities that are not ancestral spirits but archetypal denizens of the Moken's mythical universe, such as the mischievous 'monkey spirit' (*dagang*), a 'trickster' figure, distinguished by its impish character and its unrestrained promiscuity (see [app. D], DVD-Video, 05:31-06:44).<sup>116</sup>

#### 4.3.1.2 Late Morning to Noon; Appeasing a Tree Spirit

The wooden spirit poles, *lɔbo:ŋ*, are not merely symbolic representations of the ancestors; they fulfill an important, 'active' role in the ceremony. In the collective imaginings of the Moken, the *lɔbo:ŋ* are a necessary condition for *eba:b-ibu:m* to make their way into the world of the living. Like spiritual antennae (a metaphor used by Salamah to explain their role, referring to the satellite dish in the national park's rangers' headquarters), they 'channel' the ancestral spirits into the sacred ritual space around the altar. It is, therefore, mandatory to make sure that the spirit poles fulfill their intended function properly. If the spirits make it known to the *dijjanŋ* that the existing *lɔbo:ŋ* made in previous years no longer suffice (which is not necessarily the case every year), new ones have to be carved and erected.

While it is a common pattern of thought in Western cultures that religious artifacts are particularly powerful if they are very ancient (especially if they are believed to stem from the mythical, for instance biblical, past), this is not the case among the Moken. Like many traditional societies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas they consider religious or magical artifacts to possess their greatest efficacy when they are new, successively declining in power during ritual use (cf. Layton 1991). The spirit poles, however, have to be regularly renewed also for a much more profane reason: even the tropical hardwoods out of which they are carved weather rapidly in the hot, humid, salty ocean climate of the islands, lasting only a few years.

If it has been decided that new *lɔbo:ŋ* have to be made, a suitable tree

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116 J. Ivanoff writes about the Moken's attitude towards monkeys: "*Monkeys are greatly respected by the Moken, who consider them representatives of a parallel world which one must not disturb. They even feel a kinship with them.*" (2001: 111).

has to be felled to provide the necessary material. So, when the opening phase of the ceremony subsides before midday, when it gets too hot on the beach and around the shrine, preparations are made to venture into the densely forested hills, rising right behind the rearmost row of huts. Alia gathers some of the *ulá putí* as well as several young men armed with axes and machetes and leads the small procession into the forest.

The rainforest, to the Moken, is a mysterious and dangerous place, teeming not only with poisonous snakes and centipedes but also with potentially malevolent spirits, the feared *katoý alá*. The small group, therefore, makes its intrusion vociferously known by loudly beating drums and gongs, hoping to thereby chase away the lurking perils, both natural and supernatural. Gong and drum are closely associated with the primordial, mythico-historical Malay sphere, with the Moken's most important origin myths, and, hence, with the most highly venerated mythical ancestors, such as *Kén* and *Gamán* (cf. Ivanoff 2001: xx). Their sound, therefore, radiates particularity powerful spiritual efficacy, capable of providing a sonic envelope of safety and security in an otherwise hostile environment.

As the small procession winds up the steep, narrow, overgrown jungle trail, Alia begins searching for a suitable tree. Again, two different requirements have to be met, one rational and technical, the other spiritual. First, the tree has to be of a size and shape that facilitates the carving of the *lɔbo:ŋ*. It has to be reasonably tall and of straight build so that several one-and-a-half to three meter tall spirit poles may be made out of it, yet its trunk must not be too thick and preferably perfectly circular in cross-section. Also, trees that have neither too large, buttressed roots nor many branches below the crown are preferred for the same reason. Specimens of the widespread family *Dipterocarpaceae*, common around the islands and in Southeast Asia in general, often satisfy these demands.

Second, and more importantly, the tree has to be inhabited by a tree-spirit, and this spirit has to be asked to leave his dwelling place and convinced to resettle to another tree. While the Moken do not consider all, or even most, trees to be inhabited by a spirit, it is mandatory that the *lɔbo:ŋ* be carved out of a spirit-tree, as this is considered proof for its spiritual suitability. The spirit

inhabiting the respective tree must, however, not in any way be coerced to leave (nor do the Moken consider this to be possible, except perhaps by means of powerful 'black' magic); it has to leave its arboreal abode voluntarily.

Once a suitable tree is located, Alia begins to dance around the trunk, respectfully addressing the tree-spirit by chanting in the spirit language, all the time accompanied by the rhythmic beating of the gong and the drums (see [app. C], DVD-Video, 11:20 – 16:08). She explains that the Moken need to fell its tree so that they may reunite with their ancestors, and that there are many other, vacant trees in the forest for the tree spirit to make its dwelling there. This process of begging and appeasing the tree-spirit may take up to an hour or more.

Once Alia feels that the spirit has succumbed to her pleading, the young men fell the tree, remove its branches, and cut the trunk into segments of appropriate length. Afterwards, the individual sections are carried down the steep trail, back to the settlement.

#### **4.3.1.3 Afternoon; Carving the Spirit Poles; Animal Sacrifice**

In mid-afternoon, the heat of the day begins to slowly cease as the shadows of the hills fall across the settlement. People again begin to gather in the area around the shrine to resume the preparations for the first high point of the ceremony that is about to commence around nightfall. The men begin to carve the new *lɔbo:ŋ* while the women and children are preparing food offerings.

All Moken men (and also many women) are well-versed wood craftsmen. With a limited array of tools, i.e. mostly axes and machetes, they are able to transform the bare logs into stylized anthropomorphic sculptures within an hour or two. Like the felling of the tree and the carrying of the logs, carving of the *lɔbo:ŋ* is mostly delegated to the younger men, while the elders oversee the process, making suggestions and expressing praise and criticism. As the spirit-poles are to symbolize *eba:b-ibu:m*, grandfather-grandmother, it is considered important that their attributed gender is recognizable as either male or female. Nowadays, this is primarily achieved by the respective depiction of the effigies' facial features: the *eba:b* (i.e. male) *lɔbo:ŋ* are depicted with angular, elongated, and sometimes bearded faces (though very few Moken men grow a beard),

while the *ibu:m* (i.e. female) *lɔbo:ŋ* are represented by round or heart-shaped faces with larger eyes.

A comparatively recent development is the use of synthetic resin varnish to paint the *lɔbo:ŋ* in bold, vibrant colors. So, after the carving process has been finished, cans of varnish that have been purchased on the mainland specifically for this purpose, are brought and opened and the spirit poles are colorfully painted (see [Fig. 44]-[Fig. 47]). This task poses a chance for the children to actively participate in the preparations, and it is an activity they enjoy very much.

While the new *lɔbo:ŋ* are being made, a different kind of preparatory work takes place on the beach around the village shrine. Wok-like tinplate frying pans are filled with palm oil and placed over open fires. The young women and girls mix rice flour with water and palm sugar in large pots. This dough is then, by the spoonful, deep-fried in the boiling oil to make sweet, crispy rice cookies. While these cookies are mainly intended as offerings, the women make sure that enough are being prepared for the children to eat plenty of them on the sly. Other edible offerings include shipworms (clams of the family *Teredinidae*) that are considered a rare delicacy among the Moken, traditional dishes such as fried fish and sand worms (*wát*) in hot sauce, and of course rice, the Moken's main staple.

Among the most momentous and ritually most significant acts during the early stages of the ceremony is the animal sacrifice. This is also another instance where, like in the case of opium and alcohol, a substitute, chickens, had to replace the traditional sacrificial animals, sea turtles, due to Thai legislation. In the mythical tales of the Moken, the sea turtle plays a particularly prominent role. The Moken acknowledge a kind of mythical kinship to turtles. Their characteristic nature of living in the ocean, yet annually taking to the beach to lay their eggs, and also the newly hatched baby turtles making the transition from land to sea, associates to them a close, essential bond with the sea-nomadic way of life. Hence, the turtle is the traditional sacrificial animal as it is considered the most appropriate emissary to be sent towards the realm of the ancestral spirits. Traditionally, two animals, one male and one female specimen, symbolizing the ancestral couples that play such a central role in Moken tales,

had to be sacrificed. Sea turtles, however, have since the 1980s been strictly protected by national and international conservation laws. While it is tolerated by the authorities that the Moken hunt for fish within the borders of the national park, turtles are absolutely out of bounds and sanctions for infringement are, again, harsh. It is, therefore, no longer possible to carry out the sacrificial rite as prescribed by *adat*, by traditional custom, a fact that causes much chagrin, particularly on the part of the *ulá puti*. Among the first things I had been asked by Alia during my first stay was whether it was possible for me, as a supposedly 'wealthy white man', to arrange the purchase of two turtles; a question that at that point very much baffled me, as I did not understand the overall context. Needless to say that I was of no help in this matter.

As sacrificing turtles is out of the question, the Moken are faced with two options: either to desist from animal sacrifice altogether, or to find some kind of substitute. While the elders acknowledge that there really is no suitable substitute as it is particularly the sea turtle that is endowed with the appropriate mythical significance and necessary spiritual power, the idea of renouncing the sacrifice completely would have meant an inconceivable breach with their traditional ways. So, for approximately the past three decades, the Moken have annually been sacrificing a pair of chickens instead, an animal that has no mythical significance whatsoever, as the Moken have been keeping chickens only since they have become predominantly sedentary. I am not aware of any Moken mythical tale that even mentions chickens.

Two animals, ideally a hen and a rooster, are chosen from their small communal flock.<sup>117</sup> Alia removes the feathers around the chicken's neck and cuts its throat with a knife, catching some of the blood in a small bowl<sup>118</sup> - an act that is closely observed especially by the little boys (including our son), wavering between repugnance and fascination. Interestingly, Alia, immediately prior to killing the animals, utters the Arabic salutation *as-salāmu 'alaykum* (السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ; 'peace be upon you'), often followed by a brief, apparently invented phrase imitating an Islamic eulogy. Her explanation for this is as follows: the Moken traditionally do not keep chickens (or any livestock, for that matter), but the

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117 'Private property' in general is still a rather loose concept among the Moken, but it becomes increasingly important in everyday affairs.

118 Like perhaps in most cultures, among the Moken 'blood' is equated with 'life force'.

Malays do. Chickens are thus considered to be, in a certain way, 'Malay animals', and it is therefore appropriate to, in a ritual context, address them 'the Malay way', i.e. in accordance with Muslim traditions (or what the Moken take these to be). This might also be the reason why chickens, while certainly not the 'proper' sacrificial animals, are considered at least an acceptable substitute: They are considered to be 'a Malay thing', and everything that has a connection to the Malay cultural sphere may also be seen as being affiliated with the Moken's mythical past, or at least as a reminiscence to it.

Animal sacrifices, i.e. ritual offerings in which an animal is consecrated to a higher being, ritually slaughtered, and symbolically presented to that deity, have been performed in many cultures and religions, and have been practiced since prehistoric times (cf. Burkert 1983; Jensen 1992 [1951]). They are particularly common in societies engaged in field cultivation and stock keeping. Here, these rituals are believed to be remnants of older hunting rituals, i.e. from a pre-agricultural phase in the development of the given society, preserved in these sacrifices (ibid.). They are far less common among hunter-gatherer societies, so it seems rather unusual to find animal sacrifices among the Moken. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* explains that

"Perhaps we may say that originally what was sacrificed was either something living or an element or symbol of life; in other words, it was not primarily food that was surrendered, but life itself ... When animals or human beings serve as the sacrificial gift, the shedding of blood may become an essential part of the sacrificial action. Thus ritual slaying makes its appearance among cultivators and herders. (The practice is generally not found in hunting cultures, where a small but symbolically important part of the animal slain during the hunt is offered; thus the slaying is not part of the sacrificial action but precedes it)." (Henniger in Jones [ed.] 2005: 7998)

A possible explanation for the existence of animal sacrifice among the Moken might be found in the well-founded hypothesis that the Moken are "*re-specialized foragers*" (Bellwood 1985), i.e. that they have returned to a hunter-gatherer subsistence from a previous phase of swidden horticulture, growing yams on the mainland. So while among agriculturalists and herders, animal sacrifice is commonly considered to be a survival from, or a reminiscence to, an earlier hunter-gatherer stage, among the Moken it, in turn, might be a remnant of an earlier sedentary period as cultivators.

Once the preparations have been completed, time has come to erect the newly made *lɔbo:ŋ*. First, those spirit poles of which it was decided that they are no longer effective are removed, and, if the number of new *lɔbo:ŋ* exceeds that of those discarded<sup>119</sup>, holes are dug for the wooden effigies to set into. Before the spirit poles are finally put into place, they are decorated with strips of cloth, similar to those that have been knotted to the clamped strings that demarcate the ritual area. Eventually, the new *lɔbo:ŋ* take their place among the existing poles behind and around the shrine. The men make sure that each of them stands straight upright and that the 'male' and 'female' figures are well mixed, alternating in the rough row they form at the rear of the shrine.

#### 4.3.1.4 Nightfall; Arrival of the Ancestral Spirits

After the spirit poles have been arranged to the satisfaction of the *djɪŋaŋ* and the *ulá' puti*, the elders again congregate within the sacred area, lighting candles and incense, and preparing rice brandy, betel, and tobacco while the food offerings are brought before the shrine. While the hard physical work of making and erecting of the spirit-poles has been the task of the group's men, now it is again mostly the elderly women, the *ibu:m*, that take the responsibility of preparing a hospitable temporary home for the ancestral spirits.

The offerings that have been brought on large trays are carefully arranged in front of the altar-shrine, ready to be presented to the spirits. Particular care is taken in the preparation of the sacrificial 'chicken-turtles': representing the mythical ancestral couples that play such an important role in the Moken's imagination, they are symbolically 'married' in the embracing posture of an eternal kiss. This also symbolizes the bonding of the Moken with their mythical past that lies at the core of the *né'èn-lɔbo:ŋ* ceremony. Alia, occasionally assisted by the other *ulá' puti* (particularly her elder half-brother, Salamah), then resumes her invocations towards the ancestral spirits. Alia consumes the raw hearts and livers of the sacrificial animals and drinks a sip of the blood that had been caught in a small bowl during the cutting of the chickens' heads. Her explanation for this part of the ritual was simply that it was

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119 There is no prescribed number of *lɔbo:ŋ*, nor has the ratio of 'male' to 'female' poles to be exactly balanced. The Moken simply make as many *lɔbo:ŋ* as the respective tree provides material for.

“important” (Thai: สำคัญ; *sing sakhay*) to do so. Again, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* offers the following set of interpretations:

“If the sacrifice establishes or renews a covenant or, more generally, if it promotes the communion or community of recipient and offerer [which is the case among the Moken], then a sacrificial meal is usually an indispensable part of the rite. This meal can be understood as sharing a meal with the god or, the recipient, or more rarely, as ingesting the god; in this second case, the communion has a mystical character. In the first case, acceptance by the recipient removes the sacrificial gift from the profane sphere and sanctifies it; the recipient now becomes a host and celebrates a banquet with the offerer, who thereby receives back the sacrificial gift (or at least a part of it) as a vehicle now laden with higher powers. Thus understood, the sacrificial meal can be called a sacrament. The meal also establishes or strengthens the communion of the offerers with one another when it is a group that makes the offering.” (Henniger in Jones [ed.] 2005: 8000)

It appears, however, that Alia, by devouring parts of the sacrificial animals, turns herself into some sort of mythical beast: immediately after consuming the blood and organs of the ‘chicken-turtles’, Alia enters into a deep state of trance. She begins to moan and groan, rocking back and forth while rhythmically beating the floor with her hands. Finally she, consecutively, takes the chickens’ heads between her teeth and, making loud, guttural sounds, tosses them onto the sacrificial altar ([app. D]; DVD-Video, 24:55 – 25:53).

Once the animal sacrifice has been carried out properly, the men again take up the drums and gongs while Alia, now again in her human form, continues to chant invocations in the ‘sacred language’. And it is this collective drumming and chanting subsequent to the ritual sacrifice that is considered to be the final and most important stage in summoning the ancestral spirits: “*if you don’t play the drums ...?*” - “*... then the spirits won’t come!*” (cf. [1.1], above).

Soon after the drumming and chanting has commenced, some of the women begin to slowly circle the altar-shrine and the wooden *lobo:ŋ*. Others are kneeling or sitting cross-legged on the sand within the sacred area, rocking back and forth, shaking their heads from side to side, beating their thighs with



their hands, or rubbing their breasts. Their facial expressions become more and more world-enraptured, their stare vacant, gazing at nothing - or at least at nothing that would be visible to the outside observer. After a while, some of the women begin to shout, or to stammer seemingly incoherently, and to gesture wildly, pointing at something where to the outsider is merely empty space. One after another, the women get up and begin to dance about the sacred area in awkward, tumbling, jerky motions, or in wild leaps and hops - The ancestral spirits have finally arrived.

Alia herself, later, described this experience of trance by the somewhat self-contradictory testimony: "*When the katoy go into the body, the world around one goes dark - then you see the spirits of the deceased.*"<sup>120</sup> The ancestral spirits therefore appear to be somehow both agent and object of trance experience. But then again, Alia had always stressed that it was almost impossible to recount what happens in such a state, as it is both difficult to remember and hard to put into words. The apparent contradiction in her statement might simply be an indication that these experiences are difficult to comprehend rationally, even for the Moken themselves.

As dusk turns into the darkness of night, more and more women and, much more reluctantly, some of the men, enter into such a state of religious trance, dancing, shouting, and pleading until their feet refuse to carry them any further.

### **4.3.2 Second Day**

#### **4.3.2.1 Morning; Construction of the Sacrificial Boat**

Although the collective dancing continues into the small ours of the new day, as morning dawns, Alia is back at the altar-shrine, beginning the second day of *né'èn lbo:ŋ* by again, solitary and quietly, singing her invocations to the ancestral spirits.

During the morning hours, more and more of the community, at first mostly the women, begin to gather again around the small altar-shrine, still

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120 Interview April 16., 2010. See [app.C.]; DVD-Video 17:17.and passim

containing most of the sacrificial offerings, except for the tobacco and rice-brandy, which had been consumed over the course of the night. While Alia sings the sacred chants, the other women are chatting rather casually, recapitulating last night's events, telling each other what little they remember of their trance experiences, which of the deceased, parents, grandparents, children, they believe to have met, and what they have been told by them. All of this takes place in a quite informal, familial fashion, with a lot of gesturing, laughing, and occasional weeping.

Little by little also the men begin to reappear, many of them still heavily hung over – only to be jestingly teased and scolded by the women for their drunk antics. After a while, some of the men (and occasionally some of the women) again grab the drums, beginning to accompany Alia's chanting. Others begin to prepare wood, leftovers from the *lɔbo:ŋ* made the day before, as well as bamboo, pandanus leaves and vines – construction material for the sacrificial boat (*kaba:ŋ damay*; 'boat (for the) celebration') to be launched the next morning as the final ritual act, the culminating point of the three-day ceremony. Axes and machetes are brought and a lively discussion about how exactly the boat shall be fashioned this year commences among the men. Finally, a suitable log is chosen for the hull and roughly hewn into shape. Strips of hardwood, pieces of bamboo and pandanus leaves are cut to length, later to become mast, sail and coach-roof of the small *kaba:ŋ*. Just like when building a 'real' *kaba:ŋ*, a high degree of organized labor division can be observed in the process, a concept at best secondary in other aspects of Moken everyday life. Two or three of the younger men are taking care of the arduous task of carving the hull, made like in the case of the large boats from a single log. Others are busy weaving pandanus leaves into a sail and a cabin roof; again others are preparing mast, oars and rudder, again showing an astonishing degree of aptitude in carving quite delicate pieces with their rather crude tools.<sup>121</sup> Just like a real *kaba:ŋ*, the smaller model also receives its own little spirit pole as the coach-roof's main supporting beam. While the *lɔbo:ŋ* surrounding the altar-shrine have been fashioned in the 'modern' way, i.e. with faces and other

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121 Especially my wife, herself a trained wood sculptor, was enthusiastic about what the Moken could accomplish using just a hand ax or a slasher; tasks for which a Western wood carver would employ an entire array of knives and chisels.

anthropomorphic details, the spirit pole for the sacrificial boat is still carved in the traditional manner, as a column of abstract cubic forms, with only the flat, oval-shaped upper end vaguely suggesting a 'head' (see [app. C]; DVD,-Video: 38:56 – 39:01). All this takes place in an exuberant, cheerful mood, with lots of chatting and joking, and continual comments by the elders on 'how to do it right'.

While most of the men, young and old, are engaged in woodworking, the women begin again to flock to the shrine, bringing with them the remaining stock of rice brandy they have managed to save from their husband's thirst the previous night.

As soon as the ceremonial boat has been finished it is erected on wooden posts for everyone to see, and thus presented to the community. Praising the craftsmen's work and emphasizing especially well-made details, as well as speculating about the boat's eventual 'seaworthiness', more and more members of the group gather within the sacred area for the second night of the ceremony. Before long, the drumming, chanting, and drinking begins anew.

Now, with the ancestral spirits being much closer to the realm of the living, for the time being residing within the wooden spirit poles, they soon begin to make their presence felt. Much more quickly than on the previous night the first women begin to fall into a trance state. Yet as the sun rises higher and the cool morning breeze makes way for the heat of the day, the exhaustion of the previous night begins to take its toll: some of the participants in the ritual are put out of their depth by the renewed exertions (and consumption); they crawl away to doze off under a tree, or simply collapse into the sand.

#### **4.3.2.2 Afternoon; Ritual Transformations of the *djijan***

All the while, Alia has been chanting to the ancestral spirits, working her way deeper and deeper into the transcendent otherworld. While during the early hours she had been giving orders to other *ulá putí*, coordinating the sequence of ritual acts, she appears to gradually loose all bonds to her this-worldly surroundings. As this process advances, the demeanor and attitude of the other elders towards her likewise begins to change: she is no longer just *ibu:m* Alia, nor even merely the group's *djijan*, but appears to have herself transformed

into a spirit being, a denizen of the realm of the ancestors. The general atmosphere that had been rather informal and cheerful during the morning quite suddenly takes on a more serious and solemn, even timid, touch. Alia's actions and utterances have become the sole focus of the proceedings. She begins to crawl across the sacred area on all fours, wallowing about in the sand, moaning and grunting, uttering short exclamations in the sacred tongue. Then, accompanied by the beating of the gong and the chants and prayers of the *ulá putí*, she approaches the altar-shrine, her movements unnaturally abrupt and jerky, her stare vacant. An entity of the otherworld of spirits had finally taken full possession of Alia's body to claim the sacrificial offerings. The being that now appears to occupy Alia's mortal apparel fiercely thrusts itself onto the offerings within the shrine, indiscriminately devouring rice gruel and burning candles.

The most experienced *ulá putí*, first of all Salamah, try to appease and console the spirit being, frantically chanting and praying to the incessant beating of the gong. Finally, the otherworldly entity works its way into the tiny space of altar-shrine itself, starring menacingly towards the ritual community, rolling its eyes and tongue outstretched, a posture that appeared to me more akin to the portrayals of Burmese *nat* or Thai *yaksa* than to any being I had heard of so far in Moken mythology (see [app. C]; DVD-video: 39:18 - 40:52)

Her brother, *eba:b* Salamah, explained this in the following way:

*"She is now a turtle, a turtle spirit (katoy kalah); the spirit of the turtle is inside her, of those turtles [in fact, chickens] that we have given to the ancestors. Just like a newly hatched baby turtle, hatched from the egg, she goes into the sea, but it's the sea of the ancestral spirits. The Moken are living both on land and on the sea. They go from land to sea, like the turtles, and also from sea to land. The spirit of the turtle takes to the sea, and also returns from the sea."* (pers. com.; May 2010).

*eba:b* Dunung, on the other hand, interpreted Alia's transformation as her personifying a sea spirit (*djin, katoy okèn*), making references to the *hantu laut*, the usually malevolent water ghost of pre-Islamic Malay folklore.

For most of the ritual activities, even when in a trance state, Alia was able to, albeit vaguely, recount her experience afterwards, telling the others what she believed to have encountered in the otherworld. Of this last episode, however, she claims to have no recollection whatsoever, even as I showed her the video

recording I had made of the event. Alia explained that she herself had been “dead” (*má:tay*), that her *gelo* had been “far away” (*lanyo*), while the spirit entity occupied her body, and hence could not remember anything specific about what it was that took possession of her. She made it, however, clear that there was an important distinction between merely *encountering* the spirits in a trance, something every participant in the ritual could in principle experience, and actually *becoming* or *embodying* a spirit, something only a *djijan* can accomplish without either dying or going insane.

#### **4.3.2.3 Nightfall; Full Moon; Climax**

The evening hours of the second day for the most part resemble that of the first. Drumming and chanting intensifies as the night approaches and more and more people gather around the shrine, beginning to dance around the circle of the ritual.

Yet this time, as the last full moon of the dry season finally rises above the jungle hills, its silver light optically dissolving the boundary between beach and sea, the dancing, rocking, gesturing, and shouting becomes even more intense and ecstatic than the previous night. People begin falling to their knees, arms outstretched, embracing invisible entities; others are rolling back and forth in the sand, weeping and moaning; again others are vigorously beating their thighs and chests, their faces distorted into grimaces of agony.

A greater number of people appear to fall into a trance than the night before and most participant's trance states seems to be both deeper and longer lasting. Despite having spent most of the afternoon in ritual trances herself, having collapsed from exhaustion more than once during the day, Alia somehow still musters the stamina and energy to guide and protect her fellow worshipers until late at night.

As the night advances, with the dancing becoming ever more furious and ecstatic, the drum accompaniment grows equally more intense and also more monotonous, the formerly quite sophisticated rhythms eventually synchronizing into one single, unchanging pulse.

With the first light of the coming day showing itself on the horizon, people

once again start collapsing into the sand or stagger towards their huts as the climactic full moon ceremony unceremoniously draws to an end.

### 4.3.3 Third Day

#### 4.3.3.1 Morning; Launching of the Ceremonial *kaba:ŋ*; Departure of the Ancestral Spirits

The morning of the third and final day of the ancestor worship ceremony begins after only a few hours of sleep. The ceremonial *kaba:ŋ* had been placed on the beach already the previous day, resting on a supporting rack midway between the altar-shrine and the shoreline. During last night's celebrations, many of the Moken had put further gifts for the ancestors into the small boat's hull: tobacco, betel leaves, Thai bank notes, candles, incense sticks, and wickerwork bracelets. More important than these, however, are personal sacrificial offerings: cropped locks of hair and clipped fingernails are placed within the small *kaba:ŋ* to be taken to the mythical island of the dead, to strengthen the personal bond to the otherworld.

As soon as the tide is high enough, the ceremonial *kaba:ŋ* is loaded onto the bow of one of the long-tail boats where it is joined by Alia and the other *ulá puti*, bringing with them drums, gongs and what rice brandy is left over from the night before. The remaining Moken climb aboard two or three additional long-tail boats to accompany launching of the ceremonial boat.

As soon as the small flotilla puts to sea, drums and gongs start playing. Despite the often substantial swell outside of the sheltered bay, Alia begins to, once more, dance herself into a trance on the bow of the heavily rocking boat. She starts to call upon the ancestral spirits to board the ceremonial boat that will take them back to their realm, to the island of the dead. She also addresses the spirits of the sea, pleading for a safe journey to these distant shores.

About a mile and a half off shore, the long-tail boats stop their engines, the skippers doing their best to form a rough circle in the choppy waters. After Alia has spoken a few final blessings in the 'spirit-language', the younger men that are sailing the long-tail boat launch the ceremonial *kaba:ŋ* over the boat's

bulwarks. The very moment that the small *kaba:ŋ* touches the ocean's surface frantic shouting, yelling, and cheering erupts from aboard the accompanying boats. Drums and gongs are hit full force and at the highest possible pace while the boats' engines are restarted, circling the ceremonial *kaba:ŋ* several times. The ancestors have concluded their annual visit and have been welcomed, entertained, and bidden farewell according to the protocol demanded by mythical lore and traditional custom. The ancestor worship ceremony *né'èn lobo:ŋ* is over.

#### 4.4 Summary

I have noted above that it is an integral part, even a set objective, of the ancestor worship ceremony *né'èn lobo:ŋ* to experience a psychologically real, collectively acknowledged condition of communion with the otherworld of the ancestors, i.e. what is commonly referred to as a state of religious *trance*. I have argued, as the Moken themselves do, that the ancestral spirits are believed to be actual participants in these rites, the most distinguished 'honorary guests'. I have given accounts of how the Moken themselves described their respective experiences to me, and also how this focal element of the Ritual presents itself to the outside observer. I have further attempted to show the close interrelation of music, song, dance, and ritual trance within an overall mythical construal of reality – so tightly intertwined, in fact, that to the Moken they constitute an ideational and conceptual continuum. It is my considered opinion that is in this, to the Moken, coherent and continuous domain of myth, ritual, music, song, dance and trance, that we might come closest to what might be considered as what is the Mokens' equivalent to what we call 'aesthetics' - i.e. a particular mode of experience that is set distinctly apart from 'ordinary' experience, yet at the same time is inextricably tied to all forms of 'ordinary' experience in a holistic and all-encompassing manner.

Among the Moken, as we have seen, many things are different from what the Western person takes to be the normal run of things, the known patterns of faith, the usual forms of behavior, the entirety of what shapes, forms and *is* individual and social life. They appear to 'locate' that domain we label music at a

different 'place' (or at different 'places') within the fabric of their world than we do within the fabric of ours.

There are, of course, quite a few aspects of Moken culture that would deserve a more in-depth treatment and a comprehensive consideration in the light of theory. However, the most fundamental or most elementary (and perhaps also the most difficult to grasp) among these remains, as I see it, the one that has been briefly postulated in the introductory section of this text: *'how is it that the Moken happen to experience their world in such a way that they don't have an equivalent conceptual category to what we call music?; that they do not recognize a distinct domain of reality to be termed such?'*. The answer to this question, which was always offered to me in conversation with fellow students, colleagues and academic teachers alike as the only reasonable and apparently obvious one - "the Moken have just not yet recognized what music really is" – just does not seem very convincing to me.

Even after having spent considerable time among the Moken I am still in no position to offer a comprehensive account, let alone an informed analysis, of Moken culture and society in its entirety. Fundamental issues of Moken world perception and conceptualization remain still rather vague to me; disconnected, incoherent apprehensions and intuitions, far from any true *understanding*. Hence, I can still not answer this basic question in any satisfactory way – it occurs to me that this might be the kind of thing that is very difficult to *explain* as a cultural outsider as it might, probably, only be truly, i.e. intuitively, *understood* by someone who grew into the respective culture from childhood – or at least has spent more time among a foreign culture than I have.

In the second part of the present thesis I shall, therefore, make a deliberate attempt at looking at the same issue the other way round, asking: *'how is it that we happen to experience and to conceptualize our world in such a way that we, in fact, do have the term music?; that we do recognize a distinct domain of reality to be termed such?'*

As we shall see, our own conceptions and our own ideas about what the term music ultimately denotes likewise draw to a significant degree on non-rational ideations and pre-conceptual experiences; on what German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer (1955 [1925]) called „*Mythical Thought*“.



## Part II

*Myth and Ritual in Scholarly Literature; Theoretical Deliberations on the Formation of Concepts and Categories; the Emergence of the Concept of Art; And the Inherently Mythical Foundations of the Western Concept of Music*

### 5. Myth and Ritual as Analytical Concepts

*THE MYTH IS THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE; IT IS THE TIMELESS SCHEMA, THE PIOUS FORMULA INTO WHICH LIFE FLOWS WHEN IT REPRODUCES ITS TRAITS OUT OF THE UNCONSCIOUS.*

- THOMAS MANN (1957:307)

*THE MEANING OF RITUAL IS GREAT INDEED  
HE WHO TRIES TO ENTER IT WITH THE UNCOUTH  
AND INANE THEORIES OF THE SYSTEM-MAKERS  
WILL PERISH THERE*

- XUNZI (QUOTED FROM BELL 1997: VI)

It appears to be a perennial dilemma of the study of the human condition that the 'closer to home' our inquiries get, the more vague and ambiguous matters tend to become. We might have reliable theories and a controlled vocabulary with regard to the properties of astronomical objects in far away solar systems, but when it comes to the essential nature of our own being, our concepts quickly seem to abandon us: "*I believe*", writes Thomas Nagel, "*that the methods needed to understand ourselves do not yet exist.*" (1986: 10).

Myth and ritual apparently are phenomena that have been with us right

from the very infancy of our species, for we seem to be *“a species that lives, and can only live, in terms of meanings it must construct in a world devoid of intrinsic meaning but subject to physical law.”* (Rappaport 1999: 1). Nevertheless, what precisely it is that these terms actually designate remains rather obscure. No general definitions, neither of ‘myth’ nor of ‘ritual’, have so far been commonly agreed upon, as the same problems of conceptualization and categorization that make a general definition of ‘music’ so difficult, if not at all impossible, also apply to them.

As the terms ‘myth’ and ‘ritual’ will have to carry quite an explanatory burden in the further course of my argument, I will now attempt to state more precisely what I am going to mean by them. This chapter, therefore, first introduces, in a synoptic and cursory fashion, some of the central theories on myth and ritual. Owing to the particular topic of the present thesis I shall emphasize the presumed affiliations of these phenomena with the domain of art and music that several authors have attempted to point out. This chapter's main purpose is to illustrate the breadth and diversity of thought on these subjects and to develop a basic vocabulary; only a small number of these thoughts, however, will be of importance in what follows thereafter.

### **5.1 Are Myth and Ritual Distinct Phenomena or are they *“One and the Same”*?**

Despite the apparently archaic roots of the phenomena themselves, the concepts of myth and ritual as understood today in scholarly discourse are in fact of comparatively recent origin (cf. Doty 2000: 5ff. and passim). Their use in academic literature is also quite ambiguous and eclectic, as scholars from a broad range of disciplines (classics, theology, philosophy, history, linguistics, religious studies, political science, psychology, social/cultural anthropology, literary criticism) attempted to define and to contextualize these concepts with regard to their particular program:

“Every scholar still found in myth those objects with which he was most familiar. At bottom, the different schools saw in the magic mirror of myth only their own faces. The linguist found in it a world of words and names – the philosopher found a ‘primitive philosophy’ – the psychiatrist a highly

complicated and interesting neurotic phenomenon.” (Cassirer 1946:6)<sup>122</sup>

While anthropologist Edmund Leach maintains that “*myth ... is the counterpart of ritual: myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth, they are one and the same*” (1954: 13) by no means all researchers have regarded myth and ritual even to be inherently related phenomena. I, however, shall follow both Leach and fellow anthropologist, S. J. Tambiah in “*the attempt to see myth and ritual as two closely related domains and to examine their dialectical relationship*” (Tambiah 1970:3; in my case further adding ‘music’ for something like a ‘trialectical relationship’). I will, for this reason, not delegate myth and ritual to separate chapters, but shall treat them in conjunction.

While several definitions of both phenomena have been proposed, formalistic attempts at determining myth and ritual by a set of common, universal properties generally arise out of “*a false preconception, namely that ‘myth’ is a closed category with the same characteristics in different cultures ... ‘general theories’ of myth and ritual are no simple matter*” (Kirk 1964; cited in Doty 2000:xi). Ernst Cassirer states: “*A theory of myth is ... from the beginning laden with difficulties. Myth is nontheoretical in its very meaning and essence.*” (1944:73; a notion that, or at least this is my conviction, also holds true for ritual and music). General definitions of myth and ritual that have so far been proposed thus, like in the case of definitions of music, tend to be seriously flawed, either because they take a particular, culturally and historically situated example as being normative for the phenomenon as a whole, or because they retreat to abstract reductions that are difficult to reconcile with any given empirical datum.

The second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion* attempts to define myth:

“*Muthos* in its meaning of ‘myth’ describes a story about Gods and superhuman beings. A myth is an expression of the sacred in words: it reports realities and events from the origin of the world that remain valid as the basis and purpose of all there is. Consequently, a myth functions as a

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122 Elizabeth Baeten, quoting the same paragraph, notes that „[t]he reflection and the reflected are much

more intimately related than Cassirer admits. If the subject of myth is a mirror reflecting our intellectual concerns, our intellectual concerns mirror myth as well.“ (1996:163).

model for human activity, society, wisdom, and knowledge. The word *mythology* is used for the entire body of myths found in a given tradition. It is also used as a term for the study of myths.” (Bolle in Jones [ed.] 2005: 6359)

Being obviously aware of the problems inherent in postulating any essentialist, property-based definition, the author adds: “*The definition given here contains elements on which not all specialists would agree or place the same emphasis.*” (ibid.). The same standard reference puts forth a definition of ritual as being

“those conscious and voluntary, repetitious and stylized symbolic bodily actions that are centered on cosmic structures and/or sacred presences ... ritual is intentional bodily engagement in the paradigmatic forms and relationships of reality. As such, ritual brings not only the body but also that body’s social and cultural identity to the encounter with the transcendental realm.” (Zuesse in Jones [ed.] 2005 [1987]:7834).

The fact that the author tries to come to terms with ‘ritual’ by, in a single paragraph, throwing at it any and all adjectives and predicates that somehow might be deemed relevant - ‘conscious’, ‘voluntary’, ‘repetitious’, ‘stylized’, ‘symbolic’, ‘bodily’, ‘cosmic’, ‘sacred’, ‘intentional’, ‘social’, ‘cultural’, ‘transcendental’ - illustrates the problems inherent in defining such a complex and inconsistent cultural phenomenon by reference to essential constituent properties. Catherine Bell, in the same volume, therefore adds:

“The term *ritual* remains difficult to define, which is hardly surprising, since central activities and concepts are always the ones probed most restlessly. The difficulties attending the definition of *ritual* testify to the fundamental role it is given in religion and social life, as well as to its attractiveness as a focus for current theorizing about religion in general.” (Bell in Jones [ed.] 2005:7848)

Bell herself, in her *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (1992), proposes a definition of ritual based not on common attributions, but on ritual as an *activity*, emphasizing its fundamental characteristic of ‘setting apart’ a specific situation or occurrence from the ordinary ‘run of things’:

“Viewed as practice, ritualization involves the very drawing, in and through the activity itself of a privileged distinction between ways of acting, specifically between those acts being performed and those being contrasted, mimed, or implicated somehow. That is, *intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself* – to various degrees and in various ways – from other ways of acting within any particular culture. At a basic level, ritualization is the production of this differentiation. At a more complex level, ritualization is a

*way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast*, differentiating itself as more important or powerful. Such privileged distinctions may be drawn in a variety of culturally specific ways that render the ritualized acts dominant in status.” (Bell 1992:90; my emphases).

Bell's concept of ritual as establishing a “*privileged contrast*” will serve as a guiding idea to my attempts at understanding also what music, on a most fundamental level, does among the Moken as well as among ourselves, claiming that making music is essentially a ritualistic act.

Before I turn to the mythical explanations and ritual practices of the Moken sea nomads, it seems appropriate to give a brief outline of the development of these terms, ‘myth’ and ‘ritual’, and their diverse adaptations and interpretations as analytic concepts in scholarly discourse. This overview will, by necessity, be both synoptic and inchoate as I am neither familiar with the work of every author to the same extent, nor have all of the proposed approaches had the same significance for the development of theory and method with regard to the study of myth and ritual in anthropology and related fields, including ethnomusicology.

While trying to strike a balance between a systematic and yet mostly chronological presentation, I will appropriate a more thorough treatment to one of the most influential thinkers on, especially, myth: German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer's thought stands, in my opinion, as the most thorough and most comprehensive approach to interpreting myth as a fundamental activity of the mind.

I shall also appropriate several pages to French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss who is often presented as a kind of antagonist to Cassirer. Lévi-Strauss's intellectual influence during the second half of the twentieth century has been considerable. His approach at explaining the human condition out of a general, systematic sameness of their mythical tales, an underlying structure of world-making, is, superficially, not dissimilar to Cassirer's attempts made a generation earlier, but were certainly more influential, foundational of an entire school (called ‘structuralism’).

While Cassirer's work never came to be associated with a particular

school of thought,<sup>123</sup> his fundamental ideas nevertheless found their way into the study of man 'through the back door', through the work of Victor Turner, Mary Douglas, and, most importantly, Clifford Geertz.

With regard to ritual, my theoretical outlook is somewhat more eclectic. The works of British anthropologist, Victor Turner and his American contemporary, Clifford Geertz, as well as the writings of German classicists, Walter F. Otto (1874-1958) and Walter Burkert (1933-2015) have perhaps exerted a greater influence on my own thinking on the subject than others.

American anthropologist of art, Robert Plant Armstrong (1919-1984), will be given the final word in this segment as his thought is probably closest to my own, summing up most of what will be of significance later in the present thesis more clearly and concisely than I could have done myself.

The works of a number of authors that have published on the topics at issue will, however, not be taken into account, either because it is my belief that their respective contribution with regard to the subject of this thesis is mostly marginal, or because their central assumptions are implicit in the work of later writers. This is especially the case with psychological and psychoanalytical accounts of myth and ritual, such as those by Sigmund Freud, Carl G. Jung, Karl Kerényi, Erik Erikson, and James Hilman. The school of myth-oriented literary criticism (e.g. Robert Graves, Roland Barthes, Raymond Williams, Northrop Frye)<sup>124</sup> will be passed over for the same reasons.

It is of particular interest with regard to the key subject of the present thesis that several of the authors introduced below explicitly draw a connection between the realm of myth and/or ritual on the one hand and the sphere of creative expression in general, and that of music and dance in particular, on the other. While it occurred to these writers that this affiliation between, basically, the religious sentiment and the aesthetic sentiment is crucial to the understanding of these phenomena, they arrive at this insight from quite different

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123 Susanne K. Langer, though, carried on some of the central tenets of his philosophy, as did notable figures associated with the Warburg Library/Institute, both in Hamburg and after its relocation to London, such as Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, and Gertrud Bing (cf. Levine 2013).

124 For a comprehensive overview of myth in literature and literary criticism, see the monumental study of Brunel (ed., 1996 [1988]).

presuppositions and directions. I will attempt to summarize the diverse connections suggested between myth, ritual, and music at the end of this segment.

### **5.1.1 The Post-Enlightenment Crisis and the Emergence of the Humanities**

In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the European conception of the world underwent profound changes. During the middle ages, reality had been regarded as a manifestation of the divine plan, as a 'thought of God'. During the Age of Enlightenment this view was amended by the epochal discoveries of the natural sciences: God's plan now revealed itself in eternal, unalterable mechanical laws. The world, including man, was a great, marvelous machine, set in motion in the moment of creation, imperturbably running its predetermined course until Judgment Day.

This world view, with the Christian Occident firmly established at its center, came to be seriously challenged, first by the Copernican revolution, then by the discovery of more and more civilizations outside of Europe, often reaching back into the distant past, finally culminating in the rationalism and secularism of post-Cartesian Philosophies (Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke). The ensuing *Crise de la conscience européenne* (Paul Hazard 1935; cf. Picht 1987: 102), the unsettling insight that Western culture, society and religion were not grounded on absolute truths (with other cultures being merely primitive precursors or degenerate deviations), forced scholars at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth century to gradually acknowledge the fundamental relativity of man's ways of life. Eternal truths and absolute certainties were no longer to be found in one's own particular traditions.

As a result, history, the comparative study of religions, social and cultural anthropology, archaeology and sociology began to emerge as academic disciplines in an effort to systematically investigate the empirical material of all times and cultures - Scripture; the writings of classical antiquity as well as of ancient Persia, India, and China; the remains of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and, a little later, Central and South America; and the artifacts and reports of

newly discovered 'primitive' societies - hoping thus to somehow compile a newly integrated view of the human condition to replace the old one that had been rendered naïve and untenable during the Age of Reason.

The enlightenment conception of man that had been championed by Vico, Rousseau, and Herder, the idea of an essential and uniform *Consensus gentium*, a general sameness in feeling, thought, and judgment uniting all mankind, soon faced reasons for discontent: All too easily the noble idea of 'all men are essentially the same'<sup>125</sup> became distorted into the paternalistic notion that 'all men are essentially *like us*'. And this notion had to come to grief as it was confronted with the social and cultural realities in other parts of the world. Too different were the customs, beliefs, and morals of other peoples for Europeans to unprejudicely embrace them as their next of kin:

"The trouble with this kind of view ... is that the image of constant human nature independent of time, place, and circumstance, of studies and professions, transient fashions and temporary opinions, may be an illusion, that what man is may be so entangled with where he is, who he is, and what he believes that it is inseparable from them. It is precisely the consideration of such a possibility that led to the rise of the concept of culture and the decline of the uniformitarian view of man. Whatever else modern anthropology asserts ... it is firm in the conviction that men unmodified by the customs of particular places do not in fact exist, have never existed, and most importantly, could not in the very nature of the case exist ... This circumstance makes the drawing of a line between what is natural, universal, and constant in man and what is conventional, local and variable extraordinarily difficult. In fact, it suggests that to draw such a line is to falsify the human situation, or at least to misrender it seriously." (Geertz 1973: 35-36)

Relief for this dilemma arrived in the form of Darwin's theory of *The Origin of Species* (1859), leading to the application of the concept of the evolutionary process in explaining also the overwhelming diversity of man's ways of life: Society and culture were now seen as 'evolving' in distinct, ascending increments, from simple to complex, guided by 'natural principles': religion proceeding along the steps '*animism-polytheism-monotheism*' (E. B. Tyler 1871); society along the triad of '*savagery-barbarism-civilization*' (L. H. Morgan

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125 A notion that has long since been proven correct by the irrefutable evidence of human genetics: All men are indeed "created equal" (Jefferson), members of one and the same biological species, a fundamental insight that is certainly not dependent on approving nods from the side of the humanities, let alone from ethnomusicology.



1877); human intellect progressing through '*magic-religion-science*' (J. G. Frazer 1890-1915).

This evolutionary perspective allowed for Europeans to keep the moral high ground by maintaining the enlightenment view of the unity of all mankind, yet without having to consider other peoples as equals: Other peoples were simply pre-civilized and pre-literate pre-monotheists, pre-scientists and pre-technologists (and, with regard to our topic, 'pre-Pythagorases' and 'pre-Mozarts'). They just lagged somewhat behind in evolutionary development.

And this could easily be remedied by bringing to them the blessings of human progress, mercifully providing a shortcut to 'civilization'. Hence, 'social Darwinism' fitted the spirit of the age and was thus welcomed with gratitude. The order of the world that had lasted for more than a millennium, the alleged naturalness and self-evidence of Christian-Occidental supremacy, had been seriously called into question. Now, the misapplication of Darwin's theory allowed not only for the reinstatement of the old order of Western civilization being founded on absolute truths, although this time not based on religious but on scientific legitimation. It also became the a posteriori moral justification for a European conquest of all but the entire world that had already begun a century before - the Age of Imperialism.

### **5.1.2 Early Works**

While collections of folk beliefs and rites had been compiled by both clergymen and secular scholars (e.g. Marcellus 1516; Godefroy 1649; Friese 1703), the modern concepts of myth and ritual emerged only in the 1880s in what *avant la lettre* came to be called the 'ritual turn' in the study of culture (cf. Steiner 1956). Before the age of enlightenment, ancient and foreign beliefs and religious ceremonies had generally been viewed from the perspective of Christian theology, i.e. as pagan heresy or at least as infantile superstitions to be eradicated, its heathen followers to be converted to the one true faith (and often much worse). In the wake of the Age of Enlightenment, both the myths of classical antiquity and the rituals of non-European societies for the first time came to be seen as expressions of a universal urge among humans to

collectively believe in some kind of higher order. While the Judaeo-Christian attitude continued to prevail until well into the twentieth century, non-European and especially 'primitive' religions came to be regarded as a window into the earliest beginnings of religion itself. And it was these questions concerning the origins of the religious sentiment and of religious institutions that stood at the center of the first investigations into myth and ritual.

Among the earliest scholars, especially the works of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744; *Principi di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla Comune Natura delle Nazioni*, 1725), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803; *Vom neuen Gebrauch der Mythologie*, 1767; *Götterlehre oder mythische Dichtungen*, 1795), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854; lectures on *Philosophie der Mythologie*, 1842), Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900; *Essay on Comparative Mythology*, 1858),<sup>126</sup> Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889; *La Cité Antique*, 1864; Engl. 1963), Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917; *Primitive Culture*, 1871), and Andrew Lang (1844-1912; *Myth, Ritual and Religion* 1887) were of lasting influence.

In his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) Scottish orientalist, William Robertson Smith (1846-1894) was the first to describe the early customs of the Judaeo-Christian tradition not as being the consequence of divine revelation bestowed upon a chosen people, but as a set of collective social practices with a particular role in ascertaining the cohesion of an ancient society. He maintained that communal ritual acts, especially the sacrifice of the tribal "*totem*" (ibid.; a term Robertson Smith had borrowed from the Algonquin languages), were the primal religious attitude, and not sacred mythical narratives or notions of an immortal soul, as had previously been most generally asserted (ibid. 18-20 and passim; Bell 1997:261-2).

Anglican missionary, Robert Henry Codrington (1830-1922) had published one of the earliest monographs on a contemporary non-European religious system that was based on first hand experience (*The Melanesians: Studies in their*

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<sup>126</sup> Müller famously regarded myth a "*disease of language*" (ibid.).

*Anthropology and Folk Lore*, 1891; see also Cassirer 1946:62-63). Therein, he introduced the concept of 'mana', a "spiritual power" permeating all things, persons as well as objects, as well as the notion of 'taboo', the idea of a realm of sacred forbiddance, mythically protected by unalterable rules of conduct and negative sanctions; a term that even was adopted as a loanword into colloquial English, French, and German, albeit with slightly modified meanings. Codrington hereby promoted the incorporation of new, foreign concepts into the scholarly discourse on religion.

Between 1890 and 1915, British classicist, James George Frazer (1854-1941) published *The Golden Bough*, a (in its final edition) twelve-volume anthology attempting to compile and codify the religious customs of all times and peoples. A central theme that Frazer introduced into scholarly discourse was the concept of 'magic', conceived as ritualistic attempts at manipulating and altering the natural and social environment, the course of history, and of individual destiny. Frazer relegated beliefs in magic to the state of the infancy of the human mind, "[f]or there are strong grounds for thinking that, in the evolution of thought, magic has preceded religion" (Frazer 1911:164). However, Frazer also saw ritual behavior as "the original source of most of the expressive forms of cultural life" (Bell 1997:5), including myth and art. Despite his generally infantilizing stance towards the myths and beliefs of 'primitive' peoples,<sup>127</sup> Frazer's work, not least because of its impressive comprehensiveness, was highly influential on early anthropologists.

Cambridge classicist, Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928) argued, like Robertson Smith and Frazer, for the primacy of ritual over myth in the development of the religious customs of classical antiquity. In her highly influential principal work *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903), Harrison moved from an analysis of ancient rites to explanations of the corresponding mythical notions, which she interpreted as subordinate linguistic interpretations of the underlying

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<sup>127</sup> "The old notion that the savage is the freest of mankind is the reverse of the truth. He is a slave, not indeed to a visible master, but to the past, to the spirits of his dead forefathers, who haunt his steps from birth to death, and rule him with a rod of iron." (Frazer 1911: 47; aiming primarily at the thought of Rousseau's).

ritual. In doing so, she was instrumental in establishing what came to be known as the 'ritual-dominant' school of thought that came to be associated with a group of scholars collectively known as the 'Cambridge ritualists' (the core of this group being Harrison herself, Gilbert Murray [1866-1957], Francis M. Cornford [1874-1943], and Arthur B. Cook [1868-1952]). This often highly speculative (and, perhaps because of this, eminently fruitful) approach saw the communal rite as the primal expression of the religious sentiment (cf. Doty 2000: 337-345).

Harrison's *Ancient Art and Ritual* (1913) is of particular interest with regard to the subject of the present thesis as it was the first attempt to systematically investigate the underlying coherencies between ritual practice and artistic expression: "So closely, indeed, are they linked that we even begin to suspect they may have a common origin." (Harrison 1913: 9). Harrison shows that "Greek linguistic instinct pointed plainly at the fact that art and ritual are near relations." (ibid.:18): the classical Greek word for religious ceremony, *dromenon* (δρομενών, 'thing done'), is of the same etymological root as *drama* (δρᾶμα; both from δράω [drao], 'I do') - a connection that, according to Harrison, survives in our referring to a dramatic artists as an *actor*, i.e., 'someone who does' (ibid: 69-98 and passim).<sup>128</sup> Hence, Harrison regards Greek drama, and especially the choral dance, as a sublimated form of archaic ritual: "We shall find in these dances the meeting-point between art and ritual ... a ritual bridge, as it were, between actual life and those representations of life we call art." (ibid.: 13). To Harrison, the original move from pure rite towards dramatic art occurred at that moment that a part of the community detached itself from the immediate action of the ritual itself, the *dromenon*, to become contemplative spectators. She concludes that

"ritual is ... a frequent and perhaps universal transition stage between actual life and that peculiar contemplation of our emotion towards life we call art ... art ... did not arise straight out of life, but out of that collective emphasis of the needs and desires of life which we have agreed to call ritual." (ibid.: 122)

A fundamental assertion I shall attempt to support in the course of this thesis.

Further influential works to emerge from the school of thought of the

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<sup>128</sup> The corresponding Greek term for 'actor', however, would correctly be ὑποκριτής (hupokrités), 'one who answers'.

'Cambridge ritualists' were F. M. Cornford's *From Religion to Philosophy* (1912), as well as Lord Raglan's *The Hero* (1937).

While myth and ritual studies during the nineteenth century had primarily been the domain of classics scholarship and theology, it increasingly received important stimuli from the new disciplines of social and cultural anthropology, sociology, and the comparative study of religion. Over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century, deliberations about the primacy of either myth or ritual in the formation of the religious complex, the question of 'which came first', became increasingly disputed and challenged as a meaningful framework: Clyde Kluckhohn, in retrospect, called the approach "*meaningless as all questions of 'the hen or the egg' form ... neither myth nor ritual can be postulated as 'primary'*" (1942:54f.; cited in Bell 1997:8).

### **5.1.3 Sociological Theories**

Among the most consequential thinkers on religion, myth, and ritual was French sociologist, Émile Durkheim (1858-1917). Influenced by Fustel's treatise on ancestor worship, as well as by Robertson Smith's sociology of religion, Durkheim's *The Elementary forms of the Religious Life* (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 1912) is among the few early works that remained a key reference throughout the twentieth century. Durkheim associates himself with the earlier convictions regarding the supremacy of the ritual act over the sacred mythical narrative in the search for what lies at the center of human religiosity. He regarded religion primarily as a 'social fact' ("*fait social*"), stating that "*religion is something eminently social*" (1912: 10). For Durkheim, common systems of faith were primarily a means of organizing and structuring a society, providing cohesion and unity. Myth, therefore, is not so much concerned with man's perception of the natural world, but with his being in society. Natural phenomena, like storm or lightning, are not conceptualized as physical forces but as social powers, as projections of social life epitomizing social might and authority. The fundamental notion that man does not primarily perceive himself as being a part of nature, but, to the contrary, interprets his

natural environment in anthropomorphic and social terms ranks among the most significant insights into the fundamentals of human culture and into the human condition in general. This point of view shall also permeate much of what will be said below.

Durkheim established the notion of a fundamental dichotomy between the spheres of the 'profane' and the 'sacred', that would later be central to the thought of scholars such as Mircea Eliade and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Combining sociological with psychological theories, he developed an elaborated explanatory model of strong emotional involvement, or "*effervescence*", as the fundamental force behind religious beliefs, with ritual acts as its essential expression. To Durkheim, the notions of the sacred, of spirit beings, of the ancestors, and of a God or Gods were collective abstractions by which society reflected not upon the external, natural world, but upon *itself*; religious faith and social institutions were thus fundamentally interdependent. Durkheim's interest centered on particularly 'simple' societies and their belief systems, especially totemism and ancestor worship, what he referred to as the "*clan cult*". In the belief systems of the Arunta peoples of Western Australia, who worshiped symbolic depictions of each clan's totem animal, called *churinga*, he believed to have found the most archaic form of human spiritual life. In the form of the *churinga*, the clan in fact, according to Durkheim, deified and worshiped itself - its particular social structure, its modes of genealogy and authority, and the fundamental 'rightness' of its overall way of being. Durkheim thereby drew the attention of scholars of religion away from the great civilizations of antiquity and towards the many contemporary small scale societies around the world.

Romanian scholar of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) developed Durkheim's distinction between the spheres of the 'sacred' and the 'profane' into a comprehensive theory of religious experience. To Eliade, this is the fundamental, primal distinction man makes about reality-at-large:

"Man becomes aware of the Sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the Profane. To designate the act of *manifestation* of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany* ... In his encounters with the Sacred, man experiences a reality that does not belong to our world yet is encountered in and through objects or events that are part

of the world.” (Eliade 1959: 10-11; emphasis in original).

Marcel Mauss (1873-1950), a pupil (and nephew) of Durkheim's, studied the reciprocity intrinsic to the phenomena of gift exchange and sacrificial offerings in 'archaic' societies (*Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*, 1925; transl. into Engl. as *The Gift*, 1954). Mauss's starting point was the observation of a seeming paradox: while gifts appear, by (Western) definition, to be given voluntarily and out of altruistic good will, love, or friendship, gift exchange is in fact governed by strict rules. The mutual reciprocity of gift-giving is mandatory if one is not to lose social reputation and status (or at least not to be plagued by bad conscience). Sacrificial offerings, according to this logic, thus oblige even the Gods or spirits to return the favor. This results in a commitment to perpetual reciprocity - the obligation to receive and to compensate - within society as well as towards the deities, upon which the cohesion of the community is ultimately founded. Mauss's work was to have a substantial influence on Claude Lévi-Strauss and the program of structural anthropology.

#### **5.1.4 Anthropological Theories**

Franz Boas (1858-1942), a German scholar who became the founding father of American cultural anthropology, studied the culture, and especially the art, myths, and rituals, of the American Indians of the North-West Coast (Boas 1898, 1922). With the *potlach* gift-exchange ceremony among the Kwakiutl (Kwakwaka'wakw), Boas described an entire complex economy based on ritualistic redistribution of accumulated goods. Central to the *potlach* was the transmission of names, titles, and privileges inherited from within the host's lineage. This had to be witnessed by high-ranking guests and confirmed by abundant gift-giving. The ranking and position of the guests to be endowed with gifts was to be strictly observed. As a result, their social and ritual position was publicly displayed, recognized and consolidated. It occasionally happened that the heirs of a high-ranking deceased spent all their inherited wealth as part of such a ceremony to pay homage to their dead ancestor, to plead for his

benevolence, and to also confirm their rank within the spiritual and ceremonial hierarchy of the community. For the social balance of Northwest coast Indian society, this meant that it could rarely come to a permanent accumulation of wealth in the hands of individuals or families, preventing any form of plutocracy.

British-Australian biologist, W. Baldwin Spencer's (1860-1929) *The Arunta: a Study of a Stone Age People* (1927) was, as the title suggests, deeply rooted in the cultural evolutionist theories of the time. Spencer, however, was among the first investigators to base his account of the society, customs, beliefs, legends, and rituals of the peoples of central Australia on what later would come to be called ethnographic field work.

Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), a French independent Scholar of Dutch-German descent, was instrumental in establishing the comparative method in ritual studies. Influenced by Frazer's *Golden Bough*, he attempted to show general patterns in social institutions among various cultural groups. Van Gennep

“specifically focused on those rituals that accompany life crises, those critical moments in social life when individuals move from one status to another. In an echo of the three stages of the dying and rising God pattern ... van Gennep argued that these life crisis rites display a three-stage sequence: separation, transition, incorporation.” (Bell 1997:36)

In his 1909 work, *The Rites of Passage* (orig. *Les rites de passage*) he analyzed a particular type of ritualistic behavior, that, according to van Gennep, constituted a universal trait of human communities: the eponymous ‘rite of passage’. From the initiation rites of tribal groups to christian baptism, confirmation, and marriage, societies the world over conceptualize life as being subdivided into distinct, successive phases of social identity, role, and status (infancy, childhood, puberty, adulthood, marriage and childbirth, old age, death). The transition from one phase to the next being acknowledged and emphasized through communal rituals, structuring and ordering societal relations and reconstituting and reaffirming the collective worldview.



Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) is generally regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern ethnography. Like Mauss, Malinowski was particularly interested in the ritualized modalities that regulated the exchange of goods. During the First World War, he studied a ceremonial exchange system among the Trobriand islanders, called *kula*, as well as their garden and seafaring magic. Malinowski discovered that *“myths comprise a strong working force within societies ... a ‘mythological magna carta’”* (Doty 2000: 67). Based on his own experience, he subsequently demanded long term fieldwork and mastery of the respective people's language as prerequisites for serious anthropological research. Malinowski's aim was *“to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world”* (Malinowski 1964 [1922]: 25; emphasis in original). To this end he practiced what he called *‘participant observation’*, an approach that came to be the discipline-defining method of social and cultural anthropology. The concept of magic, in recourse to Frazer, lies at the center of Malinowski's theory of ritual which he sees as being aimed at ultimately rational, pragmatic ends: *„early cult and ritual are closely associated with practical concerns as well as with mental needs, there must exist an intimate connection between social organization and religious belief.“* (Malinowski 1948: 5), a thought that mirrors Durkheim's. This approach, that, in analogy to the functioning of the organs of a living organism, interprets cultural institutions, beliefs, and practices as working towards sustaining and stabilizing society (generally without the members of the society being aware of the fact), came later to be known as the school of ‘functionalism’. However, while Durkheim had been concerned primarily with the functional aspects of religion and ritual within society-at-large, Malinowski interprets these phenomena from the viewpoint of the psychology of the individual. He acknowledged the sacred/profane dichotomy established by Durkheim as a theoretical concept, yet poses the question whether this distinction is made among ‘primitive’ peoples to the same degree as among ‘civilized’ men:

„We shall have to inquire whether the sociological setting of the rational and empirical behavior differs from that of ritual and cult. Above all we shall ask, do the natives distinguish the two domains and keep them apart, or is the field of knowledge constantly swamped by superstition, ritualism, magic or religion?“ (ibid.: 10).

Raymond Firth (1901-2002) continued and expanded Malinowski's inquiries into the symbolic and ritualized aspects of economic exchange.

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe Brown (1881-1955) further developed Durkheim's sociological interpretation of myth and ritual. During the first decade of the twentieth century he conducted fieldwork among the Andaman islanders (Radcliffe-Brown 1922a, 1922b), later in Western Australia (Radcliffe-Brown 1931), where “*he sought a more systematic correlation between religious ideas and social structure, theorizing that if the image of God is a collective representation or projection of the social group*”, as Durkheim had argued, “*then different forms of social organization will have different self-reflective notions of God.*” (Bell 1997: 27). As such a clear, systematic correlation between religion and social structure could not be shown to exist, he ultimately abandoned this theory. Radcliffe-Brown instead developed a theory of ritual as a means of maintaining group cohesion and solidarity. He argued that, contrary to Malinowski, rituals not only expressed or mitigated psychological pressure, but simultaneously did produce particular mental attitudes in themselves, creating the sentiment of dependence on otherworldly forces (ibid.: 28). Though Radcliffe-Brown himself rejected the label of functionalism, his approach is often referred to as ‘structural functionalism’ to distinguish it from Malinowski's ‘social functionalism’.

British anthropologist, Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) is best known for his influential study on *Witchcraft, Oracle and Magic among the Azande* (1937). In it he describes the belief systems of the Azande peoples in the (then Anglo-Egyptian) Sudan. According to Evans-Pritchard, witchcraft is omnipresent in Azande everyday life. Illness, accidents, miscarriage, and the consequences of misfortune are invariably believed to be caused by witchcraft. Unfortunate events never happen by mere chance, a concept the Azande do not acknowledge. For example, if a granary built on wooden posts, under which people sit, collapses because termites have perforated the supporting posts, then the termites are assumed to be the immediate cause for the collapse of the granary. During the day, people often sit below the granary to escape the sun.

While it is acknowledged that the termites are the agents that effected the granary's coming down, the fact that the grain storage is collapsing just at that very moment when exactly these particular persons are sitting underneath it, is attributed to malevolent magic:

“We say that the granary collapsed because its supports were eaten away by termites. That is the cause that explains the collapse of the granary. We also say that people were sitting under it at the time because it was in the heat of the day and they thought it would be a comfortable place to talk and work. This is the cause of people being under the granary at the time it collapsed. To our minds the only relationship between these two independently caused facts is their coincidence in time and space. We have no explanation of why the two chains of causation intersected at the certain time and in a certain place, for there is no interdependence between them. Zande philosophy can supply the missing link. The Zande knows that the supports were undermined by termites and that people were sitting beneath the granary in order to escape the heat of the sun. But he knows besides why these two events occurred at a precisely similar moment in time and space. It was due to the action of witchcraft. If there had been no witchcraft people would have been sitting under the granary and it would not have fallen on them, or it would have collapsed but the people would not have been sheltering under it at the time. Witchcraft explains the coincidence of these two happenings” (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 69-70).

Evans-Pritchard's oft-cited example raised a number of questions about what could be deemed 'rational thought' in any society, including his own. Was the belief in witchcraft any more irrational than the belief in a concept like 'coincidence',<sup>129</sup> in the doctrines of Christianity, or in a particular political ideology? Evans-Pritchard thus became a vocal critic of reductionism and abstract theorizing. He was particularly discontented with the ahistorical approach prevalent in British social anthropology, at the time dominated by his teacher, Malinowski. In his opinion, it was essential to integrate both intellectual and social history into anthropological research to comprehend the sets of ideas and the structures of meaning that make up a society's worldview (a point on which I wholeheartedly agree with him).

In his treatise *Naven* (1958) on the eponymous cross-dressing rite among the latmul people of New Guinea, Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) employed concepts taken from the then new field of 'systems analysis' (or 'cybernetics'; cf.

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129 An explanation in the negative, denoting merely the absence of causal coherence.

Wiener 1948). He attempted to systematically reveal the complex interdependence between the structure of the ritual, the psychological states of the participants, and the wider social-cultural dynamics surrounding it. Yet

“[a]s he worked out logical explanations for the naven ritual on each of these levels, he argued, it became apparent to him that all of the categories of analysis he was using - structure, culture, the social, etc. - were not facts of New Guinea life but abstractions created and manipulated by social scientists like himself” (Bell 1997: 34).

Bateson, like Evans-Pritchard, thus pointed out an elementary dilemma that seems generally to plague too strictly analytic and too ambitiously systematic approaches to the study of culture: the reification of abstract concepts and categories and their naïve, unquestioned transfer from the researcher's own life-world to instances where they do not apply.

South African-born anthropologist, Max Gluckman (1911-1975) argued that earlier scholars had viewed ritual acts but one-sidedly as maintaining social order and providing group cohesion through affirmation of common beliefs and values. Gluckman, in his *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (1965) showed rituals, on the contrary, to be rather more about acting out complex and ambiguous social tensions and conflicts, an idea quite similar to that previously proposed by Radcliffe-Brown. He refers to what he calls “*rituals of rebellion*”, in which accepted patterns of authority and social hierarchy are temporarily overturned, often with regard to traditional gender roles and the subordination of women. Rather than redeeming social tension, ritual may provide catharsis by exaggerating these tensions. In ritual, Gluckman argued, it is the social relations themselves that are being symbolically enacted. Thus

“Gluckman's work shifted the definition of ritual away from the Durkheimian notion that rite was primarily concerned with religion or ‘the sacred’ ... the term ‘ritual’ could loosely refer to a wide spectrum of formalized but not necessarily religious activities. Henceforth, the study of ritual had to do with society and social relationships, not just religion or religious institutions.” (Bell 2004: 39).

Despite the heterogeneity of approaches that have been subsumed under the umbrella term of ‘functionalism’ and its diverse sub-categories, they evoked a

common point of critique: The central criticism put forth against the functionalist school was that it tended to view culture and society - and with it religion, myth, ritual, and art - as static and fixed constructs and made no provision to incorporate the historical dynamics of socio-cultural change (see, e.g., Geertz 1973).

Arguably the most seminal scholar to study myth during the twentieth century was French philosopher-turned-anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). Influenced primarily by Durkheim and Mauss as well as by Saussure's structural semiotics, Lévi-Strauss came to consider anthropology to be a positive social science in the tradition of Comté, concerned primarily with "*uncovering lawful relations among empirical facts*" about the 'savage mind' (Geertz 1973:346). Hence, his approach is both comparativistic and universalistic, searching, in stark contrast to the criticisms expressed by Evans-Pritchard and Bateson, for the general principles, the universal 'code' underlying the diversity of human cultures and their patterns of thought. According to Lévi-Strauss, myths consist of individual units or building blocks ("*mythemes*") arranged according to initially indeterminate rules. These individual units can enter into oppositional relationships, forming contrastive pairs that represent the most elementary structures of thought of a particular cultural group: "*Mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution ... the purpose of the myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction*" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 224-9). In his *Mythologiques* (4 vols., 1964-71; Engl. transl. 1969-81) Lévi-Strauss attempts to demonstrate that analytical models conceived according to the myths of a particular 'primitive' society can themselves be interpreted as transformations of again other myth-models from the same or even a different society, and that the totality of these models reveals recurring 'structural principles', allowing for a formalization of the initially indeterminate rules. Since myths are the product of a particular culture, their underlying structural rules first represent the laws of thought that shape each respective culture. Yet Lévi-Strauss echoes Rousseau's *Consensus gentium* ideals in his conviction that "*behind the empirical diversity of human societies there was an underlying unity, that the mind of mankind was*

*fundamentally the same everywhere*” (Morris 1987: 265). Mythical structures are both determined by, and manifestations of, the general processes of the mind, since fundamentally identical mental functions shape all forms of human experience and expression: „[T]he structures of the mind are, as it were, ‘immanent’ in the cultural data - in myths and symbolisms.“ (ibid.). Hence, according to Lévi-Strauss, there are universal characteristics to be found in this reciprocal relation between particular culture and universal cognitive constant - in itself a kind of oppositional pair - and by systematically analyzing a sufficiently large number of myths, the basic structural principles of human thought and ideation *as such* may ultimately be explained. Lévi-Strauss's aspiration thus is geared towards the “*discovery of structural constants that would be independent of the contingent observer and his or her particular categories, values, and beliefs.*” (Johnson 2003: 6).

Lévi-Strauss famously flattered the ego of musicologists by stating that music was “*the supreme mystery of human knowledge*“ (1964: xx). Hence, he “*singled out music and myth as the two most promising areas for the structural analysis of cultures*” (Kerman 1985: 181). Of all the anthropological scholars of myth, Lévi-Strauss makes the most frequent as well as the most extensive references to what he refers to as the ‘homology’ of myth and music, albeit in a rather idiosyncratic way: “*[T]he myth and the musical work ... appear as conductors of an orchestra whose listeners are the silent performers*” (1969: 25). Musical analogies are more than merely a recurring stylistic stratagem in Lévi-Strauss' work. He even heads the chapters of his *Mythologiques* with titles such as ‘Three-Part Inventions’, ‘Double inverted Canon’, and ‘Toccatà and Fugue’ and models the formal structure of the texts (somewhat) accordingly. Pandora Hopkins (1977: 247) thus considers Lévi-Strauss' references to music “*an integral part of his philosophy*”, explaining that

“Claude Lévi-Strauss was so thoroughly impressed by the structural nature of European art music - and its long history of musical analysis - that he has utilized concepts from this body of musical thought (including set forms themselves) as the intellectual framework for his monumental work on mythology ... He views myths as exhibiting structures similar to the musical constructions that have been so minutely scrutinized by European theorists; thus, he hopes that analytical methods - or models - drawn from musical analysis will enable him to see analogous mythological structures in such a way as to shed light on the pattern-forming nature of the human mind itself.”

(ibid.: 247-8).

And it is this approach that constitutes an obvious problem. Intent on revealing underlying structural principles in myth, Lévi-Strauss looks towards that particular musical tradition that appears to mirror his notion of a system governed by solid structural principles, viz. his own, the theory-laden music of European modernity. Again Hopkins:

“How can anyone seriously attempt to analyze over 800 myths belonging to diverse peoples spanning two continents of the world through apparatus drawn from a single elite tradition from western Europe - and, at that, a musical tradition?” (ibid.: 248).

However, Hopkins continues to explain, from the perspective of Lévi-Strauss's fundamental premises such a seemingly incongruous analogy might exhibit actual explanatory value. Lévi-Strauss regards both myth and music to be infinitely transmutable within their respective spheres, what he calls the “*capacité anagrammatique*“, yet neither translatable into any other expressive form nor ultimately existent in discursive language (ibid.). Both myth and music are, according to Lévi-Strauss, logically prior to rational language, and, while not translatable into one another, at least share structural similarities arising out of universal, pre-linguistic workings of the human mind; both are “*instruments for the obliteration of time*” as well as “*diachronic and synchronic*” at the same time (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 15 and 1958: 218; also cited in Hopkins 1977: 251); both are, he suggests at least implicitly, ultimately variations upon one fundamental *urtext*, the myth-*as-such* and the music-*in-itself*, conflated into a single archetype of primal mental structure. Hence, the classical music of Europe, familiar to Lévi-Strauss and his core readership, makes, at least to him, as good an explanatory analogy as any:

“As happens in the case of an optical microscope, which is incapable of revealing the ultimate structure of matter to the observer, we can only choose between various degrees of enlargement: each one reveals a level of organization which has no more than a relative truth and, while it lasts, excludes the perception of other levels.” (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 3).

Ultimately, however, Lévi-Strauss's extensive references and analogies between music and myth either remain rather vague and constrained (at least

measured against his own positivist aspirations), or can be broken down to the rather trivial notions that both 'have structure' and are fundamentally about 'resolving oppositions' (or, in the case of music, 'tensions') intrinsic to their respective structure, thereby mirroring equal structures and oppositions within the processes of the mind. The notion that particularly myth and music are more adequately described by metaphors of 'opposition' (or its resolution) than other products of the human mind (loc. cit. ritual, political and economic systems, literature, the visual arts, ethics, law), however, seems not at all convincing to me. The fact that Lévi-Strauss sees intrinsic structural and logical affinities between myth and music, yet categorically denies such a relationship with regard to ritual has provoked considerable criticism, among others by Ellen Basso:

"Levi-Strauss's rejection of ritual's pertinence for myth is especially misleading because throughout the New World musical performance is crucial to ritual action. Musical ritual therefore represents a third cultural mode that might have assisted understanding the phenomena of thought to which his life's work has been dedicated." (1985: 9).

Edmund Leach's (1910-1989) *Culture and Communication* (1976) became an influential structuralist treatment of symbolic systems that seeks to combine the approach of Lévi-Strauss with the symbolic theory of Cassirer and the semiotics (or semiology) of both Peirce and Saussure.

Elaborating on concepts developed by, most of all, van Gennep, Radcliffe-Brown, and Gluckman, the work of British anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983) had a lasting influence on ritual studies. Turner interpreted the *rites de passage* of the Ndembu peoples of Zambia as "*social dramas*", making use of a set of complex and dynamic symbolic systems:

"By 'ritual' I mean prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. The symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context." (Turner 1967:19).

He observed that, especially in times of social change, symbolic rituals are performed to provide security in the face of uncertainty. Following the theories



of van Gennep, Turner saw ritual primarily defined by a complementary set of distinct phases: first, ritual acts are set apart from ordinary, everyday life by entering a condition of uncertainty and ambivalence, a state of “*anti-structure*” (1967: 94-96 and passim), associated with the figure of the clown or trickster, with conflict, transgression, and with a general topsyturvy of common values, beliefs, and morals (cf. Doty 2000: 360-64).<sup>130</sup> Turner refers to this as a state of “*liminality*”, a concept I will return to below:

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.” (Turner 1967: 95).

According to Turner, in a ritual context, among participants who go through this liminal phase together, a collective experience of reaffirmation he calls “*communitas*” emerges. This *communitas* creates a common, new identity through the agency of the symbolic actions, dance, and music employed in the ritual process. And it is these concepts of liminality and *communitas* that in Turner's theory bridge the gap between the sphere of ritual and that of artistic creativity:

“Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, ‘edgemen,’ who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in mankind which has not yet been externalized and fixed in structure.” (Turner 1969: 128).

Mary Douglas (1921-2007) likewise developed a symbolic concept of religion and ritual, based on distinctions of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ among the Lele people of the Congo (*Purity and Danger*, 1966; *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, 1970). In her view, the conceptual dichotomy of purity and pollution lies at the core of religious classifications. According to Douglas, the notion of what constitutes ‘dirt’ is not an absolute, but lies in the eye of the beholder. However, dirt in any case violates a relative order, which is why one tries to

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<sup>130</sup> What in Christian Europe and Latin America is associated with the tradition of *carnival*.

restore this order by 'cleaning' or 'tidying up', which may mean very different things in different cultures. Wherever disorder is felt, there are also ideas of order and of what could preserve or endanger it. While Turner had emphasized the dynamism and creative potential of rituals, Douglas saw ritual acts primarily as agents of social stability, with the inherent danger of becoming a reactionary impediment to socio-cultural change, development and adaptation. Like Evans-Pritchard and Bateson, Douglas was highly critical of systematic methodology emulating that of the physical sciences in the study of cultural processes, insisting that the

"ultimate task is to find interpretative procedures that will uncover each bias and discredit its claims to universality ... The human being, stripped of his humanity, is of no use as a conceptual base from which to make a picture of human society. No human exists except steeped in the culture of his time and place." (Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 63).

Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) was strongly influenced by the philosophical theories of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne K. Langer (see [3.6], below), as well as by the work of German sociologist, Max Weber. His article *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (1972) ranks among the seminal works in modern anthropology. While, seen with the eyes of a 'Westerner', not strictly a ritual, at least not in the religious sense, but perhaps more of a sports event, Geertz describes the cockfight as a kind of highly ritualized drama, steeped in symbolism, with strict rules and intense social and emotional involvement on the part of the participants.

To Geertz, the central category in the study of other peoples' attitudes towards life is the general concept of "*meaning*". Following the hermeneutics of French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, Geertz understands culture as a 'text', as a structure of symbols from which meanings can be deduced. The ethnographer tries to 'read' this 'text', which is generally incomplete, incoherent, and full of contradictions. Culture is a 'public document'; it is extrinsic, i.e. located outside the individual subject. Culture is not something that 'is', but something that *takes place* in the concrete course of social interaction between people. The role of the ethnographer is that of an interpreter, trying to make sense of

observable modes of action and behavior, and trying to understand the complex of meaning they represent. Geertz, echoing both Cassirer and Langer, takes culture to be a *“historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms”* (1973: 89). Geertz describes religion as

“a cultural system, that is, a system of symbols that influences people's feelings and motivations by formulating coherent conceptions of the general order of existence. The symbols of religious beliefs and the symbolic activities of religious ritual constitute a system of values that acts as both ‘a model of’ the way things actually are and ‘a model for’ how they should be.” (Bell 1997:66)

Hence, *“[i]n ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined ... turn out to be the same world”* (Geertz 1973: 112). Religion, for Geertz, is

“a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.” (ibid.: 90).

Contrary to most other scholars, Geertz does not consider ritual a means of resolving social tensions or individual tempers, but predominantly a means to publicly *“display”* them (Geertz 1973: 444).

Geertz proposes what he calls *“thick description”*, a term he borrows from British philosopher, Gilbert Ryle, as the most promising, and intellectually most honest, approach towards an interpretation of culture:

“The aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics.” (1973: 28).

Roy Rappaport (1926-1997), who's approach has been designated ‘neo-functional’<sup>1</sup>, studied ritual as a primary mode of adaption of societies also to their natural environment, thereby contributing significantly to the sub-discipline of ‘ecological anthropology’ (or the ‘new ecology’, as it was called by Murphy, 1970). Rappaport, in his influential study on the sacrificial pig slaughtering ceremony, *kaiko*, of the Maring of New Guinea (*Pigs for the Ancestors*, 1968),

described how social conditions (warfare) and economical conditions (pig husbandry) are culturally balanced through ritual acts. Rappaport

“demonstrated how New Guinea ritual activities work to regulate the relationships between the people and their natural resources, thereby maintaining a delicate but essential environmental balance ... Sketching tribal life as a series of exchanges that include everything from genetic matter to stone axes, Rappaport cast social processes like ritual as an intrinsic part of a much larger and embracing cultural ecosystem” (Bell 1997: 29).

Rites, according to Rappaport, are a means of adjusting the spheres of “*population(s)*” and “*ecosystem(s)*” (somewhat biologicistic terms Rappaport nevertheless prefers over ‘society(ies)’ or ‘culture(s)’). In times of conflict, when the husbanding and fattening of pigs claims an undue burden of labor, the excess amount of pigs is ritually slaughtered to ensure the goodwill of the ancestral spirits, and ceremonially distributed among the community. In the ritual act, socioeconomic necessities are tied to the realm of the sacred, thus bestowing a special degree of importance and authority on them, unobtainable otherwise. Once hostilities with other groups cease (or have been mediated through exchange of pork), the fattening of pigs commences once again. As this conciliation of the “*subsystems*” (Rappaport 1984: 40) of human society and the natural environment and its limited resources into “*the larger complex system as a whole*”, a “*ritually regulated ecosystem*” (ibid.) lies at the core of man's survival in the world, Rappaport famously stated: “*I take ritual to be the basic social act.*” (1979: 174; also 1999: 137-8; emphasis in original). In his *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (published posthumously in 1999), Rappaport proposes a working definition that locates ritual at the nexus of a number of concepts that collectively make up the religious experience as a whole:

“[T]he term ‘sacred’ signifies the discursive aspect of religion, that which is or can be expressed in language, whereas ‘numinous’ [a concept first introduced in (R. Otto 1917)] denotes religion's non-discursive, affective, ineffable qualities. The term ‘occult’ refers to religion's peculiar efficacious capacities ... and ‘divine’ will signify its spiritual referents. The term ‘holy’ ... is distinguished here from ‘sacred’ and will be reserved for the total religious phenomenon [again, cf. (R. Otto 1917)], the integration of its four elements which, I will argue, is achieved in ritual ... I take the term ‘ritual’ to denote *the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.*” (Rappaport 1999: 23-4;

emphasis in original).

In contrast to Leach (loc. cit.), Rappaport maintains that myth and ritual, while related, are clearly distinct phenomena (1999: 134). The narrator or chronicler of a mythical tale may have any kind of relationship to the text; it is not required for him or her to believe in its message or to emotionally participate in its content. By contrast, the ritual act necessarily requires the participant to accept the significance of the formal and contentual terms of its performance.

Rappaport also contemplates the relationship between ritual and art:

“Art and religion seem ancient or even primordial companions, and it seems abundantly clear that representations appearing in ritual may evoke emotion and may affect cognition through their aesthetic qualities. Ritual places themselves may be works of art, and they have been, since time immemorial, been embellished by works of art ... among the most plausible attempts to explain art's origins are those taking it to emerge from, or within, religion ... Whether or not the roots of art are set in the soil of religion, or whether its roots and those of religion are together set in a yet deeper stratum of the human condition [as Cassirer and Langer, to which Rappaport refers in the following paragraph, have argued], many students have remarked not only upon their association in practice but upon similarities in their evocative qualities and effects.” (Rappaport 1999: 385).

In accordance with his general biological and ecological outlook,<sup>131</sup> Rappaport also acknowledges the relevancy of ethology for human ritual and consequently includes ritualized behavior among animals (mostly higher primates) in his analyses (Rappaport 1999: 25 and passim; Bell 1992: 89; see also Dissanayake 2006).

### **5.1.5 Philosophical Theories**

A highly influential current of thought about myth and ritual emerged during the first third of the twentieth century in Germany, notably out of a prolific collaboration of scholars from the fields of philosophy and art history. The eminent philosopher, Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) pursues in his philosophy of culture no less than the goal of a systematic foundation of the humanities. In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms (Philosophie der symbolischen Formen, 3*

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<sup>131</sup> Although, especially in his later works, ecological and systematic aspects successively forfeited their central role in Rappaport's thinking as he increasingly incorporated symbolic and interpretive approaches.

vols., 1923-1929; Engl. transl. 1953–1957), he sets out with the process of symbolization which he understands as the principle activity of the mind, a concept he had been developing since the early 1920s:

“By ‘symbolic form’ [is meant] that energy of the spirit through which a mental meaning-content is attached to a sensual sign and inwardly dedicated to this sign. In this sense language, the mythical-religious world, and the arts each present us with a particular symbolic form. For in them all we see the mark of the basic phenomenon, that our consciousness is not satisfied to simply receive impressions from the outside, but rather that it permeates each impression with a free activity of expression. In what we call the objective reality of things we are thus confronted with a world of self-created signs and images.” (Cassirer 1981 [1922]:175)

According to Cassirer, it is not sensory perceptions that are the determining factor in the epistemic process, but the use of symbols. The data conveyed by the senses is transformed into symbols (with the linguistic sphere of concepts, words, and categories being merely one of several symbolisms), spontaneously and continuously, and in this way the material of experience changes its cognitive character: it acquires *meaning*. The primary mental process is the transformation of raw sensory data into meaningful symbolic forms. Man “*has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium*” (Cassirer 1941: 25). Symbolic thought is, therefore, the fundamental condition for *relational* thought, the ability to assemble the appearances of the world into a meaningful contextual whole (Cassirer 1944: 38). Hence, man, for Cassirer, is primarily the “*Animal symbolicum*” (ibid: 23f.). The philosophy of symbolic forms examines the spheres of culture - language, myth, religion, art, history, science, technology - as the exemplary modes of human symbolic activity, as ‘energies of the spirit’ (“*Energien des Geistes*”). By means of these energies the enduring world of human reality is constituted. Cassirer interprets the fundamental natural capacities inherent in human consciousness as distinct forms of symbolic formation. While “[t]here are no strictly separate provinces of the mind” (Cassirer 1979 [1942]: 187), the symbolic modes in which man relates to the world have to be understood as generating irreducible plurality out of a singular process: “[man’s mental] activity tends in different directions, but is not divided into different parts” (ibid.).

Language, myth, religion, art, history, science, and technology are, according to Cassirer, distinct, symbolic 'ways of world-making' (to borrow Nelson Goodman's phrase), forming the matrix within which out of raw sense data a constant, permanent reality emerges, "*a reality consisting of objective things and objective qualities*" (Cassirer 1979 [1941]: 151). The second volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*,

"*Mythical Thought* paints the picture of the emergence of consciousness in nature and its movement out of an immediate, barely formed world. Cassirer imagines the human creature confronting a welter of impressions and forming an organized and meaningful 'world' out of this. The world as constituted out of discrete entities is not *given* to the human creature, it is *created*, and is created as organized and meaningful through the symbolic. Symbols, for Cassirer, are the result of the formative activity of consciousness; symbols are forms achieved through the work of spiritual functioning in the material world." (Baeten 1996: 44; emphasis in original).<sup>132</sup>

Cassirer's analysis of myth stands as arguably the most comprehensive treatment, in breadth and depth, of the phenomenon from a philosophical perspective.<sup>133</sup> It can only be adequately evaluated in light of the intellectual context out of which it emerged. Before being forced from his position as dean of the University of Hamburg by the Nazis, emigrating first to Britain and Sweden, and later to the United States, Cassirer was closely involved with the *Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg*. Its founder, pioneering art historian, Aby Warburg pursued a unique program, introducing ideas from cultural anthropology to the study of European art, especially that of the Italian renaissance. Warburg had found his life's mission in Florence, in the libraries and collections with their treasures from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. He discovered that much of the paintings he so dearly loved were deeply rooted in ancient beliefs and practices: esoteric and hermetic teachings, astrology, pre-Christian rites, and other types of semi-magical lore. Through this realization a new, revolutionary view of the Renaissance epoch emerged in his mind. It did seem to him to not so much be a progressive rebellion of rationalism and

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<sup>132</sup> Cassirer's conception of 'symbolic form' is thus rather different from the usage of the term 'symbol' in semiotics or semiology; i.e.g. in the work of C. S. Peirce and F. de Saussure.

<sup>133</sup> Both A. N. Whitehead and G. Santayana developed complex symbolic theories of the human mind and spirit that may, at least in part, be interpreted as complementary approaches to that of Cassirer's, or *vice versa* (though they do differ in many other aspects of their respective philosophies); cf.: Aiken 1962; Hamburg 1956; Dickson 2003.

humanism against an ecclesiastical dogma frozen in a thousand years, but much more a resurrection of long-suppressed archaic ideas and images exemplifying the rapport between man and the cosmos. These symbolic archetypes of the imaginary world of the Occident Warburg termed *icons*.

In myth, ritual, magic, and astrology Warburg saw the primal, elementary expressions of the creative spirit. During a visit to the New York branch of the Warburg family (the Warburgs were successful and wealthy bankers) in 1885-86, Aby met the Smithsonian Institution's anthropologist, Frank Hamilton Cushing who had conducted field research among the Zuni Indians of New Mexico (Cushing n.d.; Green, Green, and Cushing 1990). Fascinated by Cushing's account, Warburg subsequently set out for the Southwest of the United States himself to study the culture of the Pueblo Indians. He was particularly impressed by the ceremonial life of the Hopi, with their elaborate mask dances and rich mythical traditions (Warburg 1988), which seemed to substantiate the ideas he had formed in Florence with regard to the Italian renaissance: Just like the renaissance Florentines, the Hopi "*stand on middle ground between magic and logos, and their instrument of orientation is the symbol. Between a culture of touch and a culture of thought is the culture of symbolic connection. And for this stage of symbolic thought and conduct the dances of the pueblo Indians are exemplary.*" (Warburg 1998 [1923]: 170).

The library that Warburg began compiling from 1901 onwards was unique in that it combined works from disciplines as diverse as art history, classical philology, anthropology, folklore studies, mythology, and archaeology, as well as extensive pictorial material from all of these fields, all thematically interconnected by an highly innovative, intuitive cataloging system. Although the general argument of his philosophy of symbolic forms was already well advanced when Cassirer was offered a professorship at the newly established University of Hamburg in 1919, he found kindred spirits in Warburg, the library's long-time associates, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) and Gertrud Bing (1892-1964), and the library's director, Fritz Saxl (1890-1948; cf. Levine 2013; also Skidelski 2008). The entirely novel approaches to the study of art pursued by Warburg and his collaborators and Cassirer' symbolic epistemology were formative mutual influences (cf. Panofsky and Saxl 1923; Panofsky 1927).



To Cassirer, 'myth' denotes not primarily an ancient form of proto-religious and pre-rational narrative but the fundamental way of experiencing the "*immediate qualitiveness*" of the human world (1944: 79; see also Dewey 1958 [1925]: 99), the primordial symbolic mode of the mind: "*Myth ... expresses an original direction of the human spirit, an independent configuration of man's consciousness.*" (Cassirer 1955: 3). Mythical thought is the elementary symbolic form out of which all other attitudes ("*Haltungen*") towards reality emerge: "*Long before the world appeared to consciousness as a totality of empirical things and a complex of empirical attributes it was manifested as an aggregate of mythical powers and effects.*" (ibid.:1).

Hence, myth is not a psychological trait of the individual, but precisely that formative force by which the individual, the 'I', first begins to become distinguished from the world around it (cf. Baeten 1996: 59). Mythical thought, according to Cassirer, represents the primal substrate of man confronting reality, the most elementary stage of symbolic formation out of which all others emerge:

"Thus everywhere, down to the configuration of our perceptive world, down to that sphere which from the naive standpoint we designate as actual 'reality,' we find this characteristic survival of original mythical traits. Little as they correspond immediately to objects, they are nevertheless on the way to objectivity as such, insofar as they represent a concrete and necessary (not accidental) mode of spiritual formation. Thus the objectivity of myth consists primarily in that wherein it seems farthest removed from the reality of things - from the reality of naive realism and dogmatism - this objectivity is not the reproduction of a material datum but is a specific and typical mode of formation, in which consciousness disengages itself from and confronts the mere receptivity of the sensory impression." (ibid.: 14f.)

The events that constitute mythical reality affect man in an immediate way. Not as a world of abstract categories of 'things' ( a "*Sachwelt*"), not yet a subsuming of the particular phenomenon under the generalizations of concepts and categories. Mythical reality expresses itself as immediate, concrete experiences of a *sui generis* quality. Man, in the mode of mythical thought, perceives the natural world not as merely an accumulation of objects, of causes and effects, but as alive, as anthropomorphic, as social, and as expressing meaning and purpose:

"[M]yth does not know of any general laws. Its world is not a world of physical things obeying causal laws but a world of persons ... [man] looks at the world in the same sense as, in our human intercourse, we are used to look at other persons, at our own fellow creatures: The things that surround him are not a dead-stuff; they are filled and impregnated with emotions. They are benignant or malignant, friendly or dreadful, familiar or uncanny, they inspire confidence or awe or terror ... [myth] does not interpret nature in terms of our usual empirical thought or in terms of physics; it interprets it rather in terms of physiognomic experience." (Cassirer 1979 [1941]: 172-4).<sup>134</sup>

Cassirer replaces the substantialist notion of a world of objective things to be perceived by the mind with a concept of *functional relations* between mind and world.<sup>135</sup> In his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer distinguishes three fundamental 'functions' by which mind and world interact in the process of forming conscious reality: i) The 'expressive function' (*Ausdrucksfunktion*), the realm of immediate, concrete experience, subsequent to elementary symbolic forming of raw sense data (which otherwise would not be accessible to conscious experience), yet prior to conceptualization; the sphere myth, ritual, and art immediately arise out of, without prior recourse to ii) the 'representational function' (*Darstellungsfunktion*), the realm of discursive language, of concepts and categories, and of our 'everyday consciousness'; and iii) the 'significant function' (*Bedeutungsfunktion*), the realm of mathematics and science; the sphere of purely abstract *logos*.

While Cassirer is primarily concerned with mythical consciousness, he acknowledges ritual as being the 'dramatic' aspect of mythical symbolic activity (Cassirer 1946, Baeten 1996: 67). Like Harrison, Cassirer conceives the dramatic form of ritual to be logically prior to the 'epic' form of the mythical narrative (*ibid.*).

Cassirer maintains a distinctly critical view on mythical thought and its

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134 This quasi-animistic way of understanding also the natural world in anthropomorphic and social terms is widespread among the Moken and other small-scale societies, but by no means exclusive to them - we ourselves quite naturally tend to anthropomorphize and to personify both our natural and man-made environment: 'the sun is laughing', 'the heavens are weeping', 'the markets are collapsing' etc. And we even experience genuine affection not only towards plants and animals (certain of which we not only consider to be merely sentient but conscious, ascribing human character traits and emotions to them, giving them personal names, talking to them and making them talk etc.; the whole literary genre of fable is based on this), but even towards non-living things, like cars or boats (seeing a face with a particular expression when viewing the former from the front, giving, again, names to the latter, addressing them as a 'she' etc.).

135 A concept Cassirer first began to develop in *Substance and Function* (1923 [1910]).

role in human history. While he acknowledges mythical thought to be the necessary foundation of all cultural development, it has ultimately to be overcome in the pursuit of liberating mankind. Cassirer sees (or wishes to see) a *telos*, a goal-oriented principle, at work in the development of human consciousness, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. He believes in the potential of the human mind to emancipate itself from mythical thought, continuously moving towards *Bedeutungsfunktion*, with scientific thought as its crowning achievement. He considers the mythical domain of pure *Ausdrucksfunktion* to be inherently dangerous and an obstacle to the final emancipation of the human spirit.<sup>136</sup> The highly mythified totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century appear to since have proven him correct (cf. Cassirer 1946).

Cassirer's treatment of myth received its fair share of criticism since it was first published, both for inherent theoretical and conceptual problems arising out of its roots in Kantian transcendentalism as well as its essentially Hegelian-idealist-teleological perspective, and also for the central concept of symbolic forms as "*energies of the spirit*" remaining rather vague and indeterminate (Doty 2000: 238; Baeten 1996: 15-17 and passim). While it has been criticized that "*Cassirer's theory has little utility as a general theory of myth*" (Strenski 1987: 41; cited in Doty 2000: 239), this is, at least in my reading of Cassirer, not what the philosophy of symbolic forms attempts to be. It is not written from the perspective of classical mythology nor is it (in contrast to Lévi-Strauss) an attempt to explain the mythical traditions of all times and peoples. Cassirer, innately an epistemologist, was primarily searching for a cultural metaphysics of the mind, a 'phenomenology of spirit' in Hegel's sense.

It is not difficult to see why Cassirer's essentially pluralist and inductive approach has been of greater appeal to scholars in the humanities and social sciences than it had been to academic philosophers, despite (or perhaps just because of) his life-long commitment to reconciling the analytical and continental traditions. Cassirer's works were highly influential from the 1950s

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136 "*All theoretical explanation finds itself in opposition to another spiritual force – the force of myth. In order to protect themselves against this force, philosophy and science are obligated not only to replace particular mythical explanations but to do battle with the whole mythical interpretation of existence and to reject it in toto. It must not only attack the products and configurations of myth but must attack its root.*" (Cassirer 1960: 94; cf. also Baeten 1996: 55).

through the 1970s, especially among scholars reverting to the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* in search for an intellectual alternative to Lévi-Straussian structuralism, most notably those that came to be associated with 'symbolic' or 'interpretive' anthropology: Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Clifford Geertz (loc. cit.). In recent decades, Cassirer's ideas have been developed further with regard to the study of myth and ritual, most prominently by Jonathan Z. Smith (1987) and Elizabeth Beaten (1996; see also the volume by Friedman and Luft [eds.] 2015).

Cassirer's philosophy was particularly influential on the aesthetic theory of Susanne K. Langer (1895-1985). Langer, a student of Whitehead's and a close acquaintance of Cassirer's<sup>137</sup> during the final years of his life (when he taught at Yale), elaborated the philosophy of symbolic forms into a symbolic aesthetics that is as comprehensive as it is controversial (Langer 1941, 1953, 1957). In the context of the present thesis, Langer's thought is of particular interest as she was the first scholar since Harrison (loc. cit.) to systematically develop a philosophical theory based on the assumption of an inherent relatedness between the realm of myth and ritual on the one hand, and that of art and, especially, music on the other. In her *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (1941), Langer attempts to conciliate her background in Whitehead's metaphysics and Cassirer's symbolic epistemology with John Dewey's (1934) experientialist aesthetics<sup>138</sup> and the analytic philosophy of language of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1921) - a balancing act that ultimately fails, yet not without producing some genuinely seminal insights along the path.

Langer states a fundamental assumption that is thoroughly 'Cassirerian':

"I believe there is a primary need in man, which other creatures probably do not have, and which actuates all his apparently unzoölogical aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasms, and his awareness of a 'Beyond' filled with holiness ... This basic need, which certainly is obvious only in man, is the *need of symbolization* ... It is the

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137 Langer also translated Cassirer's *Sprache und Mythos* (1925) from the original German into English (*Language and Myth*, 1946).

138 And also the then highly influential aesthetics of B. Croce (1922) and R. G. Collingwood (1938).

fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time ... if the material of thought is symbolism, then the thinking organism must be forever furnishing symbolic versions of its experiences, in order to let thinking proceed. As a matter of fact it is not the essential act of thought that is symbolization, but an act *essential to thought*, and prior to it ... Only certain products of the symbol-making brain can be used according to the canons of discursive reasoning.” (Langer 1941: 40f; emphases in original).

Langer interprets the phenomenon of music as a particular and distinct ‘product of the symbol-making brain’. She rejects semantic-syntactic theories of musical meaning, claiming, in accordance with Cassirer's theory of symbolic forms (though Langer does away with much of its idealist and transcendentalist premises), that music instead belongs to an autonomous category of “*non-discursive symbolisms - myth, ritual and art.*” (ibid.: xiv). Hence, according to Langer, art and music are not ‘different kinds of language’ capable of conveying conceptual meaning-content (as, loc. cit., Schopenhauer [1818] and Croce [1909] would have it), but entirely distinct forms of symbolism that are essentially non-conceptual (cf. Åhlberg 1994: 70). “[I]n this physical, space-time world of our experience”, writes Langer,

“there are things which do not fit the grammatical scheme of expression. But they are not necessarily blind, inconceivable, mystical affairs; they are simply matters which require to be conceived through some symbolistic schema other than discursive language ... Language is by no means our only articulate product.” (1941: 89).

Langer distinguishes between two fundamental kinds of symbols: discursive (or linguistic) symbols, like words that, having a determined meaning,<sup>139</sup> may be translated (at least in principle) from one language into another,<sup>140</sup> and non-discursive (or presentational) symbols, that are only self-referencing and thus cannot (as a matter of principle) be translated - such as works of art, including music, but also those expressions belonging to the realms of myth and ritual.

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139 *Philosophy in a New Key* was written a decade prior to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, so Langer's ideas about concepts and categories are still fundamentally Aristotelian and influenced by the ‘ideal language’-philosophy of the *Tractatus*.

140 Cassirer points out the severe constraints that apply in this respect, in a sense anticipating the gist of the later Wittgenstein's ‘ordinary language philosophy’ (see [6.2.1], below): “A comparison of different languages shows us that there are no exact synonyms. Corresponding terms from two languages seldom refer to the same objects or actions. They cover different fields which interpenetrate and give us many-colored views and varied perspectives of our experience ... [names] are not designed to refer to substantial things, independent entities which exist by themselves. They are determined rather by human interest and human purposes.” (1944: 134).

Contrary to the limited meaning-content of discursive symbols, the significance of presentational symbols remains 'unconsummated'. Based on Whitehead's notion of a "*symbolic transfer of emotions*" (Whitehead 1927: 28) into works of art, Langer develops the idea of music as a "*morphology of feeling*", based on the notion that the dynamics of music share a similar structure with the dynamics of the inner life (Langer 1941: 238). Malcolm Budd (1985: 106), in his critique of her theory, summarizes Langer's argument in a set of five propositions:

"(i) Each significant piece of music is a symbol. (ii) But it is not a discursive symbol. (iii) It is a presentational symbol. (iv) But it has a peculiarity not possessed by most presentational symbols: it is an unconsummated symbol. (v) It symbolises the mere form of a feeling."

Langer's aesthetics of music faces many of the problems and ambiguities that seem to plague 'emotive' theories in general, as shown by, loc. cit., Budd (1985), remaining "*intriguingly obscure*" (Levinson 1990: 282; cf. also Scruton 1997).

Much of the criticism brought forth against Langer's theory appears reasonable. Too artificial and ambiguous seems the notion of music being a presentational symbol of the mere unconsummated forms and dynamics of man's inner life. I would not dismiss Langer's theory (or 'emotive' theories in general) out of hand, though. It seems intuitively obvious that music *somehow* relates to our affective life - but then again, I have yet to come across an experiential phenomenon that does not.

Hence, I see the strength as well as the cause for the lasting appeal of Langer's aesthetics<sup>141</sup> not so much in the elaboration of her initial premises, but in these premises themselves. The hypothesis that music and art belong to an inherently different realm of the spirit than denotative language and rational intellect, and the notion that the aesthetic sentiment and the religious sentiment, the realm of music and the realm of myth and ritual, are intrinsically related, seems to resonate with many, including myself. Langer's theory has also been accused of opening up a slippery slope towards obscurantism, as it very much excludes the realms of myth, ritual, and art from any attempt at language-bound

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<sup>141</sup> *Philosophy in a New Key* has been in print continuously since its first publication in 1941, making it one of Harvard U. P.'s commercially more successful titles.

analysis. This fundamental incompatibility might, however, actually be rooted in the subject matter itself and not in Langer's treatment of it, as I shall argue in [ch. 6], below.

The aesthetic theory of Nelson Goodman (*Languages of Art*, 1968) is in many ways a formally more rigorous (and less emotion-centered) derivative of Langer's thought. Likewise, Peter Kivy maintains positions similar to that of Langer, viz. that music does not express emotions but is *expressive of* emotions (Kivy 1980; 1984).<sup>142</sup>

American anthropologist of art, Robert Plant Armstrong (1919-1984) is among the few scholars to seriously contemplate the idea of a fundamental 'universal aesthetic', transcending particular cultural expressions (Armstrong 1971, 1975, 1981). He proposes a comprehensive anthropological aesthetics, what he terms 'humanistic anthropology' based on notions of "*being*", "*consciousness*", and "*experience*":

"Humanistic anthropology recognizes the essentially obscure, nonverbal, aconceptual nature of much of human experience ... humanistic anthropology seems to me less a science than an art. That means that multiple perspectives are not only inevitable but desirable, which in turn means that there are neither right nor wrong answers. There are only observations and postulations – analyses and constructs either plausible or implausible, liberating or restricting, seminal or barren, ones that illumine or ones that obfuscate." (Armstrong 1975:2f.)

Armstrong develops his notion of the work of art being an "*affecting presence*", what he sees as "*a projection of consciousness in consciousness*" (1975: 45; emphases in original) both in dependence on, as well as in distinction from Langer's concept of the 'non-discursive symbol':

"Mrs. Langer's nondiscursive symbol is to be seen as *mediating*, rather than *presenting*, the affecting presence, which *presents*, must be *immediating*. Though we ought not to speak of *media* but instead of *immedia*." (ibid.:49; emphases in original; cf. also Armstrong 1971: 55).

Though Armstrong delegates the notion of the symbolic, so central to Cassirer's

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<sup>142</sup> Though in his more recent works (1993, 1998), Kivy has somewhat altered and amended this notion.

though, to merely an ancillary role in the understanding of art (and of human culture as a whole) he, like Cassirer, considers “*Myth and Mythoform*” (1975: 93ff.) to constitute “*the wellspring of culture*” (ibid.). Echoing Cassirer's central assumption of a basal mental stratum of ‘mythical thought’, Armstrong summarizes his position:

“I postulate the existence of a cultural myth which is without specific content but which has particularity of form and process. I suggest that we learn this myth with awesome aptitude and hungry avidity in our earliest life and that it patterns all subsequent encounters into *experience*. Further, this myth is only grossly amenable to conceptualization for the simple reason that it is not itself conceptual, lying anterior to the processes of the reason. I postulate that one cannot study this myth solely through language, as some of us have been wont to do, because it is no more inherent in language than it is in religion, that it is as fundamental to social organization as it is to vision, and that it is to be seen best in *all* of culture. The primordial condition of this myth is as anterior to feeling as it is to concept, though it must enact itself in these domains. It is *ground* – preconcept, prefeeling, prebelief – *ground* pure and simple.” (R. P. Armstrong 1975: 95; emphases in original).

Armstrong's works have, perhaps because of his bold philosophical eclecticism and his obvious disregard for ‘method’, not received much attention (or at least not as much as I think they deserve). This last quote, in any case, makes for a fitting ‘final word’ to close this segment, as it summarizes rather comprehensively a general thought that is going to be of central importance in what is to follow hereafter: the notion that mythology, ritual, music, and art arise directly out of the “*primordial condition of ... myth*” (ibid.), out of this fundamental stratum of experiential immediacy, without prior recourse to emotions, concepts, or rational reason. These particular “*symbolic forms*” (Cassirer, loc. cit.) do not require some prior emotional, conceptional, or rational attitude towards the world of which they then are mere *representations*; they themselves *are* elementary attitudes towards the world.



## 5.2 Myth and Ritual as an Interpretive Framework for Music

THAT-WHICH-RESOUNDS IS ITSELF PRIMAL, PRIMORDIAL SPHERE THAT IS FLUID IN FORM AND LIFE ... IN GREAT, SILENT ELOQUENCE, THE MUSIC-MYTHS INDICATE THAT THE WORLD OF SOUNDS IS CLOSER TO THE MOTHERGROUND OF BEING THAN ANY OTHER ART.

- WERNER DANCKERT (1955: 114; MY TRANSL.)

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to present an overview of some of the central theories on myth and ritual, ranging from the earliest use of the terms in academic literature, to those seminal authors that are defining the discourse up until the present day. Having covered such a long period and such a wide array of viewpoints, some general observations and a bit of critique might be deemed appropriate to further work out how these terms, 'myth' and 'ritual', are to be understood in what follows, what I am going to mean by them, and how they might relate to the sphere we call music.

Mythical thought and ritual act appear not at all to be phenomena that are restricted to ancient man or contemporary non-industrialized, non-literate, small-scale societies. Myth seems to be not phylogenetically or historically antecedent, but logically and processually prior to rational and scientific reasoning. Just like 'indigenous' societies, both historical and contemporary, go about their daily routines in a perfectly rational manner, much of our own everyday consciousness and our general, non-analytic attitude towards the world is, in a quintessentially natural way, mythical. We can no more reject the factuality our own modes of mythical thought than we can deny the capacity for strictly rational reasoning to 'primitive' peoples. We are just as involved in both ourselves. Mythical and rational thought appear not to be evolutionary stages in the phylogenetic development of the human mind, but merely different strata of symbolic modes of reference towards reality. While the emphasis on one mode or the other, their particular characteristics and formations, are both determined by and constitutive of any given culture, these differences are differences in degree, not in principle.

This having been said, the theoretical criticism the different approaches and positions have so far been subjected to, either explicitly or implicitly, revolved around the fundamental distinctions made about myth and ritual as related yet ultimately analytically separate phenomena. We have seen particular tendencies and emphases in the way various thinkers approach the subject. To the early scholars, the origin of the phenomenon of religion and the question whether myth or ritual had historical or epistemic primacy or priority over the respective other, were the central concerns. With the emergence of sociology and social and cultural anthropology, the focus shifted from universalistic 'grand theories' about ultimate origins towards detailed, monographic descriptions of the customs and traditions of individual societies, and towards efforts to understand their myths and rituals not as primitive precursors of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, but as cultural achievements in their own right. Within these latter developments, several distinctive perspectives in terms of both theory and method can be distinguished. These general tendencies, however, are not restricted to the study of myth and ritual, but have shaped the ways in which anthropology approaches its subject matter in general.

The first can be considered the 'rationalistic' perspective, as exemplified by Cassirer's symbolic philosophy of culture and Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology. These programs, despite their fundamental discrepancies and oppositions, are predominantly concerned with the most basic structures of the human mind: with experience, ideas, beliefs, and concepts and with how they relate to physical and social reality and to one another.

The second might be called 'empirical' approaches, primarily concerned with observable facts, with kinship structures, social behavior, and economic transactions. These approaches are represented by the social functionalism of Malinowski and Firth, and the structural functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown and Gluckman.

Anthropologically inclined philosophers like Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss sought for symbolic expressions of elementary and supra-temporal mental structures and processes, and both believed to have found them in the world of myth. Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss both were heirs to the continental traditions of rationalism, transcendentalism, and idealism. Hence, they tended to see the

essence of the human condition in man's modes and patterns of thought, in the mental attitudes man takes towards the world, and in the symbolisms man employs in doing so. Cassirer's notion of "*das mythische Denken*" and Lévi-Strauss' notion of "*la Pensée sauvage*"<sup>143</sup> appear to be a classical case of the proverbial 'two sides of the same coin'. Both authors conceive the human world as a relational symbolic system; both see in myth a key to the, ultimately supra-temporal, 'deep structures' of the human mind; and, hence, both attempt to reconcile the particular cultural datum with the supposedly universal workings of human thought.

Yet they pursue their respective epistemic goals along quite different paths: Cassirer seeks within myth the fundamental processes of symbolization, i.e. their functional coherencies; Lévi-Strauss seeks within myth the fundamental structures of symbolisms, i.e. their formal unity:

"The study of myth for both Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss is key to the understanding of man and his culture and for both myth is symbolic. It mediates in the space between mind and reality between the I and the experienced world. Both seek to explore and define this space. But if the space is the same for both, then their routes are different, sometimes crossing sometimes diverging, predominantly moving in opposite directions ... it might be possible to say that for Lévi-Strauss the symbol is cultural whereas for Cassirer the reverse is true, culture is symbolic ... Cassirer seeks the mind which creates the myth, the spirit in all its power; Lévi-Strauss seeks the message in all its communicated complexity. The unitary power of mind in the one opposes the tension of meaning and object in the other." (Silverstone 1976 :25-7).

While Lévi-Strauss searches for structural laws within the materials of mythology, Cassirer looks for the functional coherencies between mythical thought and higher-order symbolic representations. Lévi-Strauss' structural principles of myth are pre-conscious, Cassirer's mythical substrate of thought is pre-conceptual.

Both scholars see an intrinsic relatedness between the realm of myth and that of art. And - of particular importance regarding the subject of the present thesis - both share the notion of a fundamental relatedness between mythical thought and artistic, and particularly musical, expression. I do, in principle,

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143 With Santayana's notion of "*animal faith*" and even Heidegger's "*being-in-the-world*" being related ideas, all postulating a fundamental, pre-rational and pre-conceptual substrate of immediate experience of reality.

agree with Lévi-Strauss's "*hypothesis that music and myth have played complementary roles in the history of humanity and that as the functions of myth fade away in post-Renaissance Europe, so their role is taken over by music.*" (Osmond-Smith 1981: 236). I do further assume that this complementarity, the immediate relatedness of myth and music, has been preserved in other cultures to a greater extent than it has been in the West; that such a conceptual fragmentation of an essentially integrated, holistic phenomenon into music, myth, and ritual is a particular, and comparatively recent, trait of complex, highly segmented and specialized societies.<sup>144</sup> I also share a criticism brought forth against Lévi-Straussian structuralism in general, namely that, according to Steven Feld, "*the armchairism and speculation that sometimes go along with formal analysis have a tendency to trivialize interpretations from direct experience.*" (1982: 15).

Both, the 'rationalist' and the 'empiricist' viewpoints share a common weakness, viz. taking a fundamentally Cartesian division between body and soul, mind and matter, as a given ontological fact. Both schools basically start from this dichotomy, holding one as having primacy and priority over the respective other. However,

"We have to avoid dividing ourselves up as Descartes did in the first place. *Things go wrong as soon as we start thinking about mind and body as if they were both objects* - that is, separate things in the world. The words *mind* and *body* do not name two separate kinds of stuff, nor two forms of a single stuff ... The two words name points of view - the inner and the outer. And these are aspects of the whole person, who is the unit mainly to be considered." (Midgley 2002: 15; emphasis in original).

Hence, as a third perspective (or set of perspectives), the interpretive anthropology of Geertz, Douglas, and Turner, the later works of Evans-Pritchard, as well as Leach's efforts at unifying British functionalism and French structuralism might be considered attempts at establishing a synthesis between what I have called the 'rationalist' and 'empirical' schools. Edmund Leach explicitly emphasizes the need for a unification of these approaches, a complementarity prescribed by the subject matter itself:

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144 While this notion has to remain hypothetical, we indeed find the highest degree of correspondence with our own modes of categorization of these phenomena among the 'great civilizations' of Asia, i.e. in the intellectual traditions of China, India, Persia, and the Arabic world.

“The rival theories of anthropologists are themselves parts of a single interacting whole. Both viewpoints accept the central dogma of functionalism that cultural details must always be viewed in context, that everything is meshed in with everything else. In this regard the two approaches, the empiricist (functionalist) and the rationalist (structuralist), are complementary rather than contradictory; one is a transformation of the other.” (Leach 1976: 5).

Turner and Geertz, the influence that Cassirer's philosophy of culture had on both notwithstanding, are likewise rooted in the anglophone traditions of empiricism and pragmatism. To them, observable behavior is the primary key to an understanding of human culture. Their focus, therefore, rests on cultural practice in general, and on ritual practice in particular. For both, Turner and Geertz, rituals are essentially performative and transformative processes; yet for both, they are also essentially symbolic. Their approaches to understanding ritualistic behavior can thus be seen as attempts to reveal these interdependent transformations that bind together thought and act.

Instead of the - necessarily hypothetical - deliberations about the fundamental structures of the ‘symbol making mind’ that captivated Cassirer and Lévi-Strauss, Geertz is concerned with “*tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgements, longings, or beliefs.*” (Geertz 1973:91), i.e. with the symbolic dimension in observable cultural acts. And it is these tangible, observable socio-cultural phenomena from which abstract generalizations about particular patterns of thought have, according to Geertz, to be deduced from:

“Cultural acts, the construction, apprehension, and utilization of symbolic forms, are social events like any other; they are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture. They are not, however, the same thing; or, more precisely, the symbolic dimension of social events is, like the psychological, itself theoretically abstractable from those events as empirical totalities.” (ibid.).

Hence, to make use of a thought of Wittgenstein's: just as there is no “*private language*” (1953: §256 and *passim*),<sup>145</sup> similarly there is no such thing as

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145 Émile Durkheim, in a sense, anticipates Wittgenstein's famous *Privatsprachenargument* several decades earlier: “[I]t is unquestionable that language, and consequently the system of concepts which it translates, is the product of a collective elaboration. What it expresses is the manner in which society as a whole represents the facts of experience. The ideas which correspond to the diverse elements of language are thus collective representations. Even their contents bear witness to the same fact. In fact, there are scarcely any words among those

'private myth', 'private ritual', 'private music' or any 'private cultural "thing" in general. Hence, to return to the realm of music:

"Meaning is ... not a property of things. It cannot be located in the stimulus alone ... Thus it is pointless to ask what the meaning of a single tone or a series of tones is. Purely as physical existences they are meaningless. They become meaningful only in so far as they point to, indicate, or imply something beyond themselves ... the relationships existing between the tones themselves or those existing between the tones and the things they designate or connote, though a product of cultural experience, are *real connections existing objectively in culture. They are not arbitrary connections imposed by the capricious mind of the particular listener.*" (Meyer 1956: 34; my emphasis).

The patterns of thought of a particular people - mythical, musical or otherwise - are not hidden away within the cranium of the individual; they are acted out and perpetually renegotiated in social relations and public discourse; they are the 'stuff' culture is made of. Victor Turner likewise stresses: "*it is not a matter of different cognitive structures, but of an identical cognitive structure articulating wide diversities of cultural experience.*" (1969: 3).

As we have seen, the terms 'myth' and 'ritual' have been used with rather different meanings by different authors. To sum up what I am going to mean by these terms with regard to the argument put forth in the present thesis, I shall propose a set of more precise semantic distinctions than those having been used above. Hence, the terminology that has up to this point of the present thesis been used in a more general and colloquial manner will in the following take on the form of a controlled analytic vocabulary, attempting to avoid homonyms and synonyms.

I shall take the terms 'myth' or 'mythical tale' to be referring to a given traditional narrative of some heightened degree of foundational, identity-

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*which we usually employ whose meaning does not pass, to a greater or less extent, the limits of our personal experience. Very frequently a term expresses things which we have never perceived or experiences which we have never had or of which we have never been the witness. Even when we know some of the objects which it concerns, it is only as particular examples that serve to illustrate the idea which they would never have been able to form by themselves. Thus there is a great deal of knowledge condensed in the word which I never collected, and which is not individual; it even surpasses me to such an extent that I cannot even completely appropriate all its results. Which of us knows all the words of the language he speaks and the entire signification of each?" (Durkheim 1912: 434).*

establishing, and legitimizing value in a particular society, usually making reference to some sort of transcendent or otherworldly realm and/or supernatural beings; i.e. narratives going substantially beyond the mere factual passing on of practical, everyday knowledge or the mere anecdotal recollecting of past events;<sup>146</sup> narratives that do not primarily transport ‘fact knowledge’ but ‘identity knowledge’. I take ‘mythology’ to be referring to a particular canon of such narratives, as well as to the scholarly study of the same.

In reference to Cassirer, Langer, and Armstrong, I shall take the terms ‘mythical thought’ and ‘mythical consciousness’ to mean that sphere of “*immediate qualitiveness*” of basic, fundamental experience (Cassirer, loc. cit.), the “*ground pure and simple*” (Armstrong, loc. cit.) on which man confronts reality, pre-conceptual, and pre-rational; the ultimate substrate of being and experience; the very bedrock of the human condition from which all higher-order, mediating attitudes towards reality – concepts, language, art, music, reason, science – emerge.

I shall take the term ‘ritual’ to indicate a particular context within culture (i.e. a meaningful sub-context within a larger meaningful context) in which a “*privileged contrast*” (Bell, loc. cit.) is established by collective reference towards a realm of fundamental, supra-individual ideas of what is unquestioningly taken to be real, true, and efficacious. A performative act through which that what lies at the core of both communal and individual life, what is the true origin, history, identity, and destiny of the group as a whole, is re-appropriated in an experienceable manner. And these communal performative acts, therefore, usually include reference to meaningful symbolic representations of a group's origin, history, identity and destiny, i.e. “*reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers*” of some sort (Turner, loc. cit.). I shall take the term ‘rite’ to mean an actual occurrence, a concrete instantiation, of a particular form of ritual.

I shall take myth and ritual as defined above to be two complimentary aspects of an integrated, coherent phenomenon: “*myth implies ritual, ritual implies myth, they are one and the same.*” (Leach loc. cit.). Together they form the core constituents of what we call religion. While individual religions may

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146 Though both of the latter might well be incorporated into, and be part of, mythical tales.

differ in many ways,<sup>147</sup> I shall not include any phenomenon in the category 'religion' that lacks either identity-establishing narratives or communal performative acts that relate to these narratives.

I shall consider 'myth' and 'ritual' (and, by extension, the 'religious sentiment'), as well as 'music' and 'art' (and, by extension, the 'aesthetic sentiment') to be those symbolic objectifications within the socio-cultural realm through which human groups collectively relate to the pre-conceptual, pre-rational substrate of consciousness.

When trying to make sense of expressive behavior such as ritual and music it appears to be of little help to do so from a pre-defined, a priori distinction between the inner and the outer worlds, for after what has been said so far, we are concerned with the very point at which this distinction first emerges: *"Whenever we discuss the 'meaning' of expressive behaviour we are concerned with the relationship between observable patterns in the world out-there and unobservable patterns 'in the mind'."* (Leach 1976: 17).<sup>148</sup> And this interdependency of mind and world inherent in the constitution of the *Conditio humana* lies at the core of the subject of the present thesis: It is reflected in the dialectic between mythical thought and ritual act; it is reflected in the dialectic between empirical observation and philosophical interpretation; and it is also, at least this is my hypothesis, reflected in the dialectic between musical thought and musical act; between aesthetic theory and sounding practice; between, in C. Seeger's terms, the *"speech knowledge of music"* and the *"music knowledge of music"* (see [6.1], below). To make sense of music, myth, and ritual we have to take them not as separate, independent objects in the world but as integrating aspects of a complex whole arising out of the *"sphere of mythical immediacy"* (Cassirer, loc. cit.), constituting their mutual implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions.

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147 And while this dialectic between myth and ritual might also be found in other spheres, such as politics.

148 Though Leach warns us that *"patterns in the mind"* is not at all a straightforward concept (ibid.).



## 6. The Implicit Presuppositions of 'Music' in Western Thought

*THE TENDENCY HAS ALWAYS BEEN STRONG TO BELIEVE THAT WHATEVER RECEIVES A NAME MUST BE AN ENTITY OR BEING, HAVING AN INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE OF ITS OWN AND IF NO REAL ENTITY ANSWERING TO THE NAME COULD BE FOUND, MEN DID NOT FOR THAT REASON SUPPOSE THAT NONE EXISTED, BUT IMAGINED THAT IT WAS SOMETHING PECULIARLY ABSTRUSE AND MYSTERIOUS, TOO HIGH TO BE AN OBJECT OF SENSE. THE MEANING OF ALL GENERAL, AND ESPECIALLY OF ALL ABSTRACT TERMS, BECAME IN THIS WAY ENVELOPED IN A MYSTICAL BASE.*

- JOHN STUART MILL (1869:5)

What, precisely, is it that we are referring to when speaking of something as being 'music'? How is the relationship between that which we name such on the one hand, and the language term we employ to name it on the other? Does that what we assign this particular name to have "*an independent existence of its own*"? And if so, how exactly does this existence present itself to us – and why do the Moken seem not to acknowledge it by giving it a 'proper name' themselves?

Above I have attempted to demonstrate that the Moken conceive their world in quite different ways, terms, and categories than we do. As I do not think that I am able to shed light on the question *why is this so?* from my observations among the Moken alone, I am going to, in the course of the following segments, try to approach the matter from a different, more theoretically inclined, angle.

I shall present some attempts, by various thinkers, on how we form and use concepts, categories, and names in general and also how the term 'music' came to carry the meaning it is commonly associated with today, both in musicological discourse and in colloquial use. I have made it a central assumption of the present thesis that, among the Moken, what we refer to as 'music' is ideationally and conceptually tightly intertwined with those spheres that we call 'myth' and 'ritual'. I have, therefore, proposed that what we habitually differentiate into the separate domains of the 'aesthetic sentiment'

and the 'religious sentiment' may not be compartmentalized in this way if one is to understand how the sea nomads imagine creative expression.

There appears to be a general belief in the 'West' today that, as our outlook upon reality is supposedly primarily a rational and scientific one, our concepts that we employ to relate to the world must also have, by and large, a rational legitimization. The history of Western music, likewise, has to a large degree been an endeavor striving for a continuous rationalization and formalization of both the theory and practice of an autonomous *Tonkunst*.

I shall argue that below the surface of the rationalized thought about music in the West there also runs a strong and still efficacious undercurrent of mythical thought. And while most of the mythical forces that still resonate within our conceptions about music are quite alien and insignificant to the Moken there are others that bear more than just a superficial similarity to their ideations.

I hope that by recurring to the, suppressed or at least overgrown, mythical aspects of Western thought about music I might be able to render the conceptual and ideational worlds of the Moken sea nomads somewhat less foreign and more relatable.

### **6.1 C. Seeger: The *Musicological Juncture***

A witty aphorism, variously attributed to either Frank Zappa, Elvis Costello, or Thelonius Monk asserts that "*talking about music is like dancing about architecture*". Goethe, much earlier, expressed a similar insight when he noted that "*Art is a mediator of the unspeakable*" (1960 [1827]: 43; my transl.).<sup>149</sup> Danish author and collector of folktales, H. C. Andersen reportedly held the conviction that "*When words fail, music speaks*". Victor Hugo (1864) remarks: "*Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent*".<sup>150</sup> And Aldous Huxley writes: "*After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music*" (1950 [1931]: 19). The list of similar assertions made by great literati could be extended further.

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149 „*Die Kunst ist eine Vermittlerin des Unaussprechlichen*“ (ibid.).

150 *William Shakespeare*, Pt. I, Bk. II, Ch. IV.

Such testimonies strike us as ingenious as they seem to, in a nutshell, reveal an essential truth about the nature of music and art: trying to make a musical (or other kind of aesthetic) experience understandable to someone else in plain words appears to be a futile exercise, like explaining the punchline of a joke – that what is essential is certain to escape the effort. The integrative wholeness and unity of aesthetic experience intuitively seems to be of a different kind or order than the analytic segmentation of perception and cognition into words. Music appears to be fundamentally incompatible with discursive language. It is, in the words of German musicologist Curt Sachs, „[an] art whose essence and essential expression rebels against language and concept“ (1929: 1; my transl.).<sup>151</sup> Music and art appear to grasp the world in a much different way. And this seems to be precisely their *raison d'être*. Hence, approaching a phenomenon that appears to be, in the very nature of its being, non-rational, non-theoretical, and non-conceptual by means of rational theoretical concepts might well turn out to be futile.

American musicologist, Charles Seeger (1886-1979) saw what he termed the “*musicological juncture*”, i.e. the apparently insurmountable boundary line between the realms of music and language, between μουσική and λόγος that together form the compound term that names our discipline, as constituting the fundamental issue of (systematic) musicology:

“When we talk about music, we produce in the compositional process of one system of human communication, speech, a communication ‘about’ another system of human communication, music, and its compositional process. The core of the understanding is the integration of speech knowledge in general and the speech knowledge of music in particular (which are extrinsic to music and its compositional process) with the music knowledge of music (which is intrinsic to music and its compositional process). In speaking of another system of communication we are speaking of an item of attention radically different from other items of attention. Whether we like it or not, we are speaking comparatively.” (C. Seeger 1977: 16).

What, then, is it that sets the “*speech knowledge of music*” and the “*music knowledge of music*” so fundamentally apart?<sup>152</sup>

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151 “[eine] Kunst deren Wesen und Wesensäußerung sich gegen Sprache und Begriff auflehnt” (ibid.).

152 I will concentrate on the discussion of linguistic concepts and categories at the expense of psychological explanations of perception and cognition, as the latter locate ‘where the musical action takes place’ mostly in the isolated individual’s mind (or, in the case of neuro-psychology,

## 6.2 Particulars, Universals and the 'Essential Properties' of Music

*THE TENDENCY TO FORGET THE OFFICE OF DISTINCTIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS, AND TO TAKE THEM AS MARKING THINGS IN THEMSELVES IS THE CURRENT FALLACY OF SCIENTIFIC SPECIALISM ... THIS ATTITUDE WHICH ONCE FLOURISHED IN PHYSICAL SCIENCE NOW GOVERNS THEORIZING ABOUT HUMAN NATURE.*

- JOHN DEWEY (1922: 131)

Classical theory of objecthood assumes that particulars (individual, spatio-temporally defined occurrences in the world) are inherently reducible to universals (existential, supra-temporal and supra-spatial conditions, of which particulars are mere instantiations). Hence, epistemologically speaking, we are said to structure the world around us by ordering the raw percepts, the perpetual stream of sensory information - the concrete particulars - into abstract domains, i.e. into conceptual categories, reflecting essential universals that are assumed to be objectively real.

We, purportedly, perceive the particular objects of the external world as belonging to a given *category*, and, hence, we are said to categorize things by what they 'have in common', i.e. by allocating any given percept with percepts of an 'essentially similar nature'. *To see a tree* is to sort a certain, particular pattern of optical sensory information under the category 'tree', defined by an essential, universal, and objective 'treeness' inherent to all members of the category; *to hear a dog barking* is to sort a certain, particular pattern of auditory sensory information under the category 'barking of dog', defined by an essential, universal, and objective 'dogbarkiness' inherent to all members of this category. Only by this formative process of conceptualization the raw percepts, i.e. the continuous stream of electromagnetic waves confronting the visual apparatus and the continuous stream of mechanical vibrations confronting the auditory apparatus, are said to become cognitive, i.e. phenomenologically salient, reality. Hence, conceptualization, the act of sorting particulars under their superordinate universals, is seen as being the fundamental process in the brain). An approach I tend to find unconvincing for reasons explained below.

interpreting the external world (for a comprehensive critique, see Strawson 1959). Concepts are thus assumed to be the elementary constituents, the basic 'building blocks' of human thought-life: "*Intuitions without concepts are blind*" (Kant CPR:B75).

In short, the classical model of objecthood assumes that categories are constituted by corresponding essential properties common to all the members of any one category:

"On the objectivist view, things are in the same category if and only if they have certain properties in common. Those properties are necessary and sufficient conditions for defining the category." (Lakoff 1987: xiv).

From this "*objectivist*" standpoint, these common properties are taken to be objectively existent in the external world (For a comprehensive critique, see Popper 1979). Conceptual categories are thus understood as symbolic internal representations of an objective external reality. This figure of thought, in turn, logically purports some independent entity, an underlying ontological essence or substance that these properties are attributed to, a 'featureless substrate' that is the bearer of these essential properties; the 'thing' that 'has' them.<sup>153</sup>

From this figure of thought seems to also emerge our habit of hypostatizing 'music'. We tend to speak of 'music' in the grammatically same way as of 'gold atom', thereby acknowledging that both have the same ontological status, that both are real in the same way or sense; i.e. we tend to locate the phenomenon of music in close proximity to a specific ontological category, viz. that of *natural kinds* (cf. Dewey 1938; Quine 1969).<sup>154</sup> We are postulating a metaphysically real entity: '*the music*'. Hence, we tend to define what music *is* by stating what it '*has*', i.e. by referring to music as being defined by 'having' certain essential properties. Most classical attempts at defining music have, by and large, followed this intensional approach (e.g. Riemann, Hanslick, Schenker, Schoenberg, Stravinsky). In the Western discourse about music, the alleged essential properties thus attributed, and hence conceived of

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<sup>153</sup> The difficulties in conceiving of such a substance without properties, a *bare particular*, was first discussed by John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690).

<sup>154</sup> Very broadly speaking, those entities of the natural world that exist independent of our being aware of their existence or having any knowledge about them whatsoever. See also [6.2.2], below.

as being constitutive of the category, are usually assumed as corresponding to elementary analytical units of Western music theory (tone, pitch, timbre, meter, rhythm, consonance, dissonance, form etc.), as the one is taken to be an immediate relatum of the respective other.<sup>155</sup>

The problem that poses itself is, thus, the following: if 'music' is in itself defined by 'having' certain properties it remains entirely unclear what precisely it is that, supposedly, 'has' these properties; what that basal substance, '*the music*', is that we assign these properties to. It seems uncertain what precisely constitutes the assumed bearer of these individual properties; what it is that binds them into a coherent phenomenon, a concept, a category or any kind of ontological entity - or what it is that remains if all of the properties so assigned are absent.

If now (in attempting to resolve the before-mentioned problem) we take the allegedly less naïve stance of conceiving each member of the category 'music' not as 'having' certain properties, but as being entirely *constituted by them*<sup>156</sup> - thus supposedly doing away with any underlying featureless substrate - it still remains unexplained what the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions are that ultimately define a particular object as legitimately belonging to the proposed category, and what it is (if not a "featureless substrate") that binds those properties to any particular instance.

The approach of conceptualizing music by attributing essential properties to it is still so deeply ingrained into modern Western thought that even at a most basic level of mentation we seem to habitually conceive of music as being constituted by at least two analytically separate domains; as 'having' two separate aspects. Even that what in the Western tradition would most likely be equated with music *strictu sensu*, i.e. that what we encounter during a

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155 I.e., the elementary units of analysis *are* those putative elements that are essential to the category and, hence, to the substance that is its ultimate referent. It has to be noted, however, that more recent attempts at defining music generally do not solely rely on emphasizing particular structural aspects allegedly essential to musical sound, but also include notions of purpose and context (e.g. Levinson 1990: 273; Gracyk and Kania 2011: 12).

156 This so-called 'bundle theory' of objects consisting solely as a collection of their respective constituent properties was first proposed by David Hume (1739). Though it appears to get rid of the problematic notion of an underlying featureless essence, it remains entirely unclear what it is that holds the respective properties together as belonging to one particular object or, by extension, category (the problem of the *compresence* of properties; or, in the jargon of contemporary neuroscience, the 'binding problem').

performance in a concert hall or opera house, when listening to a recording, or when playing the piano, is being conceptually fragmented into a dyad of distinct domains: an *auditory domain*,<sup>157</sup> the realm of perceived vocal or instrumental *sonance*, the experience of hearing something *as something particular* (i.e. 'hearing music' as a particular formation of sound);<sup>158</sup> and an *affective domain*, the realm of sensuous *re-sonance*, the specific mode of 'attunement',<sup>159</sup> the particular inner posture we involuntarily take towards a given sounding expression as it appears to us as having a certain 'sentiment' or 'character' we naturally feel compelled to empathize with (i.e. 'experiencing music' as a meaningful expression).<sup>160</sup>

In our everyday encounters with music, however, this alleged duality does not seem to bother us the least - for it is a duality in conceptualization only, a result of our particular tradition of analytic rationality, a faint echo of the Cartesian dualism of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. In experiencing the phenomenon of music, the auditory and the affective, sonance and resonance, presuppose each other in a way that in isolation they become meaningless. They are co-conditional necessities, co-constitutive and co-integrative,

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157 I hesitate to associate, let alone to equate, this perceptual category also with an *acoustic* dimension (in the proper, i.e. physical, sense) as numerous authors have done, for the following reason: Human auditory perception and cognition is incapable of perceiving any quantifiable acoustic parameters in the physical sense, i.e. mechanical vibrations in air as described by magnitudes of frequency, amplitude and phase. That is the reason why we have conceived of technical apparatus that *can* detect these values quantitatively, impartially, and indifferently, and translate them into 'human-readable' output in another (usually the visual) domain. Conscious persons, however, do not detect complex acoustic waveforms (irrespective of the fact that their *ears*, on a 'sub-personal' level, in a sense do). We hear a baby crying, a dog barking, the honking of a car, or the playing of a violin; i.e. we do not *detect* particular *properties* of sound, we *experience* particular auditory *qualities*; and these belong to different respective ontologies (cf. Dewey 1958 [1925]; Heidegger 2012 [1935-6]: 10; also Scruton 1997: 1-18). We cannot other than to hear something *as something*. Acoustic occurrences are merely a *necessary condition* for experiencing music (and even this is highly debatable; 'inner listening' of music, for example, takes place entirely without any simultaneous, related acoustic occurrence). In last analysis, despite both being on a trivial level related to physical sound, music has just as little to do with acoustics as speech has. Just try to hear words uttered in your native tongue as 'merely sound' - though from the standpoint of acoustics this is precisely what they are.

158 Ignoring for the time being the special case of 'inner listening', i.e., of purely mental representations of music (cf. [fn. 155], immediately above).

159 In the sense of the German *Gestimmtheit* as exemplified by Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* (1977 [1927]); a term with obvious musical connotations in both English and German.

160 These notions mirror the more vernacular distinction between 'form' and 'feeling' that, S. K. Langer (1953) chose as the title for her aesthetic theory. I prefer the somewhat more elementary and perhaps more neutral term 'attunement' (*Gestimmtheit*) to terms like 'feeling' or 'emotion' for reasons explicated in, e.g. Budd 1985). See also [5.1.5], above.

inextricably conflated, like the recto and verso of a sheet of paper, into the particular phenomenal appearance we call music. If one is absent, the phenomenon simply ceases to be music.

Much of what has been said so far harks, of course, back to one of the core issues in Western metaphysics: the so-called 'problem of universals' (cf., e.g., Wöhler [ed.] 1992; D. M. Armstrong 1973, 1989). Like the 'mind-body-problem', the problem of universals is so absolutely central to the history of Western philosophy that it is impossible to understand the Occidental tradition of thought without having understood the problem of universals and the key proposals as to its resolution.

To summarize it in the simplest possible terms: the problem of universals revolves around concrete empirical objects - *particulars* - and abstract general concepts - *universals* -; and around how that which is particular and that which is universal relate to one another. It, furthermore, inquires after the ontological status of such universals, i.e. what their particular mode of existence is: 'what are they? (ideas?, appearances?, concepts?, words?), and 'where' are they? (in a transcendent realm?, in the physical world?, in our minds?, in language?). And from this also follows the epistemological question of how we obtain knowledge of them, of how we relate to them, and of how it is that we can meaningfully, and quite naturally, use them in thought and communication despite their abstract, intangible nature.

In short, the problem of universals concerns the question of whether the referents of general concepts are real entities that exist independently of human thought and language, or whether general concepts are human constructions that have no correspondence in an external, objective reality. Is there such a thing as a universal, abstract 'redness', independently of a particular, concrete red object?; such a thing as universal, abstract 'wisdom', independently of a particular, concrete wise person making a particular, concrete wise decision?; such a thing as a universal, abstract 'to-the-left-of-ness', independently of a particular, concrete object being to the left of another particular, concrete object as seen from the spatial-temporal perspective of a particular, concrete observer?



Though this debate has, in the course of centuries, developed quite sophisticated ramifications (as I have tried to demonstrate above), much of the non-technical discourses about these matters still draw almost exclusively on the competing theories of Plato and Aristotle that had been formulated over two thousand years ago.

Both, Plato and Aristotle, believed that universals exist independently of human thought and language, that they possess a reality of their own. Hence, both their positions are referred to as metaphysical *realism*. Their respective ideas about what constitutes the mind-independent reality of universals are, however, fundamentally different.

In Plato's idiom, universals have their proper existence in what he refers to as the realm of *ideas*.<sup>161</sup> The idea (ἰδέα) is that which remains universally the same in all objects or actions, however much they may differ from one another. The idea represents the form (εἶδος) and the essence (οὐσία) of things. Ideas exist, according to Plato, as independent entities and are ontologically superior to empirically perceptible objects. The world of ideas, not that of the objects of sensory experience, represents actual reality. Platonic ideas are perfect, eternal, and immutable; they are the archetypal models (παράδειγμα) of which the individual sense objects are merely pale imitations. It is the ideas that our general concepts and category terms properly refer to; what makes them meaningful. In Plato's world, the realm of ideas is in every respect superordinate and prior to that of the objects of sensory perception, to the mere things of this world. One, therefore, speaks of Plato's theory of ideas also as the concept of *Universalia ante rem*.<sup>162</sup>

Aristotle also advocates a metaphysical realism. Like his teacher Plato

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161 For an in-depth discussion see (Fine 1993, 2003).

162 While the postulate of a transcendent sphere of perfect, eternal, immutable ideas might at first appear a little implausible to the modern mind (in which sense did the perfect, eternal, immutable idea of 'woolly mammoth' survive the extinction of the actual species?; is there also a perfect, eternal, immutable idea of 'size M plaid boxer shorts'?; etc.), Platonic realism still has many adherents even today. These are not only to be found in philosophy, but also in disciplines that are generally thought to represent intellectual and epistemological antipodes; viz. the natural sciences on the one hand and theology on the other. It is obvious why the notion of a transcendent realm of eternal, perfect truth appeals to people of faith, as religious dogma depends on the belief in some form of higher order. Yet most natural scientist, at least subconsciously, likewise hold on to Platonic realism as it is implicitly taken as matter-of-fact that the laws of nature, numbers, and the fact that  $2+2=4$  share a mind-independent, transcendent - i.e. Platonic - reality.

before, he assumes that knowledge about things is only possible when universals have a real existence. For Aristotle, however, this existence is not independent of the individual things. Universals are nothing separate from real things; they are not hidden in a transcendent sphere inaccessible to human perception, but do exist in the things themselves. Things belong to a certain category because they all share universal, essential properties; the ideal is the essence that is contained in the real - *Universalia in rebus*. Thus, the universal only exists when the particular also exists. The being of the individual things, therefore, has priority over the universal. The Aristotelian notion of *Universalia in rebus* seems to best reflect our colloquial, pre-philosophical approach to forming category terms, e.g. speaking about, say, an apple as being defined as such by 'having' this and that property (being round, red, etc.). In fact, this model is so pervasive that it "even today is taken for granted as being not merely true, but obviously and unquestionably true." (Lakoff 1987: xvii).

As the problem of universals permeates all deliberations about what exists, and in which form different things exist, it has also been at the center of discussions about the ontology of music. The notion of 'musical universals' had been an influential idea especially during the first decades of modern academic musicology. Particularly the field that eventually came to be called *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*<sup>163</sup> was primarily concerned with two central guiding questions: first, with the issue of the ultimate origins of music, of its primal appearance in human culture; and second, with the notion of musical universals, the idea that there must exist certain essential, natural, common properties that bind the countless sounding expressions in the world to that conceptual category, 'music'. And while the former might well be seen as an interesting incentive for speculative thought (cf., e.g., the volume by Wallin *et al.* [eds.] 2001), the latter caused mostly problems. Especially ethnomusicologists, having to get to grips with very different forms of music from very different societies and cultures, have long-since contemplated what might be the

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163 A program that was later, in the 1930s, to be exported to the Anglosphere, with moderate success, as 'comparative musicology' by German-trained scholars fleeing from the Nazis, e.g. G. Herzog and M. Kollinski. British and American scholars that investigated and recorded (also) non-European musics had previously mostly considered themselves 'folklorists', or simply 'music collectors'.

universal, connecting factor among all these expressions; what the ‘common essence’ might be that allows us to conflate all of these phenomena under the category ‘music’:

“[M]any ethnomusicologists, while spending much of their time studying and emphasizing the variety of musical phenomena in the world, still may have as their ultimate aim the definition of music in terms of those of its characteristics which are universal” (Nettl 1977: 2).

While dating back to the earliest days of music scholarship, the issue had again been at the center of a heated debate during the 1970s and early 80s (Wachsmann 1971; Harwood 1976; Blacking 1977; Nattiez 1977; Hood 1977; Nettl 1977; Hutchinson 1978; Koskoff 1984; List 1984), yet was ultimately abandoned inconclusively.<sup>164</sup> In recent years, however, the notion of musical universals has once more gained new currency: over the past decades, new computational methods increasingly allowed for the automated comparison of large numbers of digital sound recordings,<sup>165</sup> searching for recurring patterns that might point at intrinsic sonic or formal properties common to all individual occurrences of what we call music, i.e. for putative universals inherent in the structures of musical sound.

When discussing universals with regard to music it has, however, first to be stated that the term ‘universal(s)’ itself has been used somewhat differently, or more loosely, in musicological discourse than it is commonly used as a technical term in theoretical philosophy – and this imprecise and incautious use of the term has, as I see it, contributed substantially to the unsatisfactory state of the debate. In musicological discourse, the term ‘universal(s)’ is employed in several distinct ways. While differing quite a bit from the term’s general usage in metaphysics, these standpoints towards the issue of universals with regard to music still basically reflect the classical Platonic and Aristotelian standpoints, respectively.

The first stance on the issue of musical universals can be traced from the

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164 Much of this debate was due to two special issues of *The World of Music* (in 1977 and 1984) and turned on the problem of comparative method in ethnomusicology (a notorious hot iron in the field from its very beginnings), and on what precisely it is that is to be compared when opposing different musical utterances or musical cultures.

165 I myself have spent several years (2012-20) of my daily work on the development of the theoretical framework for just such a computational system.

Pythagoreans, to Plato, to the Neo-Platonists from Boethius to Ficino, to contemporary scientific and computational approaches in the study of music. Plato's model explicitly echoes the worldview of the Pythagoreans: the notion that true reality lies within a transcendent realm, not accessible to the human senses, but only to the mind. A realm that, to the Pythagoreans, finds its highest expression in the perfect, eternal, and immutable harmonic ratios of numbers. Plato referred approvingly to the Pythagoreans' musical numerology, while Xenocrates, a student of Plato's, attributed the discovery of the integer numerical relationships of the harmonic intervals to Pythagoras himself.

The notion of a transcendent sphere of absolute laws that govern the universe, and that expresses itself in both the 'harmony of the spheres' and in musical harmony has been among the most influential and long-lasting ideas in the Western understanding of music. And though the 'harmony of the spheres' is no longer mentioned explicitly in modern music research, the general attitude of medieval, neo-Platonic *musica speculativa* still permeates much of 'scientific musicology' even today.

The Aristotelian model, on the other hand, was most prominently applied to the realm of music by his student, Aristoxenus.<sup>166</sup> Aristoxenus positioned himself in opposition to the Pythagoreans and Platonists by proposing that Music was not to be explained by some metaphysical connection to eternal laws of the cosmos expressed by number, but empirically, as a particular phenomenon of its own. Aristoxenus argued that music was to be understood by how its intrinsic properties are actually perceived by the human ear, not by its abstract acoustic properties as observed in the numerical ratios of the vibrating string. In modern terms, his approach was one of empirical psychology as opposed to theoretical acoustics; and one of applied mathematics as opposed to theoretical mathematics (cf. Barker 1990: 119-89; Strunk 1965: 25-33).

The study of music in the Occidental tradition had ever since been dominated by an, often unfortunate, intermingling of ultimately mutually exclusive Pythagorean-Platonic and Aristotelian-Aristoxenean ideas that goes as far back as Euclid. It was only in the early modern era that the Pythagorean-

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<sup>166</sup> Aristoxenus had also been a student of Xenophilus, a Pythagorean, earlier in his life. Hence, we may assume that he was intimately acquainted with Pythagorean ideas prior to his repudiating them.

(neo-)Platonic concept of the primacy of the theoretical numerical proportions of the divided, vibrating string became challenged by the empirical observation of the natural harmonic series of the vibrating string by Mersenne and others that Aristotelian-Aristoxenean empiricism gained some relevance in the Western discourses on music.

After the invention of *Organum* in the 9<sup>th</sup> c., all of Western music was clearly Aristotelian-Aristoxenian in nature (cf. Godwin 1987: 28). Nevertheless, in theoretical thinking the Aristoxenian model always somehow remained secondary to the clear-cut theoretical elegance of neo-Platonic-Pythagorean explanations. Even after musicology became an independent field of study in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, criticism of everything 'new' was often justified by the argument that Western music had become compromised, having strayed too far from Pythagorean principles (e.g., Fabre d'Olivet 1987 [1844-52]). This led to those countless assertions made even to this day, and even by academic musicologists, that either everything post-Bach was worthless; or everything post-Beethoven was worthless; or that equal temperament itself was an expression of artistic decay; or that even everything that followed plainchant was degenerate; or that jazz, or non-European music, or popular music are not 'real' music in the first place.

Hence, in current musicological discourse we encounter the idea of 'musical universals' in several distinct forms, non of which bears any of the precision that the discussion about universals has taken on in theoretical philosophy over the past one-hundred-something years:

On the one hand, 'universal' is often used as in the declarative sentence "music is a universal of human culture". This sentence asserts that all human societies exhibit among their repertory of cultural expressions something that can sensibly be labeled 'music'. 'Universal' here is used to indicate a particular characteristic, 'music', common to all those superordinate phenomena labeled 'human society', akin to an essential property, something that everything labeled 'human society' invariably 'has'; i.e., roughly equivalent to the Aristotelian model of *Universalia in rebus*.

On the other hand 'universal' is often used as in the referential phrase "the universals of music". Here, again, 'universals' refers to particular essential

properties. This time, however, it is not music that is taken to be a universal property of human societies. Rather, it is asserted that there are certain essential, intrinsic properties that all things we label 'music' invariably must 'have'; and, hence, that it is these essential, intrinsic properties that define the category 'music' in the first place; that it is these 'universals' that allow us to recognize a particular appearance in the world as 'music', both cross-culturally and diachronically.

Again, this usage of 'universal' appears to be quite close to the Aristotelian model of *Universalia in rebus*. However, while in the prior example it is quite obvious 'where music is', where it is properly 'located' (viz. 'in human culture'), in the second example it is rather undefined where these 'universals' are to be found. This opens up the door to (neo-)Platonic explanations of a transcendent realm where the 'music-*in-itself*' might reside – presumably the realm of eternal, immutable cosmic order as manifested in simple integer numerical ratios as proposed by the Pythagoreans (cf. Godwin 1993: 160-20 and passim)

To further complicate the matter, these different usages of the term 'universal(s)' are interrelated; or, more precisely: the former usage ('music' is 'a universal of human societies') is causally dependent on the latter (there are 'universal properties' that define 'music'). For it is the latter meaning of 'universal(s)' (i.e. the alleged common essential properties that constitute the category 'music') that define the former meaning of 'universal' (i.e. that which every human society supposedly 'has').

The basic difference, in a technical sense, between these two usages of the term 'universal(s)' is the following: It is at least conceivable (albeit quite unlikely) that an anthropologist might discover a remote, as yet unknown ethnic group that does not engage in anything we would call music. We would, however, still consider these people to represent some form of 'human society' - simply one that, wondrously, doesn't make music. The sentence "the X are a human society that does not engage in making music" is neither unintelligible nor self-contradicting. 'Music', thus, is not an essential, defining property of 'human society'. Hence, even though all known human societies, to my knowledge, practice something we (*we* – not necessarily *them*) would call

'music' it could be argued that music is not, strictly speaking, a true universal of human societies; for 'Music' is not an individually necessary property of 'human society' in the same sense that, say, 'being unmarried' is an individually necessary property of 'bachelor'.

Hence arguing, as it is oftentimes done, along the lines of "100% of known human societies engage in music-making, therefore it is a *universal*" means - at least this is my take on the matter - to confuse ontological universality with empirical *ubiquity*. Even a 100% match (i.e. ubiquity) is still a statistical projection, whereas 'universal' denotes an ontological absolute: every bachelor is unmarried (or else he wouldn't be a bachelor).

Though it is customary to define 'human society' by referring to commonly shared traits like language, cosmology and religion, social order, locality, economy, history, art, and music, it is nevertheless conceivable that there are groups that lack one, or even several, of these traits while still being 'human societies'; and the anthropological literature gives a number of examples. Thus, it has to be asked if 'human society' is itself a kind of category that can meaningfully be grasped in terms of necessary, essential properties – universals –, beyond the trivial necessity that it has somehow to be comprised of humans.

In the second case, however, it is just the opposite: if there should be a mandatory set of essential, defining properties that are necessarily common to everything that is properly and rightfully called 'music', it is logically impermissible that there was some music that was missing one, several, or all of these essential, defining properties. Such an entity would simply not be music as it lacks precisely those necessary properties that would make it such.

I shall now attempt to get to grips with this basic issue, i.e. why we have a conceptual category 'music' and why we think of it in particular ways (and also why the Moken do *not* have such a conceptual category and, hence, do not think of it at all) by drawing on some of the more influential 'non-classical' theories about how we form concepts and categories in general.

## 6.2.1 Wittgenstein: *Family Resemblance*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the oft-cited sixty-sixth paragraph of the *Philosophical Investigations*, contemplates the validity conditions of the classical model of conceptual categories, as expounded above, by reference to those phenomena we call 'games':

“Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games’ ... What is common to them all? - Don't say: ‘There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”- but *look and see* whether there is anything common to *all* - For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.” (Wittgenstein 1958 [1953] : §66; Ascombe's transl.; emphases in original).

What Wittgenstein proposes here is the notion that any ordinary language category designation ultimately appears to be inherently indistinct and ambiguous, without individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions and, hence, without definite boundaries; it has nothing ‘essential’ about it whatsoever. Any limitation of a conceptual category's area of validity is by necessity an artificial, i.e., *conventional* one. A category like ‘games’<sup>167</sup> may at any time be amended, extended, and hence altered<sup>168</sup>, by new kinds of entities that resemble any one of those things previously called a ‘game’ to any sufficient extent (cf. Lakoff 1987:16).<sup>169</sup> Hence, the sphere of reference of such a category is determined not intensionally, by means of some ready-made, given purport prescribed by external reality, but extensionally, by rather loose

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167 Including such diverse things as board games, card games, dice games, puzzle games, guessing games, hunting game (i.e. the animal hunted; quarry), clapping and singing games, war games, role-playing games, computer games, ball games, party games, drinking games, political and psychological power games, “The Great Game” (i.e. the 19<sup>th</sup> c. conflict between the British and Russian empires), the Olympic Games, etc. His thought is even more commanding in the original German, where *Spiel* (game, play) also comprises such things as acting (*Schauspiel*; also, as a noun, a [theatrical] play), as well as the entire category of things termed ‘play’ in English: playing an instrument (*Instrumentenspiel*), word play (*Wortspiel*), love play (*Liebesspiel*), playing a dirty trick (*einen bösen Streich spielen*), and, afterwards, playing the innocent (*den Unschuldigen spielen*), etc.

168 Or replaced by an entirely different term.

169 Or, in the case of metaphorical designations, requiring no objectively denotable resemblance at all. Like when putting a certain type of motorcar under the category ‘hot-rod’, or putting the type of music presumably played on the radio of said car under the category ‘rock-'n'-roll’. Such categories are culture-bound, historically evolved products of the creative imagination: *metaphors*, not analytic references to objective facts.



reference to the sum of those things previously so designated,<sup>170</sup> i.e. by its use in communicative practice. To understand the meaning of a linguistic category, one has to observe its actual communicative utility: “*don't think, but look!*” (Wittgenstein 1953:§66).

In ordinary language, category terms are related to their referents and to one another not by analytically unambiguous signification, such as by a defined set of common, essential properties, but by what Wittgenstein refers to as “*family resemblances*” (*Familienähnlichkeiten*): the notion that categories are formed by series of overlapping similarities or affinities that intermesh with each other like the fibers of a thread, no one feature being necessarily common to all, or even a majority, of the objects within the category (1953: §§67-69). Ordinary language is, according to Wittgenstein (as well as to Ryle, 1949; and to Austin 1962), not primarily a means to make strictly rational, logically valid statements about the world, but first of all a way to convey *meaning* in an entirely non-theoretical, vernacular, ‘human’ way. Ordinary language is just as much perceptual as it is conceptual, just as much connotative as it is denotative.<sup>171</sup>

### **6.2.2 Searle: *Brute Facts* and *Social Facts***

There appear to be different kinds of entities in the world, some of which can be reasonably grasped conceptually and categorially by referring to essential, defining properties (i.e. intensionally), while others cannot be meaningfully apprehended in this way. There is, for example, no compelling reason to doubt the fact that gold atoms are universally and unambiguously (and independently of man knowing about the fact) defined by a common essential property, viz. that all of them have 79 protons in their nucleus; not 78 (as then it would be a platinum atom), not 80 (that's a mercury atom), but precisely 79.

But not all of the phenomena that make up reality are of a kind similar to a gold atom in that they may be unambiguously defined by a universal, essential common property. ‘Marriage’, for example, is an occurrence within

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170 In this case the English language (or Wittgenstein's original German). There are, of course, languages that do not have a synonymous category term.

171 In this, Wittgenstein famously refuted his own stance advocated in the *Tractatus*, and with it the central claim of logical positivism as represented by Carnap, Neurath, Schlick (based on prior ideas of Frege and Russel) and others during the first decade of the twentieth century.

reality that is very different from 'gold atom', although objects containing a large number of gold atoms might play an important role in the ceremonial act of marriage in certain societies. Likewise, what is constituent of 'glass' is of a different order than what is constituent of 'glass breakage insurance'; and what is constituent of a 'printed piece of paper' is of a different order than what is constituent of 'money'.

American philosopher, John Searle (1992; 1995; 1997) breaks this ontological differences down into a duality of what he calls observer-independent, fundamentally unambiguous *brute facts* on the one hand ("*mountains, molecules, and tectonic plates*" being among his favorite examples), and observer-relative, systematically ambiguous *social facts* on the other ("*money, marriage, government, universities, cocktail parties, and summer vacations*"); i.e., those entities that are the givens of the material universe as opposed to those entities that are man-made and whose existence is based on conventions and on the attitudes we take towards them. And the latter appear to have a character distinctly different from the former:

"The concepts that name social facts appear to have a peculiar kind of self-referentiality ... for social facts, the attitude we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon. If, for example, we give a big cocktail party and invite everyone in Paris, and if things get out of hand, and it turns out that the casualty rate is greater than the Battle of Austerlitz - all the same, it is not a war; it is just one amazing cocktail party. Part of a cocktail party is being thought to be a cocktail party; part of a war is being thought to be a war. This is a remarkable feature of social facts; it has no analogue among physical facts." (Searle 1992: 34-5)

If we follow Searle's view (which is not logically incontestable but has a certain casual soundness about it that strongly appeals to me), a question now poses itself, viz. whether those things we label 'music' (or 'myth', or 'ritual') are more akin to those things we label 'games' (or 'marriage', or 'cocktail party') or to those things we label 'gold atoms' (or 'mountains', or 'tectonic plates'),<sup>172</sup> as the answer to this will determine what constitutes the appropriate epistemological and, hence, methodological approach to the subject matter.

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172 For sake of completeness, however, it has to be noted that our ways of conceptualization might be not at all this straight forward even with regard to such 'natural kind' terms, as Kripke (1980 [1972]) and Strawson (1979) suggest.

### 6.2.3 Rosch: *Prototype Theory*

The *Circulus vitiosus* that all classical, intensional, property-based attempts at defining 'music' seem to ultimately run into, i.e. "music is that which 'has those properties' that are constitutive of that which is to count as 'music'" is exemplary of Nietzsche's famous dictum that "*only that which has no history can be defined*" (1994 [1887]: II;13). To make sense of a historically evolved phenomenon such as music, a different approach seems necessary.

In the 1970s and '80s American linguist, Eleanor Rosch expanded and elaborated on Wittgenstein's general observations, proposing a new paradigm of categorization that came to be called *prototype theory* (Rosch 1973, 1977; see also Lakoff 1987: 58-67 and *passim*). It follows from the premises of the classical theory of objecthood that, as all legitimate members of a given category allegedly share a defining 'minimum requirement'-set of common, essential properties, all members of the category also share the same status; a category so defined is non-hierarchical, it doesn't allow for the gradations and nuances within a given category that are so essential to everyday language. Either a thing legitimately belongs to a given category (because it features the necessary essential, universal properties), or it does not (because it lacks one, several, or all of the necessary essential, universal properties).

Rosch, however, claims that we do not identify the members of categories by making recourse to their alleged constituent essential, universal properties at all. Instead we perceive a given appearance in the world as belonging to that particular category by assessing its degree of overall similarity, or perceived proximity, to a *prototypical example* of that category. In this view, category references are ordered hierarchically, from prototypical examples to marginal cases.

Applied to the domain of Western music, this suggests that, say, Bach's *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, Beethoven's '*Waldstein*' sonata or Schubert's '*Der Tod und das Mädchen*' might constitute prototypical examples of 'music' while Cage's infamous 4'33", Chowning's *Turenas*, or a recording of whale 'song' might be considered border-line cases of varying degrees of (dis-)similarity to the prototypical ones.

This account of the process of categorization intuitively seems to fit the way we 'go about things'; its *Gestalt*-like approach also seems to better account for complex objects and processes, abstract ideas, cultural tropes, and subjective experiences than does the idea of subjecting any and all of the countless appearances in the world to a steady, unconscious process of constant analytical segmentation into, and comparison of, their underlying 'constituent, essential, universal, natural properties'.

It is, however, immediately obvious that a notion such as 'prototypical examples' refers, in all cases except perhaps the most banal like sticks and stones (and probably even for them), to historically, socially, culturally, and biographically determined ideas; i.e., they are *culturally relative*.

A prototypical example for the category 'music' might be a very different thing to a white farmer from rural Idaho, an Afro-American youth from Chicago's South-Side, a single mother living in an Oklahoma trailer park, a Jewish college professor from Brooklyn, a Louisiana *Créole*, an elder of the Hopi tribe from Arizona, and an elder from the Yupik tribe from Alaska, even though all of them are citizens of the same nation state at the same point in history, and for all of them the English word 'music' is part of their active vocabulary.

While classical Aristotelian theory assumes that categories are mental representations of natural classes of things given in the external world, Wittgenstein's, Searle's, and Rosch's approaches maintain that this is not at all the case. Conceptual categories are, according to these perspectives, not givens imposed on us by external reality, but central parts of the cognitive models *we make about the world*. A view on the matter that is also in accordance with many empirical findings in anthropology, particularly with regard to categories and designations that appear so elementary, obvious, and self-evident to us that it even seems difficult to imagine that other peoples might conceive of them differently; e.g. kinship terminology (Lounsbury 1964; Pasternak *et al.* 1997), terms for body parts (Sharp 2000), terms regarding spatial organization and orientation (Hallowell 1977), color terms (Berlin and Kay 1969; Kay and McDaniel 1978; Sahlins 1977; see also Lakoff 1987: 22-30), and 'folk taxonomies' of animal and plant species (Berlin *et al.* 1973; Brown

1986).

### 6.3 Properties and Attributions, and the ‘Lowest Common Denominator’ View of Human Culture

This apparent cultural relativity of conceptual categories has proven to be a major obstacle to the understanding of other peoples' worlds, including their creative expressions, as we cannot other than to perceive the world in the terms of our own conceptual categories. And it is our conceptual categories that, to a large degree, determine how the world appears to us, what is in the world and what is not.

In the passages cited above, however, Wittgenstein cautions us that our own conceptual categories might well mislead us by making us believe that they must be referring to some defined entity or bounded object: if we have a term for it, there has to be an underlying ‘essence’, a ‘thing’ this term ultimately refers to; an idea similar to what Whitehead calls the “*fallacy of the perfect dictionary*”, the misconception that there was a one-to-one correspondence between word and world.<sup>173</sup>

There is an important distinction between *properties* that are *intrinsic* to an object or class of objects, and *attributions* that we *ascribe* to a certain phenomenon or class of phenomena. And we seem, too often and too unthinkingly, to take the latter as being of the same ontological status as the former, thereby misleading ourselves into taking our own attributions as being actual properties of the phenomenon or object in question. Categorical nouns that rely entirely on attributions, that basically *are* complex patterns of attributions, such as ‘music’ (or ‘games’), therefore, may raise the fallacious expectation that they denote a clearly defined referent; and, hence, these expectations are all too easily carried over to instances where this might not at all apply, or not in the same way, or not to the same extent – such as when referring to the world of people whose conceptual categories are significantly different from our own.

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173 To state an extreme (and very probably fictional) case of this fallacy: in German academe there circulates an anecdote about an 18<sup>th</sup> c. scholar, J. G. A. Galletti, who is alleged to have said: “*The swine quite rightfully bears its name, for it is truly a filthy animal!*”.

The complex patterns of attributions, connections, associations, and references between words and the concepts or categories they denote is a defining constituent of any given culture, largely determining how a particular people relate to reality. Thus, our own concept of 'music', the import we associate with the propositional semantics of the term itself, is, of course, historically and culturally determined. Its denotative and connotative sphere of reference, and the 'prototypical examples' we associate with it, are neither universal nor normative. It is *our* way of conceptualizing a particular set of more-or-less interrelated phenomena. When applying the attributions we associate with the term 'music' unquestioned to the expressions of other cultures, we are in danger of forcing what 'they' are doing under a term that appears to be appropriate merely by force of being compatible with our own conceptual framework; with the connotations the category 'music', for us, carries with itself: "[T]he first fallacy is to regard one's own brand of music or musicology as the whole of either." (C. Seeger 1977 [1948]; see also Tomlinson 1993: 15).

The positivist notion that there was some 'minimal set of criteria' to define what 'essentially' constitutes the phenomenon of music appears to rest on a fallacious conception about the nature of the phenomenon; let alone the question whether such a 'lowest common denominator'-view of human (musical) culture is epistemologically and ethically desirable in the first place (cf. Geertz 1973:43).

As C. Seeger has argued, no general natural or logical correlation has so far been shown to exist between the acoustical and formal properties of musical *sound* on the one hand, and the linguistic attributions and ascriptions made *about* music (including the category noun 'music' itself) on the other; what he termed the "*musicological juncture*" (loc. cit.). The ways in which we make and experience music and the ways in which we speak and write about music are clearly things of a different order. The meaning(s) of the first cannot be translated meaningfully into the latter in any general, systematic way. Their ontological relation seems to be merely one of coexistence, neither one being an immediate relatum of the respective other. And, or at least this is the point of view put forth in this thesis, they remain disjointed, unconnected entities without the unification provided by the mediating agents of history and culture.

The concepts we employ to refer to 'music' are thus not a priori, prescribed by some alleged set of essential constituent properties representing structures objectively given in the external world. They much rather appear to be culturally patterned attributions referring to socially legitimized ideas and conventions relating to historically evolved practices (cf. Blacking 1973; Seeger 1987; Turino 2008). They emerge by means of historical processes, as collective ideas, views and behaviors of the members of a particular social group with particular customs and traditions; i.e. by having *learned* to make certain associations and judgments with regard to certain appearances of man-made sound and accordant ways of behavior due to prolonged exposure to a certain 'way of life' (cf. Meyer 1956: 60f.).

It seems appropriate to now look in some detail at several of the underlying assumptions and connotations that resonate with the term 'music' as understood in the West, our culturally inherited modes of thought, our inevitable bias, our prototypical models, our "*own brand*"; and to see what ethnomusicologists (like myself) take with them into the 'field' as their, to borrow a term from Charles Keil, "*interpretive baggage*" (1979: 26). How much interpretation is, unknowingly or half-knowingly, already being performed when attempting to put other peoples sounding expressions under the category of 'music', or any of the sub-categories we associate with the phenomenon? When referring to other peoples non-linguistic sounding expressions as 'music', what exactly does this imply? What are we actually designating when applying this concept?

## 6.4 'Music' is not a Ubiquitous Category

*WHY IS OUR MOST AFFECTING MUSIC NO MORE THAN EMPTY NOISE TO THE EAR OF A CARIBBEE? ... ARE HIS NERVES OF A DIFFERENT NATURE FROM OURS?*

- JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (1781; TRANSL. IN ROUGET 1985: 169)

The fact that they do not command a semantically equivalent term to what we call 'music' is a characteristic that the Moken share with numerous, perhaps even the majority of, other cultures around the world, as "*agreement on definition and conceptualization of music itself does not even come close to being a cultural universal.*" (Nettl 2000: 472).

Classically, David McAllester (1954: 4 and passim) reports about sound-making among the Navaho: "*A 'fact' in the Navaho universe is that music is not a general category of activity but has to be divided into specific aspects or kinds of music*". Likewise, Steven Feld (1981: 27-38; 1982: 35-43) tells us that among the Kaluli of New Guinea they use an extensive metaphorical vocabulary (derived mainly from waterfall sounds and bird 'song') with regard to different kinds of song and ceremony (both referred to as "*gisalo*"; *ibid.*), but no term that would be similar to, let alone synonymous with, 'music' as we commonly understand it. John Blacking (1967: 16-27) presents a comprehensive glossary of Venda terms with regard to repertoires and genres, singing and dancing styles, and musical instruments, yet none that would translate as 'music'. Ruth Stone writes that among the Kpele of Liberia

"music sound is conceived as part of an integrally related cluster of dance, speech, and kinesic-proxemic behavior referred to as *pêle* and occurring in particular time-space dimensions ... The Kpelle term *pêle* glosses certain music events as well as a broader spectrum of human behavior including games. Music may be *pêle*, but not all music is *pêle*, nor, as in the case of games, is all *pêle* music. Several events an ethnomusicologist might label music are not considered part of the category *pêle*." (1982: 1).

Charles Keil reports about West-African conceptualizations in a more general



way:

“The problem of our biases hit me rather forcefully when it became clear that a word corresponding to our term ‘music’ could not be found in one African language after another – Tiv, Yoruba, Igbo, Efik, Birom, Hausa, assorted Jarawa dialects, Idoma, Eggon, and a dozen other languages from the Nigeria-Camerouns area do not yield a word for ‘music’ gracefully ... So what seems to us a very basic, useful, and rather concrete term is apparently a useless abstraction from a Tiv, Yoruba, perhaps even pan-African or non-Western point of view.” (1979: 27).

A similar observation, notably from a musical culture much less distant from the domain of European art music, is stated by Timothy Rice:

„During the course of my research I learned that Bulgarian villagers did not seem to have a cover term for the linguistic domain we label music in English. Rather this unnamed domain had five subdomains in Bulgarian: (1) Instrumental music (a ‘play-thing’) and its playing, (2) songs and singing, (3) laments and lamenting, (4) drums and drumming, and (5) dances and dancing.“ (2017: 5).

The list of examples could be continued further. Bruno Nettl Summarizes:

“Certainly not all [peoples] have a term that translates as ‘music’. Even European languages do not have all that much unanimity; look, for example, at the bifurcation of *Musik* and *Tonkunst* in German, or *Muzika* and *Hudba* in Czech. In Persian culture, much of what we conceive of as music is called *Musiqi*, a term derived from Greek by way of Arabic; but much that sounds to us Europeans as music would not be considered *Musiqi* but rather *Khandan*, a word that means reading, reciting, and singing; and some sounds or genres would be regarded as somehow between these two extremes. The Blackfoot language has as its principle gloss for music the word *saapup*, which means something like singing, dancing, and ceremony all rolled into one. Thus if we are to talk about music as a universal phenomenon, we cannot do it on the basis of a commonality of cultural conceptions.” (2000: 466).

Hence, even cultures that use essentially ‘the same word’ phonetically and etymologically (i.e. derived from the Greek *μουσική*, like for instance the Hebrew מוזיקה [muziquah], the Arabic موسيقى [musiqi], the Amharic ሙዚቃ [muzika], or the Georgian მუსიკა [musika]) often associate a quite different content with the term than do (central or Western) Europeans, hence rendering it not at all ‘the same word’ semantically.<sup>174</sup>

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174 For instance, often reserving the term music strictly for ‘instrumental play performed in a profane setting’, explicitly excluding song as well as liturgical chant and the playing of instruments in a ceremonial context.

Now, what does this mean? All these people are quite obviously making *music*, aren't they? Could it really be that they do not recognize the true essence of the nature of music, so that they cannot even give some proper name to the category? That they, on a fundamental level of mentation, are ignorant of what it is they are doing?

This notion is, of course, ridiculous. They all know perfectly well what they are doing. The lack of a general, overarching gloss for those phenomena that we would subsume under our conceptual category of 'music' merely indicates that many other peoples' cognitive and conceptual models are just not identical with ours. That "intentional sound-making that is neither language nor mere signaling" (or something to this effect), the idea of an autonomous domain of *Tonkunst*, simply is not a mandatory, natural, universal category.

Taking, with John Searle, the position that social facts are to a significant degree constituted by *what we take them to be*, that they in a certain sense *are* the very conceptions we make about them, the absence of what to us is a central conceptual category should certainly attract our attention. How can we say that we are speaking about a general, even a 'universal' phenomenon of human culture, when the conceptualizations that are, at least to a large degree, constituent of the phenomenon in question turn out to be so inconsistent and diverse among different cultures and languages, and sometimes even within one and the same culture and language?

If a concept appears to be ever so central and paramount to our discourse about a subject as does our term 'music' - even the name of our discipline is based on this very word<sup>175</sup> - and this word just has no corresponding equivalent in one language after another, this indeed is a strong incentive to find out *why this is so*. If a concept like 'music' does not exist in the ideational world and in the language of a particular culture, this also raises a number of follow-up questions, like: do they (too) contemplate beauty? Do they (too) associate specific affective virtues with their sounding expressions? Do they (too) acknowledge a sphere of 'art' as distinguished from 'non-art'? If so, do they (too) appreciate outstanding artistic quality? Do any of these notions

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175 Within academic musicology and its diverse sub-fields there indeed seems to be very little dissent about what constitutes the core subject of our discipline, albeit with the inevitable blurry areas at the concept's margins.

that we commonly associate with 'music' (or 'art') apply at all? And if not, which normative values do they associate with sound-making? And is *sound* itself even as central to their notions as it is to ours?

Richard L. Anderson here poses the most fundamental of questions: „*How are we anthropologists to identify, much less discuss, art in non-Western settings?*“ (1992: 927), pointing out that

“some - ... probably most – cultures have no tradition of using disinterested, theoretical principles to discuss the relative merits or fundamental nature of art; that is, they have no explicit, clearly articulated aesthetic philosophy” (ibid.).

While to us the theoretical reflection about artistic expression has become an integral part of the way we perceive and conceptualize the phenomenon as a whole, of “*what it is thought to be*” (Searle, loc. cit.), this might not at all be the case with ‘them’ (it is certainly not the case with the Moken). There appears to be no substantiated reason to assume that the conceptual apparatus and the scope of explanatory competence of Western aesthetic theory and its cognate fields, including those based on empirical observation and scientific methodology,<sup>176</sup> in any appreciable way transcend the realm of the Western history of music and art. “[I]t’s conceivable”, ponders Keil (1979: 27), “*that we may eventually think it silly, ethnocentric, even pompous to be designating disciplines with names like ‘musicology’ or ‘ethnomusicology’*”. Or, in the words of anthropologist Robert Layton: “*What right do we have to assume that our criteria of harmony, rhythm and proportion are those of other people?*” (1991: 13; emphasis in original).

Here the burden of proof of my argument is reversed to a certain extent: for the fact that the Moken and many other peoples have no concept for music now seems to demand less of an explanation than the fact that *we*, for whatever reason, actually *do have* such a category.

In anthropology, the overarching term ‘art’ has been widely challenged as a

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<sup>176</sup> Like, e.g., the field known as the ‘cognitive psychology of music’, that relies almost entirely on Western subjects exposed to stimuli defined by Western notions about what music ‘is’ (i.e. autonomous, isolated structures of acoustic phenomena defined as ‘having’ particular ‘properties’ like meter, rhythm, pitch, timbre, consonance, dissonance etc.).

meaningful concept for scholarly debate (cf. Maquet 1986; Anderson 1992; also Layton 1981: 4ff.). Too varied are the objects, practices, and ideas that are allegedly covered under this term, and too great has been the influence of Western philosophical aesthetics on the denotative and descriptive import associated with the semantics of 'art' for it to remain a useful category, at any rate in trans-cultural discourse:

“[A]s aesthetic theory has developed, the number of apparently undeniable qualities or characteristics of art that have been suggested and must somehow be incorporated into any definition has become decidedly unwieldy, and today it is generally agreed that definitions of art, if one desires them at all, must be either injunctive or open-textured.” (Dissanayake 1980: 399).<sup>177</sup>

The term 'music' (generally understood as a sub-category of 'art') on the other hand has not been scrutinized in the same way, or at least not to the same extent.<sup>178</sup>

In trying to understand why the Moken and many other cultures do not command a term that is semantically equivalent to our concept of music I shall now, in some detail, take a closer look at how this concept emerged and acquired its common meaning; and at how it came to be that we are using a conceptual category as a matter of course that, to other peoples, is entirely superfluous and expendable.

As I have expounded above, transferring a linguistic term, with its entire complex semantic field of denotations and connotations, from one language into another is fraught with, sometimes insurmountable, problems. This, however, does not imply that terms like 'music' or 'art' (or 'myth', or 'ritual', or 'religion', or 'economy', or 'marriage') cannot at all be meaningfully applied to different cultures, even if the respective foreign language has no direct lexical, or even

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<sup>177</sup> In the article cited, Dissanayake claims that many of the notions usually associated with art can be subsumed under more general (and better researched) behavioral/ethological categories (play, exploratory behavior, general perception). While her analytical framework thus clearly differs from mine, her reasoning has a similar starting point.

<sup>178</sup> Notable exceptions include Turino (2008) and Tanner and Budd (1985). Tanner concedes that *“there should be another set of terms which are both appropriate to our experience of music, and also serve genuinely to characterize it. But it should be clear that there can be no such mediating language.”* (in Tanner and Budd 1985: 217). I consider it to be a fundamental priority of ethnomusicology at least to try come up with just such a mediating language, even if this should turn out to be ultimately futile.

conceptual, equivalent. After all, cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology basically are processes of translation, and so we have to communicate unfamiliar phenomena in some intelligible way, using familiar terms. This, however, raises again the inevitable question *why is this so?* Why are concepts and words that seem rather natural to us completely unnecessary in other cultural circumstances?

Familiar terms should, as I see it, just not be employed naïvely and unquestioned, as matter-of-fact, this-means-that designations, when referring to essentially unfamiliar phenomena. Words that to us signify certain ideas and concepts (with all the inherent difficulties and vaguenesses described in [ch. 6], above) become, if used with regard to other cultures, *analogies*, mere conceptual approximations, and therefore require comprehensive additional explanatory designation and qualification.

We inevitably take prior theoretical knowledge, preconceptions, and prejudices - some form of *"preunderstanding"* as Timothy Rice calls it - with us into the field: *"[T]he test of the effectiveness of such imported theories"*, Rice argues,

"is not whether they come from inside or outside the culture but whether they provide a convincing explanation or an eye-opening inside into the workings of the local music culture we are studying. From a hermeneutic perspective, it is predictable that some of these interpretations will match those of the people with whom we work and some will not. But when they don't match, we or some local observer will point that out. That's the way scholarship is supposed to work" (Rice 2017: 21)

While I am not quite as optimistic (out of personal experience; cf. [1.3], above) with regard to the timely clarification of possible misunderstandings as is Rice, I do certainly agree with his general assertion. Yet for this process to work, to be able to tell adequate from inadequate background assumptions, we have to be consciously aware of the fact that our background assumptions are merely just that: preconceptions and interpretations (and, in the worst case, prejudices), and not given truths about music, society, culture, or anything. Our view on the particularities of a foreign culture is inevitably a 'view from somewhere', yet seldom if ever the detached perspective from the crow's nest. And it is often quite hard to take a step back to look what our particular 'observation platform'

is constructed from, which angles of view it allows, and which not. I shall now try to take such a step back.

Our modern concept of music, and of art in general, is in fact a comparatively recent development, its meaning and sphere of reference, as presently understood, and as (at least to my understanding) being implicitly taken as a kind of 'norm' or 'standard' in most of musicology and art history, having evolved, roughly, over the course of the past 250 years (cf. Kristeller 1951, Fubini 1991).<sup>179</sup> To begin with I will, therefore, briefly recapitulate and summarize, in very broad outline, some of the key developments in the history of Western thought that led to our present understanding of what 'music' in particular and 'art' in general are "*conceived to be*" (Blacking, loc. cit.) among 'us Westerners'.

With regard to 'our' conceptions about music and its 'situatedness' in Western consciousness, I should presently like to identify some central paradigms. While music is a lot of different things to a lot of different people, even when limited to music in the Western tradition, I see two figures of thought to be paramount and of exceptionally far-reaching consequence with regard to our conceptions about music. I will refer to them as (a) '*the Pythagorean Myth*' and, in borrowing a famous dictum from French critic, André Malraux, as (b) '*the Imaginary Museum*'.

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179 The Western notions about what music 'is' are undoubtedly meaningful with regard to music of the Western classical repertory and thus have a certain merit when applied to this particular tradition. In a culture where a substantial part of music is made with the musically (at least semi-)educated connoisseur in mind and a superstructure of theory (whether mostly technical, as in the West; or mostly metaphysical or mystical, as in Indian, Chinese, and Arabic music theory) and the according technical vocabulary are an essential part of the phenomenon as a whole, a basic understanding of fundamental theoretical concepts might very well enhance the experience (cf. Tanner and Budd 1985).

## 6.5 The Pythagorean Myth

*INSTEAD OF CONSULTING NATURE ABOUT MUSIC, THE PHILOSOPHIC MIND HAS FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TURNED TO IT FROM THE DIRECTION OF GEOMETRY, IN ORDER THEREIN TO FOLLOW PYTHAGORAS WITHOUT FIRST EXAMINING WHETHER THAT AUTHOR WAS WELL- OR ILL-FOUNDED. HE IS MADE TO SPEAK, MADE TO ACT AS ONE BELIEVES HE MAY HAVE DONE. HYPOTHESES ARE IMAGINED WITH HIM, OR AFTER HIS FASHION, TO MAKE THE RATIOS HE GAVE TO THE SOUNDS SQUARE WITH THE DIFFERENT ORDERS THAT EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS. EACH SAYS WHAT HE THINKS ABOUT IT, AND ALL ARE EQUALLY MISTAKEN.*

-JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1998 [1754]:180)

We often seem to take for granted that our own worldview is based on rational understanding and has, therefore, a claim to being universally normative; that there had been a particular

*“chain of circumstances [that] led to the appearance of cultural phenomena on the soil of the Occident, and only here, which – as we at least like to believe - lay in a direction of development of universal significance and validity” (Weber 1965 [1904-5]:1; my transl., emphasis in orig.)*

This claim to rational explanations of universal validity extends also to our understanding of music: while what has for long been called “primitive music” is thought to be based merely on the arbitrary whims of some obscure traditions and customs and, hence, ultimately on false premises, we like to believe that we ourselves have identified the universal laws of music, the music-*in-itself* (cf. Becker 1986: 341-59).

I shall argue that this belief in such a rational essence of music is in itself based upon a quintessentially mythical narrative: The ancient myth of music being a mirror of eternal cosmic order expressed as simple numerical ratios.

This particular Occidental view on music originated, if such a ‘first beginning’ might be reasonably determined at all, with Pythagoras's (6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) empirical and mathematical studies on the vibration of strings; or, more precisely, with the legends that recount these alleged experiments, passed on

by Plato, Xenocrates, Euclid, Nicomachus, Ptolemy, Augustine and Plotinus throughout antiquity and into the medieval world (for a comprehensive treatment of the Pythagorean tradition in [music] history, see Burkert 1972; Godwin 1993). The Legend comes down to us in the words of 1<sup>st</sup> century mathematician, Nicomachus of Gerasa as follows:

“Pythagoras being in intense thought whether he might invent any instrumental help to the ear, solid and infallible, such as the sight hath by the compass and rule, as he passed by a smith's shop by a happy chance he heard the iron hammers striking on the anvil, and rendering sounds most consonant to one another except one. He observed in them these three concords: the octave, the fifth and the fourth ... he hastened into the shop, and by various trials finding the difference of sounds to be according to the weight of the hammers ... having taken exactly the weight of the hammers he went straight home, and to one beam fastened to the walls ... tying four strings of the same substance, length, and twist, upon each of them he hung a several weight, fastening it at the lower end, and making the length of the strings altogether equal; then striking the strings by two at a time interchangeably, he found out the aforesaid concords, each in its own combination; for that which was stretched by the greatest weight, in respect of that which was stretched by the least weight, he found to sound an octave. The greatest weight was of twelve pounds, the least of six; thence he determined that the octave did consist in double proportion ... Next he found that the greatest to the least but one, which was of eight pounds, sounded a fifth; whence he conferred this to consist in the proportion 3:2 ... but unto that which was less than itself in weight, yet greater than the rest, being nine pounds, he found it to sound a fourth; and discovered that, proportionably to the weights, this concord was 4:3; which string of nine pounds is naturally 3:2 to the least; for nine to six is so, viz., 3:2, as the least but one, which is eight, was to that which had the weight six, in proportion 4:3, and twelve to eight is 3:2; and that which is the middle, between a fifth and a fourth, whereby a fifth exceeds a fourth, is confirmed to be 9:8 in proportion. The system of both was called Diapason, or octave, that is both the fifth and the fourth joined together, as duple proportion is compounded of 3:2 and 4:3; or on the contrary, of 4:3 by 3:2.” (from *Enchiridion harmonices*, transl. T. Stanley [1701]; quoted in Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 3-6)

The Pythagorean doctrine of music being primarily a particular kind of acoustic phenomenon, ‘geometrical proportions made audible’, was codified in late antiquity by Roman philosopher, Boethius (c. 480 - c. 525 CE) in his *De institutione musica*. Boethius assigned music, together with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy to the curriculum of higher learning, the *Quadrivium*,<sup>180</sup> thereby locating it firmly with mathematics and the natural

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180 Together with the preparatory *Trivium* (grammar, logic, rhetoric) these subjects formed the seven *Artes liberales*, the canon of academic education throughout the middle ages.



sciences, a stance that had been adopted also by scholars from the Islamic world, such as Al-Kindi (c. 800 - 873 CE) and Al-Farabi (c. 870 - c. 950 CE).<sup>181</sup>

To Boethius, music proper was not actual music-making (which he considered manual labor and thus not worthy of a free man), but the purely intellectual contemplation of the mathematical regularities of the harmonic series as displayed by the Pythagorean proportions.<sup>182</sup> Actual musical sound was merely a pale reflection of ultimate natural laws, a watered-down sensory experience of universal truths. This alleged proximity to arithmetic and geometry lend to the notion of music as understood in the Western tradition a certain apparently objective, natural validity that other expressive forms that, much later, together with music, became collectively subsumed under the term 'art' (i.e., poetry, drama, painting, sculpture) seemed to lack (cf. Kristeller 1951).<sup>183</sup> And this notion of music being both an expression and a sensory experience of 'hidden principles', of a universal essence of natural order, remained largely unquestioned for centuries - after all Kepler, Huygens, Descartes, Bacon, Milton, Leibniz, and Euler likewise thought in this way.<sup>184</sup>

During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the rediscovery of classical Greek thought also led to a revival of the Pythagorean-Platonic obsession with finding the one universal principle that, allegedly, equally governs the cosmos, man, and the arts (e.g. Ficino: *De vita libri tres*, 1489; Gaffori: *De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus*, 1518) - an aspiration that found its perhaps most iconic expression in Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*.

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181 Somewhat similar (yet by no means identical) notions are also to be found in the musical thought of ancient India and China, i.e. other complex, literate 'civilizations' comprised of cities and states, with a hierarchical government structure, a bureaucracy, a high degree of diversification and specialization, and advanced mastery of mathematics and engineering (cf. for India e.g. Rowell 1992; for China e.g. Green 2016 [1913]).

182 What after John of Murs (13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c.) came to be called *musica speculativa*.

183 This also appears to be the reason why 'musical acoustics' established itself early on as an accepted sub-discipline of physical acoustics, while basically similar ideas like 'poetical acoustics' or 'painterly optics' or 'sculpture metallurgy and geology' never seriously occurred to anyone (or at least not as an independent field of inquiry separate from the purely practical needs of conservators). Michelangelo's notion that any sculpture is actually a preexisting 'prisoner in the stone', only to be freed by the sculptor should have been incentive enough for the latter. The metaphorical character of Michelangelo's dictum had, however, been recognized as such; unlike Pythagoras's quite similar notion that 'music was a prisoner of the geometrical ratios of the vibrating string'.

184 Leibniz famously held the conviction that "*Musica est exercitium arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi*" (letter to Goldbach, April 17, 1712).

Renaissance and early modern music scholars (e.g. Willaert, Fogliano, Zarlino, Monteverdi, Werckmeister), however, successively abandoned strict neo-Platonic Pythagorean theory in favor of artistically more potent alternatives, ultimately leading to a generally accepted settling for the harmonically reinterpreted bi-ovular twins to the Ionian and the Aeolian modes, the diatonic major and ('natural') minor scales, during the later part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>185</sup> They did so, however, in a truly Pythagorean spirit, refining the mathematical underpinnings to suit their needs, sacrificing the simplicity of the Pythagorean proportions while remaining faithful to the fundamental conviction that music was a sounding representation of natural order. Even Jean-Phillipe Rameau, despite his critical stance towards the Pythagorean view expressed in the above epigraph, nevertheless went on to argue his own 'naturalistic' theory of harmony as underlying the universal "*musical instinct*" (1754), and hence remains fundamentally rooted in the Pythagorean tradition (cf. Godwin 1987; 1989).<sup>186</sup>

It was assumed that there were certain (in Plato's idiom) 'immutable forms' hidden in the physics and mathematics of sound itself, ultimately expressible as numbers, and that it was these underlying common laws that eventually guided artistic principles. Music was seen to be inherently latent in physics and physiology, in the laws of acoustics and the workings of the human ear. Man was thought to be able to understand these natural orderings (the scholar by empirical observation and mathematical deduction, the 'genius' by intuition), and thus to make them manifest in the form of the 'musical work'.<sup>187</sup> Hence, the notion that Pythagoras was the 'discoverer of harmony'<sup>188</sup> is still

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185 The development of European music theory with regard to musical scales is extremely multifarious, spanning more than two millennia, and can only be mentioned here in the most general way. For a comprehensive treatment, see (Grout 1960).

186 The written exchange between Rameau and Rousseau on this matter has been compiled in a volume edited by Scott (1998). In it, Rousseau anticipates a position that should become fundamental to ethnomusicology some two centuries later, rhetorically asking: "*But if the lengthy routine of our harmonic successions guides the trained man and the professional Composer, what was the guide of those ignorant people who have never heard harmony in those songs which nature dictated long before the invention of the art? Did they therefore have a feeling for harmony anterior to experience, and if someone made them hear the Fundamental Bass of the tune they had composed, is it to be thought that any of them would recognize his guide there, and that he would find the slightest relation between that bass and that tune?*"(1998[ 1755]: 275).

187 For critical discussions of the concept see e.g. Treitler 1989; Taruskin 1995; Goehr 2007.

188 Or even the *Inventor musicae* as Pythagoras had sometimes been called by medieval scholars (cf. McKinnon 1978).

widely held (and taught), despite numerous philosophical challenges as to its validity.

One of the bolder criticisms of this position comes from American composer-theorist Norman Cazden, who maintains that

“most consonance theories remain philosophically rooted ... in the Pythagorean concern with abstract ratios of small whole numbers, and fail to observe as their initial premise that musical harmony *secundum auditem* arises only in the creative activity of human beings.” (Cazden 1972: 217).

Yet, within the Western paradigm the Pythagorean train of thought has proven so pervasive that, to us (and this appears not to be restricted to musicologists), it seems quite natural to think about music in terms of acoustics and mathematics. Yet, on the other hand, it appears to be quite superficial and inadequate to reduce painting to color theory, to the optical properties of pigments, or to the geometry of the vanishing point; to think about poetry or drama in terms of phonetics or of lexicon and grammar; or to conceive of sculpture in terms of the geological characteristics of marble or the metallurgy of bronze – the notion that the essence of the art is to be found in the natural properties of the materials used in making it.<sup>189</sup>

Is music really a thing so inherently different, in principle, from other artistic, expressive forms as to justify this remarkable, fundamental disparity in the way we think about it?<sup>190</sup> Or have in the case of Western thought about music, in the wake of the Pythagoreans, technical means and creative expression, *precondition* and *proposition*, been coalesced in a very peculiar way? Physical sound and its perception merely constitute the *individually necessary conditions* and by no means the *jointly sufficient conditions* for the

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189 Of course, certain aspects of the visual arts may be *described* in mathematical terms, e.g. proportion such as in the case of the much over-strained *Sectio aurea*, as anything in the world of material objects can, at least in principle, be *described* mathematically.

190 Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both answered in the affirmative, as did Lévi-Strauss, taking a staunchly Platonic position regarding the differences between painting and music: “*There is no true equality, then, between painting and music. The former finds its materials in nature: colors are given before they are used. .... It seems to me that this congenital subjection of the plastic arts to objects results from the fact that the organization of forms and colors within sense experience ... acts ... as an initial level of articulation of reality. Only thanks to it are they able to introduce a secondary articulation which consists of the choice and arrangement of the units, and in their interpretation according to the imperatives of a given technique, style or manner - that is, by their transposition in terms of a code characteristic of a given artist or society.*” (Lévi-Strauss 1964: 19). I consider this position untenable for reasons explained below.

complex phenomenon we call music to emerge as a meaningful appearance within the human world:

“[f]or in the art of music, psychoacoustic phenomena indeed serve as the requisite material base, but as to the superstructure of artistic forms created by human artifice, *they are employed, like any raw material, for human social purposes not inherent in their initial state*” (Cazden 1972: 233; my emphasis).

Cazden goes on to demonstrate by example how acoustical and perceptual theories of consonance and harmony are contradicted by actual compository practice even within the idiom of western ‘common practice’ art music. He concludes that ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’ - the core, principle ideas of the Pythagorean school of thought - are phenomena experienced in listening to the man-made affair we call *music*, not in detecting certain superimpositions of periodic vibrations in air, inherently reducible to physics:<sup>191</sup>

“Consonance response is not inherent in inalterable, eternal universal psychoacoustic laws, neither those of Nature nor of human perception. It is neither an earthly echo of the resounding harmony of the spheres nor a crystallization in the human soul of the mysteriously potent ratios of small numbers” (ibid.).

Hence, even before non-European musics began to put into question the notion of objectivity and normativity of the theoretical concepts underlying Western musical thought, contradictions with regard to the dominant paradigm of ‘Pythagorean’ music theory were realized to exist within the idiom of Western academic art music itself: The minor triad, so central to the Western tonal-harmonic system could not be made consistent with the overtone series or any other form of simple mathematical ratios (the ‘*Mollproblem*’);<sup>192</sup> the ambivalence of the role of the perfect fourth, perceived as consonant or dissonant according to context and epoch, seemed to question the validity of the naturalness of consonance perception; the gradual emancipation of dissonance as a means of

191 Which are entirely different things ontologically, in the same sense that a *temporal sequence of pitched tones* is not at all the same thing as a *melody* (cf. Scruton 1997: 39ff.).

192 A rather artificial construct, the so-called ‘undertone series’ (or ‘series of subharmonics’), that appears in the empirical world only under very particular circumstances and only in approximation (such as when overblowing certain aerophones) had to be mathematically deduced (by inverting the natural overtone series through arithmetic division into a kind of mirror image of its empirically observable counterpart) to somehow integrate the minor triad into the Western, Pythagorean theoretical system - or to simply argue away the problem with numbers (cf. e.g Hauptmann 1853; Helmholtz 1863; Riemann 1905; Oettingen 1913; Godley 1952; D. Harrison 2004).

artistic expression during the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>193</sup> as well as the development and general acceptance of equal temperament as an answer to purely artistic needs and in direct violation of Pythagorean principles suggested that artistic invention in any case ‘overruled’ any alleged ‘natural laws of sound perception’. And this, in turn, put into question whether these could be considered to be ‘laws’ at all. “*The suggestion that I’m just enjoying the harmonious workings of my faculties*”, writes Nicholas Wolterstorff, “*strikes me as a non-starter!*” (2003: 331).

## **6.6 The Study of Non-European Music and the Burdensome Legacy of the Pythagoreans**

The program of *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* emerged in a time of incredible scientific and technological progress. During the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the enormous success and incisive consequences of, especially, physics and physics-based machinery and weaponry had led to fundamental, revolutionary changes in the way man shaped his environment, met the production of his goods, waged his wars, and, consequently, how he perceived his now rapidly transforming world in general. This severe changes, in turn, gave rise to the widely held belief that, accordingly, *all* knowledge had to be arranged exclusively on the model of the physical sciences: on empirical observation and experiment, confirmatory measurement, inductive generalization, and reduction to elementary, causal ‘first principles’ expressed in mathematical terms, and aimed at a definite result or final explanation.<sup>194</sup> Scientific procedure came to be seen as not only the sole means to obtain certain, factual, technologically and economically exploitable knowledge about the natural world, but also as the final arbiter with regard to human affairs and concerns such as ethics, law, politics, economy, religion, and art - of human life

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193 And, later, the abandonment of the idea of tonality itself by Schoenberg and his pupils as well as the general acceptance of highly ‘dissonant’ Afro-American blues/jazz harmony in both popular and ‘serious’ music.

194 For two highly influential critical analyses of the logical possibility of physical reduction as a general epistemic principle, see Fodor (1975); Kripke (1979).

in its entirety<sup>195</sup> - reflecting philosophical positions that came to be known as *scientific materialism* (today we would say *physicalism*) and *positivism*.

Hence, much of early comparative musicology was conducted in a general intellectual climate dominated by several influential theories that attempted to adopt the rigor of the exact sciences to the realm of human affairs: Comte's 'social positivism' (1830-42; Engl. [abr.] 1853), Gobineau's 'racial biology' (1853-5), H. Spencer's 'social Darwinism' (1860-2), Haeckel's 'scientific' justification of eugenics (1868; largely based on prior ideas of Lamarck's), the scientific claims purported by both Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis, Taylor's ideas about 'scientific management' (developed during the 1880s; published in 1911), and similar programs that were postulated either in ignorance or deliberate disregard of 'Hume's guillotine'.<sup>196</sup>

Hence, when in the 1880s the academic study of music broadened its perspective to include the sounding expressions of non-European cultures, it did so from out of the well-made Procrustean bed of Pythagorean music theory, which was considered to be an established and firm basis for a rational, scientific evaluation of all musical expressions - Rousseau's admonitions written a century earlier notwithstanding:

"[M]usicians who view the power of sounds only in terms of action of the air and the excitation of fibers are far from knowing in what the force of this art truly resides. The closer they approach to physical impression the further they take it from its wellspring, and the more also they deprive it of its primitive energy." (transl. quoted from Rouget 1985: 169).

Studiously avoiding Rousseau's important insights, particularly three interrelated beliefs about the nature of music were largely taken to be self-

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195 Or simply declaring any issues with regard to the latter to be "meaningless questions" for being unapproachable by scientific method, as did e.g. the members of the 'Vienna circle' (Carnap, Schlick, Neurath *et al.*).

196 'Hume's guillotine' is called a general logical principle according to which one cannot infer from an 'is' to an 'ought' (hence, it is also called the 'is-ought-problem'). Hume states that from a purely descriptive statement (such as an empirical fact or measurement datum) one cannot conclude *logically* on normative or prescriptive statements, as such a conclusion always involves individual judgment based on previously established attitudes or convictions (e.g. the notion "It has been conclusively shown that smoking increases chances of falling ill with lung cancer dramatically. Thus, you should quit smoking" implies the prior judgment that suffering from lung cancer is inherently a bad thing. As obviously right as this advice might seem it does not constitute a *logical* imperative, but makes recourse to the commonly established conviction that it is desirable to lead a long and healthy life). cf. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (2000 [1739]: 469f.).

evident and of general validity: The notion that ‘music’ was to be understood primarily as a particular kind of acoustic phenomenon; the notion that musical scales and the concepts of consonance and harmony were based on universal laws of acoustics and auditory perception; and the notion that, as Western music had been devised in reference to the geometrical proportions of the overtone series for centuries, the emergence of the modern tonal-harmonic system based on the diatonic major and minor scales presented a stage reasonably close to the endpoint of a telic, progressive process, artistically reflecting the discovery of natural laws and, therefore, could assert a claim to being normative (e.g. Riemann 1873, 1882): “*They imagined a universal music history culminating in European art music*” (Rice 2014: 17), with other forms of music being either primitive precursors or expressions of cultural deterioration.

As the experience of harmony and, by extension, euphony was generally thought to be based on the, *avant la lettre*, ‘behavioristic’<sup>197</sup> principle of stimulus and reflex, i.e. caused spontaneously and automatically when exposed to certain well-formed acoustic structures, it was believed that musical utterances could be legitimately investigated on their own accord, without further recourse to the people and the cultures that had produced them.<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, the emergence of comparative musicology was in many ways a direct consequence of the prior invention of the *phonograph* by Thomas Edison in 1877 (‘perfected’ [i.e. practically usable] version 1888). Without the technical possibility of sound recording, these enterprises would probably not have come into being altogether, and certainly not in the way they did. Thus, this particular field of music scholarship came to be inextricably intertwined with the technology of music recording from its very beginning.

The phonograph (and its many successors), however, showed to have a kind of ‘built-in confirmation bias’: the perceived objectivity, and thus authority, of technical apparatus led to the belief that the phonograph (like, previously, the photographic camera with regard to the visual world) renders an impartial

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197 B. F Skinner’s ‘(radical) behaviorism’ being a late intellectual straggler of 19<sup>th</sup> c. social positivism (e.g. Skinner 1971). For a scathing critique see (Chomsky 1971).

198 It has to be acknowledged, however, that international travel and, hence, fieldwork in the modern sense, was much more difficult in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century than it is today. On the other hand, though, that didn’t stop the imperialist powers of the day to ship millions of troops, officials, and clergymen to even the remotest parts of the planet.

account of 'what's *really* there'; that with recorded sound one has something like the 'essence' of music. The very way sound recordings are became thus an evaluative and biased statement about what music is. "*In fact,*" however, writes Thomas Turino,

"the sound of documentary field recordings can be, and usually is, manipulated through microphone placement and sound equalization ...to create, not merely capture, the sound that the documenter wants to hear and present to others on a recording." (2008: 69)

Analogous to the 'armchair anthropology' prevalent in the day, the subject of study in the early years were the phonograph recordings of non-European music and the collected musical instruments used in making it. The life-worlds of the people who made and used them in practice, and the cultures they were a living part of, were regarded as largely irrelevant to the issue. Hence, any 'scientific' understanding of music had first to be purified from 'contamination' by subjectivity, individual experience, historical and cultural incalculables, and presumably naïve 'folk explanations'.

As Western scholars regarded tonality, melody, and harmony as the most significant, defining aspects of music, it was considered obvious that the 'essence' of foreign musical expressions was to be found in structures similar to our own notions of 'musical scales', in some intrinsic logic of relative pitch, of systematized intervals. It appeared natural that at the basis of all music had to be a foundation of set, ordered material, a tonal 'system', to begin with: "*Their musical style analysis and comparison reduced dynamic, temporal musical processes to a fixed product made up of 'elements' such as melody, rhythm, texture, and form*" (Rice 2014:18). Music-making inherently meant that this default material was to be manipulated following more-or-less predefined rules of configuration reflecting natural order. Musical expression of other peoples was essentially conceived of as primarily a systematic, rule-governed act, analogous, at least in principle, to the process of composition in the Western common practice tradition, only less elaborate and thus somewhat inferior; merely an awkward trial at something Western civilization had developed to mastery.

Hence, it was believed that other peoples' musical 'systems', could, in



principle, be translated into the preconceived patterns of Western music theory, and the underlying 'universal natural principles' thus revealed and explained. These formalistic notions fitted well into the preconceived evolutionist perspective of the day. It was taken for granted that Western music had reached maturity, while 'primitive' musics were inferior manifestations of a lower rung on the ladder of 'natural' artistic progress.

The ethic of the early researchers into non-Western music, particularly in Europe (e.g. Wallaschek 1893, Stumpf 1911), thus reflected a seemingly self-evident presupposition: While other peoples might engage in music-making without themselves knowing about its alleged 'universal natural principles' (due to their not having 'discovered' them yet) we, on the other hand (previously having identified those principles) may apply our superior insights to their activities, much in the same way that we apply advanced medical diagnostics to their illnesses: "*cultural facts were applied more or less indiscriminately to 'prove' the already deduced theory.*" (Merriam 1964:52).

Confronted with the *Tonsystem und Musik der Siamesen* (Stumpf 1901), that, despite representing the highly evolved court and temple music of a rather 'civilized' society, seemed to have no systematic relationship to the Pythagorean proportions or the natural harmonic series whatsoever (except for octave equivalence, or so Ellis assumed; cf. Garzoli 2015:5), the first fundamental problems inherent to the approach of *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* appeared. Convinced that there just *had* to be *some* general law, some mathematical theory, some universal, underlying such a highly developed music, Stumpf marveled about how the Thai people could have 'calculated' their scales<sup>199</sup> without the prior knowledge of logarithms and irrational numbers, concepts that had been introduced only shortly before into the Siamese intellectual sphere from outside (ibid.). Erich M. von Hornbostel, the first scholar

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199 The heptatonic scale of classical Thai court music had first been described as being equidistant (7-tet. or equi-heptatonic), formed around an alleged (and empirically unobservables) 'ideal interval' of 171,43 ct., by Ellis in 1885; a notion that has been reiterated ever since (loc. cit. Morton 1976; Fuller 1983). This assumption, however, is at best an abstract generalization expressed in the concepts of Western mathematical thought. Garzoli (2015) has demonstrated that neither the idea of fixed numerical ratios as the basis of musical intervals, nor the concept of 'scale' itself are immanent categories in Thai musical thinking: "*While it is common to discuss tuning in terms of scales, the concept of a musical 'scale,' as it is routinely understood by Western musicians, has harmonic implications that are not relevant to traditional Thai music. The term has no direct equivalent in Thai music ... and the concept is not part of traditional Thai musical thought*" (ibid: 6).

to realize and to openly criticize a Eurocentric bias in comparative musicology, encountered similar problems when trying to explain the tonal systems of the Indonesian archipelago by means of his own ill-fated *Blasquintentheorie* ('theory of [over-]blown fifths'; Hornbostel 1975 [1927; lecture 1913], for a critique see Kunst 1948; Bukofzer 1949). While the failure of these approaches has sometimes been attributed to a lack of precision of early apparatus, comparatively recent essentialistic and formalistic attempts at explaining the musical expressions of non-European cultures by reducing them either to the physical properties of sound, to geometric proportions or to numerical ratios have proven equally unconvincing (e.g. Rahn 1996; Sethares 2005; Savage 2015).<sup>200</sup>

All these approaches share the same esoteric, hermeticist, neo-Platonic ideas of a fundamental relatedness between *Musica humana*<sup>201</sup>, *Musica instrumentalis*,<sup>202</sup> and *Musica mundana*<sup>203</sup> that had been postulated by Boethius and that were later codified by John of Murs: they are basically a continuation of the Pythagorean numerological mysticism of ancient and medieval *Musica speculativa*, the idea of an occult universal principle, a harmony of ideal order, an all-encompassing 'Divine arithmetic' to be 'discovered' in musical sound.

Instead of investigating sound-making as an actual, empirically observable, historically evolved, social phenomenon performed and experienced by actual persons situated in real-world cultural frameworks, there still is proposed a hidden principle expressing natural order, as being 'the *really* real thing'; a metaphysically real 'music-*in-itself*' that somehow lurks behind the innumerable particular manifestations of man-made sound and the modes of thought and behavior that surround it. This attitude, like all forms of metaphysical essentialism, has led to numerous and severe conceptual and epistemological problems.

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200 For a recent and highly ambitious attempt at explaining Western music in its entirety as a mathematical system, see Mazzola 2002.

201 Today conceptualized as an underlying harmonic order in human perception, (neuro-)cognition, and psychology.

202 What today we would call the acoustics of musical instruments

203 The 'Music of the Spheres'; mirrored today in the idea of a 'grand unifying (physical) theory' of the nature of the universe, including man.

First and foremost, the reification of the English category noun ‘music’<sup>204</sup> into a metaphysically real entity, somehow concealed behind the countless empirically real sounding expressions of man, leads to erroneously applying scientific methodology to what is in fact merely an ordinary language category term that lacks any clear definition. This, plainly, seems to be an instance of what Gilbert Ryle calls a “*category-mistake*”; like asking where ‘the team’ was when on the football field only individual players are to be seen; or like asking where ‘the university’ is when in empirical reality only libraries, auditoriums, teachers, and students are to be found. Using scientific methods to examine a conceptual generalization, i.e. an empirical non-entity, is obviously problematic.

Second, instead of describing empirical musical reality, there were postulated universal properties that are supposed to reflect natural laws of physical sound and auditory perception, i.e. a *normative canon* of what constitutes music, of what the essence of music ‘*really is*’ (or, worse still, ought to be). This, by logical inference, presumes the necessary possibility of ‘the most consummate piece of music there can be’, i.e. a musical utterance that exhibits the essential, natural orderings of musical sound in ultimate perfection, with all other musical utterances representing a descending order of imperfection. And this, in turn, seemed to allow for an objective judgment, a hierarchical ordering of the sounding expressions of the world’s peoples, along scientifically established, and thus universally valid, criteria of musicality. And though at least no longer stated explicitly in current discourse, it seems that even recent studies take it at least implicitly that this ideal was realized (as of yet) most perfectly in the European art music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>205</sup>

Hence, when an indigenous person considers her technically plain, decidedly non-Pythagorean chanting to be deeply important, intensely meaningful, and thus (presumably) *beautiful*, she is, ‘by scientific verdict’, simply mistaken.<sup>206</sup>

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204 Or its near-synonyms in other Germanic as well as in the Romance and Arabic languages.

205 And the statements that designate most of the European art music after c.1890 as well as Jazz and popular music as “decadent”, “degenerate” or “*entartet*” are, therefore, legion.

206 Several years ago (while collecting material for a digital sound archive), I had asked a former academic teacher of mine if, during a prolonged field trip to Africa in the 1980s, he had only recorded instrumental music and song or perhaps also explanatory interviews with musicians. “No,” he replied, “*why should I have? They themselves don’t actually understand*

This notion has to be fallacious for obvious reasons: actual music making, even in the West (i.e. even while commanding the powers of super-precise computer generated sound), would have to be, as seen from this perspective, merely a parade of ignorance, a display of actual musicians' incompetence to satisfactorily represent the alleged magical properties of small integers as sound. Music-making is, if we are to take the essentialist view seriously, the perpetual failure of man, despite having tried for millennia, to grasp the eternal, universal geometrical laws that govern music, and to adequately represent them in the one, final, ultimate, ideal, perfect musical work; in the *music-to-end-all-music*.

In hindsight, the positivist approaches of 19<sup>th</sup> century comparative musicology were thus not so much an attempt to explain empirically observable, real-world, socio-cultural, expressive, aesthetic phenomena, but ultimately a demand towards socio-cultural reality to subjugate itself to a particular form of metaphysical essentialism posing as scientific knowledge.

Hence, the more actual knowledge about, and understanding of, non-European music was accumulated, the more the formalistic view of music as being primarily a rule-governed ordering of particular kinds of acoustic phenomena based on underlying laws of geometry and auditory perception came to be recognized as a specifically Western, 'Eurocentric' disposition. Music, even our own, was fundamentally and deeply rooted in historically evolved traditions and customs, in human affects, and in culturally formed beliefs, customs, and morals, and thus was inseparable from the life-world of the people that produced it:

"Music is much more than just the sounds captured on a tape recorder. Music is an intention to make something called music (or structured similarly to what we call music) as opposed to other kinds of sounds. It is an ability to formulate strings of sounds accepted by members of a given society as music (or whatever they call it) ... A parallel can be drawn with speech, which is also much more than a collection of sounds. With a limited number of phonetic possibilities, people around the world say many different things; with

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*what they are really doing anyway!*". More recently, but in a similar vein, during a conference a colleague attempted to rebuke my position quite vocally by stating: "*well, they also have malaria, haven't they? And they don't really know what that is either!*". Both notions I tend to find more than just a little problematic, and for more than one reason.

acoustical resources limited by the physics of sound production and perception, people around the world make many kinds of music for many different reasons.” (A. Seeger 1987: xiv).

To briefly recur to a previous example: ‘music’ relates to ‘sound’ in the same trivially true fashion that ‘human society’ relates to ‘person’: The latter ultimately constitutes the former, yet the former can in no way be understood solely in terms of the latter.

Music turned out not to be primarily about a systematic, rule-governed assembly of certain kinds of sounds but about expressing culturally and historically constituted *meaning*. And “*In terms of meaning and expressiveness, music systems resist comparison, defy structural analyses, and cry out for particularized, detailed descriptions.*” (Becker 1986:353). And just as is the case with language, the communication of culturally constituted meaning through structures also of non-linguistic sound lies beyond the sounding structures themselves:

“Distinctions between the surface complexity of different musical styles and techniques do not tell us anything useful about the expressive purposes and power of music, or about the intellectual organization involved in its creation. Music is too deeply concerned with human feelings and experiences in society, and its patterns are too often generated by surprising outbursts of cerebration, for it to be subject to arbitrary rules, like the rules of games.” (Blacking 2000 [1973]: x).

The “*idolatry of universals*” (Dewey), the ambitious search for the underlying essence in all things (and, hence, all musics) that had guided early comparative musicology, had exhausted itself in asserting mere *universalities*.

It has since been attempted to somehow save the idea, presumably out of a well-intentioned but theoretically flawed desire to maintain a *Consensus gentium* view of music (and of mankind), by stating that “*universals need not apply to all music*” (Wallin *et al.* [eds.] 2000: 14; emphasis in original). While the notion that “[c]ertainly a feature that is found in three of four musical styles in the world is of great interest to anyone” concerned with understanding music (ibid.) is a perfectly valid one, this again constitutes an unfortunate misapplication of the term ‘universal’. *Generalizations* made by musicologists with regard to the kinds and degrees of similarities between musical features in

different cultures is a different thing entirely, both epistemologically and ontologically, from the notion of *universals* intrinsic to – and, hence, defining of – *all* of those phenomena we term ‘music’.<sup>207</sup>

The same fundamental problems with regard to empirical universals that persisted in the case of all other social and cultural phenomena turns out to be just as insurmountable in the case of music, “*for to say that they are empirical universals is to say that they have the same content, and to say they have the same content is to fly in the face of the undeniable fact that they do not.*” (Geertz 1973: 39-40). Based on Geertz's formulation that culture is “*historically constructed, socially maintained; and individually applied*” (1973: 363-4), Rice states that “*music is historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually created and experienced*” (2017: 6). And this dynamic interplay of history, society, culture, and individual leaves little room for grand, universalist theories based on alleged essential, natural laws and their ‘discovery’ by scientific means. Music is not the kind of ‘thing’ that could be grasped in this way – because it just is not any kind of ‘thing’ in the first place:

“it is tempting to think of *social objects* as independently existing entities on analogy with the objects studied by the natural sciences. It is tempting that a government or a dollar bill or a contract is an object or an entity in the sense that a DNA molecule, a tectonic plate, or a planet is an object or entity. In the case of social objects, however, the grammar of the noun phrases conceals from us the fact that, in such cases, *process is prior to product.*” (Searle 1992: 36; second emphasis mine)

This insight of Searle's, that in the human world of ‘social objects’ “*process is prior to product*”, is quite a fundamental and important one – especially if one is trying to understand those quintessentially human ‘social objects’: music, myth, and ritual.<sup>208</sup>

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207 And to speak of “near-universals”, as some have suggested (e.g., of all people, McAllester 1971: 379), doesn't help the least, for “near-universals” are precisely *not* universals, but merely a misleading way to speak of a *statistical projection* which is a different thing altogether: “*Accepting the idea of statistical universals means abandoning the principle that there is a significant difference between universality and popularity.*” (Nettl 2000:467). The very concept of ‘universal’ implies as its most fundamental rule ‘*no possible exceptions!*’. That's what ‘universal’ means. All red things are red. There are no gold atoms having either more or less than 79 protons in their core.

208 Though, as should be obvious after what has been said so far, I am not particularly fond of the term „social *object*“. But this point of critique is purely semantic and does not seriously impair Searle's argument on any substantial level.

The quest for discovering those ultimate, natural, and universal ‘hidden principles’, the ‘essence’ constituting a music-*in-itself* that the Pythagorean school of thought seemed to hold out in prospect - equally valid for a Bach fugue, the chanting of Tibetan monks, a work of *Musique concrète*, an Inuit lament, a performance of *gamelan gong kebyar*, and a ‘noise rock’ concert - might have appealed to the particular 19<sup>th</sup> century Western sentiment of seeking that what is *really* real by reducing highly complex and diverse phenomena to their lowest common denominator; the notion of the alleged supremacy of oneness over many-ness, of unity over multiplicity, that came down to us from Anaximenes via Parmenides and Plato.<sup>209</sup> It, however, did rather little to broaden our knowledge about music.

Hence, some of the major theoretical criticisms that ultimately led to the abandonment of the program of comparative musicology<sup>210</sup> were aimed at the metaphysical realism and essentialism inherent to the idea of ‘musical universals’ that was so central to it - and also at the notion that meaningful assertions about ‘music-*in-itself*’ could be made at all (e.g. Merriam 1964, Nettl 1964, Blacking 2000 [1973]).

On the evidence of the bewildering diversity of man's sounding expressions the idea that those geometrical proportions that Pythagoras is said to have empirically observed in the vibrating string were somehow the actual,

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209 Plato: “*To the man who pursues his studies in the proper way, all geometric constructions, all systems of numbers, all duly constituted melodic progressions, the single ordered scheme of all celestial revolutions, should disclose themselves ... [by] the revelation of a single bond of natural interconnection.*” (*Epinomis* 991e; 992a). Dewey (1958 [1925]) offers the following rebuttal: “*If classic philosophy says so much about unity and so little about unreconciled diversity, so much about the eternal and permanent, and so little about change (save as something to be resolved into combinations of the permanent), so much about necessity and so little about contingency, so much about the comprehending universal and so little about the recalcitrant particular, it may well be because the ambiguousness and ambivalence are actually so pervasive. Since these things form the problem, solution is more apparent (although not more actual), in the degree in which whatever of stability and assurance the world presents is fastened upon and asserted ... Quarrels among conflicting types of philosophy are thus family quarrels. They go on within the limits of a too domestic circle, and can be settled only by venturing further afield, and out of doors.*” (46f.; my emphasis). With regard to the present thesis, I have obviously taken Dewey's request quite literally.

210 And also, at least in the anglophone World (with the notable exception of UCLA, where C. Seeger had first introduced the concept), of ‘systematic musicology’, as it became increasingly obvious that “*„[e]ven the discoveries of systematic musicology may apply only to the musical traditions of systematic musicologists and to the perceptual faculties that have been developed in their own cultures.*” (Blacking 2000 [1973]: 89-90).

subconscious driving force behind all of these sounding expressions became untenable. True musical universals with respect to the Pythagorean proportions or their numerous later elaborations and alterations, the only possible indication for any such natural law underlying all musics, turned out to be few and far between (octave equivalence;<sup>211</sup> a certain preference for discrete pitches and repetitive temporal structures; a vague statistical prevalence of intervals in the region of our fourths and fifths; as well as a general preference for such rather ambiguous things like ‘regularity’, and ‘symmetry’; cf. Savage and Brown 2013; Panteli *et al.* 2017; yet all of this rarely with any degree of scientific precision, further compromising the idea of a representation of natural order; cf. Nettl 2000: 468).

It, therefore, seems questionable whether these phenomena can, strictly speaking, be considered *musical* universals at all, and not much rather general *anthropological* ones, arising by necessity out of the universal physiological sameness of the sensory, perceptual and cognitive apparatus (cf. Carterette and Kendall 1999: 727f.), and thus being logically prior to any purposeful creative act.<sup>212</sup> They appear to be not the determinants of what constitutes ‘music’, but merely its natural boundary conditions.

And so it turned out to be the work of, of all people, empirical scientists, Hermann v. Helmholtz and Alexander J. Ellis, that finally laid to rest (or, better, *should have* laid to rest) the Pythagoreans’ view on what allegedly lay at the core of the phenomenon of music. For as early as “1885, Alexander John Ellis ... demonstrated that musical scales are not natural but highly artificial, and that laws of acoustics may be irrelevant in the human organization of sound”

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211 Garzoli (2015) even doubts the universality of the octave, citing Thai classical music as an example. I have worked with Thai musicians for several years. Unfortunately the very question (i.e. to measure the precision of the octave) never occurred to me or simply escaped my attention; I took it for what it was (i.e. rather imprecise to the Western ear, without that being of any matter to the integrity of what is actually being performed). I am, however, inclined to confirm Gerzoli’s observations: Neither is there a term for, nor any strict idea or observation of (in the acoustical sense) the doubling of vibration frequency in traditional Thai court or temple music.

212 I.e. the sensation of octave equivalence and the preference for distinct pitches being general universals of auditory perception, and hence necessarily applying also to the particular case of a work of music and its perception; just as trichromatic color vision and face recognition being general universals of visual perception, and hence necessarily applying also to the particular case of a painting and its perception.



(Blacking 2000 [1973]: 56).

Ellis had invented an analytical system of division of the semitone of the Western equal tempered scale into one-hundred microtonal sub-steps, or *cents*; a graduation that has been in use ever since. Comparing the *Musical Scales of Various Nations* (1885) on the basis of his new classification.

“Ellis discovered that tuning systems were far too varied to be explained by a mathematical theory such as numerical ratios or a natural phenomenon such as the harmonic series ... His new measuring tool allowed him to contradict Pythagoras and all the others after him who claimed that musical scales can be explained mathematically or naturally as opposed to culturally.” (Rice 2014: 19)

While Helmholtz acknowledged that the laws of auditory perception (“*die natürlichen Gesetze der Tätigkeit unseres Ohres*”) play an important role among the fundamental building blocks (“*Bausteine*”) that make up our ability to experience music at all (i.e. that which the deaf lack), he ultimately relegated them to the role of a mere precondition, locating music firmly within the artificial realm of products of the human spirit:

“The construction of scales and of harmonic tissues is a product of artistic invention, and by no means furnished by the natural formation or natural function of our ear, as it has been hitherto most generally asserted”<sup>213</sup> (Helmholtz 1954 [1885]: 365-6; see also Bujic 1988).

Examining a much wider variety of examples than Helmholtz had, Ellis eventually came to a similar conclusion. And in the appendix to his English translation of the fourth German edition of Helmholtz's groundbreaking *Tonempfindungen*, Ellis concluded with the much-cited sentence:

“The musical scale is not one, not ‘natural’, not even founded necessarily on the laws of the constitution of the musical sound so beautifully worked out by Helmholtz, but very diverse, very artificial, and very capricious” (in Helmholtz 1954 [1885]: 526).

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213 “*Ich habe mich bemüht in der letzten Abteilung dieses Buches nachzuweisen, daß die Konstruktion der Tonleitern und des Harmoniegewebes ein Produkt künstlerischer Erfindung, und keineswegs durch den natürlichen Bau oder die natürliche Tätigkeit unseres Ohres unmittelbar gegeben sei, wie man es bisher wohl meist zu behaupten pflegte ... Demgemäß meine ich, können wir nicht zweifeln, daß nicht bloß die Komposition vollendeter musikalischer Kunstwerke, sondern auch selbst die Konstruktion unseres Systems der Tonleitern, Tonarten, Akkorde, kurz alles dessen, was in der Lehre vom Generalbasse zusammengestellt zu werden pflegt, ein Werk künstlerischer Erfindung sei.*” (ibid.).

And as the central concept of ‘natural scale’ and, hence, ‘natural harmony’, as the fundamental trait of all music broke down, the entire Pythagorean view of the phenomenon of music should have gone down with it – it turned out, however, that ancient, long-established myths are quite stubborn and tenacious creatures.

The paramount empirical observation about those things we put under the category term ‘music’ seems to be that the things that we denote thus are “*not one, not ‘natural’*” but decidedly varied and transient, historically contingent, highly volatile, distinctly inconsistent, and bewilderingly ambiguous. They are an expression of complex cultural processes steeped in meaning and significance, irreducible to mere sounding structures, let alone mathematical rules. They cannot be grasped from any formalistic perspective concerned with exterior semblance instead of inner meaning. And these ascriptions of meaning and significance that constitute the implicit presuppositions of sound-making are the result of particular historical processes. And our own ascriptions and implicit presuppositions certainly are no exception. Hence, these attempts to grasp music as a kind of naturally ordered formal system tells us much more about the intellectual history of the Occident than it tells us about music.

If the Western system has a certain proximity to the natural laws of sound and to the realm of mathematics that other systems lack, this is, as Max Weber has shown in his lucid essay *Die Rationalen und Soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik* (1921),<sup>214</sup> because of the particular historical development that *made it to be that way*. Occidental music (what Weber called “*harmonisch rationalisierte Musik*”; *ibid.*: 5) is the result of “*purposively rational musical actions’ over musical actions of a kind which have only traditional legitimation*” (Feher 1987: 147).<sup>215</sup> And while the Pythagorean doctrine has become an integral part of the intellectual history of Occidental music, the historical development of musical practice, even in the West, does in no way reflect, or correlate with, the

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214 An attempt by Weber to place a ‘rational’ theory of music against the romantic irrationalism of both Nietzsche and Wagner.

215 This relation is not at all dissimilar to the difference between natural languages that have *evolved* by means of a historical process, and artificial languages that have been *created* based on a previously devised theory.

progressive increase of knowledge in the science of sound or its perception and cognition.<sup>216</sup>

As it can be stated with a great degree of confidence that what we call 'music' is a particularly human social activity that predates any knowledge of acoustics (or physiology, or neurology) in the scientific sense by many millennia, it follows *a fortiori* that, with Blacking (loc. cit.), knowledge about the physical mechanics of gases (or about the workings of the organism, including the ear and the brain) is entirely "*irrelevant in the human organization of sound*". Walter Burkert (1972: 380-1) writes:

"What distinguished the Pythagoreans was apparently not a special knowledge, inaccessible to others. Rather, something which may well have lost its interest for professional musicians came to be prized among them as a fundamental insight into the nature of reality ... There is no necessary connection between the discovery of the musical ratios and the knowledge of the nature of sound, of vibration or wave movement of the air."

While, according to legend, having made fundamental contributions to mathematics and geometry,<sup>217</sup> Pythagoras, if he actually existed, was above all an ancient mystic, the leader of a religious cult, engaging primarily in numerology, i.e. in number-mysticism (cf. Burkert 1972: 162ff.; Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 3ff.). His alleged experiments with the vibrating string came down to us in the form of accounts in much later sources (most importantly Nicomachus, 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE, loc. cit.; another numerologist mystic), and the legend of the 'Pythagorean hammers' even is, from the standpoint of modern-day acoustics, entirely fallacious (as had been shown as early as 1636 by Mersenne in his *Harmonie universelle*). The connection between music and metalworking that the legend reports, however, becomes comprehensible when seen not from the point of view of physics but from a mythological perspective:

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216 With the possible exception of certain technical developments in the (with regard to fundamental theoretical issues at stake here rather peripheral) domain of musical instrument making (such as more controlled timbre, greater loudness, tuning stability, and the technology of electronic musical instruments). With the advent of the first commercially available, laboratory-precision digital-additive sound generating music computer, the Australian-manufactured *Fairlight CMI* ("Computer Musical Instrument" [Ryrie and Vogel 1979]), allowing, by means of additive synthesis, for the generation of every sound physically possible, discussions about "quality of music being related to quality of sound being related to technological advance" remains no longer an endeavor to be sensibly pursued.

217 Though even the namesake discovery of the relations of the sides of a right triangle was known centuries earlier in both Mesopotamia and China (cf. Hersh 1997: 92).

“The mythical inventors of smithcraft, the Idaean Dactyls, were regarded not only as wizards and founders of mystic rites, but also as the inventors of music ... Music magic is found throughout the mystery cults and takes a special character among the Pythagoreans ... the *acusma* which states that the sound of bronze when struck is the voice of a *daimon* makes the transition, in the Pythagorean milieu, between music and metal-working. The claim that Pythagoras discovered the basic law of acoustics in a smithy is a rationalization – physically false – of the tradition that Pythagoras knew the secret of magical music which was discovered by the mythical blacksmiths.” (Burkert 1972: 376-7).

Hence, ultimately, „[T]he Pythagorean studies of magic numbers [were] directed towards philosophic mysteries rather than to the study of reality” (Cazden 1972: 231).<sup>218</sup>

Likewise, the according theories of Chinese antiquity, of ancient Persia and India, and of the medieval Islamic world are certainly much more closely related to astrology, number mysticism, and magic than to our modern day understanding of mathematics or mathematical physics:

“Throughout man's history there has been a close connection between the natural numbers and the activities of the divine Creator. The natural numbers have always been seen by some at least in every civilization to be symbolic of deep esoteric religious beliefs. The Babylonians had a hierarchy of sixty Gods each of which was associated with one of the first sixty natural numbers ... In ancient India, we find religious significance assigned to each of the first 101 numbers, and in the Mayan civilization the first thirteen numbers all represented Gods ... It is therefore not surprising that number theory, first developed by the Pythagoreans, was associated with their religious beliefs and practices.” (Flegg 1983:272-3).

Pythagoras's theories about musical intervals and scales were thus not an analytical exposition of what constitutes music in general (or even in his own day and society, as the account of Aristoxenos suggest; cf. Strunk 1965: 24-33), and it appears questionable whether Pythagoras was concerned at all with

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218 In recent decades, Pythagorean and neo-Platonic ideas in general had a profound influence on esoteric, 'new age' thinking about music. A prominent example is the notion (sometimes stated with reference to early exponents of acoustics like Sauveur and Chladni, but mostly to occultists like Rudolf Steiner or G. I. Gurdjieff [or Iamblichus or Agrippa for the historically inclined]; or to the alleged hermetic knowledge of, usually unspecified, 'indigenous peoples' or 'ancient civilizations') that music played on instruments tuned to a standard pitch of exactly  $a=432\text{Hz}$  exhibit certain quasi-magical effects as they are said to be 'in tune' with, alternatively, planet earth's 'Schumann resonances', with the frequencies of certain 'brain waves', with the 'natural frequency' of the organ of Corti, or with cosmic background radiation. None of this, needless to say, stands to even superficial scrutiny. Occultism remains the "*Metaphysik der dummen Kerle*" (Adorno 1969 [1951]: 351).

observing the actual musical practice of his contemporaries:

“The question of what observations lay behind the discovery of the numerical relations of musical intervals, and of when this happened, is harder to answer than it first seems. The often expressed opinion, that these numbers had been known ‘from time immemorial’ in the daily work of makers of musical instruments, does not comport well with the nature of Greek instruments. The most common stringed instruments have strings of equal length and no finger board, though flageolet tones seem to have been recognized. In the triangular harp the tension of the strings and their thickness played some role, but we do not know just what. In a wind instrument with finger holes, that is, the *aulos*, the distances between the holes do not correspond directly or accurately to the ratios of the intervals; actually the holes were simply bored at equal distances. The syrinx was not used in the music of the classical period. And the monochord with a movable bridge, the *κανών*, the only ‘instrument’ on which the Pythagorean musical theory can be demonstrated with any approach to exactitude, is an artificial device for experimentation, the time of whose invention is controversial.” (Burkert 1972: 374-5).

Pythagoras, it seems, proposed what was first and foremost a mystical vision of how music *should be* within an ideal cosmology, a perfectly rational, causally determined physicalistic reality governed solely by geometrical rules and mechanical laws. A cosmology based on the primal ground of number, applying equally to the vibrating string as to the movements of celestial bodies, as well as to human affects, beliefs, and morals, all creating one great, eternal, mechanical συμφωνία.<sup>219</sup>

It, therefore, seems plausible to assume that Pythagoras did not relate music to geometrical proportions to postulate empirical facts or analytical insights about music, but to associate music with that other realm known to him that was equally closely related to the notion of the transcendent: the

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219 The ‘Music of the Spheres’ and the τετρακτύς as key to its understanding; a notion we still find in Boethius, a thousand years later. For an early account from a opposing point of view see Joannes Tinctoris: “Before carrying out this project, I cannot pass over in silence the opinion of numerous philosophers, among them Plato and Pythagoras and their successors Cicero, Macrobius [Ambrosius Theodosius], Boethius, and our Isidore [of Seville], that the spheres of the stars revolve under the guidance of harmonic modulation, that is, by the consonance of various concords. But when, as Boethius relates, some declare that Saturn moves with the deepest sound and that, as we pass by stages through the remaining planets, the moon moves with the highest, while others, conversely, ascribe the deepest sound to the moon and the highest to the sphere of the fixed stars, I put faith in neither opinion. Rather I unshakably credit Aristotle and his commentator, along with our more recent philosophers, who most manifestly prove that in the heavens there is neither actual nor potential sound. For this reason it will never possible to persuade me that musical concords, which cannot be produced without sound, can result from the motion of the heavenly bodies.” (Liber de arti contrapuncti, 1477; transl. in Strunk 1965: 8).

metaphysical realm of numbers. And this figure of thought was by no means an isolated occurrence, as “[m]any early civilizations shared various aspects of numerology, but the Pythagoreans carried number worship to its extreme.” (Boyer and Merzbach 1991:53; see also Szabó 1978). To the ancient thinkers, numbers and music were those phenomena most clearly and unequivocally referring to a transcendent realm, to that which is only partially rationally comprehensible and ultimately inexplicable. It was, therefore, only natural to postulate inherent connections between those spheres. However, “to hypostatize number as did the Pythagoreans, to speak of it as the ultimate reality, the very essence and substance of things, is a metaphysical fallacy.” (Cassirer 1944: 77).<sup>220</sup>

The particular Pythagorean mindset of looking also upon the things of the human world in terms of (geometrical) means instead of *meanings*, of proportions rather than *propositions*, became a powerful, normative blueprint on how the particular, “*purposively rational*” (Weber, loc. cit.) musical system of the Occident was to develop over the course of the following two-and-a-half millennia:

“No one, I think, denies that Western art music has a foundation in the natural world, is very complex, and is deeply meaningful to its musicians and audiences. The problem lies in denying these attributes to other peoples' music ... The idea that one's own musical system has a natural foundation, is rooted in the realm of nature, and is not merely an artifice of men's minds is a concept which is maintained by many peoples of the world. There are many ways to be ‘natural’ musically.” (Becker 1986:341-2).

From the perspective of the cultural anthropologist, Pythagoras's legendary epiphany in the forge constitutes, basically, no more (and no less) than a seminal moral, a founding myth. Hence, Pythagoras finally has to take his place among figures like Hermes, Apollo, Orpheus, and Pan:<sup>221</sup> he is, first and foremost, another mythical *culture hero* in the great mythical narrative

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220 Plato (and, even more so, the neo-Platonists) went even further than the Pythagoreans, doing away with empirical observation altogether: “*What Plato desiderates is not an analysis of audible music but pure number theory, above and beyond experience. In the Timaeus, Plato carried out this Program, at least by way of suggestion, using a series of numbers derived from the ultimate principles, which arrayed themselves in a scale without audible sound, the numerically harmonic structural pattern of the world, the ‘world soul’*” (Burkert 1972: 372)

221 Or among Jubal among the Hebrews, or Nareda and Saraswati among the Hindus, or Ling Lun among the Chinese, or Bragi among the Germanic peoples.

surrounding, defining, and ultimately constituting Occidental music.

## 6.7 The Emergence of Aesthetics, the modern Concept of Art, and the *Musée Imaginaire*

*[I]T IS MY CONTENTION THAT ONLY IN HISTORIC TIMES DID THE BEHAVIOR OF ART BECOME INCREASINGLY DETACHED FROM THE REST OF LIFE, REGARDED AND VALUED PRIMARILY FOR ITS OWN SAKE ... IN A QUITE UNSELFCONSCIOUS WAY ART ACTUALLY APPEARS TO INFORM ALL OF LIFE IN SOME TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES.*

- ELLEN DISSANAYAKE (1980: 403)

*MOST OF OUR MISCONCEPTIONS OF ART ARISE FROM A LACK OF CONSISTENCY IN THE USE OF THE WORDS ART AND BEAUTY. IT MIGHT BE SAID THAT WE ARE ONLY CONSISTENT IN OUR MISUSE OF THEM.*

- HERBERT READ (1972: 19)

As described above, there has been a long essentialist and formalist tradition in the Occident - to view music in the light of its alleged underlying natural principles, as 'underlying natural principles', since the decline of mythical thought and the ascendancy of rational thought, have become generally considered to be a kind of truth fundamentally superior to mere subjective experience.<sup>222</sup>

In the following, I shall now try to broaden the perspective with regard to the historical developments that led to this particular view so prevalent in Western culture, and how it relates to the perspective of the Moken. While the previously asserted notions and concepts had a most profound influence on the way we conceive 'music' (and, *ergo*, how we define the subject of musicology), there have been several other interdependent developments in society, in the

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<sup>222</sup> And, with regard to obtaining knowledge about the workings of the material world, rightfully so.

structures of power, in economy, and in what is generally called the 'history of ideas' since, roughly, the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that fundamentally shaped the particular Western view of the world and thus also our concepts about music and art; i.e. how they obtained their 'place'; where they 'belong' in our collective, culturally patterned imaginings.

### 6.7.1 The 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

From the late 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the powers that had used the arts as one of the most important means of representation during the Middle Ages, the church and the aristocracy, forfeited their dominant role within society, taking with them in their decline the last remnants of medieval feudalism; first in the Italian city states, later in the Netherlands. Following the Reformation and the Thirty-Years-War, European society and European thought underwent profound changes that found its most distinctive expression in new forms of art. The spiritual inwardness of Lutheran and Calvinist religiosity (believing in the *immediate* and *individual* access to divine salvation; cf. Weber 1905), made the world of the prior forms of art seem superficial and therefore untrue. What had previously been regarded as artful now merely appeared *artificial* (cf. Picht, loc. cit.). The conscience of protestant piety also became a fertile ground for the new concept of *subjectivity* - a quite radical change in thought - with profound implications on the attitude towards, and the perception of, art. During the ensuing Age of Humanism and the Enlightenment, art forms developed which served the representational needs of the new self-consciousness of the emerging (outside of the Italian and Iberian peninsulas predominantly protestant) bourgeoisie. Subsequently, the ideas of 'aesthetics' and the 'aesthetic contemplation' of '*l'art pour l'art*' emerged from these developments.<sup>223</sup>

In the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Immanuel Kant proposed what remains the perhaps most influential Idea in the process of the secularization of

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223 The term 'aesthetics', in its modern meaning, had appeared first in Baumgarten's *Meditationes* of 1735 but became recognized as a new idea following his *Aesthetica* (1750-58). For an general development of aesthetic thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. see especially Shaftsbury (1711); Rousseau (1750); Winckelmann (1764); Herder (1769); Schiller (1794); for an overview see, again, Kristeller (1951).



Western aesthetics: the posture of “*disinterested interest*” (“*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*”) as the attitude towards, and the defining principle of, art: pure contemplation, devoid of any religious, political, or economic concern; free of any commitment or interference; a pure, subjective act of imaginative experience; Kant, in doing so, gave birth to the modern Western idea of ‘Art’.<sup>224</sup>

Paul Oskar Kristeller, in his seminal two-part article entitled “*The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics*” (1951) emphasizes the significance of the 18<sup>th</sup> century for the development of our modern concept of ‘Art’:

“The fundamental importance of the eighteenth century in the history of aesthetics and of art criticism is generally recognized ... It is known that the very term ‘aesthetics’ was coined at that time, and, at least in the opinion of some historians, the subject matter itself, the ‘philosophy of art,’ was invented in that comparatively recent period and can be applied to earlier phases of Western thought [and, likewise, to non-European cultures] only with reservation. It is also generally agreed that such dominating concepts of modern aesthetics as taste and sentiment, genius, originality and creative imagination did not assume their definite modern meaning before the eighteenth century.” (1951: 96).

The epochal change from art as an expression of the divine, or of divinely legitimized authority, to an object of detached aesthetic appreciation was most famously expressed in Hegel's dictum of what later came to be known as the ‘end of art’ (“*das Ende der Kunst*”; probably the second-most influential idea in Western aesthetics), though, in fact, it was merely a conceptual re-weighting and, in a certain sense, the very beginning of our current, modern concept of ‘Art’.<sup>225</sup>

“[T]he form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of spirit. No matter how excellent we find the Greek likenesses of the Gods, no matter how we see God the Father, Christ, and Mary so estimably perfectly portrayed: it is no help; we no longer bow before them ... thought and reflection have spread their wings above fine art.” (*Lectures on Aesthetics*; Knox's transl.).

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224 This general idea, two centuries later, still underlies James Joyce's (speaking through his literary alter ego, Stephen Daedalus) famous distinction between “*proper*” and “*improper*” art: “*The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. These are kinetic emotions. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion (I use the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.*” (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916; several eds.).

225 Hegel had studied Plotinus extensively, so this idea might not be *that* original after all.

The gradual decline of the role of religion and the progressing secularization of society in the wake of the age of reason apparently had left a blank spot within the human world. Art no longer was a manifestation of the sacred, or of the God-given power of the ruler, but an expression of the aesthetic autonomy of the individual 'genius', representing a rare ability to tap into some abstract, private 'beyond', available only to himself; not primarily part of a collective view of the world and a common way of life, but largely an expression of a purely individual, super-human aptitude. Thus, Descartes' *ego cogito*, the thinking subject, ultimately attained supremacy over fate and divine providence in the now individualized human spirit; often (and somewhat over-simplistically) exemplified in terms of music history by the step from Bach to Mozart.

The "*God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man*" (Pascal) that the Copernican revolution and the secularization brought by the Age of Enlightenment had left behind was now to be filled through the apotheosis of the great creators of art themselves, through the idolization of the 'divine genius': No longer were art and music a *means* of worship of the sacred, a medium by which the transcendent was rendered accessible to collective experience, but the works of art, along with their creators, had themselves become the *objects* of adoration. And the experience of transcendence that had for many centuries been the ground of being for the cathedral and the synagogue became increasingly associated with the new so-called 'temples of the Muses' (a concept we shall return to below) that usually even imitated the sacred architecture of Greek antiquity. Aesthetic contemplation had taken the place of pious devotion.

So, by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new conceptual category had firmly established itself: 'Art' with a 'capital A' and in the singular (as opposed to 'the arts', in the plural, which had denoted a much greater variety of practices, many of which we would today consider crafts or pastimes). 'Art', reified into a metaphysical 'thing'; a term that not only denotes a certain canon of expressive forms - painting, sculpture, poetry, drama, dance, music - but primarily a particular, quite elusive idea of non-utility as well as an outstanding degree of expressive quality, of great personal achievement, of individuality and

innovation within one of these categories that has to be met to '*really* be art' (cf. Kristeller, loc. cit.).

And it is this peculiar perspective, this attitude of secularized worship of the individual artist, and the cult of individualism and subjectivism itself, that sets the modern European concept of 'Art' fundamentally apart from the ways that many, if not most, other cultures conceptualize creative expression. In most cultures, creative expression appears to revolve primarily around the social 'we' and around a *dialogue* with society's metaphysical mirror-image in the collective imaginings of a transcendent otherworld. In Western conscience, the contemplation of art appears to have developed into what is largely a solipsistic *monologue*. Art in the West today seems, as the pun goes, to primarily lie in the 'I' of the beholder.

### 6.7.2 The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the rapid advancement of technology through the triumph of the empirical natural sciences, by widespread industrialization in Europe and North America, by the bureaucratization of society, and by the professional diversification and specialization of its individual members - what Weber famously called the "*disenchantment of the world*" ("*die Entzauberung der Welt*"; 1995 [1919]).<sup>226</sup> And the positivist view of music fitted so well into the modes and molds of thought of a time of great scientific discoveries and technological progress that the consequences of the fundamental insights of Helmholtz and Ellis were, for the most part, studiously avoided. Too obvious did it seem that also art had to be subjected to the idea of continual 'progress'; too convincing was the view that any appearance within the world was sufficiently understood only when it was reduced to ultimate fundamental principles that could be quantified and expressed in some concise mathematical equation; and too appealing was the idea that even these most exalted, elusive and affective expressions of the human spirit could thus be subjugated to universal laws and to the alleged safety and certainty of scientific naturalism; and that these awkwardly irrational parts of human nature, these

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<sup>226</sup> A term Weber uses as a neutral description of the progress towards rational civilization, i.e. the renunciation of beliefs in magic, not as a criticism of modernity (ibid.).

misfits within modern society, could hereby finally be rendered predictable and manageable:

“The idea was no longer to conceptualize music as a naturally ordered whole, but to impose on it the reign of reason and the scientific representation of the world: harmonic order is not naturally assured by the existence of God. It has to be constructed by science, willed by man ... The aesthetics of representation could no longer find acceptance as a natural fact. So it disguised itself as science, as a universal law of perception, as a constructed system of thought.” (Attali 1985: 60f.)<sup>227</sup>

It was not until the final quarter of the nineteenth century that the mechanistic post-enlightenment explanation of the world came to be seriously questioned. Reverting to the thoughts of Vico, Herder, and Schleiermacher, it dawned upon German thinkers such as Dilthey (1883, 1910), Droysen (1855), Windelband (1904[1884]), and Rickert (1899) that the reality of man was not primarily that of natural laws, but that of history.<sup>228</sup> That societies and cultures - even individuals - were the result of particular historical processes. ‘The past’, however, is not an object. It cannot be adequately explained by the laws of the exact sciences or be reduced to mathematical formulae.<sup>229</sup>

Yet, while those scientific notions about the human condition that had emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century continued to dominate the intellectual debates with regard to music and art until well into the 19<sup>th</sup>, other developments in society proved to be equally influential. From the year 1800 onwards, public museums, opera houses and concert halls, as well as specialized art colleges and conservatories came increasingly to be established throughout Europe (cf. Kristeller, op. cit). Art criticism, literary criticism and music criticism appeared. And without these facilities, without the modern *Kulturbetrieb*, most of today's art would simply not exist. With the establishment of the museum and the concert hall (and, later, the art print and the sound recording) emerged what could be called the ‘information-theory-view’ of art as being essentially constituted by an alleged ‘transmitter-signal-receiver’ hierarchy (as later

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227 Attali's reference to “God” is, of course, not a theological but a metaphysical one, i.e. an entity similar to the God of Spinoza or Whitehead.

228 French historian, Hippolyte Taine, however, at the same time sought to also establish a ‘science of history’ based on deterministic natural laws (Taine 1865).

229 Despite ‘grand-theory’-ambitions, even ‘universal historians’ such as Burckhardt, Spengler, and Toynbee refrained from overly scientific explanations of the historical process.

described by Shannon 1948; see also Benjamin 1936; McLuhan 1964; Postman 1992), i.e. supposedly fixed agent/patient, work/holder, performer/audience oppositions; a view that has become so prevalent that it completely dominates both our ideations about the nature of music and art and our social behavior in most exhibition and performance settings.

Until the late nineteenth century, the masks and sculptures brought to Europe by sailors and colonial troops were seen as no more than bizarre curiosities having little to do with 'true Art'; at best being clumsy, failed attempts at producing art (cf. Torgovnick 1991). What Wachsmann (1973: 7) termed "*the invasion of Europe by foreign sounds*" in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, understandably, a challenge to the preconceived Western patterns of thought about music. Hence, the reaction to the *gamelan* ensemble at the 1889 world fair in Paris was, Debussy's fascination notwithstanding, largely one of incomprehension. Despite the wild, romantic exoticism distinctive of the time, being confronted with the 'real thing' overcharged the ears of the Parisian audience (cf. Fauser 2005). Likewise, the attempts of artists to adapt and incorporate the allegedly 'raw' aesthetics of 'tribal art' into their modes of expression, such as the works of Picasso's 'African period' (c. 1907-09)<sup>230</sup> and similar 'primitivist' efforts by Matisse, deVlaminck, Gauguin and others, largely met with refusal (cf. Goldwater 1986 [1938]; Rubin, Oldenburg, and Varnedoe 1984; Rhodes 1994).<sup>231</sup>

Ultimately, however, the reduction of all of man's creative expressions into a single, overarching conceptual category made possible that formalization which allowed the totality of stylized productions of all times, places, and peoples to be viewed uniformly and universally as 'Art', that is, as a collection of objects of disengaged aesthetic pleasure: The cubist Picasso just as the naturalistic Rembrandt painting, just as the photographic portrait, just as the Congolese mask or the carving from New Guinea, just as the mosaics of Pompeii, just as the cave paintings of Lascaux and Altamira; and Gregorian plainchant, just as the Javanese *gamelan*, just as the Bulgarian folk song, just

230 See especially the two rightmost figures in *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* (1907), whose faces are quite obviously inspired by African dance masks.

231 Especially the audience's reaction at the now famous 1910 exhibition, *The Post-Impressionists*, held at London's Grafton Gallery, was one of outrage and disgust (cf. Torgovnick 1990: 85-104).

as the Beethoven Quartet, just as the Inuit lament, just as Schoenberg's twelve-tone-technique - with a uniform, and therefore *indifferent*, interest (cf. Picht, loc. cit.). They all, indiscriminately, became objects of subjective aesthetic appreciation.

French art critic, André Malraux has famously coined the term "*imaginary museum*" for that sphere within which the modern (and 'post-modern') Western conscience identifies the world of 'Art' – that we take it as self evident that specialized painters paint for the gallery and the museum and that professional composers compose for the concert hall and the opera house; and that all of the different things that find their way into a Western museum or concert venue, regardless of where they originated or what their intended purpose might have been, become, by authority of the imaginary museum, 'works of Art'.

Music, especially, became a commodity, subjugated to the process of "*mechanical reproduction*" (Benjamin 1936) and meant to be 'consumed' in accordance with the "supply-and-demand"-logic of free-market capitalism. The advent of the recording industry thus was only conceivable as a result of this particularly occidental development - not primarily because of the evident scientific-technological advance of the West, but because the idea of narrowing the phenomenon of *music* down to isolated, mechanically reproducible *sound*, detached from particular occasion and immediate social interaction, would simply not have occurred to most other cultures.<sup>232</sup> Thomas Turino, in this regard, reports the following:

"When people buy a photograph of a person, they understand that it is only a representation of that person, not the real thing. Older indigenous Aymara musicians with whom I worked in Peru during the 1980s treated the recordings that they made of their festival music as we might use photographs. After a festival was over, they often listened together to the recordings they had made on their boom boxes, largely to remember and replay what had been happening in the festival at that point ... The

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232 The fact that, after World War Two, recordings of predominantly Anglo-Afro-American popular music began their triumphant march around the world, as well as the contemporary preference for European 'classical' music among global elites, especially in the Far East, have been repeatedly called upon as 'proof' for an intrinsic superiority of the Western concepts of music (mostly minus the very dominant 'Afro'-part in popular music). By this logic, one could also argue that the food at McDonalds, the clothing at H&M, and the furniture sold by IKEA are 'intrinsically superior', or that Rolex watches keep the most accurate time. I would consider the increasing hegemony of Western music to be less of an aesthetic and more of a socio-economic issue, brought about by a certain 'power of highly rationalized things', and the allure of (cultural) status symbols.

recordings were a representation of a celebration and of social interactions realized in a special way through playing music and dancing together. For them a recording is to 'music' what, for us, a photograph is to the person in the snapshot: a representation of something else, not the real thing" (2008: 24).<sup>233</sup>

To become a commodity, music had to be "*de-ritualized*" (Attali 1985: 24), i.e. deprived of its original, communal context, and thus stripped of most of what had constituted its long established social meaning.

The museum and the gallery, the concert hall and the hifi-set<sup>234</sup> today are the places where we appreciate art and music in a detached, 'Kantian' posture of "*disinterested interest*".<sup>235</sup> The sphere of the imaginary museum is both invisible and ubiquitous; dominating our, now 'aestheticized', consciousness. Lydia Goehr (2007) has adopted Malraux's dictum into the philosophy of music and has called her seminal book discussing the concept of the musical work<sup>236</sup> *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*.

After all this, the question now arises: if even our own ideas about what music

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233 Turino's anecdote also reminds me of certain conversations I had after showing video footage of my field work among the Moken to colleagues at conferences etc. There seemed to be a certain discrepancy in the way the audio and video components of an audio-visual documentation of music-making, respectively, were perceived that occurred to me as somewhat paradoxical. The visual part was taken, to be sure, as what it actually was: a temporally and spatially confined technical rendering of certain aspects of a bygone event, observed from a particular perspective; a mere re-presentation on a two-dimensional screen. The audio track of the same recording, on the other hand (or at least so it occurred to me), was generally regarded as occupying a different ontological status or truth value. Despite being, technically, a PCM bit-stream reconverted into the analog domain, electrically amplified and reproduced over loudspeakers, it was generally perceived as being more closely related to the 'real thing' (or even as actually being that 'real thing' itself) than the visual part. Less constructed, less restricted by choice of microphone placement than the visual representation was constrained by choice of camera angle; not a mere rendering of a music performance, but more of a factual presence of 'the music'; not a view into the past, but a bringing-into-the-present. And while to us this discrepancy in aesthetic evaluation has become quite natural - after all that is what we are used to getting as 'music' on an LP, a CD or from a streaming platform - other peoples, like the Moken and the Aymara, seem to judge things quite differently. Wolterstorff engages a similar issue when he writes: "*I dare say that most of us would be reluctant to say, when looking at a portrait of the current president of the United States, that we were seeing the president; yet it would come naturally to us to say that we saw the president on TV. Well, if we can see him on TV, how about seeing him in a photograph? And if in a photograph, why not in a painting?*" (2003: 337).

234 And, in recent years, the multi-purpose 'smartphone', 'earplug' headphones, and 'bluetooth'-boomboxes.

235 The remnants of ritualized modes of conduct in the postmodern world of Art have been described e.g. for the concert hall by Small (1987); for the museum by Duncan (1995).

236 With particular emphasis on the theory and practice of 'historically informed performance' and the problems inherent in this approach.

and art are is ultimately based upon mythical convictions and beliefs that are only hidden from us by a thin varnish of modern rationality - is the view of the Moken sea nomads perhaps not as foreign to us as it may at first appear? Could there, perhaps, be connecting, bridging thought patterns that allow us to get closer to a true understanding of their aesthetic worlds?

## 6.8 A Unifying Perspective: Music and Notions of External Agency

*THE MYTH OF THE MUSE CARRIES WITHIN ITSELF A WONDERFUL KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURE OF THE WORLD ... AND THIS KNOWLEDGE IS THAT SOMETHING PRECEDES HUMAN TELLING, WHICH MUST BE RECEIVED AND HEARD BEFORE THE MOUTH CAN MAKE IT AUDIBLE TO THE EAR. AND FURTHER: THAT THIS MYSTERIOUSLY SOUNDING VOICE, WHICH PRECEDES HUMAN SPEECH, BELONGS TO THE BEING OF THINGS ITSELF.*

- WALTER F. OTTO (1955: 16, MY TRANSL.)

*I HEARD AND WROTE WHAT I HEARD. I AM THE VESSEL THROUGH WHICH THE 'RITE' PASSED.*

- IGOR STRAVINSKY (1962: 147)

I have attempted to make a point as to that the life-world of the Moken in general, and their notions about what we call music in particular, is in many ways different from ours. Ideas of invoking a mythical past through music, of summoning the spirits of the ancestors through song, and of communicating with the dead through ritual dance appear rather remote to our notions of artistic expression and aesthetic contemplation. Hence, in striving for a genuine understanding of how the Moken sea nomads as well as many other societies



around the world see these matters, our own quotidian concepts and categories often seem either largely insufficient or entirely out of place.

In search for more appropriate connecting factors than those provided by modern Western conceptualizations, I shall now attempt to dig deeper into the ideational and conceptual foundations of the Western tradition, again drawing on the ancient Greeks.<sup>237</sup> I shall try to find there concepts, ideas, and imaginings that might be of help in bridging the gap between the Moken's understanding of music and our own; that might render their concepts, ideas, and imaginings perhaps less alien or 'exotic' and more relatable and accessible.

### **6.8.1 Music and the Belief in Supernatural Intermediaries**

I have made it a central assumption for the argument put forth in the present thesis that what constitutes the phenomenon we call 'music' is not, in fact, an autonomous object; not any kind of 'thing'. What we name such is not determined by a priori givens intrinsic to an essential, metaphysical '*music-in-itself*'. Rather, it is determined by collective ascriptions, valuations, and judgments, by the common imaginations of actual, historically and culturally situated groups of persons about what they consider 'music' (or whatever they might call it, if anything at all) to be.

In [5.2] I have argued that in forming the category 'music', modern Western thought seems to have primarily relied on a particular kind of hypostasis, on an act of reifying a conceptual category that refers to certain social facts; attempting to grasp what music 'is' by recurring to what it 'has', i.e. by reference to 'essential properties' that, allegedly, define the category 'music'. It is by means of assuming a single underlying essence that the Western mind has conceived a single category concept.

I have further attempted to demonstrate that many of the most fundamental assumptions that the 'rationalized' notions about music within the Western paradigm are based upon, are in fact mythical and mystical in nature, rooted in the number mysticism and the divinely ordered cosmologies of Greek

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<sup>237</sup> There are other aspects of the Occidental intellectual tradition that might serve equally well for this purpose, such as the extensive manuscript tradition of medieval mysticism. I just happen to be more adept in the history of Greek antiquity than in that of the middle ages.

antiquity and medieval Europe (or, respectively, their near-contemporaries in the great civilizations of Asia). This interim conclusion shall now serve as an incentive to look more closely at realm of attributions that, for millennia, have also formed Western man's explanatory frameworks of what constitutes the phenomenon of music and its the alleged relationship to the sphere of the sacred, of myth and ritual, of divine cosmology, and of magic – a general notion that I have above referred to as the *religio-aesthetic sentiment*:

“[That art is] a means to a state of exaltation is unanimously agreed, and that it comes from the spiritual depth of man's nature is hardly contested ... Art is, in fact, a necessity to and a product of the spiritual life, ... to which it gives and from which it takes ... [Both art and religion] have the power of transporting men to superhuman ecstasies; both are means to unearthly states of mind. Art and religion belong to the same world ... the kingdom of neither is of this world ... Between aesthetic and religious rapture there is [thus] a family alliance.” (Clive Bell 1914: 54-68; quoted in Wolterstorff 2003: 327-8).

During much of European history, imaginations about music's connection to the human spirit were a direct emulation of, and hence subordinated to, Pythagorean numerology and the Platonic belief in an eternal, universal harmonic order governing the (geocentric) cosmos as well as the soul and the destiny of man, as put forth in the writings of neo-Platonic scholars such as Agrippa, Ramos, Ficino and Gaffori (cf. Tomlinson 1993; also Strunk 1965).

Yet from the Presocratic tradition stems also a different type of ‘hypostasis’ that has been just as important and formative in European thought about the nature of music: reifying ‘music’ not by reference to what it ‘has’, but in terms of what it ‘does’. Not by defining music in terms of constituent properties, but in terms of *effective virtues*. In classical antiquity this idea found further expression in Plato's deliberations about the virtues of the different Greek modes. In the middle ages this idea became synonymous with Boethius's concept of *Musica humana*, the notion that the harmony of the celestial spheres (the *Musica mundana*), is mirrored in the effects that the proportions of musical tones and intervals have on the human body and on human affects and morals. The same divine principle was assumed to govern both man and the cosmos, In accordance with the hermetic principle of ‘as above, so below’ (for a comprehensive treatment see Godwin 1995). Hence, the tripartite segmentation

into *Musica mundana*, *Musica humana* and *Musica instrumentalis* (i.e., actual music-making) dominated medieval European thought about music.

The pre-classical and archaic heritage, however, presents us with yet another mythical strand underlying Occidental thought about music – one more ancient and less mechanistic and rationalizing - that can be traced from archaic Greek rites, through the visionary ecstasies of the medieval mystics, to the romantic effusions of Schopenhauer and (the young) Nietzsche; and that can also be transferred to the reports of anthropologists regarding the beliefs and practices of many non-European societies: A tradition that understands music not by means of its supposed relation to divine truths expressible by abstract number but by its relation to the concrete, actual experiences of life and death, and to man's hopes for a better beyond – and the eternal truths of mathematics and the hopes of man towards eternity are things of a very different order. And while we have become accustomed to *explaining* music in the terms of the former, it appears to have been, through all ages, predominantly been *understood* in terms of the latter. And in this seems to lie the reason why music is, the world over, so closely linked to all forms of religious ritual, to imaginings of some otherworldly realm, and to the belief in supernatural intermediaries. Thus, even if we still take 'universals' to be what ethnomusicologist are supposed to look for, these particular beliefs about the transformative powers of music, its relatedness to some beyond, however imagined, and its according uses within religious and ceremonial contexts appear to be a more promising field of study than the formal structures of musical sound:

"I mentioned the importance of music in ritual, and as it were, in addressing the supernatural. This seems to me to be truly a universal, shared by all known societies, however different the sound. Another universal is the use of music to provide some kind of fundamental change in an individual's consciousness or in the ambience of a gathering. Music 'transforms experience,' in the words of David McAllester (1971)." (Nettl 2000: 468).

From the archaic world until quite recent times, ideas about music were, thus, simultaneously linked in a quite different, non-Pythagorean, way to the sphere of the sacred and the mysterious, to Gods and deities, to spirits and demons, and to the general belief about music being a vital link to an otherworldly, transcendent domain. A tradition of imaginative conceptions about the nature of

music that is, by all indications, both much older and much more widespread than the Pythagoreans' obsessions with magic numbers and the harmony of the spheres. A way of perceiving music that relates not to mediating *theoretical constructs about* reality, but relates to the *immediate experience of* reality (Dewey, loc. cit.; Cassirer, loc. cit.).

### 6.8.1.1 Ancient Notions of Spirit Possession: Hesiod's *Præmium to the Theogony*

The belief in an immediate association between music and transcendental efficacy, the notion that music has the capacity to transform not only the emotions but the moral character of people and to even allow a participation in the realm of the divine, survived in the form of the Aristotelian concept of musical *ethos* (*ἦθος*) (*Nicomachean ethic*; see also Weiss and Taruskin 1984:1; Strunk 1964; Bujic 1988):

“[N]either Pythagorean nor Christian efforts to mathematize music had been successful due to the overwhelming influence in the Greek and Christian worlds of *ethos* which protected the affective character and blocked the rising hegemony of the consistently quantifiable aspect of music.” (Feher 1987: 337)

Yet, there is to be found an even older account on these matters that predates Aristotle's attempts at a more rationalized explanation, probably by millennia. It confronts us not as an analytic concept (such as *ethos*), but in the form of anthropomorphic mythical beings: in the form of those ancient mythical figures called the *Muses* (Μοῦσαι; cf. W. F. Otto 1954), those nine<sup>238</sup> archaic deities of the arts and of spiritual wisdom that our terms ‘museum’, ‘amusement’, ‘mosaic’, and, of course, ‘music’ originate from.

The Muses might be seen as the forces of artistic creativity personified, the intermediaries between the realm of sacred knowledge and the domain of

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238 As canonized by Hesiod. Older (and also some later) sources speak of *the Muse* in the singular, i.e. as an individual deity or Goddess; cf. Plato, *Ion*, below.

mortal men - an idea of, and belief in, external, divine agency as the wellspring of creative expression that has survived in our notions of *inspiration*<sup>239</sup> and of *genius*.<sup>240</sup> They give personal identity to the forces one feels being taken over by during the act of creative expression, that are experientially real, yet out of the grasp of rational cognition. And, according to John Dewey, we cannot help but to explain non-cognitive experience by recurring to notions of supernatural agency:

“When intellectual experience and its material are taken to be primary, the cord binding experience and nature are cut ... Hence, unless there is a breach of historic and natural continuity, *cognitive experience must originate within that of a non-cognitive sort*. And unless we start from knowing as a factor in action and undergoing *we are inevitably committed to the intrusion of an extra-natural, if not supernatural, agency and principle*.” (1958: 23; my emphases).

Hence, the Muses' inspirational powers are still evoked by Plato (in the *Ion*; i.e. in post-Homeric times, when rationality had largely superseded myth as the fundamental attitude of Greek thought),<sup>241</sup> when he discusses the nature of poetic creation. Plato has Socrates metaphorically compare the contagious virtue of artistic inspiration to the imparting powers of the magnet, emphasizing the essentially collective, unifying, *communitas* aspects of musical-poetic expression:<sup>242</sup>

“This stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain: and *all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone*. In like manner the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. *For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed*. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance *are not in their right mind*, so the lyric

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239 Latin *inspiratio*, ‘breathing into’, ‘animating’; from *in*, ‘in(to)’, and *spirare*, ‘breathing’; cf. *spiritus* ‘breath’, ‘soul’, ‘spirit’.

240 Latin *genius*, ‘personal (protective) spirit’, ‘ancestral spirit’, ‘spirit of place’ (cf. *genius loci*).

241 Plato disapproved of most (instrumental) music as a source of mere “*irrational pleasure*”, as he makes plain in the *Republic* and the *Timaios*, as well as in the *Protagoras*. According to Plato, the *ethos* of music had to be controlled not to mentally weaken or to emotionally confuse especially the young. If applied correctly, however, it could become a valuable tool of moral education; a standpoint he shares with his Chinese near-contemporary, Confucius (孔夫子, K’ung-fu-tzu; d. 479 BCE; cf. Weiss and Taruskin 1984: 7).

242 In his day and age known only in the form of rock magnetite.

poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but *when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed*; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind." (Plato: *Ion*, Fowler's and Lamb's transl.; my emphases).<sup>243</sup>

A thought that, much later, formed the ground for Nietzsche's 'Apollonian/Dionysian' dichotomy in the *Birth of Tragedy* (1872).<sup>244</sup>

As has been described in [ch. 4] above, among the Moken making music is intimately linked to the belief in otherworldly forces and entities. I shall now further inquire into our own mythical traditions and how they link musical expression to the workings of supernatural beings, by briefly referring back to Malraux's dictum of the "*imaginary museum*" discussed above, and to Goehr's translating the concept into the world of music I shall ask: what, precisely, is a *museum*?

Originally, in Greek, *mouseion* (μουσεῖον) was the name of every sacred site where the presence of the Muses was worshiped. The ancient library of Alexandria was called the *Musaeum* – indicating that all forms of true knowledge once were considered to be divinely inspired -, and hence our term. The most venerable *mouseion* was perhaps the ancient dancing ground devoted to the Muses on Mount Helikon in Boeotia, where "*their soft feet move in the dance that rings the violet-dark spring and the altar of mighty Zeus. They bathe their lithe bodies in the water of Permessos or of Hippokrene or of God-haunted Olmeios.*"<sup>245</sup> In this sacred grove the Muses, "*singing in sweet voices*", revealed themselves to Hesiod<sup>246</sup> and "*taught Hesiod beautiful song as he tended his sheep at the foothills of God-haunted Helikon*", bestowing onto him the talent to tell epic, mythical poems by *inspiring* him, that is, by *breathing into*

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243 This is not meant to be an unbiased description, but as strong criticism of the Dionysian influence upon poetry, an intrusion of the ancient realm of *mythos* into Plato's ideal *polis*, exemplifying social order and governed by sober rationalism.

244 The conceptual dichotomy 'Apollonian/Dionysian' had, however, already been used as denoting a fundamental opposition earlier, e.g. by Winkelmann, Schelling, and Bachofen.

245 *Theogony* 9-12. All quotes are taken from Athanassakis's translation (*Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1983).

246 7<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC; author of *Works and Days* and the *Theogony* and, besides Homer (and, in the realm of lyrical composition, Archilochus) our most significant source on pre-classical Greek thought.

him the God-given ability to poetize.<sup>247</sup> In doing so, they ignited his enthusiasm, his ἐνθουσιασμός, literally his 'being possessed by a deities essence';<sup>248</sup> what Plato (in the *Phaedrus*) has Socrates refer to as *θεία μανία*, divine madness, famously stating that „*the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the God.*” (ibid.: 244c); and what the Romans later called the *Furor poeticus*, the god-given frenzy of the poet. The Muses spoke thus to Hesiod:

“Listen, you country bumpkins, you swag-bellied yahoos, we know how to tell many lies that pass for truth, and we know, when we wish, to tell the truth itself.’ So spoke Zeus’s daughters, masters of word-craft, and from a laurel in full bloom they plucked a branch, and gave it to me as a staff, and then breathed into me divine song, that I might spread the fame of past and future, and commanded me to hymn the race of the deathless Gods, but always begin and end my song with them.” (34-42)

Hence the invocation of the Muses, calling upon them to avail the poet as a medium for their transcendent wisdom, became a mandatory part of every lyrical poem and hymn. The power of artistic creation was considered to be ordained by the Gods, it could not be conceptualized other than being bestowed upon the poet by forces outside of his own self, by divine agency. How else could Hesiod, being, like Saul, merely a poor (and, presumably, illiterate) shepherd, have explained to himself that suddenly he had the knowledge and wisdom that allowed him to poetize about the very origins of the Gods? How could his memory (Μνημοσύνη; *Mnemosyne*, mother of the Muses) recall and recount events he could never possibly have witnessed himself?<sup>249</sup>

What Hesiod was supposed to do from there on was to perform ‘that what pertains to the Muses’, that is: *music*. For Hesiod had been made an αοιδός (*aoidos*; from αἰδεῖν, ‘to sing’), i.e., a *singer*, not merely a teller, of epic poems. This heritage, the ‘Orphic’ union of the composer-singer-poet, remained part of the Western tradition until the time of Obrecht, Ockeghem, and Dowland

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247 Cicero, in his *De Natura Deorum* (45 BC), coined the term *afflatus* (a compound of *ad*, to, and *flatus*, blowing) to emphasize the component of external force that had been lost in the more colloquial use of inspiration as simply “having an idea”.

248 A meaning that survives also in the literal German translation, *Begeisterung*.

249 I shall here not grant space to some published notions that presume that all of Greek mythology is based on a cynical selling-out of rustic fantasies and rural folklore for personal profit, akin to the snake-oil vendors and televangelists of recently. I shall assume that what we know today about the ancients generally corresponds to actually held world views.

(cf. Godwin 1995:90). And ever since, the poetic gesture of reverence towards the realm of the inspirational, otherworldly deities became a trope so ingrained into the form of the epic poem that, more than two thousand years later, Milton, like Homer,<sup>250</sup> Pindar,<sup>251</sup> Virgil,<sup>252</sup> Ovid,<sup>253</sup> and Dante<sup>254</sup> before him, still opens the 7<sup>th</sup> Book of *Paradise Lost* (1667) by invoking the Muse Urania.<sup>255</sup> The *aoidos* and his many successors became seen as the media that 'channeled' sacred wisdom and divine beauty per their knowledge of ancient lore and their privileged access to the realm of otherworldly beings: hence, 'αοιδός' also carries the consignification of 'conjurer' or 'necromancer', i.e., someone who evokes the spirits of the dead by singing their deeds and adventures to the living (cf. Picht, loc. cit.).

German philologist, Walter F. Otto summarizes classical Greek sources on communal, ritualized dance: the greek χορός (*choros*; 'dancing crowd') and its ritualistic roundelay (ἡ χορεία; *hē choreía*) that had been a central part of archaic forms of worship:

"So one can say that in the dance life reveals the pure form of its essence and in it feels the most blissful joy. But as the dancer in this way is himself, the miracle of all true self-being occurs: he is, at the same time, no longer himself. He is suspended in a higher encounter with the very being of things, now raising its enchanting voice. The earth touched by the foot is no longer

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250 "O Muses, dwellers in the mansions of Olympus, tell me - for you are Goddesses and are in all places so that you see all things, while we know nothing but by report - who were the chiefs and princes of the Danaans?" (*Iliad* I:1.2.31; Butler's transl.).

251 O Golden lyre,/ Apollo's dark-haired Muses' joint heirloom/ Alert for whom/ The dancer's footsteps listens, and the choir/ Of singers wait the sound/ Beginning of the round/ Of festal joy, whene'er thy quivering strings/ Strike up a prelude to their carolings: /Though slakest the lancéd bolt of quenchless fire;/ Yea, drooped each wing that through the æther sweeps,/ Upon his sceptre Zeus's eagle sleeps,/ The bird-king crowned! (First Pythian Ode; Newcomers's transl.)

252 "Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso,/ quidve dolens, regina deum tot volvere casus/ insignem pietate virum, tot adire labores impulerit./ Tantaene animis caelestibus irae?" (*Aeneid* I: 8-11).

253 „You Muses, Goddesses present to poets,/ reveal, now (since you know, and spacious time cannot betray you)/ where Aesculapius, son of Coronis, came from, to be joined to the Gods of Romulus's city,/ that the deep Tiber flows around“ (*Metamorphoses* XV:622-625; Kline's transl.).

254 "O Muse, o alto ingegno, or m'aiutate;/ o mente che scrivesti ciò ch'io vidi,/ qui si parrà la tua nobilitate." (*Divina Commedia* I, *Inferno*, ll. 7-9).

255 "Descend from Heav'n Urania, by that name/ If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine/Following, above th' Olympian Hill I soar,/ Above the flight of Pegasean wing./ The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou/ Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top/ Of old Olympus dwell'st, but Heav'nlie borne,/ Before the Hills appeerd, or Fountain flow'd,/ Thou with Eternal Wisdom didst converse,/ Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play/ In presence of th' Almighty Father, pleas'd/ With thy Celestial Song."



mere soil; her ancient-eternal divinity breathes and sanctifies the steps. The head drifts drunkenly within the light, to which the arms swirl upwards. Or the hands take hold of those of the other dancers, to lead the exultant jubilation toward the miracle of the world. *This is the dance in its upsurge, heightened to ecstasy, where the word and, with it, objective thinking is extinguished.*" (1955: 77; my transl. and emphasis)

Despite (or perhaps because of) his language being steeped in the jargon of German romanticism, W. F. Otto's account vividly describes the ecstatic element and the otherworldly ideations and experiences that the Greeks attributed to the ritual dance, to collective, synchronized, musical movement in a ceremonial context.

As has been described above (in [4.3]), it is also such a state of rapture, of believing to participate in an otherworldly realm, that constitutes the nexus of religious and aesthetic experience in the singing, drumming, and dancing of the Moken sea nomads. Much like the *aoidos* among the ancient Greeks is the singer of sacred wisdom, related to him while possessed by the Muses, among the Moken it is the *djijnan*, the 'shaman', that is the singer of sacred wisdom, related to him while possessed by the spirits of the ancestors. Both communicate with some otherworldly realm while in a state of *θεία μανία*. And, like among the archaic worshipers performing the *ἡ χορεία* on the sacred ground of the *μουσεῖον*, it is the ritualized round-dance around the spirit-poles that is the *conditio sine qua non* for participating in the otherworld of the ancestral spirits.

#### **6.8.1.2 Modern Notions of Spirit Possession: Aesthetics as Transformational Process**

Homer and Hesiod in their epic poems had unified and canonized much older religious beliefs: They conferred name and shape to the many local and regional deities of the archaic Eastern Mediterranean world, which themselves traced back to the countless domestic hearth-and-household spirits of prehistoric times, themselves quite probably survivals of a primeval ancestor cult (cf. Grimm 1835; Harrison 1903; Rohde 1925; W. F. Otto 2013 [1934]).

These beliefs that lie deep within our own intellectual history seem to locate the ancient conceptualizations about what constitutes the musical-poetic impetus

close to a category that anthropologists today would perhaps call 'spirit possession' or 'prophetic trance'; a state where people are said to experience a psychologically real contact with otherworldly forces and entities. Hence, the ancient poet-singer appears to be more closely related to our notions of a shaman, a diviner, a seer, or an oracle than to our modern idea of a literary figure or a composer.

Hence, in this brief digression about the etymology of the term 'museum' (and, thus, 'music') all the fundamental motifs that we need to now take a final look at the musical culture of the Moken, of what they take 'music' to be (cf. Searle, loc. cit.) are already gathered: its relation to myth and ritual; sacred places, ecstatic dances, trance states, and belief in otherworldly beings, spirits that are invoked, providing the reason and the cause for, and being also the recipient of, sounding expressions. At the very foundations of the Western intellectual tradition, in archaic Greek thought, we have hereby found beliefs, figures of thought, elementary motifs that provide for us a cultural bridge to the ideational world of the Moken sea nomads.

And such figures of thought, such beliefs about the supernatural origin of music and its mediation by divine agency, are not only to be found among the Moken and the ancient Greeks, but among a plethora of societies around the world:

"for the Flathead, the most important single fact about music and its relationship to the total world is its origin in the supernatural sphere. While it is recognized that some songs are individually composed by human beings, and that some other songs are borrowed from neighboring peoples, all true and proper songs, particularly in the past, owe their origin to a variety of contacts experienced by humans with beings which, though a part of this world, are superhuman and the source of both individual and tribal powers and skills." (Merriam 1967: 3)

Likewise, A. Seeger reports from the Amazonian rain forest:

"Music transcends time, space, and existential levels of reality. It affects humans, spirits, animals, and those hard-to-imagine beings in between ... In the upper Xingu region, in the state of Mato Grosso, singing is associated with ceremonies taught to men by spirit ancestors when they walked on earth, and music makes possible a return to and a renewal from the sacred past ... As far as we know, throughout lowland South America music is used to represent and create a transcendence of time and substance: past and

present are linked and humans and non-humans communicate and become comingled. The time and potentiality of myth is to some degree reestablished in the present through the sound of flutes, rattles, and voice.” (1987: 7).

The Kpelle of Liberia, according to Stone

“acknowledge that inherited talent, supernatural aid, and individual practice all contribute to a musician's skill ... A performer's supernatural aid is a difficult matter to discuss in the field situation. If a performer has a tutelary spirit, the relationship is a treacherous and often difficult one ... The spirits often make great demands in return for their aid to a musician, and most musicians are reluctant to detail their association with a tutelary spirit. This tutelary may be an animal or human spirit revealed in the sphere of dreaming, *nyii-pere* (sleep-road), as contrasted to everyday reality, *ɔ́é-pere* (here-road). Informants relate stories of people with tutelary spirits who became insane or died as a result of not being able to meet the requirements demanded by the spirit.” (Stone 2010 [1982]: 88-9).

Becker (in Sullivan [ed.] 1997: 17) reports from Southeast Asia:

“Javanese musicians use the Sanskrit term *rasa* to cover a host of meanings, feelings, intentions, and ideas which can be communicated by a *gendhing* [structural principle of *gamelan* music] or a dance performance, a song, or a poem. One of the strongest undercurrents of meaning of the term *rasa* is a religious sense, a feeling of unity with the world beyond oneself, a transcendental experience induced by an artistic event. From the invoking of indigenous deities in the many trance performances of Java to the stories of indic gods in the *wayang kulit* shadow-puppet theater to the quiet religiosity of the playing of a court gamelan, the spiritual dimension of artistic performance is constantly emphasized.” (Italics in original).

And Pinto (1991: 172) states about Afro-Brazilian Candomblé:

In *candomblé*, music is played on different occasions and is assigned different functions. It not only serves as a means of glorifying the divine, as it is known in Catholicism, for example, but in many cases enables immediate contact with the transcendent sphere. (my transl.).

It is these imaginings about the nature of music that link the Moken and numerous societies past and present to the ancient Greeks - not historically but ideally - and, hence, to the roots of Western intellectual history with regard to music and art; a world that is in itself essentially mythical. The Moken's ideas and beliefs about what constitutes music-making appear to be much more

closely related to the original Greek notion of *mousiké* than to the modern Western notion of *Tonkunst*. It appears that, among the Moken like in Plato's time, many societies are not so much, perhaps not even primarily, concerned with the intrinsic properties of musical sonance, but with its *resonance*, with the meaningful inner echo it produces in individual man and thus with its power over collective ideas and morals. Not so much with the actual artistic *product*, but with the the *process* of artistic expression – and with the extrinsic agencies that are believed to mediate it: with the experience of profound *transformation*, of being taken over by a force transcendent of the own self; that *inspires*, that 'makes one do things'; that ensures that by chanting one becomes *enchanted*. The notion that artistic expression is not primarily individual, but collective; not exclusively active but also passive; that it is an act of mediation, of *mediumship*, even of *possession* (as in the original ἐνθουσιασμός); of becoming transparent to forces from outside oneself. Hence, in all cultures and epochs the impetus to produce music and lyrical poetry has been regarded not as a thing man brings forth on his own accord, but something that is bestowed upon him from outside, by which he is *befallen*. As with passion, or fear<sup>256</sup> one is *overcome* by it. And this is what fundamentally links artistic expression and experience with divine rapture, the aesthetic sentiment with the religious sentiment.

Taking a somewhat Durkheimian stance on this fundamental issue, I shall argue that this external actuating forces, these powers greater than the single man, Plato's *original stone*, are the expression of "*la conscience collective*" (Durkheim 1912), of those supra-individual ideations, beliefs, conceptions, and representations that we refer to as *culture*; similar to what C. G. Jung (*Collected Works* 9/1, § 88 ) refers to as a society's "*collective unconscious*", as the "*historical background of the psyche*"; or what Maurice Halbwachs (1980 [1925]) calls "*collective memory*"; or what G. H. Mead (1934) addresses with his concept of the "*generalized other*": i.e., the transpersonal, all-encompassing, meaning-endowing context within which social life is inevitably and inescapably embedded, and which reflects back into the being-in-the-world of every single individual in a perpetual, reciprocal, and unchallenged process (cf. Geertz 1973:

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256 Experiential phenomena that likewise have been collectively externalized and personified as agencies acting upon both the individual and the group (e.g., *Eros* [Ἔρως] , and the brothers *Deimos* [Δεῖμος; terror] and *Phobos* [Φόβος; fear] respectively, in classical Greek mythology).

14, also Cassirer, loc. cit.).

In the expressive symbolic forms of music, myth, and ritual, individual experience is “*transformed*” (McAllester, loc. cit.) into what above has been called a ‘supra-individual’ mode of being. In this supra-individual mode of being the fundamental divisions between individual and society are temporarily dissolved and, hence, may be renegotiated, modified or validated, and finally reinstated – similar to what came down to us from the Greeks in the Idea of κάθαρσις - and what the Moken experience as an immediate congregation with the spirits of their ancestors.

## 7. Synopsis and Conclusions

In the course of the present thesis I have attempted to attain a deeper understanding of music and its role and meaning in the culture of the Moken sea nomads of the Eastern Andaman Sea.

I have tried to show how their aesthetic worlds and their according conceptual categories are quite different from ours. When we talk about “musical aesthetics”, for example, we have a fairly concrete idea about what this term refers to - namely, to ‘music’ and to how we perceive ‘music’, appreciate it, etc. ‘Music’ denotes a particular domain of our reality, and what belongs to this domain and what does not appears quite uncontroversial, at least outside of the peripheral regions of scholarly disputes. The word ‘music’ does not initially raise any serious semantic or pragmatic problems; it is a word with which we can communicate meaningfully and with rather little dissent. I have declared that the Moken (as well as many other societies around the world), however, do not have a word for ‘music’ in our sense of the term in their language; and I have expounded the difficulties, both theoretical and in terms of method, that this fact poses to an understanding of their forms of sounding expressions: if ‘music’ is an actual ‘thing’ in the world, why can’t they name it? And if music is not an actual thing in the world - well, what is it then?

In a first attempt at coming to terms with this peculiar situation I have postulated two initial guiding questions: (i) “*where is (what I perceive to be) music ‘located’ within the web of cultural reality?; where is it identified as naturally ‘belonging’?*” and (ii) “*which domains is (what I perceive to be) music seen as being directly related to or interrelated with?*”. These questions provided the continuous thread that led through the various deliberations that followed.

In [Part 1] I have attempted to give a condensed account of my fieldwork among the Moken sea nomads of the Eastern Andaman Sea between the years 2007 and 2018. First, I have given a brief overview of what had previously been written about them. I have then presented my own observations, with emphasis

on the religious beliefs and the mythical worldview of the Moken, and how these relate to their conceptions about expressive behavior related to sound. I have paid particular attention to the ancestor worship ceremony *né'èn lobo:ŋ* as it occurred to me that it is in this context that where the Moken themselves 'locate' the phenomenon of music revealed itself most clearly: viz. in the interrelationship between music-making, mythical interpretations of the world, and communal rituals.

I have described how trance states, the psychologically real reunion with their ancestors, form the central pivotal point of the annual ancestor worship ceremony. Two particular aspects of this experience seem to be common to all of their accounts: temporary dysphasia (i.e. loss of the ability to process language) and partial or total amnesia (i.e. loss of memory) with regard to the conceptions of external reality.

Another aspect of trance experience had been repeatedly shared by my informants: while denotative, everyday language becomes incomprehensible, other forms of speech-like expression acquire profound meaning, viz. the 'sacred language (*makao puti*)'.<sup>257</sup> Furthermore, my Moken collaborators have repeatedly stressed the fact that, while quotidian language becomes unintelligible, musical utterances remain meaningful and significant; they are even described as acquiring a much more profound significance than is attributed to them in everyday life; they constitute the central means to facilitate communication with the realm of the ancestral spirits: "*If you don't play the drums...?*" - "*... then the spirits won't come!*".

What the Moken report appears to me to be something quite different than just a temporary lapse in everyday consciousness, or some more-or-less superficial alteration of the senses as one might experience while, e.g., drinking or consuming narcotics in a non-ritualized context. What they describe is not merely an "*altered state of consciousness*" (Ludwig 1968; Aldrige and Fechner [eds.] 2006) that occurs to the individual self, but much rather as an extensive disintegration of the individual self.

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257 Such and similar phenomena are collectively referred to as *glossolalia*. Within Christianity this is most readily associated with the practice of 'speaking in tongues' among Pentecostal sects.

If we take these accounts seriously (which I think we should)<sup>258</sup> there follows from this a profound epistemological conundrum: We generally consider the self to be the irreducible ground of all conscious experience. If a state of trance may, on a most elementary level, be designated by the fact that the integrity of the self is no longer being maintained, i.e. by the very self itself being temporarily absent - which instance or entity is it, then, that now experiences? Which instance or entity is it that recounts, for example, the fact that music remains meaningful while speech does not? Does the reported oscillating between blurred recollection and complete amnesia reflect that the conscious self likewise see-saws to and fro, somehow picking up fragmentary bits of information from the trance non-self? Or are these descriptions perhaps only believed to be based upon own trance experiences, while in fact they are but hypotheses, deduced from the recurrent observation of others?<sup>259</sup>

However the psychological details of this particular state might actually be (and they certainly are beyond the scope of the present thesis), these testimonies at least suggest that the self might be neither of that monolithic integrity, nor that perfectly subjective and private, as we usually take it to be. Instead of referring to an altered state of consciousness that takes as its referent the experientially and cognitively enclosed individual, what the Moken

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258 We have no means to objectively verify (or falsify) their claims. The problem of the empirical impossibility of observing subjective phenomenal mental content, *qualia*, from a third-person perspective exists, as a matter of principle, with regard all phenomena that occur in the consciousness of an individual. The methods of neuroimaging today present promising new methods of indirect observation of those brain processes that are associated with conscious experience (what has been called the 'neural correlates of consciousness'). The fundamental epistemological problem of the inaccessibility of the phenomenal experience of others, however, remains unaffected by these developments. For hypotheses and theories that endeavor to equate objective brain states with subjective mental states, see, e.g., Ortony *et al.* (eds.) 1988; Varela *et al.* 1991; Damasio 1994, 1999; Blood and Zatorre 2001. For critiques of this standpoint see, e.g., Bennet and Hacker 2003, 2008; Weisberg *et al.* 2008; Hyman 2010; Massey 2010.

259 This last notion is quite close to the common arguments put forth in attempts at the wholesale rejection of the phenomenon of trance that I had to confront many times over the course of my investigation: 'This is all not *really* real!'; 'this is all make-believe!'; 'this is just pretense!'; 'they sure *act* like it, but they don't really *experience* it the way they profess!'; 'this is all just superficial theatrics disguising and reinforcing actual hierarchical structures of power!'. Can I definitely rule out that this might be the case? That myself and countless other researchers, and perhaps even those people concerned themselves, in countless cultures around the world, and throughout what is known about man's history, might be profoundly mistaken? That it is not the phenomenon of trance that is in question here, but much more the question why man (wrongly) *believes* that such a phenomenon actually exists? No. I can't. I simply find it more plausible, more compelling, and more in accordance with my personal outlook on human nature to take people seriously and their accounts as being basically honest (cf. Becker 2004: 31-4 on the general problem of the believability and authenticity of trance states).



describe might more appropriately be understood as a supra-individual mode of being:

“[T]rancing and playing music are personally manifested but exist supra-individually. All persons involved, musicians, trancers, and other participants seem to be acting as self-contained, bounded individuals, and indeed they experience whatever they experience as deeply personal and emotional, but the event as a whole plays itself out in a supra-individual domain.” (Becker 2004: 129).

The first-person singular, the conscious ‘I’, becomes effectively attenuated in favor of a corresponding enhancement of the first-person plural, the collectively acting ‘we’. This might be interpreted as a strong case of what Victor Turner (1969: 128) calls a state of “*communitas*”, a unity (in the literal sense of oneness) with the entire community, both living and dead: the experience of being less of (or not at all) a distinct self and more of (or entirely) an indistinct aspect of a greater historico-socio-cultural whole.

Those phenomena that we have compartmentalized into the distinct domains of music, myth, and ritual form a continuous realm of being in the ideations of the Moken. Accordingly, their conceptualizations of these matters differ significantly from ours. I have stated how it had occurred to me with some force that several of the central conceptual background assumptions, our implicit presuppositions and the tacit assumptions that we take largely unquestioned and as self-evident when speaking of music, while not at all wrong nor meaningless, are in fact peculiar to Western thought. Hence, these assumptions tend to become problematic when trying to elucidate the ideas, convictions, and beliefs existing among other cultures with regard to their creative expressions and the according valuations; i.e. their, in our parlance, ‘aesthetics’.

In [Part 2] I have attempted to propose a particular theoretical perspective on the pivotal concepts of the present thesis, ‘music’, ‘myth’, and ‘ritual’.

In [ch. 5] I have presented a compilatory survey of the sociological, anthropological, and philosophical literature, attempting to trace how the central terms ‘myth’ and ‘ritual’ acquired their meanings as currently understood in academic discourse. I emphasized several approaches as being of particular

consequence to an understanding of the Moken's life-world: a view on myth, represented most notably by Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, that takes "*mythical consciousness*" to be a particular, pre-rational, pre-conceptual formation of mind; and the views on ritual postulated by Catherine Bell and Victor Turner, i.e., respectively, the concepts of creating, through the acting-out of collective beliefs, a domain of "*privileged contrast*" within which a state of "*communitas*" may be experienced. I have stated the central hypothesis that among the Moken music, song, and dance are best understood as belonging to the general domain of ritual acts, and that they constitute a means to address and express essentially mythical, pre-conceptual strata of the mind, i.e. the "*immediate qualitiveness*" (Cassirer, loc. cit.) of experiencing reality.

In [ch. 6], addressing the central problem of the Moken not having a term for 'music', I have confronted the classical, i.e. Platonic-Aristotelian, theories of objecthood with more recent, 'non-essentialist' approaches by Wittgenstein, Searle, and Rosch. I have attempted to demonstrate that 'music' is not a bounded object, a 'thing' objectively existent in the world and defined by common essential properties, but a conventional and contingent category abstraction we make about particular aspects of our social life (while others don't). I have attempted to substantiate my conviction that the idea of 'musical universals', of what is not merely real but *really* real about music, is fallacious per *Circulus in probando*: there is no defined empirical object these universals could meaningfully be attributed to, for it is to be the alleged universals themselves that are to define the empirical object in the first place. And in the empirical world there are only concrete, particular instances of music-making - *musics* and *musicking* - to be found, loosely related by ever-transforming, historically contingent, culturally negotiated, inter-meshing sets of similarities in sound, behavior, ideation, experience, conceptualization, and context, akin to the Wittgensteinian notion of "*family resemblances*". The only logically non-contradictory definition of music, therefore, must be a nominalistic and extensional one: "*Music is the sum of those phenomena to which we apply the term 'music'*". And this definition is not only quite unsatisfying but also depends on the lexical availability of the term 'music' and cannot be readily transferred to languages that lack a strictly synonymous term.

From this followed that the fact that many cultures (e.g., the Moken as well as the Suya, the Kaluli, the Kpelle and many others) do not command a category term that is semantically equivalent to our term 'music' in their respective languages is not due to the alleged circumstance that they haven't yet discovered what music essentially 'is'; that they somehow lack proper understanding, being ignorant of some particular, objective domain of reality. It is merely the result of *their* abstractions about particular aspects of *their* social life having developed differently from *our* abstractions about particular aspects of *our* social life. The fabric of their ideas, beliefs, convictions, and customs is such that they conceptualize their world differently than we conceptualize ours. The 'situatedness' of particular forms of man-made sound, their 'place' within the cultural fabric of the respective societies, and the implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions they associate with them, simply do not warrant that particular forms of man-made sound alone be categorially grouped into an autonomous conceptual category in its own right, i.e. without recourse to particular contexts and to contiguities with other expressions of social life.

Based on this rationale I have, in a dialectical change of perspective (i.e. from the view of the outsider in Moken culture to that of the insider in European culture), attempted to reveal how this peculiar concept of 'music' developed in the course of Western intellectual history in the first place, and how the term acquired the semantic content most generally associated with it today. I have presented a critical overview of several central beliefs with regard to where, to the Western mind, the realm of what we call music 'belongs'. I have further made an effort to show that even the "*purposively rational*" (Weber, loc. cit.) music of the European tradition is just as much rooted in inherently mythical and mystical conceptions about man and his relation to the universe as is that of the Moken.

In this manner I have arrived at the tentative conclusion that two key notions have had a particularly profound formative influence on where the modern Western conscience 'locates' the phenomenon of music; where to us it has its proper 'place': first, the mystical cosmology of the Pythagoreans that, because of its grounding in numbers and proportions, became the foundation of

a rationalized, formalistic, 'quasi-scientific' understanding of music in the Western tradition; and second, to the realm of the 'imaginary museum' that tends to regard all creative expressions of man, with indifference as to their provenance, age, and original meaning, as 'Art' - thereby taking as universal and normative ideas, beliefs, and concepts that are in fact particular to the intellectual tradition of the Occident.

I have attempted to point out the developments in European society and culture since the beginning of the modern era that turned the creative expressions of the human spirit from communal reverence towards a collectively imagined transcendent realm to subjective and individualistic self-referentiality; i.e. a process that eventually led from singing, dancing, sculpting, or painting as *collective expressions of adoration* of sacred powers by the entire community, to the institutionalization of 'works of art' as the *objects of subjective adoration* in a Kantian attitude of detached aesthetic contemplation by the individual connoisseur.

I have further adduced the example of the foundations of Pythagorean music theory (what I have termed the 'Pythagorean myth') for another, slightly different reason: viz. to demonstrate that myths are not merely colorful legends. They have a profound influence on how we perceive and shape our world. They are, in a sense, axiomatic: they are integral to our perceiving the world as being how it is, to what we consider fundamental reality to be, to what we take, unquestioningly, as "*ground pure and simple*" (Armstrong, loc. cit.), as self-evident, as matter-of-course; for "*In mythical imagination there is always implied an act of belief.*" (Cassirer 1972 [1944]: 75; emphasis in original).

A certain Eurocentric arrogance seems to often have led us into regarding traditional societies as living 'in their own world of myths and superstitions', taking for granted a "*polar contrast between 'primitive' and 'civilized' societies or between two distinct mentalities, the one 'pre-logical' or 'pre-scientific' and the other 'logical' or 'scientific'*" (Lloyd 1979: 1). In reserving the latter mentality for ourselves, we all too easily ignore the efficacy of ancient custom and tradition over the Western conscience.<sup>260</sup> It is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to separate mythical tradition from factual historiography

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260 And the mythico-historical authority of both Athens and Jerusalem in particular.

out of the perspective from inside a culture that has been shaped by both to an equal degree. Actual (historical) occurrences and the (mythical) structures of meaning in which they become embedded inevitably conflate into the complex horizon of culture that forms the fundamental frame of reference within which every society, and every individual within that society, exists.

Hence, the legends about the mythical figure, Pythagoras, and his alleged epiphany in the forge have had very real and lasting ramifications with regard to how we conceptualize certain forms of creative expression – just as much as the legends about the mythical ancestors and their deeds have had very real and lasting ramifications with regard to how the Moken conceptualize certain forms of creative expression. Pythagorean number mysticism, the Idea that music connects human affects and morals to the whole cosmos and to ultimate and universal truths, to the ‘mind of God’, through the magical efficacy of small integer fractions has held a powerful fascination for centuries; from antiquity to the Neo-Platonists, to Leibniz, to the early systematic musicologists, to even some computational approaches of today. The ‘Pythagorean myth’ not only provided the foundation of what we conceive ‘music’ to be, but also determined how the ‘rules’ of Occidental music, the tonal material and its organization, the entire musical paradigm of the West, developed. Hence, in a certain sense Pythagoras was indeed the *inventor musicae*, the inventor of European art music. There appears, however, to be no compelling reason to assume that the numerological interpretation of the phenomenon of music that originated with the legends about Pythagoras has any justifiable claim of being of universal validity. The alleged “*mysteriously potent ratios of small numbers*” (Cazden, loc. cit.) appear to be merely a part (albeit a highly influential one) of our very own ‘musical folklore’: “*Western music is just too different from other musics, and its cultural context too different from other cultural contexts*” (Kerman 1985: 174) to consider it normative in any general sense.

That elusive “*music-in-itself*”, the alleged referent the term ‘music’ ultimately refers to, that could bridge the gap between particular sounding expressions based on historically evolved socio-cultural conventions on the one side and the general, universal constants of auditory perception and cognition, of mathematics and the cosmos on the other seems to be no more than a

mirage. 'Music', apart from particular appearances we consider to be music, seems to be no more real than a 'university' is real apart from individual buildings, students, faculty, and staff; and no more real than a 'team' is real apart from its individual players.

Finally, I have (in [ch. 7]) again taken to ancient Greek mythology to illustrate that in many, if not most societies, past and present, musical expression in particular has been associated with ideas of supernatural causation. While the 'Pythagorean myth' was certainly the most efficacious and influential legend with regard to the musical traditions of the West, classical mythology nevertheless presents us with other accounts of the belief in somehow 'otherworldly' sources of music within our own intellectual tradition: of its role in cosmogony and cosmology; of its first appearance within the world of mortal men; of its transcendent virtues and this-worldly ethos; of legendary musicians wielding magical power through their mastery of the art. A view that is not so much concerned with what music ultimately 'is' than with what it *means* and *does*; not so much with what it is 'comprised of' than with what it *relates to*; less with its 'constituent properties' than with its *constitutive efficacy*.

And it is this part of the Occidental mythical heritage that brings us closer to an understanding of the Moken and their attitudes towards musical expression as being bestowed upon them by the spirits of their ancestors – and to their world in general as being entirely interwoven with sacred powers that are, however, of an entirely different kind than the 'Divine arithmetic' of the Pythagoreans.

I have attempted to reveal the fundamental similarities between what among the Greeks came to be called the Muses (the etymological root of 'music'); what to the Moken are their ancestral spirits; and what among numerous societies around the world is likewise imagined as personified, supernatural intermediaries: spirits, deities, angels, or demons. Among the sea nomads, like among the ancient Greeks, just as among the Kpelle, the Flathead, the peoples along the Xingu, and countless others, musical expression is not thought of as

being willed by man, but as being bestowed upon him through the agency of otherworldly entities. Man is seen as but an empty vessel, a medium through which divine afflatus is channeled; ideations that survive in our own notions of 'inspiration' and 'genius' - and, of course, in the very term 'music' itself.<sup>261</sup>

These trans-cultural ideations seem to reflect the notion that music relates to spheres of human consciousness and of experiencing reality 'that are not entirely ours alone'; that belong to a domain that transcends our everyday perceptions of volition and causality; that are neither accessible nor expressible by our quotidian modes of navigating the world. There still seem to be, even in our scientific-technological age, fundamental strata of our being that remain inaccessible to rational thought and inexpressible by denotative language - with ritual trances being merely their most conspicuous manifestations. And to relate to these domains man has developed other, more appropriate strategies: expressive forms like music, myth, and ritual - and the whole domain of religion and art in general - by which man articulates fundamental contexts of meaning and being that remain irreducible to analytical concepts. Among the Moken, as well as among many other cultures past and present (and the 'modern West' is by no means excluded), music, myth, and ritual - and, by extension, the aesthetic sentiment and the religious sentiment - are perceived as inherently interrelated phenomena, co-conditional expressions of the immediate experience of many different realities.

According to this rationale it would seem that the general association of music with the realm of the sacred, however imagined, is not due to an inherent relatedness of music to cosmic truths expressed in numbers and proportions (which is, as we have seen, a peculiarity of the European tradition),<sup>262</sup> but because it refers to a realm of immediate, pre-emotional, pre-rational, pre-conceptual experience of reality. Music is fundamentally mythical, for in music,

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261 And these ideations about extra-human agencies even extend to domains where we might expect them the least: Just like the artist believes that he 'channels' the muses (or some other transcendent entity by which he feels inspired), the natural scientist likewise seems to believe that he, too, is merely a medium that, impersonally and impartially, 'channels' a different transcendent entity: namely the scientific method - a shared belief that is ritually enacted throughout the scientific community by imperatively avoiding the first person pronoun 'I' in writing, perpetuating the impression that it is, in fact, not the individual scientist but the scientific method itself that is giving purely objective testimony.

262 As well as, to a lesser extent, the great civilizations of Asia.

just as in mythical thought, the *means* of expression and the *meaning* of expression cannot be sensibly separated (Cassirer, loc. cit.). In the life-world of the Moken, like among the ancient Greeks, these “*non-discursive symbolisms - myth, ritual and art.*” (Langer, loc. cit.) appear to be manifestations of an “*immediate qualitiveness*” (ibid.) of experiencing reality: “*cognitive experience must originate within that of a non-cognitive sort*” (Dewey, loc. cit.), a characteristic that music shares with mythical thought and ritual practice for these spheres are inherently related: with regard to these particular modes of experience “*we are inevitably committed to the intrusion of an extra-natural, if not supernatural, agency and principle*” (ibid.).

What we refer to as ‘music’ appears not to be sufficiently described by analytic reference to properties allegedly intrinsic to musical sound (tone, timbre, rhythm, pitch, etc.), nor is it meaningfully reducible to quantifiable constituent parts of a lower order (acoustic, geometric, or otherwise), nor can it be grasped solely in terms of our mere creatural faculties (physiological, neurological, genetic, etc.). By necessity, any such attempts *ab initio* ‘loose the phenomenon’ they set out to investigate in the first place.

Having taken, with John Searle, the position that a large part of what defines what social and cultural facts *are* is determined by *what we take them to be*, I consider McAllester's epistemological objective cited at the beginning, i.e. asking “*what music is conceived to be*” (my emphasis), as being largely identical with the ontological question of ‘what music *is*’, as the latter is entirely dependent on the former. “*Whatever it is,*” writes Roger Scruton, echoing Searle's notions about the difference between natural and social facts, “*music is not a natural kind. What is to count as music depends on our decision; and it is a decision made with a purpose in mind*” (1997: 17). And, hence, it was these decisions and purposes and the underlying ideas, convictions, and beliefs that inform them, that have been the subject of the present thesis. And while in the Western tradition it was ‘decided’ that music was to develop along the lines of the geometric laws of harmonic proportion, this is by no means necessarily the case with other traditions.

“*Numerous musical myths unanimously emphasize the extra-human-numinous or divine origin of the sound-world*” writes Danckert (1955: 112; my



transl.). It appears, therefore, coherent to assume that music *not*, in fact, *is* an objective expression of eternal, divine (or, in modern parlance, ultimate scientific) truths, as the Pythagoreans and their many successors would have it, but is, the world over and throughout history and in many different ways, *conceived* as being related to the realm of the 'sacred', the 'transcendent', and the 'otherworldly', however defined; to that what is *considered* ineffable; to that what is *deemed* to be beyond and above the mortal individual; to that what people are *convinced* constitutes ultimate reality; to what is *believed* to be eternal truth - a general attitude towards music within which both the Pythagoreans' belief in the magical efficacy of small integer fractions and the Moken's belief in the magical efficacy of the spirits of the ancestors constitute merely particular instances.

As Searle has stressed, when it comes to social facts "*process is prior to product*" (loc. cit.). Hence, any attempt at formulating what could be called a 'trans-cultural aesthetics' (or at least something in that direction) has to confront the question of what elicits and guides the processes of "*artistic invention*" (Helmholtz, loc. cit), and the ideas and beliefs that inform it, and not be content with analyzing structures inherent to the resulting "*products*" (ibid.).

And I strongly suspect that it is in this dichotomy, in the opposition of process and product, that we might find the key to an understanding of why our Western concept of 'music' finds so few correspondences among other cultures. We have come to regard our manifold sounding expressions primarily by their final outcome, as a *product*, a result; as the 'thing' that ultimately emerges from certain human actions. Many other cultures, in contrast, seem to take these human actions themselves, the *process* and what motivates, informs, and contextualizes it, as the dominant reference in their conceptualizations. To us, 'music' denotes first of all a class of objects; the process has been subjugated to the supremacy of the final product: we *make music* like we make bread.<sup>263</sup> To 'them' the different modes of behavior and their socio-cultural coherencies

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263 The Romanic languages, e.g. the French *faire de la musique*, the Italian *fare della musica* etc., illustrate the point even better. In German, the verb *musizieren* somewhat transcends this product-oriented notion. This concept has, however, only very recently been introduced into English (by Christopher Small, 1998) with the somewhat unwieldy yet perfectly fitting gerund "*musicking*".

appear to take priority, while analytic deliberations about certain particular aspects of their outcome constitute a “*useless abstraction*” (Keil, loc. cit.).

Making music, singing, and dancing is something humans do to heighten their state of being and to ascertain their place within reality. Like engaging in ritual, telling mythical tales, or playing games, it is rich in implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions and, therefore, is fundamentally rooted within the human world of meaning. Among the Moken, music-making constitutes “*instruments for the obliteration of time*” (Lévi-Straus, loc. cit.); for “*music is used to represent and create a transcendence of time and substance: past and present are linked and humans and non-humans communicate and become comingled*” (Seeger, loc. cit.), thus providing the essential means for a perpetual re-negotiation and re-affirmation of the Moken's cultural identity as “[t]he time and potentiality of myth is to some degree reestablished in the present through ... sound” (ibid.).

It is a culture's accumulated experiences and their historical development that shape and define the ideas, beliefs, and valuations about what sound-making is conceived to be; what constitutes the cluster of associated implicit presuppositions and tacit assumptions that surround it; what beliefs and convictions lie at the core of a particular peoples' ‘aesthetics’; what makes it into more than mere sounding structures, viz. into meaningful expressions of cultural identities:

„[U]ltimately the determinant of response [to music], just as with verbal language, is the total lifetime accumulation of experience with the specific types of organized musical procedures developed historically within a given human society, to which each individual is acculturated, and which constitutes a system of music-making of which the indicated sound-event contributes to a sample.“ (Cazden 1972: 220 f.)

Music is “*an attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world*” (Attali 1985: 46) by forming “*fulcrums of identity*” (Turino 2008: 2). Among the Moken, these “*fulcrums of identity*” culminate in the psychologically real experience of contact and communication with the mythical realm of the ancestral spirits during communal rituals. And it is within this “*consensual representation of the world*”, this coherent domain of experience that what we

conceptualize as the distinct sphere of 'music' is seen as naturally 'belonging'; it is here that it is properly 'located'; here it has its 'place' within the Moken worldview as an integral part of their cultural identity.

Independent of our scientific-rational view of reality and the technological progress only made possible by it, elementary layers of our being appear to exist, inaccessible to rational thinking and ineffable for denotative language. And in order to relate to these domains of reality, man has developed other, more appropriate strategies: forms of expression such as music, myth and ritual - and furthermore the entire area of religion and art - through which it becomes possible for man to articulate the analytically irreducible experiences of existence. Spheres that ultimately remain inaccessible to science and philosophy; who are the rightful domain of poets, singers, dancers, painters and sculptors (and their closest relatives, shamans, oracles, and priests) And their forms of expression are withdrawn from our rational tools of understanding, since they are independent forms of understanding the world themselves. Just as ethics cannot be understood with the means of physics and thermodynamics cannot be grasped with the means of hermeneutics, so the forms of creative expression remain incomprehensible with means of knowledge inherently alien to them. The areas of the aesthetic and the religious together form an autonomous, and profoundly social, approach to understanding reality.

To leave the final conclusion of the present thesis to them:

"The wood speaks, sand speaks, all things speak ... The dogs bark, but we are different, we are different, we sing; yes we sing." (From the Moken tale *The Feminine Ancestors*; J. Ivanoff 2001: 319-20)

## Postscript: Against Scientistic Parochialism and In Defense of a Humanistic Study of Music

*A BEETHOVEN STRING-QUARTET IS TRULY, AS SOMEONE HAS SAID, A SCRAPING OF HORSES' TAILS ON CATS' BOWELS, AND MAY BE EXHAUSTIVELY DESCRIBED IN SUCH TERMS; BUT THE APPLICATION OF THIS DESCRIPTION IN NO WAY PRECLUDES THE SIMULTANEOUS APPLICABILITY OF AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT DESCRIPTION.*

- WILLIAM JAMES (1882: 76)

There remain several issues with regard to the scholarly investigation of music that occurred to me while writing this text, and that have only been briefly touched upon as they initially appeared to me rather peripheral to the core subject of the present thesis. In hindsight, I think they might still make a worthwhile addition as these deliberations concern the way we approach our subject matter, theoretically and methodologically, on a most fundamental level. I shall, therefore, finally return to an issue that had been briefly addressed in the introduction to the present thesis, viz. the problem of scientism in philosophy and the humanities in general and with regard to the study of music in particular.

The scourges of Pythagoreanism and neo-Platonism have, in recent decades, once more led to the resurgence of 'grand-theory', 'explain-all' ambitions in the academic engagement with music and art that, as I see it, constitute a serious misrendering of the subject matter and an obfuscation of the real problems confronting us in our efforts to better understand these phenomena. "*Philosophy is*", writes Thomas Nagel,

“... infected by a broader tendency of contemporary intellectual life: scientism. Scientism is actually a special form of idealism, for it puts one type of human understanding in charge of the universe and what can be said about it. At its most myopic it assumes that everything there is must be understandable by the employment of scientific theories like those we have developed to date – physics and evolutionary biology are the current paradigms – as if the present age were not just another in the series ... Too much time is wasted because of the assumption that methods already in existence will solve problems for which they were not designed; too many

hypotheses and systems of thought in philosophy and elsewhere are based on the bizarre view that we, at this point in history, are in possession of the basic forms of understanding needed to comprehend absolutely anything.” (1986: 9f.)

As I consider these developments a serious detriment not only to (ethno-)musicology but to the endeavor of understanding the human condition in general I shall here summarize my own thoughts regarding these matters in the form of a brief epilogue.

In case I might, in what has been said above, have stirred the impression of merely having erected a Pythagoras-shaped straw-man just in order to knock it down for sake of an argument long since settled, allow me to quote from an article published as recently as 2008, and in no lesser a journal than *Nature*:

“Trying to understand music is a little like trying to understand biology. The problem is so hard that *you have to be reductionist*, breaking it down into the *building blocks* and how they *function*. Then you find that the original problem has evaporated: in this atomistic view, ‘life’ or ‘music’ ceases to be visible at all. Nonetheless, it makes sense to start with the nucleotides of music: single notes, idealized perhaps to pure tones with a single acoustic frequency.” (Ball 2008: 160; my emphases).

Alas! To *really* understand music, which only exists, and in the very nature of things can only exist, as a part of human social life, one has to get rid of both ‘life’ and ‘music’ in the first place and reduce either to its respective “*nucleotides*”<sup>264</sup> - i.e., in the case of music allegedly to “*pure tones*” - to tones purified of life and other equally spurious contaminations; to a thing that does not even exist outside of the laboratory (and even there only in approximation): pure sinusoids of a determined, invariant, single frequency – sound in a form that is closest to pure number; an utterly artificial construct in the spirit of mythical Pythagorean numerology.

This example seems to reflect a common metaphysical fallacy: namely, the conflation of the actual empirical study of music as an observable socio-

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264 Ignoring for the moment the apparent conviction of the author quoted that the study of biology, i.e. of the natural processes that govern life, and the study of music, i.e. of a particular kind of behavior human cultural groups engage in, and the sounding outcome of this particular social behavior, are in any way comparable phenomena; a notion I consider to be fundamentally out of order.

cultural phenomenon (or cluster of phenomena) with newly rehashed ideas borrowed from ancient and medieval *musica speculativa*, i.e. metaphysical deliberations about the alleged 'ultimate ground of being', the 'fundamental essence', or the 'universal principles' of music. This metaphysical fallacy is all the more difficult to recognize as such for it, more often than not, appears in the disguise of science.

The fact that it appears impossible to translate musical and artistic experience into discursive language in any satisfactory way has, over the course of the past decades, led to several programs in the natural sciences that endeavor to translate the phenomena of music and art into measurable 'correlates' of so-called 'mental states', promising "*the key to understanding what art really is*" (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999: 17; my emphasis).<sup>265</sup> Armed with functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), Positron Emission Tomography (PET), and powerful computers, cognitive and neuro-evolutionary psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and evolutionary biology have since closed ranks with parts of philosophy and the humanities in a collaborative effort at demonstrating quantifiable and empirically observable 'universal principles' underlying all art and music, proposing findings that, allegedly, "*have the advantage that, unlike the vague notions of philosophers and art historians, they can be tested experimentally*" (Ramachandran 2000: 19).

The Darwinian principles of evolution are, apparently, no longer confined to the systematic explanation of the diversification of species, including *Homo sapiens*, through adaptive natural selection (promoting preferential survival of the 'fittest' [H. Spencer's terminology] individuals among each type of organism and thus the favored passing on of its genetic endowment) but are consulted to explain everything - and everyone - in the world of living things.<sup>266</sup>

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265 Though the answer to the question of 'what art *really* is' is, of course, trivially simple and requires no neuroimaging apparatus at all: 'art', like 'music', (*really*) is a conceptual abstraction, a language-tool: a *category noun*.

266 Perhaps the most vehemently popularized attempt at explaining human culture in reductionist, 'scientific' terms is the idea of the *meme* (Dawkins 1989 [1976]). A meme is supposed to be the socio-cultural equivalent to what a *gene* is in reproductive biochemistry: it, allegedly, carries 'cultural information' as a particular content of consciousness in a similar way to a gene carrying 'biological information' as a particular content of DNA. The idea proposes that there is a law-governed mechanism, 'cultural selection', that is equivalent, similar, or at least somehow analogous to Darwinian natural selection (yet the details of how, precisely, this process is supposed to work are at best vague). Although the meme has been widely publicized in popular science circles, the alleged explanatory and/or predictive value of the idea is still not

Yet, evolution itself did, as it seems, a rather underwhelming job with regard to the development of human perception and cognition, and human consciousness and awareness in general. We seem to be, in our naturally evolved condition, entirely unable to grasp anything even remotely close to having a claim to being called *reality*, even with regard to things of our own making, like music and art. For thousands of years mankind has, allegedly, been deceived into believing a superficial illusion, forced into a most basic intellectual subsistence economy, with no chance of grasping the world (let alone man's own role within it) how it *really* was.

While the ancient Greeks - Thales, Pythagoras, Democritus, Epicurus - did a first clumsy step we now, at last, begin to grasp the true, i.e. purely evolutionary, reality of the human condition that evolution itself had so long withheld from us. Namely, the alleged fact that we are not conscious individuals and self-determined actors, in short *persons*, but "*biological machines*" (classically Huxley 1874; also Dawkins 1976; Dennett 1991) whose minds are in fact their brains, and whose brains are in fact "*computers*", i.e., input-output devices performing algorithmic operations (Putnam 1967; Fodor 1975; Maturana and Varela 1987; P. M. Churchland 1989; Pinker 1997; for an early critique see Searle 1983).<sup>267</sup> Now, however, we are for the first time in human history able to shed the shackles of the bodies and, well, 'minds' formed and firmed by the evolutionary process, to understand what the evolutionary processes itself *really* had meant us to be - through behavioral genetics, 3D-neuroimaging, and computational Big Data analysis. It might have taken countless millennia, but at last the process of human evolution caught up with itself. Finally it was realized that beyond the quantifiable parameters of the laboratory lurks nothing but the great void: joy and suffering; beliefs, desires, ambitions, hopes, and anxieties; personal memory and biographical depth; the idea of culture and of belonging to one; the experience of friendship, of love, and of estrangement; - even the individual subject, the first-person-singular, the

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at all obvious. The DNA-sequence and its biochemical transcription mechanisms seem to be an entirely different kind of process referring to an entirely different order of entities than, say, 'Cathy's new hairdo that Jenny's going to copy'. Hence, the meme-hypothesis appears to be merely another scientific metaphor lacking explanatory power in any truly scientific sense.

267 Such analogies have a long history. From 18<sup>th</sup> c. trick fountains to 19<sup>th</sup> c. railroad switchyards to the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. telephone network, to modern day computers, man has always tried to understand the mind in the terms of its latest inventions.

'!' out of which even the starkest experimentalist cannot escape on the other side of the lab door - all of these things, in *reality*, are mere "*illusions*"; just a concomitant commentary; nothing but the constant hum of the machine (cf. Dennett 1992; Churchland and Churchland 1998).<sup>268</sup> Seen from this perspective, what we call 'art' must be no more than a superficial epiphenomenon:<sup>269</sup> appearing and appealing solely to our mostly useless natural faculties, art seems at best to be good for decorating the ill-lit walls of Plato's cave of eternal ignorance.

Apparently everything we, until very recently, had deeply cherished as being the most worthwhile endeavors of mankind, the noblest achievements of the human spirit - poetry, drama, music, painting, sculpture - are not *really* what we thought they were. Shakespeare, Bach, Dostoevsky, Rodin, van Gogh, Rilke - non of this has any meaning whatsoever, for *meaning* itself is an illusion, a mere sleight of hand our brains play on our, equally illusionary, selves.<sup>270</sup>

The *true*, i.e. strictly evolutionary-utilitarian, purpose of music and art can only be grasped by neuroscientists and evolutionary geneticists, the rest of us being tricked into erroneously taking to be of life-defining importance what in *reality* is just meaningless pretense: the aesthetic sentiment, like the religious sentiment with which it is so inextricably coalesced, allegedly is merely an embarrassing survival of the idiotic infancy of our species.

According to Semir Zeki, one of the leading proponents of 'neuroesthetics', artists, whether in the modern Western sense or in an ancient or non-European one, are not exceptionally sensitive and clear-sighted people able to convey vistas of reality that may shape and transform entire cultures and

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268 As an 'illusion' is, for the term itself to make any intelligible sense, not something that merely *is* but something that *is had* (i.e. something that some other thing, assumingly a *conscious person*, is deceived by or succumbs to), it remains unclear which instance or entity (if *not* a conscious person) it is supposed to be that 'has' that specific 'illusion'. Either this 'illusion' is itself an illusion, deluding an illusionary conscious self (which does not make much sense); or this particular idea is all but self-refuting by itself having to recur to a supremely unscientific but all-too-human ordinary language communicative tool: namely, a *metaphor*.

269 Music being in the words of evolutionary psychologist, Steven Pinker merely "*auditory cheesecake*" (1997: 534). Perhaps Pinker has had life-altering experiences with cheesecake that I myself have, as of yet, missed.

270 The conceptual muddle that such deliberations inevitably lead into compels the old question: if I have a 'body', a 'brain', a 'self', a 'mind', and perhaps even a 'soul' - what entity is it then that has all these things?



epochs. The poet is not “*a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply*” (Wordsworth), but merely a scientifically illiterate proto-neurologist with a natural talent to tickle our medial orbito-frontal cortex:

“The artist in a sense is a neuroscientist, exploring the potential and capacities of the brain, though with different tools. How such creations can arouse aesthetic experience can only be fully understood in neural terms. Such an understanding is now well within our reach.” (Zeki 1999; quoted from Tallis 2011: 284).

The much-criticized cultural relativism of post-1950s humanities and social sciences is now increasingly becoming replaced by a kind of ‘scientific relativism’: as long as one employs some sort of established scientific method to investigate whatever socio-cultural phenomenon is at hand (especially if this method involves sophisticated and costly technical apparatus), one is almost certain to be taken seriously (and to be published), irrespective of how shaky the theoretical foundations of the given approach might actually be.

Research programs that carry the attitude of scientifically ‘debunking’ what previously were taken to be generally recognized questions and discourse topics in philosophy and the humanities and doing so in the most radical way possible, appear to be seen as holding the highest prospect for true progress. Nascent fields such as ‘Neuroesthetics’ (Zeki 1999, 2001; Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999)<sup>271</sup>, ‘Neuroarthistory’ (*sic!*; Onians 2005), and ‘Neuromusicology’ (Arias 2014) have received significant attention, both in academia and in the general public, in their efforts at debunking our, presumably naïve, everyday notions about the nature of art, claiming to having revealed “*The Neural Correlates of Beauty*” (Kawabata and Zeki 2004).

The methodological, theoretical and conceptual shortcomings of these

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271 In Ramachandran's and Hirstein's core argument (*ibid.*), a well-established concept in the context of discrimination learning called *peak shift* features prominently (see, e.g., Terrace 1964; 1968). Peak shift is a neurological measure that is said to indicate how much an organism's reactions generalize from one stimulus to another, similar stimulus (in this particular case the specific observation that an exaggerated presentation of a previously known stimulus pattern results in measurably higher activity in the respective part of the organism's neural apparatus). This phenomenon, say Ramachandran and Hirstein, lies at the ground not only of caricature and cartoon (where it might be reasonable to assume that peak shift plays some kind of role), but also at the experience of ‘beauty’ as a generalized phenomenon (in which case the assumption is meaningless, as ‘beauty’ is non-generalizable for reasons given below).

endeavors are, however, as numerous as they are severe (as shown by, e.g., Midgley 1985, 1992, 2001; Bennet and Hacker 2003, 2008; Weisberg *et al.* 2008; Hyman 2010; Massey 2010; Tallis 2004, 2011, 2018; Searle 1980, 1992), and, hence, they cannot be treated here in appropriate detail.

I will have to leave it with a few general observations: For a start, ‘beauty’ is not in any way a legitimate object for scientific investigation, for it is not an object of any kind. It is neither an empirical datum nor an inherent property of any one entity, but a *value judgment*.<sup>272</sup> Nor is the scholarly term ‘aesthetics’, whether in philosophy, art history, or musicology being understood as solely, or even characteristically, the study of the ‘nature of beauty’ (and it has not been thought of as such for at least the past 175 years, i.e. since the publication of Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*): “[T]he equation (*art = beauty*) rests on shaky ground” (Conway and Rehding 2013: 1). Shaky indeed, “[f]or art is not necessarily beauty: that cannot be said too often or too blatantly.” (Read 1972 [1931]: 20). Beauty “is in fact but a secondary and derivative feature” of art (Cassirer 1972 [1944]: 140).

Yet more crippling to these efforts than are such naïve conceptual errors with regard to the notion of ‘beauty’ is the fact that the majority of studies in this field generalizes the same fallacy by ascribing neural states to the perception of apparent ‘properties’ (like ‘beauty’) allegedly inherent to the work of art (or an isolated part thereof) or the piece of music (or an isolated part thereof) that the respective study’s subject group is presented with. The ensuing muddle of ontic, epistemic, and empirical domains<sup>273</sup> is profoundly confused, and the resulting problems are absolutely non-trivial.

Any such approach is, by its very nature, subject to the same inadequacies that plague essentialist, ‘property-based’ assumptions about the

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272 And, hence, subject to the societal, cultural, and biographical dependencies and contingencies that inform any type of judgment.

273 I.e., (a) the given ‘work of art/music’ and (b) its objectification into an autonomous, ahistorical, isolated ‘thing’ within the external world; (c) the alleged ‘inherent properties’ (‘beauty’, ‘consonance’, etc.), pre-defined and assigned to this alleged object; (d) this alleged object being further reinterpreted as a ‘stimulus’ by force of its ‘inherent properties’; (e) the subjective aesthetic experience of the participant; (f) this experience, in turn, being reinterpreted as a cognitive ‘response’ (to the ‘stimulus’ provided by the alleged ‘inherent properties’); (g) the observable (by means of neuro-imaging technology) brain-states being (h) reinterpreted as ‘correlates’ of the perception of the pre-defined ‘inherent properties’ in the ‘stimulus-response’-pattern; and (i) the generalized assertions made from the latter about all of the former.

nature of concepts and categories referring to man-made cultural phenomena, and the reification of the entities that are their respective referents, in general. It, therefore, remains entirely unclear what such 'neuro'-prefix programs are supposed to discover or to demonstrate in the first place, let alone by what means. "*Neuroesthetics*" writes British neurologist Raymond Tallis, "*breaks down the barrier between the appreciation of art and ordinary perception and hence removes its own distinctive object.*" (2011: 339). Likewise, 'neuromusiology', by reducing the experience of music to nothing more than a neurophysiological stimulus-response-mechanism with reference to mechanical vibrations in air does not explain anything about music, but explains music away in the first place.

There is no compelling reason to assume that a brain scan of a musician playing the violin can tell us anything more about music (or beauty) than a brain scan of a mathematician performing calculations can tell us about mathematics (cf. Midgley 2001: 91). Here, Albert Einstein's famous, albeit anecdotal, quote strikes one as appropriate: being asked by the wife of fellow physicist, Max Born if everything might be represented by means of the natural sciences, Einstein replied: "*that is conceivable, but it would make no sense. It would be a description by inadequate means - as if one represented a Beethoven symphony as an air pressure graph.*" (Born 1966: 292; my translation).<sup>274</sup>

Likewise, and more generally speaking, There is no compelling reason to assume that the modes and methods of inquiry devised to do explanatory work in the physical sciences - aiming at the discovery of ultimate first principles regarding the fundamental interactions of matter-energy-space-time - are the appropriate means to further our understanding of music any more than they can shed light on poetry, law, ethics, or history. An exact biochemical analysis of a cheeseburger is not 'more real' or 'more true' than the phenomenal experience of simply eating the thing;<sup>275</sup> it merely constitutes a different ontology

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274 "Sie [Hedwig Born] fragte Einstein einmal: 'Ja, glauben Sie denn, daß sich einfach alles auf naturwissenschaftliche Weise wird abbilden lassen können?' 'Ja', meinte Einstein, 'das ist denkbar, aber es hätte doch keinen Sinn. Es wäre eine Abbildung mit inadäquaten Mitteln, so als ob man eine Beethoven-Symphonie als Luftdruckkurve darstellte.'" (ibid.)

275 Nor would such an analysis be of any help if the task is to describe the culinary customs of the Cantonese, or to compare them to those of Bretons. If the publishers of *Guide Michelin* would decide to replace the articles of restaurant critics with laboratory analyses, this would certainly not be welcomed as a step long overdue.

and, hence, universe of discourse:

“This question of the meanings of our current abstractions of all types of entities is more than a metaphysical puzzle for learned people. It is a question of practical good sense in our everyday judgment of affairs. Our danger is to take notions which are valid for one perspective of the universe involved in one group of events and to apply them uncritically to other events involving some discrepancy of perspective.” (Whitehead 1966 [1938]: 67).

And this epistemological danger is just as imminent today as it was in Whitehead's time: what we call aesthetic experience with regard to music is reduced by the field of acoustics to mechanical vibrations in air, by cognitive neuroscience to electro-chemical occurrences in the brain, and by the field of evolutionary genetics to its alleged selective benefits.<sup>276</sup> Splitting reality up into one domain that is merely real (subjective experience) and another that is truly veridical (objective scientific fact) does more harm than good when applied to the effort of understanding the actual, richly textured life-world of humans. This kind of scientific parochialism leads to presumably making statements about music, while in fact making statements about the physics of sound, about the neurology of the brain, or about the process of evolution by natural selection. The workings of acoustics, neurology, and genetics are, however, logically prior to any *Gestaltungsabsicht*, antecedent to any impetus of creative expression, whether it is conceptualized as ‘music’, or in any other way, or in no way at all.

Scientific explanations of causes and effects in the interactions of matter-energy-space-time constitute an entirely different ontology and universe of discourse, namely one in which the notions of *meaning* and *significance* that are paramount within the realm of artistic expression and aesthetic experience are themselves *insignificant* and *meaningless*.

To put it bluntly: how is knowledge about physics, about neurophysiological processes in the brain, or about the workings of our genes supposed to further our understanding of, say, a Bach cantata, despite Bach

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276 David Huron's article (1999) on what he terms the ‘New Empiricism’ in musicology (introduced as a kind of counter-movement against the hermeneutically minded, ethnomusicology-influenced ‘New Musicology’ of the 1980s and ‘90s) gives an overview of what is essentially a renaissance of 19<sup>th</sup> c. ‘pre-Helmholtz-and-Ellis’ positivism - in terms of methodological ideas above all triggered by the general availability of powerful microcomputers and advanced acoustical measurement apparatus, and the emergence of sophisticated neuro-imaging technologies, yet theoretically mostly barren.

himself (let alone the vast majority of musicians and conductors performing his works even today) having lacked any such knowledge? How is knowledge of this kind related to the subject matter if mastery of such knowledge is entirely irrelevant to both making music and enjoying it? Which kind of hidden reality are such endeavors, then, supposed to discover? If we are to explain 'what music is' in such scientific terms we are obviously talking about a different thing than Bach had in mind when he talked about 'music' – and certainly about a different thing than what the Moken have in mind when they do *not* talk about 'music' at all.

Any claim to explanatory competence by the scientific disciplines with regard to matters of music, of pretending to explain what music *really* is, relies *necessitas* on postulating an underlying, hidden music-*in-itself* as the actual subject of investigation, as the 'thing' that is the term's ultimate referent and that, hence, is ultimately to be explained; a notion that, as I have attempted to demonstrate above, is merely an obsolete piece of Aristotelian essentialism.

The burdensome legacy of the Pythagoreans notwithstanding, music as we experience it, i.e. as a phenomenal appearance of a particular kind, seems not to be part of the physical universe of objects, but to be exclusively associated with the human world of *meaning*. Art is not an expression of some alleged intrinsic harmony of nature but, in the words of Paul Cezanne, "*harmony that runs parallel to nature*". Music scholarship thus appears to rest not on the solid rock of eternal natural laws, but on the shifting sands of the historical-cultural process and its perpetual contingencies:

„music springs neither out of some immanent property of the tones themselves, nor out of an automatic delight in the forming of any and all possible patterns out of tones, guided by no previous experience. Musical relations are instead given in the set of habits that have evolved in a given music culture and that are accordingly transmitted as crystalizations of that culture's history." (Cazden 1972:219).

Leonard B. Meyer, in a highly influential book, expresses a very similar thought:

"Musical meaning and significance, like other kinds of significant gestures and symbols, arise out of and presuppose the social processes of experience which constitute the musical universes of discourse. The perception of and

response to the probability relationships obtaining within any style system are not naive reflex reactions. Nor are the probability relationships universals having some kind of 'natural,' physical meaning. The response to music as well as its perception depend upon learned habit responses. The style systems to which these responses are made are, in the last analysis, artificial constructs developed by musicians within a specific culture. The very fact that there are many different musical style systems, both in different cultures and even within a single culture, demonstrates that styles are constructed by musicians in a particular time and place and that they are not based upon universal, natural relationships inherent in the tonal material itself. And if the experience of music is not based upon natural, universal responses, it must be based on responses acquired through learning." (1956: 60f.).

Music, like all socio-cultural phenomena, is not a result of causal imperatives, but a product of the historical process. Hence, it is no more meaningful to talk about 'music-*in-itself*' than it is to talk about 'Beethovens-fifth-symphony-*in-itself*', or 'Irish-folk-song-*in-itself*' (or 'literature-*in-itself*' or 'sculpture-*in-itself*'). While it might be perfectly valid to make certain generalizations about a particular repertory of folk songs from Ireland (or different instances of Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup>), these are *synthetic constructions* a posteriori; this is precisely *the making of categories*. And this process of forming a category does not make the 'Irish-folk-song-*in-itself*' suddenly appear within empirical reality out of thin air. It merely provides a language tool. It is a case of communicative practice, not of metaphysical analytic.

The epistemological form of inquiry has to follow the ontological form of its particular subject matter. Hence, 'music' cannot be observed objectively, for it is not an object of any kind. It is a conceptual generalization; a *category noun*. Christopher Waterman, in the same vein, states:

"the irreducible object of ethnomusicological interest is not *the music itself*, a somewhat animistic notion, but the historically situated human subjects who perceive, learn, interpret, evaluate, produce, and respond to music" (quoted from Rice 2014: 24; emphasis in original)

Hence our essentialist habit of speaking about 'music' in the singular, as if it was an object, a particular 'thing' in the world, comes to be recognized as being a mere *façon de parler*, a pragmatic derivative abstraction, one of the many peculiarities inherent to our "*linguocentric predicament*" (C. Seeger, loc. cit.).

Music is a complex man made appearance based on particular, historically evolved socio-cultural conventions. As such, each kind of music demands its autonomous, characteristic mode of *understanding*. It is non-generalizable. It is irreducible to the physics of sound in a similar way that language is irreducible to the physics of sound; or 'marriage' is irreducible to the biology of reproduction; or 'summer vacation' is irreducible to the workings of the combustion engine.

“*It is obvious*”, writes Stephen Davies,

„that a listener can understand music only if she approaches it in terms of the conventions that shape it as the music it is ... A person who listens to Balinese Gendèr Wayang, neither knowing nor caring why the sounds follow each other in the order they do, is someone who interests herself not in the music, but in *the noise it makes*.” (1994: 326; my emphasis).

The scientific attitude deliberately excludes the necessary conditions that define the universe of discourse within which alone the phenomena of art and music may be meaningfully debated: the human person and its historical and biographical situatedness within a particular culture and society. It also excludes, from the outset, people from those cultures and epochs that do (or did) not exert systematic scientific reasoning from any proper discourse about what it is they themselves are actually doing.<sup>277</sup> Intellectually honest inquiry into the heart of the human condition cannot, therefore, be narrowed down to 'research' guided by 'method' and aimed at 'matter-of-fact', for

“Matter-of-fact is an abstraction, arrived at by confining thought to purely formal relations which then masquerade as the final reality ... The concrete world has slipped through the meshes of the scientific net ... The concentration of attention upon matter-of-fact is the supremacy of the desert.” (Whitehead 1938: 18).

I shall, therefore, not willing to knowingly run into any kind of desert,<sup>278</sup> consider what we call 'music' to be a phenomenon that exists solely and exclusively in the “*concrete world*”, i.e. within the experiential reality of actual persons and within the inter-subjective cultural frames of reference of particular societies. It

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277 This even applies to the majority of contemporary, Western, conservatory-educated musicians as they generally lack any advanced scientific education.

278 Having conducted prolonged fieldwork in the *Fezzan* (Arab.: فزان), be assured that this metaphor is not an empty one to me.

can, thus, only be meaningfully treated within the universe of discourse of man's actual experiences, i.e. by what Wilhelm Dilthey (loc. cit.) called “*understanding*” (*Verstehen*, the mode of mental re-enactment [*Nachvollzug*], of empathizing with somebody about something; in contrast to the scientific notion of “*explaining*” [*Erklären*] law-governed events of cause and effect). And it is these characteristic modes of *understanding*, the particular ideations, conceptions, beliefs, convictions, implicit presuppositions, and tacit assumptions that differ from one cultural group to the next; that define different cultures as *being different*; that allow us to distinguish ‘own’ from ‘other’. And only in acquiring such a particular, characteristic mode of *understanding* do we get closer to other peoples' aesthetic imagination.

Any attempt at reducing music to ‘essential constituent properties’ of a lower order requires a prior ontological shift away from the experiential, phenomenal first-person reality of actual human beings towards the domain of third-person-observable objects. Neither acoustic phenomena (in the physical sense), nor neural processes (not even our own), nor the workings of molecular genetics are part of our experiential reality in which alone the terms ‘music’ and ‘art’ are meaningful assertions. I shall, therefore, argue that such a precedent ontological shift towards quantifiable parameters constitutes merely a different, more sophisticated kind of trope, logically equivalent to those metaphorical attributions generally used in non-technical discourses about music: they cannot claim a privileged truth-value; at best they are somewhat more general; at worst (and usually) they are so general as to become meaningless.<sup>279</sup>

Transferring those empirical and analytical methods that have been devised to describe and explain the eternal, unchanging, law-like, quantifiable phenomena of the natural world (scientific reduction, experiment, measurement) into the realm of the contingent, presupposition-rich, fluctuating, transient, meaning-based, qualitative conceptions and expressions of the human world<sup>280</sup>

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279 Such as when Pinker considers ‘music’ and ‘cheesecake’ to be entities of essentially the same order, as both are generalized as belonging to those things - as far as I know together with sex, violence, shopping, and drug abuse - that flush the brain (or particular parts of it) with dopamine (cf also Blood and Zatorre 2001).

280 In the terminology of, again, John Searle (1992), applying means devised to explain *intrinsic facts* about the (natural) world in trying to understand *observer relative facts* about the (social) world.



(or, worse still, confusing the one with the other) in the attempt to discover something permanent and law-like (and therefore ‘truly scientific’) in the ever-changing expressions of man means reducing the richly textured fabric of living cultural expressions to generic, anemic, decontextualized concepts.

This, in turn, ultimately leads to precipitous and problematic contentions of the kind: “it might *appear* to be so-and-so, but in *reality* it’s (just) this-and-that”:<sup>281</sup> Music might *appear* to be self-transcending, profoundly life-affirming, of utmost significance, deeply meaningful, or at least entertaining. But in *reality* it merely constitutes mechanical vibrations in air that trigger particular neural processes, evolved to promote group cohesion or to provide a reproductive advantage.<sup>282</sup> It *appears* to be something that in *reality* it is not.

I, however, take it to be a primal fact that when trying to make sense of music (or myth, or ritual, or poetry, or the visual arts, or drama, or the world of human creative expression in general), we are concerned solely, exclusively, and ineluctably, with the very realm of *appearances*; with, literally, how certain man-made phenomena *appear* to actual persons; not with how they are ‘processed’ by isolated, ahistorical, culture-neutral human organisms (which are nonexistent). And with how and why they *appear* in a different way to different people in different cultures at different points in human history; not with ‘what they *really* are’, i.e. with their ontological status within some supposed ultimate reality (to which we have no access). “*The philosopher is not permitted to construct an artificial man;*” insists Ernst Cassirer, “*he must describe a real one.*” (1944: 11).

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281 For examples with regard to music, see le.g.. Pinker (1999), Leventin (2009), Honing (2013); with regard to the visual arts see again Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999) and Ramachandran (2003); for a detailed refutation of the latter see Hyman (2010).

282 As we all know, toothless blues singers, just like mad painters, starving poets and syphilitic playwrights, are the epitome of the ‘survival of the fittest’.

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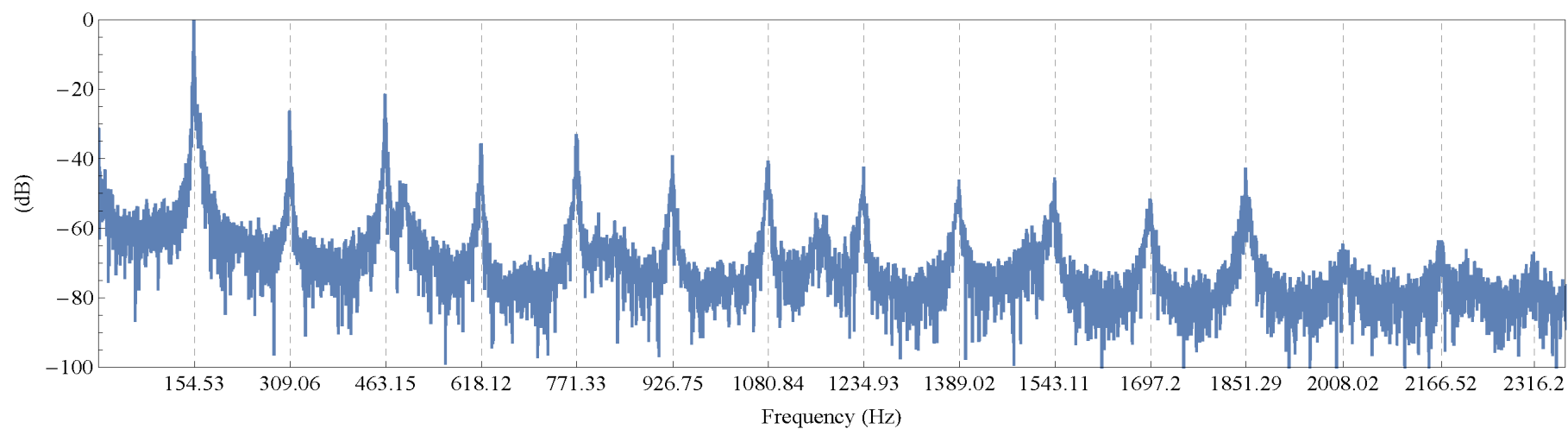
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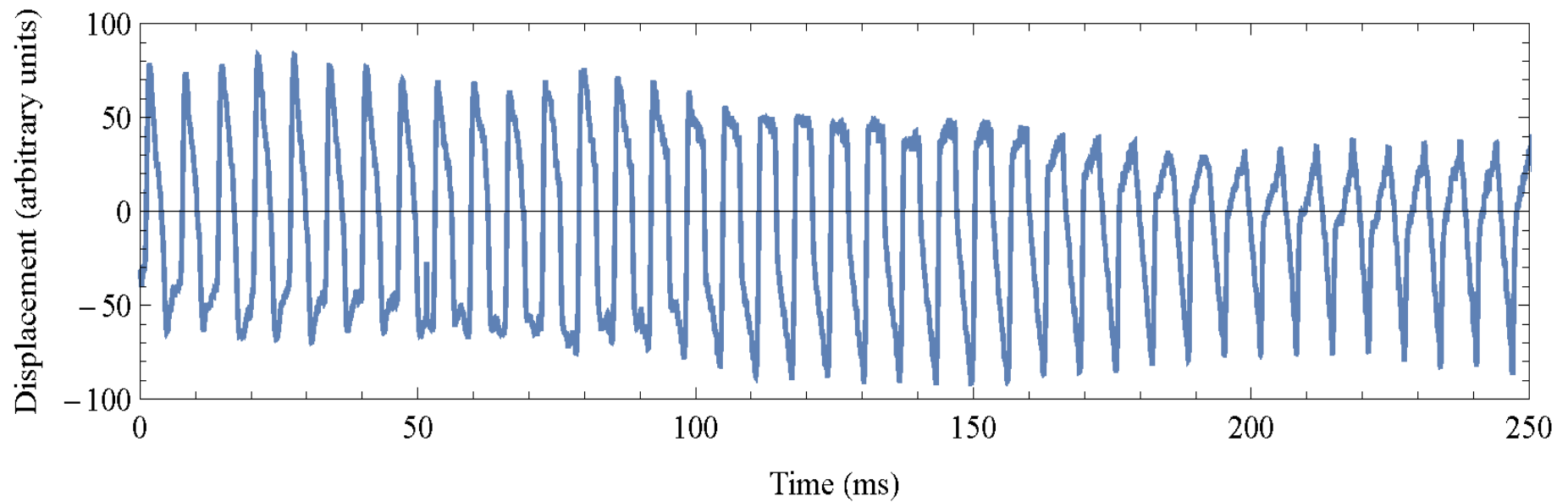


## Appendix A: Sonagrams and Tonometric Analyses

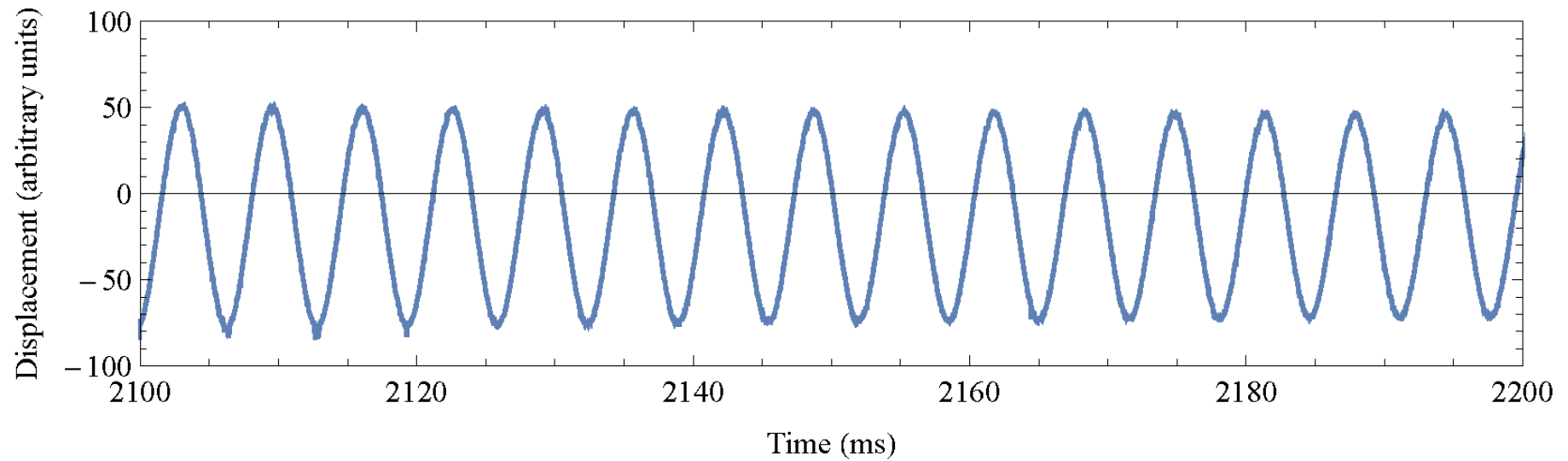
### A.1: *Kating gà-un* Sonagrams



*Figure 1: Kating gà-un: harmonic overtone spectrum, high noise component (high-speed camera, point tracking of the transversal string deflection, FFT derived)*



*Figure 2: Kating gà-un: forced oscillation period, transient condition; very low 'fly-back' and 'double-slip' behavior (high-speed camera, point tracking of transversal string deflection)*



*Figure 3: Kating gà-un: forced oscillation, steady state; strikingly symmetrical waveform without observable 'stick-slip' behavior (high-speed camera, point tracking of the transversal string deflection)*

## A.2: Tonometrical Analyses of Selected Moken Melodies

The results of two complementary types of tonometrical analysis are presented below:

(1) The micro-analysis of selected, short interval sequences and their graphic representation as basic frequency contours over time. This allows the individual intervals and the design of the melody line to be illustrated very precisely.

(2) A macro-analysis of longer sections (with a correspondingly large number of tones and intervals) and the statistical evaluation of the data obtained in this way. By forming the median of a large number of determined basic frequencies within a respective pitch class, a “typical” scale for the respective song can be approximated in this way.

The division into tone levels is based on their actual occurrence within the melody of an analyzed song, regardless of their interval width, in the manner ‘lowest scale degree, 2nd, 3rd, etc., highest scale degree’. Also, leaps that could be explained by multiples of smaller tone steps are initially evaluated as single intervals, as long as a breakdown of such leaps into smaller individual intervals within the same examined performance has not been verified by measurement. Syllabic pitch changes were usually given greater weight than those that were performed melismatically (*i.e.* over a suspended vowel) not least because the former are usually more pronounced in the fundamental frequency contours.

### A.2.1 *Yiné chichum pùtiak*

The melody of the song *Yiné chichum pùtiak* [CD tracks 1-4] is by far the most frequently sung and played tune in the Moken repertory and serves as the basis for numerous variations and improvisations. The striking popularity of this melody suggests that it may be regarded as particularly representative of the understanding of tonality and the principles of melody

formation in the music of the Moken.

Since variations of this song were performed comparatively often, I also had the opportunity to record this melody during all field visits in a number of different contexts, performed by several people from two different Moken communities, as well as played instrumentally (i.e., melody only, without accompanying song) by *eba:b* Dunung on the *katiŋ*.

As an example, excerpts taken from a total of twenty-two recordings of different variations of the song *Yiné chichum pùtiak* will be analyzed.

Figure 4 shows the beginning of the basic motif of the melody performed solo on the *katiŋ*. A cumulative range of 478.4 cents is developed in three steps (corresponding to a pure fourth [4:3] -19.64 cents, or two stages in equidistant pentatonic -1.6 cents). The measured interval width varies between 141.5 cents (between the integer frequency ratios 27:25 and 12:11) and 178.7 cents (between 11:10 and 10:9). The interval steps become narrower as the pitch increases. Figure 5 shows a similar sequence of tones from a later section of the same recording. At 474.6 cents, the developed range remains almost the same as in the previous example, but the spread of the intervals is more pronounced: the first step corresponds to a whole tone (between 9: 8 and 10: 9). The third corresponds to the major diatonic semitone (15:14). The step in between corresponds to the 4/5 tone with the ratio 11:10 (Ptolemaic second or major undecimal neutral second).

These first examples already show the basic difficulties inherent to reducing living music making to the theoretical construct of a tonal system - regardless of the performance of the measurement technology used.

Figure 6 shows the pitch contour of the complete main phrase of the melody *Yiné chichum pùtiak*. Here, too, there is a high degree of inconsistency in the intonation of the individual intervals, between 108.4 cents and 173.8 cents (the downward leap of 281.9 cents is counted here as two steps of 141 cents each).



There is basically a tendency towards the three-quarter tone: the median of the interval values is 146.9 cents. Particularly striking is the obvious reference to a fundamental tone in the melody line, which is quite atypical for the music of Southeast Asia (cf. Morton 1976): From the tonic at 171.8 Hz,<sup>1</sup> the range of tones in three steps up to the highest tone, the fourth level at 220,3 Hz (corresponding to a cumulative interval of 463.5 cents, between an augmented third 125:96 and a minor fourth 21:16, or the 21st harmonic).

In Figures 7 to 9 the main phrase is introduced with the *bia:y* drone string. The tonic 172 Hz follows the upward leap ~ 540 cents (slightly smaller than the undecimal augmented fourth with the ratio 11: 8). The design of the phrase largely corresponds to the example in Fig. 6. Figures 9 and 10 show variations of the main phrase taken from different recordings.

Figure 12 shows a short excerpt from a greeting song by the Moken community from Ko Payyam to the group of Mu Ko Surin to the melody *Yiné chichum pùtiak* (female voice, unaccompanied). The accuracy of the fundamental frequency analysis is significantly lower than in the previous examples. However, the highest and lowest tone of the developed range again show an interval between augmented third 125:96 and narrow fourth 21:16.

Figures 13 to 15 show excerpts of the melody, sung here by Dunung, accompanying himself on the *katiŋ gá'un* in unison. While the ornamentation is more complex than in the purely instrumental examples, the melody remains largely the same.

The examples given, short motifs and longer phrases, show the basic formal characteristics of the melody *Yiné chichum pùtiak*: a four-step scale in the range of a narrow fourth and a melody line that gradually develops from a fundamental tone up to the fourth degree and finally returning step-wise back to the root, completing the phrase.

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1 The measured values in the analysis on which Fig. 6 is based lie one octave below the auditory assessment of pitch; see. Fig. 4 u. 5

There is quite a wide range of variation in the intonation of the individual degrees, resulting in a correspondingly large inconsistency in the intervals, both between degrees within the same example and between the same degrees in different examples. Basically, the interval between the third and fourth degree is usually smaller than the rest.

The previous analyses show the difficulties that arise in trying to derive a uniform pattern from the inconsistent intervals of living music making. Therefore, longer sections of recordings of the melody *Yiné chichum pùtíak*, with a correspondingly large number of individual intervals, will now be statistically evaluated. A total of 36 longer sections (with a duration of 12 seconds to two minutes and 42 seconds) from 22 different recordings of both vocal and instrumental performances from 2007 and 2010 were subjected to a pitch class analysis in *Tarsos*.

The results of the individual analyses (see example in Fig. 16) were then evaluated using a spreadsheet (using the statistics software package *R*) and the respective median, mean and standard deviation of all measured pitch classes were determined (see Table 2).

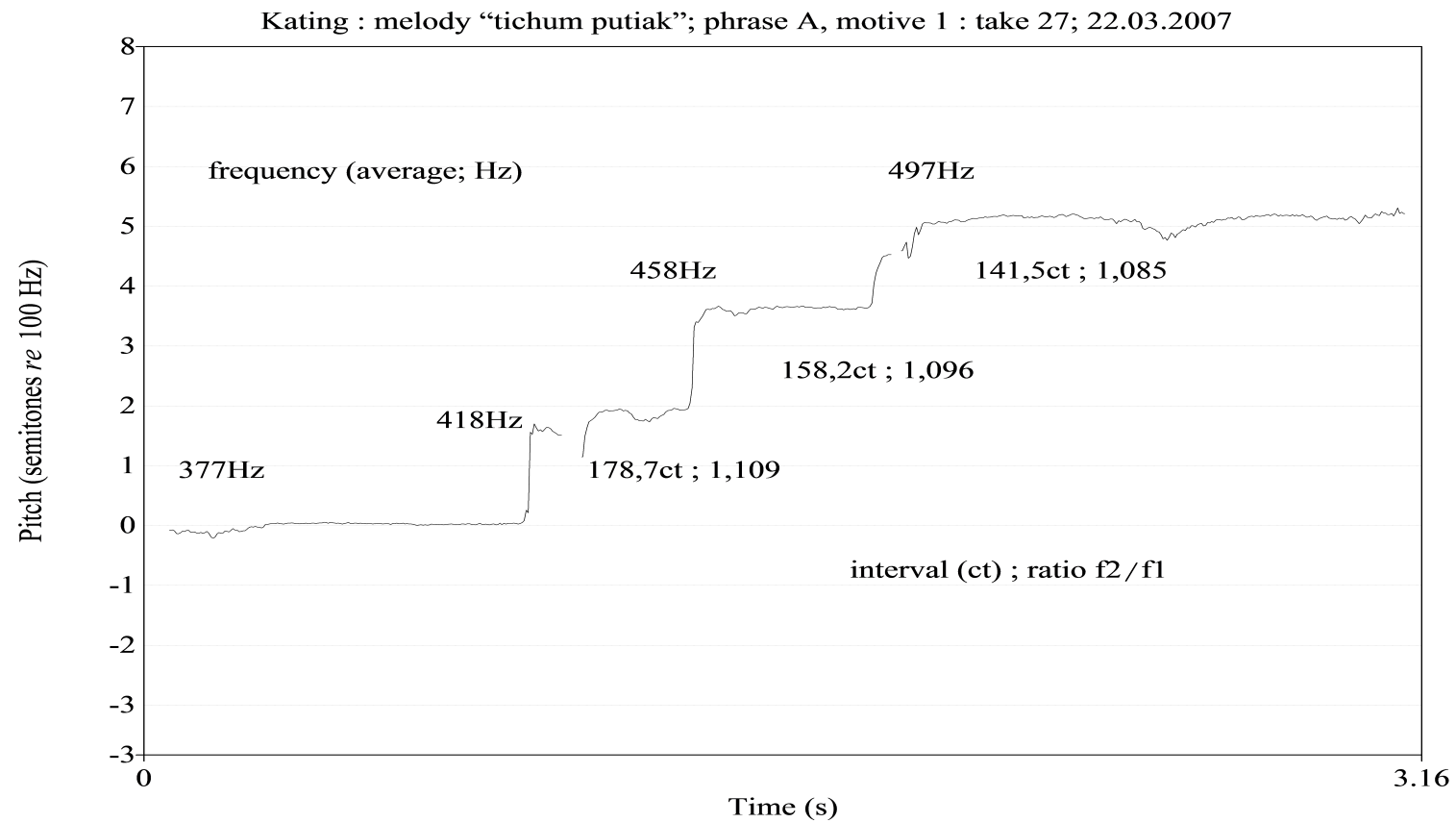


Fig. 4: Yiné chichum putiak. Fundamental frequency contour (Praat); development from the fundamental to the third scale degree, spanning approx. a fourth.

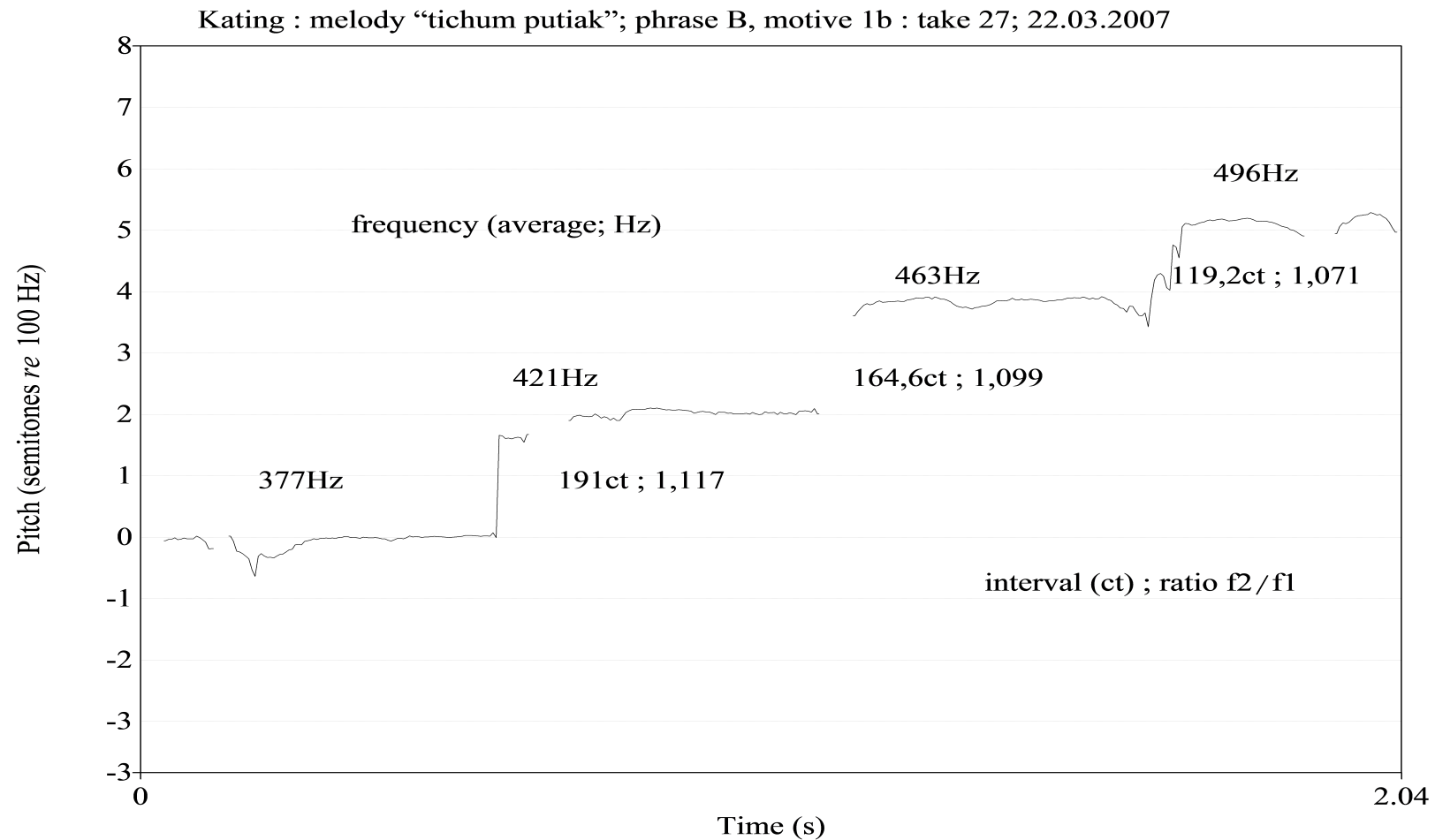


Fig. 5: Yiné chichum pütíak. Same motif as in Fig. 4, but with different interval widths

Tichum Putiak phrase Aa1+2 (kating solo); take 24, 12.02.2010

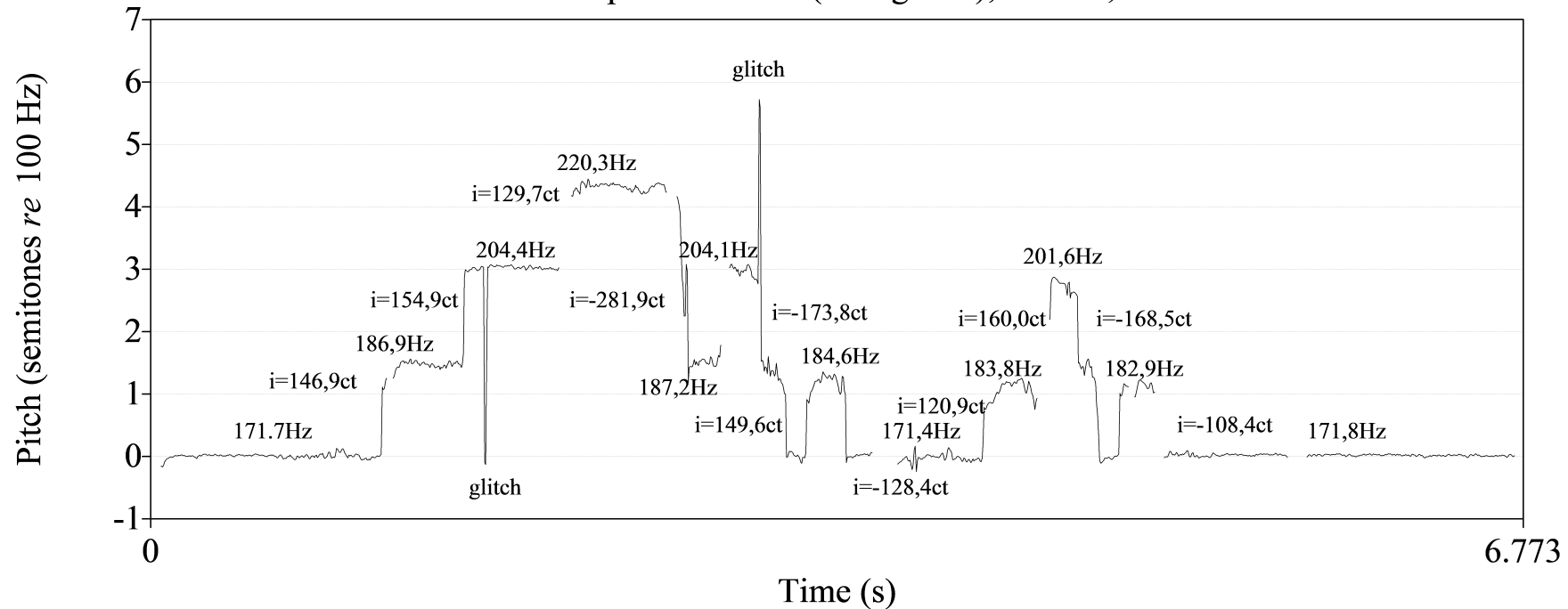


Fig. 6: Main phrase of the melody Yiné chichum pùtiak; Starting from the 'tonic' ~ 172Hz (F3 -26 cents [8va]) ascent to the fourth and gradual return to T

djine tichum putiak : phrase B1 (-4th); kating solo; take 24, 12.02.2010

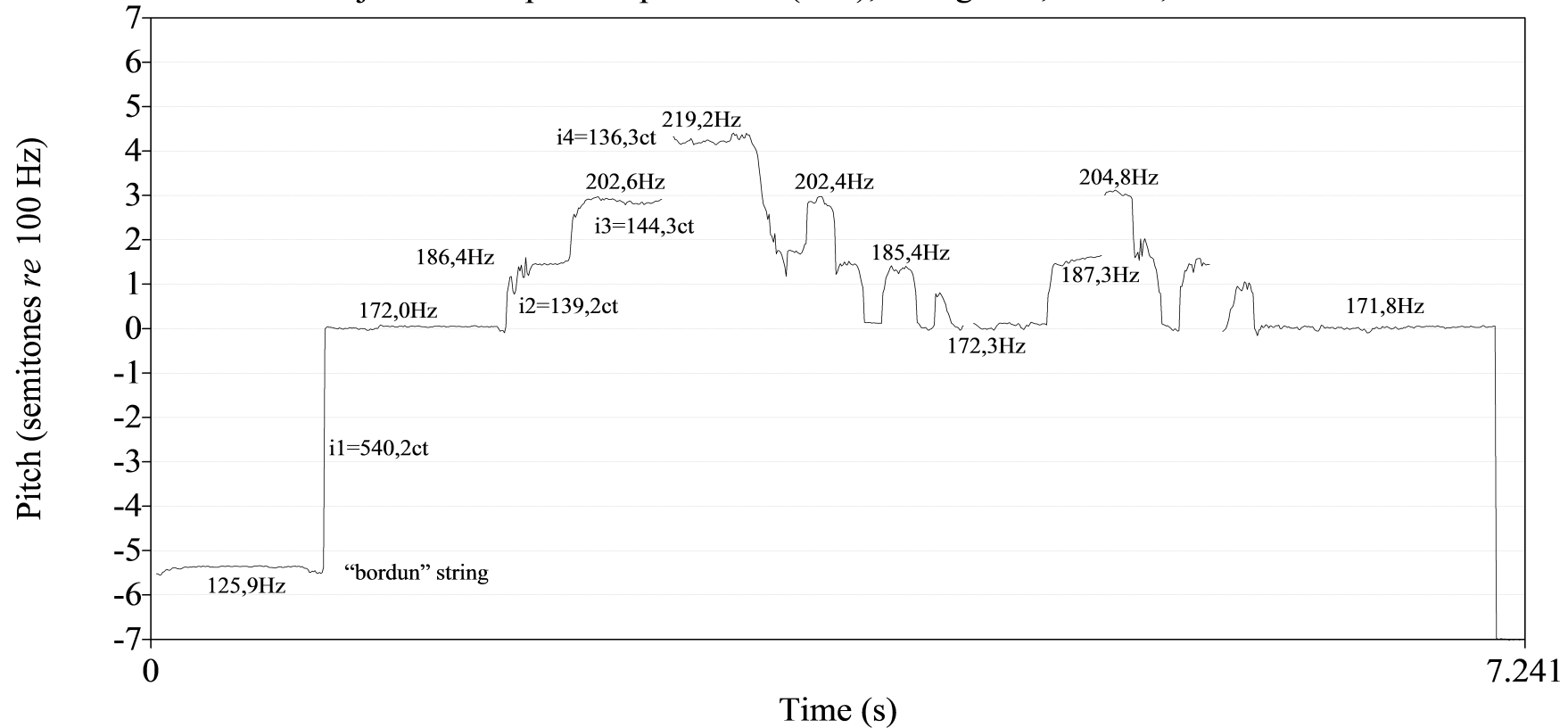


Fig. 7: Yiné chichum pùtiak, main phrase starting with the bia:y ('drone') string (B2 +35 cents [8va])

djine tichum putiak : phrase B1 (-4th); kating solo; take 24, 12.02.2010

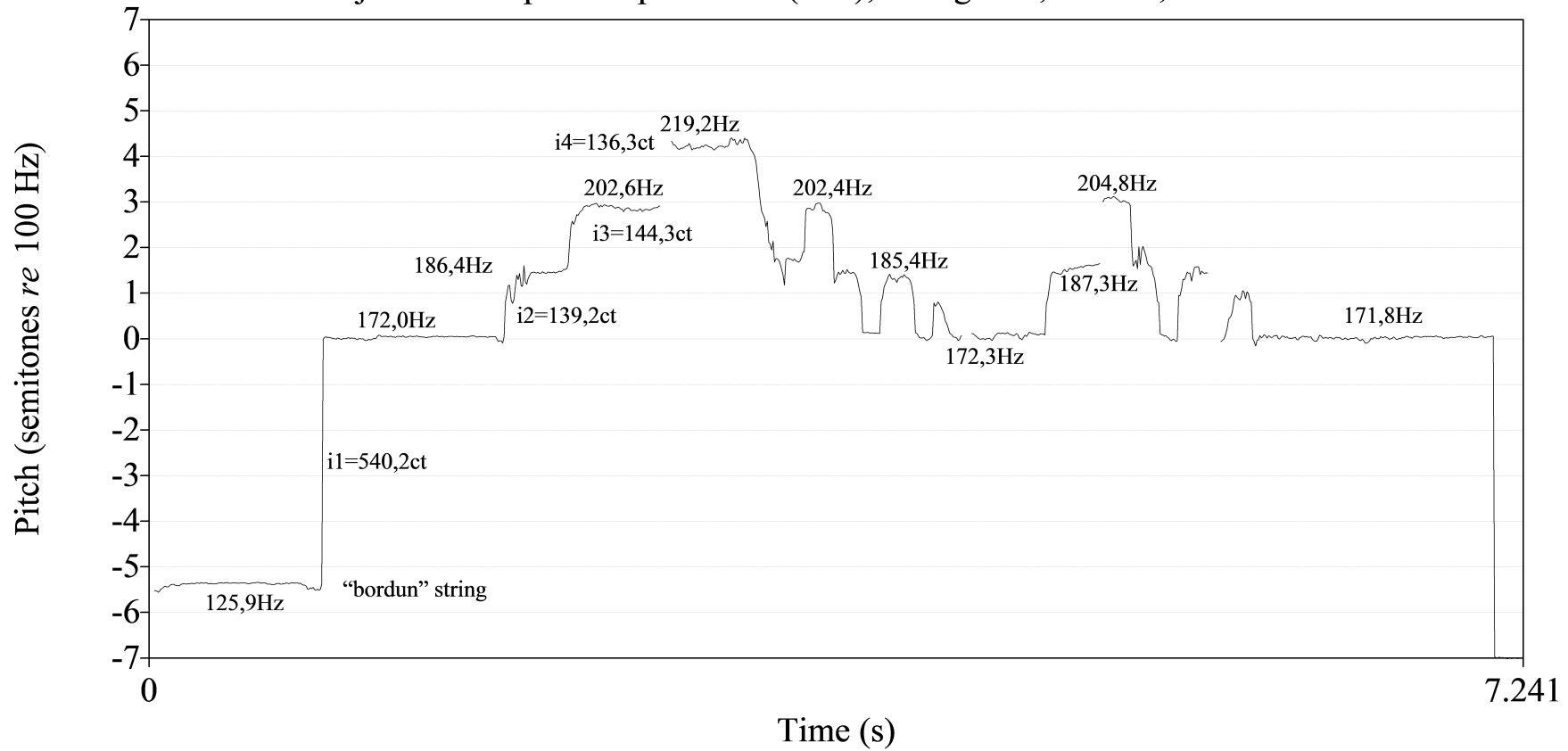


Fig. 8: Yiné chichum pùtiak, variation of the main phrase

djine tichum putiak : phrase A (-4th) kating solo; take 24, 12.02.2010

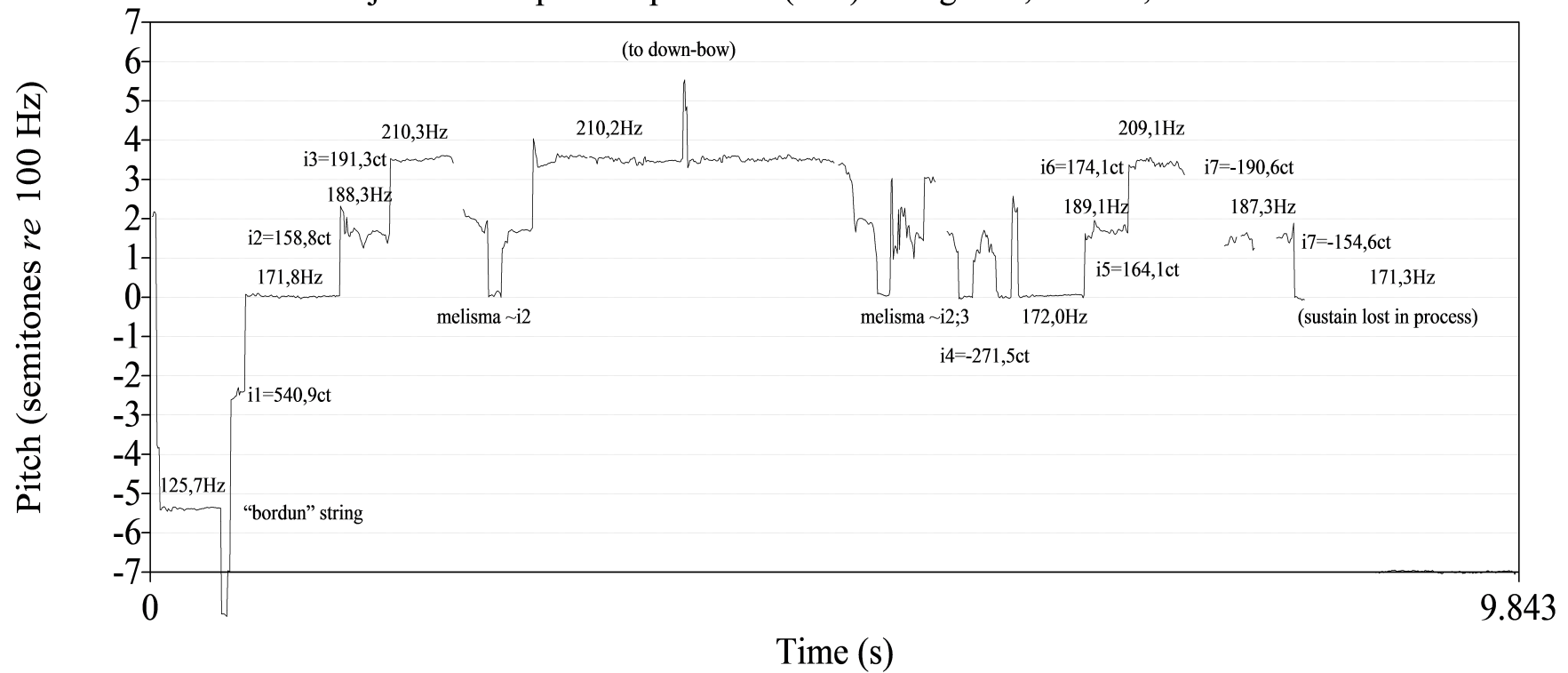


Fig. 9: Yiné chichum pùtiak, variation omitting the fourth; ornamentation



Tichum Putiak phrase Aa(3)(kating solo); take 24, 12.02.2010

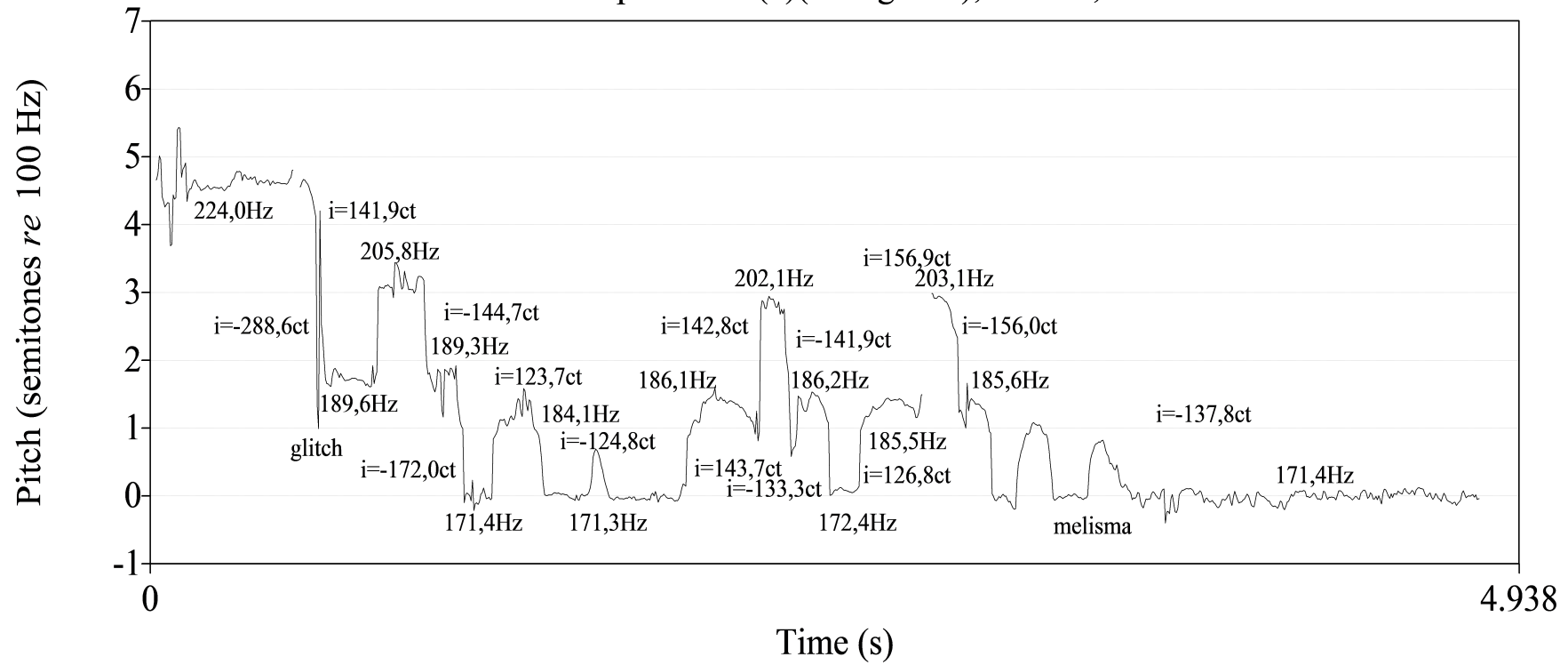


Fig. 10: Yiné chichum pütíak, variation, starting on the fourth degree, ornamentation and ending on T

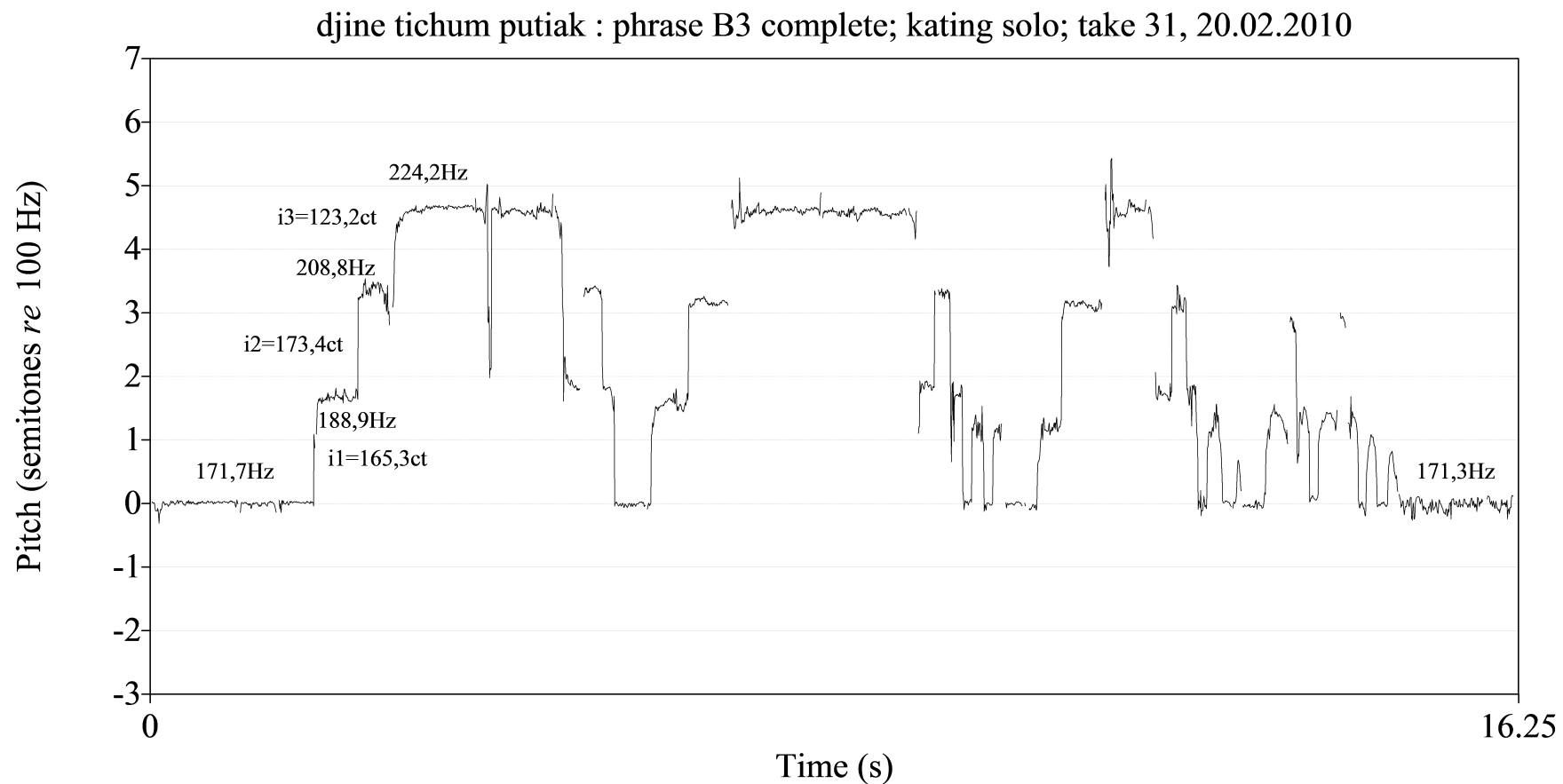


Fig. 11: Yiné chichum pùtiak, three iterations of the introductory motif of the phrase with variations

Vocal : melody “tichum putiak” phrase A,B; motive 1,2 + melisma; Ko Payyam, take 133b, 5.5.2010

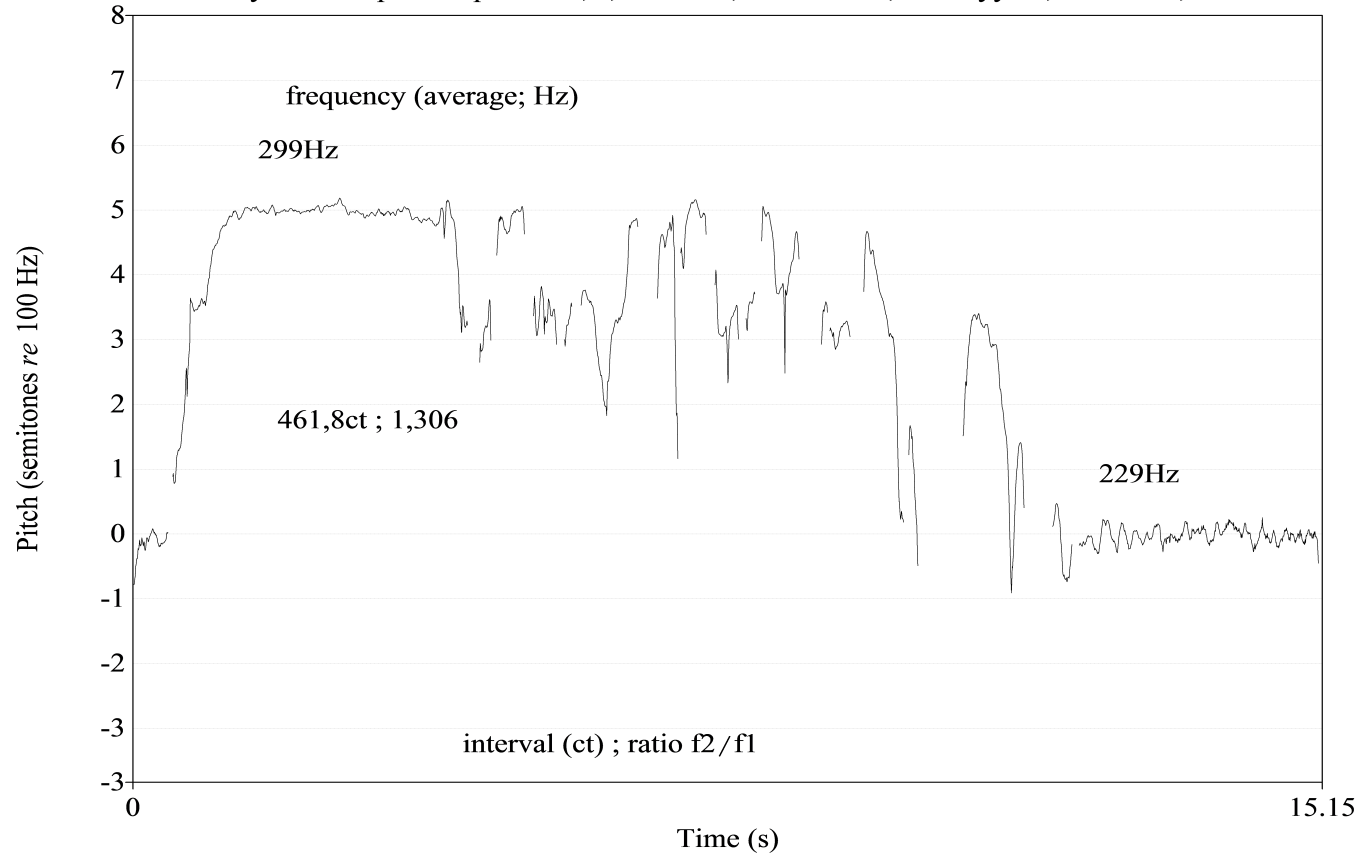


Fig 12: Yiné chichum pùtiak, sung motif from the island of Ko Payyam, again in the range of a narrow fourth

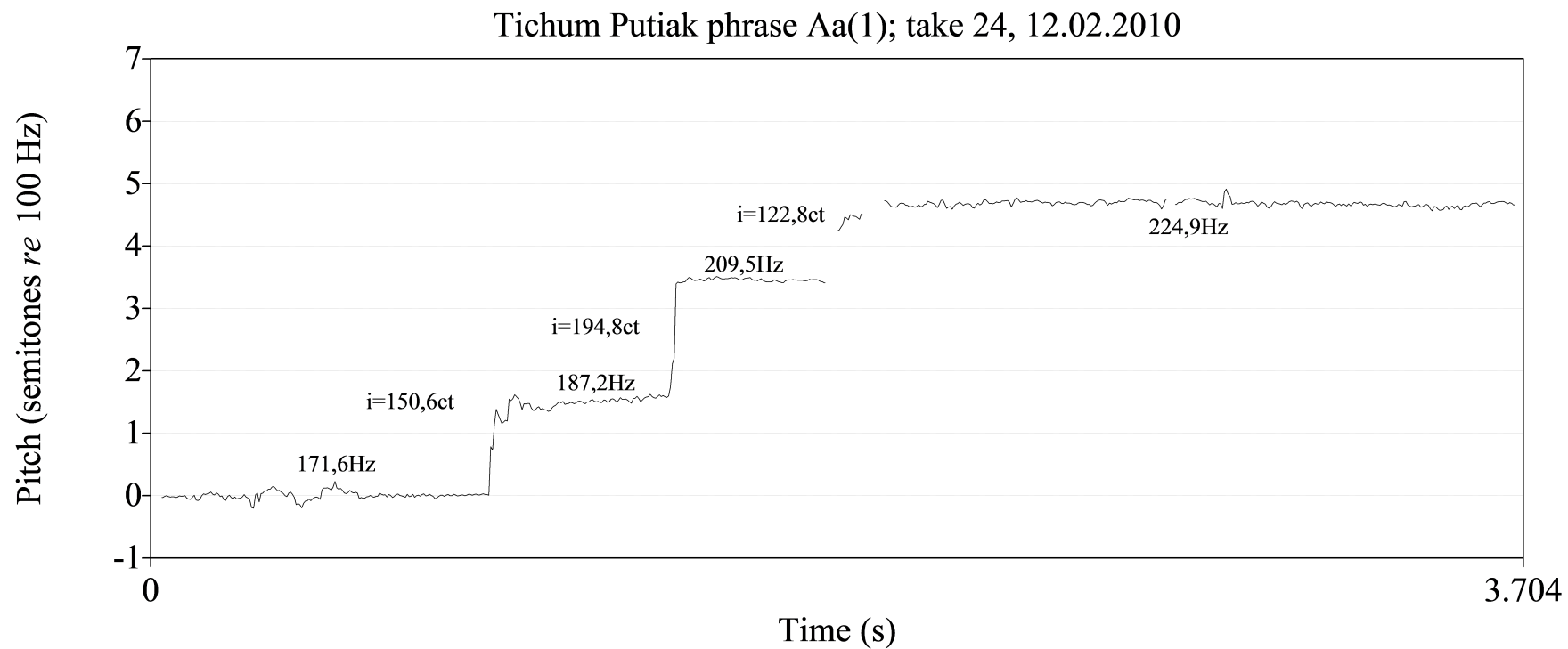


Fig. 13: Yiné chichum pùtiak, Introductory Motif. Again in the range of a narrow fourth (here 468.2 cents), developed in four steps

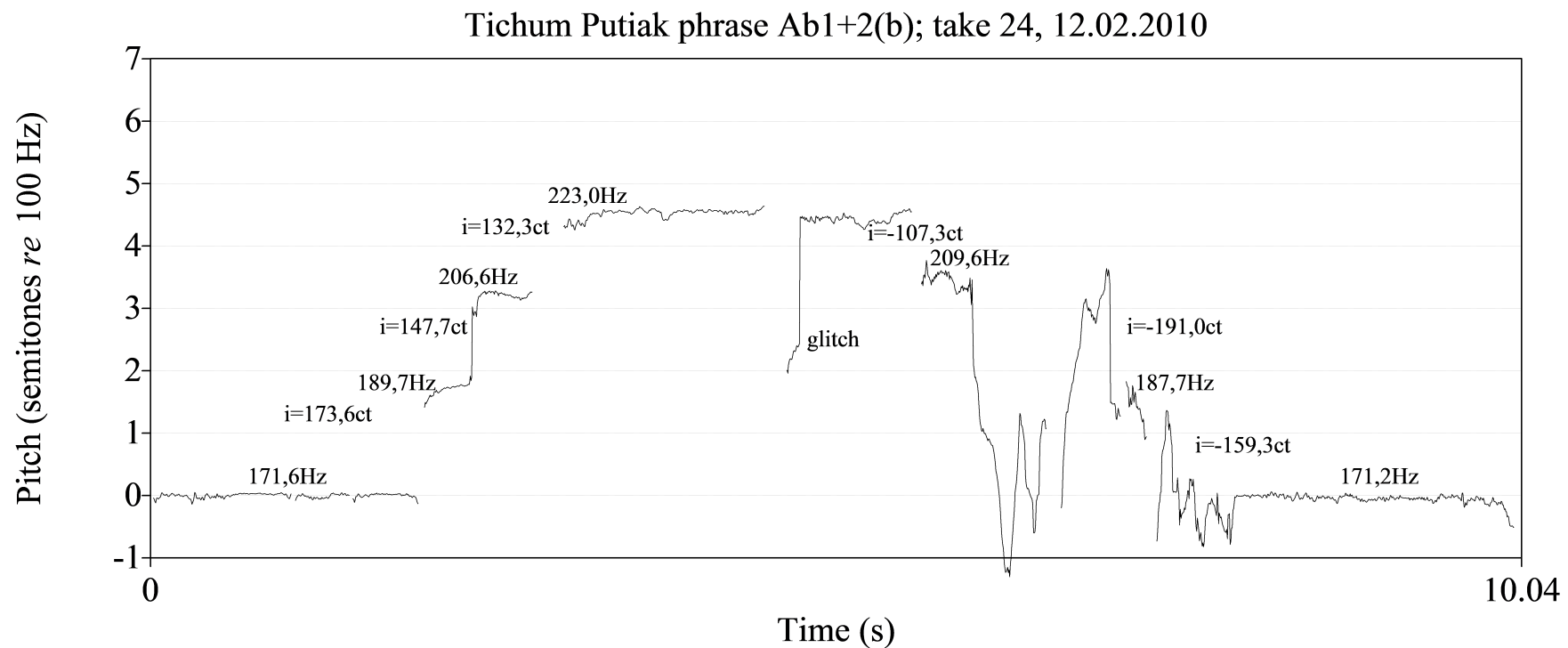


Fig. 14: Yiné chichum pùtiak, main phrase with melismatic ornamentation before the return to T

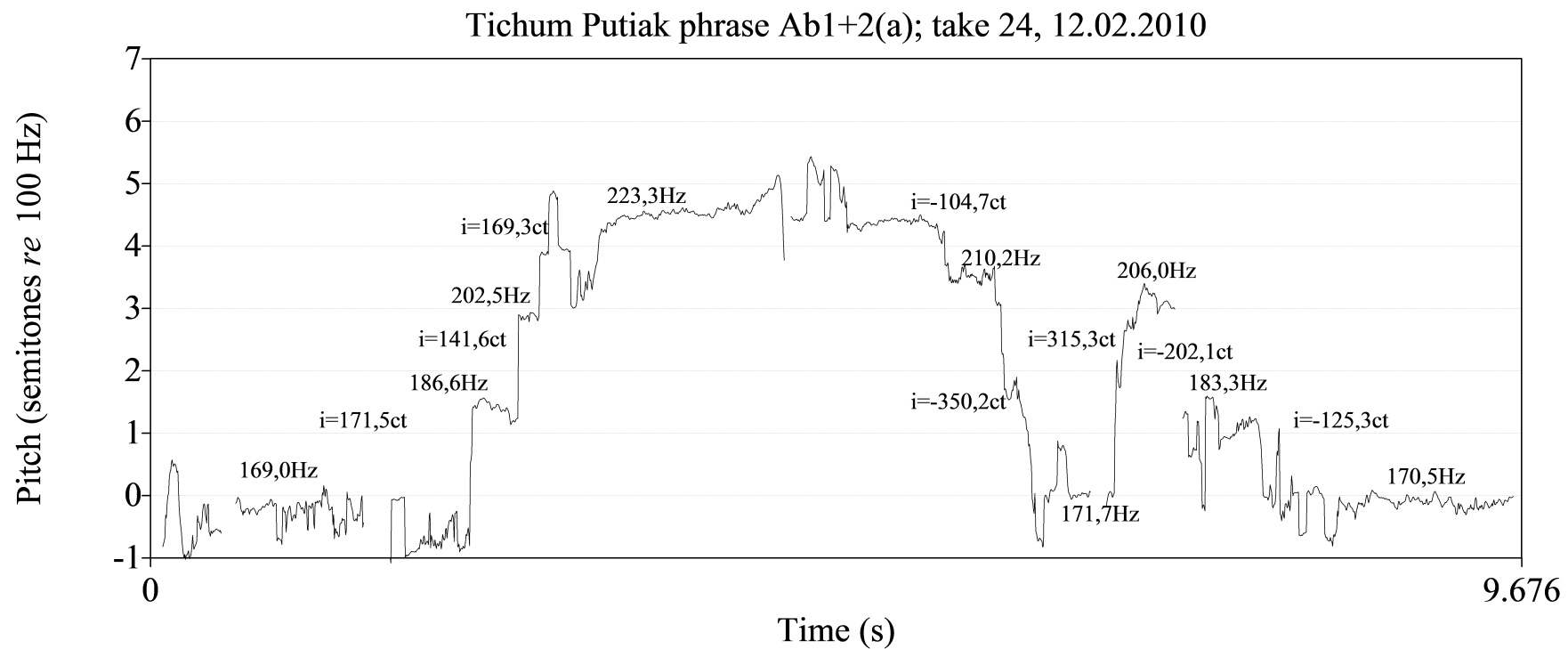


Fig. 15: Yiné chichum pùtiak, variation of the main phrase

Djine Tichum Putiak, four iterations (motifs A,A1,A1,A), complete contour, take 32, 02.02.2007

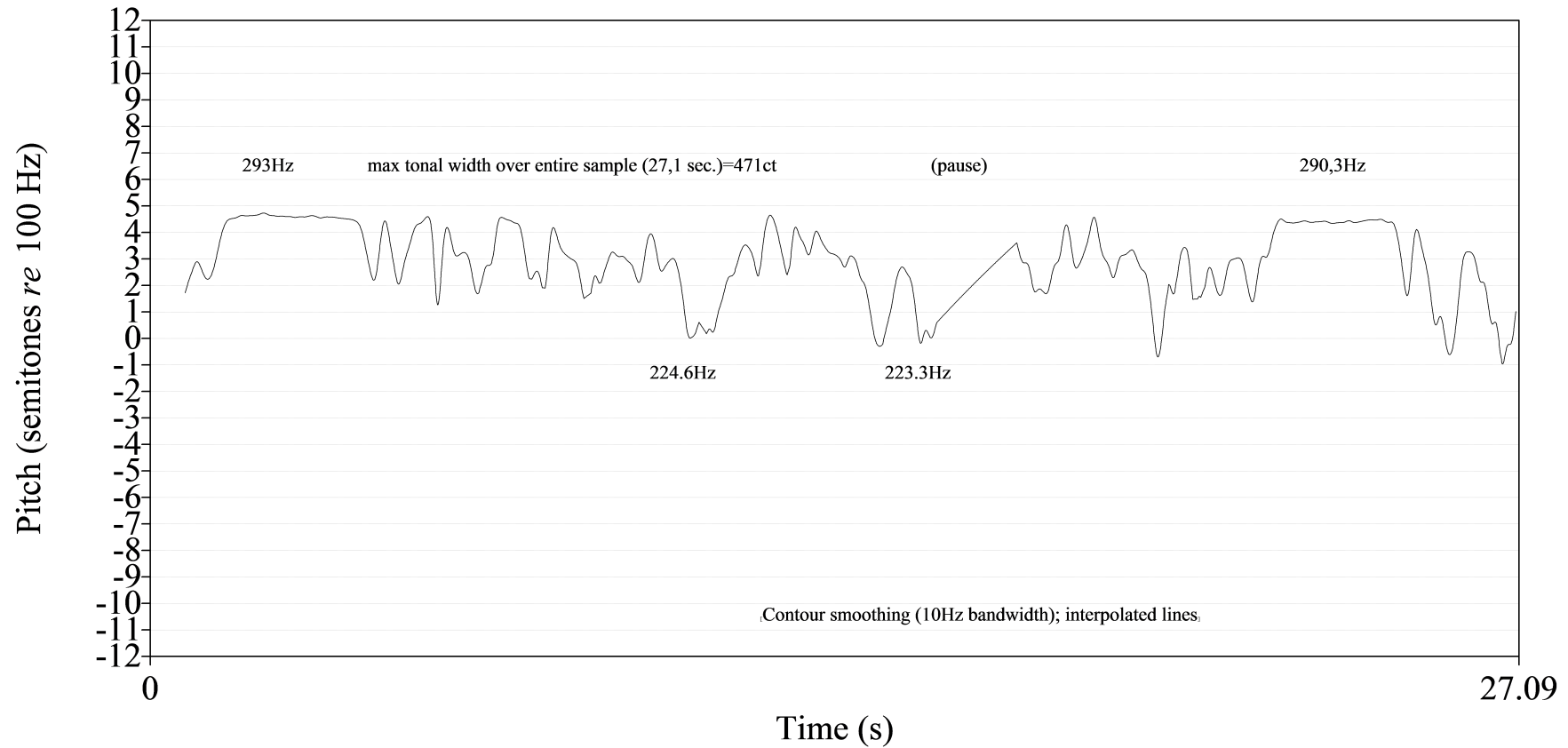


Fig. 16: *Yiné chichum pùtiak*, melody outline of a half-minute section from a recording of a sung performance

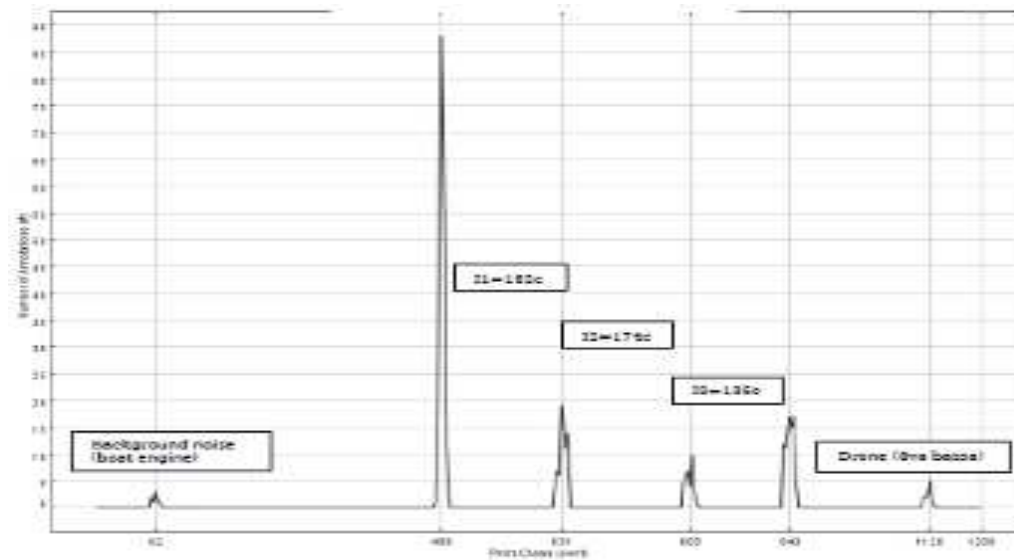


Fig 17: Example: Pitch class histogram (Tarsos) of the recording 41\_A2\_a\_2007 (1 min.17 sec .; octave error in the fundamental frequency determination of the 'drone' string)



| <b>Recording</b> | <b>Duration</b> | <b>Drone</b> | <b>Drone&lt;&gt; #1</b> | <b>#1 absol.</b> | <b>#1&lt;&gt;#2</b> | <b>#2 absol.</b> | <b>#2&lt;&gt;#3</b> | <b>#3 absol.</b> | <b>#3&lt;&gt;#4</b> | <b>#4 absol.</b> | <b>Drone (8va bassa)</b> |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| 09-A,a - 2 -2007 | 0:46            | -70          | 537                     | 467              | 153                 | 620              | 174                 | 794              | 108                 | 902              | 1130                     |
| 09-A,a – 1- 2007 | 1:24            | -73          | 540                     | 467              | 135                 | 602              | 156                 | 758              | 150                 | 908              | 1127                     |
| 10-A - 2 - 2007  | 0:55            | -70          | 540                     | 470              | 162                 | 632              | 144                 | 776              | 162                 | 938              | 1130                     |
| 24-A - 1c - 2010 | 0:17            | -70          | 543                     | 473              | 159                 | 632              | 192                 | 824              | 174                 | 998              | 1130                     |
| 24- A - 1b 2010  | 0:24            | -76          | 498                     | 422              | 213                 | 635              | 180                 | 815              | 180                 | 995              | 1124                     |
| 24- A-1e 2010    | 1:06            |              |                         | 467              | 162                 | 629              | 171                 | 800              | 141                 | 941              |                          |
| 07-1-C1-a-2007   | 0:33            | -94          |                         |                  |                     |                  |                     | 839              | 156                 | 995              | 1106                     |
| 07-1-C1-b-2007   | 1:43            |              |                         | 470              | 159                 | 629              | 147                 | 776              | 138                 | 914              |                          |
| 07-1-C1-c-2007   | 0:12            | -70          | 537                     | 467              | 180                 | 647              | 141                 | 788              | 126                 | 914              | 1130                     |
| 07-1-C1-c1-2007  | 0:47            |              |                         | 470              | 168                 | 638              | 162                 | 800              | 129                 | 929              |                          |
| 07-1-C1-d-2007   | 0:49            |              |                         | 470              | 150                 | 620              | 195                 | 815              | 123                 | 938              |                          |
| 33-E-Aa-1-2010   | 0:25            | -70          | 537                     | 467              | 165                 | 632              | 177                 | 809              | 120                 | 929              | 1130                     |
| 33-E-Aa-2-2010   | 1:28            |              |                         | 470              | 162                 | 632              | 177                 | 809              | 132                 | 941              |                          |
| 33-E-Ab-1-2010   | 1:07            |              |                         | 470              | 165                 | 635              | 165                 | 800              | 126                 | 926              |                          |
| 33-E-Ab-1b-2010  | 1:29            | -73          | 543                     | 470              | 171                 | 641              | 180                 | 821              | 105                 | 926              | 1127                     |
| 11b –A-1-2007    | 0:39            |              |                         | 467              | 180                 | 647              | 168                 | 815              | 123                 | 938              |                          |
| 11c –A1-2007     | 0:26            |              |                         | 470              | 165                 | 635              | 174                 | 809              | 135                 | 944              |                          |
| 51-Ab-1b-2010    | 0:19            |              |                         | 470              | 171                 | 641              | 186                 | 827              | 99                  | 926              |                          |
| 52-Ab-1,2 -2010  | 1:03            |              |                         | 467              | 159                 | 626              | 159                 | 785              | 144                 | 929              |                          |
| 15-A,a-1-1007    | 0:22            |              |                         | 470              | 165                 | 635              | 180                 | 815              | 120                 | 935              |                          |
| 9c –A,b-1-2007   | 1:34            |              |                         | 470              | 141                 | 611              | 180                 | 791              | 141                 | 932              |                          |
| 8-A,a-1b-2007    | 2:08            |              |                         | 467              | 177                 | 644              | 150                 | 794              | 132                 | 926              |                          |
| 42-B-a1,b1-2010  | 0:58            |              |                         | 464              | 147                 | 611              | 204                 | 815              | 99                  | 914              |                          |

(Contd. next page)

| Recording                 | Duration | Drone | Drone<> #1 | #1 absol.  | #1<>#2       | #2 absol.  | #2<>#3       | #3 absol.  | #3<>#4       | #4 absol.  | Drone (8va bassa) |
|---------------------------|----------|-------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|
| 6-ABfull-2007             | 0:15     |       |            | 470        | 150          | 620        | 153          | 773        | 132          | 905        |                   |
| 5a-1,2-2007               | 0:52     |       |            | 473        | 138          | 611        | 180          | 791        | 135          | 926        |                   |
| 32a-a1,b1,2-2010          | 0:27     |       |            | 470        | 177          | 647        | 147          | 794        | 132          | 926        |                   |
| 16-B5-ab-2007             | 0:29     | -70   | 537        | 467        | 147          | 614        | 180          | 794        | 114          | 908        | 1130              |
| 16-B4-?-2007              | 0:51     | -76   | 543        | 467        | 135          | 602        | 156          | 758        | 150          | 908        | 1124              |
| 17-A1,A2-2007             | 0:14     |       |            | 467        | 120          | 587        | 198          | 785        | 147          | 932        |                   |
| 44-full-2010              | 1:27     |       |            | 467        | 159          | 626        | 159          | 785        | 144          | 929        |                   |
| 45-full-2010              | 1:46     |       |            | 470        | 165          | 635        | 177          | 812        | 123          | 935        |                   |
| 47-(lɔbo:ŋ voc) full-2010 | 2:42     | -70   | 540        | 470        | 150          | 620        | 153          | 773        | 132          | 905        | 1130              |
| 49-full-2010              | 1:32     |       |            | 470        | 150          | 620        | 159          | 779        | 147          | 926        |                   |
| 50-A-2010                 | 0:36     | -61   | 534        | 473        | 165          | 638        | 150          | 788        | 126          | 914        | 1139              |
| 50-B-2010                 | 0:51     |       |            | 470        | 168          | 638        | 183          | 821        | 147          | 968        |                   |
| 50-D-2010                 | 0:41     | -64   | 527        | 473        | 165          | 638        | 183          | 821        | 150          | 971        | 1136              |
| <b>Median</b>             |          |       | <b>537</b> | <b>470</b> | <b>162</b>   | <b>632</b> | <b>174</b>   | <b>797</b> | <b>132</b>   | <b>929</b> |                   |
| <b>Empirical Mean</b>     |          |       |            |            | <b>159,9</b> |            | <b>169,7</b> |            | <b>134,5</b> |            |                   |
| <b>Standard Deviation</b> |          |       |            |            | <b>16,5</b>  |            | <b>16,5</b>  |            | <b>18,5</b>  |            |                   |

Table 1: Evaluation of 36 pitch class histograms of the melody Yiné chichum putiak

In the individual pitch classes, which each represent the cumulative frequency distribution of a large number of basic frequencies determined by the autocorrelation algorithm, the interval widths show a fairly high degree of variation between the individual examples.

The statistical evaluation for the interval between the first and second stage gives a median of 162 cents and an empirical mean of 159.9 cents with a standard deviation of 16.5 cents; the interval lies therefore between the undecimal neutral second 12:11 (150.64 cents) and the Ptolemaic second 11:10 (165 cents).

The median for the interval between the second and third degrees is 174 cents with an average of 169.7 cents and a standard deviation of 16.5 cents. This lies between 11:10 and the small whole tone 10:9 (182.4 cents) and quite close to a tone step of an equidistant heptatonic scale (171.43 cents, or 21/7:1), usually considered the theoretical ideal of the Thai *piphat* (cf. Morton 1976; for a differing view, see Garzoli 2015).

The interval between the third and fourth degrees is much narrower: the median is 132 cents, the average is 134.5 cents with a standard deviation of 18.5 cents. The interval lies therefore between 27:25 (the Pythagorean great Limma) and the equal tempered neutral second of 150 cents.

In autocorrelation, the fundamental frequency of the 'drone' string was rated an octave higher than the auditory assessment of the relationship to the other tones on the scale (octave errors are a known problem with autocorrelation algorithms, see Dziubinski and Kostek 2004). If the measurement results for the 'drone' are transposed down by 1200 cents, the interval between it and the first degree gives a median value of 537 cents, between the sharp fourth 27:20 and the undecimal augmented fourth 11:8, corresponding to the 11th harmonic. The leap from the 'drone' string to the first degree thus corresponds approximately to the tonal range between the first and fourth degrees and may perhaps be interpreted as a stratification of three equal intervals of 179 cents each.

A statistically derived schematic representation of the scale of *Yiné chichum pùtíak* might be depicted as follows:

|                      |                                      |         |         |         |   |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| Degree               | 0<br>(‘drone’)                       | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4 |
| Interval<br>(Cent)   | 537<br>( $\triangleq 179 \times 3$ ) | 16<br>2 | 17<br>4 | 13<br>2 |   |
| Range a, b<br>(Cent) | 537<br>( $\triangleq 179 \times 3$ ) | 468     |         |         |   |
| Range a+b<br>(Cent)  | 1005                                 |         |         |         |   |

If the mean value of all measured intervals is formed on this basis, a ‘standard interval’ of 173.25 cents, corresponding to 6.93 steps per octave, can be constructed. This corresponds to a deviation of only 1.82 cents compared to the theoretical ideal interval of equidistant heptatonic (171.43 cents). The scale shown might therefore be described as a four-tone scale section of a quasi-equi-heptatonic scale, the range of which correspond roughly to a fourth.

Whether this represents an actual approximation of something like ‘Moken musical thought’ (or anything that actually exists in reality at all) or merely a vain exercise in Pythagorean numerology remains open for debate (see [3.7] and [6.5] of the present thesis).

The following analyses are based on recordings which, despite the complementary approach, could not be resolved into the fundamental frequencies of the tone sequences with the same precision as the examples discussed above. I have far fewer recordings of the songs in question (usually only two or three) than of the extremely popular *Yiné chichum pùtiak*.

The examples [A.2.2], [A.2.3] and [A.2.4], from the repertory of work chants (*Yiné denang-denang*), were partly recorded with rather loud drum accompaniment. They were also performed over long stretches with two (mostly not strictly unison) voices. The example [A.2.5], from the mythically significant repertory *Yiné luuy ku bia:y*, was performed by *ibu:m* Alía, according to traditional customs, directly at the water's edge and include accordingly strong wind and wave noise. All of this makes the fundamental frequency analysis with the applied autocorrelation algorithms, which

depend on the highest possible degree of periodicity of the signal, considerably more difficult.

In order to nevertheless derive some basic representations from the existing material and to be able to compare them with the evaluations described above, the windowing functions implemented in the program for signal smoothing and interpolation of discrete measured values were used in the subsequent analyses, at the expense of ultimate detail. In this way, at least the contour of the melody course may be represented. It was also quite difficult to determine discrete pitch classes with the software package *Tarsos*; the results shown can therefore only be approximate.

### A.2.2 *Yiné bor duyū:ŋ*

The song *Yiné bor duyū:ŋ* (“song of the oar”)<sup>2</sup> [CD track 5] is a rowing song from the repertory *Yiné denang-denang*. These chants, like the present and the following example, are often characterized by a ‘call and response’ structure of the performance.

*eba:b* Dunung and *eba:b* Djepen alternately perform the part of the ‘caller’. The ‘response’ is sung jointly by both (with considerable deviations in respective pitch). Both also perform the drum accompaniment.

Figure 18 shows the ‘call’ phrase of the song, mainly performed on two degrees. The interval width fluctuates relatively strongly (here by more than a whole tone) and in this sample excerpt lies between 322 cents (5.4 cents larger than the Pythagorean augmented second 19683:16384) and 440 cents (5 cents larger than the septimal major third 9:7). The other ‘call’ phrases of the recorded performance essentially follow the scheme shown.

Figures 19 and 20 show two variations of the ‘response’ phrase, starting at the low ‘0’ level, in the second example starting at the first level. Following the introductory upward steps, there follows a motif similar to the ‘call’ phrase, primarily chanted on two tones.

Figure 21 shows the introductory sequence of the ‘response’ phrase from ‘0.’ to the 3rd degree with a final return to the 1st degree. The developed tonal range is a total of 946 cents, between the septimal major

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2 Cf. Malay *dayung* = oar

sixth (12:7) and the septimal minor seventh (7:4). Figures 22 and 23 each show a complete sequence of the 'call' and 'response' phrases.

The basic frequency contours of the song *Yiné bor duyú:ŋ* shown so far illustrate the general form of the melody line. They hardly allow statements about regularity in the intonation of the individual intervals. The statistical evaluation of the pitch class analysis of nineteen sung 'response' phrases shows a more uniform picture: the Leap from the '0' to the first degree corresponds, at 537 cents, almost exactly to that from the 'drone' string to the first degree in the melody *Yiné chichum pùtiak* (see [3.4.2.1] and Table 3).

The median of the measured intervals between the 1st and 2nd and between the 2nd and 3rd degrees is 177 cents each, again very close to a theoretically ideal interval in equidistant heptatonic (171.43 cents; 21/7:1). The total tonal range is 6.6 cents larger than the major sixth 5:3. If one only considers the tonal range between the first and third stages, there is a cumulative interval of 354 cents, 4 cents larger than the equal tempered neutral third; If one added the measured scale by an - imaginary - fourth interval of also 177 cents, one would again be in the region of a fourth, twenty cents shorter than 11:8 (the 11th harmonic, or the undecimal quarter-tone expanded fourth). Hence, the scale on which *Yiné bor duyú:ŋ* is based appears to obey largely similar formal regularities as the song *Yiné chichum pùtiak*

| Degree           | 0   | 1                                 | 2   | 3   |
|------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Intervall (Cent) |     | 537<br>( $\approx 179 \times 3$ ) | 177 | 177 |
| Range (Cent)     | 891 |                                   |     |     |

Although the analyzed intervals in the song *Yiné bor duyú:ŋ* are somewhat wider than in the Melody *Yiné chichum pùtiak*, there is again an obvious tendency towards intervals between three-quarter and whole tones (or their multiples), with a preference for tone steps close to the theoretically ideal interval of an equidistant heptatonic scale.

So while the examples considered so far seem to be based on a common type of usage manager, some of the songs analyzed below result

in completely different interval structures.

Djiné Bor Duyung, call phrase A4, take 66, 22.04.2010

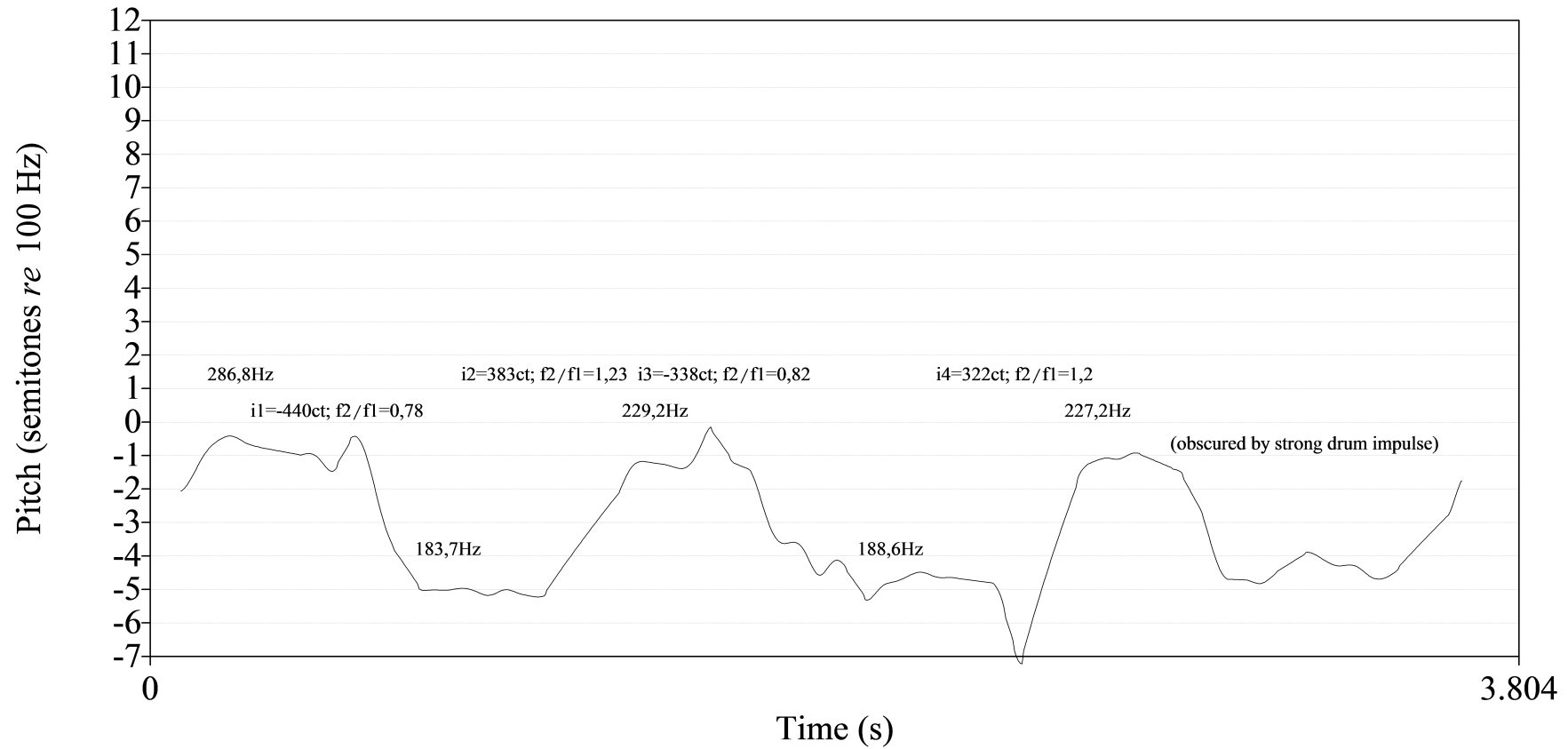


Fig. 18: Yiné bor duyung, 'call' phrase; chanting on two tone degrees



Djiné Bor Duyung, response phrase A, take 66, 22.04.2010

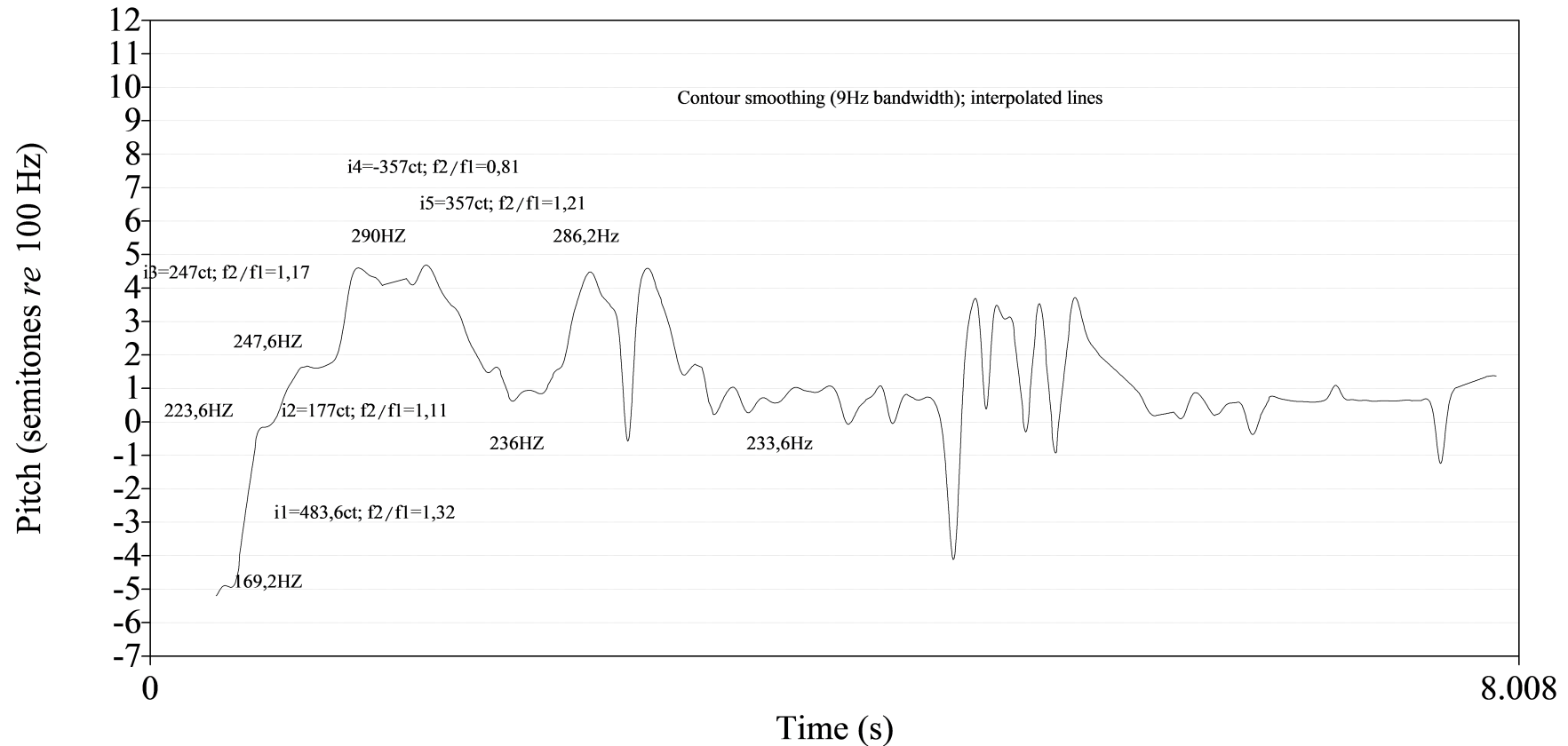


Fig. 19: Yiné bor duyung, 'response' phrase with '0' degree, similar to the 'drone string' in the case of Yiné chichum pùtiak [A.2.1]

Djiné Bor Duyung, response phrase B, take 66, 22.04.2010

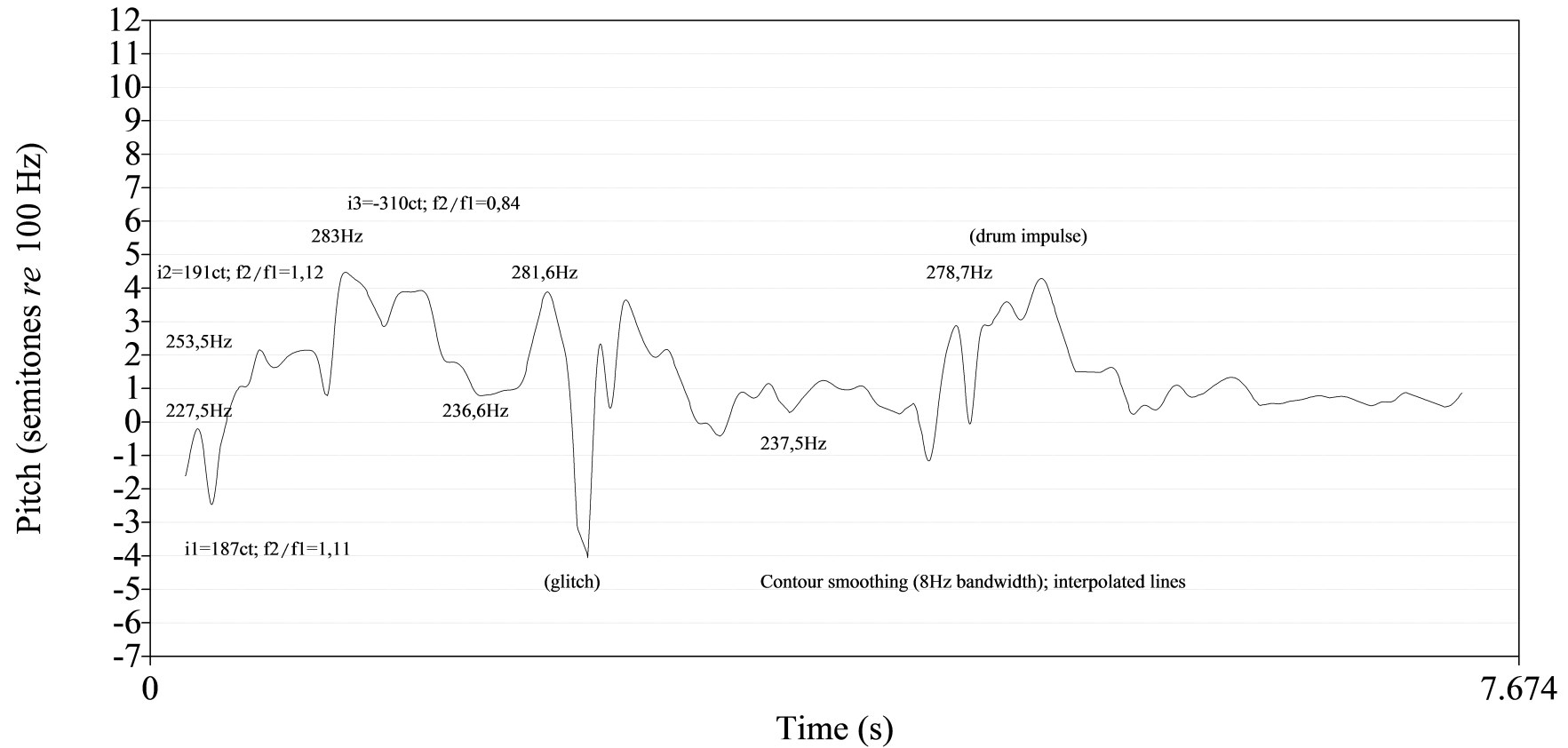


Fig. 20: Yiné bor duyung, 'response' phrase, starting on the first degree

Djiné Bor Duyung, response phrase B, take 66, 22.04.2010

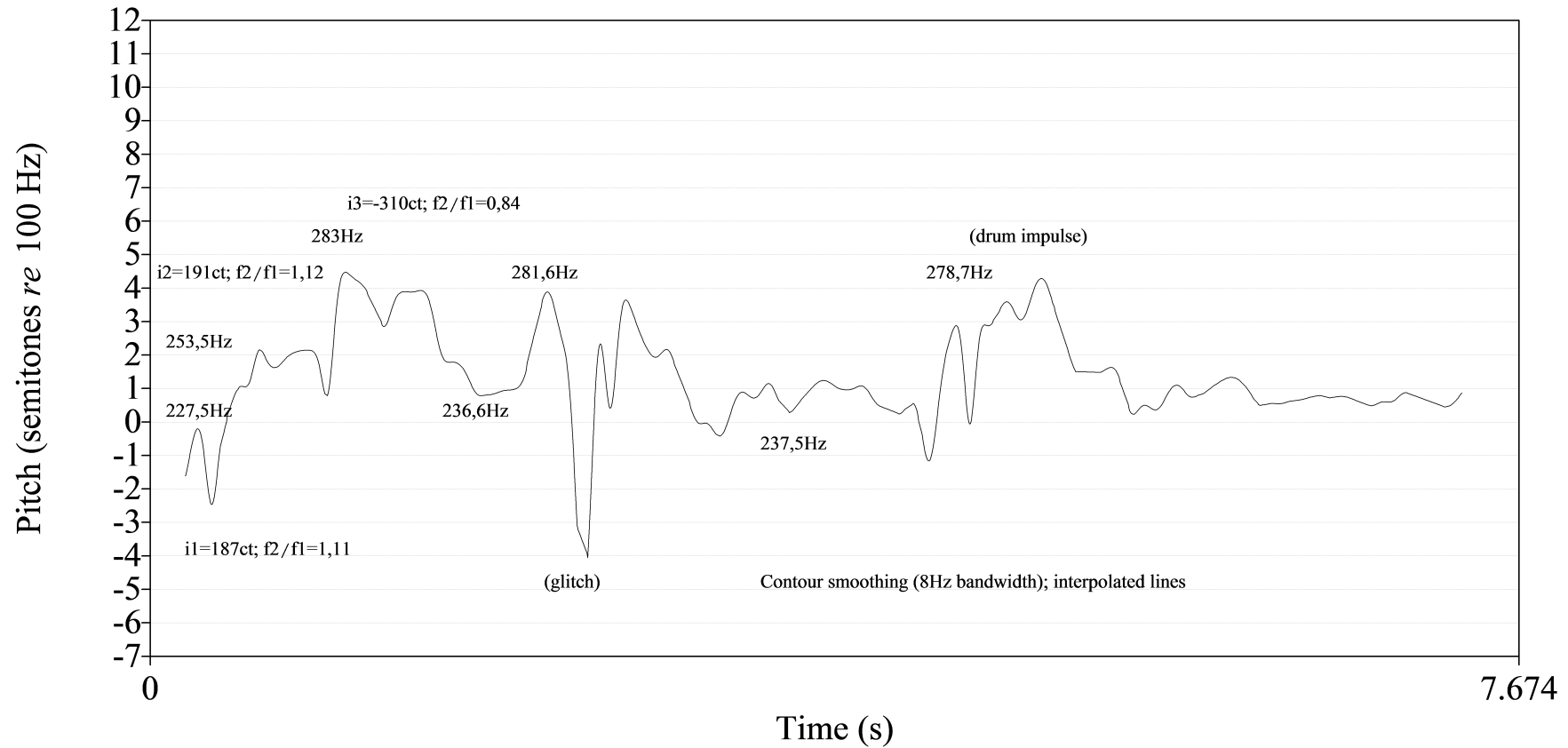


Fig. 21: Yiné bor duyung, detailed examination of the beginning intervals of the response phrase

Djiné Bor Duyung, call & response, phrase B complete contour, take 66, 22.04.2010

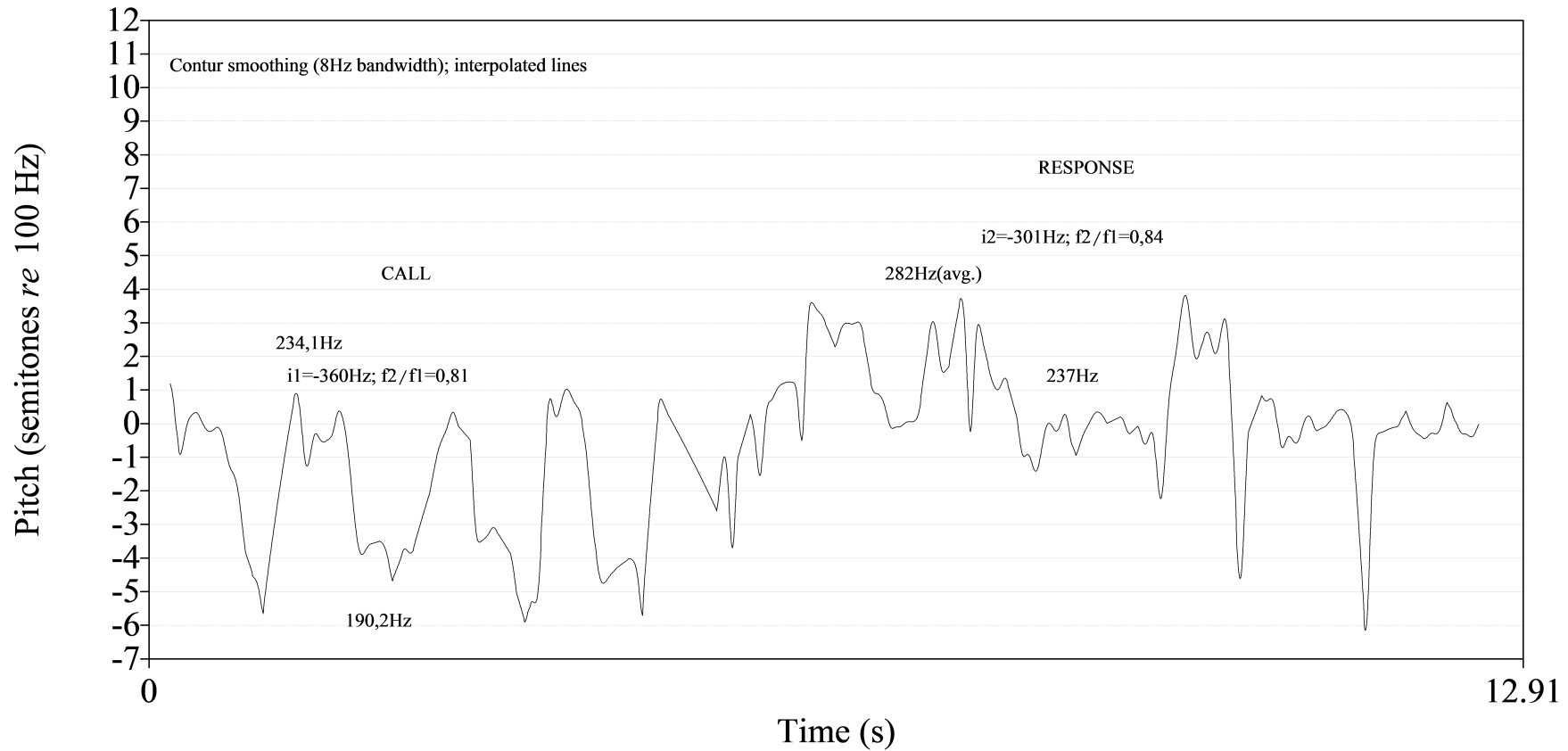


Fig. 22: Yiné bor duyung, alternation of 'call' and 'response' phrases

Djiné Bor Duyung, call & response, phrase D complete contour, take 66, 22.04.2010

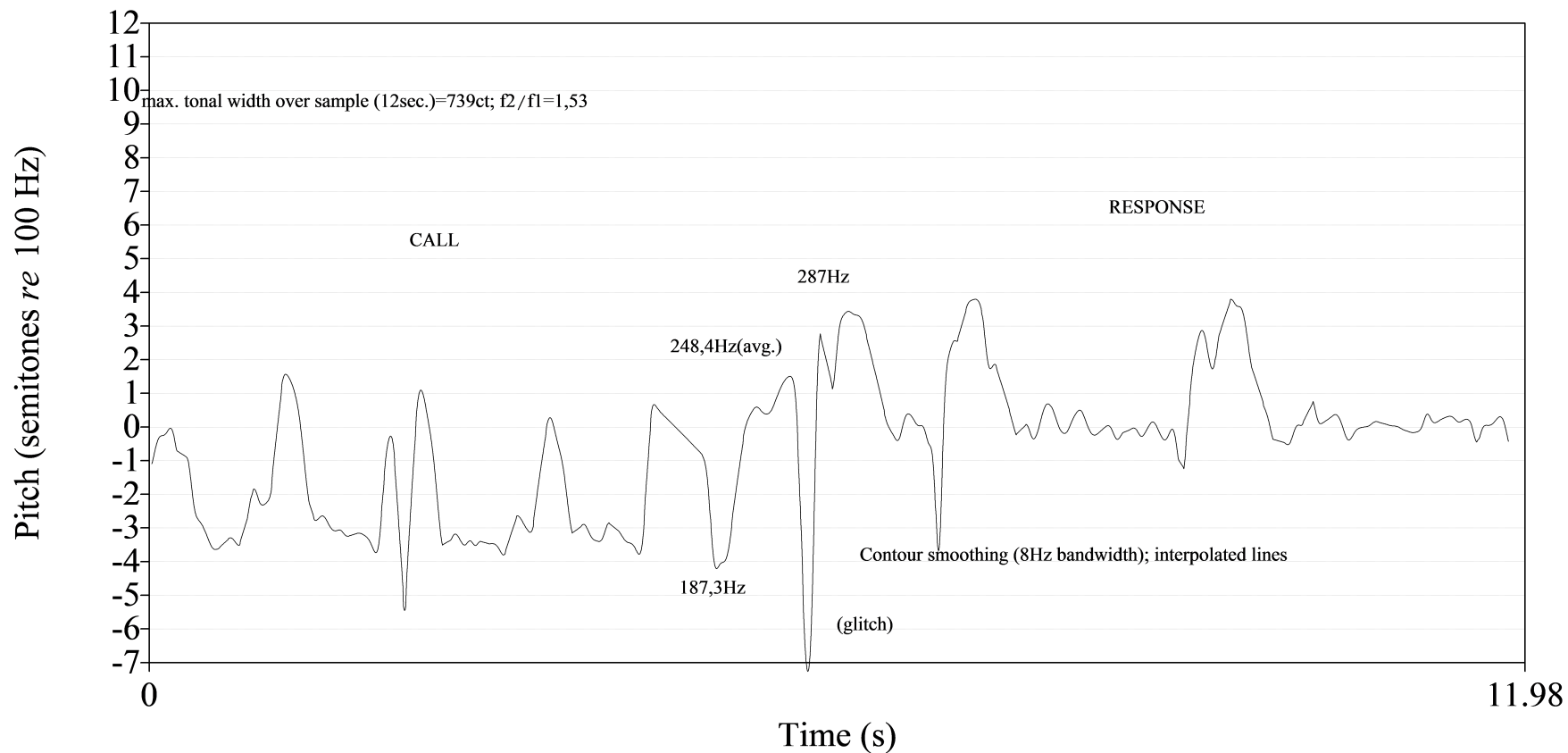


Fig. 23:: Yiné bor duyuy:ŋ, alternation of 'call' and 'response' phrases, variation

### A.2.3 *Yiné bor peñui*

Another ‘call and response’ chant from the repertory *Yiné denang-denang* is *Yiné bor peñui* (“song of the turtle”)<sup>3</sup> [CD track 6]. However, in contrast to the previous example, both the ‘call’ and the ‘response’ part are sung with a short, three- or four-tone motif. The ‘lineup’ corresponds to [A.2.2], except that *eba:b* Djepen performs the ‘response’ solo.

Figures 24 and 25 first show two versions of the ‘call’ phrase. In a downward movement from the 3rd to the 2nd to the 1st stage, a range of about a major third (5:4) is passed through. The intonation of the introductory 3rd stage also shows melismatic lowerings of the fundamental tone in (approximately) quarter tone steps. It cannot be conclusively assessed whether the intonation of discrete micro-intervals is intended here, whether the tone is intended as a kind of broken glissando, or whether this is merely to be regarded as an example of sufficiently accurate intonation, according to the tonal ideations of the Moken. However, I tend towards the latter interpretation.

The song’s ‘response’ phrase introduces a short upward leap to the fourth degree (figures 26 and 27). Figure 28 shows a section of a recording that includes two iterations of the ‘call’ and ‘response’ schemes.

While the fundamental frequency contours shown in turn exhibit a considerable range of variation, a surprising median appears in the statistical evaluation of the pitch classes: the interval between the 1st and 2nd stage corresponds approximately to the minor whole tone 10:9, the interval between the 2nd and 3rd degrees corresponds to the major whole tone 9: 8. The 4th degree, which is only intoned very briefly (see the sharp peaks in Fig. 28), averages 431 cents, slightly smaller than the septimal major third 9:7. Only the step from the 2nd to the 3rd stage fits at least approximately into the previously developed scheme.

| Degree          | 1         | 2   | 3   | -4   |
|-----------------|-----------|-----|-----|------|
| Interval (Cent) |           | 207 | 186 | -431 |
| Range (Cent)    | 393 (824) |     |     |      |

3 Cf. Malay *penyu*= turtle

Djiné Bor Penjui, call, first 3 intervals, take 88, 15.04.2010

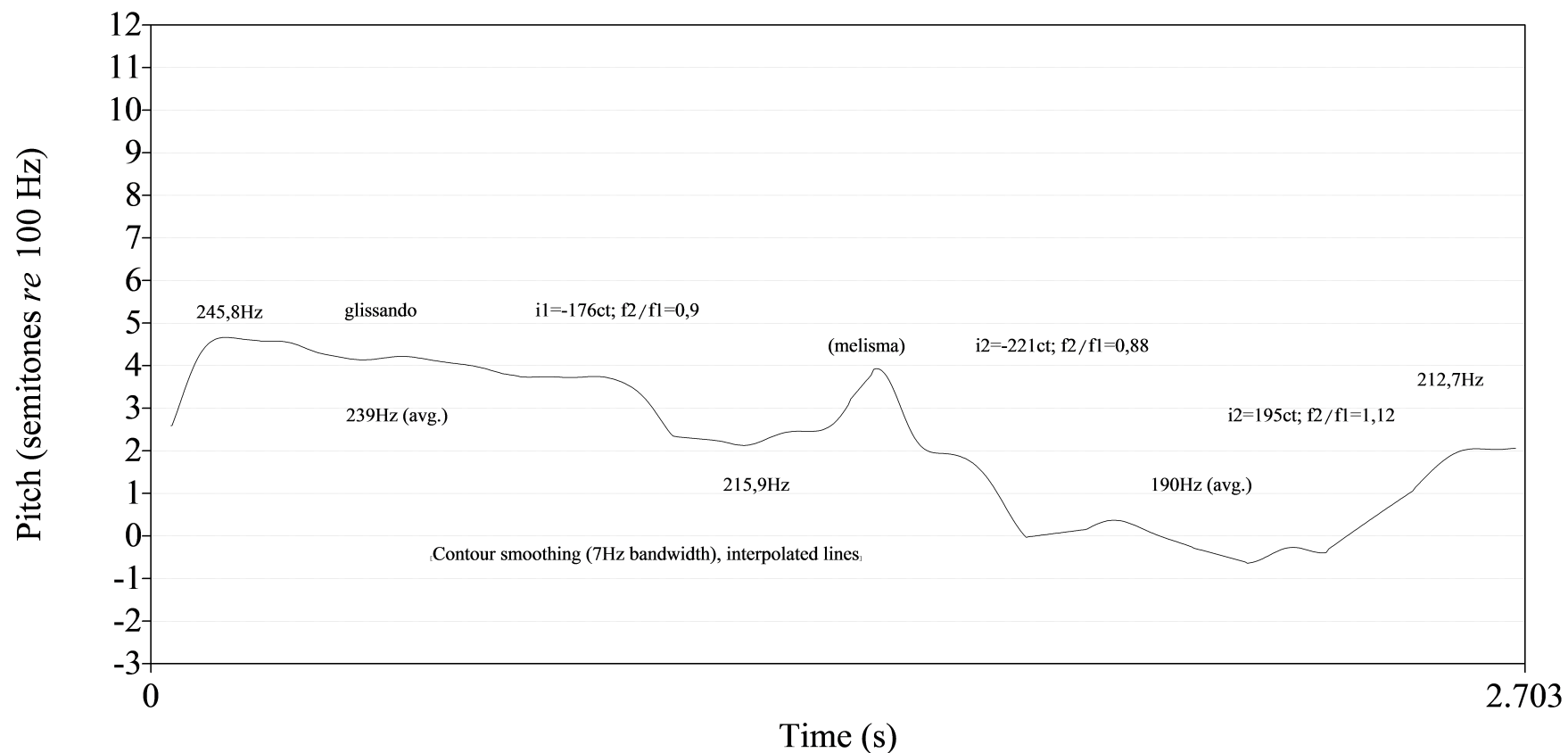


Fig. 24: Yiné bor penjui: 'call' phrase; 'glissando' downward over the 3rd degree; melismatic ornamentation on the 2nd degree, then proceeding to the 1st and return to the 2nd degree

Djiné Bor Penjui, call B, first 2 intervals, take 88, 15.04.2010

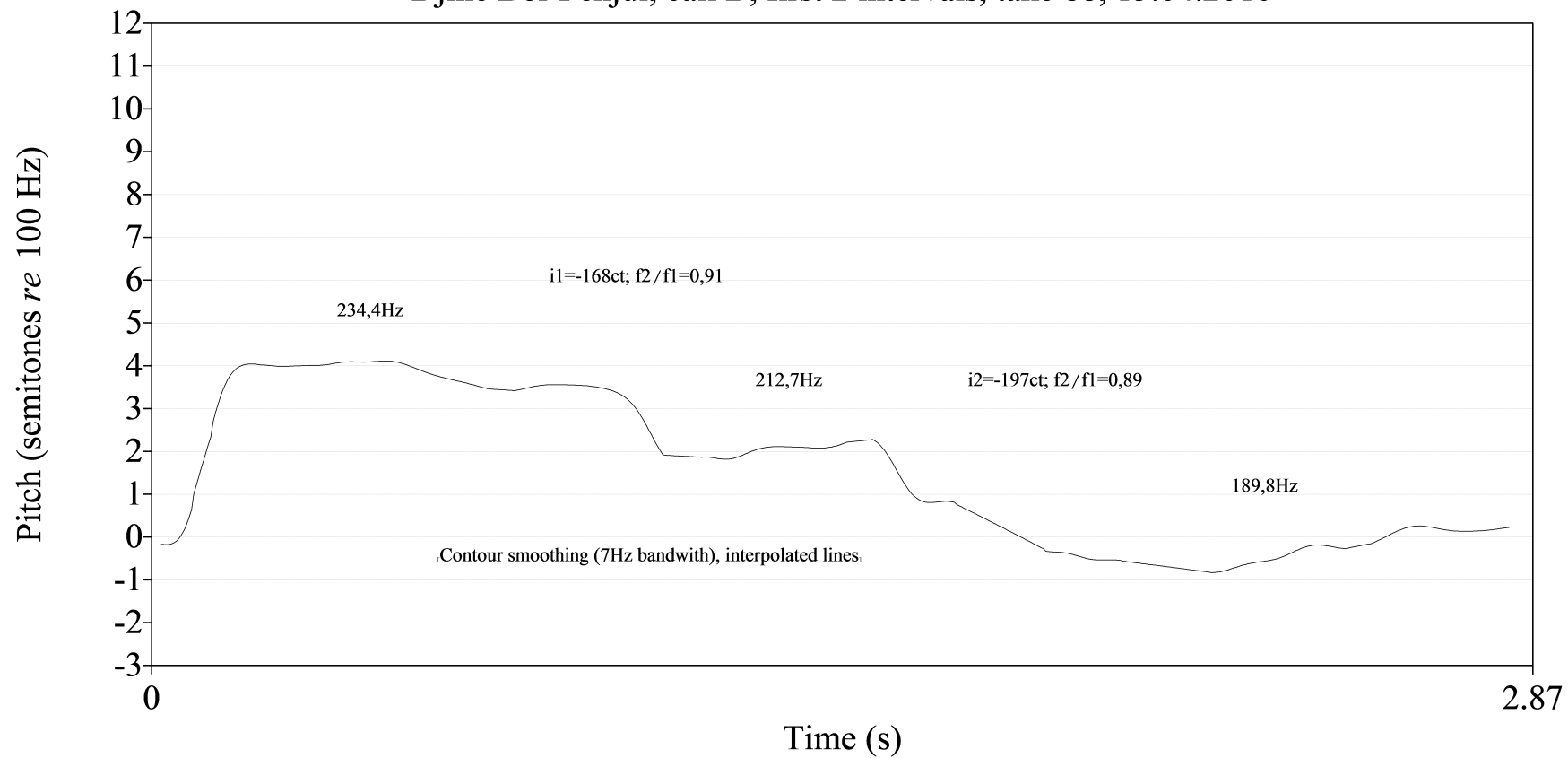


Fig. 25: Yiné bor penjui: 'call' phrase; 3rd, 2nd and 1st degree



Djiné Bor Penjui, response, first 4 intervals, take 88, 15.04.2010

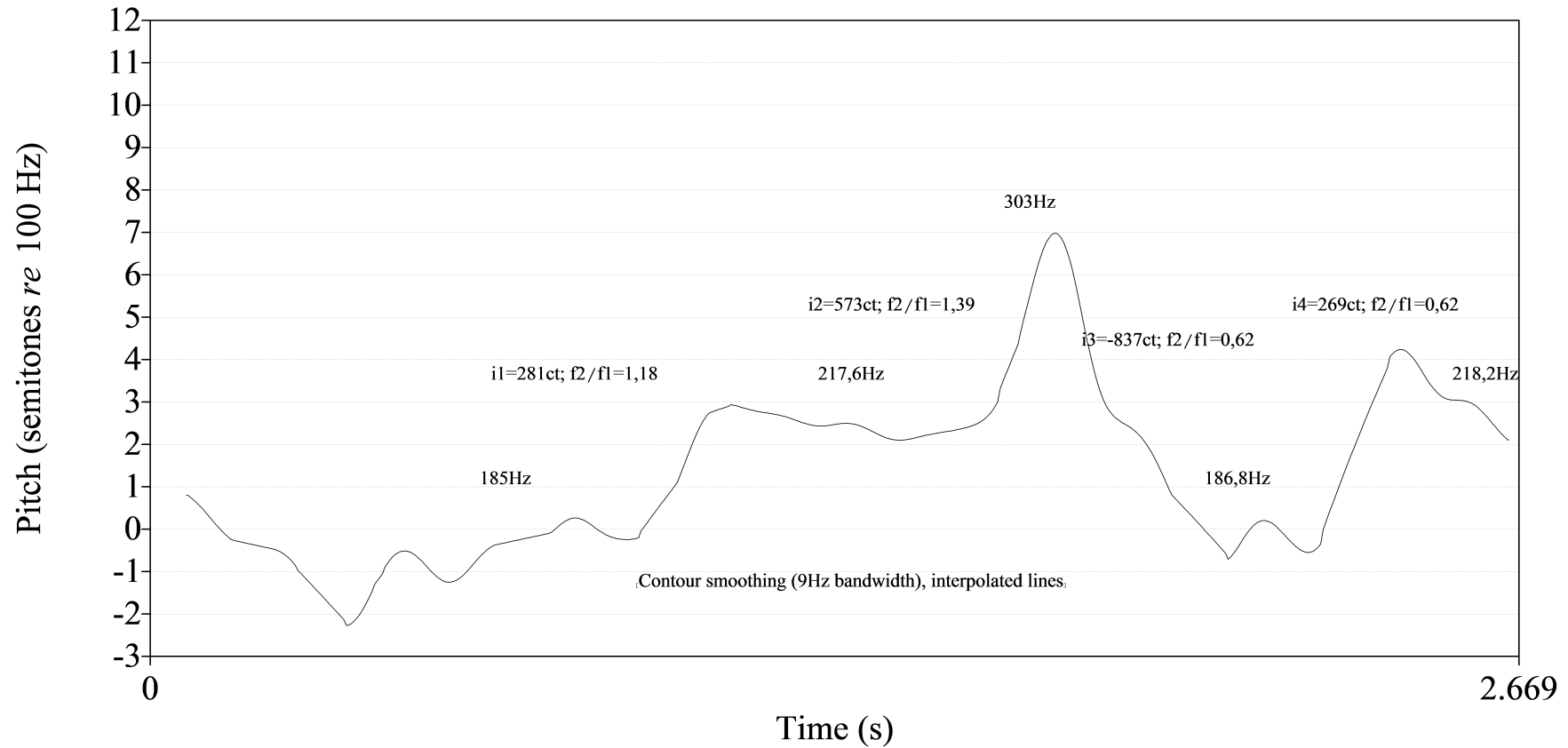


Fig. 26: Yiné bor penjui: 'response' phrase; 1st, 2nd and newly added 4th degree, here near Huygens' Tritone 7:5

Djiné Bor Penjui, call & response, two iterations, take 88, 15.04.2010

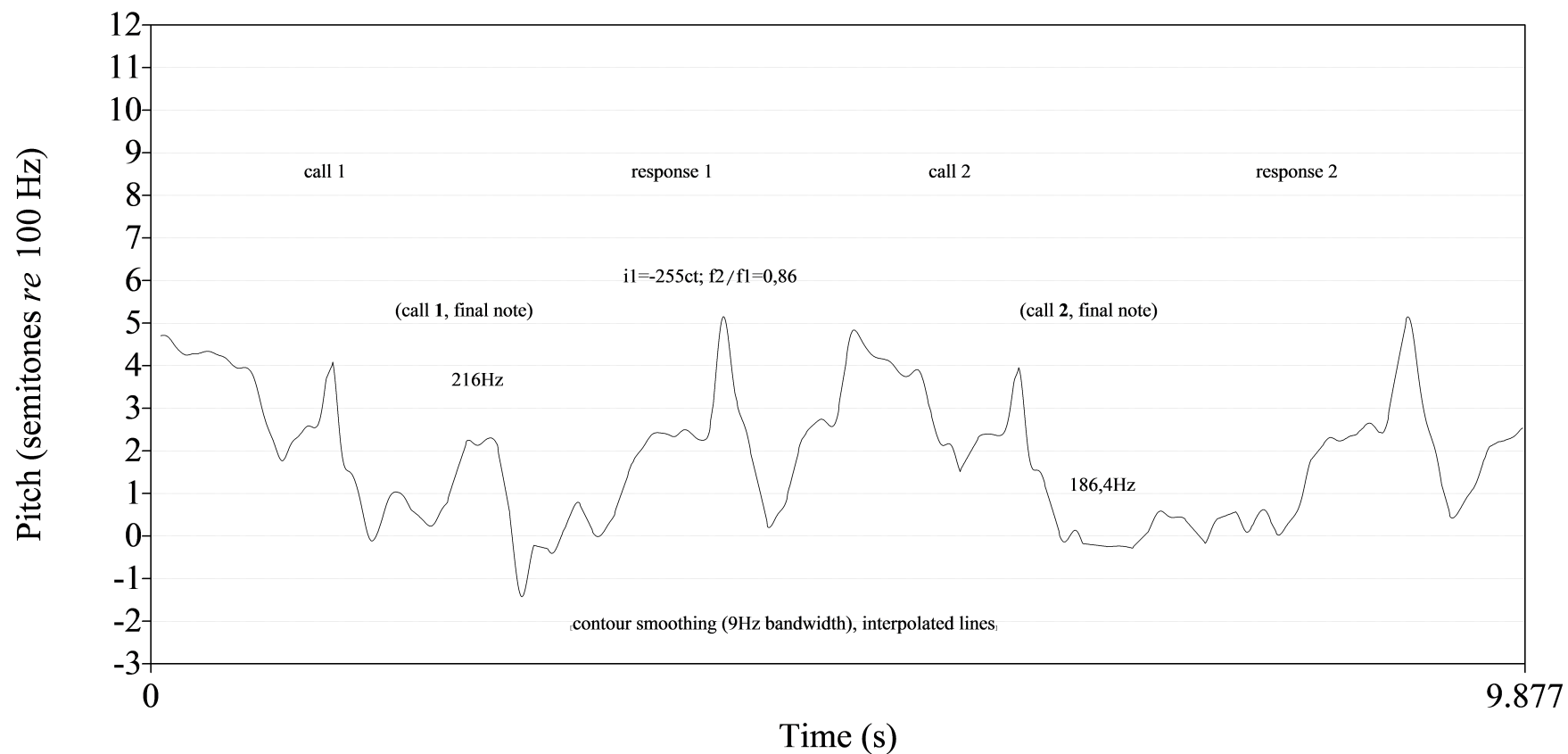


Fig. 27: Yiné bor penjui: pitch contour of two iterations of the 'call and response' scheme

#### A.2.4 *Yiné o adey*

The seafaring song *Yiné o adey* (literal meaning of title unknown) [CD track 7] has the most complex, but at the same time the perhaps most accessible melody, to Westerners, of all Moken songs I have recorded. Although it is said to belong to the repertory of working songs, *Yiné denang-denang*, there is no ‘call and response’ structure here. The main phrase of the song is formed by a four-bar motif consisting of five tones, each followed by a two- to three-bar *Sprechgesang*-type chant. Performers as in [A.2.2] and [A.2.3].

The first part of the main motif is characterized by a gradual ascent from the 1st to the 4th, and finally to the 5th degree. The auditory impression of the tone sequence is that of a diatonic major tetrachord in the tonic-subdominant range, analogous to c-d-e-f, which finally, supplemented by the dominant, encloses the range of a fifth. The second part of the motif also uses a kind of diatonic major tetrachord. The sequence of tones in turn rises step-wise up to the 4th degree, to then (via 2nd-3rd-1st.) finally return to the tonic. The statistical evaluation confirms a scale that can be interpreted as a section of a diatonic major scale, the boundary tones of which enclose a fifth. This cannot be easily reconciled with the scheme developed on the basis of the melody *Yiné chichum pùtiak*. The averaged interval between the 1st and 2nd degrees is, at 222 cents, a little smaller than the diminished third 256:223 (223.5 cents). However, if one takes into account the generally fluctuating intonation of the Moken and possible inaccuracies in the measurement, this is not all that far from a whole-tone. The interval between the 2nd and 3rd degrees is approximately in the middle between 10:9 and 9:8, *i.e.* 8 cents below the major second. The interval between the 3rd and 4th degrees corresponds to the septa-decimal semitone 17:16, that between the 4th and 5th degrees in turn corresponds to the equally tempered major second.

| Degree          | 1            | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   |
|-----------------|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Interval (Cent) |              | 222 | 192 | 105 | 201 |
| (7 TET)         |              | 200 | 200 | 100 | 200 |
| Range (Cent)    | 720<br>(700) |     |     |     |     |

Djiné O Adey, motiv A, take 24, 16.03.2007

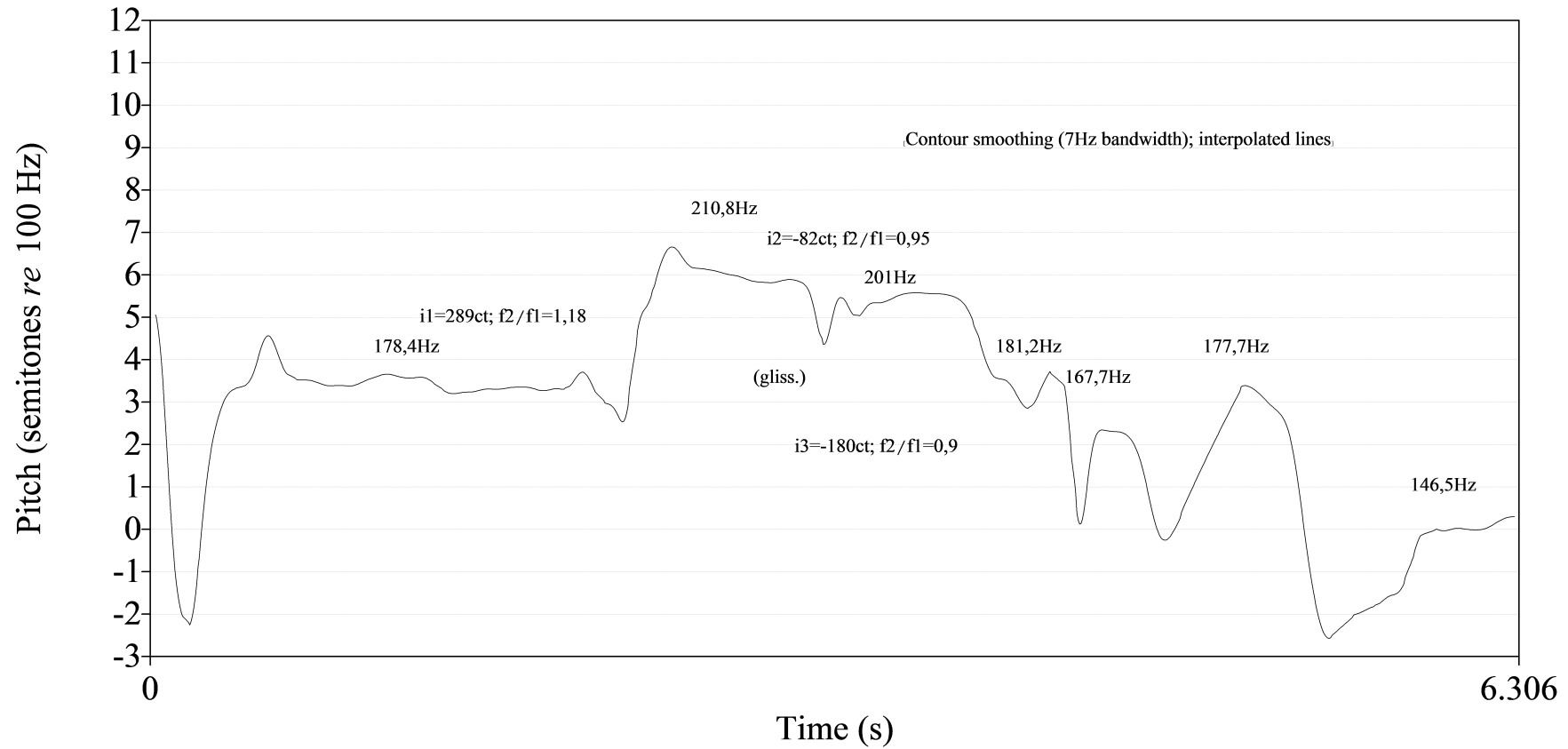


Fig. 28: Yiné o adey, first half of the four-bar main motif.

Djiné O Adey, motiv A1, take 24, 16.03.2007

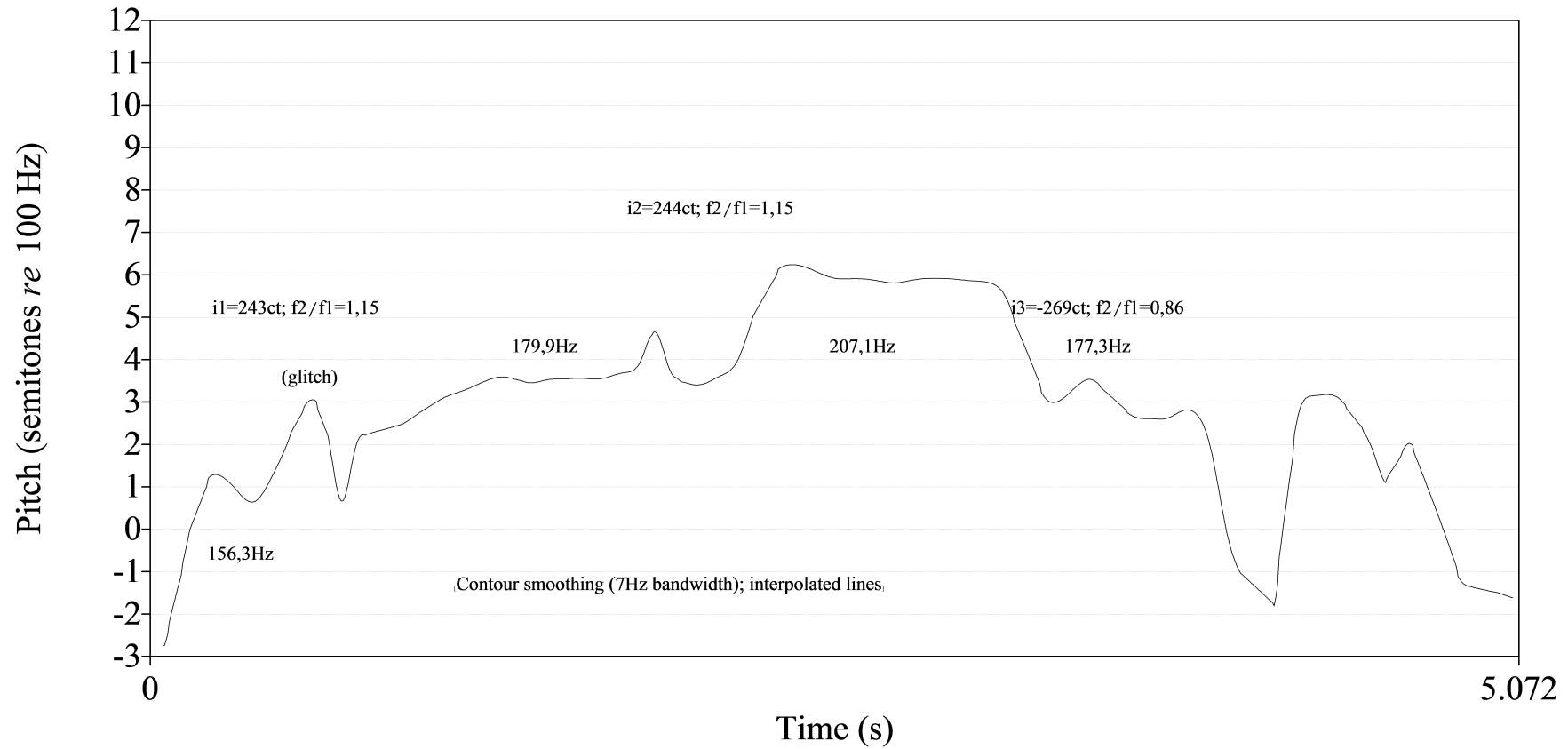


Fig. 29: Yiné o adey, variation of the first half of the main motif

Djiné O Adey, motif B, take 24, 16.03.2007

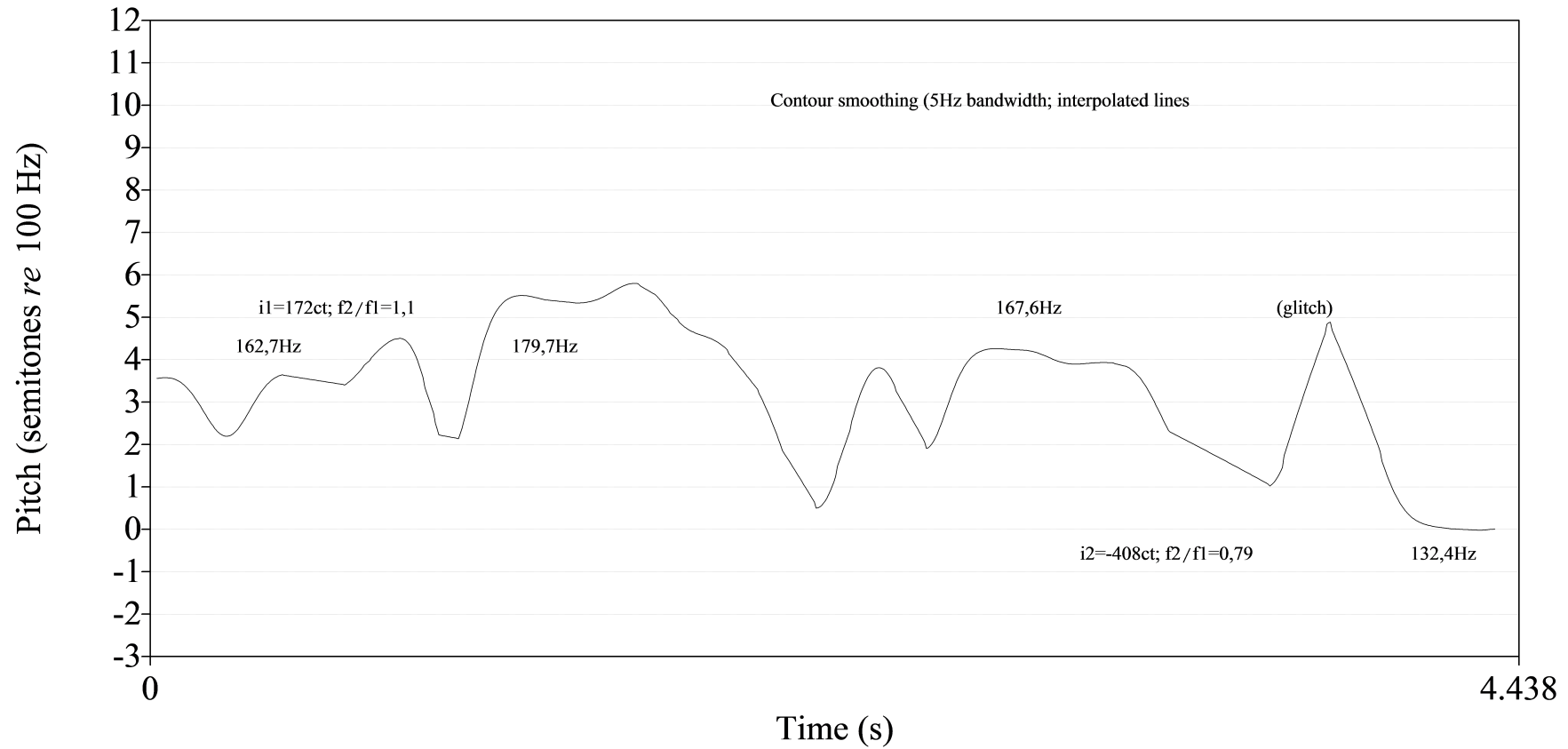


Fig 30: Yiné o adey, second half of the four-bar main motif

Djiné O Adey, motif B1, take 24, 16.03.2007

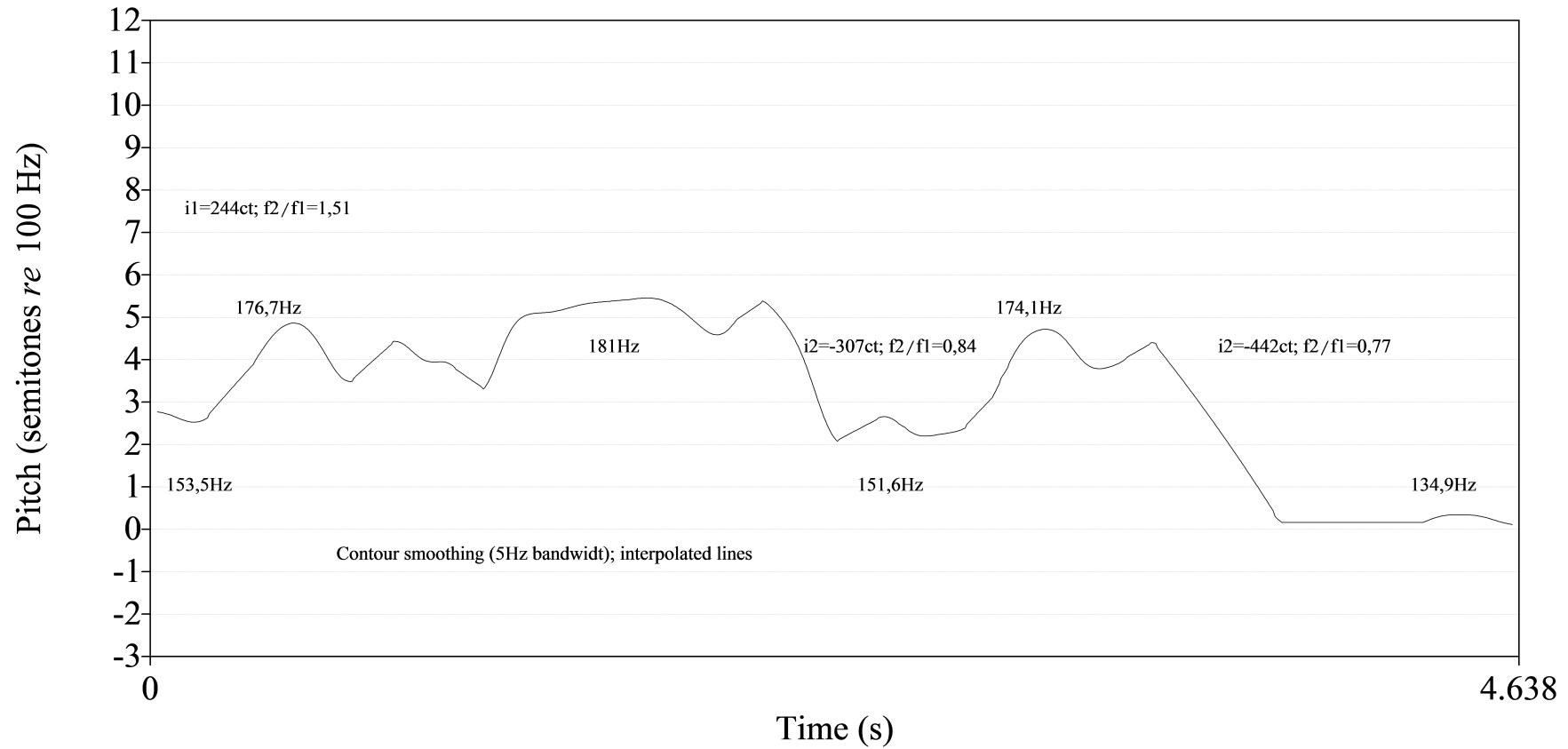


Fig. 31: Yiné o adey, variation of the second half of the main motif

Djiné O Adej, main motif, complete contour, take 24, 16.03.2007

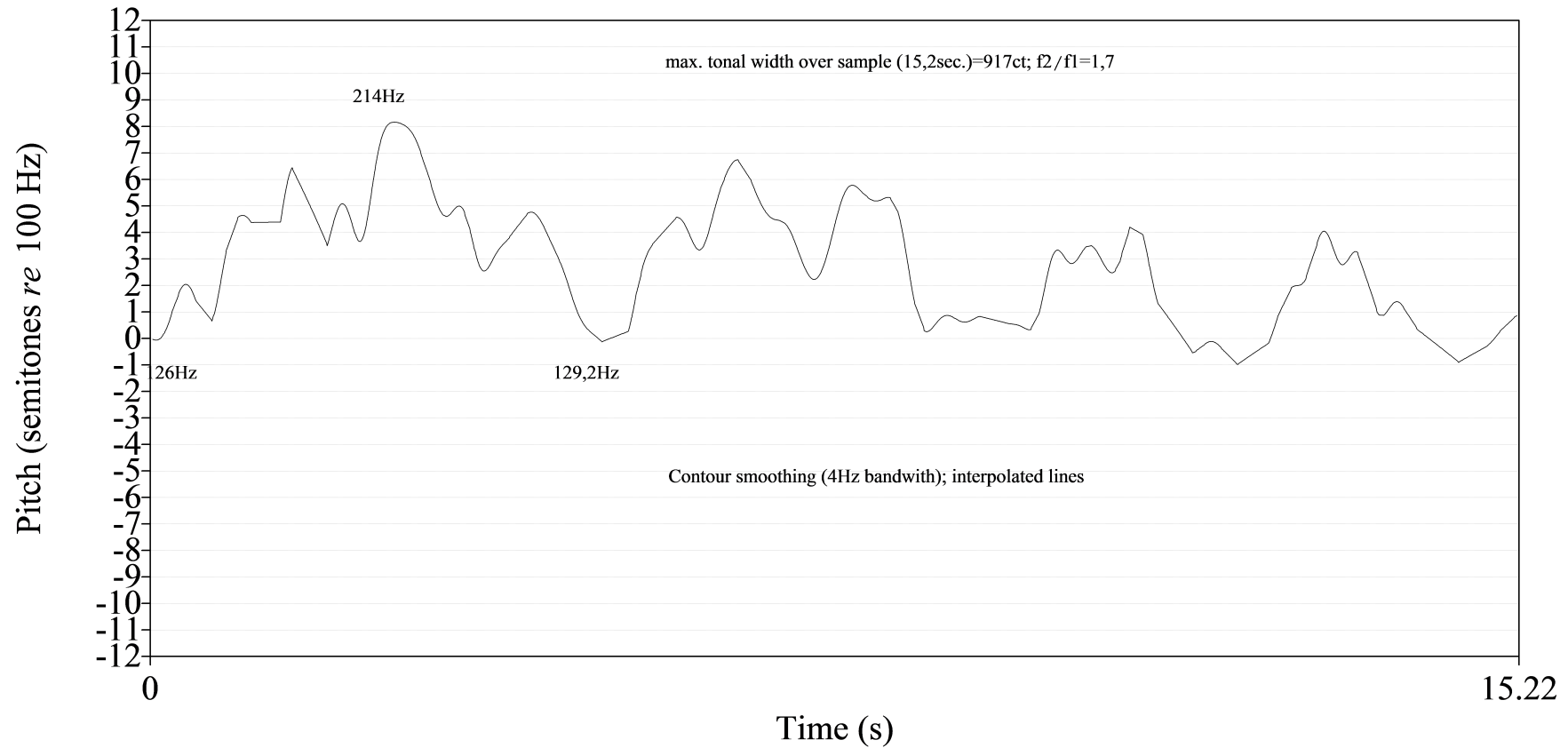


Fig. 32: Yiné o adej, four-bar main motif and two-bar addendum in chant



#### A.2.5 *Yiné luuy Manyu bia:y Dawi*

The song *Yiné luuy Manyu bia:y Dawi* (Song [of the] younger Manyu [and the] elder Dawi) [CD track 8] is a song from the repertory of songs about mythical ancestral couples, *Yiné luuy ku bia:y*. As such, it is performed alternately by a male and a female singer (here mainly *eba:b* Djepen and *ibu:m* Kabía, later also *ibu:m* Muki), who represent the respective mythical ancestral couple. The tonometric analysis of these recordings was extremely difficult due to the lively, vocal comments of the singers themselves and everyone else present. Some basic structures of melody can still be illustrated in the following examples.

Both singers begin their respective phrase by opening up the tonal range of about a diminished fourth (471 cents, 21:16), which is already known from [A.2.1] (Figures 34 and 35). They either leap from the 1st to the 3rd degree or progress step-wise, including the 2nd degree. The remainder of the performance is mainly characterized by leaps between the 1st and 3rd degrees. Sometimes, in order to emphasize particularly important words, a 4th degree, on average around 240 cents above the 3rd degree, is added.

Djiné Luuy Manyu Biay Dawi, first three intervals, take 42, 15.04.2010

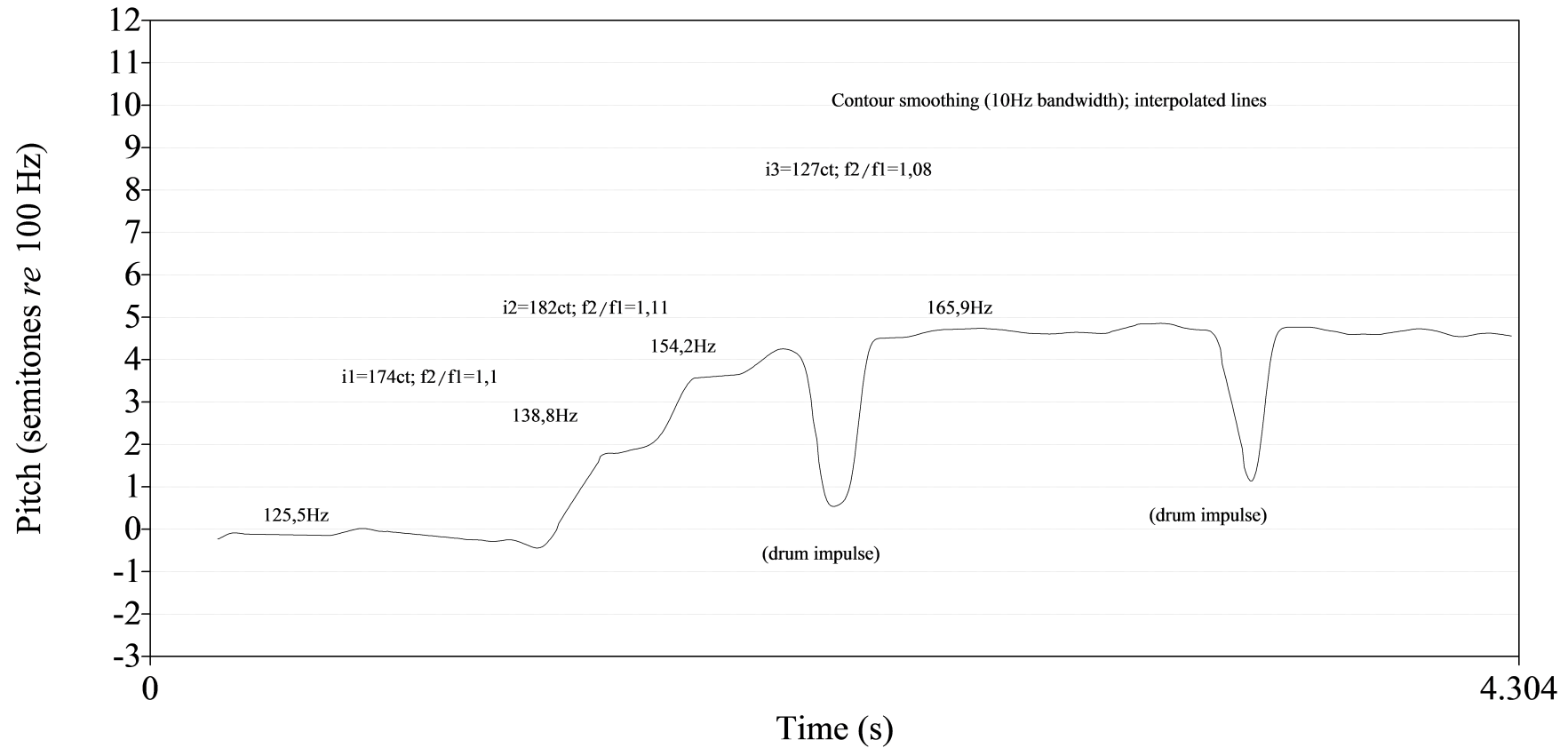


Fig. 33: Yiné luuy Manyu bia:y Dawi: development of the quart-range ~ 21:16 in three steps

Djiné Luuy Manyu Biay Dawi, motif A1a, take 42, 15.04.2010

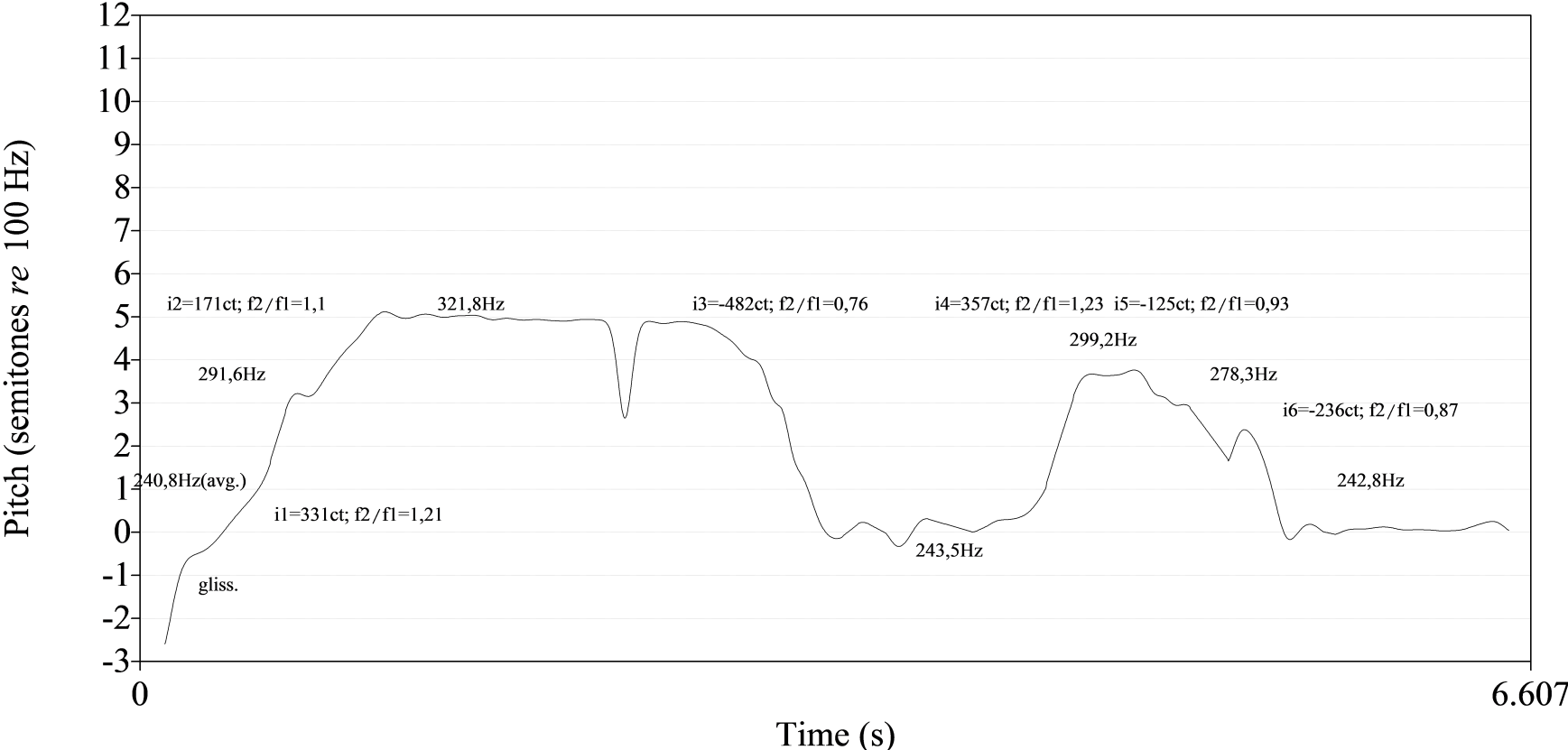


Fig. 34: Yiné luuy Manyu bia:y Dawi: female part; Initial motif and improvised development

Djiné Luuy Manyu Biay Dawi, motif A1b, take 42, 15.04.2010

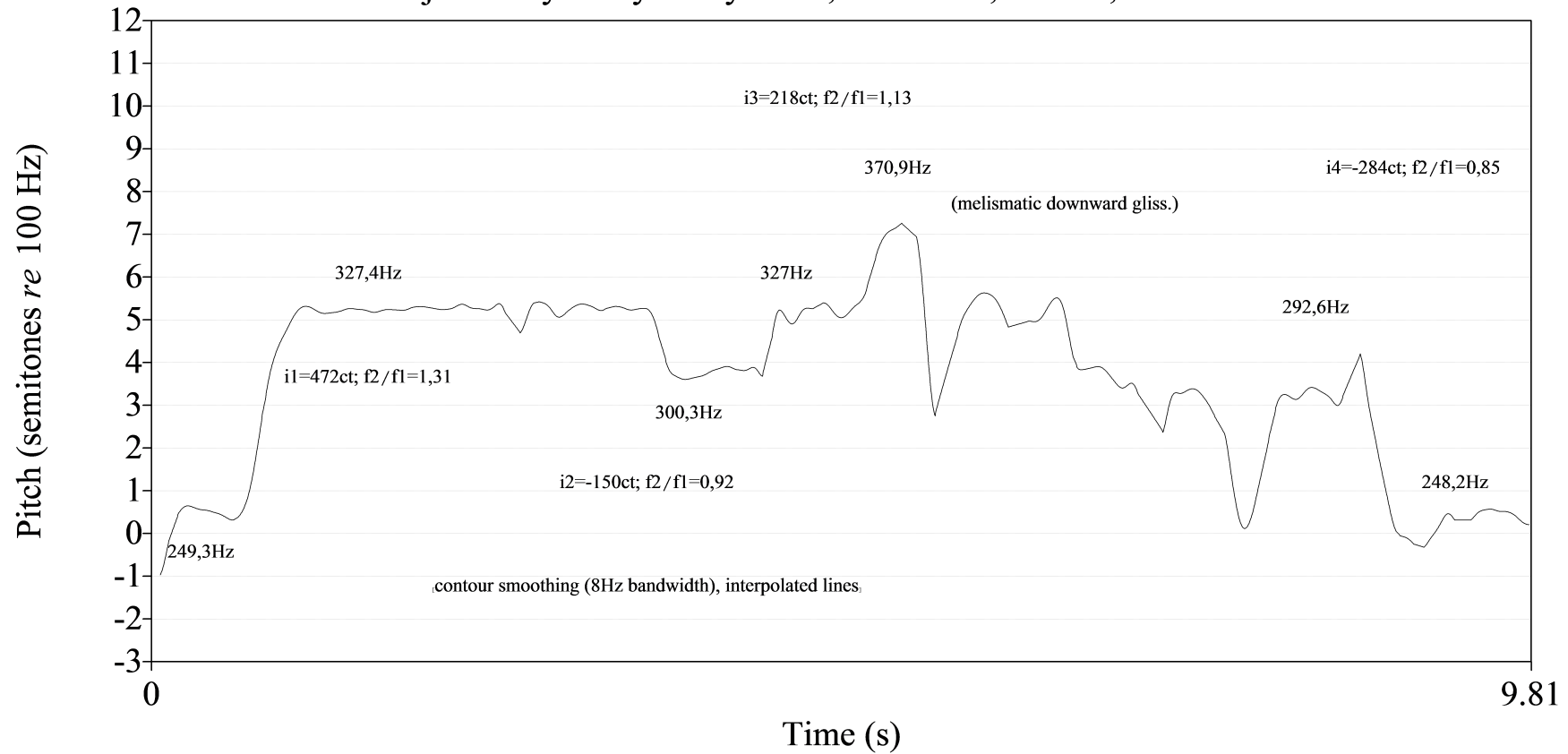


Fig. 35: Yiné luuy Manyu bia:y Dawi: female part; variation including 4th degree

## **Appendix B: Illustrations**

(All photographs by Natiya Pisuthipornkul and Christian Koehn, 2007-2018)



*Fig. 36: The Moken settlement Omag Latá at high tide*





*Fig 37: The only traditional kaba:ŋ that survived the 2004 tsunami*





*Fig. 38: View along the settlement's main alleyway*





*Fig. 39: eba:b Dunung*



*AbbFig. 40: ibu:m Alia*





*Fig. 41: eba:b Salamah*





*Fig. 42: eba:b Djepen*





*Fig. 43: ibu:m Alia singing to propitiate the spirit of a tree chosen by her for making new lbo:ŋ spirit poles*





*Fig 44-47: lolo:ŋ Spirit poles (this page: female ibu:m left, male eba:b right)*





*Fig. 45*





*Fig. 46*





Fig. 47





*Fig 48: The village shrine prepared for the ancestor worship ceremony in 2007*





*Fig 49: The village shrine prepared for the ancestor worship ceremony in 2010*





*Fig. 50: Votive offerings to the spirits during the ancestor worship ceremony in 2007*





*Fig. 51: In the foreground the sacrificial chickens, substituted for the turtles demanded by traditional custom, can be seen*



*Fig. 52: ibu:m Alia chanting, calling the ancestral spirits*





*Fig. 53: Chinese plastic fans used for divination*





*Fig 54: After hours of chanting to the spirits, ibu:m Alia enters a deep trance while eba:b Djinin incessantly strikies the khong*





*Fig. 55: The drumming and dancing continues until late at night while more and more of the Moken fall into a trance*



*Fig 56-58: eba:b Dunung finishing a new katiŋ gá'un*





*Fig. 57*



*Fig. 58*





*Fig. 59: ibu:m Yamu playing the katiŋ gá'un*



*Fig. 60-61: Alternating songs yiné lawan being performed in the evening*





Fig. 61





*Fig. 62: ibu:m Muki dancing*





*Fig. 63: ibu:m Yamu dancing*

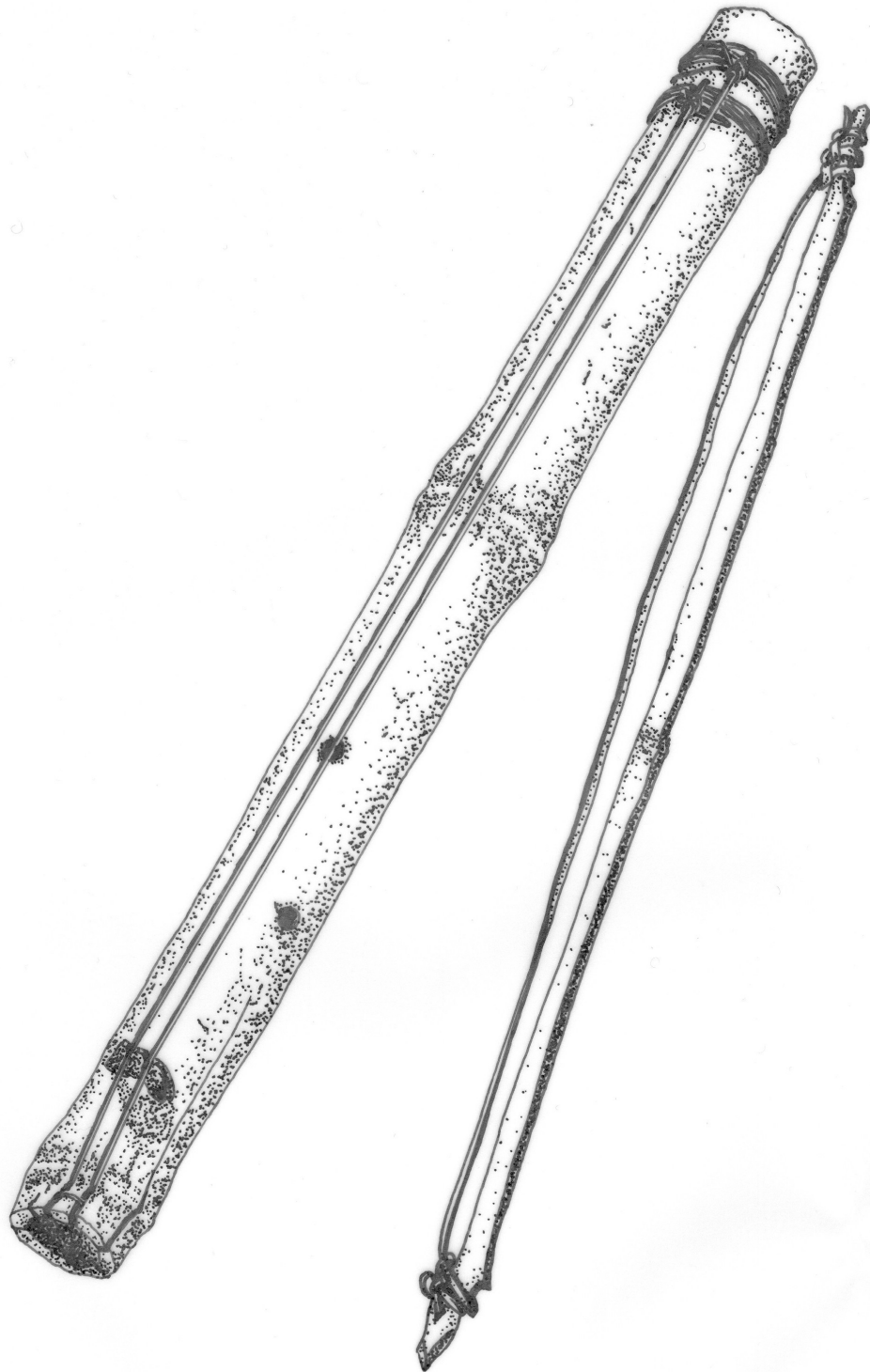


*Fig. 64: eba:b Laut and eba:b Salamah drumming and singing from the mythical epic poem "Gaman"*

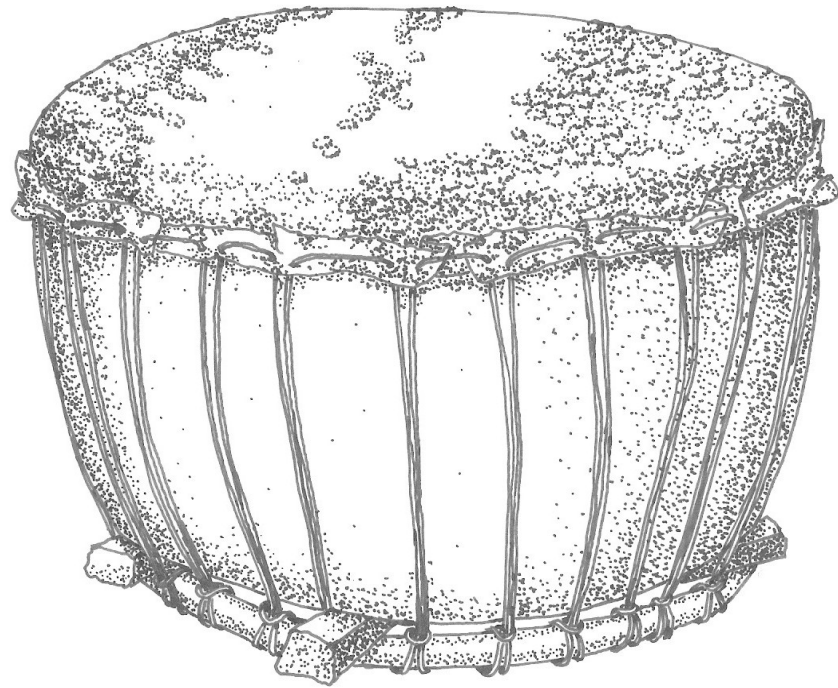




*Fig. 65: ibu:m Chabai, recently gone blind, singing about the hardships of old age. Her Husband, eba:b `Da accompanying her on an imported drum.*



*Fig. 66: The bowed bamboo tube zither katiṅ gá'un (drawing N. Pisuthipornkul)*



*Fig. 67: The drum bá-nà (drawing N. Pisuthipornkul)*

## Appendix C : Audio-CD

### Track List

| #                     | Title   | Duration     |
|-----------------------|---|--------------|
| 1                     | <i>Yiné chichum pùtiak, katiŋ</i> and vocals;<br>[take a27; 22.03.2007]   | 1:54         |
| 2                     | <i>Yiné chichum pùtiak, katiŋ</i> instrumental;<br>[take b24; 12.02.2010]   | 8:22         |
| 3                     | <i>Yiné anat medu:n</i> (song child sleep),<br>lullaby to the melody <i>Yiné chichum pùtiak</i> ;<br>[take b95; 02.05.2010] | 14:42        |
| 4                     | Salutary song from the Moken group of Ko Payam<br>to the melody <i>Yiné chichum pùtiak</i> ;<br>[takeb 46; 17.03.2010]      | 12:34        |
| 5                     | <i>Yiné bor duyu:ŋ</i><br>[take b66; 22.04.2010]  | 2:20         |
| 6                     | <i>Yiné bor pepui</i><br>[take b88; 15.04.2010]   | 4:14         |
| 7                     | <i>Yiné o adey</i><br>[take a24; 16.03.2010]  | 4:26         |
| 8                     | <i>Yiné lu'uy Manyu bia:y Dawi</i><br>[take b42; 15.04.2010]  | 9:09         |
| 9                     | <i>Yiné lu'uy Tchuni bia:y Koro anat Tchilin</i><br>[take b99; 02.05.2010]  | 7:13         |
| 10                    | <i>Seritá lu'uy Sibían bia:y Gaman</i><br>[take b96; 02.05.2010]  | 6:29         |
| 11                    | <i>Yiné putí</i> (ritual invocation)<br>[take a36; 26.04.2007]  | 4:10         |
| 12                    | Ritual Dance 1<br>[take b72; 27.04.2010]  | 3:43         |
| 13                    | Ritual Dance 2<br>[take b73; 27.04.2010]  | 3:47         |
| 14                    | Ritual Dance 3<br>[take b76; 28.04.2010]  | 1:41         |
| <b>Total Duration</b> |   | <b>82:13</b> |

### Appendix C (Audio)

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/jyk553p3zcty0lc8nvrim/hrlkey=moir1rfqrydpmg8fem0ktnmdm&dl=0>



### Appendix D (Video)

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/zcnv5l7dy80tsg19uj3wq/Appendix-D-Documentary-Film-Moken-Ancestor-Worship-Ceremony.mp4?rlkey=qahvne4agpl47ga9zov5ucagi&dl=0>



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Der Unterzeichnete versichert an Eides statt:

1. Dass ihm die geltende Promotionsordnung der Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar gemäß Verkündungsblatt Nr. 3/2017 vom 30.10.2017 bekannt ist.
2. Dass er die schriftliche Dissertation mit dem Titel „Music, Myth, and Ritual among the Moken Sea Nomads: On the Contiguity of Aesthetic and Religious Experience in the Life-World of a Maritime Hunter-Gatherer People“ selbst angefertigt und keine Textabschnitte eines anderen Autors oder eigener Prüfungsarbeiten ohne Kennzeichnung übernommen und alle von ihm benutzten Hilfsmittel, persönlichen Mitteilungen und Quellen in seiner Arbeit angegeben hat.
3. Dass die technischen Zeichnungen zweier Musikinstrumente in [Anhang B] von seiner Lebensgefährtin, Frau Natiya Pisuthipornkul, geb. 31.05.1973 in Hamburg, wohnhaft wie oben, angefertigt und entsprechend kenntlich gemacht wurden.
4. Dass die Hilfe eines Promotionsberaters nicht in Anspruch genommen wurde und dass Dritte weder unmittelbar noch mittelbar geldwerte Leistungen vom Unterzeichneten für Arbeiten erhalten haben, die im Zusammenhang mit dem Inhalt der vorgelegten Dissertation stehen
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Hamburg am 09.04.2021

Christian Daniel Koehn