Musical nomadism (in lieu of closure)

In *Musical Elaborations*, Said first critiqued and then espoused music as an allegory for history. He criticized Thomas Mann's and Theodor Adorno's turn to music as an emblem for the Nazi catastrophe, because they elevated the 'European avalanche' to 'the level of the essential and the universal'.[46] 'A secular attitude', he continued, 'warns us to beware of transforming the complexities of many-stranded history into one large figure, or of elevating particular moments or monuments into universals […]. There is always the possibility to transgress.'[47] Said subsequently transformed music into an allegory for his own purposes, to embody the spirit of secular criticism animating his work. Drawing from a vocabulary of displacement, he argued that music shows 'nomadic' qualities, because of its profligate involvement in the world, its excessive fluidity of meanings and its impurity of origins. Music holds 'a nomadic ability to attach itself to, and become a part of social formations, to vary its articulations and rhetoric depending on the occasion as well as the audience, plus the power and the gender situations in which it takes place'.[48] Said was drawn to music's capacity to embed itself in cultural contexts without becoming subsumed by them, as well as to its enactment of temporalities different from a smooth, consistent unfolding of time. In short, music opened up conceptual spaces alternative to the schematic ideas of historical time and belonging with which he battled in text-orientated disciplines of literary scholarship and cultural and political history. Remembering this music-allegorical dimension of Said's legacy is important for us as musicologists: we have grown used to importing theory from outside fields, yet that 'nomadic' object within may also open the possibility to transgress.

Sensing beyond Orientalism

RACHEL BECKLES WILLSON

Even while attributing importance to Said's *Orientalism*, scholars have not been slow to point out that it created at least one intractable challenge. Said argued convincingly for the colonial constitution of European literature and managed to bring the politics of representation to the forefront of scholarly debate; but he tended to reify precisely the dualistic relationships he set out to critique. One reason for this was that although he deplored the totalizing perception of nineteenth-century Orientalists, his own writing held fast to foundations in the same intellectual tradition.[49]

Our situation today, nearly four decades on, is conducive to exploring further, however. Broad epistemological shifts have made us critical of the humanities' and social sciences'

[46] Said, *Musical Elaborations*, 51.

[47] *Ibid.*, 55.

[48] *Ibid.*, 70. Stathis Gourgouris presented related ideas on Said's musical nomadism at the Edward Said Conference in Utrecht in 2013.

[49] For Said, the Orientalist was 'principally a kind of agent of […] comprehensive visions', working through a system that 'presumes that the whole Orient can be seen panoptically'. Said, *Orientalism*, 239–40.

dependency on visual metaphors ('representing', 'framing', 'mapping' and 'shedding light on', for instance).[50] Scholars in a range of disciplines have argued for a replacement of the habitually disembodied gaze and its representations with a broader appraisal of human sensing as a multiple, fluid, intermingled and situated process.[51] Thus we may now be able to draw Said's critical impulse into new constellations of thought, and my aim here is to contribute to such a project. I use as my basis some of his recollections from childhood, drawing these into thinking associated with scholarship's sensory turn.

Said was filmed in 2003, two years before he died, in a long conversation with the writer Charles Glass. At an early stage in the published part of their dialogue, he makes the following comments:

> Music … I was, I think, it's probably very vain to say this, but I was many years ahead of my time. I had perfect pitch ah … which I didn't discover until I left home. I mean I just could hear ah … the notes exactly right, identify them. Um, I had a perfect memory, I could remember a piece from the moment I heard … My mother used to say, for example, that at the age of one and a half, or even maybe two, I had memorized 40 or 50 folk songs and nursery rhymes and when my cousin who played the harmonica, um, would play one of them and make a mistake on purpose I would start to cry and remonstrate against that.[52]

Said's words are intriguing because of the threshold of difference at which he articulates his childhood position. His 'perfect pitch' is a human capacity for naming the pitches to be heard from the instruments that came to dominate Europe in the nineteenth century (archetypally the piano). The phenomenon was a consequence of industrial production and exposure to that. It is suggestive of how a measurement made standard for the purposes of economics can be normalized and inscribed on the body as memory, value and potential power or vulnerability. Said's account indicates all these qualities. At that time, his viscerally experienced memory of melody separated him out from others, leading him to be a soft target for provocation.

Other remarks indicate separation as well. He loved listening to recordings, and when Glass checks what recordings these were, whether he heard any Arab music on record, Said responds by saying that it was 'never Arabic music', because that was

> exclusively as I recall connected with family events, one or two of my uncles, you know very rare, we didn't have many family events but if we did, let's say Palestine or in Lebanon, never in Egypt,

[50] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN, 1972; repr. 1983); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA, 1991); Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London, 1993). For an overview of such work, see *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (Oxford, 2004).

[51] Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia, PA, 1982); Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (Philadelphia, PA, 1989). Numerous works situate sound in broader discussions: see, for instance, Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London, 1985; repr. 2008); Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Bloomington, IN, 1990); and Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC, 2002).

[52] *Edward Said: The Last Interview* (DVD, Extended Version, dir. Mike Dibb, prod. D. D. Guttenplan; ICA Projects, 2004), at 20:27.

> one of my uncles would play the *'ūd* and they would all sing together but it was like Greek to me, it didn't … I didn't … I never learned the words.[53]

As he goes on to say, the one occasion he remembers a serious encounter with Arab music was when he was nine years old and taken to hear the most celebrated singer of the Arab world, Umm Kulthum. This was not successful:

> I was revolted by it, it just struck me as horrible. First of all it began way too late for my, you know, age, 9.30, so a lot of waiting around and sort of warming up, then she came out and there was no form to the music that I could identify – it was just repetition with tiny differences in each repetition and it was all slow and it was all sort of mournful.[54]

From here on, he invokes a further set of distinct categories separating Arab music from Western music, and his knowledge from that of his teachers:

> And it contrasted terribly with the Western music, you know Mozart and Beethoven and Mendelssohn and … that I loved. I had very good teachers in the sense that they were musical and encouraged me but I think in many ways I was ahead of them because I knew more about music.

One way of thinking about these memories is to recognize them as practices of cultural capital. In conversation with Glass, Said is performing judgments that are embedded in, and situate him in, particular regimes of power.[55] As he did in his autobiography *Out of Place*,[56] he is constructing himself in the style of an individual who was always already distinct from his surroundings as a consequence of his cultural and artistic preferences. But this pattern of judgment was built into his early upbringing, both in missionary schooling and at home. The comments he remembers from his mother (mentioned in the first quotation above) appear similarly in *Out of Place*; but there we learn that she produced them to conjure up an image of Edward's earlier, ostensibly more applied self, and to reproach him for his recent disappointing behaviour.[57] By nostalgically invoking the earlier precociousness of his multilingual speech, reading, maths and musical recognition, she identified these skills as measures of goodness, and their emergence in Said's youth as signs of an honourably advanced development. Said himself did not at the time recognize himself in what she said, but photographs of their earlier life seemed to bear out her narrative of lost joy.

Said's memories should not be discussed only along the lines of cultural capital, colonial anxiety and identity, however. Rather, they can be considered as symptomatic of a particular enlightenment sensory regime, one in which the categorical and discursive are valued as the proper means through which to contain the chaotic life of the world. Said's inference that photographs could be evidence of happiness is part of the same order: the visual is valued as a sense that can be separated off from senses that might have different stories to suggest, as the

[53] *Edward Said: The Last Interview*, at 21:21.
[54] *Ibid.*, at 22:03.
[55] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: Towards a Politics of the Performative* (London, 1997).
[56] See above, note 33.
[57] Said, *Out of Place*, 27–8.

only sense that can indeed be reliable 'evidence'.[58] By considering a broader sensory dimension, I suggest, we may gain a fresh purchase on Said's thinking.

His various accounts invite us, after all, to appreciate him as a potential contributor to situations of relational sensing. When his uncles gathered to sing with the *'ūd*, he was disturbed not to be able to participate: unable to find the linguistic access ('it was like Greek', 'I never learned the words'), he could not share the vocalizing that they were 'all' experiencing 'together'. When he was taken to hear Umm Kulthum, his corporeal sense of temporality was profoundly disrupted: there was too much waiting around; and then there was a lot of musical repetition that lacked distinctions that he could enjoy; he sensed mournfulness. In these situations, he could not join the pleasurable sensory experience that the people around him were living out; he was sonically (and thus physically) excluded.[59] And his descriptions intimate profoundly visceral experiences, namely an inability to use his voice and a disturbed sense of corporeal rhythm.

Because they are relational, his accounts also intimate the world beyond his individual body, invoking indeed a transcorporeal assemblage that is held together (or not) by sensory experience. The activity of those around him relies on their interconnectedness in that time; and it also depends on their shared recollections, whether of past contact with an instrument (*'ūd*), melodies, words or events. Animate and inanimate objects are manifestly in flux here, part of kinaesthetic interactions between present and past actors and events. Such interactions have been theorized by a number of writers, using terms such as 'network' and 'sensorial assemblage'.[60] And we could think about Said's happier musical experiences (all musical experiences, in fact) similarly. The sphere in which he developed a sense of participation was shared affectively with an instrument (he learnt the piano from the age of six), books (he read about music), the radio, 78 rpm records, opera attendance (from the age of 15), his teachers and a great many types of memory.

All this suggests that he was, very early on, disciplined into a certain sensory regime, and not provided with sustained access to others that might have been also available. This is one example of childhood experience in the colonized region, but it is of course just one.[61] A near contemporary of his, also from a Christian family in Jerusalem, reveals a very different

[58] The Latin root of 'evidence' is 'videre', to see. Yannis Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses: Human Experience, Memory, and Affect* (Cambridge, 2013), 5–6.

[59] Said does not mention it, but recordings of Umm Kulthum's concerts allow us to hear the active and noisy audience participation that was typical of the time. Calling out in appreciation is part of Arab music traditions, and could have contributed to Said's feelings of discomfort, because he was not himself able to take part. For discussion of historical and contemporary aspects of this 'creative listening', see Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of Tarab* (Cambridge, 2004), 131–3.

[60] I would not myself use the term 'network' for Said's situation here, because of its association with Actor Network Theory. To me, an approach with more sensitivity to living organisms, and a focus on flows rather than actors/objects, seems more appropriate. Useful theorizations include Tim Ingold's 'Towards an Ecology of Materials', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012), 427–42, which draws together his thinking on the distinction as developed over some years, and the positing of a 'sensorial assemblage' in Hamilakis, *Archaeology and the Senses*, 126ff.

[61] For one influential theorization of this educational process in the explicitly sensorial realm, see Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2004), 116ff.

environment. She and her siblings heard English, Greek and Arab music played and sung in their home and in the homes of friends; they listened to recordings of European opera and light music, played the piano and attended concerts of European music, and they studied music at school.[62] From her we read about sensory experience of events that included her participation, whether this was feisty imitation of visiting musicians at home, singing and dancing for family and friends, or sitting quietly in more formal settings, observing the concert audience members who, 'all dressed up for the occasion, looked so stiff in their fineries they made us laugh'.[63] Parody was apparently well established in this family; her brother used to say to his sisters at such events: 'Now let's study the programme like thoroughly cultured folk!', as if mocking the earnest didacticism of the European-style concert regime.[64] Bringing the two remembered childhoods together reveals the breadth of sensoriality that impacts on musical appreciation and, ultimately, value.

From what Said presented of his childhood memories, it might seem that even in those early years he lacked the requisite memories needed to participate in Arab music-making in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine. We might even argue that his intensive contact with the piano and other forms of industrialized musical production sedimented within him the (memory of a) tuning pattern that mediated or intervened unhelpfully in contexts of Arab music. But that is probably too formalistic: when he cried and remonstrated in response to melodic errors, he was hearing a harmonica, after all. The seven-bit just intonation of this instrument is different from that of the piano, and cuts across 'Western' and 'Oriental' categories. Such a detail is lost in the memories of memories of memories within Said's narrative, but is testament to the nuances of affective experience, and Said's 'never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations'.[65]

Although Said may have come to present his musical experiences in exceptionally divided ways, his words reveal that how he felt about them was not so divided, and here, I suggest, is where we might consult his work as we continue to pursue these ideas. All the experiences and judgments were located in his body, and these were experienced in shared and overlapping spaces of sensoriality and narrated as such. Thus we have learnt that some of these spaces afforded him the capacity to play, sing, imagine and think creatively; others led him to feel inept, incapacitated and probably unhappily bored. They influenced one another. And at any stage, as we know from his contemporaries with different opportunities, such experiences could have been transformed. And there were doubtless occasions of such transformation that were absorbed into his sense of himself, lost to reasoned recollection.

Ultimately I suggest that Said's words need not be read only as representations, as discourses for deconstruction. A personally situated sensoriality is persistent in his writing more generally, despite the binarisms in which it is often formally structured, and the sort of disruption to

[62] Hala Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I: A Personal Record* (Amman, 1990), 7–9, 13–16, 18, 37, 68, 72–3. Hala was a daughter of Khalil Sakakini (1878–1953), essayist, poet, scholar and founder of three schools (1909, 1925 and 1938), who also served as Education Inspector under the Ottoman and the British regimes in Palestine. I present Hala's memoirs in a broader context in *Orientalism and Musical Mission*, 116–212.

[63] Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I*, 80.

[64] *Ibid.*, 78.

[65] Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregg and Seigworth (Durham, NC, 2010), 1–25 (p. 1).

which he alerts us could be incorporated within the critical project, not left outside. To be sure, his open declaration of revulsion on experiencing sonic alterity jars against our desire for tolerance. But we can frame this differently: his frankness brings us into confrontation with aspects of humanity (in ourselves) that we wish not only to overcome but tend also to evade. If we read it afresh, his work could well contribute to our quest for less categorical and more adventurous ways of engaging with sonic experience.[66]

Appropriating Said

KOFI AGAWU

Born in Palestine, educated at a British boarding school in Egypt and later in the United States, Said is typically scripted as an influential literary and cultural critic, a passionate advocate for the Palestinian cause and a prominent public intellectual. In the course of a lifetime of active research he produced an extraordinarily wide range of criticism and scholarship, for which he is justly celebrated today. As a fellow traveller in the field of postcolonial studies, I find many aspects of Said's work stimulating and inspiring. I believe that the daily practice of musicology would be significantly enhanced if musicology opened itself up to key elements in Said's thought and method. Assembling an adequate portrait of such a(n imagined) musicology would, however, require far more space than is available here. So I will limit myself to two tasks: first, I will rehearse some of the conditions that made Said's work possible; and secondly, I will suggest that a particular idea of his, the notion of contrapuntal reading, can be fruitfully adapted to an adjacent area of scholarship, namely research into African music. Thoroughly worked-out positions on these (and related) topics obviously lie beyond the scope of this intervention, but perhaps this ensemble of fragments will indicate some of the potential in appropriating Said.

Three basic, practical activities define Said's background: reading, listening to music and writing, including the development of a critical vocabulary. Said read voraciously and in several languages (Arabic, French, German, English). This lends a certain authority to some of his more sweeping claims about the 'West' and the 'Orient'. Of the figures who shaped his intellectual horizons, three writers or groups of writers are often mentioned. First is the eighteenth-century Neapolitan Giambattista Vico, whom Said acknowledged as 'the single most powerful intellectual influence on my life'.[67] A chapter on Vico appears at the end of his second major book, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*.[68] There he explains the sources of this particular affinity and contextualizes them with reference to American and French critical

[66] In an expanded version of this paper I address Said's sensing in the piano recital as well, and suggest it affords us insights into a broader range of musical experience as well as a return to the political. See Rachel Beckles Willson, 'Value and Abjection: Listening to Music with Edward W. Said', *Against Value in the Arts and Education*, ed. Emile Bojesen, Sam Ladkin and Robert McKay (forthcoming).

[67] *Edward Said: The Last Interview*, at 54:59.

[68] See above, note 2.

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