



Experience *and* Meaning in Music Performance

Edited by Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck, and Laura Leante



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This endeavour officially started life at the Open University in 2005 as a research project on North Indian music led by Clayton and Leante and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (pilots had earlier been funded by the AHRC’s predecessor the Arts and Humanities Research Board and by the British Academy). Their ambition was always to expand the scope of this project, including application of its methods to other repertoires, and this was made possible. Nikki Moran, Andy McGuiness and Mark Doffman joined the project group as research students working on Indian classical music, indie rock and jazz, respectively; Glaura Lucas became involved through a collaborative project on Congado; and Byron Dueck was appointed to further consolidate the work of the group, bringing additional theoretical ideas and a new body of ethnographic data concerning western Canadian aboriginal music. Our gratitude goes first therefore to the core members of the team who have contributed with chapters to this volume—Mark Doffman, Glaura Lucas, Andrew McGuiness and Nikki Moran—whose willingness to share ideas has kept the debate alive throughout the years and who showed great patience with us in the long course of its preparation.

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Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck, Laura Leante—March 2013



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About the Companion Website

www.oup.com/us/emmp

Oxford has created a website to accompany *Experience and Meaning in Music Performance*, on which a variety of materials can be found, including audio and video files, colour versions of some illustrations and other materials. Readers are encouraged to explore these materials in conjunction with the analyses presented in the text.

Recorded examples available online are found throughout the text and are signalled with the symbol ; visual illustrations, text and other materials are signalled with the symbol .

EXPERIENCE AND MEANING IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

1

INTRODUCTION: EXPERIENCE AND MEANING IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

Martin Clayton, Byron Dueck and Laura Leante

EXPERIENCE AND MEANING IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE: THE PROJECT

Three overarching themes frame this collaborative volume: *experience*, *meaning* and *performance*. *Performance* defines music as the moment of production—of sound, meaning or consequential action—rather than as model, ideal or product. It directs our attention to people producing, experiencing and making meaning from organised sound: people with bodies as well as minds, with a concrete existence in time and space, whose musical behaviour is shaped by innate tendencies (such as that towards rhythmic coordination, or entrainment), as well as by individual, environmental and social factors. *Experience* also focuses our attention away from the ideal and towards the phenomenal: what people actually do, and what they feel, while engaging in music. The discussions of experience here range widely, considering how listeners as well as performers encounter music. *Meaning* is also understood in a broad sense. We examine on the one hand what might be called embodied ideas: concepts whose meanings are tied to physical experiences of musical performance but owe little to linguistic mediation. On the other hand, we explore how discourse shapes musical experiences, what performers try to invest in performances and what they think they (and others) ought to get out of them.

The contributions to this volume tend to privilege moments of performance, expanding subsequently to explore how performers and audiences characterise such moments: that is, how they imbue them with meaning, sacred symbolism, as well as social and political import. In tracing this trajectory from the moment of

execution, we hope to present a novel and productive view of how cultural practice inflects the experience and meaning of musical performance, challenging the dominance of the discursive without writing it out of the picture. As the following essays demonstrate, close study of performances enables insights into the dialectical relationships between the discursive and the experiential, and between the ideological and the embodied. Discourse is sometimes understood as an interpretive layer superimposed upon performance, but in the following chapters, it is revealed to be a practice that both inflects and is inflected by corporeal experiences of music. Thus moving between meaning, experience and performance, this collection aims to set out a coherent and productive paradigm for the study of music.

This volume exists as the result of collaborative endeavour over a period of several years, expanding from an initial research project focusing on North Indian classical music. The original project was developed around a core question: 'How does the immediate experience of musical sound relate to processes of meaning construction and discursive mediation?' We were interested, in other words, in the relationship between our bodily involvement in musical experience and the way we talk about music, including how we assign meaning and value. We argued that in order to explore this question, it would be necessary to combine verbal reports about musical experience with empirical methods not dependent on those reports, and that it would therefore be necessary to synthesise traditional ethnographic work (such as interviews with musicians) with methods borrowed from psychology and ethology to investigate the nonverbal or paralinguistic behaviour associated with music making. The key to the project became, then, to a considerable extent a methodological issue: How could empirical study of nonverbal behaviour in musical performance be integrated into a programme of ethnographic research?

The question of interdisciplinarity was therefore central to our endeavour from the outset, and we have aimed to provide practical solutions to its challenges while also contributing to theoretical discussion. The goal we set ourselves was the development of an original research paradigm, one that would incorporate specific proposals for the study of embodiment, gesture and nonverbal communication, entrainment and verbal reports of musical experience. Any research project is by its nature a process of exploration and discovery, of course, and the coalescence and growth of a research group whose members each brought a unique set of disciplinary assumptions and genre-specific musical experience and knowledge naturally entailed the discovery of new possibilities and the abandonment of less productive paths.

The result is not narrowly defined as a single, prescriptive model for music research. Such models can perform a number of useful functions, including acting as a guide for researchers during a period of training or as discussion pieces for fellow academics—the most productive doing so for many decades after publication. They

do not, however, tend to serve as prescriptive models for research practice, as each new researcher will inevitably aim to challenge, develop or extend earlier work. We hope therefore that this volume—which reflects ways of approaching our research questions from numerous disciplinary and interdisciplinary angles—will offer a stimulus for discussion and debate, a paradigm that others will wish to critique and extend. We have not attempted to reduce our proposals to a handful of words and phrases, or to pretend that the different contributors have all applied exactly the same methods or approached their field from exactly the same perspective. What binds them is not a narrowly defined research model, but rather a shared commitment to collaboratively explore a common set of interests from broadly compatible perspectives. Our hope is that the loose but nonetheless rigorous model of interdisciplinary research that this collection represents will prove more dynamic and more adaptable than a more prescriptive paradigm might have done.

The remainder of this chapter sets out some of the concepts that proved most productive during the course of our work together from our first funding in 2005 to the geographical dispersal of the group between 2008 and 2010. We start, of course, with the key terms of the volume's title: performance, experience and meaning. Given that each has been the subject of many volumes of debate and speculation in its own right—which we have no wish to repeat—we focus here on the specific range of connotations of the terms we have in mind when we use them. In the subsequent section, we introduce a further layer of shared ideas, in the form of two cross-cutting issues that we have found to be effective levers with which to approach experience and meaning in music performance: the study of gesture and nonverbal communication on the one hand, and of entrainment and interaction on the other. These approaches shed light on aspects of musical performance of which we have been too little aware in the past, but for whose study we are currently in a position to develop new and effective methodologies. In a sense, the decision to focus on these areas is pragmatic, then—these are the areas in which it is currently possible to make considerable methodological advances—but we also aim to demonstrate in this volume how effectively they can be deployed in shedding new light on our key themes.

PERFORMANCE, EXPERIENCE AND MEANING

We begin with a brief consideration of the keywords of this project. *Performance* refers first and foremost to the collective acts central to most of the chapters in this volume: public concerts, ritual observances, musical collaborations and so on. In focusing on performance, we privilege actual instances of music making, sometimes in ways that highlight distances between the ideal and what in fact happens. One

area of particular interest is real-time interaction between musicians, as in Mark Doffman's exploration of jazz musicians who drift in and out of close temporal synchrony. Another involves performances whose successful accomplishment is socially desirable or spiritually imperative, but whose outcome is uncertain (Andy McGuinness's and Glaucia Lucas's chapters). These essays highlight the unpredictable aspects of performance, and how musical undertakings have consequences, not only for the reputations and careers of professional musicians, but also in broader social and spiritual realms.

Our approach attempts to take a 360-degree view of the subject, addressing not only musicians, who are typically privileged in ethnomusicological accounts, but also audiences. Listeners play a fundamental role in many kinds of performance, and a number of these chapters accordingly examine their responses, reported experiences and accounts. Our analyses reveal musical performances as events where specialists and nonspecialists can have quite different perspectives on what is going on. Laura Leante's chapter, for example, explores the meanings that Indian audiences ascribe to performances of Hindustani classical music, revealing both correspondences to and divergences from expert pedagogy and criticism. Byron Dueck's essay suggests that audiences hear and replicate metrical music in contrasting ways, and that these hearings and subsequent performances are not always authorised by dominant discourses. These chapters explore individual differences in hearing, but they more importantly show how listening varies from group to group (particularly, as might be expected, in cases where groups possess dissimilar musical knowledge and ideology). Including audiences in discussions of performance, and acknowledging their distinct or culturally specific ways of hearing, allows us to investigate the implications of listening for social and cultural distinction. It also permits us to explore how some kinds of listening and interpretation are privileged in dominant evaluative discourses, while others are not.

'Performance' is also understood here in terms of what is sometimes called performativity (see Herzfeld 1997; Lee 1997; Silverstein 1997). The following chapters consider what it is that musical and paramusical acts accomplish. McGuinness's chapter explores the potential of risk-taking rock performances to engender felicitous and infelicitous forms of subjectivity. Martin Clayton's chapter suggests that one reason why rhythmic performance is so central to ritual observance and public gathering is its potential to create a sense of collectivity in the course of assembly. Nikki Moran argues that, through the use of gestures and other nonverbal cues, performers of Indian classical music regulate one another's musical actions and perhaps even extend prompts to audience members. In each case, music making and the activity surrounding it are presented as potentially productive or effective social action.

It should be clear by now that our exploration of music performance is closely intertwined with our analysis of how it is encountered. *Experience*, our second keyword, emphasises the corporeal nature of musical performance. In exploring embodied experience, the contributors to this volume take both of the methodological routes introduced above: ethnography on the one hand, and methods grounded in ethology and psychology on the other. Ethnographic research has been useful for learning how musicians and listeners describe their own musical experiences. This is particularly evident in Doffman's chapter, which draws upon statements from jazz musicians about their experience of musical groove. But non-ethnographic methodologies have also been helpful—in part because, as they sometimes reveal, descriptions of musical experience do not take all aspects of it into account, and often represent it in different ways. Thus in Doffman's research, musicians' characterisations of groove do not always correspond with what close study of the microtiming of their interactions shows. Lucas, Clayton and Leante undertook an analysis of musical recordings of Congado performances (2011, see Lucas's chapter) that reveals complex rhythmic subtleties in the relationships between performing groups; however, participants in these performances tend to approach and describe their interactions from quite different perspectives and locate other kinds of significance in them. In the chapters that follow, then, experience is not sought solely through ethnography: although musicians often convey much about musical experience through their descriptions of it, words can also fail them, sometimes because they are not able to express exactly their embodied experience of the music. At the same time, and in contrast, ethnography sometimes clarifies exactly what other methodologies do not explain. Moran's chapter analyses video recordings of North Indian classical music performance, discovering a complex relationship between musical gesture and attentional 'looking' behaviour. Her reflections on the reasons for this cross-modal relationship, however, look to fieldwork and ethnographic interviews for potential explanations.

We understand experience not only as embodied but also as culturally mediated: that is, shaped by and oriented to a social context. The contributors to this volume therefore investigate the experience of musical performance in a range of contexts: from concerts in a number of cultures and genres (jazz, Indian classical music, alternative rock), to religious rituals (Afro-Brazilian Congado), to rehearsals, to (last but not least) listening to recorded music. Similarly, we show how the experience of music can take place in different spaces and at different levels of awareness. Some chapters discuss performances in relation to physical spaces—including public venues in urban centres (McGuinness, Doffman), outdoor spaces of community life (Lucas), and contained spaces of private assembly (Moran). In others, the focus includes imaginary dimensions, as in the instances of listeners projecting themselves

into virtual environments evoked by the music (Leante) or of the metaphorical representation of ritual spaces (Lucas).

In a number of the contexts we consider, there has traditionally been a strict separation of performing and listening roles. In keeping with our inclusive approach to performance, we have sought to consider experience widely, taking into account not only those who are involved in the physical production of musical sound, but audiences as well (and thus extending approaches such as the one Regula Qureshi uses in her influential study of *qawwali*, 1995 [1986]). To date, our investigations of the experiences of audiences draw upon data gathered in focus groups conducted with listeners to North Indian Classical music, many (but not all) of whom have been non-experts. Leante's chapter explores how these listeners describe their experiences of music and in doing so imbue them with a range of meanings.

Thus we arrive at the third keyword, *meaning*. Musicians and listeners ascribe significance and value to music, to the events in which it is performed, and to contexts, ideas and objects associated with it. The meaningfulness of music is evident in Lucas's discussion of the Afro-Brazilian Congado ritual, where instruments, musical patterns and collective singing and dancing all have sacred significance. For instance, ternary repetitions of songs and triple patterns in drumming connect the music of Congado not only to the idea of the Trinity, but also to culturally specific concepts of family lineage and ancestry. The assembled groups performing music and dance and the other elements of the Congado ritual, meanwhile, are said to constitute a rosary, with each individual member a bead in the larger whole. Indeed, a number of other aspects of the Congado ritual are described with reference to the rosary, which is often used metaphorically in reference to spans of ritual time, from the relatively short (a song) to the long (the six-month period within which all Congado activities take place).

At the same time, music also gives meaning to events, imbues contexts and objects with value and reinforces social bonds and distinctions. Congado again provides a good example: as certain Congado groups move through public spaces, their percussionists elaborate basic rhythmic patterns in ways that produce dense musical textures. In this way, they render sonorously palpable the protective efficacy of their ritual work, which guards participants and certain kinds of sacred knowledge from social and spiritual threats. At a more basic level, the collective process of making music in Congado helps to define groups and communities and makes their collectivity manifest.

Our investigations of musical meaning are rooted above all in ethnographic methodologies including fieldwork and participant observation, interviewing and focus-group meetings. All of the following chapters employ ethnographic methods, but they complement them with a variety of other approaches, since it seems to us

that an interdisciplinary perspective offers the most viable and productive path to understanding how people make sense of music. Leante, for example, draws upon semiotics, while Clayton and Doffman apply entrainment theory and analysis of rhythm. In drawing upon ethnography, we acknowledge that the study of processes of signification in music cannot elude the consideration that meaning is grounded in the particularities of cultural practice and social relationships. Meaning is also rooted in our bodies, however. As Doffman's research suggests, jazz musicians' discussions of the embodied phenomenon of groove often overlap or intersect with descriptions of their social relationships to one another. Leante, meanwhile, shows that sound can be embodied through listening, and this in turn informs the way people talk about music and the meanings they attribute to it. And Moran's chapter opens a door to considering meaning as something arising not just from an individual's embodied perspective, but also from his or her highly interactive social reading of others' movement and physicality. The somatic aspect of signification is discussed in more detail in later sections of this introduction, which explore at greater length the connections between embodied experience and meaning.

GESTURE AND ENTRAINMENT

Cutting across the abstract terms *performance*, *experience* and *meaning*, a focus on two phenomenal aspects of musical performance imparts additional coherence and resonance across the volume: a number of chapters explore embodiment and gesture, while others consider aspects of musical temporality, especially entrainment. Embodiment and entrainment are clearly not the only lenses through which to view experience and meaning, but they do seem to be particularly useful at this juncture. One reason for this is pragmatic, as noted above: a combination of the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas and the rapid development of digital technologies make it far easier both to conceive and implement new research methods in these areas. Less arbitrarily, perhaps, each of these topics affords a focus on aspects of experience and meaning that are not easily captured by verbally mediated discussions of how music works and what it means (whether those discourses are accessed through ethnographic methods or some other medium): how people use body movement, often unconsciously, in order to communicate and coordinate their actions with others; and how patterns of musical interaction and coordination develop in response to the underlying dynamics of their temporal relationships.

One chapter (by Moran) examines gesture and nonverbal forms of communication, joining recent interdisciplinary conversations about the role of the moving body in musical practice. Another (by Leante) investigates the embodied aspects

of the meanings listeners attribute to musical sounds. During the course of our research, the topic of embodiment has been introduced and extended in a variety of ways: as a response to this, another, concluding, chapter (by Clayton and Leante) reviews the topic of embodied cognition in music more generally and situates the individual studies in this volume in relation to this burgeoning field.

Musicological approaches often treat the concept of gesture essentially as metaphor, and the movement implied by the term as virtual or imagined; empirical research, on the other hand, tends to focus on actual gestures. Rolf Inge Godøy and Marc Leman's 2010 collection investigates them using a variety of innovative methods, some inspired by an intention to exploit the lessons learned in new digital musical interfaces (see also Leman 2007). Our aim is somewhat different, although our empirical approaches find a place within the same body of discourse (see Clayton and Leante's brief contributions to Godøy and Leman 2010 and to Gritten and King 2011). The methods described in this volume have been inspired most by the approaches of David McNeill and of Adam Kendon to verbal communication: in particular McNeill's view of the complementarity of spoken word and physical gesture, and Kendon's focus on gesture as an integral part of social interaction (McNeill 1992 and 2005; Kendon 1994). Our concerns, then, are principally with the relationships between gesture and meaning in music performance and its reception (Leante), and with the role of gesture in the coordination of joint action (Clayton, Moran). Implicit in these approaches is an interest in the unconscious aspects of gesture. We can gesture consciously, of course, just as we can deliberately amplify or suppress gestural communication according to context, but a conscious intention to gesture is not a precondition for it to occur. In this sense, a careful study of gesture can be used as a proxy for aspects of action and experience that may not be verbalised, and it can therefore be a useful approach to our principal themes of experience and meaning.

The chapters concerned with gesture also suggest new ways of understanding experience, meaning and performance. First, movement and gesture shape physical experiences of listening, performing and collaborating musically; they are an important aspect of embodied encounters with music. Second, such movements stand in complex relationships with meaning. A simple model might understand gestures as relatively ambiguous movements, to be imbued with meaning by audiences, musical collaborators and various commentators. In fact, their cultural or contextual significance is often quite specific. Moreover, as the chapters by Leante and by Clayton and Leante suggest, movement and meaning inform one another. Gestures both reflect and shape their cultural context: movements are influenced by ideology, while ideology is expressed and experienced through movement. Third, musical gestures advanced in the course of performance have a 'performativity' of their own. They

are consequential and effective, regulating (or attempting to regulate) the interactions between performing musicians and between musicians and their audiences, but often in ways that are nonlinguistic and vague with respect to intentionality.

Another quartet of essays focuses on elements of temporal organisation in music, particularly pulse, rhythmic patterning, metre and groove (Clayton, Doffman, Dueck and Lucas). These chapters explore how musicians from different traditions shape and respond to regular patterns of pulsation in music. More broadly, they examine the diverse means by which those traditions nuance and complicate the basic process of entraining to a regular pulse: for instance, through metre, groove and even apparent efforts to avoid playing in time with one another. Taken as a group, they suggest that the particularities of musical experience are related to the unique ways that various music-cultural practices channel the inherent inclination to entrain to a pulse.

The theme of entrainment has become key to music-theoretical and psychological approaches to metre. The approach taken here is consistent with those current in music theory, psychology and neuroscience, but, again, places emphasis on at least two implications of the concept that have not been widely discussed elsewhere. The first of these is the idea that musical metre emerges from embodied interactions between individuals and can therefore be regarded as an index of coordinated action (Clayton). To what extent, then, are our musical choices afforded and constrained by the properties of dynamical systems that do not depend on our conscious intentions? What are the implications of this view for our experience of musical interactions, in which we may not be exactly the willing agents we often perceive ourselves to be? Second, what are the social entailments of musical entrainment (Doffman, Dueck)? To what extent are the preferences of particular groups of people (as they choose between different entrainment possibilities) indicative of social choices? To what extent do certain kinds of musical coordination bring certain kinds of social grouping into being?

FURTHER THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Human Body: Universal and Cultural

The studies of entrainment and gesture that follow necessarily approach a genre of inquiry familiar to ethnomusicologists and social scientists: namely, investigations concerning human universals and cultural particulars. The body, its comportment and its experiences have long been understood as shaped in fundamental ways by culture. Marcel Mauss, for instance, showed how some very basic activities—including walking, running and squatting—are practised in culturally specific and

historically contingent ways (Mauss 1973 [1935]). This volume returns to such questions of generalisability.

So, for example, we understand the ability to entrain to rhythmic regularities to be universally human, but we also hold it to be a phenomenon determined by culture. Although the fact of entrainment enables musical coordination, it leaves a great deal of room for complex elaborations. Musical manifestations of entrainment rely upon highly specific forms of training and enculturation: the tendency for two people to fall into step with one another while walking side by side is quite different from the effortful kinds of synchronisation that enable professional musicians to ‘stay together’—that is, move through the same metrical and formal structures—at extremely fast tempos. The following chapters benefit from engagement with recent hypotheses about the implications the natural limits of human entrainability have for musical practice across cultures—for instance, Justin London’s work examining why certain metres are more common than others (2004). But they are nevertheless insistent that bodily givens are complicated and qualified in myriad ways by cultural practices, as Clayton notes in his chapter.

Indeed, this fact becomes the basis for investigations into the meaningfulness and social performativity of rhythm and metre. As the chapters by Doffman, Dueck and Lucas indicate, social groups evaluate musical practices and practitioners based on their mastery of culturally specific rhythmic techniques. Musical performance is rarely a question of simply ‘falling into time’ with one another. Playing in time with the music also involves aligning one’s comportment to broader ideologies concerning what is musically appropriate and effective. Failure to measure up to these benchmarks can have serious consequences: personal, social, spiritual and political.

Our work therefore continues a well-established theme in comparative writing on rhythmic synchrony. As Clayton, Sager and Will (2005) note, Alan Lomax’s work on rhythm (1982), John Blacking’s writing on ‘bodily resonance’ (1983, 1992), and Steven Feld and Charles Keil’s reflections on ‘groove’ and ‘participatory discrepancy’ (Keil and Feld 2005, Keil 1995) suggest that, in many cultural contexts and in many particular ways, rhythm plays a crucial role in the experience of collectivity. In this respect, we continue the Durkheimian tradition Martin Stokes (2001) identifies in ethnomusicology: that is, we draw attention to the frequent connections between musically coordinated action, heightened emotional experience and feelings of community. Nor does Durkheim’s connection between ‘harmony and unison of movement’ and collective expressions of emotion apply solely to so-called ‘elementary’ forms of social and religious life (1995 [1912]: 228, *passim*). The links between embodied, affective and collective experience are just as evident in contemporary public cultures, as work by Keil and Feld (2005), Feld (1990), Hirschkind (2006) and Stokes (2011) suggests. Here too, entrainment has implications for social affiliation, including political life.

Music, Meaning and Embodiment

The following chapters also contribute to long-standing discussions of the relationships between music and meaning (see, for instance, Meyer 1956, Coker 1972, Feld 2005 [1984], Imberty 1986, Small 1998, Rice 2001 and Clayton 2001). As remarked above, a simple model of musical meaning might understand musical performances and experiences as fundamental or primary moments vested with meaning through talk about them, musical meanings accruing like layers around a kernel of ‘absolute’ sound. Reflection suggests a much more dialectical process: music and musical experiences are not simply vested with significance through talk; they reflect, amplify and play fundamental roles in constituting cultural concepts. Meaning can also exist *a priori* with respect to the act of performance: see, for instance, the discussion of the Afro-Brazilian concept *pôr sentido*, meaning to invest each action with meaningful intention, in Lucas’s chapter.

The chapters in this volume complement existing discussions of the relationships between music and meaning by exploring how another element, embodiment, relates to and connects them. Connections between sound and physical movement abound. Musicians frequently characterise and communicate about music through gestures (see Leante 2009), as readers who have given, received, or observed music lessons in a variety of musical traditions will know (Fatone et al. 2011 discuss cases of Indian classical music and Scottish bagpipe instruction; see also Clayton and Leante’s chapter). In these practices, teachers regularly evoke sought-after sounds with the help of expressive movements. Sounds also stand in ‘modelling’ relationships to nonpedagogical movements—dancers, for instance, often attempt to represent musical sounds through their actions, whereas musicians may emulate in overt and subtle ways the movements of dancers. Furthermore, complex relationships connect embodiment to concepts and ideologies. Culture imbues certain kinds of movement with social significance, and, conversely, particular gestures and postures mediate important cultural concepts, sometimes in nonlinguistic ways. Consider, for instance, the physical placement of Indian classical musicians on stage, or students and instructors in a classroom. Both contexts encourage or even demand certain postures and orientations of faces and eyes. In such situations, ideologically valorised hierarchies are not simply ‘reflected’ in bodily placement and posture; rather, superordinate and subordinate status are experienced *through* them. Following from the above, embodiment can become a point of articulation between music on the one hand and cultural concepts and ideologies on the other. So, for instance, as Leante explains in a 2009 article, sacred and secular nobility are experientially embodied in certain elements of the North Indian musical mode called Shree Raga, as well as in the physical gestures musicians employ to ‘describe’ it. One might locate a similar