Music and Latency in Teju Cole's *Open City*: Presences of the Past
Birgit Neumann & Yvonne Kappel

Abstract: This article sets out to explore configurations of literary musicality in Teju Cole's novel *Open City* (2011), showing how intermedial relations between literature and music are linked to the novel's exploration of transcultural histories of violence. Supporting but also displacing the larger verbal narrative, intermedial references in *Open City* produce a surplus of meaning, an unruly remainder. They do so by introducing musical frictions that resist and undermine the structural coherence of the text and gesture toward something nonlinear and latent. Modelled on the form of the fugue, the novel's contrapuntal structure reveals the disjunctions, latencies, and elisions within hegemonic orders of knowledge and destabilize established notions of community, memory, and cosmopolitanism. To afford a fuller understanding of what we call the novel's "intermedial poetics," our essay will first provide a brief definition of the concept of intermediality, showing how references to music in the novel are connected to concepts of latency and atmosphere. Following this, we will investigate configurations of literary musicality in *Open City*. We argue that the contrapuntal structure of the novel clashes with the protagonist-narrator's contrapuntal reading of urban spaces and histories, asking readers to rethink conventionalized notions of black diasporic subjects.

Keywords: Teju Cole, *Open City*, intermediality, music, latency, memory

I. Dissonant Voices in *Open City*

In Teju Cole's novel *Open City*—a complex work about migration, transcultural violence, memory, and the arts—the narrator-protagonist, Julius, wanders restlessly through the maze-like streets of New York. Upon the corner of Sixty-sixth Street, he notices signs announcing that the big Tower Records store is "going out of business" (Cole, *Open City* 16). "[I]ntrigued also by the promise that prices had been slashed," Julius enters the music store and is captivated by the "music playing overhead" (16). Almost against his will, he becomes "rapt" in Gustav Mahler's late symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* (17)*,* luring him into "the strange hues of its world" (16). In a state of "trance," Julius notes:

> On hearing Christa Ludwig's voice, in the second movement, a song about the loneliness of autumn, I recognized the record-ing as the famous one conducted by Otto Klemperer in 1964. With that awareness came another: that all I had to do was bide my time, and wait for the emotional core of the work, which Mahler had put in the final movement of the symphony. I sat on one of the hard benches near the listening stations, and sank into reverie, and followed Mahler through drunkenness, longing, bombast, youth (with its fading), and beauty (with its fading). Then came the final movement, "*Der Abschied,*" the Farewell, and Mahler, where he would ordinarily indicate the tempo, had marked it *schwer*, difficult.
>
> The birdsong and beauty, the complaints and high-jinks of the preceding movements, had all been supplanted by a differ-ent mood, a stronger, surer mood. It was as though the lights had, without warning, come blazing into my eyes. (17)

Impressing deeply upon Julius' memory, the epic symphony, composed during the most painful period of Mahler's life, becomes a site of "new intensity" (17), of affect and excess, causing a longing to hear more. And yet, though evoking an affective intensity and presence, the translation of music into words also highlights the unbridgeable gap between these modes of signification. While references to music conjure up sounds, to-nality, and rhythms, their reliance on words simultaneously underlines

the absence of actual music, thus giving way to a multidimensional interplay between presence and absence, fulfilment and loss. Intermedial references to music weave their medial otherness into the text and introduce a number of dissonances that partially suspend and displace the meaning-making mandate of narrative. In contrast to Julius' many explicit meditations on history, which testify to his intellectual mastery, the interplay between the intermedial references that pervade *Open City* and its plotless narrative structure create a certain "mood" (17), a sense of foreboding and an atmosphere of expectation. This atmosphere gestures toward something beyond Julius' control and existing dominant orders of knowledge and prescriptive normalcy, i.e., something that is there and yet remains latent. Such latent living on—a *sur-vivre* in the Derridean sense[1]—indexes an intractable persistence, a presence of the past that conjures up alternative, largely forgotten histories that haunt and affect subjects "without warning" (17), as Julius puts it. For immediately after listening to Mahler, Julius connects the music to the workings of memory, admitting that the force of the music escapes his control: "The five-note figure from '*Der Abschied*' continued on from where I escaped, playing through with such presence that it was as though I were in the store listening to it. . . . My memory was overwhelmed. The song followed me home" (17). For Julius, music threatens to overwhelm him and troubles his sense of continuity, causing him to experience a disrupted chronology.

It is this unruly dynamic created by the interplay between words and music, past and present, as well as sameness and difference that this essay is concerned with. *Open City*, we argue, reconfigures these dichotomies as a disjunctive interplay in which conflicting experiences and dissonant voices are bound together to create frequently uncanny echoes and unpredictable resonances. The very structure of the novel enhances this sense of contradictory openness: modelled on the musical fugue and its contrapuntal organization, the narrative intermingles different—at times conflicting and contrasting—voices, sensations, and memories. Time and again, Julius' free-floating thoughts, which occasionally merge into a stream of consciousness, are interrupted by other voices, memories, and thoughts.[2] While these bits and pieces resonate with one an-

other, they also produce dissonance, noise, and friction, thus entangling readers in an endless "web of echoes, contrasts, and connections between and across different domains" (Vermeulen 90). The contrapuntal organization unleashes an excessive remainder that defies unified, coherent, and fixed meaning-making to allow for the affective latencies that reveal contradictions immanent in Julius' narrative. Affective latencies refer to possible forces that are immanent in actualized, culturally prevalent orders and that materialize in dynamic and unexpected intensities, "disconnected from meaningful sequencing" (Massumi 25). Latency, a modality of the possible, is characterized by interruptions to normative stuctures, alerting subjects to "the limits . . . of knowledge" (Cole, "Blind Spot" 383). These limits crystallize in the novel's poetic and political endorsement of a minor ethics[3] that is committed to remembering repressed histories while highlighting the instability and unreliability of memory.

Published in 2011, Cole's novel almost immediately became an international success and has spurred a considerable range of scholarly research dedicated to the novel's originality in narrative mediation and its complex engagement with cosmopolitanism and mass migration in times of an accelerated globalization.[4] Several critics have cogently argued that the novel invites a cosmopolitan reading,[5] and yet they show that it does so not by showcasing new forms of conviviality but by unmasking the shortcomings of cosmopolitanism and its seemingly ethical momentum as a neoliberal "façade" (Krishnan 677). In *Open City* cosmopolitan attitudes are largely revealed to be a "rarified set" of "*aestheticist* . . . attitudes" and stylized gestures of a privileged elite (Vermeulen 87; emphasis in original), which ultimately fail to address, let alone change, existing inequities.

Open City tells the story of Julius, a half-Nigerian, half-German psychiatrist at New York City's Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, who roams the streets of New York City and later Brussels. On his walks, the thirty-something Julius encounters a number of different characters and visits a range of cultural institutions, such as museums, monuments, concert halls, memorial exhibitions, and internet cafés. Rather than having a well-developed and coherent plot, *Open City*'s composition of haphaz-

ard encounters, random visits, and aimless walks gives rise to a loose series of ruminations on art, philosophy, geography, and history. Step by step, Julius' thoughts, together with the multiplicity of other voices, stories, and memories evoked in the text, uncover marginalized histories—largely histories of violence, ranging from Native American genocide, the transcultural slave trade, and European histories of colonial exploitation, to the attacks of 9/11 and the Iraq War. Contrary to what the many references in the novel to cosmopolitan values might suggest, these histories of suppression connect New York City to Brussels. The titular open city is a far cry from cosmopolitan harmony. Recalling Brussels' war-time capitulation, openness in Cole's novel indexes violation, betrayal, and complicity and thus hints at the sinister side of celebratory historical accounts: "Had Brussels's rulers not opted to declare it an open city and thereby exempt it from bombardment during the Second World War," Julius explains, "it might have been reduced to rubble. It might have been another Dresden" (97). In *Open City*, the non-dialectical linking of supposed opposites (for example, the linking of openness to war with collaboration) becomes a central resource for making familiar terms suddenly strange, prompting readers to reconsider established interpretations.

Indeed, Julius, as an epitome of the hybrid narrator-protagonist that features so prominently in contemporary diasporic African writing, sets the frame for the novel's contrapuntal approach to memory and cosmopolitanism. At first, he impresses readers with his immense historical knowledge, meticulous descriptions of various aesthetic experiences, sensitivity to humanitarian injustices, and sharp analyses of pressing socio-political issues, much of which he unfolds "on the background of a globalized imagination" (Levy and Sznaider 204). As the narrative progresses, however, he becomes increasingly suspect as a narrator, and his cosmopolitan attitude is gradually unmasked as a shallow, frequently self-aggrandizing posture. While cultivating a curiosity for the arts, he remains "magnificently isolated from all loyalties" (Cole, *Open City* 107). Gradually, Julius transforms from an acute "observer of the world around him" into a narrator "marked by a malicious narcissism" (Krishnan 677). The cultural repression of violent histories of exploita-

tion is echoed in Julius' unwillingness to confront his own sinister past: he refuses to acknowledge a rape he is accused of having committed. This shocking revelation, which disqualifies Julius as a reliable narrator and keeper of cultural memory, invites readers to reconsider the facile association of the postcolonial or diasporic subject with histories of oppression.

Both the novel's topical concerns and its distinct narrative composition are closely linked to music and musicality. Besides the novel's structural imitation of the musical fugue, the novel abounds with references to various composers of classical music, such as Henry Purcell, Ferruccio Busoni, Gustav Mahler, Franz Schubert, George Frideric Handel, Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich, and Frédéric François Chopin. The novel also alludes to Jazz and Jazz musicians, mentioning Cannonball Adderley, Chet Baker, and Bill Evans, among others. And yet, despite the prominence of music and musicality in *Open City,* the role of these intermedial references have received relatively little attention.[6] We argue that a close examination of intermediality is crucial to understanding the distinctive ways in which the novel engages with transcultural histories, memory politics, and cosmopolitanism. The references to music evoke the latent, ghostly presence of the past in the present, gesturing toward historical elisions, frictions, and potentialities within culturally prevalent orders and the conventions and beliefs that underlie our sense of reality. To come to a fuller understanding of the intermedial poetics composed by the many musical references in the novel and their affects and effects, our essay will provide a brief definition of the concept of intermediality, showing how references to music in the novel in particular are linked to latency and atmosphere (Part II). In Part III and Part IV, we will investigate configurations of literary musicality in *Open City*, illustrating how an engagement with relations between literature and music add to our understanding of the novel's multi-layered exploration of history.

II. Intermedial References to Music: Figurations of Otherness and Plays of In-Between-ness

Intermedial references in literature exert contradictory forces: they support and extend but also displace and contradict the larger verbal

context of texts, thus producing a surplus of meaning by introducing musical frictions that resist and undermine the structural coherence of the text, which then gesture toward something nonlinear and latent.[7] While allowing the verbal text and music to be connected, intermedial configurations also create fruitful tensions between words and music that allow both to maintain, even showcase, their difference (Neumann 516). By translating music into words, the verbal form of signification is confronted with an aesthetic and material alternative, a sense of otherness, which reframes the signifying repertoires of text. Mimesis here, following Michael Taussig, turns into alterity, making possible the entanglements between separate entities (129). Precisely because this play between words and music reveals that one medium cannot simply be translated into another—that there will always remain an untranslatable, unruly remainder of musicality that exceeds assimilation—this tension affirms the inherent creativity and agency of mediality. Mediality is used to describe the specificities of distinct media, which are productive rather than simply reflective since they prefigure content, form, and possible effects. The agency of mediality manifests itself in eventful frictions and resistant traces that exceed the possibilities of representation and, as Vittoria Borsò argues, "cannot be integrated into existing orders of the sayable or audible" ("Audiovisionen" 167; our translation).

Intermedial research, which over the last fifteen years has turned into a bourgeoning field within the humanities, has largely been dedicated to verbal-visual configurations while references to music have received relatively little critical attention.[8] It seems that in the contemporary Western culture that is obsessed with both words and images, the significance of music is almost inevitably underestimated (Storr xii). That music somehow stands out from the other arts and proves resistant to theorization is often linked to its "unbreachable otherness" (Crapoulet 7), which results from its lack of representational or propositional character (Storr 3), the multidimensionality of rhythm (Serres 120), the unsignifying materiality of sound and voice (Kivy 4), as well as from its unique investment in atmosphere. Music, according to Peter Kivy, thrives on "abstract, nonrepresentational, frequently expressive patterns, forms, and perceptual qualities" that cannot be contained by discursive orders of knowl-

edge (4). The materiality of sound in particular counteracts the logic of representation. But this non-representational dimension of music may also have productive effects: freed from the subordination to discourse and form, the materiality of sound may become a source of potentiality, in the sense of Giorgio Agamben, an eventful occurrence in which possibility and impossibility of action coexist and are held in balance (*Potentialities* 182). The obdurate, asignifying force of materiality affects subjects in unpredictable ways and gives rise to new, underdetermined possibilities, attachments, and connections.[9] The materiality of sound "acts much like friction in the formation of meaning, or noise in communication" (Borsò, "Threshold" 132), turning music into an event that happens but that does not necessarily "happen *to* anything" or anybody (Scruton 5; emphasis in original).

Rather than producing meaning and knowledge, music creates certain moods. According to Anthony Storr, music conjures up "moods and passions that we have not yet encountered" (118); similarly, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht links moods (*Stimmungen*) directly to the musicality of sound. Much like music, Gumbrecht argues, *Stimmungen* affect our senses although we "are unable to explain the causality" (*Atmosphere* 4). The hearing of sounds involves and even moves our body, causing unpredictable changes in physical sensation. As the hearing of sounds makes possible an "encounter . . . with our physical environment" (4), it disrupts the individual's self-contained interiority. Expounding the different connotations of the German word for mood, Gumbrecht notes that *Stimmung* is connected to both the word *Stimme* (voice) and *stimmen* (to tune an instrument) and thus blurs the difference between human and non-human sound (4). Gumbrecht suggests that moods created by music have a productive potential since they draw our attention to hitherto unnoticed aspects of reality and call for new modes of perception and description: "As the tuning of an instrument suggests, specific moods and atmospheres are experienced on a continuum, like musical scales. They present themselves to us as nuances that challenge our powers of discernment and description, as well as the potential of language to capture them" (4). But while the act of tuning an instrument (*stimmen*) makes harmony possible, it may also cause dissonance

and friction, i.e., *Unstimmigkeiten*, which can evoke experiences, memories, and practices that put to the test a community's ideals, norms, and self-understanding.

Moods are complex, multilayered, and sometimes even opaque sensations; they emerge from the presence of something that defies translation into language and cannot be codified into words. According to Gumbrecht, the evocation of a specific mood typically hints at something that is latent, starting to crystallize but refusing to materialize.[10] Thus, moods or atmospheres are "sources of energy" that operate as a vague, often uncanny foreboding, hinting at latent realities that linger beneath the surface (*Atmosphere* 18). The latent cannot be discerned or uncovered, but its presence can be felt through the sensuous particularities of atmospheres that evoke the possible, i.e., unactualized layers of meanings, intractable forces, and marginalized experiences (Gumbrecht, "Dimensionen" 11). More specifically, latency designates possibilities, connections, and alternatives that are immanent in the real—not opposed to it. It is a force that opens the actual to the possible, showing that the possible is already inscribed in the actual. Opening up a "new set of historical possibilities" and accentuating the "shadowed historical persistence" of the past (Boxall 81, 62), latency troubles chronological continuities between past, present, and future. It encodes new temporalities that lay bare the incommensurabilities of our present and that provide an opportunity for new temporal connections between temporal layers to emerge.

What does this unruly scenario entail for the reading of literary texts? Reading for *Stimmung* and latency, Gumbrecht remarks, "cannot mean 'deciphering' atmospheres and moods, for they have no fixed signification. . . . Instead, it means discovering sources of energy in artifacts" (*Atmosphere* 18). Intermedial references to music in a literary text, we argue, are a particularly productive "source of energy." As outlined above, references to music mark an absent presence, oscillating between words and music, connectivity and difference, sameness and otherness, actuality and potentiality. These references enact unpredictable connections and confront readers with "a tinge of the unexpected" (Massumi 27). The eventful frictions that synaesthetically blend the acoustic and

the verbal give the text its distinct atmosphere, opening the novel to rhythmic transactions, irregular duration, and multitemporal pulsations, which gesture toward a possibility that is immanent in "past realities" (Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere* 14). Intermedial references to music can indeed, in the words of Cole, "trick [us] into divulging truths that we do not know we know" ("Blind Spot" 383).

III. The Sonic Fugue and Contrapuntal Readings of Western History in *Open City*

Open City begins with a temporal paradox, an opening that is at the same time a continuation and succession, gesturing to prior events and forestalling "any attribution of originary words or deeds" (Cuddy-Keane 97). This "self-canceling beginning" catapults readers *in medias res* (97), as if inviting them to join Julius on one of his endless walks: "And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city" (Cole, *Open City* 3). Julius explains that these walks started as an attempt to break with the monotony of his evenings, which largely consisted of reading, listening to classical radio, "watching bird migrations from [his] apartment" (3), and eventually falling asleep on the sofa. He makes much of the fact that when listening to classical music, he "generally avoided American stations" since their constant commercial breaks interrupted the flow of music (4). Instead, he turned to classical radio from Europe:

> And though I often couldn't understand the announcers, my comprehension of their languages being poor, the programming always met my evening mood with great exactness. Much of the music was familiar, as I had by this point been an avid listener to classical radio for more than fourteen years, but some of it was new. . . . I liked the murmur of the announcers, the sounds of those voices speaking calmly from thousands of miles away. . . . Those disembodied voices remain connected in my mind, even now, with the apparition of migrating geese. (4–5)

Tellingly, from the opening of the novel, scenes of Julius listening to classical music are permeated with a sense of isolation, displacement, and even lack. Not only the music of "Beethoven," "Wagner," and "Shchedrin" (4) but also the "disembodied" and indecipherable voices from faraway spaces match his "evening mood." The act of connecting his isolation with the ghostly voices of announcers in Europe creates an unstable paradox: the global connection builds on disconnection, which is only heightened by the fact that Julius "couldn't understand the announcers." Rather than securing an "aural communion" (Krishnan 681), listening to classical radio stations from Europe is experienced as an act of "speaking in tongues" (Agamben, *End of the Poem* 121), which puts language's semantic intentionality and referentiality under pressure. This act indexes the very limits of communicability and translatability, demarcating where commonalities across borders fail. Agamben argues that speaking in tongues does not consist in the "pure utterance of inarticulate sounds" or in "words whose meaning I do not understand" (*End of the Poem* 66). Rather, as Daniel Heller-Roazen explains Agamben's line of reasoning, "[t]o hear such sounds is to know they mean something without knowing exactly what such a 'something' might be; in other words, it is to discern an intention to signify that cannot be identified with any particular signification" (594). The frictions between the intention to signify and the failure of others to understand that intention mark a non-signifying form of communication (594), which thrives on the materiality of sound rather than the potential meaning of the sign. The very lack of relationship, here enacted by decoupling the signifier from the signified, evokes a socio-politically resonant scenario of alienation and absence that Julius links to processes of migration: "Those disembodied voices," he stresses, "remain connected in my mind, even now, with the apparition of migrating geese" (Cole, *Open City* 5).

In the novel's opening passages, classical music persistently alludes to something beyond the present moment—to other spaces, cultures, and languages intertwined with traveling, transport, and migration. As if to compensate for his isolation, Julius starts reading his books out loud, "with [himself] as [his] audience" (Cole, *Open City* 6), transforming

the monologic structure of his narrative into a network of voices: "I noticed the odd way my voice mingled with the murmur of the French, German, or Dutch radio announcers, or with the thin texture of the violin strings of the orchestras" (5). As he inscribes his voice into the texture of the music and the announcements played on the radio, Julius' discourse comes to resemble what he calls a "sonic fugue" (5).

The fugue, translated from the Latin word *fuga* which literally means flight or escape,[11] is a contrapuntal style of composition that brings together two or more different voices which "enter imitatively one after the other, each 'giving chase' to the preceding voice" and co-existing in a tonal pattern of dissonance and consonance (Latham). Figuring prominently in the work of classical eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composers—such as Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven—the tonal fugue is a genuinely polyphonic form that follows a clearly defined pattern. It builds on a theme that is introduced by the first voice and subsequently imitated by a second voice, usually in a different pitch. This compositional procedure is repeated with the entry of each new voice, typically yielding "an alternating sequence of subject and answer" (Latham). Because each voice will eventually counter the newly entering voice, the fugue is generally considered the most emblematic form of imitative counterpoint.[12] In counterpoint, each voice reaches out for another voice, both accepting and displacing its primacy (Adorno 145–69). The result is, as Edward Said remarks in *Music at the Limits*, a polyphonic verticality that unsettles hierarchical patterns:

> In counterpoint a melody is always in the process of being repeated by one or another voice: the result is horizontal, rather than vertical, music. Any series of notes is thus capable of an infinite set of transformations, as the series (or melody or subject) is taken up first by one voice then by another, the voices always continuing to sound against, as well as with, all the others. (5)

Another way to say this might be that the fugue's contrapuntal composition fosters entanglement and interconnectedness, without glossing over the singularity of the particular.[13]

The contrapuntal principle underlies the novel's approach to history. For "[m]ore than anything else," Julius is a contrapuntal "reader" of urban spaces, histories, politics, the arts, and many other cultural phenomena (Goyal 66). Indeed, the novel's most salient characteristic is its abrupt shifts from Julius' sophisticated reflection on the monuments of civilization to his excavation of repressed histories of violence lying underneath.[14] In this way, the prevalent histories, which frequently support the grand narratives of nations, are confronted with their latent counter-histories, yielding a complex interplay between affirmation and negation. Time and again, Julius uses the disruptive potential inherent in the latent resources of the past to inscribe into the metropolitan icons of New York and Brussels repressed acts of exploitation and violence. When wandering through the maze-like streets of New York, he realizes that the grand "office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government" were once the site of an African burial ground (Cole, *Open City* 220). In a similar way, Julius uncovers the histories of migrants buried under the World Trade Center and, in so doing, evokes the close links between colonialism, transcultural violence, and global capitalism—links that underline the primacy of capitalist interests over cosmopolitan ideals. When Julius travels to Belgium and excavates the country's colonial histories of exploitation hidden under the grandeur of metropolitan streets, New York's subaltern histories suddenly begin to resonate with those of Brussels. Julius' contrapuntal readings of time and space establish the fragile but haunting presence of erased histories, now present only "as a trace" (Cole, *Open City* 54). In registering these traces, the contrapuntal narrative gradually replaces the linear, progressive time of globalization with Wai Chee Dimock's deep time, an alternative, multi-layered temporality that spans the distance between centuries and continents.

Much of the novel's aesthetic complexity and socio-political ambiguity resides in the fact that Julius' contrapuntal reading of time and space is itself embedded in the novel's dense fugue-like contrapuntal structure. Significantly, the structure defies Julius' control and, with each added narrative, sheds a different light on his critical ruminations. Time and again, the stories and voices of other characters interrupt and

find their way into Julius' homodiegetic narrative: Dr. Saito, his mentor and former professor whom he occasionally meets to discuss literature and the arts; Saidu, a refugee from Liberia; Pierre, a Haitian shoe-polisher; his ex-girlfriend Nadège; Dr. Maillotte, with whom be becomes acquainted on his flight to Brussels; and Farouq and Khalil, two North African migrants whom Julius meets in Brussels. Jointly, they produce a dense web of echoes, an echo-chamber in the sense of Roland Barthes,[15] which pervasively displaces notions of a single voice and unified self. The occasional absence of quotation marks in the novel adds to this sense of dissolution since at times it becomes impossible to clearly distinguish between the narrator and the other characters (Vermeulen 94). As different voices intermingle and narrative hierarchies are blurred, conventional notions of the novel as a privileged site for the exploration of subjectivity, interiority, and "the realities of psychic life" lose their validity (94). Though the "'contest' between voices" (Wolf 31) invites a number of possible connections between seemingly unrelated characters, times, and spaces and allows actualized historical narratives to resonate with latent experiences, *Open City* refutes the possibility of a narrative voice that could establish relations between strangers and create coherence. The deeper socio-political significance of this strategy lies in the novel's questioning of conventional understandings of the self and community. If Cole's novel does imagine a community, this community is one "without unity" (Culler 32)—built on difference, friction, and traumatic proximity, not on natural, genealogical relations.

Many of the stories that make their way into Julius' narrative provide a counterpoint to Western ideals of cosmopolitan hospitality and ethics. Jonathan Culler, taking issue with Benedict Anderson's claim that the nineteenth-century European novel contributed to national homogenization, argues that narratives told from a limited point of view frequently usher in social plurality and destabilize notions of national unity (Culler 23). This imagining of a different kind of community—i.e., a community without a centre and built on difference rather than natural, genealogical relations—equally applies to *Open City*, which insistently shows that strangeness and plurality cannot be reduced or integrated into a totalizing whole. For example, Saidu's painful account of the civil

war in Liberia (in which most of his family was killed), his escape to the US, and his detention in Queens indicate the limits of cosmopolitanism. But importantly, these stories also provide counterpoints to Julius' cultivated knowingness. More often than not, Julius fails to respond to the stories that others share with him, and instead of showing sympathetic engagement, he remains detached from the people who reach out to him. When Julius' next-door neighbor tells him about his wife's death five months earlier, he admits, "I had known nothing in the weeks when her husband mourned, nothing when I had nodded to him in greeting with headphones in my ears" (Cole, *Open City* 21). Music thwarts rather than enables connection. And while replacing the single narrative perspective with multiple voices might index plurality and polyvocality, it primarily reveals Julius' incapacity to think in relational terms.

Moreover, Julius is unable or unwilling to critically assess the validity of the political ideas and loyalties that other characters voice. Among the most disturbing voices in the novel are those of Farouq and Khalil, two North African migrants with whom Julius discusses urgent political topics like the conflict between Israel and Palestine and Islamophobia in the wake of 9/11. Though Julius is impressed by Farouq's immense knowledge of contemporary politics and his familiarity with the theories of Paul de Man, Edward Said, Tahar Ben Jalloun, and Walter Benjamin, Julius does not understand Farouq's passionate language: "the victimized Other: how strange, I thought, that he used an expression like that in a casual conversation" (105). Farouq's is a kind of language in which the division between political and personal allegiances, which Julius vehemently upholds, collapses. When Khalil rehearses some fairly stereotypical, politically disquieting notions about Hamas, Israel, and American foreign policies and bluntly expresses his sympathies for the 9/11 attacks, Julius fails to respond to this kind of radical thinking in any meaningful way. He muses whether "having no causes, . . . [and] being magnificently isolated from all loyalties" (107), might be a better alternative to the rage felt by Farouq and Khalil.

More than once, then, Julius loses control over "the fugue of voices" (Cole, *Open City* 216) and either remains unaffected or lets them go unchallenged. As these voices introduce "noises from far off" and give

chase to Julius' dominant narrative voice (22), they reveal Julius' affective distance, his unwillingness to commit to other people and their cosmopolitan ideals. The many counterpoints which remain unanswered, eliciting neither response nor resonance, persistently exceed the fugue's well-ordered structure and interrupt its rhythmic flow, opening it up to contingency, inconsequentiality, and atonality.[16] It seems that the Western model of the fugue, with its rigidly defined principles and its carefully balanced interplay between dissonance and consonance is hardly capable of sustaining the multiplicity of competing voices and disquieting accounts that evoke the inequalities in a globalized world. In *Open City*, tensions and frictions prevail with hardly any possibility of release. In this process, the contrapuntal structure, including the principle of polyphony, becomes shallow and inconsequential, if not ethically suspect. Vermeulen is right when he notes that "[t]he novel can be read as a catalogue of failed attempts to live up to the expectation of achieved polyphonic form" (92). Though the counterpoint and polyphony make room for difference, multiplicity, and plurality, they hardly establish connections across difference. What prevails is a constant background noise, which does not so much index socio-cultural plurality as it does *Unstimmigkeit*, i.e., dissonance within contemporary political and normative orders. By accentuating the limits of the contrapuntal form, *Open City* also compels us to reconsider facile assumptions about difference, polyphony, and hybridity that underwrite much contemporary critical theory and are all too often celebrated as the backbone of cosmopolitan conviviality.

The novel's musicalization counters Julius' reading of the city, an act that, broadly speaking, presupposes a decipherable surface. The contrapuntal structure also puts to the test the idea of being a reader of cities, stories, and people. Rather than trying to read meaning into what we perceive, the novel's intermediality challenges readers to accept a certain indeterminacy, unpredictability, and unreliability. The structure and musicality of the narrative do not "resolve into meaning" and resist integration into a linear, chronologically ordered narrative (Cole, *Open City* 22); the novel does, however, create a distinctive rhythm that unsettles the concept of space as "a synchronous surface" and uncovers its

"diachronic constitution" (Haverkamp 12). This networked and multi-layered space bears the traces of the unactualized past—a past with yet unknown potential for the present and future. "Each one of those past moments," Julius notes, "was present now" (Cole, *Open City* 54). Though Julius' claim suggests an awareness of the past's persistence, he is unable to acknowledge how his own history exerts psychological pressure on his behavior.

Giving rise to feedback loops, spiraling, and disruption, one might best describe the rhythm of latency as an "idiorrhythm" (Barthes, *How to Live Together* 35). According to Roland Barthes, the idiorrhythm is a "transitory" and "fleeting" rhythm that is "always made in opposition to power" (35). It emerges in "the interstices, the fugitivity of the code" (Barthes 7)—that is, a regulating structure of signifying systems—and allows "for imperfection, for a supplement, a lack, an *idios*: what doesn't fit the structure, or would have to be made to fit" (35). In *Open City*, idiorrhythm arises from the constant changes in narrative tempo. While some chapters are dominated by long descriptions of the visual arts and architecture and unfold in a relaxed, unhurried manner, others perform rapid cuts and hectically jump from one episode or impression to the next, introducing "a potentially infinite series of submovements punctuated by jerks," as Massumi describes it in relation to affect (40). Time and again, the narrative circles back through different variations of a specific motif before morphing into the fluidities of rhythmic extemporization. And while some chapters start *in medias res* and have no obvious connection to the preceding chapter, others begin where the previous chapter ended and establish a sense of continuity. The changes in rhythm create the nagging feeling of a constantly deferred conclusion, which remains unreachable according to the dynamic of the idiorrhythm.

Laying bare possible, forgotten, and repressed experiences, *Open City*'s contrapuntal organization appears to reflect what Said calls a "contrapuntal analysis" (*Culture* 318). To counter hegemonic, unified versions of the past, Said asserts that "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-

existing and interacting with others" (36). That is to say that contrapuntal analysis, which Said expressly links to the contrapuntal principle in Western classical music, makes it possible to read the imperial archive and related identitarian narratives against the grain. As the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that *Open City* only partly acts as contrapuntal analysis. Though its contrapuntal structure links diverse and seemingly unrelated experiences while reconfiguring history from the perspective of its immanent otherness, the novel also shows that some experiences, spaces, and people resist being read. Latent history, a spectral presence "across centuries" (Cole, *Open City* 221), remains largely unintelligible and inaudible within what Jeremy Gilbert calls, in the context of the discrepant relation between music and words, "the structural logic of language." But it is not only the very readability of experiences, histories, spaces, and persons that *Open City* calls into question but also the notion of a privileged reader. Who after all, the novel asks, can claim the right to read history in an ethically sound manner?

IV. Classical Western Music, African Repercussions, and the Dissociative Fugue: "The *Unfug* of the Code"

Julius' contemplation of the repressed histories of colonialism, economic exploitation, and transatlantic slavery that have gone into the making of contemporary New York and Brussels sparks his wish to understand his own part in these histories. Shortly after reflecting on the history of the World Trade Centre and forced dislocation within New York of "[t]he Syrians, the Lebanese, and other people from the Levant [who] had been pushed across the river to Brooklyn," Julius states, "I wanted to find the line that connected me to my own part in these stories. Somewhere close to the water, holding tight to what he knew of life, the boy had, with a sharp clack, again gone aloft" (Cole, *Open City* 59). What is remarkable about this statement is not only Julius' wish for connection—which is at odds with his usual deliberately detached perspective—but also his abrupt change in pronoun from "I" to "he." The pronoun "he" creates a network of possible references: it might refer to one of the skateboarders Julius has just watched or to John Brewster's "painting of a child holding a bird on a blue thread" (38) that caught his attention in the

American Folk Art Museum (Vermeulen 97). However, it seems more plausible that the third-person pronoun refers to Julius himself, signaling his dissociation from his past and the general alienation that grips his diasporic subjectivity. Tellingly, Julius, who is practically obsessed with uncovering collective histories, reveals little about his personal past. It is only through the dense network of intermedial references to music that Julius' troubled past is conjured up, registering experiences that had previously resisted orders of the sayable.

Julius' Nigerian upbringing and scholarly education are steeped in colonial history and its persistent postcolonial repercussions. He lost his Nigerian Yoruban father at the age of fourteen; he is also estranged from his German-born mother, who, even after her husband's death, feels closely connected to Nigeria. His rejection of his mother spurs his wish to leave his family home behind and to join a military school in Zaria, which deepens Julius' estrangement from his country of birth. His classmates perceive him as the other, a "foreigner" (Cole, *Open City* 83). It is also here, in the military context of a colonial educational system designed to extol Western culture, where Julius first becomes acquainted with classical music. He experiences this introduction as highly unsatisfactory since the music lessons "never involved any listening to music, or the use of instruments, and our musical education was composed of memorized facts: Handel's birth date, Bach's birth date, the titles of Schubert lieder" (82). The crippling over-identification with colonial culture evidently leaves little room for an appraisal of local music; it recalls the "Manichean divisions" that lie at the heart of colonialism (Krishnan 688), which reverberates in Julius' rejection of his Nigerian roots, in a suppression of his (post)colonial difference. Julius eventually turns his back on Nigeria and moves to the US, where he struggles to leave his past behind and to enact what Madhu Krishnan calls "the total eradication of history under the auspices of colonial cleaving" (688). Cleaving refers to the act of removing colonial elements of one's life selectively—in this case, Julius' attempt to move beyond his Nigerian identity and memories of his past. Because Julius is mired in isolation and alienation, his memories of Africa mainly produce gaps, blank spaces, and discontinuities: "The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly

empty space, great expanses of nothing. . . . Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten" (Cole, *Open City* 155). As if to overcome the physical and psychic splits that underlie his (post)colonial subjectivity, Julius, once in New York, becomes "an avid listener" (4) to classical music and develops a dislike of jazz.

According to Cameron Fae Bushnell, classical Western music is closely linked to empire and imperial efforts to subsume the heterogeneity of colonial knowledges under unifying Eurocentric structures. Western music, Bushnell maintains, "operates as a metonym for a totalizing system based in European culture" (3) and functions as a "symbol for empire, its attitudes, structures, and systems of order" (11). Bushnell notes that classical Western music can be traced back to ancient Greece, where it underwrote "cultural notions of 'greatness'" and eventually became "universally emblematic of cultural superiority" (12). To be sure, Bushnell's statement glosses over the great diversity of classical Western music and ignores the potential disruptions and creative transformations that are introduced once Western music is transferred into colonial contexts. Such creative appropriations trouble efforts of construing empires as homogenous spaces. And yet Bushnell has a point when arguing that classical Western music formed an integral part of the colonial educational system, which was designed to propel the "civilization" of the colonized and showcase the presumed superiority of the West (12). Arguably, Julius' nagging sense of alienation goes hand in hand with his endorsement of Western music and his concomitant rejection of jazz music, which is thick with histories of transatlantic slavery but also with socio-political resistance and cultural revitalization. His ostentatious reveling in classical Western music and his dislike of jazz might indeed express Julius' desire to become absorbed by hegemonic Western and non-black subjectivities.[17] But *Open City* might as well be challenging facile ethnocentric understandings of identification, including the stereotypical link between racial heritage and cultural preference. If *Open City* is an "African book" as Cole claims ("Interview"), then this sense of Africanness clearly transgresses older concepts of black solidarity and ethnic heritage, such as provided by pan-Africanism, to usher in more ambiguous forms of identification that "go beyond conventional

frames" (Goyal 68). In this way, the novel alerts readers to the perils of identity politics, which reduces subjects (including authors) to representatives of a social group.

Paralleling the efforts of Western cultures to conceal their complicity with violence and exploitation, Julius' dissociation from his Nigerian past crystallizes in his denial of his role as Moji's violator. In this context, it is useful to remember that Moji is the sister of Julius' childhood friend in Nigeria, which is why he associates her closely with Nigeria. Just as he has distanced himself from his homeland, his "friend, or rather an acquaintance" is also "long forgotten" (Cole, *Open City* 156). The novel once again draws on a contrapuntal principle, where the entry of Moji's story displaces the primacy of Julius' voice and—dramatizing the dynamic of accusation and denial, as well as remembering and forgetting—yields a dissonant polyphony that underlies the novel's engagement with history. Before reconnecting with Moji at a party in New York, where she accuses him of raping her years ago in Nigeria, Julius contemplates with typical self-complacency how individuals struggle to hold onto a sense of normalcy. According to him, such a sense of normalcy first and foremost aims at psychic self-preservation and the construction of a usable past, which involves constant reinterpretations of wrongdoings:

> Each person must, on some level, take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him. Perhaps this is what we mean by sanity: that, whatever our self-admitted eccentricities might be, we are not the villains of our own stories. In fact, it is quite the contrary: we play, and only play, the hero and in the swirl of other people's stories, insofar as those stories concern us at all, we are never less than heroic. . . . From my point of view, thinking about the story of my life, even without claiming any especially heightened sense of ethics, I am satisfied that I have hewed close to the good. (243)

The framing is remarkable since it bolsters what James Wood calls Julius' "selfish normality" that bluntly vindicates Julius' ethical arbitrariness:

because Julius does not "[claim] any especially heightened sense of ethics," he is satisfied that he has mostly "hewed close to the good." But ethics, as Moji makes clear, does not only involve hewing "close to the good"; it also involves the willingness to remember histories that interfere with individual needs of self-preservation.

When Moji confronts Julius with the knowledge that he raped her in their teens, he acts like he "knew nothing about it, had even forgotten her, to the point of not recognizing her when [they] met again" (Cole, *Open City* 244). The act of dissociating himself from a past that continues to traumatize her, Moji suggests, is itself a manifestation of power and privilege; accordingly, she considers Julius' ostentatious and self-complacent indifference a "luxury of denial [that] had not been possible for her" (244). But instead of responding to Moji's charge, Julius simply walks away, "enjoying the play of light on the river" when the

> just risen sun came at the Hudson at such an acute angle that the river gleamed like aluminum roofing. At that moment—and I remember this exactly as though it were being replayed in front of me right now—I thought of how, in his journals, Camus tells a double story concerning Nietzsche and Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, a Roman hero from the sixth century B.C.E. (246)

While Julius does not deny the truthfulness of Moji's story, he refuses to be affected by it and, in an act of "calibration" (243), turns her charge into just another story. Jointly, Moji's story of traumatic suffering and Julius' failure to respond to the pain of others produce a "double story" in which the dynamics of point and counterpoint, of accusation and denial, turn ethics into a self-complacent solipsism,[18] accentuating the power structures and partiality that underlie the construction of memory. This dense, disjunctive, and multilayered temporality—akin to the "speed of [the] mental disassociations" (Cole, *Open City* 18) that Julius admits to be suffering from—slips through the net of linear chronology and reveals the limits of narrative memory to produce continuity and an ethically meaningful past. Though narrative memory is often praised as a privileged form of establishing meaningful

connections between past, present, and future, the novel illustrates that it may also give rise to disruptions and ethically precarious interpretations of the past.

In an interview, Cole has noted that a "plausible" (though not openly marked) "framing device for *Open City* is a series of visits by Julius to his psychiatrist" ("Interview"). Indeed, Moji's accusations shed a different light on the erudite protagonist. It confirms what Julius' ostentatious detachment has suggested all along, namely that his incessant walking has a compulsive dimension that intimately connects the novel's fugue to its counterpoint, the so-called "dissociative fugue" (Vermeulen 102). According to standard definitions, dissociative fugue, also known as psychogenic fugue, is characterized by temporary identity confusion, mental dissociation, breakdowns of memory, as well as the compulsion to wander and travel away from home (American Psychiatric Association). Though people suffering from dissociative fugue show few outward signs of illness, the symptoms make it difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate social relationships. Seen from this perspective, the novel's fugue form is deeply steeped in repression and amnesia. These materialize in Julius' own dissociative flight from his African past and in his attendant attempts to negate his (post)colonial difference. As suggested by the novel's contrapuntal structures, the dissociative fugue is not the opposite but an integral part of the fugue. While the novel, due to its contrapuntal structure, lays bare many disregarded histories, it also throws into relief the limits and exclusions inherent in any historical account. The formation of meaning per force relies on acts of selection and exclusion. The novel's paradoxical structure invites us to reconsider other binary divisions and easy classifications that structure our thinking, such as the division between normalcy and pathology, cosmopolitanism and violence, remembering and forgetting, postcoloniality and hegemony, and Africa and the West. Perhaps, more than anything, Cole's *Open City* teaches us how to listen to the "*fugitivity* of the code" (Barthes, *How to Live Together* 7)—the gaps and uncertainties that resist complete integration into preformed meaning-making practices—and to "trace out a story from what was omitted" (Cole, *Open City* 9): We are asked to surrender to unheard, latent, and ambiguous sounds so that a distancing

from well-known narratives about the nation, community, history, and identity becomes possible.

In *Open City*, the structural interdependency of the fugue and the dissociative fugue assert the close links between culture and violence. It confirms Benjamin's thesis that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256). Julius is indeed blinded by the "overwhelming . . . light" of Western art, but he immediately admits that "even that light was shadowed" (Cole, *Open City* 250). As the fugue and the dissociative fugue are entangled in a pattern of confirmation and negation, *Open City* sets free latencies of the past that haunt cultures and individuals, asking them to acknowledge their own unreliability and complicity in mechanisms of exploitation and power. This complicity, the novel suggests, does not diminish the obligation to remember, write, and rewrite history; it does however oblige us to critically assess the stories that we tell ourselves and others.

In a central passage of the novel, Julius, wandering through Brussels, enters a church in which an "unseen organist" plays a "Baroque piece" that soon "takes on the spirit of something else," something that resembles Peter Maxwell Davies' "O God Abufe" (Cole, *Open City* 138). The piece is made up of "distinct fugitive notes that sh[o]ot through the musical texture," creating a melody that is "difficult to catch hold of" and that elicits a "fractured, scattered feeling" in Julius (138). It takes Julius a while to realize that the music was not played by an "unseen organist" but "was recorded and piped in through tiny speakers" and that the "source of the fracture in the sound" was "a small yellow vacuum cleaner" (138). Here, the echo-chamber reveals its intractable, uncanny agency as the "fugitive notes" produce ever new, unpredictable, and uncontainable resonances, underlining the unreliability of memory from which to retrieve a solid understanding of the past. As a matter of fact, the peculiar mixture between the sound of high culture and those of machines, between Baroque music and "[t]he high-pitched hum from the machine" (138), temporarily bring to the fore what Julius calls the "*diabolus in musica*" (138)—the marginalized, latent, and unruly otherness immanent in standardized models of cultural patterns, as well as signifying and generic models. But they also point to the extent to

which Julius is blinded by the "overwhelming . . . light" of Western music (250), all too willing to interpret the sound of the vacuum cleaner as "distinct fugitive notes" (138). The vacuum cleaner, Julius eventually notices, is pushed by a woman who, a "few weeks before, [he] would have assumed . . . was Congolese" (138) and whose presence in the Belgium church "might . . . be a means of escape" designed to "forget" her past (140). Evoking escape, refuge, forgetting, and migration but also the limits of knowledge, the "fugitive notes" are a fitting expression of the acts of repression and absences that stabilize seemingly self-contained discourses. As the "fugitive notes" introduce an "irruptive sense of things past" (156) that trouble any "secure version of the past" (156), they produce what Anselm Haverkamp calls the "*Unfug* [nuisance] of the code" (166). According to Haverkamp, the "*Unfug* of the code" is precisely the site where the disturbing presence of latent pasts becomes perceptible and where individuals are temporarily confronted with their sinister, repressed histories (166).

V. "Mahler's Sense of an Ending": Back to the Beginning

Open City ends as it begins—with a temporal paradox. The ending brings us back to the beginning, namely to Mahler's music and to the mysteries of bird flight, and yet, the circular structure notwithstanding, the narrative refuses to come full circle. Julius, one year older and barely changed by his confrontation with past atrocities, attends a performance of Mahler's Ninth Symphony at Carnegie Hall. Julius is fascinated by the Austrian Jewish composer's "obsession with last things" and the general "sense of an ending" that pervades his music (Cole, *Open City* 250). The Ninth Symphony in particular is suffused with the personal disasters Mahler faced in his last years. Because of "the vicious politics of an anti-Semitic nature," Mahler was "forced out of his directorship at the Vienna Opera" and eventually migrated to New York (249); his daughter Maria Anna died of scarlet fever and diphtheria, and Mahler himself was diagnosed with a heart defect. Mahler, Julius muses, "made himself a master of the ends of symphonies, the end of a body of work, and the end of his own life. Even the Ninth wasn't his very last work; fragments of a Tenth Symphony survive, and it is even more funereal

than the preceding works" (250). But for Julius, Mahler's music evokes a sense of ending and death, both of which self-reflexively frame the narrative's own poetics of ending. In addition, Mahler's music transcends binary oppositions, moving beyond totalizing structures to forge new, multi-layered connections that might serve as a resource for pluralized modes of world-building. "Mahler's music," Julius notes, "is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question" (252). These musings on Mahler's music induce Julius, in a very rare moment in the novel, to acknowledge his own blackness, which, up to that point, he has attempted to ignore or suppress through his endorsement of hegemonic practices. The fact that this acknowledgement is elicited by Mahler's music is fitting because the composer's ambivalence toward his own Jewishness parallels Julius' struggle with his own blackness. Scanning the audience in Carnegie Hall, Julius notes: "Almost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white. . . . I am used to it, but it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them" (251–52). Once again, the novel suggests that the possibilities of music, namely its power to communicate new, open, and pluralized relations, fail to link up to real-world politics. As long as difference is negated and traumatic pasts are repressed to serve the self-aggrandizing needs of nations and individuals, change toward a more cosmopolitan and ethically more sound society appears impossible.

Open City is far from constructing a strong, politically effective counter-story that could confirm difference and mobilize marginalized voices to resist hegemonic practices. Similar to music, the novel has no message and no single point. Its engagement with political atrocities cannot be translated into any form of commitment or clear ideological position. Its refusal to associate the arts with political and moral reflexivity geared toward resistance does not however indicate a lack or even failure.[19] Rather, it has productive implications because it emphasizes the very eventfulness of the arts, including acts of reading and listening, prior to and independent from any political lesson, ideology, or

belief. The novel's poetics and politics of remembering are pitched in a minor key; they are ambiguous and polyvocal in their political thrust and dissonant in their aesthetic. The contrapuntal principle as well as the frictions between verbal narrative and musicality set free latencies—both in the sense of the historically repressed but also the historically possible—that resist integration into a unified, coherent, and meaningful structure and that defy attempts at narrative closure. The "*Unfug* of the code" evokes competing voices and dissonant noises—noises that mark their affective power by gesturing toward the forgotten and the repressed while underlying the instabilities, contradictions, and even biases of any historical narrative. This performative paradox of a weighty historical narrative that asks readers to think about historical atrocities through the use of an ethically unreliable narrator who abuses the privileges afford by his hegemonic position as a male, intellectual American lies at the heart of the novel. *Open City* is a polyvocal exploration of the ethical injunction that repressed and marginalized histories need to be remembered, even if such acts of remembering might be tainted by the fallacies of memory. The act of remembering in itself does not automatically translate into more ethically sound positions, let alone into a historical consciousness, from which a cosmopolitan ethics could be derived.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 Derrida's concept of *survivre* describes the living on (the persistence) of the past throughout time. This living on is not only a continuation of life but also a living on with a surplus, a transformed life. *Survivre* is connected to a ghostly return ("[s]urvivance et revenance" [Derrida, "Survivre" 153]), which has unpredictable effects because it cuts across life and death. Derrida's concept takes issue with the primacy of those living in the present and instead seeks to instill a sense of responsibility for the non-living who continue to live-on. For Derrida, it is especially language and writing in which a *survivre* of the past can happen and with which our article is concerned.

2 As Vermeulen notes, because of its melancholic tone, its pronounced engagement with the ethics of remembering, as well as its innovative play with the generic conventions of the novel, *Open City* has repeatedly been compared to the works of W. G. Sebald, one of the writers to whom Cole feels indebted (82).

3 We use the term "minor" in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari to refer to alternative political expressions and actions, which unfold a transformative yet unstable force that escapes codification and stabilization. Accordingly, a minor ethics negotiates ethical issues in relation to situated conditions and localized knowledge rather than universal principles, remaining aware of its own limits.

4 See Hallemeier; Krishnan; Vermeulen; Gehrmann; Oniwe; Hartwiger. Most of these contributions deal with the novel's ambivalent exploration of cosmopolitanism, paying specific attention to Julius' knowledgeable but unaffected perspective.

5 See, Hallemeier; Vermeulen; Krishnan.

6 Only Vermeulen (91–94) pays close attention to the musical fugue form and its contrapuntal principle of composition; Maver briefly mentions the novel's engagement with the fugue.

7 A writer, photographer, photography critic, and art historian, Cole is eager to probe new interrelations, transfers, and passages between words, images, and sounds and consistently works towards hybridizing media. Intermediality is a consistent feature of his work.

8 There are exceptions to the rule, such as the fine studies by Wolf, Bushnell, and Hoene.

9 While many scholars link the specificity of music to its connection to emotions (Storr 3; Levinson 11), we argue that music has a capacity to induce different affective states in listeners. Whereas emotions can typically be codified, classified, and named, affect is best understood as a potent yet underdetermined intensity (Massumi 24–25; Vermeulen 7) that "passes through but also beyond personal feelings" (Terada 110).

10 These ideas are expresses in Gumbrecht's *After 1945* (23) and "Encounter" (94).

11 The fugue gained popularity in the middle of the eighteenth century, mainly in Germany. The term is derived from the Italian *fuga*, which literally means "flight," and also from the Latin word *fuga*, meaning "ardor." The term also references the act of "running away" and "fleeing," from the Latin verb *fugere*. The current English spelling (1660s) is derived from the French translation of the Italian word ("Fugue").

12 For a more detailed discussion of the formal elements of the fugue, see Ratner's *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*.

13 Despite its relatively strict formal rules, the fugue's horizontal structure is often considered a dialogic and pluralizing form.

14 For a similar reading, see Vermeulen's analysis in *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form*.

15 Barthes' concept of the echo-chamber understands human speech as the product of previous utterances. The concept stresses the connections between utterances across time and cultures and celebrates plurality. The echo-chamber is a repetition, an echo, but a repetition with a difference (*Roland Barthes* 74). By this token, we understand the mingling of different voices in the novel as an echo-chamber: the voices revolve around similar ideas but always approach them slightly differently, thus producing echoes and slippages.

16 We understand atonality in the broad sense, i.e., as a lack of a tonal center.

17 Goyal also reads how Julius "recoils from commitment of any sort" as indicative of his wish to not be easily read as a black subject (66).

18 For a similar assessment, see Wood's review of the novel, "The Arrival of Enigmas."

19 In her reading of *Open City*, Goyal highlights the need to rethink established postcolonial approaches to literature. According to her, the novel addresses "the schism between postcolonial theory advocating hybridity or opacity and postcolonial literature gleaning ordinary life, both quotidian and violent" (66).

Works Cited

Adorno, Theodor W. "Die Funktion des Kontrapunktes in der neuen Musik." *Musikalische Schriften. Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, Suhrkamp, 1978, pp. 145–69.

Agamben, Giorgio. *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Stanford UP, 1999.

——. *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy.* Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford UP, 1999.

American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Dsm-5*. American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.

Barthes, Roland. *How to Live Together*: *Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces.* Columbia UP, 2012.

——. *Roland Barthes*. 1977. Translated by Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, 2010.

Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." 1940. *Walter Benjamin: Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken, 1968, pp. 253–64.

Borsò, Vittoria. "Audiovisionen der Schrift an der Grenze des Sagbaren und Sichtbaren: zur Ethik der Materialität." *Poetische Gerechtigkeit*, edited by Sebastian Donat et al., Duke UP, 2012, pp. 163–88.

——. "On the Threshold between Visibility and Sayability: The Event of Visuality in the Materiality of the Image." *Between Urban Topographies and Political Spaces: Threshold Experiences*, edited by Alexis Nuselovici et al., Lexington, 2014, pp. 129–42.

Boxall, Peter. *Twenty-First-Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

Bushnell, Cameron Fae. *Postcolonial Readings of Music in World Literature: Turning Empire on Its Ear*. Routledge, 2013.

Cole, Teju. *Open City*. Faber & Faber, 2011.

——. "Interview: Teju Cole." *Post 45*, 19 Jan. 2015, post45.research.yale.edu/2015/01/interview-teju-cole/. Accessed 27 Mar 2018.

——. "Blind Spot." *Known and Strange Things*. Faber & Faber, 2016, pp. 379–85.

Crapoulet, Emilie. "Voicing the Music in Literature: 'Musicality as a Travelling Concept'." *European Journal of English Studies,* vol. 13, no. 1, 2009, pp. 79–91.

Cuddy-Keane, Melba. "Virginia Woolf and Beginning's Ragged Edge." *Narrative Beginnings: Theories and Practices*, edited by Brian Richardson, U of Nebraska P, 2008, pp. 96–112.

Culler, Jonathan. "Anderson and the Novel." *Diacritic*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1999, pp. 19–39.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated and with a foreword by Brian Massumi, Continuum, 2004.

Derrida, Jacques. "Survivre." *Parages*, by Jacques Derrida, Galilée, 1986, pp. 119–218.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Deep Time: American Literature and World History." *American Literary History*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2001, pp. 755–77.

"Fugue." Online Etymology Dictionary, www.etymonline.com/word/fugue.

Gehrmann, Susanne. "Cosmopolitanism with African Roots: Afropolitanism's Ambivalent Mobilities." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp. 61–72.

Gilbert, Jeremy. "Signifying Nothing: 'Culture,' 'Discourse' and the Sociality of Affect." *Culture Machine*, vol. 6, 2004, n.pag.

Goyal, Yogita. "The Transnational Turn and Postcolonial Studies." *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, edited by Yogita Goyal, Cambridge UP, 2017, pp. 53–71.

Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. *After 1945: Latency as Origin of the Present*. Stanford UP, 2013.

——. *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature.* Translated by Erik Butler, Stanford UP, 2012.

——. "How (if at all) Can We Encounter What Remains Latent in Texts?" *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2009, pp. 87–96.

——. "Zentrifugale Pragmatik und ambivalente Ontologie: Dimensionen von Latenz." *Latenz: Blinde Passagiere in den Geisteswissenschaften*, edited by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011, pp. 9–19.

Hallemeier, Katherine. "Literary Cosmopolitanism in Teju Cole's *Every Day Is for the Thief* and *Open City*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 44, nos. 2–3, 2014, pp. 239–50.

Hartwiger, Alexander. "The Postcolonial Flâneur: *Open City* and the Urban Palimpsest." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–17.

Haverkamp, Anselm. *Figura Cryptica: Theorie der Literarischen Latenz.* Suhrkamp Verlag, 2002.

Heller-Roazen, Daniel. "Glossolalia: From the Unity of the Word to Plurality of Tongues." *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, edited by Barbara Cassin et al., Princeton UP, 2014, p. 594.

Hoene, Christin. *Music and Identity in Postcolonial British-South Asian Literature*. Routledge, 2015.

Kivy, Peter. *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience*. Cornell UP, 1990.

Krishnan, Madhu. "Postcoloniality, Spatiality and Cosmopolitanism in the Open City." *Textual Practice*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2015, pp. 675–96.

Latham, Alison. "Fugue." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Online-only ed., Oxford UP, 2011, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-2723. Accessed 27 Mar. 2017.

Levinson, Jerrold. *Musical Concerns: Essays in Philosophy of Music*. Oxford UP, 2015.

Levy, Daniel, and Natan Sznaider. "Cosmopolitan Memory and Human Rights." *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, edited by Maria Rovisco and Magdalena Nowicka, Ashgate, 2011, pp. 195–209.

Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke UP, 2002.

Maver, Igor. "Teju Cole's Nigeria and the Open Cities of New York and Brussels." *Acta Neophilologica*, 2013, pp. 3–11.

Neumann, Birgit. "Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, edited by Gabriele Rippl, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 512–29.

Oniwe, Bernard Ayo. "Cosmopolitan Conversation and Challenge in Teju Cole's *Open City*." *Ufahamu: African Studies Journal*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2016, pp. 43–65.

Ratner, Leonard. *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style*. Collier, 1980.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage, 1994.

——. *Music at the Limits: Three Decades of Essays and Articles on Music*. Bloomsbury, 2008.

Scruton, Roger. *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation*. Continuum, 2009.

Serres, Michel. *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*. Bloomsbury, 2016.

Storr, Anthony. *Music and the Mind*. Free Press, 1992.

Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. Routledge, 1993.

Terada, Rei. *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject."* Harvard UP, 2003.

Vermeulen, Pieter. *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel: Creature, Affect, Form*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Wolf, Werner. *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*. Rodopi, 1999.

Wood, James. "The Arrival of Enigmas." *Newyorker.com*. New Yorker, 28 Feb. 2011, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/02/28/the-arrival-of-enigmas. Accessed 27 Mar. 2017.