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Appropriate Data / Dada
A Partial Reading of a Fragment of Shona Mbira Dza Vadzimu Music

By Martin Scherzinger
Columbia University

[Open inverted commas]

This paper¹ will² analyze³ a piece of Shona Mbira dza Vadzimu⁴ music known as *Nyamaropa*. The analysis will draw upon the insights of numerous post-Schenkerian theories,⁵ although no explicit reference is made to these writings.

¹ **Certain**

Ready-made. Just Fountain.

Ready-made disciplines appear like ballistics to analyze and explain, to critique and deconstruct this partial *ngoma* of Zimbabwe: the traditional progression *Nyamaropa* traditionally played to evoke the so-called 'so-called *mudzimu*'...based here on the playing of Mister-traditional Gwanzura Gwenzi of Harare, Zimbabwe on a traditional *mbira dza vadzimu*...built out of *mva malopa* and iron rods...softened in the womb furnace.

Mister Researcher, just insert and note the play of silence and sound in which it comes to mean.

Take note, Mister Inquirer. Mister 'Eye'.

Ready-made. Just add water.

² **Insert (Berlin Dada)**

"Die vergleichende Musikwissenschaft, die sich zur Aufgabe macht, die Tonprodukte, insbesondere die Volksgesaenge verschiedener Voelker, Laender und Territorien behufs ethnographischer Zwecke zu vergleichen und nach der Verschiedenheit ihrer Beschaffenheit zu gruppieren und sondern." (1885, 14)
...and thus arises the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology. 'Systematische Musikwissenschaft' is studied at the Technische Universitaet, Berlin, 'Historische Musikwissenschaft' at the Freie Universitaet and 'Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft' in a separate Department of the Freie Universitaet. Composition, a fourth category, is taught at the various 'Hochschulen'.

³ **Certain Insert**

Music analysis is emphasized at the Technische Universitaet, while courses in

the study of musical form are obligatory at all of the aforementioned institutions.

The 'professionalization' of music analysis is witnessed by both the vast body of literature which has appeared in its name recently and by the various analysis-oriented curricula offered by leading western universities and music institutions. American universities generally divide their programs for graduate study into the same four groups, namely 'Musical Composition', 'Ethnomusicology', 'History of Music' and 'Theory of Music'. The central aim of the latter program is to provide the student with a range of analytic approaches to music theory.

The analysis of music today, as an autonomous discipline or as an obligatory component of a broader curriculum has come to occupy a central position in the study of music generally. Since Heinrich Schenker's formulation of music's irreducible basis ('Hintergrund') in the 1920's, a proliferation of distinct analytic methods has emerged. These range from 'cognitive' approaches to analysis (Rudolph Reti, Leonard Meyer, Eugene Narmour), whereby the process of listening to music is considered as a dynamic unfolding of expectations, to 'set-theoretical' analysis (Allen Forte, John Rahn) explicitly modeled on formal theory in logic and mathematics.

⁴ Appropriate Data

What voice speaks this *ngoma* that is not one?

What ritual? What (w)rites this music of the Other, the *Odder*?

⁵ A Syllogism

Music analysis, a fully fledged academic practice in its own right today, is a manufactured discipline producing certain effects, which, by virtue of its centralized position and institutional support, has the power to determine the limits of musical value. It is, on this view, one device whereby favored repertoires of listening are constructed and transmitted. Hence, there is an important interplay between the canon of music generally and the manner in which it is spoken about. African music tends to be approached from an anthropological perspective...

(Small footnote to the footnote: A history of definitions of the field of ethnomusicology may reveal a silent movement from a study of certain *kinds* of music, namely 'non-western', 'exotic', or 'orally transmitted' music, to a processual definition which focuses on the *way* in which it is to be studied...

[Big toe note to the small footnote to the footnote: These ethnomusicological narratives are taken in the above note to share certain rhetorical tropes and strategies and thus I inevitably engage in a kind of idealism that claims that these tropes have determining power and bear the same charge in different historical settings. But taken as a foundational ruse, rather than as a historical fact, this idealization may problematize a range of other questions around the claims to facticity of a category of musical research called 'African music' claiming

that the discourse of 'facts', particularly as it manifests in a certain Victorian anthropological gaze—of remarkable tenacity and persistence—is in itself part of an Imperialist episteme, and that Empire and empiricism can be connected by more cogent word-plays than punning.]

...These changing intellectual traditions can seem to reflect a change in the name of the discipline from 'Comparative Musicology' to 'Ethnomusicology' in the 1950s and 1960s. The earliest definition of Comparative Musicology per se is proposed by Guido Adler in his codification of the whole of Musicology in 1885: "...comparative musicology has as its task the comparison of the musical works—especially the folksongs—of the various peoples of the earth for ethnographical purposes..." (1885, 14) Other writers elaborate these margins of the ethnomusicological debate:

1935: Robert Lachmann: "Non-European music is handed down without the means of writing; its investigation demands, therefore, other methods than those for Western art music." (1935, 1)

1941: Glen Haydon: "Non-European musical systems and folk music constitute the chief subjects of study; the songs of birds and phylogenetic-ontogenetic parallels are subordinate topics." (1941, 218)

1946: Willi Apel: "Comparative musicology...[is]...the study of exotic music ... Exotic music...[is comprised of]...the musical cultures outside the European tradition." (1946, 167-250)

The non-European component is echoed by Herzog (1946), Koole (1955), Nettl (1956), Rhodes (1956), Schneider (1957), Kunst (1959) and Seeger (1961) among many others.

By 1961 the term 'Comparative Musicology' had been abandoned except as a historic reference, although it periodically reappeared as applying to a portion of the broader field of ethnomusicology. The anti-comparative stance was motivated by the idea that meanings may differ from one culture to another and that comparison of these diverse things may become a comparison of unlike things. John Blacking in 1966 expresses this point of view: "...we may be comparing incomparable phenomena...if we accept the view that patterns of music sound in any culture are the product of concepts and behaviors peculiar to that culture, we cannot compare them with similar patterns in another culture unless we know that the latter are derived from similar concepts and behavior." (Quoted in Merriam, 1977, 193-4) Mantle Hood understands the deployment of comparison to be premature and dangerous: "It seems a bit foolish in retrospect that the pioneers of our field become engrossed in the comparison of different musics before any real understanding of the musics being compared had been achieved." (1963, 233) In 1969 he writes: "...a vast number of musical cultures...are yet to be studied

⁶ A radical relativization of musical material takes place in *Nyamaropa*. Every note is subordinated to an underlying harmonic and rhythmic matrix embedded within the structure of the music. No moment can be identified which is not

systematically...before comparative methods can give musicology a truly world-wide perspective." (1969, 299) The new definitions of Ethnomusicology are constructed in terms of a sharp rupture with the past, emphasizing process over form, the orientation of the student over any rigid boundaries of discourse, the context of music over music sound alone and the cultural totality over component parts of culture. Ethnomusicology now becomes "...the study of music in culture..." (Merriam, 1960, 109), "...the study of music as a universal aspect of human behavior..." (Nketia, 1962, 1), "...an approach...not only in terms of itself but also in terms of its cultural context..." (Hood, 1969, 298) or "...the study of music as culture..." (Merriam, 1977, 204).

⁶ (continued) Although, in this view, these musics are regarded as aesthetic constructs with their own principles and conventions, they are located in a specific social context—a context that grounds their very existence. These studies thus focus on the production of the musical arts. This production is activated by particular people at particular times in accordance with particular conventions. The circumstances, the constraints and the embedded interests served by musical practices are additionally investigated.

This is what is meant by an 'anthropological perspective'—a text, perhaps, invoking historical context to marshal persuasively a vast range of generically, historically and geographically diverse material to cohere around a silent nexus of theoretical ideas: A con-text.)

...while western music is regarded as immanently aesthetic in its academic formulation...

(Footnote to footnote: What do we do with a musical score? What can we do with it? What should we do? I can invoke the spokesmen of the archive:

Ian Bent, in his opening chapter entitled *Music Analysis in Perspective* in his book entitled *Analysis*, defines music analysis as "that part of the study of music which takes as its starting point the music itself, rather than external factors." (1987, 1) Carl Dahlhaus, in a concluding essay entitled *Standards of Criticism* outlines the three conditions for an analytic interpretation worthy of the name: "...first, it must not depart from the text; second, it must be consistent and free of contradictions within itself; and third, it must not be utterly consumed with executing a literal reading of the work." (Dahlhaus, 1967, 99) The publisher's blurb to Jonathan Kramer's book *The Time of Music*, articulates the author's achievement in

conclusively a function of these background matrices. This analysis will only examine the harmonic^{7 8} patterning in *Nyamaropa*.⁹

the following terms: "Close musical analysis brings theoretical speculation back to real music..." (Kramer, 1988)

I will offer brief expositions of only two analytic discourses which are held to fall outside the 'formal' analytic domain, namely Schenkerian and 'cognitive' approaches to analysis.

Schenker's phenomenological orientation—reducing the musical experience to a fundamental stratum which directs motion to an end point—simultaneously foregrounds both an historical genre and a class of music analysts endowed with the requisite sensitivity and musicality to carry out a successful (Schenkerian) analysis. Schenker was dismissive of the average person's abilities to appreciate serious music at all. By seeking general properties of musical experience per se Schenker posits the irreducible basis of all music in the 'Hintergrund'. A single musical work is presumed to be an organic whole, and so too, for Schenker, can nearly two centuries of thematically disparate texts be unified in a single analytic phenomenology by virtue of an underlying fundamental stratum. Musical phenomena are perceived as prolongations of inner universals. The analytic terminology reflects and expresses this inner coherence. Schenkerian analysis penetrates these interior musical structures, and it is this reduction to fundamental principles which Allen Forte likens to a kind of "...high-level achievement in science." (Quoted in Yeston, 1977, 7) Schenkerian analysis is the most widespread model for tonal art music analysis in the U.S.A. today.

'Cognitive' approaches to music analysis examine the listener's role in musical perception. These approaches are derivations of various psychological theories current in the 1950s, notably 'information theory' and 'reception theory'. For Leonard Meyer, music analysis centers around patterns which inhibit or fulfill the expectations of the listener. The interface between what the listener anticipates at any given moment and the actual sonic event which completes it, is explored as a determinant of the amount of information transferred in this interaction. Meyer posits the notion of the 'competent listener', who is familiar with the norms of the given style and the patterns the music makes when the music is interpreted by these norms. For Meyer, "...there is agreement about which progressions are strongly implicative and which are less so, which triads are relatively stable and which tend to be mobile and ongoing, and so on." (1973, 27) Conceptions of 'gap-fill motions' and 'generative events' are employed to delineate the psychological goals and patterns which a competent listener comes to expect.

⁷ (continued) Eugene Narmour, in his book *Beyond Schenkerianism*, refines Meyer's central thesis and outlines a new model called 'implication: realization' which recognizes the potentially manifold nature of the 'implication'. The implica-

tion carried by a given moment derives not only from the stylistic context of the work ('style-structure') but also from previous events and their relationship in the work ('idiostructure'). The implications, according to Narmour are occasionally contradictory and thus only a partial realization is possible at these times.

The listener's framework for listening is introduced into the analytic sphere. The process of listening to music in this account becomes a dynamic unfolding of expectations. The style structure generates a frame of reference within which the listener comes to expect certain features. The ensuing events retrospectively modify this initial interpretation. In this process the idiostructure facilitates the highlighting and backgrounding of certain features. The cognitive approaches to analysis thus postulate a listening experience in which assumptions are continually questioned, beliefs are transformed and inferences are renewed in a cyclic process. Significantly, Narmour's model, with its emphasis on the historical evolution of style, is coupled with a critique of Schenkerian analytic practice.

[Small footnote 1 to footnote to footnote: Unlike ethnomusicology, there is no watchful concern in these accounts for 'context' or 'culture', even where the listener in the latter account is potentially reintroduced into a cultural setting. The listener brings to bear certain strategies—'repertoires' of familiar 'codes of reference'—on the musical work, which in turn govern its meanings systematically. Information is imparted primarily through *disconfirmation* of expectation. The codes governing the musical work are at odds here with the codes of interpretation. When the patterns of perception are challenged, musical pieces impart most information. This conception of information is extended to count as a factor impinging directly on the value of the work.

The transformatory potential implicit in this assignation of value exists in a paradoxical relationship with the idea of the 'competent listener', for logically the 'incompetent listener' would be most radically upbraided in her confrontation with the estranged music, enjoying the value of much information. This, however, is to misinterpret the theory because comprehensibility demands a certain amount of concurrent compositional redundancy in the music. Information and redundancy are situated in an equipoise and the method seems to collapse into the formalism it seeks to transcend. The undermining of expectations amounts to little, as the listener is not radically challenged but reinstated rather as a more thoroughly liberal subject.]

[Small footnote 2 to footnote to footnote: What do I do with these musical texts? What can I do with them? What should I do?

-trace the contradictions that threaten to disrupt the discourse but paradoxically, like the taboo with its violation, define its boundaries?

-excavate the ideological underpinnings...the interpellation of the subject...the

conditions of production?

-muddle-meddle in a Derridean 'freeplay of signification'?

-announce my suspicion of all metanarrative by 'showing my behind to the Political Father'?

-crabwalk in a perpetually deflecting distraction from footnote to footnote?

Wait Mister Interrogator, is this writerly textacy or is the deconstructive text rendered a roving itinerant traveling silently from discursive circuit to discursive circuit? Does post-structuralism, in the tradition of Descartes, suspend the authority of any textual practice where the Cartesian ideal suspends any notions of reality? A Barthesian Cartesian?

I must move on.

Perhaps the extent to which these music-theoretical unities mentioned above repress and conceal their ideological underpinnings provides a clue to their degree of usable cultural agency.

Perhaps noiselessly inserting an alien fragment into the discourse will allow the fragment, as newly mysterious, to partake in the power of the archive, lest it disrupts the mystical fusion of the discourse.

⁸ {Insert / Fragment:

...lest it disrupts...?

...lest we forget...?

...lest it exerts...?

...lest we forget...British structural functionalism with medicine man's hat on and angel's wings scientifically proving the equivalent rationality of the Other, the equivalent virtuosity of the Indian musician, the equivalent history of theoretical scholarship in Chinese music, the equivalent harmonic complexity of *Nyamaropa*...

...what voice may I choose...?

...what trope of order...?

...of disorder...

...in fighting the border of order with the order of border...?}})

...The motivation for my work is twofold. Firstly, by applying western models of analysis to other musics, and by deriving results as formally compelling as those for western works, I am attempting to shed a critical light on the arbitrary nature of the musical works that are inserted into the canon, and secondly, to demand recognition for these musics in this discourse. Strategically analyzing mbira music in terms of western interpretative criteria from the music-theoretical discourse must, therefore, not be read as a 'truth' about the music, but rather as an attempt to create, without mastery, an additional cultural space, through reclassification, for the mbira. I am, as a result, interested in questions of ownership and property and seek in this way to activate discussion around these issues.

More specifically,¹⁰ the harmonic progression, which forms the unchanging basis of the variations, will be assessed primarily in terms of its generative potential. Inherent tendencies in the progression provide a powerful impetus for repetition due to an ambiguity in the duration of the cycles which direct the motion. In other words, harmonic cycles of varying lengths concurrently exert a distinct gravitational pull on the pitch flow. Harmonic significance is therefore subject to an incessantly manifold logic, demanding a continual perceptual revision. Thus arises the compulsion for repetition.

The chord progression upon which the cycles of *Nyamaropa* are based is illustrated in figure 1. Each 'chord' (or dyad) is represented here by a capital letter. In the first measure of the diagram a subtle upward harmonic tendency can be noted in the overall arc-shape. Although the three chords essentially outline three open fifths ascending in thirds, the third chord is represented in inversion. (This is done in order to remain within the traditional range of the *mbira*.) The first and the last chords have a common note D which acts as a unifying element in the partial progression. A point of departure is thus restated resulting in the arc-shape from D to F to D. Since each chord is comprised of and defined by only two notes, this recurrence would seem to be significant.

⁹ Inaction

A thousand years of harmonic development are frequently enlisted in white music histories to distinguish western music from other forms of music. Two years before liberation in South Africa, Arthur Wegelin, cited in the *South African Journal of Musicology* as one of South Africa's leading ethnomusicological researchers sets forth, ever forthright, some of the features of African music: "Bantu music...lacks a particular dimension: its harmony has remained rudimentary: it has remained a tail-stump instead of developing." (Quoted in Levy, 1992, 7)

¹⁰ Abstract

Open inverted commas more specifically comma the harmonic progression comma which forms the unchanging full-stop full-stop full-stop repetition full-stop full-stop full-stop progression full-stop full-stop full-stop the inverted comma shapes inverted stop stop stop repetition is in this way required as a stop stop stop necessity stop close inverted commas.

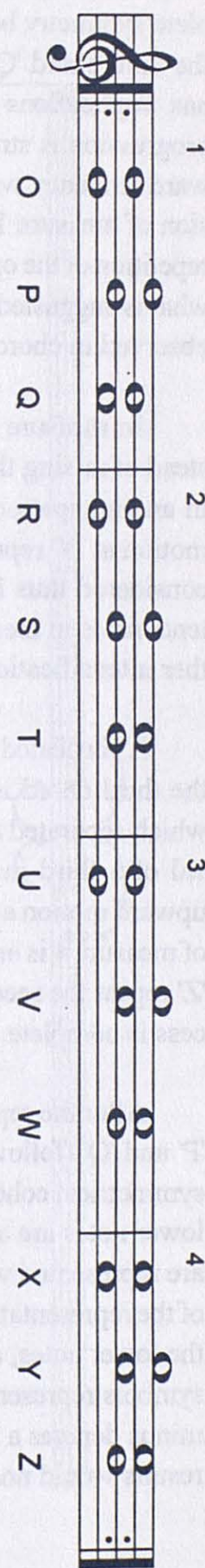


Figure 1: The underlying chord progression of *Nyamaropa*

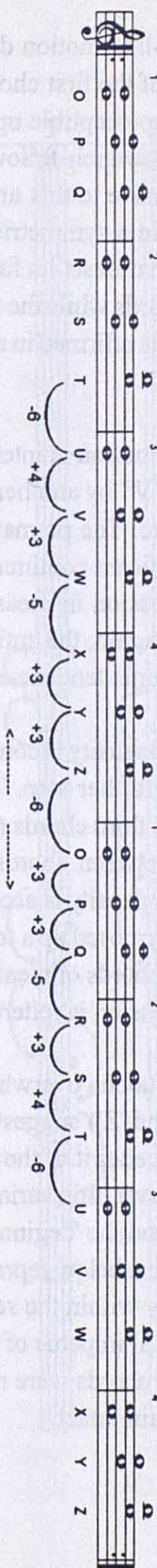


Figure 2: The intervallic palindrome in the chord progression of *Nyamaropa*

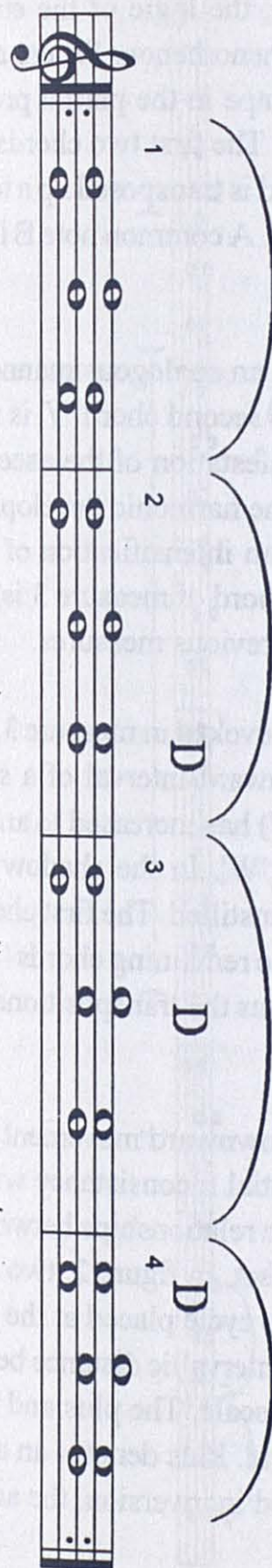


Figure 3: The harmonic hemiola in the chord progression of *Nyamaropa*

The completion of the arc-like motion does not, however, represent a complete symmetry because the G of the first chord 'O' has been replaced by an A in the third chord 'Q'. This barely perceptible upward impetus within the arc shape has implications for the chords which follow. In fact, the logic of the ensuing progression is strikingly responsive to this ancillary phenomenon. Where an upward tendency was embedded in a symmetrical arc shape in the partial progression of measure 1, measure 2 manifests its fulfillment. The first two chords are a repetition of the opening two chords while the final chord is transposed up a tone—what is suggested in measure 1 is affirmed in measure 2. A common note B is now observed in chords 'S' and 'T'.

In measure 3 the upward motion is intensified in an analogous manner. Instead of raising the third chord 'W' by another tone, the second chord 'V' is raised in an anticipation of this feature. The premature manifestation of the ascending motion at 'V' represents a significant continuation of the harmonic developments considered thus far. The progression in measure 2 is an intensification of latent tendencies in measure 1. Once again, the anticipated chord of measure 3 is a further intensification of the harmonic tendencies in the previous measures.

A concealed downward propensity is concurrently evoked in measure 3, since the third chord is not raised a further step. The downward interval of a second which separated the second and third chords ('S' and 'T') has increased to an interval of a third in measure 3, between chords 'V' and 'W'. In the shadow of an upward motion a downward propensity is accordingly instilled. The first chord 'X' of measure 4 is analogously transposed up a tone and the remaining chords 'Y' and 'Z' repeat the second and third chords of measure 4. Thus the transpositional process is complete and the progression is reiterated.

After the repeat sign, the sudden overwhelming downward movement at 'O', 'P' and 'Q' (following 'X', 'Y' and 'Z') suggests a potential inconsistency with the symmetrical coherence that precedes it. If the intervallic relationships between the lower notes are analyzed, however, this variance is offset. In figure 2, two cycles are represented with the 'end' and the 'beginning' of the cycle placed at the center of the representation. The numbers below represent the intervallic distance between the lower notes, counted simply within the seven-note scale. The plus and minus symbols represent the directional impetus of the interval. Plus denotes an ascent, minus denotes a descent. If the chords were represented in inversion, the analytic results would nonetheless remain intact.

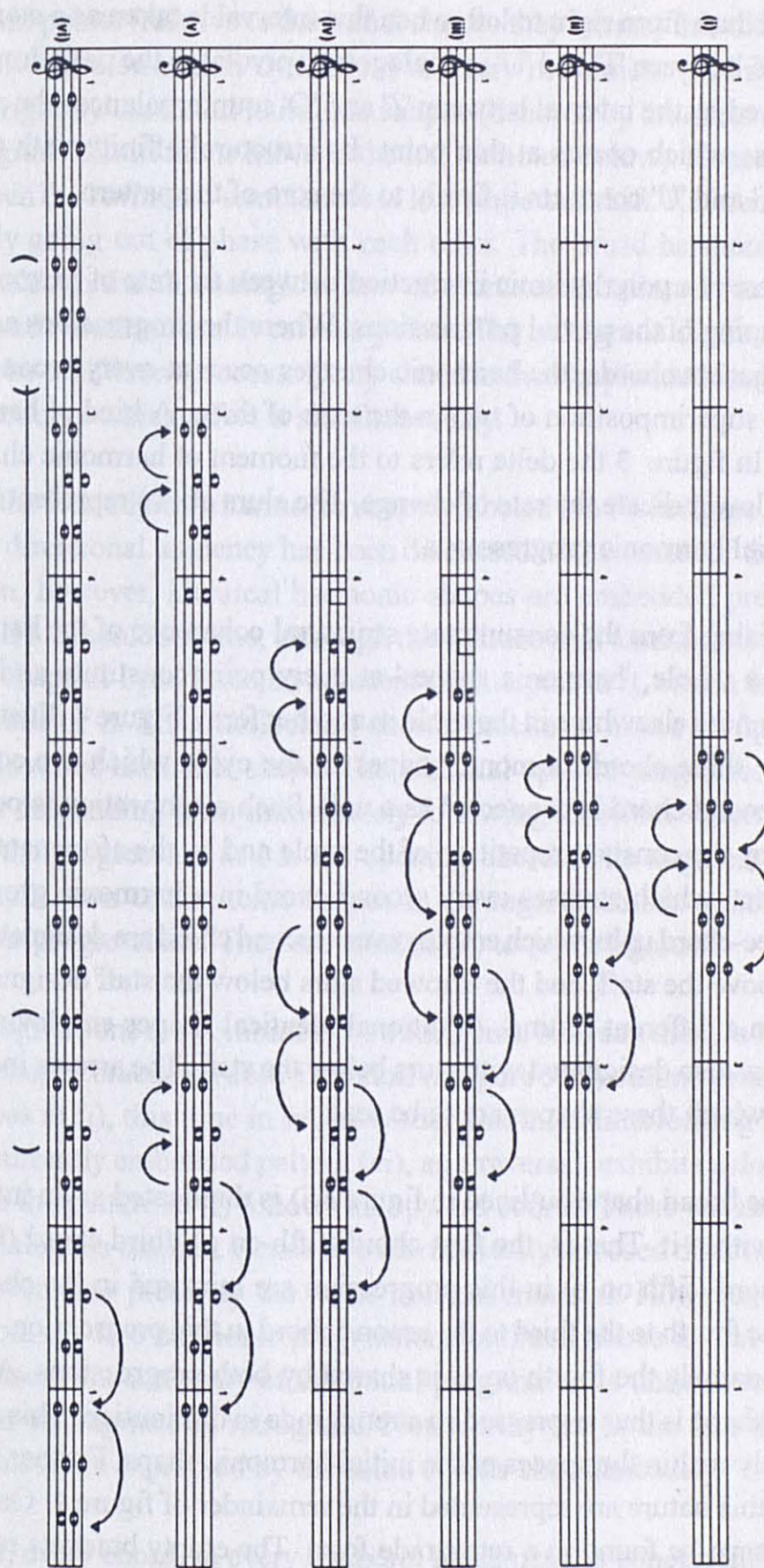


Figure 4: The Relationship of Equivalent Harmonic Shapes in Nyamanyapa

Strictly in intervallic terms, the interval between 'Z' and 'O' represents the pivotal interval in a palindromic distribution. Proceeding from left to right mirrors the procedure from right to left, when this interval is taken as a starting point. The interval 6 between 'T' and 'U' is analogously pivotal in the palindrome. The crucial role played by the interval between 'Z' and 'O' counterbalances the apparent downward bias which occurs at this point. Its structural affinity with the interval between 'T' and 'U' connects it firmly to the core of the pattern.

There is a polyrhythmic interaction between the rate of harmonic change and the grouping of the partial progressions. Where the progressions are comprised of three adjacent chords, the harmonic changes occur at every second chord, resulting in a superimposition of two in the time of three. A kind of harmonic hemiola results. In figure 3 the delta refers to the moment of harmonic change, while the slurs below indicate the rate of change. The slurs above represent the grouping of the partial harmonic progressions.

Arising from the consummate structural coherence of the harmonic progression as a whole, 'harmonic shapes' at every point constitute and resemble their own likeness elsewhere in the cycle in another form. Figure 4 illustrates the twelve possible three-chord harmonic shapes in the cycle which are constituted when every second chord is connected as a unit. Such a connection is perceptually suggested by the constant repetition of the cycle and by the aforementioned hemiola-like effect, which stresses every second chord in a harmonic grouping in threes. The three-chord units which employ every second chord are designated with arrowed slurs above the staff, and the arrowed slurs below the staff designate the identical shape in a different setting. Additional identical shapes employing every second chord are also designated with slurs below the staff. The arrows indicate the direction in which these shapes are to be read.

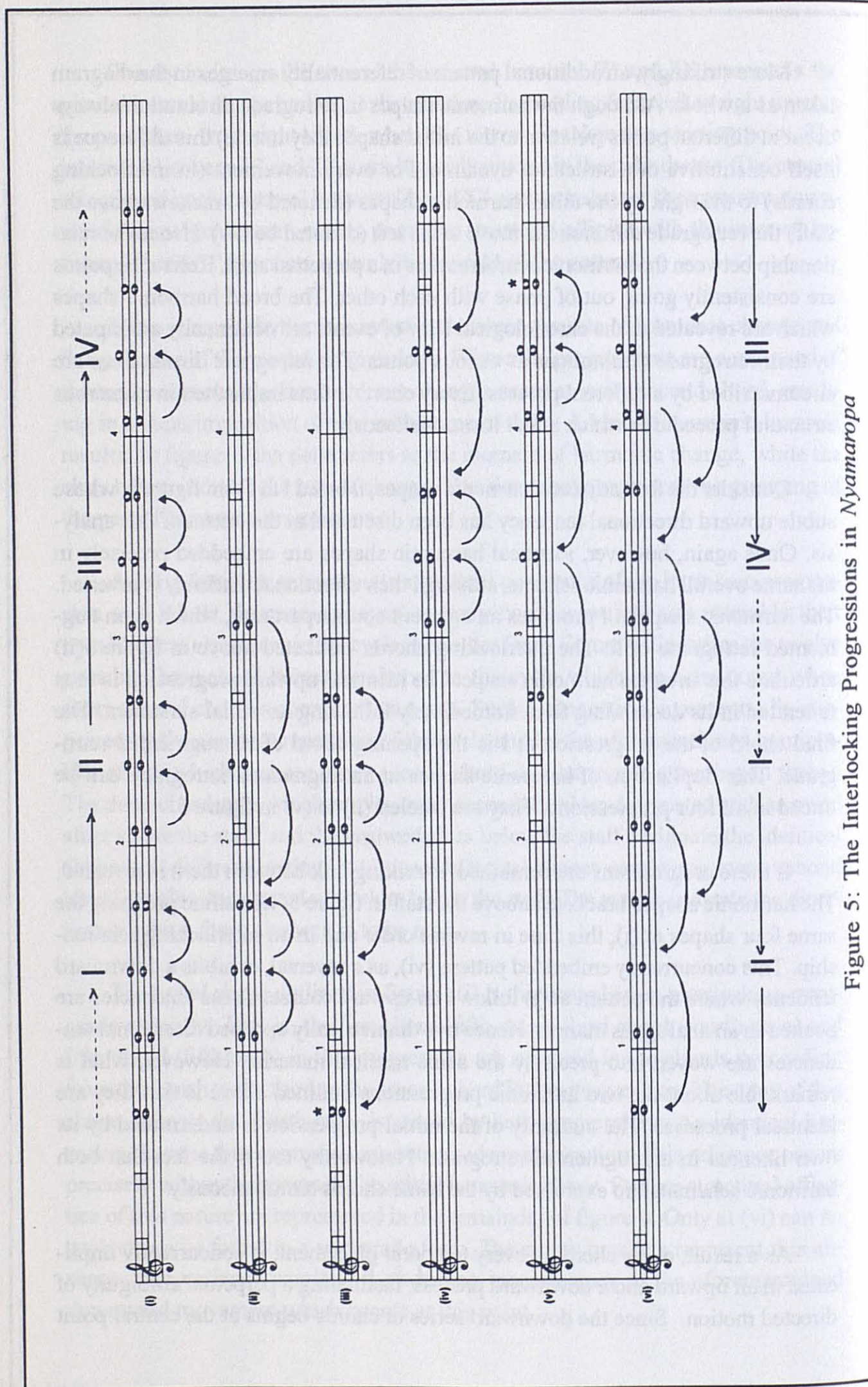
The broad shape outlined in figure 4(i) is duplicated as an interlocking retrograde within it. That is, the first chord (fifth on g), third chord (fourth on a) and fifth chord (fifth on b) in this progression are mirrored in the chords proceeding from the fourth to the third to the second chord in this progression. The apex of this shape, namely the fourth on a, is shared by both progressions. An identical harmonic shape is thus expressed as a retrograde in diminution. This reference occurs precisely within the spaces of the initial harmonic shape. Further structural affinities of this nature are represented in the remainder of figure 4. Only at (vi) can no such shape be found in a retrograde form. The empty brackets represent this absence. The variance parallels the seeming inconsistency of the aforementioned downward movement which occurs at this point.

More strikingly, an additional pattern of referentiality emerges in the diagram taken as a whole. Although the harmonic shapes in retrograde diminution always occur at different points (relative to the initial shapes they iterate) this difference is itself constitutive of a structural dynamic. For every movement (in interlocking chords) to the right by the initial harmonic shapes (denoted by brackets above the staff) the retrograde diminutions move to the left (denoted below). Hence the relationship between the harmonic semblances is in a perpetual shift. Reference points are consistently going out of phase with each other. The broad harmonic shapes which are revealed in the chronological flow of events are continually anticipated by their retrograde diminutions at various points. The retrograde diminutions are circumscribed by a different process. Every chord is thus implicated in numerous structural procedures which affect it simultaneously.

Consider the four adjacent harmonic shapes, labeled I to IV in figure 5, whose subtle upward directional tendency has been discussed at the outset of this analysis. Once again, however, identical harmonic shapes are embedded precisely in the same overall harmonic scheme, although their directional tendency is inverted. The harmonic shape at I produces an adjacent counterpart to it, which is an augmented retrograde of it. The interlocking chords bracketed above in figure 5(ii) articulate this inverted harmonic shape. The identical upward progression is thus reiterated in its descending form immediately following its initial statement. The final chord of the progression at I is the opening chord of its augmented retrograde. This duplication of harmonic shapes in an augmented retrograde can be traced in all four progressions. They are labeled (ii) to (v) in figure 5.

If these progressions are combined, a striking link between them is revealed. The harmonic shapes bracketed above the staff in figure 5(vi) outline precisely the same four shapes at (i), this time in reverse order and in an interlocking relationship. This concurrently embedded pattern (vi), as a reversal, exhibits a downward tendency where the pattern at (i) follows an upward course. These tendencies are posited in an analogous manner. Hence two diametrically opposed directional tendencies are woven into precisely the same musical material. However, what is remarkable about the two harmonic progressions outlined above is that they are identical processes. The authority of the initial progression is undermined by its own likeness in an augmented retrograde. Noteworthy too is the fact that both harmonic schemata are expressed by the same chords simultaneously.

As a result, every chord, in every temporal placement, is concurrently implicated in an upward and a downward process, facilitating a perpetual ambiguity of directed motion. Since the downward series of chords begins at the central point

Figure 5: The Interlocking Progressions in *Nyamaropa*

of the upward progression, these propensities themselves are structurally interlocking. Any harmonic concluding point is, in this way, rendered imaginary. The final chord of the progression at IV, marked with an asterisk in figure 5(v), for instance, is already implicit in the second progression II of the augmented retrograde progression, marked with an asterisk in figure 5(iii). As central to this latter progression it cannot conclude the former progression. The manifold harmonic processes in *Nyamaropa* are thus locked in a perpetual reiteration, as potential concluding points in one harmonic scheme function simultaneously as central points, or starting points, in different, albeit concurrent, harmonic schemes. As a result, there can be no overriding final goal in the directed motion. Repetition is in this way required as a harmonic necessity.

11 Postlude

'Ethnographic surrealism', invoking the historical avant-garde, seeks to recapture an orientation towards cultural order (writing, singing, analyzing, synthesizing, expressing, representing, painting, arguing, describing...these activities, precisely, are difficult to fix and may merge) as an impetus for reinvigorating the business of ethnographic and other knowledge. This investment in the past may serve to rejuvenate a method, albeit to destabilize it, and seeks in this sense to be regarded as strategic and not as a mapping of certain intellectual or artistic traditions within a history of ideas.

Modernist methods are instilled for a purpose. Fragmentation, juxtaposition, destabilization of subject and subject matter, offer a point of view from which common sense and normal stable meanings appear as ideological formations, clumsy constructions endowed, however, with an awesome degree of cultural agency...the routine common sense of World Wars, Imperialism, Revolution.

Ethnography, ordinarily associated with rendering the unfamiliar comprehensible—an extension of Enlightenment science—is shown to inhabit the same domain (or Region, or Empire even) as Surrealism, which is often associated with the defamiliarization of the comprehensible. Woven inextricably, ethnographic surrealism is offered as a utopian construct for future possibilities in cultural analysis. "To see culture", states James Clifford, "and its norms—beauty, truth, reality—as artificial arrangements susceptible to detached analysis and comparison with other possible dispositions is crucial to an ethnographic attitude." (1988, 119)

From a Parisian perspective, the first World War is identified as playing a formative role for the surrealist movement. For Apollinaire, 'victory' can amount only to "all things bearing a new name." (Quoted in Clifford, 1988, 120) Africa is posited as a provider of other beliefs and forms, not as temporary excursions out of the collective order, but as serious alternatives. Relativist ethnography and surrealism co-inhabit an exotic realm where primitive societies are available as both

(continued)²⁶

aesthetic and scientific resources. Clifford characterizes this situation as ironic: "For every local custom or truth there was always an exotic alternative; a possible juxtaposition or incongruity." (1988, 120)

For the surrealist ethnographer reality is contested, order is ridiculed. One's own 'seeing eye' is destabilized. The binaries 'them/us', 'western/other', 'masculine/feminine', 'metropolitan/periphery' are eroded and so too the distinction 'anthropology/art'.

This analysis of *mbira dza vadzimu* music attempts to dramatize some of these possibilities. It may function as a 'double image' (objectively delirious, systematically bewildering?). Dali says, "...[a]... double image [is] the representation of an object which, without the least figurative or anatomical modification, is at the same time the representation of another object that is absolutely different, one that is also free of any kind of deformation or abnormality that would reveal some sort of artificial arrangement." (Quoted in Breton, 1969, 274)

My objects are, on the one hand, the discourse of music theory and, on the other, *Nyamaropa* meeting fortuitously in an analytic encounter. *Nyamaropa's* fixed and naive purpose, provided by ready-made disciplines like ethnomusicology, finds itself in the presence of another equally fixed, but remote, reality through which it may fleetingly escape its identity. This can be specified further with an analogy from surrealist photography, where the reality depicted is transformed through the action of the frame. In Man Ray's *Minotaure*, for instance, the bull's physiognomy is located by the act of cropping the image. The 'frame' of this analysis of *Nyamaropa* is the very language of music theory. A seamless surface of syntactic effects is preserved in order to convulse reality 'from within', rather than surrendering its hold on reality through collage.

Riding on the back of a metaphor, kept intact (without showing the showing) by surreptitiously reorganizing what is already surreptitiously surreal and disrupting (hopefully with some grace) a web of strings (lest we forget that knowledge is tied to power), nature is convulsed into a kind of 'writing'. The core of *mbira* is metamorphosis. There is no essence: only the temporarily unchanging manifestations, patterns, beliefs, habits. A carcass. Remains.

¹² What pattern? What angle of vision is selected in these writings? Does it constitute western music in its own image—appropriating and redeeming, representing and preserving Otherness, enshrouding it with the same technical imagery...

(continued.)¹²

...or can it momentarily construct the possibility of a differently focussed history of relations between African and Western music, invoking a living *mbira dza vadzimu* musical tradition in a post-colonial context, opening, perhaps, another cultural space with its attendant material benefits, by claiming a fortuitously perverse space within the post-Schenkerian paradigm, for the retheorizing of African music?

I take it to be fanciful to presume that operating outside these modes of discourse is possible, choosing rather to mobilize them in a different configuration, to marshal the power of narrative coherence in a music-theoretical language for a fictional (factional) historical staging of *Nyamaropa*. The refusal in this analysis to interrogate the apparatus of the staging, the position of the writer, the selection of the moment, and the sites of the consumption of this writing are obligatory gestures of allegiance to the analytic categories employed. As an object of ethnomusicological study, scrupulously pointing out that musicality is always constructed, taking different forms and meanings in different places at different times—circulating through time and space like a Platonic Form—options of dialogue are potentially foreclosed and a stubbornly passive view of nature is upheld.

I do not wish to naively assume a range of speaking subalterns, hereby subscribing to another assumption about the fullness of the agency of the Other in an anthropological gaze, or pretend that pure cultures have been left intact by the penetration of Capital, untainted by the West, but instead to insist on a recognition of the risks of certain dangerous, if necessary, interpretative impositions.

By grafting together these naturally distinct and distant realities in this analysis, perhaps I attempt to designate a privileged space for African music, or perhaps I attempt to mount a critique of the conceptual tools I cannot not use, in order to try to think an 'African' music not predicated on the violence implied in the process of Othering that an ethnomusicological narrative may involve. Throughout these writings, and in various ways, the logic of 'affinity' (between so-called 'musical' so-called 'cultures') is interwoven with that of 'difference' in a precarious montage.

The tyranny of this text lies in the distance it takes from these ideals.

THE END

But wait: *Entre Acte*

Callous and corn note

I must still tell you an important lie...you see, Mister T, the piece upon which this analysis is conducted is all made up. The music is not the traditional Shona progression *Nyamaropa* at all, but simply my own improvised ideas...minor inventions parading as interventions.

Look closely. Look how the puppet collapses as I cut the strings which attach it to the master...how useless this heap of paper becomes...the cutting of Sampson's hair...

What is at stake when this binary is severed?

What narrative unity is threatened by this loss of cogency in the loss of the Other (despite the self-conscious partiality of these writings)?

Said asks "On what basis may human groups—accurately (and to this we must add morally)—be distinguished?" (Quoted in Clifford, 1988, 268)

What, precisely, marks the difference between my improvisations in Melville, Johannesburg, and Ephant Mujuru's improvisations in Yeoville, Johannesburg...this black and white border order?

But wait, before I stage myself as an 'Odder', a final footnote is required to put the record straight.

But wait: Cinem a nemiC

²⁸ A final grit and dirt note

But wait, Mister Investigator, look closely. I told you. A lie. You see, the piece upon which this analysis was conducted *is* the Shona progression *Nyamaropa* of Zimbabwe. This last footnote was itself the lie.

Now we can, once again, tie up the strings and stick back the hair and harness together substance and copy in an imitative, contagious magic of ethnographic representation. It is this awkward, knotted, lopsided and rickety construction in a final grit and dirt note that puts the record straight, a straight record

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- INSIGHT?

- on site

- "WAYS OF some HEARING."

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[Close inverted commas]