

Music, Affect and Atmospheres: Meaning and Meaningfulness in Palauan *omengeredakl*

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Abstract

In this article, I explore facets of the complex musical experience afforded by *omengeredakl*, a genre of traditional vocal music from Palau, Western Micronesia. The concept of atmosphere will lead me to propose a conceptual distinction between musical meaning(s) and musical meaningfulness as well as enable an integrated analysis of both. With this, I am pointing at weaknesses in some of the recent ethnomusicological literature on atmosphere: atmosphere should not be identified with affect, or looked at as part of a two-stage process in which affective experience is followed by reflective interpretation. The potential of atmospheres for the study of music lies precisely in that the concept enables us to transcend this and other pairs of opposites. Overcoming this binary will allow us to draw closer to the efficacy of music: after all, the proverbial ‘power of music’ exceeds the impact of affective experience and discursive meaning.

Introduction

It was a cool and quiet February afternoon in Melekeok,¹ with a soft breeze from the east coming in from the sea. We were sitting under the palm trees, shaded from the sun, and like all the other women around, 82-year-old Victoria² was chewing betel nuts. She was pondering how to respond to the question I had just asked her: How would she describe the musical genre I had come to research, *omengeredakl*? A well-known *omengeredakl* singer, she clearly did not find it an easy question. I was expecting to hear about the *omengeredakl* songs she liked the most, and perhaps the vocal qualities and musical skills she was looking for in fellow singers, but she had something else on her mind. ‘You know,’ she said slowly after a while, ‘in *omengeredakl*, there’s the *esbe* [a solo part in the vocal ensemble performing the *omengeredakl*]. The word *esbe* is related to *mengesb*, and it has to do with that lunar constellation when the moon stands right in the center of the sky. We call [that part of the vocal ensemble] *esbe* because its sound is almost like the moon up there...’ – while talking, Victoria had begun to wave her left hand in a semicircle, slowing down the gesture and pointing to the sky as her hand reached the highest point – ‘...and we’re down here.’ Her hand dropped in her lap again. She continued to chew her betel nut, and, nodding slowly, after a while she added: ‘But really, we’re all the same.’ A number of the women sitting around us nodded approvingly, but I was a little puzzled at first by Victoria’s response. Later on, we all engaged in a conversation about specific *omengeredakl* songs, talking about the lyrics and how the voices were supposed to blend in with one another at times but remain discernible at other times. I asked a couple of questions about the individual parts of the vocal ensemble, trying to identify the rules for individual voices, and the women answered them patiently for a while. However, at some point, 80-year-old Oribech seemed to feel that I was completely missing the point. With a wave of her hand, she laughed and said, ‘Look, [when you’re singing *omengeredakl*] you simply know how it’s supposed to feel. Everybody knows. And when you know that, it’ll make a lot of sense to you. You’ll know what to do.’

The scene I just described took place at the Melekeok Senior Citizen Center in Palau, Western Micronesia in 2005. Six women from Melekeok, the Palauan state situated on the eastern coast of Palau's 'big island,' Babeldaob, had come to talk to me about traditional Palauan singing groups' repertoire. They were elders, aged between 70 and 89, and known for their knowledge of traditional Palauan songs. We listened to historical recordings from the 1960s³ and talked about them. Then, the women would perform a number of songs for me to record, explain the repertoire they chose, and tell me about the individual songs. Several of the women made a comment about *omengeredakl* similar to that of Oribech's in the previous paragraph: While they all agreed that its characteristic musical structure and the musical responsibilities of individual singers were of course central to *omengeredakl* as a musical form, *omengeredakl* performances were supposed to have a certain 'feel.' That feel, to them, was constitutive of *omengeredakl* as a genre. In other words, the women suggested that the whole *omengeredakl* is much more than the sum of its (musical) parts. The 'indeterminate quality of feeling poured out into space' (Böhme, 1995, p. 27)⁴ that, to Victoria, Oribech, and the other women, was so crucial to *omengeredakl* was what made performing it so meaningful.

This notion of meaningfulness, which is not normally distinguished from 'meaning' in music research, is crucial to the argument I will be presenting below, in which I analyze the layered meanings my interlocutors found so essential to *omengeredakl*. I derive the term meaningfulness from the work of New Phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz (cf. Schmitz et al., 2011). When it comes to music, neither meaningfulness nor meaning are intrinsic to music. Rather, the experience of either is one way to relate to music. Meaning has been the subject of a great number of long-standing discussions against the backdrop of a range of intellectual traditions, including structuralism, semiotics, discourse analysis, and hermeneutics. These discussions all consider meaning but are subject to a highly restrictive discourse that regards music as interpretive (e.g. Kramer, 2011, pp. 65ff.): meaning, then, can be hermeneutically specified, circumscribed, or even described, if only to a certain degree (cf. Goehr, 1993; Chapin and Kramer, 2009; Kramer, 2001; 2011). Having said this, I do not intend to essentialize the complex history of theories about musical meaning in music studies and beyond. But for now, I want to sidestep this history in order to cast light on another facet of the meaning (i.e., meaningfulness) of music, which does not feature in any of the discussions of meaning I am familiar with. This meaningfulness, according to new phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz (2011), manifests atmospherically and as a corporeal impression. In other words, the musical event's sonic materiality is transduced, via the felt body, into the shared feeling usually called an atmosphere. Schmitz characterizes meaningfulness as 'internally diffuse' or 'manifoldly chaotic'⁵ (Schmitz, 1990, p. 19). Meaningfulness consists of a 'whole gathering of meanings,' but these meanings are not, or not necessarily, individually identifiable or describable except in metaphorical terms. Instead, they may be experienced as atmospheres or themes. Meaningfulness, then, refers to loaded impressions of a whole, according to Schmitz. These impressions are loaded because they communicate more meaningfulness than people can 'tease out using language' (Schmitz, 1990, p. 19)—in other words, meaningfulness goes somewhere words cannot follow. We are dealing with

'something manifold which is tersely closed and detached on the one hand, and peculiarly internally diffuse on the other: The situations in question are not all discrete, and hence they cannot be specified, for in the way they relate to one another it is not always clear which is identical with which and which is different from which'⁶ (Schmitz, 2005, p. 104).

I will explore the philosophical context of this notion of meaningfulness in greater detail below. Here, it is important to note that meaningfulness is by no means an opposite of ‘meaning’ but one possible manifestation of the meaning of music. If in the North Atlantic Academy the ‘mind/body problem’ (Crane and Patterson, 2000; Leys, 2011) is still prevalent, then ‘meaning’ has been associated with ‘mind.’ Meaningfulness, however, leaves the ‘mind’ part of the dichotomy; if we consider the felt body (*Leib*) to be the nexus between an atmosphere and an individual, then the felt body is located in between the body and mind and relates to both. This in-between space is where atmospheres do their work (*cf.* Vadén and Torvinen, 2014). Music’s internally diffuse meaningfulness may at times present itself as an atmosphere that will be experienced with the felt body, leveraging both affective and interpretative frames but exceeding both by way of its primarily corporeal experiential quality. The corporeality of atmospheric experiences is contiguous to any contingent historical and culturally specific interpretative frames. It cannot, however, be equivalent to affectivity or necessarily occur prior to any and all interpretative frames, as McGraw (2016) suggests. This highlights an issue with the few texts that have proposed the concept of atmospheres for use in music studies: the notion of atmosphere has too quickly been conflated with affect. I believe this issue must be addressed if atmosphere is to become a productive concept in the study of music. McGraw (2016) suggests that we first process atmospheres affectively, then interpretatively, implicitly referring to Massumi’s ‘missing half second’ (e.g. Massumi, 2002, p. 222).⁷ Both affect and interpretively qualified emotion are involved in experiencing atmosphere. But I contend that atmospheres refer to an entirely different dimension of human experience: one that points to the felt body as the site at which musical meaningfulness is both produced and experienced. This occurs in a way that goes way beyond affect and interpretation because meaningfulness only comes about in the interaction with both, as I will argue below. The idea of the autonomy of affect (Massumi, 1995) hinges on the assumption that external stimuli are experienced in a two-fold process in which content and intensity are processed separately and successively. For Massumi, they belong to different orders. While content is linked to a signifying order and hence allows for the verbalization of the experience, intensity causes bodily reactions (Massumi, 1995, p. 85) that cannot be articulated in language and remain unactualized. Intensity, for Massumi, is material and impacts on the narrativization of content but remains obscure itself. In this way, it does not create meanings but is capable of modifying meanings (*ibid.*). Intensity, which for Massumi equals affect (Massumi in Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. xvi), is processed faster than signified content. Affect, for Massumi, is pre-personal. The distinction between the materiality of affect and the non-materiality of discursively rendered meaning has led a number of affect theory scholars working on sound to conclude that sound, and by extension music, belongs in the order of the affective, and only in that order (e.g. Gilbert, 2004; Shouse, 2005, pp. 5, 12–13; Cox, 2011, p. 157). The striking return of the mind/body divide in these debates has been critically addressed before, most notably perhaps by Ruth Leys (2011). Atmospheres can help transcend this rather limiting binary, which does not do justice to the lived reality of musical experience, as I will show below. McGraw points out important opportunities that arise when thinking about atmospheres, especially when he speaks about atmospheric sociality (*cf.* Abels 2013; 2016) and how the notion of atmospheres ‘holds the potential for immanent play prior to the comprehension of [...] categories [including race, sexuality and class]’ (McGraw, 2016, p. 142). But atmosphere offers more than just another twist on the opposition of affect and interpretation. Implicitly addressing a much broader discourse straddling psychology and philosophy, it has the capacity to open new ideas about how music can mean things to certain people because it has ‘no object other than the situation’s own intensity’ (McGraw, 2016, p. 142). In situations characterized by musical atmospheres, very disparate layers of meaning and meaningfulness coalesce in the experience of sound.

The potential for analysis of atmospheres in music studies, then, is that the term allows scholars to better understand music's meaningfulness as a specific, and specifically musical, way in which music means. The value of this lies in that musical atmospheres are indeed the link to 'something beyond the representational' (McGraw, 2016, p. 126) but to some extent encompass the representational at the same time. The question, then, is not so much what a particular atmosphere, musical or otherwise, is, but rather what it does, and how we can study what meaningfulness suggests in a way that is methodologically sound. One thing that makes atmospheres both notoriously difficult to handle and tremendously interesting for music research is that there is barely anything predictable about the effects of musical atmospheres. In the present article, I will attempt to sketch the potential value of atmospheric theory in music studies. Rather than making a primarily theoretical argument supplemented by ethnographic vignettes (like McGraw 2016), I choose to discuss that potential in terms of some of the ethnographic material I have collected in Palau over the course of nearly ten years, asking what dynamics account for the shared character of the sensation that my interlocutors reported when we were talking about *omengeredakl*.

Palau: Palauan Chants as Signs of History

Situated some 800 kilometers southeast of the Philippines, Palau is currently home to a population of about 21,000. Long before Europeans first discovered the Palauan islands in 1522, Palauans were part of an inter-island trade and communication network, especially with the islands of Yap, according to linguistic and archaeological evidence (Abels, 2008). In 1686, Francisco Lazcano seized the Palau islands for the Spanish crown, terming them 'the Carolinas'. Spain took virtually no action to actually colonize her newly acquired territory, and missions were not significantly successful until the late nineteenth century.

In 1783, Captain Henry Wilson and the *Antelope* made the first thoroughly documented contact between Palauans and Europeans. The *Antelope* shipwrecked on August 10 that year, just off Koror Island, which remains the center of the island nation. The Palauans helped Captain Wilson to build a new ship, named *Oroolong*, with the *Antelope's* remnants. Ever since the *Antelope* incident, Europeans maintained a relatively constant presence on the Palau islands, but did not affect Palauans' everyday life to any significant degree. This situation changed when Germany bought Spain's Western Carolina territory for a bargain in 1899 and immediately established a colonial government on neighboring Yap with outposts on Palau. In 1914, at the outset of WWI, Japanese forces displaced the militarily unprepared German administrative staff in Micronesia and occupied all of Micronesia except Guam. Until WWII, Japan had been allotted a Class C mandate by the League of Nations. The Japanese presence profoundly changed Palauans' lives. A Japanese educational system was implemented, and Koror, which remains the most populated area of Palau, became not only the administrative headquarters of the Japanese Pacific territory but also a small metropolis with paved roads, electricity, movie theaters, and geisha houses by 1940 (Parmentier, 1987; Rechebei and McPhetres, 1997).

WWII brought massive violence to Palau. The United States had suspected that military fortifications had been developed in Japanese Micronesia since WWI but did not go on the offensive in the Southwest Pacific. In 1944, three years after the traumatic experience at Pearl Harbor, the US Airforce began attacking Japanese military bases and industrial sites in Micronesia. The Japanese government formally surrendered in September 1945, and the US Navy became the interim administrative authority until 1947, when the United Nations and the US signed the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which gave the US full power and

authority over, among others, the Palauan islands. In the final quarter of the twentieth century, when the Trust Territory became its present political organization, tiny Palau opted to re-establish her political independence instead of joining the Federated States of Micronesia. This political status was eventually achieved in 1994, putting an end to nearly a century of Spanish, German, Japanese, and US colonization—or so the official story goes.

This historical narrative is only one of several stories, for the traditional Palauan understanding of history is consciously self-referential and all-inclusive. The past is not different from the present per se; events largely follow a ‘replaying pattern well documented in myths, chants, and narratives’ (Parmentier, 1987, p. 3). History therefore consists of stories, and the past may at times be as much a part of the present as the other way around. A number of traditional musical genres, including *omengeredakl*, are considered *olangch* (Pal. ‘mnemonic marker’; ‘external sign’), a part of these stories. *Olangch* is a complex Palauan term that semiotician Richard Parmentier translates as ‘signs of history’, further qualifying it as those ‘representational expressions which, through their iconic, indexical, and residually symbolic properties, record and classify events as history, that selective discourse about the diachrony of a society’ (Parmentier, 1987, p. 11). Oral signs of history, including *omengeredakl*, have an ‘aura’, argues Parmentier. This aura, which is ‘[...] derived from their contiguity with the original context [, ...] makes these objects appropriate signs of history’ (Parmentier, 1987, p. 3). As such, they are ‘frequently considered to be concrete embodiments or repositories of the past they record, that is, to be endowed with the essentialized or reified property of historicity’ (Parmentier, 1987, p. 12). The historicity of signs of history resides in their specific materiality, and, according to new phenomenologist Gernot Böhme, in the atmosphere that emanates from that materiality (Böhme, 1995). In the case of *omengeredakl*, then, singing is ‘aesthetic labor’ (Böhme 1995, pp. 35ff.), a process in which spaces, people, objects, and, in this case, cultural practices are given qualities that make them exude something through their specific material form—something vague and unspecific, perhaps, but something nonetheless. My analysis of *omengeredakl* therefore needs to begin with the intertwining of the sonic materiality and atmosphere in the song. After all, this was what made Victoria, Oribech and their fellow singers immediately think of grander schemes within which current musical practices ‘made sense’, as they put it, on that February afternoon in Melekeok.

In the following, I will determine how *omengeredakl*, and more specifically, the musical structures of *omengeredakl*, produce an atmosphere of historicity. After fleshing out details of the transductive process in which a material sound event becomes a shared feeling loaded with meaningfulness, I will take a closer look at the neo-phenomenological notion of meaningfulness and its usefulness for the study of traditional musics.

Olangch: Omengeredakl’s Suggestions of Motion

Omengeredakl is a group chant.⁸ The word *omengeredakl* implies that something is sung in a loud voice, and it means ‘to begin a song’ in the context of music-making. One singer in the group inserts spoken interfaces between the formal units of an *omengeredakl*, usually by clapping their hands at a certain point, and underlines the lyrics through gestures and dance movements. Other singers may join in by clapping their hands. While gestural dance may play a considerable role in the performance of *omengeredakl*, its importance varies in contemporary performances. My interlocutor Riosang, who was in his sixties at the time of our conversation, described the genre as follows:

[*Omengeredakl*] are sung by a group: the leader explains the verses, and one person ‘deviates’ from the group, keeping the rhythm. The leader starts the chant, the ‘paddlers’ continue the chant—[the ‘paddlers’ are] the crowd, at least four people—and then there is the person who departs from the main melody.⁹

There are Palauan terms for the vocal parts Riosang describes. The *melemotem* prompts or ‘explains’ the song’s lyrics between the formal parts of the *omengeredakl*. The *meruchodl* is a solo singer who commences the sung section of an *omengeredakl*. The *esbe* is the ‘counterpart’ singer (the person who ‘deviates’ from the group’, as Riosang put it).¹⁰ The *melikes* is the leader of the chorus, and the *rokui*—Riosang calls them ‘the crowd’ here—is the chorus itself.¹¹ *Melemotem*, *meruchodl*, *esbe*, and *melikes* are referred to as the *lebuchel*, or the ‘leaders’ (Palau Society of Historians, 2002, p. 21). The primary function of the *melemotem* is to remind audiences of the lyrics, which may be lengthy. In *omengeredakl*, the lyrics are recited in full by the *melemotem* between the formal units, before they are sung by the chorus. Recited and sung lyrics may slightly overlap. The *melemotem* performs these lyrics in a number of ways, from ordinary speech to parlando singing. He or she is followed by the *meruchodl*, who starts the sung part of the *omengeredakl*. *Melikes* means ‘to speak (i.e., words of song which others will sing in response)’ (Josephs, 1977, p. 163). This word primarily means ‘to pole (a canoe)’. This metaphor neatly illustrates the function of the *melikés*: to guide the ‘crew’ or chorus through the ‘water’ or music.

As mentioned above, *esbe*, which is related to the Palauan word *mengesb*, refers to a lunar constellation in which the moon is positioned in the center of the sky.¹² The word *esbe* also means ‘to sing “with an especially high-pitched voice” as the only person in the group’ (Josephs, 1977, p. 179). The *esbe* is an important part of the *omengeredakl*; it significantly shapes the musical form and functions as a marker of form in the musical texture, as shall be seen. If the *esbe* does not function successfully, however, the piece is still distinguishable to the Palauan listener as *omengeredakl*.¹³ *Rokui* simply means ‘all of them.’¹⁴ In the context of *omengeredakl*, it refers to the chorus. The choristers usually join in *un à un*, as there is no clear ‘chorus entry’ that demarcates the formal units. Given the tonal characteristics of the chorus part, this leads to gradual building of a frequency band rather than rapid entry. Across Micronesia, canoeing metaphors are a popular means to describe the social dynamics of group actions, and Riosang’s comparison of the *rokui* with paddlers is revealing in this regard: every paddler’s position has an important role in safely navigating the canoe, yet the overall safety of the journey entirely depends on how the group interacts.

In terms of musical form, *omengeredakl* consist of a flexible sequence of four roughly standardized structural units and interpolated spoken or recited *melemotem* passages. These five elements can be interpreted as the building blocks of *omengeredakl*. The melodic progression of the four units (A, B, C, and D) generally follows a scheme that is roughly uniform throughout the same piece but may differ to some degree among different performances. In any case, the contours of the phrases are recognizable across different performances.

Listen to sound example 1

As can be gleaned from the sound example, a very characteristic feature of the tonal language of *omengeredakl* is the rendition of the chorus’ part. While the main melodic line serves as a point of reference for all singers, only one singer typically follows it. The remaining singers, except the *esbe*, perform slightly higher- or lower-pitched variations of that line, typically close to either the main melody’s pitch or a fellow singer’s intonation of the same line. The

musical result is a thick texture that can be described as a frequency band. The *esbe*, entering either roughly on beat with the chorus or with a slight time displacement, adds another vocal part to the thick musical texture, which usually commences on a pitch spectrum above that employed by the *rokui*. In the following, the *esbe* melody slowly descends in pitch towards the phrasal ends, while the chorus remains around the established frequency band. Within a phrase, the *esbe* and chorus parts slowly converge. As the *esbe* part draws nearer to the *rokui* throughout the course of the musical phrase, it evokes a frequency band with narrowing upper contours. Usually, two descending melodic *esbe* phrases occur in each formal unit. In this regard, the *esbe* part may be viewed as a quasi-diminution of the chorus' part, which occurs solely on the level of musical form and does not affect the (inner) tempo. The end of the first *esbe* phrase is an interior phrase conclusion. The final movement of the phrase differs from this conclusion as the *rokui* narrows the frequency band. An interior phrase conclusion in *omengeredakl* can therefore be identified by the convergence of the contours of the frequency band and concurrent maintenance of tonal friction generated by a frequency band with stable contours. In the concluding part of the phrase, the frequency band appears to be narrowed to a width that is perceived by the listener as a distinct (and consonant) pitch, not a dense frequency band. In this way, the development of tonal friction serves as a marker of musical form as it defines the shape of those musical phrases that involve the *rokui*. Figures 1–3 illustrate this concept, showing the development of spectral density over the course of three *rokui* phrases in one *omengeredakl* recorded by Barbara B. Smith in 1963.¹⁵

Sound example 1

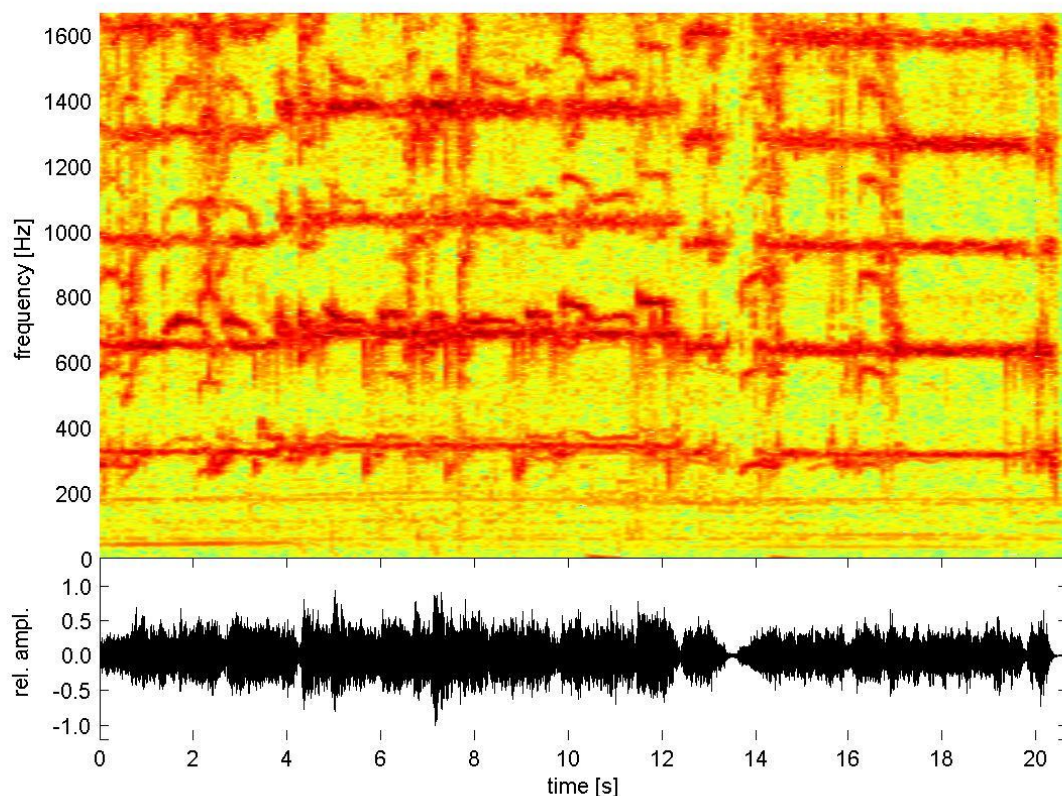


Figure 1: Spectrogram of phrase 8 of recording Smith I-2 (sound example 1).

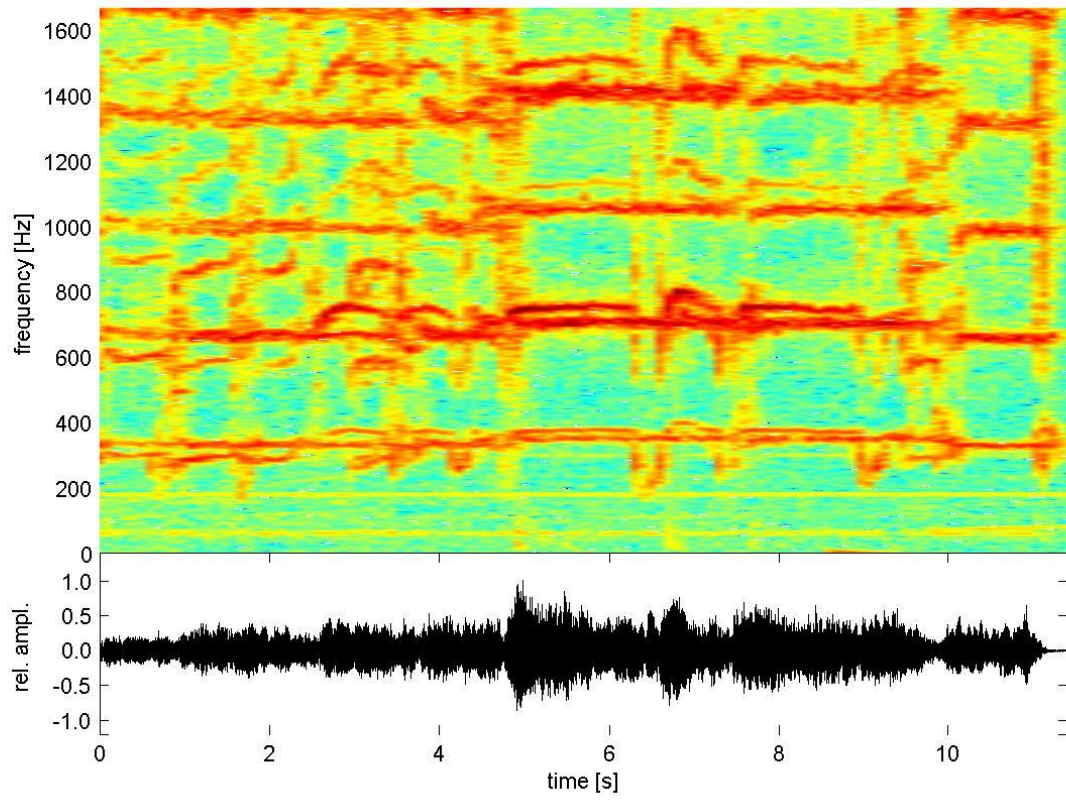
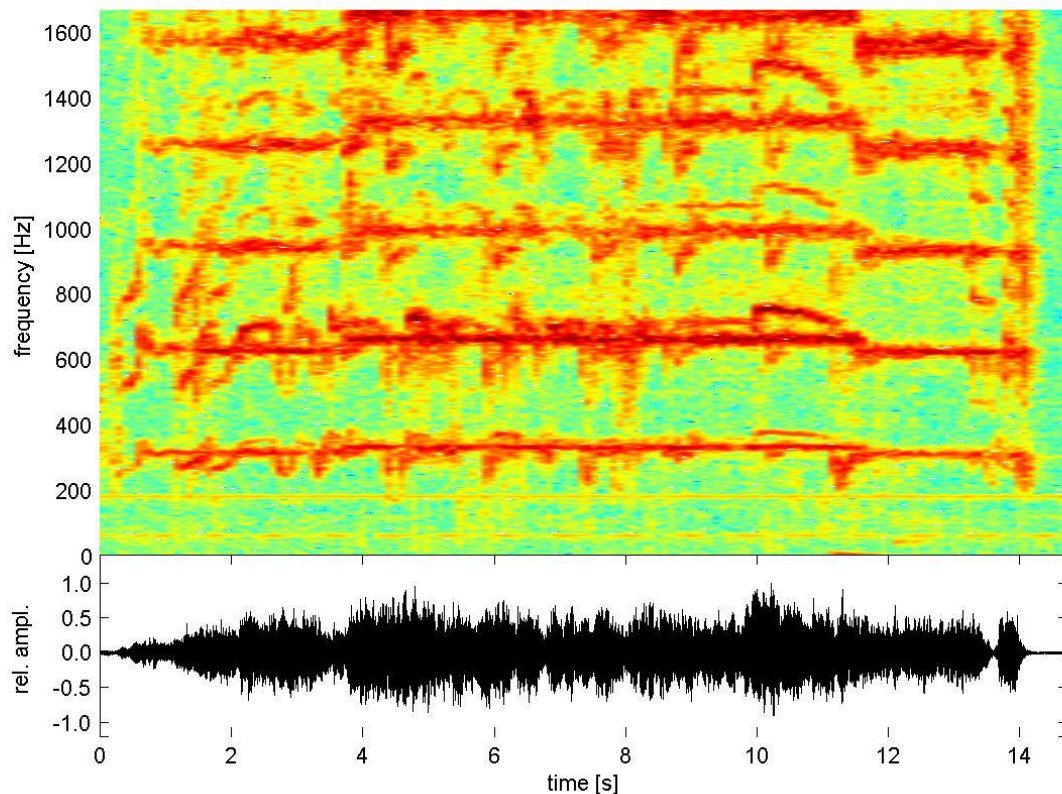


Figure 2: Spectrogram of phrase 9 of recording Smith I-2 (sound example 1).



Sound example 2

Figure 3: Spectrogram of phrase 17 of recording Smith I-2 (sound example 2).

All three spectrograms clearly illustrate the final narrowing of the frequency band, which, by establishing a small plateau of a narrow frequency range at the phrasal end, brings the phrase to its conclusion. This final narrowing begins around 17'' in Fig. 1, around 10'' in Fig. 2, and around 12'' in Fig. 3 and sound example 2. The spectrograms also illustrate something else: the structural parameters that singers focus on in the *rokui* parts in order to make the *omenegeredakl* feel 'how it's supposed to feel,' as Oribech put it. First, there is the considerable spectral friction within the frequency band that builds up to the final plateau at the phrasal end. In the case of sound example 2 and Fig. 1, this creates a single suggestion of motion that lasts for the whole phrase. This suggestion of motion can quite literally be described as roughly 11 seconds of contraction followed by about 2.5 seconds of expansion. At 14'', a brief increase in spectral friction marks the end of the phrase and the suggestion of motion. In Fig. 2, we can see roughly 10 seconds of contraction followed by about 2 seconds of expansion, and in Fig. 3, there are 11 seconds of contraction and 3 seconds of expansion. This process of contraction and expansion is a tangible manifestation of the way in which individual voices behave both towards another and together. It brings into existence the *rokui* (lit. 'all of them'), the key auditory body of the performance. The emergence of the *rokui* requires all singers to contribute to a musical event that occurs only *inbetween* the vocal parts. It therefore cannot be analyzed in terms of individuals' parts. This also explains why Victoria and Oribech did not deem it relevant to explain the rules for the melodic progression of the individual vocal parts' to me. It did not make sense to them to elaborate on that because they found that clearly, the music could not properly be described in these terms.

The *rokui* phrase suggests motion, musically conveying that thickly textured relationality is the primary structural element in the performance and does not serve as a metaphor but as an atmosphere. According to Schmitz, it modulates the singers' and audience's vital drive with its continuous oscillation between contraction and expansion, which responds to a stimulus beyond affect and perception. Paraphrasing anthropologist Charles Hirschkind,¹⁶ this suggestion of movement stirs up 'latent tendencies of [...] response sedimented within the mnemonic regions of the flesh' (Hirschkind, 2006, pp. 82f.). Here, the mnemonic regions of the singers' felt bodies resonate and remember the Palauan concept of community, which was developed when the gods created the islands and their societal hierarchy. As *mechas* (a respectful Palauan term for elder women, who are considered culture bearers), *omengeredakl* singers often consider it their responsibility to pass on the experiential knowledge about such traditional key concepts through song. As Oribech said to me in a conversation a few weeks after the one I described at the beginning of this article, 'we can only sing [to the young people]'. With that, she meant that some traditional values cannot be fully translated into words. They require a different medium, in this particular case *omengeredakl* and the encompassing felt-bodily experience of Hirschkind's responsiveness they afford. The particular notion of community that, as the *mechas* suggested during our conversations, is embodied by the *rokui*, can be traced all the way to the gods and is present throughout Palauan oral history and mythology. By modulating the felt body's rhythm of contraction and expansion, the *rokui*'s suggestion of motion causes the felt body's knowledge of this origin and cultural history of the notion of community to resonate in a diffuse way with the musical experience of singing *omengeredakl*. If the musical texture of the *rokui* phrase exudes a sense of community, as my interlocutors kept emphasizing, then the spectrograms above show how this happens: primarily through a modulation of the *rokui*'s frequency band and its internal tonal tension. This modulation is a suggestion of movement that, in *omengeredakl*, resonates with Palauan notions of societal structure, community values, spiritual obligations, social responsibility, and historicity. This resonance is possible because of the confluence of two historicities: the historicity of these notions themselves and the historicity of a musical genre that is *olangch* and as such capable of resounding these notions: *omengeredakl*. The materiality of the latter suggests movement. In a traditional context, Palauan listeners' felt bodies powerfully experience these suggestions of movement as an atmosphere that is inseparable from the affective and emotional qualities of the former. This is also why *omengeredakl* items will be performed during official events of political nature, if at all possible: to evoke that shared feeling of belonging to one and the same community.

The *esbe* part is illustrated as a clearly discernible, two-part melodic line that is 'poured' on top of the *rokui*'s frequency band. In sound example 2, located in Fig. 3, one can see those two parts from 2–8'' and 8–12'', including the melodic arch of the second *esbe* part, which commences around 8'' and reaches its highest pitch at around 10''. The women's use of the *esbe* to refer to 'the moon up there', together with Victoria's hand gesture, seems to become self-explanatory: the uplifting melodic movement that reaches beyond the upper contours of the frequency band suggests a spatial expansion that links the *rokui* to a wider sonic space. But that is not all there is. Beyond the isomorphic metaphor, the *esbe* further reinforces the felt bodily experience of the grander frame of reference, that is, the Palauan concept of historicity that is closely linked to spirituality. This is why the structure of *omengeredakl* simply 'make sense', in the words of my interlocutors. Palauan spirituality is deeply intertwined with cosmology and its coming into existence. Throughout Palauan mythology and oral history, the moon is a central luminary both mythologically and spiritually. Accordingly, the lunar cycles are the primary markers of time, and these cycles at the same time explain the structure of Palau's divinely created societal hierarchy (cf. Parmentier, 1987, pp. 134ff.).

There reference to the moon in the word *esbe*, then, is a reference to one of the guiding principles in the Palauan traditional worldview.

Loudness, related to the modulation of spectral friction, can also be observed in the figures. Generally, harmonics—appearing in the spectrograms as horizontal lines—tend to have comparatively constant frequencies, but as can be gleaned from the spectrograms, their loudness increases proportionally more than that of the lower frequencies. Hence, there is a greater concentration of acoustic energy in the higher band of the spectral envelope. Due to the frequency band's continuous movement of internal pitches—voices constantly shift within a very close intervallic range—the acoustic result of the phrase is complex, constant modulation between brighter and darker timbres. These oscillations form another suggestion of motion that is much quicker and more varied than the suggestions brought about by play with spectral friction and the distribution of the *esbe*'s phrases across the *rokui* part. They also cause the part preceding the final plateau to become louder, while the final plateau itself, featuring many fewer oscillations of this kind, is quieter. This emphasizes the largest suggestion of motion in the *rokui* phrase: the one marked by spectral friction, which creates the impression of a frequency band shaped like a melodic arch. In this way, a hierarchy is established between the various suggestions of motion that unfold simultaneously: the suggestion of motion brought about by tonal friction marks the formal parts of the performance, whereas the other suggestions of motion shape the phrase's inner gestalt.

These musical suggestions of movement (and others) comprise a musical event, the diffuse meaningfulness of which is made up of layered felt bodily sensations (such as expansion in space) and remembrances (such as experiencing through the felt body the specifically Palauan notion of community). It is only through the incorporation of suggestions of motion in the musical experience of singing *omengeredakl* that the full meaningfulness of *omengeredakl* became tangible to Victoria, Oribech, and their fellow singers. This is why they suggested they would not be able to 'explain' and I would just have to learn (with my felt body) how it was supposed to feel. As Oribech said, sometimes one can only sing.

Meaningfulness

What, then, is the analytical merit of the term meaningfulness here? New phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz's notion of meaningfulness hinges on the definition that feelings 'are atmospheres poured out spatially that move the felt (not the material) body' (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 247). Feelings are 'out there', in other words, and as atmospheres, they the capacity of drawing in people who happen to be located in the place inhabited by these feelings. With this, Schmitz takes a tough stance on what he calls the 'psychologistic-reductionist-introjectionist objectification' prevalent in North Atlantic philosophy, which, according to him, results in 'the consequent dogma that man consists of body and soul' but 'fails in that the relation of the conscious subject to their private inner sphere cannot be adequately characterized, even though a number of suggestions are in place' (*ibid.*). Trying to overcome both intellectualistic and mentalistic approaches, Schmitz argues that the felt body (*Leib*) is that which a person can sense of herself within the sphere of her material body (*Körper*), without falling back on the five senses (*cf.* Kazig, 2016, p. 3). Looking at the various ways in which the felt body affords corporeal sensation and, with this, corporeal dynamics, Schmitz directs his analysis toward the (felt) bodily practices involved in humans' interactions with the world. He thinks of the human condition as one that is centrally driven by the 'vital drive' ('vitaler Antrieb' in the original German). This vital drive involves corporeal 'expansion' and 'contraction':

‘[...]he often non-specific, diffusely localised corporeal feelings operate most of the time in the form of a pulsating rhythm in the felt body constantly oscillating between corporeal expansion and contraction, regularly at work in breathing. [...] Corporeal expansion is a marked widening of the felt space in the region of one’s body, most notably occurring in states of relaxation. [...] The opposite pole of corporeal contraction is a marked narrowing of the felt body, often in states of sudden, unexpected change to one’s bodily orientation—such contraction occurs in states of shock, in panic or moments of great focus and concentration. Usually, expansion and contraction are dynamically related’ (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 245).

The felt body, to Schmitz, is highly sensitive to the space around it, and especially to the spatially ‘poured out’ feeling usually called atmosphere. Its involvement with its surroundings is ‘both realized and mediated by corporeal feelings that in turn make manifest (disclose) goings-on in the environment’ (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 245). These corporeal feelings react to the environment’s suggestions of motion by expanding or contracting vis-à-vis the world. This is an immediate, pre-reflective way of intermingling with the world that Schmitz calls ‘self-consciousness without identification [...] It can be characterized further by noting the irrevocable ‘mine-ness’ that is stamped upon every experience of a conscious subject’ (Schmitz et al., 2011, p. 245).

Suggestions of motion, according to Schmitz, are ‘pre-figurations of motion of figures that are either in repose or motion, or of motions; [these pre-figurations] always exceed the scope of the motion that may actually be executed’ (Schmitz, 2014, p. 76; translated from the original German). Suggestions of motion serve as a bridge (Ger. *Brückenqualitäten*). This facilitates incorporation and is thus the key to understanding how a specific atmosphere’s musical suggestions of motion are capable of completely taking hold of people and making them want to dance and sing along; or, in the case of *omengeredakl*, of suggesting to them an encompassing sense of belonging. To participate in this way is a manner of knowing and relating to the world with the felt body, ‘a mode of thought, already in the act’ (Manning and Massumi, 2014, p. vii) that takes place in the felt body. Atmospheres do not dictate feelings; rather, they are spatially present feelings that activate modalities for the (felt) body to align with the world. These modalities are experienced as musical meaningfulness: the sensation of everything making sense the *omengeredakl* singers in Melekeok referred to.

Meaningfulness in music, then, may be experienced as atmospheric suggestions of motion. This is what happened in the case of the *omengeredakl* I have discussed above. The key difference between musical meaningfulness and musical meaning(s) is that the latter are the result of interpretive techniques attributing meaning, whereas meaningfulness emerges from their specific forms of articulation (here, *omengeredakl* singing) and manifests as a corporeal experience. Still, meaning and meaningfulness are not entirely separate because the attribution of meaning is always taking place vis-à-vis the (felt) body, as I have shown above. Their relationship is one of both tension and simultaneity. This is what makes culturally specific atmospheres such as the atmospheric historicity of *omengeredakl* possible. Meaningfulness, then, highlights other facets of the complex ways in which music means: those that the felt body immediately tunes into and resonates with but that escape interpretive techniques. The moment music becomes manifest as an atmosphere, it charges situations with complex meaningfulness. This happens through the experience of music’s distinctive aesthetics, as Victoria, Oribech, and the other women suggested when they said, ‘[And] when you know [how you’re supposed to fill in your vocal part], it’ll make a lot of sense to you. You’ll know what to do’. This statement aligns with anthropologist Karen Nero’s observation

that in Palau, as in much of Micronesia,

‘[...] aesthetic emphasis is on the perfection of the performance rather than the creation of a lasting object. When perfection is achieved, the thrill of recognition in the audience fulfills local sensibilities, but translates poorly into academic discourse’ (Nero, 1999, p. 257).

Conclusion

Like music, atmospheres are a process, not an effect. In experiencing an atmosphere, the felt body reaches out into its environment and towards other human bodies through the contraction and expansion of the vital drive, which exceeds the clear-cut boundaries of the physical body. Therefore, when experiencing a musical atmosphere, felt bodies interact with the world, which makes the mind/body dichotomy useless as an interpretive tool. Not only do atmospheres, according to Schmitz, act as a bridge that emphasizes the fleeting connection between the body and its environment but also they show how the distinction between attributed meaning and felt experience may well be analytically useful at times, but ultimately falls short of addressing the lived experience. Lived experience is characterized by the inseparability of the experiential intensity of discourse and the discursive dimension of feeling in music. The meanings of suggestions of motion are internally diffuse, many and ambivalent. Through musical suggestions of motion, some of these meanings resonate with the social and cultural configurations they encounter; others do not. In order for felt bodies to react to suggestions of motion, they need to be responsive to them. Whether or not felt bodies are responsive depends on the social and cultural configurations that are inscribed in them and within which they move. This emphasizes once more just how deeply intertwined atmosphere and discourse are in the musical experience. It also underscores that the analytical merit of atmospheres for music studies is not in the general and the theoretical; atmospheres only become useful vis-à-vis the particular and the ethnographic.

In the case of *omengeredakl*, the social and cultural configurations inscribed in the felt bodies that were responsive to the music’s suggestions of motion included a set traditional values, a distinctly Palauan notion of history and how it is constituted, and an equally distinctively Palauan sense of community. The meaningfulness Victoria, Oribech and the other women found in chanting *omengeredakl* came about in the resonances between the suggestions of motion and these various frames the suggestions of motion encountered. These resonances enable the discursive description of an atmosphere, in this case identifying an atmosphere as *olangch*, as well as an experiential qualification of that discursive meaning. The atmospheres of *omengeredakl* in general, and of specific *omengeredakl* performances in particular, have multiple meanings both for individuals and between individuals because atmospheres are always internally manifold. To describe the atmosphere of *omengeredakl* as one of *olangch* or even historicity is to single out one of the possibilities afforded by the song. Individually felt experiences of an atmosphere are always already in conversation with several experiential, interpretive and affective frames at the same time.

These atmospheric effects resonate in felt bodies as meaningfulness. There, in felt bodies, meaningfulness emerges from interacting with competing local discourses of musical meaning and the sensation of affect, thus coming about in between experiential, interpretive and affective frames. This emergence yields an effect of both intensity and meaning that goes way beyond the effect these respective frames could possibly yield by themselves. This is what makes musical meaningfulness a true ‘in-between phenomenon’ (cf. Vadén and

Torvinen, 2014, p. 3). Neither meaning nor meaningfulness are an either/or phenomenon, one representative and the other not, one material and the other immaterial, one signifying and the other asignifying. Here, thinking through music with atmospheres can substantially further important earlier work on (a) musical semiotics (e.g., Turino 2014) by transcending Peircean categories of signification; (b) entrainment (Clayton et al. 2004), which focuses primarily on cognitive processes while incorporation describes a type of corporeal communication that becomes actualized as felt-bodily experience; and (c) music as an affective and aesthetic agent in everyday life (DeNora 2000), to which it adds a more encompassing perspective. Atmospheres point us to how the felt body thinks and the mind feels, how thought is affected and how affective experience reasons. This itself has been amply theorized upon in various branches of philosophy, most notably perhaps in Richard Shusterman's pragmatist somaesthetics (2008). But atmospheres offer a number of concrete analytical tools to us music scholars, as I have shown above. With this, the notion of atmospheres allows us to draw a little nearer not so much on what music means to whom, but why and how it means so much in a specifically musical way.

What thinking with atmospheres offers to music studies, then, is a layered account of meaning and meaningfulness that cuts across taken-for-granted binaries such as the body (which feels sensations) and mind (which attributes meaning), or affect and discourse. Atmospheres do not primarily account for what (all) music may mean to whom, nor do they account for the intensity with which someone experiences a musical performance. Instead, they allow for an exploration of the workings of musical meaning(fulness) that sensitizes us to the spectrum of ways in which music means, and the varying intensities with which meaning may be experienced. Thinking about atmospheres invites us to look at music-making as cultural knowledge in action in the sense of Manning and Massumi (2014): as a specifically musical mode of knowing in which musical experience converges with thinking and feeling. This occurs in the case of *omengeredakl*, where chanting amounts to pinpointing what it means to 'simply know how it is supposed to feel'.

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¹ February 18th, 2005. In this article, I am drawing on fieldwork I performed in Palau from 2005–2008 and in 2014. All interviews quoted were conducted in Palauan, and all translations are mine.

² In order to protect their privacy, I refer to my interlocutors by their first name only, foregoing their hereditary titles.

³ From the Barbara B. Smith collection, a part of which has been published (Koch and Kopal 2015).

⁴ In the original German, '[...] eine unbestimmt räumlich ergossene Gefühlsqualität.'

⁵ 'Binnendiffus' and 'mannigfaltig chaotisch' in the original German.

⁶ '[M]an hat es also mit einem Mannigfaltigen zu tun, das prägnant geschlossen und abgehoben ist, aber doch eigentümlich binnendiffus: Die vorschwebenden Sachverhalte usw. sind nicht alle einzeln und lassen sich deshalb auch nicht aufzählen, weil in ihrem Verhältnis zueinander nicht oder nicht in allen Fällen feststeht, welche mit welchen identisch und welche von welchen verschieden sind' in the original German.

⁷ For a related critique of this division based on empirical evidence, see Sperber and Mercier 2017. Critiquing the notion of a two-step process in which affect is followed by reflection as outlined above, cognitive scientists Sperber and Mercier propose instead the idea of a continuum of inferences straddling perception, intuition and reasoning. Intuitions, for them, are metacognitive: their content is conscious but ‘there is no awareness [...] of the inferential processes that deliver an intuition [...] Intuitions are not, however, experienced as mere ideas ‘in the air’ or as pure guesses. They come with a sense of metacognitive self-confidence that can be more or less compelling: intuitions are experienced as weaker or stronger’ (p. 66).

⁸ For a more in-depth description of the genre of *omengeredakl*, see Abels (2008).

⁹ Personal communication, 15 February, 2005.

¹⁰ There seems to be a tendency in Palau to assign the *esbe* part to exceptionally high-pitched male voices. Although there are few such voices, these men are highly sought after. David, personal communication, 19 January, 2006.

¹¹ Osamu Yamaguti in 1965 recorded a slightly different Palauan terminology. According to him, the *mesuchokl* prompts or ‘explains’ the lyrics between the formal units of the *omengeredakl*; *mengider* is the ‘start-off’ that commences the *bóid*; the *meliikes* is the leader of the chorus; and the *mengesbch* is the ‘counterpart singer’ (see Yamaguti 1967). This terminology was not approved of by my interlocutors in 2005 and 2006, and they proposed the one I give here instead.

¹² In English, the term also means ‘to sing out of tune,’¹² but in Palauan it does not have this negative connotation, as will become evident in the description of the *omengeredakl*’s tonal language I am giving below.

¹³ In contemporary *omengeredakl*, the *esbe* part is sometimes omitted, typically for lack of skilled singers.

¹⁴ See Josephs 1977, 190, 293.

¹⁵ Barbara B. Smith performed fieldwork in Micronesia, including Palau, in 1963. Her recordings are stored at the Pacific Collection of the University of Hawai’i at Manoa Library. A copy is held by the Belau National Museum in Koror, Palau. Parts of the Smith recordings have been published as a CD (Koch and Kopal 2015).

¹⁶ Charles Hirschkind refers here to the affective intensities of the body rather than the responsiveness of the felt body. In keeping with the discussions of affect presented by Deleuze/Guattari, Massumi, and others, McGraw (2016) and Torvinen and Vadén (2014) assume that affect is sensed before interpretive frames are leveraged. I, however, contend that both processes may happen at the same time and interrelate.