

***Music Grooves.* By Charles Keil and Steven Feld. (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994. Pp. viii + 402.)**

**Beverley Diamond**

Volume 18, numéro 1, 1996

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087547ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087547ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Diamond, B. (1996). Compte rendu de [*Music Grooves.* By Charles Keil and Steven Feld. (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994. Pp. viii + 402.)]. *Ethnologies*, 18(1), 124–131. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087547ar>

This is a book for which I would recommend setting aside a quiet afternoon to savour. Although its episodic structure may appear initially strange to a European reader, the story nonetheless has a compelling quality which pulls the reader into its imaginary world of transformations and magic. The pleasure of this text is enhanced by the superlative scholarship evident in its editing. Whether reading for enjoyment or more scholarly reasons, *Iron Hawk* pleases from beginning to end.

### References Cited

Deloria, Ella. 1932[1974]. *Dakota Texts*. New York : AMS.

Deloria, Ella. 1992. *Deer Women and Elk Men: The Lakota Narratives of Ella Deloria*, ed. Julian Rice. Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press.

Deloria, Ella, and Franz Boas. 1941[1976]. *Dakota Grammar*. New York : AMS.

Anne BRYDON  
University of Western Ontario

---

*Music Grooves*. By Charles Keil and Steven Feld. (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994. Pp. viii + 402.)

Lest readers think that this book is merely a compilation of reprints of work published by two leading ethnomusicologists between 1966 and the present, let me attempt a “hook” by describing the publication as hypertext without a Pentium pricetag. The articles — mostly revised, enriched by extensive photographic material, and, in some cases, reassembled from multiple sources — are enough reason to buy the book, of course, since virtually all of them are influential contributions to the discipline, and since their arrangement here has the added advantage of allowing readers to see how key concepts developed over time. But in between the reprinted articles are three reflexive dialogues framing, extending, and arguing the issues previously published. Cross-referenced to these in a unique style of end-notes are “Further Comments” which effect a leap to yet another information level. I predict that these sections, with their extensive bibliographies, each one highly personal but exemplary for its thoroughness and range, will become widely used reading lists in many a graduate programme in ethnomusicology (and related fields such as folklore) for subjects ranging from “cultural studies,” the current critique in musicology, music cognition, semiotics, polka scholarship and a host of others.

The double meaning of “music grooves” serves as an organizational frame for the anthology, the first section focusing on “Participation in Grooves” and the second on the “Mediation of Grooves.” Intersections and collisions between the authors’ explorations of these broad themes are constructed more or less smoothly. It is the disjunctures (the participant discrepancies, one is encouraged to say) as much as the resonances between their work that makes this book engaging.

The first Dialogue situates their intellectual work in relation to their personal experiences, contextualizing their “authority” as white, suburban-raised males born about a decade apart, and as musicians with exceedingly diverse professional interests (Keil rooted in blues and jazz, as well as music of the Nigerian Tiv, the polka culture in midwestern America, Cuban, Japanese and Greek musics ; Feld also rooted in jazz but best known for his extensive research on the Kaluli). I loved this Dialogue. They seemed at their most vulnerable here. The contingencies which helped shape their ideas and interests, the fluidity of their thinking, all were laid open in a way which really helps one situate their professional work.

Part One begins with theoretical pieces by each author followed by applications of at least some of the same theoretical issues. Keil’s “Motion and Feeling through Music” (1966) was his first published articulation of his discontent with the syntactic and structural analytic approaches (particularly that of Leonard B. Meyer, his teacher-cum-adversary) which dominated music theory then and now. He posits “engendered feeling” as an alternative paradigm to “embodied meaning” assumed by formalist approaches. His critique was an important statement, though perhaps not as singularly important as is suggested in the second dialogue (one thinks here of contemporaneous work by John Blacking — who is acknowledged in one footnote — or of Norma McLeod’s exploration of “coterminousness” — a concept which approaches participant discrepancies from a slightly different point of view). The reiteration of this piece alongside the more concrete exploration of participant discrepancies which developed out of it is fascinating. For this reviewer, the article has acquired the flavour of a utopian period piece, apparently unaware of its reification of a mind/body split in its separation of thinking and doing. From a distance of almost 30 years, his aim to displace rather than complement Meyer as a music theory guru seems pointlessly confrontational.

Feld’s “Communication, Music, and Speech about Music” (1984) remains, on the other hand, one of his most important contributions to ethnomusicology, in my opinion. The resonance with Keil is clear here in his emphasis on the “real worlds of users and use” as well as the “ambiguities, heterogeneity, lived meanings, and the multifunctionalism and reception of signs” over issues of form or taxonomy. Like Keil, he takes on the elders — Charles Seeger, whom he criticizes for overdrawing the referential in speech, the

semiotologists Molino, Nattiez and others. His concept of the relational nature of communication is somewhat different from Keil's, however, particularly in its emphasis on speech about music. Feld posits an alternative communications model which stresses the perspective of the listener (the producer is also a listener, of course) and the "interpretive moves" which render listening experience meaningful. His typology of these moves (his categories include "locational," "categorical," "associational," "reflective," and "evaluative") and their various "conceptualizing frames" (including "expressive ideology," "identity," "coherence") remains a useful framework for researchers. What his 1984 model did not yet manage, in my view, is adequate attention to the power differentials implicit in the interlayering of interpretive moves, an interlayering which masks, displaces, and effaces as often as it complements. More recent work on "mediation" (e.g., Hennion 1993, Guilbault 1995) has incorporated such complexities while remaining deeply indebted to Feld.

Chapters 3 and 4 seem to apply the theories explicated in chapters 1 and 2. By 1987, Keil had worked out his theory of "participatory discrepancies," a belief that "music to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be 'out of time' and 'out of tune'" (p. 96). His "application" ranges over the diverse styles which interest him, from the paired trumpets of the polka band to the Bo Diddley beat. Although his thinking had developed considerably since 1966, the sweeping generalizations demand resistance, at least from this reviewer. "Participation is the opposite of alienation from nature" ( p. 98) he asserts; what about the "participation" of strip miners, road hogs, or poachers, one could retort. The devotion of an entire issue of *Ethnomusicology* to Keil's theme, however, is indication of the growing interest in participant discrepancies and illustration of the ongoing refinements which he continues to make. This theory is, in my view, his greatest contribution to the study of music thus far. Indebted to Owen Barfield (and Levi Bruhl before him) for his concept of participation (as distinct from the conscious), Keil seems curiously unaware of the enormous feminist discourse relevant to this theory — Julia Kristeva's *chora*, Cixous' *jouissance*. More recently, of course, scholars working on "performativity" have, in my view, achieved a more processual approach to participation. Work by Judith Butler, Dorinne Kondo, or Suzanne Cusick merit acknowledgement in the extensive bibliography. This lacuna in the literature points, I think, to the crux of a difference between Keil and Feld. Keil is concerned with those discrepancies which are somehow acknowledged as structurally appropriate in the creation of music (we are not always aware for whom these are appropriate). Feld (and the performativity authors just cited) recognize both individual and shared kinds of interpretive moves (in both music and speech discourse, "appropriate" or not) about both the creation and reception of music.

Feld's "Aesthetics as Iconicity of Style (Uptown Title) ; or (Downtown Title) 'Lift-up-over sounding' : Getting into the Kaluli Groove" (Chapter 4) is

convincing as a case study for the theory he presented in Chapter 2. As complex as its title, this article circles around academic theory (uptown) and indigenous thought (downtown) as it unfolds the deep-seated Kaluli metaphor of “lift up over” which operates intertextually in music performance, visual art, and dance, as well as social relations and even rain-forest navigation. Feld tries to get beyond the concept of homology to what he labels iconicity, a concept he invokes for metaphors which have become “naturally real, obvious, complete, and thorough” ; a concept which is clarified considerably in the ensuing “Dialogue.” This is one article which has shifted emphasis for me because of its positioning in this anthology. When it was first published, I read “lifting up over” as an additive process, a textural layering but the word “discrepancy” would not have come readily to mind. Now, juxtaposed with Keil’s theories, individualism seems more important than consensus. Characteristic of much of Feld’s work, the musical sounds are kept in the foreground, with many references to recorded examples (I especially like the incident recording Kaluli responses to PNG pop and “voice Bosavi.”) Surprisingly, however, there is little “thick [ethnographic] description” and very little actual Kaluli discourse. More Kaluli voices, making the interpretive moves Feld describes, might alleviate my concern about the representation of “lifting up over” as *the* trope for Kaluli aesthetics. While we do see multiplicity and polyreferentiality in Feld’s presentation of this, the construction is still tightly controlled by him.

Dialogue Two is largely an exegesis of the articles in Part One. While I appreciated the fuller exploration of Feld’s iconicity concept toward the end of the dialogue, I found the first half to be the least illuminating section of the book, in part because much of it seems rather self-congratulatory, ignoring achievements of scholars working on related issues, in part because of what I perceive as some blind spots in their arguments. I have a problem with “groove,” for example, as (simply) something we get into externally when the whole notion is so integrally linked to the internal, the emotional, the bodily. I find it strange that feminism is not acknowledged for its fundamental contributions to our understanding of the relationship of analysis and evaluation, or that the “ethnography of performance” scholarship in 1970s and 80s ethnomusicology is similarly ignored. I think that, far from “liberat[ing] the music-making from the strictures...,” Keil glosses over a huge point when he implies but then often ignores that music feels, not “out of time” and “out of tune,” but totally together when the participant discrepancies fall within acceptable limits, limits which are culturally bracketed. I am not convinced that “jazz is more like the rest of the world’s musics than is Western art music” (p. 156) but regard this as a marginalization of non-improvised traditions and a distortion of many improvised ones which are taught and performed in radically different contexts. The division of the world into those who like perfection and those who don’t is yet another over-generalization. To be fair, Feld takes these reductions on, accusing his colleague of folk protectionism

and a game of absolutes. Keil defends his big gestures as necessary political moves in a mission to counter the hegemony of the West against the rest. Again, I'm not convinced.

Part Two, concerning issues of mediation and commodification, contains more varied modes of discourse (a series of letters regarding their admiration for, but difficulty in writing about, Aretha Franklin; a cartoon diatribe against modern music; a couple of vintage Keil polemic pieces; Feld's exegesis of his *Voices of the Rainforest* CD). The opening of academia to different styles of discourses is exciting in my view and this anthology offers ample demonstration of how engaging these stylistic juxtapositions can be. On the other hand, this part of the anthology never achieves the coherence of Part One, in part because of the plural modes, in part because the authors are more sharply divided on many of the issues.

Chapters 5 ("People's Music Comparatively : Style and Stereotype, Class and Hegemony") and 7 ("On Civilization, Cultural Studies and Copyright") are characteristic Keil doing his most in-your-face Marxist thing. The former attempts a comparison of blues and polka, both of which flourished in the commercial marketplace when the first recordings were produced in the 1920s and again in the 1950s. His exploration of the concept of style is interesting in comparison with Feld's in Chapter 4. Chapter 7 draws an unabashedly black-and-white contrast between civilization (controlled and controlling) and culture (all that is spontaneous and good). "Whose culture ? whose civilization ?" I want to shout. Responding to Keil's reductionism in kind, I would have to protest that the dichotomies he draws replicate the fundamental polarities of patriarchal society, polarities which are often received as racist and sexist. If his arguments acquire more nuance, so will mine.

In between these are the Aretha letters, a fascinating exchange which struggles with the difficulty of "reading" an artist whose work is variably resistant and acquiescent to oppressive social forces. In a way, they have tipped the roles here and present themselves as ethnographic informants. The vulnerability is a nice authorial twist.

The final group of three papers has two warm-up acts and a main event: Chapter 8 is Feld's "Notes on World Beat," a piece which preceded much of the literature on Paul Simon's *Graceland*, an album which is analyzed here in addition to collaborations between Muddy Waters and the Stones, Peter Gabriel and Youssou N'dour, as well as Talking Heads and Fela Kuti. Keil's "Music Mediated and Live in Japan" — more of a travel report on the innovative ways in which he noted that the Japanese were interacting with technology — is a key statement in his opus. It is here that he was moved to modify his earlier monolithically negative response to commodified musics, as he begins to understand some examples of the "personalization of mechanical processes" (p. 253). Finally, in Chapter 10, Feld's "From Schizophrenia to Schismogenesis : On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of 'World Music' and 'World

Beat',” we have a major piece about the recent explosion of industry interest in musical pluralism, leading into a fascinating account of Feld’s own participation in the industry during his production of *Voices of the Rainforest*. In relation to his earlier “Notes on World Beat,” this piece repositions Feld as a participant in the intercultural interpretive moves of his Kaluli collaborators. The issues of representation which he unfolds are vividly drawn and controversially justified as he recounts his production decisions.

If there is a point of agreement in this group of three papers, it is that both scholars are interested in revitalization through appropriation, and in the accepting of stereotypes in order to transcend them. But the final Dialogue makes it clear that their disjunctures are sharp with regard to issues of commodification and mediation. They argue strongly about agency and the media, about issues of identity and authenticity, about the appropriate means for validating serious music worlds, about appropriate strategies for decolonising the music business, about musical tokenism. Motivated by a very real fear of an “echo-catastrophe,” Keil wants to keep the focus on “fat ideas” (like who makes the money) and admits his love of slogans rather than arguments (saves trees!). Feld invites real ethnography, arguing that the relationships between recorded and live music are more complex than Keil suggests. I found this debate utterly important. It’s a conversation which needs many more participants.

Thus far, my review of *Music Grooves* is too smooth. I think readers need to know that this book was hell to review ! The richness of presentational modes, themes, and perspectives is anything but straightforward. The diverse modes of discourse have already been alluded to. The extraordinary combination of seriousness and playfulness have not. The word-play sticks in one’s mind exactly as these two clever writers intend : there’s the punning title, of course ; Keil’s interchangeable references for PD to indicate participant discrepancies, particles dancing, and public domain; or his play on rights, rites, writes, wrights, and REITS (Real Estate Investment Trusts) ; Feld’s playful angst over style and grooves, “Re-fused ? Re: Fused ? Refused ?” They are extraordinarily good labellers of their ideas. One has to work hard to figure out whether the substance underlying the label is worth the seduction. Often it is.

The book’s very richness inspired me to make some 27 pages of notes in preparation for writing the review. Unlike most of my notes toward a review, these were not coherent summaries of well-developed themes and ideas, but fragments fraught with question marks, bracketed responses with a tone inappropriately combative for an even-handed reviewer, and even in one place (p. 228 in case anyone is interested) block letters which declared that “I GOT SO MAD HERE !” As a book which seeks not merely to explore intellectually but to inspire “participatory consciousness,” it was clearly a stunning success with me !

For yet another thing, the book was hard to review because the body of work it represents is not a neat package easily contained in its 400 pages. I already

alluded to the extension of Keil's "participatory discrepancy" theories, for example, in *Ethnomusicology* and the connection between Feld's *Voices of the Rainforest* CD and Chapter 10. The reading is definitely enriched if one knows more of their work. It's hard to keep straight where *Music Grooves* takes off from previous publications or anticipates subsequent ones.

Finally, it is hard to write a review of this book without talking about personalities — something which feels inappropriate in a book review. (But then, what is appropriate for a book which integrates cartoons and high theory ?) So here we must in fact meet, not two distant scholars, but Charlie Keil — slightly larger than life, always looking for the colossal, the eventful, the feelingful, the fat ideas ; not afraid to stumble — and Steve Feld — dauntingly smart, involved, hip to the industry but sensitive to the artists. Clearly they choose to write their personalities, their humanness, into this book and I applaud them for that.

But these reviewer's woes are, in every case, integrally linked to the innovative structure and content of the publication. In each case, my difficulties signal their achievement. While there were moments when this book struck me as a breast-beating damnation of the smoothness and mechanical efficiency of a monolithic "West," a reinscribing of a selective authenticity, it is fundamentally subtler than this. If only because it places objects of study and authors' subjectivities in new relationships, relationships where the participant discrepancies enable a sort of "lifting-up-over" the issues, this anthology is an inspiring and provocative read whether or not you've previously encountered the reprinted articles.

### References Cited.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble*. New York : Routledge.

Cixous, Hélène. 1975. Le rire de la méduse. *L'arc*:39-54.

Cusick, Suzanne. 1994. On a Lesbian Relationship with Music. A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight. In *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett *et al.*, pp. 67-84. New York : Routledge.

Guilbault, Jocelyne. 1995. On Interpreting World Music: A Challenge in Theory and Practice. Ms.

Hennion, Antoine. 1993. *La Passion Musicale*. Paris : Diffusion Seuil.

Kondo, Dorinne K. 1990. *Crafting Selves : Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press.



---

Kristeva, Julia. 1984[1974]. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller. New York : Columbia University Press.

McLeod, Norma. 1966. Some Techniques of Analysis for Non-Western Music. Ph. D. Dissertation, Northwestern University.

Beverley DIAMOND  
York University

---

*Chocolates, Tattoos, Mayflowers : Mainstreet Memorabilia from Clary Croft.* By Clary Croft. (Halifax : Nimbus Publishing, 1995. Pp. vi + 106.)

Nimbus Books, or rather Kathy Koulbach, has designed an appealing book in *Chocolates, Tattoos and Mayflowers*. Glossy boards over sewn-in signatures of nearly square pages, all laid out stylishly, and with a want-to-eat-it photograph of chocolates (and a mayflower) on the cover — all this makes it a lovely book for a gift. And what's inside makes it an appealing bathroom or bedside book. No doubt that's where it will have been found this summer : a copy for each room in bed-and-breakfasts in Nova Scotia.

Clary Croft is described on the back cover as a “writer, folklorist and entertainer” and he attends to this book in all three roles. It grew out of a series of his radio items for the Nova Scotia CBC's regional network programme, “Mainstreet.”

Croft has been a singer and an investigator of Nova Scotian folksong for some twenty-five years. In that time he has lived not in the fat valleys of academic land but in the rather leaner “public sector” outcrops of gigs and grants. There are few jobs for folklorists in Canada, but for those people able to present folklore to the public, there are opportunities in the media. Early birds, and far flying ones, get the worms. Croft is such a bird. A folksinger, a sometime costumer, a media researcher, and a friend of Helen Creighton's in her last years: all these past lives have given him a variety of knowledge about the province that hints at the encyclopedic.

An awareness of the degree to which all cultural writers and presenters, academic or otherwise, dress up their material increasingly pervades academic folklorists' approach to “popularizers,” an approach that is more liberal in the 1990s than a generation ago. Croft is not an academically trained folklorist ; he took courses in the subject at university, and he worked closely with the Creighton collection at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia. Nimbus claims in their press kit