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Decentering Gagaku. Exploring the multiplicity of contemporary Japanese Court music

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PROPOSITIONS
FROM THE DISSERTATION
DECENTERING GAGAKU. EXPLORING THE MULTIPLICITY OF CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE COURT MUSIC
BY ANDREA GIOLAI

1. *Gagaku* is a bundle of partially connected, materially heterogenic “states” (more or less crystallized, more or less fluid) whose description as “things” can only be reductive.
2. *Gagaku*’s historical continuity derives from its capacity to remain multiple, and its multiplicity is based in the blurriness of the confines between what it is and what it is not.
3. The force which keeps *gagaku* alive is interstitial: it moves across and redefines the boundaries of this genre.
4. The history of *gagaku*’s transformations in the Meiji period reveals that the so-called “modernization” of Japanese music was paradoxical: it consisted in inventing the notion of “Japanese traditional music” while simultaneously creating musical objects that escape the distinction between modern and traditional.
5. The three most important amateur *gagaku* groups in Kansai are the “localized other” of a “centralized Japanese court music”. Their modern history is characterized by their resistance to the centripetal, hegemonic forces embodied by Tokyo’s Office of *Gagaku*.

6. Moving the capital to Tokyo was the primary cause of the appearance of the modern *gagaku* amateur.
7. Practicing *gagaku* as a local amateur means being part of a community in which the interactive shaping and constant renegotiation of a shared passion is at least as important as the physical production of sounds and dance movements.
8. Safeguarding a performing art should imply caring for its materials and materiality, not neutralizing its vitality by turning it into a museum good. For this reason, a politics of the intangible insensitive to the claims of the people who provide the primary materials for the performance of *gagaku* must be countered with an alternative politics of the tangible. *Gagaku* is not an endangered species.
9. Ethnomusicology should not be distinct from sound studies. Both are interested in “sound as the interrelation of materiality and metaphor” (Novak and Sakakeeny 2015).
10. The experience of participant observation is characterized by a constant oscillation between immersion and auscultation.
11. Those practicing Area studies should be more aware of the strong resonances between geographical border-crossing, interdisciplinarity, and the resistance of sound to being contained.
12. It is not only possible, but also desirable to tackle ontological questions about music without subscribing to one particular disciplinary domain.
13. The analogical concept of resonance conveys the multiplicity of reality but does not require a predetermined methodology for its study.
14. Resonances between the language used to describe something and the thing described yield performative and affective knowledge.