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OPEN CITY'S "ABSCHIED": TEJU COLE, GUSTAV MAHLER, AND ELLIPTICAL COSMOPOLITANISM

JOSH EPSTEIN

The dear earth everywhere
 Blossoms in spring and grows green again!
 Everywhere and forever the distance shines bright and blue!
 Forever...forever... [*Ewig...Ewig...*]
 —Gustav Mahler, ending of “Der Abschied” [Farewell],
 from *Das Lied von der Erde* (1909), trans. Deryck Cooke.¹

When we sit down to make work, we are made of all the things we have
 consumed.
 —Teju Cole, interview with Khalid Warsame

Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011)—a novel determined to unravel its protagonist—is bookended by the late music of Gustav Mahler, a composer equally determined to disintegrate. A roundabout *bildungsroman* that counterpoints the memories of a Nigerian psychiatrist, Julius, with his present-day movement through Manhattan, *Open City* is haunted by Mahler’s presence as an infirm Bohemian-Austrian composer in New York, who sought solace both in long walks and in the philosophical *Weltschmerz* of Goethe and Schopenhauer. If Cole’s elusive narrator finds an intellectual mirror-image in Mahler, that alienated image reflects a gaping ellipsis at Julius’s core. Julius’s narrative is initiated by a recording of Mahler’s song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* (*Song of the Earth*) (1909), which he hears playing in a Tower Records store, before spiraling back, at the end of the novel, to a live performance of Mahler’s last finished work, the Ninth Symphony (1909). Having been alerted to a series of Mahler concerts under the baton of Simon Rattle, the cosmopolitan British conductor, Julius is disappointed to find that *Das Lied von der Erde* is sold out, but attends a performance of the Ninth instead. Before narrating his experience of the piece, Julius slips into a

pedagogical register, explaining the composer's personal history leading up to these last great works:

Mahler's mind was perpetually on last things: *Das Lied von der Erde*, with its pained notes of farewell and its bittersweet sound world, was largely written in the summer of 1908. The year before, in 1907, vicious politics of an anti-Semitic nature saw him forced out of his directorship at the Vienna Opera. This disappointment had come on the heels of a great shock earlier, in July 1907, the death from scarlet fever of the elder of his two daughters, five-year-old Maria Anna. When the Metropolitan Opera engaged him for the 1908 season, he brought his wife, Alma, and younger daughter over to New York. There had been a respite, a moment of glory and some satisfaction. (Cole 249)

What might seem like a superfluous lecture, in a novel full of superfluous lectures, illuminates *Open City's* form and content. A Jewish Bohemian-Austrian composer traveling abroad to New York, Mahler reads as a double for Julius's open-bordered cosmopolitanism. One might observe, too, the spiraling, back-and-forth character of Julius's Mahler lesson, which starts in the composition of *Das Lied* and the memory of "last things," moves back to Mahler's dismissal from the Opera, back again to the death of his daughter, and then forward into his move to New York. Julius's attendance at the concert takes on a similar spiraling quality: we are told that "yesterday afternoon" he was alerted to the Mahler series, and that tonight's concert is sold out, before detailing the prior night's performance of the Ninth. At the beginning of the novel, *Das Lied* seems to give shape to Julius's day, while his final return to Mahler's Ninth, as I shall argue, derails narrative linearity, marking something both crucial and disruptive in the passage of time.

Open City's engagement with the aesthetic and ethical difficulties of cosmopolitanism continues to attract scholarly attention, pivoting largely on the elusiveness of Julius's constantly shifting narrative. Despite this, and despite Mahler's prominence at the novel's beginning and end, the composer's place in *Open City* has gone almost entirely ignored, except as an offhand example of Julius's faith in aesthetics. In a suggestive interview with Christopher Lydon, Cole describes Mahler as "an American composer" who "took advantage of modern travel,...so that when you hear the music in this country, you connect [Mahler] to past American listeners." Mahler's oft-quoted remark that he was "thrice homeless"—a Bohemian in Austria, an Austrian in Germany, and a Jewish person everywhere—coincides with the thematic insistence in his music on placelessness and itinerancy, and anticipates *Open City's* preoccupation with the same. Much as the criticism on *Open City* has examined Cole's reconstellation of the problems of cosmopolitanism, musicological scholarship has explored Mahler's engagement with the material tensions of *fin-de-siècle* Europe. In *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy* (1960), Theodor Adorno explores the "novelistic" qualities of Mahler's work, articulating the problem that

Cole and Mahler share: “The traumatic tone in Mahler’s music, a subjective moment of brokenness, is not to be denied....But even where the musical process seems to say ‘I,’ its correlative, analogous to the latent objective first person of the literary narrative, is divided by the gulf of the aesthetic from the person who wrote the phrase” (24-25). Adorno probes the material dialectics of Mahler’s technique, reaching not for a holistic “synthesis” that sublates the contradictions of experience, but for a negative image of the music’s inexpressible remainders.² Mahler’s music indirectly narrates personal and historical traumas through a mediating process that, like *Open City*, produces a dialectical “gulf” between author and narrative.

Julius, hearing Mahler, is no less “broken”—if he expects healing from aesthetic identification, he is looking in the wrong place. Engaging with Mahler’s music, and the cultural dilemmas that it embodies, opens up the critical potential of the novel’s form, folding Mahler’s dialectics into Cole’s intricately elliptical and contrapuntal narrative. If Mahler’s music exemplifies the “detachment” formed by the “high value Cole’s characters assign to cosmopolitan cultural production” (Hallemeier 240), Cole does not merely position Mahler as an example of bourgeois art; indeed, as Adorno suggests, Mahler’s music shares the novel’s urge to probe the contradictions of “cultural production” *per se*. As Mahler’s symphonies give voice to “[r]eified commodity characters,” in the form of lowbrow “marches and Ländler” (which Adorno compares to the traces of “penny dreadfuls” in the realist novel), they reveal themselves as “eminently modern in offering no surrogate of a significant whole, staking everything on alienated fortuitousness” (*Mahler* 62). Mimicking Mahler’s contrapuntal “[a]symmetry and irregularity of individual figures” (67), *Open City* reckons with the historicity and the contingency of traumas both present and past, both experienced and inflicted on others—it is revealed late in the novel that he has raped his friend Moji—and of expressive art forms that liberal cosmopolitans speak of as “timeless” “significant wholes,” but which reveal themselves as “bundled profusion[s] of [the music’s] own impulses and experiences” (63). Through Mahler’s music, *Open City* explores the potential of aesthetics to critique (rather than merely reaffirm) the patterns of consumption in which it partakes, and to fragment (rather than solidify) the boundaries of the cosmopolitan subject who consumes it.

Enconced though Mahler may be in the European musical tradition, Julius’s encounters with *Das Lied* and the Ninth repeatedly awaken latent questions about his own alterity—his past in Nigeria, ethnocentric commodity kitsch, and the traumas of colonialism generally—even as they remind us that Julius has inflicted new traumas on others. I wish to avoid reducing this argument to a study of “influence,” not least because the “language of borrowing and influence,” as Ayi Kwei Armah argues, is too often used to impugn African writers’ “original creativity.”³ Cole’s gestures to Mahler, a “borrower” whose “Orientalist” exoticism at times veers close to kitsch, put “creativity” itself

under pressure: to “create” is to plumb one’s stores of knowledge, recirculate those materials in a new form, and diagnose the work they perform. Julius’s African identity is entangled with Mahler’s internationalism, rendering his ethnicity as a mediated site of difference-within-difference. In the process, the gaps among these materials are opened out, creating a vertiginous vacuum at the center of Julius’s physical and narrative movement.

Cole makes this vertigo explicit after Julius leaves the concert performance of Mahler’s Ninth. As the music wanes into serene silence, Julius reflects on the composer’s death:

Mahler had worked, without self-pity, through his illness, through the catalogue of sufferings, and in his gargantuan compositions had worked elegy finely into elegy....He made his own death matter...so that it almost seemed as though he really died like a dragon breaking down a wall, as is said of certain great Chinese poets. (254)

Julius then catalogs the “streptococcal blood infection” and “infective endocarditis” that claimed Mahler’s life (254). Late in “Der Abschied,” the last movement of *Das Lied*, the alto (or, in some performances, baritone) sings the line “*Still ist mein Herz*,” a “still heart” both literal and spiritual. Julius’s reference to Chinese poets recalls the source of *Das Lied*: a setting of Tang Dynasty poetry loosely translated by Hans Bethge (with Mahler’s further additions). Moreover, Julius’s fascination with the Austrian composer is coextensive with his ecumenical consumption. The novel tracks Julius as he moves amidst Senegalese sidewalk salesmen (18), observes the “endless variety of South Seas masks” in the apartment of his mentor, Professor Saito (170), and moves through New York’s Chinatown districts, where he hears “twelve notes” from a Chinese marching band, “spiritual cousins of the offstage clarion in Mahler’s Second Symphony” (191). An international composer whose symphonies concatenate Western and Eastern sources, Mahler’s music composes through the materials with which the city is littered. Mahler, no less than Julius, is made by the things that he consumes.

And also un-made—for as Julius leaves the concert hall, he finds himself stranded on an unfinished fire escape:

Only when the door clicked behind me did I realize what I had done. I had used the emergency exit, which led directly from the fourth tier to the fire escape outside the building....Now, I faced solitude of a rare purity. In the darkness, above the sheer drop, I could see the lights of Forty-Second Street flashing in the visible distance....And then I saw that the fire escape went only halfway down the building, ending abruptly at another closed door. The rest of the way down to the ground, some four flights, was air alone. (255-56)

Expecting a return to urban modernity, we are instead faced with a spatial truncation, which encapsulates the novel’s temporal back-and-forth. Julius’s

“solitude of rare purity,” the abrupt foreclosure of a safe climb back to the earth, marks a corruption in Julius himself. As his showy authority over his materials starts to be exposed, Julius’s “solitude” reads not as a resolution, but as a shaking of his own foundation. Like the fire escape, the aporia of Julius’s narrative offers two options: an escape inward or a fatal drop to the earth’s surface. Julius finds himself looking up from the fire escape toward the “dark spaces” of the sky, which he reads as distant stars “giving out light but present to me only as blank interstices” (256). In Pieter Vermeulen’s words, “The novel’s anticlimactic ending underlines its main insight: recording the ‘still legible’ world involves a refusal to see the stars as self-sufficient constellations of significant connectedness” (“Flights” 55). Like *Das Lied*, which ends mid-sentence, and like Mahler’s Ninth, which to Julius resembles a boat that “dissolves into the substance of the fog” (254), the tapering-off of Julius’s narrative finds “connectedness” only in unspoken “blank” ellipses, repressed narratives whose future-anterior legibility must be taken on faith.

Out of time with his own past, dislocated from his own colonial subjectivity, Julius finds himself stranded on a series of abortive paths (staircases, boats, buses, walks) as he follows the elliptical fits-and-starts of Mahler’s equally fragmentary and citational music. As the novel closes, Julius finds himself on a boat: a yacht party to which he is perfunctorily invited, where he observes the Statue of Liberty, though Cole will not allow this symbol of cosmopolitan openness to retain a solid form. The statue, we are told, has proved “fatally disorient[ing]” for migrating birds, whose carcasses are collected and sent to scientific museums, and the novel ends with the anticlimactic observation that, “On the morning of October 13,...175 wrens had been gathered in” (259). A morbid coda to Mahler’s parodies of birdsong, these dead birds “highlight,” as Madhu Krishnan argues, “the illusory appearance of freedom in the open city, covering over a deeper and more sinister production” (693). Like *Das Lied*, which Julius hears in the heart of a global body on the verge of expiring (Tower Records), the open syntax of *Open City* is permanently in the middle of a sentence, beginning mid-thought, ending in a terminal *Ewig*...

Cole thus complicates the notion that aesthetic cosmopolitanism can make a subject whole, and instead points us to an *elliptical cosmopolitanism* in which the consumption of art both creates and corrodes novelistic identity. To reduce Mahler to a symbol of Julius’s cosmopolitan humanism is to obscure the negative-dialectical subtlety of Mahler’s own work, and to duplicate Julius’s mistake—as though listening to great music can affirm one’s “connectedness.” Julius is not just made, but unmade, by the things that he consumes. The dialectical irony of Cole’s and Mahler’s works is that they show how an unmaking can be made—can be given material form. Mahler’s music initiates Julius’s “psychogeographical”⁴ mobility through New York, while leaving his development, and that of Cole’s novel, stranded in ellipsis, rendered as open as the city itself.

Julius observes the tendency of music to absorb a tradition, noting that Mahler's encyclopedic musical language continues to admit new resonances with each performance. Just as Simon Rattle is "communicating" with Mahler-conductors before him (Julius rattles off a list of nine), Mahler's musicological legacy has absorbed Adorno's dialectical method. Mahler's "novelistic" (and "nominalistic") symphonies, Adorno claims, honor their thematic figures much as a novel honors its characters: by presenting an "essence" that is warped by the passage of narrative time (which, in turn, mediates historical time). Nothing in Mahler's symphonies, Adorno argues, "is ever entirely consumed by the dynamic, but nothing ever remains what it was. Time passes into the characters and changes them as empirical time alters faces" (72). Seen as both an "anarchic threat to bourgeois values" and as the "last outstanding petit-bourgeois symphonist,"⁵ Mahler's cosmopolitan modernity gestures toward Orientalism and otherness, and "novelistic" narratives that unwind the symphonic tradition apply *a fortiori* to *Open City*, which distends Julius's persona by exposing what he has concealed. Punctuated by birdsong, by the noise of the marketplace, by the willfully artificial Orientalist exoticism that Adorno heard as a "pseudomorph" for Mahler's permanent homelessness, *Das Lied* gives shape to Julius's wanderings through New York and Belgium, moving contrapuntally against the rhythms of city and nature. Julius gives narrative form to what is implicit in Mahler's symphonies, which "do not express a discipline which triumphantly subdues all particulars and individuals; instead, they assemble them in a procession of the liberated, which in the midst of unfreedom necessarily sounds like a progression of ghosts" (Adorno, *Quasi* 97). Cole's novel reinvents Mahler's processions of memory, and defamiliarizes the ideal of a subject becoming "whole" through music and literature, using Julius's movement to destabilize his subjectivity. The formal digestion of *Open City*'s "concrete particulars," grappling with Mahler's "unattainability of a harmonious, reconciled totality" (97), implodes the dream of cosmopolitan brotherhood reconstructed in the intersecting spheres of aesthetics and commerce.⁶

The role of aesthetics in Cole's critique has a powerful dialectical edge: art, as a putative site of liberal universalism and freedom, reveals its own spiraling self-cancellations, which shake the "harmonious totality" by implicitly summoning up historical traumas. As Amanda Anderson has written, nineteenth-century representations of cosmopolitanism privilege self-reflexive critical distance, through figures such as "the dandy, the Jew,...the doctor, the writer, and the professional" (apt descriptions of Mahler and Julius themselves), whose aesthetic practices reflected cultural anxieties attached to the "distinct promises of modernity" (4). For Rebecca Walkowitz, likewise, cosmopolitanism in twentieth-century modernism is both a stylistic posture and a political concern; in the work of W. G. Sebald, Cole's primary influence, Walkowitz reads "vertiginous" forms of perspective that submit "acts of international violence" to a discriminating gaze (158). Building on Walkowitz,

Vermeulen contends that *Open City* exposes the inadequacy of “pseudo-aesthetic solutions” for the material rifts of race and nation, critiquing a self-congratulatory “intercultural” “tourism” that dabbles in aesthetic traditions only to subordinate them to bourgeois taste (“Flights” 43). Thus Julius’s movements through the “open city” defamiliarize the presumed “touristic” whiteness of the *flâneur* trope, and bring the historical traumas of empire to the surface of the city-text, by “unmasking” the “bland cosmopolitanism” that “occlude[s]” colonialism’s “originary violence” (Krishnan 677).⁷ If we extend Victorian and modernist forms of the cosmopolitan to include postmodern possibilities of *bricolage* and hybridity, cosmopolitanism reads less as a universal ideal than as an open process of self-critique and “incompleteness” (Delanty 38).⁸

By no means does *Open City* reject aesthetics, which submit the “touristic” impulses of the cosmopolitan to redoubled skepticism. Rather, as Julius surrenders body and mind to Mahler’s music, he is forced to surrender a posture of cosmopolitan detachment and instead to experience a fragmentary and materially concentrated encounter with “the objective world, disembodied, impervious to concepts, yet utterly definite and clear” (Adorno, *Mahler* 25). If Mahler strives for transcendent beauty, he exposes the ruptures internal to this ideal, as his musical tourism—its accumulation of popular ballads, hymns, country dances, “Eastern” idioms, and recycled artifacts from his own *oeuvre*—creates a ghostly procession of desiccated memories. Similarly, if Julius seems to take recourse in dilettantish cultural elitism, Julius’s “crossing of national boundaries” might, for critics reading his narrative, represent “less a step up in the world than a destabilization of the world” (Robbins 147). Put differently, if Julius latches on to “high art” as a form of social mobility, Cole allows us neither uncritically to assimilate Mahler’s music to “bourgeois taste,” nor to diffuse its artistic and emotional force. In this respect, *Open City* seems both to intensify and to parody the pleasures of Mahler’s music, capitalizing on its excesses without dismissing the work that they perform. What Julius experiences as the incomparable beauty of *Das Lied von der Erde* works not past but through the concrete particulars of Mahler’s musical language, producing a constellation: a fragmentary array of sensations, which expose the remainders of experience.

Mahler adapted the text of *Das Lied* from *Die chinesische Flöte* (1907), Hans Bethge’s loose translation of Tang Dynasty poets Wang Wei and Li-Tai Po, to which Mahler added his own verses (including the elliptical final lines). For his acolytes, Mahler’s gift was to synthesize his borrowed musical sources while preserving their material character. His primary detractor, Robert Hirschfeld, assailed Mahler’s ironic “scoffing” at his own material, marshalling a rhetoric of decadent “poor health” that anticipated later anti-Semitic responses to Mahler’s work (though Hirschfeld himself was of Jewish descent) (La Grange 273-77). Mahler’s First Symphony transposes the rhyme *Bruder Jakob* (the German *Frère Jacques*) into a minor key, signaling something both childlike

and funereal before transitioning to a stylization of Klezmer. His Eighth Symphony, likewise, elevates a range of literary sources to epic scale, ending with the passage from Goethe's *Faust*: "All that is transitory is but a likeness" [*Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis*]. Adorno archly observes that this passage on the transitoriness of the phenomenal was first drafted on a piece of toilet paper, a material artifact "kept for decades in the house of Alban Berg" (38), the modernist Viennese composer (and Adorno's teacher). Adorno would read Mahler's influence on Berg, Arnold Schoenberg, and Anton Webern not as an abandonment of tradition, but as a dialectical rearrangement of its "concrete needs," a Janus-faced impulse to digest tradition in a form both modern and "open" to recirculation.

Julius, a less-than-scrupulous psychiatrist, builds his narrative on those of his patients. One of them, known as V., is a scholar of Dutch genocides of Native Americans, and just as her depression proves inextricable from her subject of study, Julius's attitudes on colonialism and suffering are hard to extricate from those of the patients he diagnoses. It is worth observing that Mahler was among Sigmund Freud's most famous interlocutors: the two met in 1910, less than a year before Mahler's death, in the midst of a marital crisis between Mahler and his wife, Alma (who was growing friendly with a young Walter Gropius). Though efforts to read Mahler's music as case studies for his psychological struggles can seem strained, Mahler's music has been illuminated by the congress of psychoanalytic and narrative theory; specifically, the Ninth and *Das Lied* manifest modes of compulsive repetition that Freud associated with the death drive. As John Toews contends,

What we experience as we read a Freudian text or listen to a Mahler symphony is the fictional voice of the narrating 'I' acting out its story through encounter, dialogue, and reflection within the constantly shifting horizons of memory and expectation. In some sense, therefore, both the music and the text are autonomous subjectivities that interact with the reader/listener. (82-83)

Similarly, as the boundaries of Julius's "I" give way—shifting between past and present, informed by encounters with friends, patients, texts, and city-as-text—textuality takes on its own autonomous character, through which it exposes the historicity of its container. In an analysis of Mahler's Sixth Symphony (1904), Seth Monahan argues that the music's "narrativity" either resists "ontologically binding schema" or yields to them ironically so as to reveal "the *gap* between Mahler's immanent structures and the balanced, symmetrical archetypes that they so urgently distort" (57, italics in original). Mahler's symphonies embrace received musical forms only to amplify their broken historicity, "turn[ing] obsolete symphonic means against themselves" (55). Never permitting us to read Julius as mere traumatized "victim," the novel exposes the extent to which trauma is "inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of...repetitive

seeing” (Caruth 94). The elliptical spirals of Julius’s belated reckoning with his past position the novel’s various traumas—those he has inherited, perpetrated, or coopted from his patients—contrapuntally against each other.

Moving from city to city and accumulating a cosmopolitan openness to experience, Julius reenacts Mahler’s alienation within Vienna and the Viennese musical tradition. Mahler spent the last years of his life walking through Europe and America, pedometer in hand. According to Thomas Peattie, walking reinforced Mahler’s sense of alienation while allowing him physical contact with the “earth,” a “defence mechanism” that allowed him to “retreat from the pressures of daily life....[H]is sense of himself as an outsider also suggests that he might have walked...to lay claim to the places that he wished to belong” (164). Mahler’s music of nature is equally shaped by the pressures of travel; Mahler moved not only on foot, but by boat and train, particularly in his later years, as a celebrity conductor constantly in demand. The asymmetrical rhythms of Mahler’s music, which simulate an experience of “panoramic perception” akin to a train passenger, also create a parallax effect, destabilizing perception and modeling a “continuously unfolding landscape in which the music that passes before our ears can be apprehended only as a succession of fleeting and fragmentary utterances” (Peattie 139, 151).

For both Mahler and Cole, the cosmopolitan’s perspective—and pulse—are altered by the speed and physicality of his mode of travel, rendering the body susceptible to many kinds of pain, and making it difficult to find a stable vanishing-point. Late in the novel, Julius is assaulted on a city bus by four strangers, who use gestures of racial solidarity to draw the open-minded cosmopolitan close, only to pummel him and steal his wallet (212)—a form of belated poetic justice for Julius’s own violence, and a gesture to the uneven ruptures of his own narrative. And for Mahler, as he wrote to Bruno Walter in 1908, “An ordinary, moderate walk gives me such a rapid pulse and such palpitations that I never achieve the purpose of walking—to forget one’s body” (qtd. in Peattie 175). Similarly, the wanderer in *Das Lied* who sings the resonant line “I seek rest for my lonely heart!” [*Ich suche Ruhe für mein einsam Herz*] voices the inevitable dissipation of his pulse. The opening fluttering woodwinds of the Ninth Symphony and an ostinato interval of a third in *Das Lied* that alternates between triplet and duplet are but two examples of the rhythmic asymmetries in Mahler’s late works; Leonard Bernstein, in a lecture televised the same year as Adorno’s monograph, compares these arrhythmias to the composer’s erratic heartbeat (*Four Ways*). In both Mahler and Cole, the uneven syncopes between moving body and moving landscape are realized in an ever-shifting textual surface.

During these years Mahler continued voraciously to read Nietzsche, Goethe, and Schopenhauer, at the same time that he was gifted a copy of Bethge’s creative translations in *Die chinesische Flöte*. His late work, as the musicological consensus has it, treats the philosophy of Wang Wei and Li Po

(heavily mediated by both Bethge and Mahler) as an Eastern allotrope for the death-drive and for Schopenhauer’s philosophy of self-abandonment to the Will. *Das Lied* ends with an ambiguously defined narrator yielding to the “dear earth” before trailing off, mid-ellipses, into transcendent non-being. In the first movement, “The Drinking Song of Earth’s Sorrow” [*Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde*], Mahler introduces a pentatonic motif, A-G-E-C, which tracks through the entire cycle (Figure 1). In Western music, the pentatonic scale is often used, with varying degrees of sensitivity, as a code for exotic otherness; Mahler threads it through *Das Lied* in homage to the Chinese sources of the poetry, while recycling it in tribute to the protagonist’s reintegration with the earth. Mahler undergirds the alto’s final “*Ewig...*” with an added-sixth: an altered major chord (C/E/G/A) that “verticalizes” the pentatonic motif of the opening movement (Figure 2). The body has disintegrated into Nature, voice into voice; *Das Lied* ends, in its blank ellipses and exoticized added-sixth, in the infinite space of alterity. Likewise, the indifferent anti-climax of *Open City*—Julius seeking hollow refuge in dead birds and “blank interstices” that emphatically do not see him back—verticalizes Julius’s contrapuntal movement through space.

Julius’s subjective “narrativity” is realized through dialectical irony: the realities of emotional and historical trauma emerge through various encounters with ersatz exoticism and mechanical reproduction, catalyzed by Mahler’s parodies of the “obsolete.” Julius’s nightly walks, described in Chapter One, structure the narrative while creating a “counter-discourse” to a colonial “imperative to order” (Krishnan 683). In his movement through various urban spaces, Julius encounters “exoticized” Orientalist discourses, while his own steps create an embodied disturbance to those discourses. Julius is walking in Mahler’s worn-out shoes—moving through ethnocentric discourses of otherness and attempting, if failing, to synthesize them in a “verticalized” snapshot of cosmopolitan multiculturalism.

Elliptical Exoticism: Orientalism, Mediation, and Consumption

Perhaps Adorno’s most important intervention is to understand Mahler’s exotic Orientalism as a “pseudomorph,” which “does not take itself literally



Fig. 1. Pentatonic motif from “Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde” (A-C-E-G). Transcribed from *Das Lied von der Erde*, by Gustav Mahler, arranged for piano and voice by J. W. von Wöss.

but grows eloquent through inauthenticity” (148). (Adorno also heard in these pseudomorphs a “cover for the composer’s own Jewish element” [149].) Like the various “imitations” and copies of Eastern art that Julius encounters throughout the novel—an “imitation Chinese peasant’s hat” (31), “imitation Ming Dynasty lacquerware” in Chinatown (190), etc.—Mahler’s fascination with the East was, for Adorno, saved by his avoidance of a jargon of authenticity. Mahler points us to the problem of mediation *per se*: Arved Ashby finds Mahler’s scores, such as the striking of two hammer-blows in the Sixth Symphony, offering not just instructions for “how to play,” but also gestures to mechanical reproducibility that “pai[n] us with the radiant transience of his imagery” and promote shock rather than contemplation (238-

The image displays a musical score for the ending of "Der Abschied" from Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. The score is arranged for voice and piano. It features several staves: an Alto voice line, a woodwind section (Flute, oboe, horn), a string section (Violin, Viola, Cello), and a Harp. The Alto part begins with the lyrics "E - Wig..." and is marked with a dynamic of *ppp* and the tempo instruction "Gänzlich ersterbend". The piano accompaniment includes a prominent added-sixth chord (C/E/G/A) in the right hand, which is marked with a dynamic of *ppppp*. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 9. The key signature is one flat (F major/D minor) and the time signature is 3/4.

Fig. 2. Ending of “Der Abschied,” with added-sixth chord (C/E/G/A). Transcribed from *Das Lied von der Erde*, by Gustav Mahler, arranged for piano and voice by J. W. von Wöss.

39). We are thus faced with the paradox of a “transhistorical” or “timeless” image of the Orient that is itself mediated by a persistent historical discourse. Andrew Deruchie observes that Mahler’s representations of death and cyclical regeneration are borne out of the Orientalist milieu of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna (and Germany), noting the extent to which Rilke, Hofmannsthal, and Klimt, among others, turned to “what they viewed as the timeless wisdom of ancient China and Japan” in order to respond to “the challenges posed by encroaching modernity.” Building on this exoticized (though sympathetic) mythology of the East, *Das Lied* “reconfigures the *telos* as the liquidation of the very *notion* of subjectivity,” subsuming “the individual subject’s journey and death within a broader rhythm of decay and regeneration that it identifies with eternal nature” (Deruchie 77, italics in original).

Mahler, on behalf of an extensive network of Viennese cosmopolitanism, establishes a keynote question in Cole’s novel: how the aesthetics of “otherness” and difference both prop up and unbind the travelling subject. *Open City* introduces Edward Said’s landmark study of *Orientalism*, not in Julius’s voice but in a secondary narrative: frequenting an Internet café in Brussels, Julius falls in with Farouq, a Moroccan whose strident nationalism, though resonating with Julius’s sense of dislocation, rubs against his multicultural equanimity.⁹ Farouq invokes Said in a discussion of Moroccan literature, indicting the “orientalizing impulse” of Western publishers: “Difference as orientalist entertainment is allowed, but difference with its own intrinsic value, no. You can wait forever, and no one will give you that value” (104). (Stimulated, though not convinced, by Farouq’s passion, Julius mails him a copy of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism* upon returning to New York.) A related dynamic emerges in Julius’s friendship with Professor Saito, a translator of *Beowulf* and editor of *Piers Plowman*, and a gay Japanese immigrant who was interned during World War II. Saito’s lessons in memory exert a powerful pull on Julius: “it was he who first taught me the value of memory, and how to think of it as mental music, a setting to iambs and trochees” (14). Music and memory are tied together as psychological realities, and as practices of intellectual discipline; Saito trains Julius to internalize poetry so that he can, in turn, yield to Mahler’s disintegration of memory—risking, however, the elision of ethical critique and responsibility. In Saito’s apartment, Julius observes the “Polynesian masks” and “life-size Papuan ancestor figure,” accumulated from a “lifetime of collecting”; Saito poignantly responds that he “adore[s] imaginary monsters” but is “terrified of real ones” (11). Here, too, encounters with the aestheticized exotic produce an ellipsis that obscures the traumas of the past; Julius observes later that amidst these artifacts, “All that was missing...were photographs: of family members, of friends, of Professor Saito himself” (11).

Julius’s encounters with the exoticized East in *Open City* are not entirely cynical; they merely remind us of their mediated status as artworks, and of how

elliptical narrative can both repress and un-repress the material conditions from which art draws. Walking along Broadway past the Bowling Green, Julius hears the sound of two *erhu* players, and thinks “of Li Po and Wang Wei, of Harry Partch’s pitch-bending songs, and of Judith Weir’s opera *The Consolations of Scholarship*, which were the things I could best connect to this Chinese music. The song, the clear day, and the elms: it could have been any day from the last fifteen hundred years” (165). If Julius idealizes the sound of an *erhu* as “timeless,” Cole makes us fully aware that the naïve trope of timelessness is itself a historical filter. Partch’s search for a “corporeal” reintegration of art with bodily motion was grounded in his encounters with Cantonese theater, facilitated by the loosening and ultimate repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1930s and 1940s San Francisco, Partch interacted sympathetically with a culture of immigrants who had “helped transform the district into one of the city’s biggest tourist attractions (and into the largest concentration of Chinese anywhere in the world outside China), peddling Otherness to a population eager to purchase it” (Granade 6). Partch’s aesthetic, like Mahler’s and Julius’s, was shaped by the commodification of otherness, an element of American consumer culture resurfaced by Julius’s encounters with music. As Julius leaves a movie theatre, having seen a fictionalized Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*, he is heckled by a ten-year-old boy in an “imitation Chinese peasant’s hat” (31), as if to transmute suffering into micro-aggressive kitsch.

Julius’s artistic cosmopolitanism cannot transcend, but can only mediate, the conditions of its making and reception—music in *Open City* may be “timeless” in the sense that temporality is constantly unstable, but it is insistently situated in the historical anxieties of both Mahler’s and Julius’s worlds. After conversing with Farouq, Julius senses his own isolation: “I floated in the dark, anonymous to myself, lost in the sensation that the world existed but I was no longer part of it” (130). Echoing Mahler’s earlier setting of Friedrich Rückert, “I am lost to the world” [*Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*], in which the speaker declares himself “dead to the world’s tumult” and “alone in [his] song,” Cole ratchets up the dialectical tension of Mahler’s exoticism: if Mahler projects the East as a space for liquidated subjectivity, *Open City* illustrates Julius’s consumption of this “Eastern” sensibility. Julius dissolves his “I” by walking through cosmopolitan spaces, inhaling as much aesthetic material as he can, only to find himself consumed in return. Julius’s encounters with Mahler and Partch, Saito and sidewalk merchants, perform an elliptical circulation through the marketplace that renders him hollow at the core.

“Anonymous to Myself”: The Ellipses of Subjectivity

In the realist novel, curiosity is the means through which a protagonist intensifies lived experience: “Live all you can,” as Lambert Strether says in James’s *The Ambassadors*; “It’s a mistake not to” (131). As if to test the limits

of Strether's gospel, Julius's radical openness to art may also take the form of an evacuation of responsibility, a failure (or refusal) to come to grips with the effects of his own actions and sensations even as he narrativizes them.¹⁰ Leon Botstein compares Mahler's late work to the realist novel (*The Ambassadors*, in particular), focusing on free indirect discourse and other "novelistic" mediations between protagonist and reader: "The listener in Mahler's case, like the reader of a third-person realist narrative, has the sense of direct confrontation with a musical mirror of the chaos and ambiguities of the external world and subjectivity, and seems to circumvent the mediation of a narrator" (35). As James and Mahler slow the passage of subjective time, "narration and description" generate a sense of parallax in their "contrasting temporal frames" (39). Botstein resists the tendency to hear Mahler's symphonies as "chapters of an ongoing biography," but notes the political potential of his work, which "seemed to speak for everyone by articulating the experience of the unjustly marginalized" (10). For Federico Celestini, too, Mahler reads as a composer whose "intertextuality, diffuse subjectivity, and openness" allow listeners to hear music's material texture: constructed yet open, integral yet made of other integrities (165). Cole stretches these principles of narrative openness: by multiplying narratives that run interference with each other, the "novelistic" development of *Open City* produces a form of cosmopolitanism that recoils in elliptical self-contestation.

Let me return, then, to *Open City*'s opening invocation of *Das Lied von der Erde*. As *Das Lied* emerges, Julius begins to "acclimatize to the music playing overhead and to enter the strange hues of its world" (16), a gesture to the music's "Viennese chinoiserie" (17) and a preparation of Julius's mental recomposition of his surroundings. He observes the music's "birdsong and beauty, the complaints and hi-jinks," qualities that foreshadow the littering of New York Harbor with bird carcasses. As the opening five-note motif of the "farewell" movement, "Der Abschied," creeps in, Julius senses "the woodsiness of the clarinets, the resin of the violins and violas, the vibrations of the timpani, and the intelligence that held them all together and drew them endlessly along the musical line" (17). The musical material—the tonal language, the agitations of wood and air—draws Julius out of a different kind of material consumption, a sale at Tower Records. As John Sheinbaum suggests, Mahler's use of timbre, part of the music's material labor-value, destabilizes the easy translation of his music into exchange-value: "For Adorno, avant-garde art's 'immanent law' is that works should critique conventional notions of formal coherence so as to resist becoming a mere commodity, a standardized structure for easy consumption" (44). Likewise, as Mahler's music strains to resist commodification, its presence in Tower Records marks the death-drive of global capitalism. "I was rapt," Julius says—an odd phrase, literally meaning "raped," that sets up Moji's later revelation and Julius's narrative implosion. Julius continues through the "brisk trade of sidewalk salesmen"

and a Jamaican grocery, where he finds a Blockbuster also going bankrupt. We are told that Mahler's music "fell over [his] activities for the entirety of the following day"; as that day unfolds, *Das Lied* proves a diegetic soundtrack for the Darwinian liquidations of capital, and Julius grows "touched" by the "swiftness and dispassion with which the market swallowed even the most resilient enterprises" (19).

The reemergence of Mahler at the end of *Open City*, framed by Julius's awe at the cruelties of the marketplace, counterpoints the music's timelessness with dark historical echoes. Julius waxes universalist about the Ninth Symphony's transcendent appeal: "Mahler's music is not white, nor black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question" (253). This aestheticism displaces the logic of a rational, color-blind "invisible hand" underlying the appeal to cosmopolitan brotherhood, and Julius's language, as he notes the uncanny movement of a fellow concertgoer, suspiciously resembles the literature of colonial violence:

In the glow of the final movement, but well before the music ended, an elderly woman in the front row stood, and began to walk up the aisle. She walked slowly, and all eyes were on her, though all ears remained on the music. It was as though she had been summoned, and was leaving into death, drawn to a force invisible to us. (253)

Here we might detect echoes of *Heart of Darkness*, in which the "apparition" of an African mistress accosts Marlow's crew, finding herself, like this elderly audience member, the object of an impersonal gaze: "And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul" (70). Julius recapitulates Marlow's contempt for Belgian imperialism under the humanist banner of "progress," as he wanders Brussels (the eponymous "open city"), disturbed by the "palpable psychological pressure" forced on him by the colonial monuments of the Parc du Cinquenaire (97-98). Confirming the motif of pseudomorphic "aesthetic tourism" as a mediation of historical violence, Julius then observes a group of Chinese tourists—who look, from a distance, like "toys"—before receding into a memory of his ancestral *oma* (100). The "vibrations" that Julius hears in Mahler are framed by a fiercely colonial gaze; "drawn to a force invisible," the elderly woman seems, *pace* Julius's "not white nor black," to materialize the Gothic procession of a colonial past.

Julius's hearing of Mahler, and spiraling escape from the concert hall, thus precipitate, and give concrete form to, historical traumas; his own inflicted traumas; his non-linear geographical movement from Africa to Brussels to America; and the material historicity of musical sound's putatively "universal

vibrations.”¹¹ Musicological studies of Mahler’s Ninth frequently note its fragmentary structural quality. Julian Johnson emphasizes its juxtaposition of contradictory forces, which produce “a structural *impasse* that testifies to the inability to join opposing ideas within the same syntactical process”; Mahler thus produces not a fixed “subject” but a “subject in process” (117). Anthony Newcomb, too, observes the Ninth’s “spiraling” effect, a reading that he builds on M. H. Abrams’s *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971). For Abrams, the *bildungsroman* dialectically fuses “the idea of the circular return with the idea of linear progress, to describe a distinctive figure of Romantic thought and imagination—the ascending circle, or spiral” (Abrams 183-84). Mahler’s Ninth likewise follows a spiraling “protagonist”: an adolescent naïf who absorbs the contradictory materials of his surroundings—the rustic country dances and urbane symphonic traditions—only to integrate them in a dissonant “past within a present.”¹² This plot trajectory generates the “conceptual *topos*” of a “protagonist rebuilding a life undone by ruinous experience” (Newcomb 122). As Julius attempts to reconstruct, if not “rebuild,” his own ruinous past, his hearing of the Ninth aspires to control his multiple narratives (including those that he appropriates and represses); the spiraled fire escape recapitulates the negativity of this synthesis, as the “universal vibrations” of Mahler’s music perforate Julius’s narrative.

Down to Earth: Elliptical Modernity in *Open City*’s “Abschied”

For what are symptoms if not echoes—acoustic fragments of ailments’ invisible origins? In their physical and plastic amplitudes, they are transcripts of a mute totality—pieces of the whole, whose identity is constructed through a series of performances....The important thing to note about such reconstructive logic is that it “does not describe a state of things, but immediately produces a real fact.” (Gafijczuk 7)

Describing, in the context of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, the Freudian “symptom” as not just a psychological category but an acoustic one, Dariusz Gafijczuk encapsulates the dilemmas of music in *Open City*. Gafijczuk quotes John Austin’s theory of the performative to characterize psychoanalysis as fragmentary speech-act, which reconstitutes—but does not add up to—a totality, much as Julius finds his narrative undone by contractions and ellipses, symptoms of Mahler’s traumas and Julius’s repressions. Julius observes that “even the strongest symptoms are sometimes not visible, because the source of our information about the mind is itself the mind, and the mind is able to deceive itself” (238); Julius’s interactions with psychoanalysis, and with Mahler’s music, might still render them *audible*.¹³

Open City begins in the middle of a sentence (“And so when I began to go on evening walks last fall”), before describing these walks as a “counterpoint” to his daily work, and juxtaposing his own “aimless wandering” to the “habit

of watching bird migrations” (3-4). The rhythms of Julius’s steps counterpoint the rhythms of nature, giving form to his memory: “So amazed was I by [the birds] that I couldn’t trust my memory when they weren’t there” (4). Throughout the novel, which is structured (like *Das Lied*) by the passing of seasons, these natural sounds are laced over the disciplinary “rhythms of... manual labor” and corporal punishment to which he becomes calloused at the Nigerian Military School (81), and then the “preplanned choreography” of violence that he receives by his putative “young, black” “brothers” (212). Julius proceeds to describe his habits of aesthetic consumption—listening to Wagner on the radio, reading Barthes and Augustine, situating these various artifacts in a “sonic fugue” (5). Though these walks offer Julius a “release from the tightly regulated mental environment” of his work (7), they constellate the compulsions of art and music, observation and memory. As he observes “masses of people” hurrying into the subway, a movement he associates with a “counterinstinctive death drive,” Julius foreshadows the formal ellipsis and subjective decay of his own narrative, walking “with thousands of others in their solitude...all of us reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified” (7).

Mahler’s and Julius’s narratives probe these “unacknowledged traumas,” opening them further through the formal dialectics of “counterpoint.” In adding to Bethge’s translations, Mahler fragments the lyric speaker, dividing Wang Wei’s lyric “I” into pilgrim and “friend,” an “observed” and an “observer.” Like Julius—an analytical subject who turns in on his own voice—the narrators of “Der Abschied” move across each other. This fragmentation of subjectivity is manifested in Mahler’s rhythmic asymmetry: unsettling a uniform beat, “Der Abschied” strives for a “pulselessness, an unmeasuredness,” which “seemingly arrests the momentum...of the music” (Mitchell 393, 410).

In *Open City*’s large-scale form, similar dynamics are in play. Part I (chapters 1-11) is subtitled “Death is a perfection of the eye”: an approximate to the death-drive of Mahler’s music, which blurs subjectivity and intensifies sensation. Part II, subtitled “I have searched myself” (chapters 12-21), yields the revelations of Julius’s violence and then abandons his introspective “search” mid-thought. As Julius leaves Chinatown, moving past its Mahlerian marching band and imitation lacquerware, he recalls “boyhood morning assemblies” where he

experienced the sudden disorientation and bliss of one who, in a stately old house and at a great distance from its mirrored wall, could clearly see the world doubled in on itself. I could no longer tell where the tangible universe ended and the reflected one began. This point-for-point imitation, of each porcelain vase,...extended as far as where my reverse self had, as I had, halted itself in mid-turn. And this double of mine had, at that precise moment, begun to tussle with the same problem as its equally confused original. To be alive... was to be both original and reflection, and to be dead was to be split off, to be reflection alone. (192)

Finding himself split into a present and a past self—a colonial subject and a cosmopolitan aesthete—Julius takes recourse in the two voices of *Das Lied*: the tenor, a “wanton singer of Dionysian revelry,” and the alto’s Apollonian voice of “appeasing resignation” (Hefling 81). Julius unconsciously recalls the image of “Von der Jugend” (“Of Youth”), the third movement of *Das Lied*: “On the little pool’s still / Surface everything appears / Fantastically in a mirror image.” Following up on the despair of the second movement, “Der Einsame im Herbst” (“The Lonely One in Autumn”), in which “My little lamp / Has burnt out with a splutter,” “Von der Jugend” contemplates the “missed and lost possibility” of life “through the inverted opera glass of childhood” (Adorno, *Mahler* 152) in a pentatonically exoticized gaze onto the past. Julius’s refracted fragmentation, which starts as an introspective “search for himself” and ends in elliptical failure, puts his past and present narratives into tensile counterpoint. And, as the next chapter begins, we are told that “[i]n the spring, life came back into the earth’s body” (193); as in Mahler, a new movement is marked by a new season, and the regeneration of the earth promises only further to open the subject’s internal “disorientation and bliss.”

In “Der Abschied,” where the earth is made new precisely as the subject opens out, repetition and self-borrowing unravel the solidity of its main voice. Stephen Hefling observes the movement’s intensive “recycling of ostinato components”: unpredictable rhythmic motifs that destabilize the “local pulse of the music” (107-08). An orchestral birdsong motif, moving unevenly between sextuplets and quintuplets, interrupts the narrator’s observation of nature, leading him to conclude that “The world is falling asleep!” (*Die Welt schläft ein*). Bernstein compares Mahler’s Ninth to Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” a fleeing from the self that applies equally well to the “Abschied.” Mahler’s Nature produces both universalizing wholeness and entropy: birdsong pulls the narrative voice back to the earth and marks its disintegration. Here the song’s second character, the “friend” for whom he waits, alights from his horse and asks to seek “rest” for his “lonely heart.” Mahler changes Bethge’s pronouns to render the two voices ambiguous (“*He* asked him where *he* was going, / And also why it had to be”), and “the musical persona and the archetypal figure of Death become one, inseparably fused” (Hefling 113-14, emphasis added). As with Julius’s mirror-image, whether this friend is a *doppelgänger* of the frame narrator, the imagined reemergence of a ghostly past, or the figure of Death itself is difficult to discern.

Opening mid-thought, moving contrapuntally, the elliptical structure of *Open City* collapses the self into pseudomorphic reflection. Part I of *Open City* (“Death is a perfection of the eye”) and Part II (“I have searched myself”) are fused in a negative synthesis that exposes the vacuous “self,” both subject and object of a “search” that awaits Julius’s transformation into “reflection alone.” Julius’s narrative is consumed by the contrapuntal, parallax movement of his own pilgrimage through the cosmopolitan marketplace; *Open City* finds

its conflicted form through a music as international and as “novelistic” as Julius himself. If Mahler bids farewell to the solid material limits of the body, Cole’s novel is an “Abschied” to the restorative, rather than the disintegrative, potential of music. Just as Mahler’s music “shatter[s] the walls of the securely constructed form” (Adorno, *Quasi* 84), Julius is both “blossoming” and dehiscent, integral and elliptical—unbound by his movements across the earth.

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NOTES

¹ Rpt. in Mitchell, 336-37. I use Cooke’s translation of Mahler’s text throughout.

² John Williamson contends that Mahler scholars’ fixation on Adorno’s monograph has led to a limited form of historicism. Without taking a stand on this musicological concern, I argue that Cole is building not just on Mahler’s music but on his cultural resonances, and that *Open City*’s dialectical approach to Mahler resembles Adorno’s.

³ Nicholas Brown notes Armah’s response to Charles Larson, whose *Emergence of African Fiction* “claims to show Armah’s formal debt to James Joyce. Armah’s intervention made it clear that the ‘language of borrowing and influence is usually a none too subtle way Western commentators have of saying Africa lacks original creativity’” (Ayei Kwei Armah, “Larsony: Or, Fiction as Criticism of Fiction” [1977], qtd. in Brown 2, 202n).

⁴ The term “psychogeography” comes from Guy Debord’s Situationist essay “Theory of the Dérive” (1958). After the illegitimate arrest of a group of African Americans in a Philadelphia Starbucks, Teju Cole published a Facebook post claiming that “[f]or blacks in white terrains, all spaces are charged....[W]e are compelled...to practise psychogeography. We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance.” Cole also notes that “playing overhead during the arrest was Dizzy Gillespie’s ‘Salt Peanuts.’”

⁵ Iwan Sollertinski, qtd. in Franklin 9.

⁶ Vermeulen argues that *Open City* ironizes its own cosmopolitanism by unleashing a range of “particular dynamics” that are contrapuntally “imbricat[ed],” but not “synchronized,” with the “rhythms of the market.” Julius’s movement across cultural landscapes thus refuses “cathartic emotive transports” for “empathetic cross-cultural identification” in deference to affects of frustration and disconnection (“Reading” 278, 282).

⁷ If Mahler reads as a cosmopolitan *flâneur*, *Open City* questions the presumed whiteness of this trope. Vermeulen has demonstrated the novel’s use of *flâneurie* “to indicate the limits of the cosmopolitan imagination,” refusing to bury the material injustices of empire under the “illusion that imaginative transports can stand in for real global change” (“Flights” 42). Vermeulen further contrasts the *flâneur*, who uses consumption and narrative to “enrich the self,” to the *fuguer*’s “compulsive escape from their normal lives,” which “was ‘less a voyage of self-discovery than an attempt to eliminate self’” (*Open City* 30, qtd. in “Flights” 54), a point apposite to the elliptical (rather than self-completing) nature of Julius’s listening.

⁸ Delanty contends that cosmopolitanism should be seen as “a cultural medium of societal transformation” based on the “principle of world openness” and “associated with the notion of global publics” (27). On the virtues and problems of cosmopolitanism in Cole’s novel and in African literature more broadly, see Elze, Eze, Gehrmann, O’Gorman, Oniwe, and Varvogli.

⁹ Oniwe reads Farouq as a test case of a tension between the “affirmation of difference” and “uncritical nationalism” (61).

¹⁰ Daniel O’Gorman convincingly argues that *Open City*’s “virtually plotless surface” as Julius moves through Manhattan “belies a more deeply embedded story about nationhood, violence, and responsibility,” and that the revelation of Julius’s rape prevents us from taking “supercilious comfort” in the cultural politics of a left-liberal intelligentsia (58).

¹¹ Conrad's fascination with the word "vibration" may likewise feed into what Julius perceives as the "universal vibrations" of Mahler's music. On "vibration" as a marker of Conrad's interest in the materiality of sound, see Julie Beth Napolin, "A Sinister Resonance" (*passim*), as well as Epstein, *Sublime Noise*, 29, 83-84.

¹² For critiques of Newcomb's argument, see Hooper, also Neubauer. I offer Newcomb not as a "correct" reading of Mahler but as one that has specific resonances with *Open City*.

¹³ Rebecca Clark addresses the methodological questions of "symptomatic" and "surface" reading, reading both as equally crucial to the "parasitic" quality of narrative in Cole's novel.

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