BLOOD PIECE

slip the blood to me, Bud
shoot the juice to me, Bruce
pour the crimson in me, Jimson
pass the claret to me, Barrett
pump the fluid in me, Louis
put a gallon in me, Allan

Nervous Norvus, *Transfusion*

This question of blood music, blood and music, begins in an out of the way place; Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Mythologiques*, the metamythological culmination and suicide of anthropological structuralism. Lévi-Strauss bookends his enormous project with two musical metaphors; the *Overture* of *The Raw and the Cooked*[1] and the *Finale* of *The Naked Man.*[2] In the *Overture*, Lévi-Strauss gives us a music and a myth that thinks itself through affinity rather than temporal succession.[3] In the *Finale*, Lévi-Strauss is combative, fighting for the legitimacy of a project, but he returns to this same problem, the legitimacy of music as a mode of thinking with powers beyond the plastic or literary arts. This legitimacy crisis arises out of a strange and

[1] Lévi-Strauss, Claude *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964/1969) p.1-32
[2] Lévi-Strauss, Claude *The Naked Man* (1971/1981) p.625-695
[3] The line between synchrony and symphony is also found in his analysis of the Oedipus myth, where to understand the mythical structure we must stop reading linearly and think of it should think of it as "an orchestral score" with a rhythm of motifs; the familiarity of Europa, Jocasta and Antigone, the footed homonymy of Labdacus, Laius and Oedipus, and the blood cut alternately from similarity, brothers and fathers, and difference, all harmonizing as "one bundle of relations" Lévi-Strauss, Claude *Structural Anthropology* (1958/1963) p.212

paradoxical figure, Lévi-Strauss' own invention; the Structural Human. This being takes as its condition of possibility the radical unity of the *anthropos* beyond culture. The broad diversities of culture are merely molds pressed over onto a malleable entity called human, one whose transcendent substance shows through in the regularities they provide in the form of myths. There are certain hierarchies that Lévi-Strauss admits, such as the distinction between scientific and mythological thinking, but these are questions of efficacy in the world, not moral value or intellectual superiority. In order to evacuate a kind of early anthropological racism, however, Lévi-Strauss' human often appears as a void. Perhaps nowhere is this put more radically than in Lévi-Strauss' *Myth and Meaning:*

> "I never had, and still do not have, the perception of feeling my personal identity. I appear to myself as the place where something is going on, but there is no 'I', no 'me.' Each of us is a kind of crossroads where things happen. The crossroads is purely passive; something happens there. A different thing, equally valid, happens elsewhere. There is no choice, it is just a matter of chance."

This "crossroads" entity is the source of Lévi-Strauss' connection to music because, like myth, "music has its being in me, and I listen to myself through it. Thus, the myth and the musical work are like conductors for an orchestra, whose audience becomes the silent performers". Music has a kind of radical immediacy, but it also eludes many of the traditional kinds of explanations of meaning, particularly textual or semiotic ones, trapped as they are in unidirectional linearity. It

is this escape which gives music and myth the precise dynamic which makes it so attractive to the philosopher of diachronic synchrony; the "obliteration of time".

However, this preliminary tribute confirms the existence of the problem more than it solves it. The true answer is to be found, I think, in the characteristic that myth and music share of both being languages which, in their different ways, transcend articulate expression, while at the same time—like articulate speech, but unlike painting—requiring a temporal dimension in which to unfold. But this relation to time is of a rather special nature: it is as if music and mythology needed time only in order to deny it. Both, indeed, are instruments for the obliteration of time. Below the level of sounds and rhythms, music acts upon a primitive terrain, which is the physiological time of the listener; this time is irreversible and therefore irredeemably diachronic, yet music transmutes the segment devoted to listening to it into a synchronic totality, enclosed within itself. Because of the internal organization of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilizes passing time; it catches and enfolds it as one catches and enfolds a cloth flapping in the wind. It follows that by listening to music, and while we are listening to it, we enter into a kind of immortality.

This obliteration of time is neither simple nor dialectical. It is rhythmic, a forced pursuit which lacks a beginning or an end, and therefore strives for the form of a compulsion, an unstoppable, undifferentiated flow, "a kind of immortality". When Levi-Strauss returns to music in the Finale, he brings along his beast:

Mythology and music have in common the fact that they summon the listener to a concrete form of union, with the difference, however, that myth offers him a pattern coded in images instead of sounds. In both cases, however, it is the listener who puts one or several potential meanings into the pattern, with the result that the real unity of the myth or the musical work is achieved by two participants, in and through a kind of celebration. The listener, as such, is not the creator of the music, either through a lack of natural ability or through the incidental fact that he is listening to someone else's music, but a place exists inside him for the music: he is, then, like the reverse, hollowed-out, image of a creator, whose empty spaces are filled by the music.

Something has mutated. Once silent performers, now the structural human is a hollow, an image, an emptiness waiting to be filled.

Passive, choiceless, silent performers, immortal, driven on by the rhythmic beat of a permanent compulsion, not a pulse but the image of pulse, not a creator but the image of a creator, their open hollow veins waiting for fluid, a figure who strikes terror in the liberal humanism of the choosers and the free agents; it should be clear by now that Lévi-Strauss is writing a vampire story. In his structural human we see not the bloody vitality of Shelley's Monster, shrieking in Wertherian anguish, but a pure exsanguinate, a being drained of its fluids in order to prepare its entry into the total normalization regime of midcentury European liberalism.

Our exsanguinate unsubject is an experimental entity which we can use to encounter blood music because it is neither the pure void of passive desire found in the Nietzschean last man, with his atonal blink blank blunk nor is it the rhizomatic desire of Sylvano Bussoti's *Piano Piece for David Tudor No. 4,* pluralizing in the high arts of non-representational irrepetition. Instead, the exsanguinate pursues their self-abolition not in order to make of themselves a several or a swarm, but to maintain, to become ever more self-identical, accelerating into the deadlock of their own necessary being.

Bon Iver's *Blood Bank* begins with several the principal themes that persistently occupy blood music; memory, kinship and color:

> *Well, I met you at the blood bank*
> *We were looking at the bags*
> *Wondering if any of the colors*
> *Matched any of the names we knew on the tags*
> *You said "See, look, that's yours*
> *Stacked on top with your brother's*
> *See how they resemble one another's*
> *Even in their plastic little covers?"*

The colored blood forms a line which connects the brothers but in paradox. It is the effect of a soft lie, because we know all blood looks the same, even out of their little plastic covers. This is semiotic blood, a blood which can be recognized, even tied to names. This color is a kind of knowledge, an established homology which ends in rhythmic repetitive declaration:

> *And I know it well*
> *I know it well*
> *And I know it well*

a refrain of knowledge, a deep bone knowledge which comes without instruction, ἀνάμνησις fluid. Compare this with Game's *Red Nation*, where blood escapes from designation and memory and its color lets it spread rather than stick:

> *Russia got a red flag,*
> *US got red stripes*
> *[. . .]*
> *I'm Malcolm X before he turned Muslim: Red*

Between these two lines we see the songs temporal confusion. Red has the ability to pass between porous spaces inverts Malcolm X's heroic transformation narrative, while the "Russian" disaster is re-tuned to a revolutionary soviet socialism and made equivalent to its presumed opposite, the US. Compare with another Red lyric, Langston Hughes' "Put One More S in the USA":

Come together, fellow workers!
Black and white can all be red:
Put one more S in the U.S.A.

And yet the blood here is the street gang, the Bloods, who appear as the vanguard establishing the new contiguity, Game as the "Che Guevara of the New Era".

If blood as red is accomplishing this time obliteration, in *Red Nation* it does so as a total indistinction, an abolition of Bon Iver's fraternal kinship for an anachronistic circulation. This line between ablution and abolition leads directly to the Christian metaphysics of blood music. *Fountain Full of Blood,* a gospel classic, shows the repetitive, pumping logic of blood and blood again:

There is a fountain that I see
Filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's vein
The sinners, sinners plunged beneath that blood
Lose all their guilty stains[4]

[4] This image already exists in Antiquity, see Heraclitus frag. 130: "They vainly purify themselves by defiling themselves with blood, just as if one who had stepped into the mud were to wash his feet in mud. Any man who marked him doing thus, would deem him mad."

This classically Christian description of the blood wash is not the limit of that tradition's contribution. Consider The Zion Travelers' eruptive *The Blood*, a materialist Christianity where Jesus is thanked not for his blood, but for theirs, for the warmth of blood in the veins, the persistence of life rather than the death-worship of sacrifice. The Travelers thank this blooded god for the beauty of the sunlight, not the abstraction of the heavens. Perhaps most blasphemously, they allow it to make a shared horizon; their own warm blood is the same warmth as the resurrected and embodied Christ, emphasizing Jesus' human rather than divine substance.

In this light-blood and warm-blood, we can see glimmers of something slightly more pagan. Another entry on this line is Béla Bartók's *Castle of the Bluebearded Duke.* Another vampire story, but a strange one: the Bluebearded Duke is a resistance rather than a compulsion, and he is pursued by a fanatical lover, his new wife Judith. He pulls away from her, tells her to leave him, shows her warnings and horrors and blood, both figurative and literal, but she keeps after him, trying to learn the depths of his castle. The metaphor that Bartók uses is a blood of light, an illumination. Only when she arrives at the last door does Judith understand this light was only visible to her because she had a fate, to be imprisoned as the Stars, last of the four lights commanded by this vampire with his three other wives, Dawn, Noon and Dusk. Thinking back to our exsanguinate, this inversion of the vampire narrative makes a new kind of dramatic sense; the cyclical eternalism of the rotation of light gives the Bluebearded Duke a vampirism of the gatekeeper, the rigorous

experimentalist who tests his potential victim rather than devours her. Only when she has demonstrated the persistent pulse of will-to-know is she then consumed, bloodlessly.

A more contemporary iconographic paganism is The Rolling Stones' 1983 video *Too Much Blood*. Deeply indebted to Michael Jackson's *Thriller,* the video is half horror mini-movie, half media satire, set in a well-lit Italian ruin. In extended spoken-word segments, Jagger describes two dangerous exsanguinations. The first, a semi-fictionalized narrative based on Issei Sagawa, a cannibal who killed and ate his classmate in Paris in 1981. Sagawa heavily mediated his murder and butchery, photographing every stage of the dismemberment, but Jagger's "Japanese cannibal" drains his victim and stores her neatly in the refrigerator, only captured when he tries to hide the bones. The other exsanguinate is the horror movie victim:

> *Did you ever see Texas Chainsaw Massacre?*
> *Horrible, wasn't It?*
> *You know people really ask me: is it really true*
> *You know, where you live in Texas*
> *Is it really true what they do around there, people?*
> *I say, "Hey man, every time I drive through the crossroads*
> *I get scared there's a bloke running around*
> *with a fucking chain saw!"*

Here the binary is the empty rotation between the bloodless murder of the careful cannibal, consuming the last drops, and the bloody nonviolence of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre. The Rolling Stones play with this loose irony, the horror movie they're starring in and the ones they're critiquing, by worrying

about the blood that isn't flowing, namely the erotic blood flow that these horror tales are prevent:

> *Pretty ladies, don't be scared*
> *Pretty ladies, don't be scared*
> *Pretty ladies, don't despair*
> *There's still so much love*

Following Jagger's suggestive pivot, there are a pair of more contemporary pop star blood songs worth comparing. Taylor Swift's *Bad Blood* is a very literal narrative about bad blood between her and her haters, but at its centerpieces she invokes two new exsanguinates:

> *Band-aids don't fix bullet holes*
> *You say sorry just for show*
> *If you live like that, you live with ghosts*
> . . .
> *If you love like that, blood runs cold*

The actual narrative maneuvers of this ghost are confusing, whether it is the ghost-invoker who is themselves ghastly or the subject who maintains their blood feud, but these two figures openly complicated the vampiric line. The ghost is an exsanguinate who maintains their motion but not their depth, while the cold-blooded is the corpse, the pooling inside of them turning into a taint, a corruption, and a rot. On the other hand, we have Carly Rae Jepsen's *Warm Blood* which is content to wrap an image-complex around skin, blood, warmth, sex and a loss of control. Where Swift's song was lyrically direct, Jepsen roots her blood-music in the music itself, the beat moving between muffled, waterlogged heartbeats which reach a series

of escalations, layers of deep heart thuds, as the warm blood beneath the skin rises, simmers on the surface, and pumps.

The relation between blood and the beat is given a physiognomic dimension in the film *We Are Your Friends,* a 2015 film starring Zac Efron as Cole, an EDM DJ in Los Angeles.

> So it's the DJ's job to get the crowd out of their heads, and into their bodies. So, in order to do that, you need, at the very least a caveman's sense of rhythm, a cursory knowledge of mathematics, and the broad strokes of ninth grade biology. Next you want to zero in on their heartbeats. I like to start em off at about 120 beats per minute. That's equivalent to the heartbeat of a long-distant runner. You see BPM is the name of the game. It governs how your body moves. Once you've locked on to their heart rate, you start bringing them up song by song. There's a popular myth that 128 beats per minute is the rate that synergizes most with your heartbeat. That's the magic number. Once you've gotten your crowd there, you're controlling their entire circulatory system.

This blood music is formally and materially homologous to the blood itself, a cosmic isomorphism which allows entanglement between the two conditions and gives music a measure of direct influence on the blood. Crucially at this point it lapses back onto a meaningful or metaphorical blood as the control elicits sexual arousal, getting the blood up. The DJ is a Deleuzean Schopenhauer, pulling apart bodies to find their resonances and then, like some early modern wizard, manipulating the bodies back into new alignments at different frequencies, coordinating and recirculating them on his controlled rhythms.

blood in the eyes

Within the blood, body and music connection, one particular metaphor stands out; blood in the eyes. Victoria Spivey gives an early version of this strain with her terrifying 1927 murder fantasy *Blood Thirsty Blues*.

Blood, blood, blood look at all that blood
Blood, blood look at all that blood
Yes, I killed my man, a low down good for nothing cur
I told him blood was in my eye,
and still he wouldn't listen to me
I told him blood was in my eye,
and still he wouldn't listen to me
Yes, instead of giving him sugar, I put blood in his tea
Another thing, folks, you can put me down and let me walk
Another thing, folks, you can put me down and let me walk
You know I'm a mighty mean woman,
and I won't stand for nobody's talk
The only man I ever loved, I done sent him to his ruin
The only man I ever loved, I done sent him to his ruin
Yes, I know I'm blood thirsty
From wondering what my poor man's doin'

Spivey's songs play heavily in sexual double entendres, giving "instead of giving him sugar, I put blood in his tea" a potentially erotic alternative reading, but on the text as it lies, there is a blood poisoning wrought by blooded eyes, eyes that scratched too deep beneath the surface and caught the "poor man", moving the blood from the eye, to her throat in thirst, to his, in tea.

The Mississippi Sheiks follow this in the early 1930s with *I've Got Blood in My Eyes for You.* The blood starts as a happy lust,

a passionate coloring of the vision. But this blood is a volatility; it blinds the singer to the fact that he is getting grifted, that his lover is dating him for his money. Once he notices the circumstance, his blood-eyes turn violent:

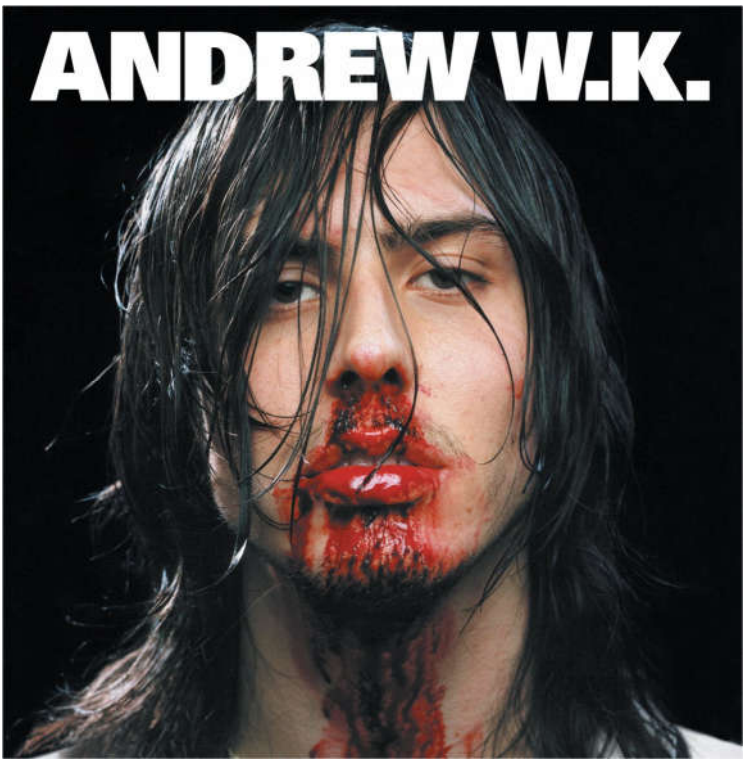
I went back home, put on my tie
Gon' get that girl that 'is money will buy
. . .
She looked at me, begin to smile
Hey-hey babe, 'Can't you wait a little while?
No, no babe
I've got blood in my eyes for you
. . .
No, no ma'am, I can't wait
You got my money, tryin' to break this date
. . .
I'm gonna tell you somethin'
Gon' tell you the fact
If you don't want me, give my money back
. . .
It ain't no need a gettin' roustin' yo jaws
Ya ain't gonna get none of my Santa Claus
Hey-hey-hey, babe
I've got blood in my eyes for you

When Bob Dylan covers the song in 1993, as *Blood in My Eyes,* he cuts the last verse, where the implicit violence becomes and open threat. The lust is now soft, old, casual and careless, and brings out the alternate blindness, that of a sad jilted food rather than the high-strung young man.

These latter two work best as complementary songs, because they hinge on the line "I don't care what in this world you do". For both, it is a structuring lie; the Sheiks care, out of jealously, and their obvious care leads directly to the eruption of violence, a vacillation that presages the move from control

to out-of-control. As Dylan's singer cares from helplessness, the lie repeats his weakness, doubles it. The ironic first-person reflection gives Dylan's version a further angle; blood-eyed blind to his own desiccated masculinity; without violence, what does the song even mean?

This same dynamic between anxiously flaccid and violent blood-eyed masculinity plays out between Andrew WK and Sufjan Stevens. Andrew WK's 2001 album *I Get Wet* was instantly associated with its provocative cover, which drives the blood themes on the album. Depending whether the eyes read as dazed defiance or nihilistic emptiness, the blood runs from a party punch or a cocaine nosebleed. On songs like *Don't Stop Living in the Red*, WK plays the color game, making a relatively



empty homology between blood, RPMs and bankruptcy. On the title track, the implications of "getting wet" go from sexual to directly violent.

You watch what I say, watch what I do
Because I really don't care, I really don't care
I know you're trying to get somewhere
You watch what you say, watch what I do
I'm gonna get on you,
I really don't care, I really don't care
You're never gonna go nowhere

I get wet
I get wet when the party is dying
I get wet without even trying
I get wet
I get wet whenever you're trying
I get wet when I know that you're dying
I get wet

You're making wars
You're breaking doors
And now you're on the floor

"I Get Wet" escapes the sexual double entendre and heads for a purely psychotic release, as sweat, blood and cum co-mingle, consubstantial in WK's nihilistic fantasy. Similarly, the eye (perhaps too much to locate in the "I") is not particularly inflected by blood but is subsumed like everything else in a cormlike snarl of ecstatic equivalence. Here, the singer takes pleasure not only in the failure of others to simplify their fluid pleasures, but even in their resistance to the present state of things, by dying or fighting back. It is possible to read these war-

makers and door-breakers as be the police, but the theme of radical reduction to a single pleasure principle of “Party” is the removal of these distinctions in the circulation of a singular fluid.

Sufjan Stevens’ blood eye is, like Dylan’s, a loss of masculine power.

If I was a different man
If I had blood in my eyes
I could have read of your heart
I could have read of your mind
But now I'm lonely instead, I put up a fight
So, pick up your battering ram, love
I want to see it

Here the blood-eyed, itself within the same horizon as the hard-dicked, gets access to this being-with-another, a fluid and easy between-themselves. It is not blinded, but like WK, augmented. A blood-eyed viewer reads and responds intelligently, while Stevens unblooded eye cowers, chanting "There's too much riding on that, too much, too much, too much love" and hiding from any potential lovers. Stevens makes a complex of the word love, blood-eye-being, and the reading of the latter. This reading, bleeding, battering ram masculine figure is absent. Unblooded, love is the failed measure of his masculinity. Crucially, the anxiously limp dick is not a failure because it failed someone else, but because it failed *him*.

A more rare but significant blood-eye is the wounded eye. The blood-eyes above are frequently ambivalent, injured but driven by that injury to something more extreme, perhaps even more powerful. Atari Teenage Riot’s *Blood in my Eyes* poses a different split, between the injuries of desire which lead to a

desire for injury. Ostensibly a second-wave feminist denunciation of plastic surgery as a male gaze effect, the blood in the eye is the "mutilation" of the cut in the eye of the "favorite girls" but also the medico-sadistic desire in the surgeon himself.

Blood in my eyes, blood in my eyes
I get blood in my eyes, I get blood in my eyes
Reconstructive surgery
And can specify how old you want to be
Snake heads, snake heads, they're just snake heads
Because you just talk anyway!
When men stop mutilating their favorite girls
Then something scary has been let loose among us
But I feel like an explosion of
Too much blood!
Where'd you get your delusions from?

The blood transfers, a mutation transfusion from diseased perspective to a reconstructed perceiver. In the song, the voice of the male impetus for surgery and the male surgeon entwine, becoming a bloody conspiracy carving up a woman. This also prompts a double blood, the blood of the cut and the blood of youthful vigor. Here, the [desire / violence :: eye / blood] analogon has the heartbeat but only to emphasize the medical trauma, not to salvage the flesh.

The other version of this wounded blood-eye is Jay Reatard's *Blood Visions*. These blood visions are changes, impositions onto the subject trying to dangerously maintain his own stasis. There are two visions which he rehearses; in *I See You Standing There*, he becomes an ex-(lover/friend) who watches someone playing with their children in the park while

“hiding in the darkness”, trying to be unseen in order to maintain the fantasy persistence of a relationship which has fully escaped and forgotten his existence. Conversely, *Turning Blue* lapses back into the body’s interior, for a blood that collects in the corpse and a vision that lies in the dream:

You got me sweating
Shaking in my skin
I know it's nice
To find beginnings and ends
As sad as it seems
You're turning blue in my dreams

Reatard’s “beginnings and ends” appear as invasions on his body’s attempted hypercoherency. Their escape into the hard interiority of the dreamworld is only another return to the mantra of the title song, “Blood visions, these things will change”. The inevitability of change is both the nightmare of the lurking ex- and the scrambling presence which is always going to fail to maintain this palpably unsettled circumstance.

The path out of this pooling, blue interiority is sound. The blood eye has a pair, the blood ear, in Suzanne Vega's *Blood Makes Noise*. The song is a pair with Atari Teenage Riot; a woman in the hospital, blood in her ear, simultaneously nerves and anxiety, scares her and keeps her from speaking until it has deafened her through din. Only by waiting for silence can she come back, that is, only by becoming exsanguinate. The sound of the track is fully pulsed blood fed through our structuralist automaton; industrial machines knocked, words Blondie-rapped, sound as a noise, not a song, sound as a ringing in a windy tunnel. If Vega points us to the exit, John Cage takes us through with one of the purest distillations of blood music, *4'33"*. In Cage's essay "Experimental Music", he writes:

For in this new music nothing takes place but sounds: those that are notated and those that are not. Those that are not notated appear in the written music as silences, opening the doors of the music to the sounds that happen to be in the environment. This openness exists in the fields of modern sculpture and architecture. The glass houses of Mies van der Rohe reflect their environment, presenting to the eye images of clouds, trees, or grass, according to the situation. And while looking at the constructions in wire of the sculptor Richard Lippold, it is inevitable that one will see other things, and people too, if they happen to be there at the same time, through the network of wires. There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot. For certain engineering purposes, it is desirable to have as silent a situation as possible. Such a room is called an anechoic chamber, its six walls made of special material, a room without echoes. I entered one at Harvard University several years ago and heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation. Until I die there will be sounds. And they will continue following my death. One need not fear about the future of music.

4' 33"

FOR ANY INSTUMENT OR COMBINATION OF INSTRUMENTS

John Cage

The piece, often mischaracterized as silent, is therefore the rhythm of the heart and the whine of the nerves. The sound of blood occurs as a kind of primal ritual, the first human repetition. Notably, this is the first song discussed with neither a subject nor a victim who is bleeding or exsanguinate. This is the intact subject whose blood is flowing appropriately within their enclosed body. Given the Lévi-Strauss structuralist vampire, we can then see Cage as a counter-example. We might suspect a whole range of discursive effects, but three obvious points seem worth noting here. If the exsanguinate obliterates time, the title and form of the piece, the *4′33″*, is a rebuke, the perfect salvaging of time. Second, as a piece of conceptual music defined by duration, it is absolute linearity, with a big blank unidirectional score rather than Lévi-Strauss' synchrono-diachronic orchestral scores. Finally, if the exsanguinate's music gives them a desubjectified "immortality", Cage thinks instantly of his own actual death, positioning the hopeful future precisely in his passing, not his persistence.

Cage's intact body and blood, along with the organic holism of the performance itself and the lebensraum fantasies of his pure white pages and sound-proof chambers, is challenged directly by composer Steve Reich. His piece, *Come Out*, was composed in 1966 as part of a legal aid benefit for the Harlem Six, six young black men who were framed for murder by the NYPD after being brutally beaten in a police riot. The piece consists of a clip from an interview with one of the young men, Daniel Hamm, saying "I had to, like, open the bruise up, and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them". After repeating the whole sentence three times, Reich lets the last

five words repeat on two tracks, gradually shifting out of phase. Both the sound as music and the sentiment of the linguistic phrase are concerned with the same problem, how to make the invisible, (this bruise blood, the acceptability of state violence and the use of the legal system to target these young black men) come to vision, and how to make the silence of that bruise blood and the ignored demands for justice to come to sound. The repetition contains the beating of the heart and the music effect but also the ritual call, the insistence, that the blood is going to be seen, that the accusation is going to reverberate even if it will not be recognized.

A companion to the Reich piece is Gavin Bryars' *Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, from 1971. Another loop, this time a street hymn sung by a homeless man near Elephant and Castle station in London:

> *Jesus' blood never failed me yet*
> *Never failed me yet*
> *Jesus' blood never failed me yet*
> *There's one thing I know*
> *For he loves me so*
> *Jesus' blood never failed me*
> *Never failed me yet*
> *Never failed me yet*
> *One thing I know*
> *For he loves me so*

The loop grows from silence and is gradually overwhelmed by lush orchestral music that arises behind it, before fading away again. The unstable foundations move it constantly, from interesting to beautiful to melodramatic to heartbreaking and

heartbroken, even angelic, to confusion and embarrassment. I can't listen to it without finding myself bursting fully into tears.

Both Bryars and Reich understand the fundamental line that music and blood share. The pulse, the repetition, the move from the figure to the ground that happens through repetition. But Reich's piece is hostile and analytic, a persistent attack on the cops who beat and framed the Harlem 6. Its victim is exsanguinated, its logic is inexorable. You have some sense of where you are in the piece by how of joint it gets. Bryars leaves you in the open for long stretches, just back and forth in the movement.

Come Out also has a total abstraction built into it, the musicality of language wrenched from meaning. You don't need the protest context for the piece to work, you can just sit in the repetitions and swim. It can even be funny, if in a slightly hysterical way. Bryars, on the other hand, short-circuits analysis. Of course it's music, it's singing. While he builds it slowly, once he gets there, he stays there. Perhaps most profoundly, he gives his recording a pneuma, a breath, a pause, a rest right before the track loops again, a rest that starts to hit harder and harder as it goes on, as you get attuned and aligned to the rhythmic physiognomies of the piece. If Reich is the pulse, Bryars is the compulsion, pulsing together, the repetition which grows on itself and mutates. Reich decays, the burst vessel, Bryars blooms. Never failed me yet, the absolute image of hope, renewed, rebuilt, not similar but resonant. What happens in the Reich piece isn't a shock but every time I start to cry while listen to the Bryars piece, I am stunned and bewildered. This is the

compulsion too, the horizon within itself bridging over to me, and my repetitions, the beated dialectic of a fluid metronome.

Having traced this blood music this far, it's time to venture a concept. Blood works in this music as the repetitional flux, that which encounters the wiry mechanistic compulsion latent in empty veins. The drained exsanguinate unsubject has gotten twitchy chasing the delirium of a mystical formalism, and only the flush and pull of repetition, one with bursts and breaks, can match these thin, achievable satisfactions.

pause flush pause flush pause beat pause flush

Use your blood to paint.
Keep painting until you faint. (a)
Keep painting until you die. (b)

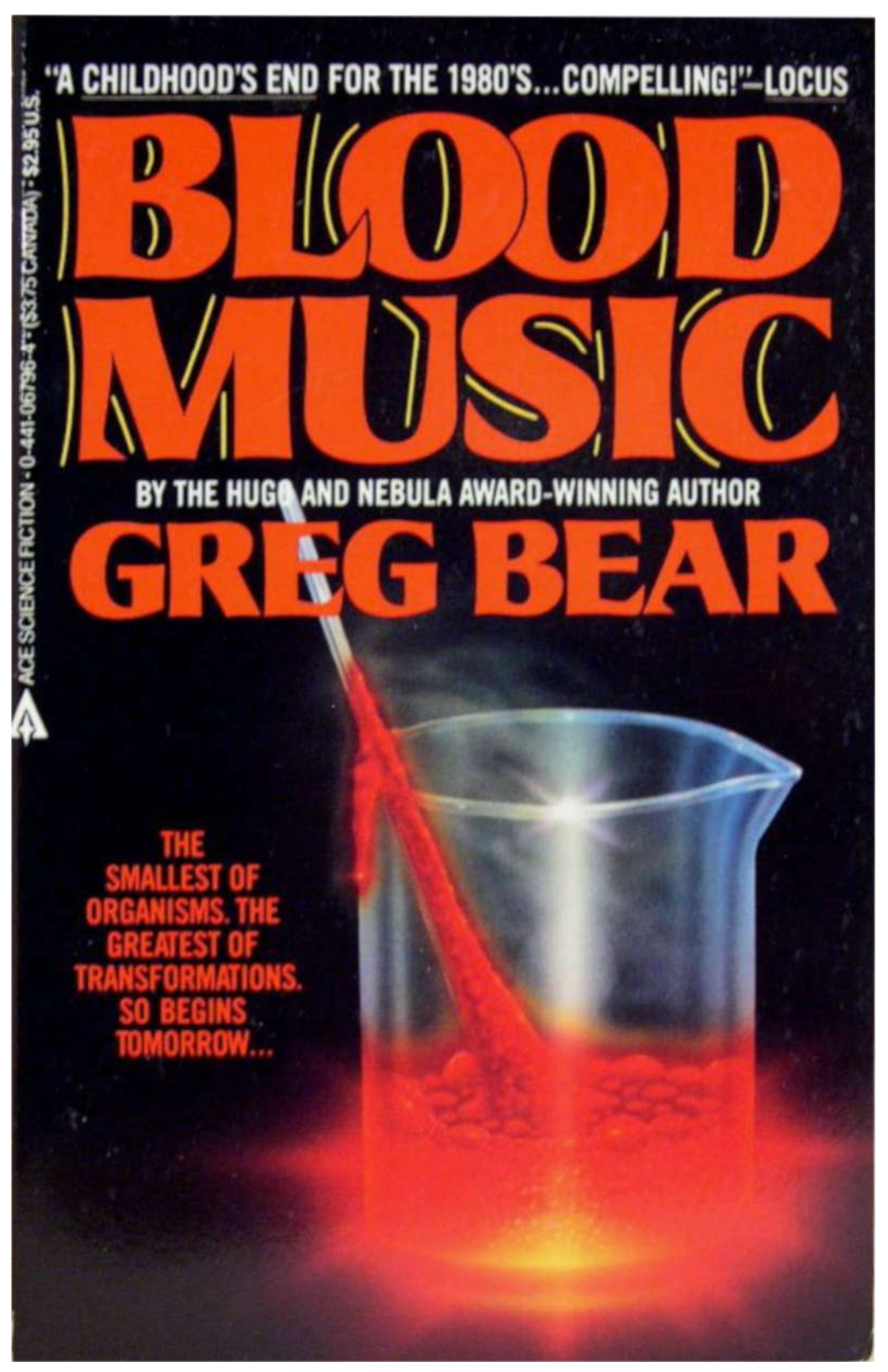
1960 spring

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