

## Chapter 4

### Time and Time Again: Repetition and Difference in Repetitive Music

ANNE DANIELSEN

Email: [anne.danielsen@imv.uio.no](mailto:anne.danielsen@imv.uio.no)

Tel: +47 48214002

Postal address:

Department of Musicology

University of Oslo

Box 1017 Blindern

NO-0315 Oslo

#### Abstract

This chapter addresses the relationship between repetition and variation in repetitive music. Building on philosopher Gilles Deleuze's discussion of repetition (*Difference and Repetition*, 1994), and more particularly on his distinction between static and dynamic repetition, the author introduces the idea of *repetition as production* to the experience of music and then applies this conceptual framework to various musical examples of groove-based music in the African American tradition from the 1960s onward, as well as in other genres. She also touches upon the ways in which new technological tools have made it possible to shape the crucial inner dynamics of repetitive grooves in completely new ways, and she gives examples of new rhythmic feels that derive specifically from these tools' capacity to take control of and manipulate events along the temporal axis. Ultimately, she examines the ways in which repetitive music is organized in time at the level of a whole track or song—that is, as a musical form—and discusses the experience of such a form in different contexts. This leads to more general considerations about repetition as a changing same at the cultural and historical level.

**Bio:** Anne Danielsen is Professor of Musicology at the University of Oslo. She has published numerous articles, book chapters, and books on rhythm and aesthetics in post-war African-American popular music. She is the author of *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Wesleyan, 2006), editor of *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction* (Ashgate/Routledge, 2010), and co-author of *Digital Signatures. The Impact of Digitization on Popular Music Sound* (MIT Press, 2016).

## Chapter 4

### Time and Time Again: Repetition and Difference in Repetitive Music

ANNE DANIELSEN

From the Baroque era to the present day, Western art music has often been experienced and described in terms of a teleological process. Music seems to form large-scale curves of tension, often building up to a climax before reaching a conclusion that is felt to be well prepared and quite natural. However, this is only one way of shaping musical time. In fact, within larger historical and geographical contexts, repetitive or cyclical musical forms have tended to dominate, in part because repetition facilitates the memorization of musical material in oral musical traditions and helps the communication of the overall musical structure too.

This chapter aims to shed light on the nature of repetition in music that relies on such repetitive or cyclical forms.<sup>1</sup> I shall begin with general considerations of the experience of time in music. Then I will discuss the relationship between repetition and variation, and the way in which invariant aspects of music form a background by virtue of which attention is drawn to those things that vary. I also develop the idea of repetition *as production*, relying in particular on philosopher Gilles Deleuze's discussion of repetition (1994) and especially his distinction between static and dynamic repetition. I will then apply this framework to various musical examples of groove-based music in the African American tradition from the 1960s onward. I will also examine how new technological tools have made it possible to shape the crucial inner dynamics of the groove in completely new ways, and I will give examples of new rhythmic feels that derive from those tools' capacity to take control of and manipulate events along the temporal axis. Finally, I shall address the ways in which repetitive music is organized in time at the level of a whole track or a song—that is, as a musical form—and discuss the experience of such a form in different contexts. This will lead to a more general conclusion regarding repetition as a changing same, from both a cultural and a historical perspective.

#### **Repetition versus repetition**

In *The Time of Music* (1988), Jonathan Kramer attempts to systematize and analyze different types of musical time. His point of departure is a binary theoretical division between linearity and nonlinearity. Musical linearity is defined as “the determination of some characteristic(s) of music in accordance with implications that arise from earlier events of the piece,” while nonlinearity is “the determination of some characteristic(s) of music in accordance with implications that arise from principles or tendencies governing an entire piece or section” (20). Put another way, in a linear mode, musical meaning is developed through a teleological process and connected to preceding as well as succeeding events. Musical meaning in a nonlinear mode, on the other hand, is simply uncovered. For Kramer, all music exhibits both linearity and nonlinearity. His categories of musical time are consequently developed as variations and combinations of these

---

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter rely on work that was first published in my book *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament* (Danielsen 2006b).

two modes. The first category is called “goal-directed linearity” and addresses the classical tonal repertoire. Here too, however, Kramer calls attention to nonlinear aspects and their function as a backdrop against which the linear aspects of music come into focus: after a few bars of unchanging texture and surface rhythm, the expectation arises that the next measure will be similar in turn. This way, attention is directed toward those musical aspects where the linearity unfolds, such as melodic contour, harmony, the use of different registers, and in some cases the dynamics (42).

Kramer’s analysis of tonal classical music demonstrates that repetition always goes hand in hand with variation, and, more importantly, that repetition tends to produce a certain kind of focus. Because the capacity of our short-term memory limits the amount of information that is available to conscious awareness at any given time (Snyder 2000: 51), our attention tends to be drawn to those things that vary, as opposed to the repeating, invariant aspects that instead come to form the background. Still, what constitutes such variation differs greatly with musical genre and depends, first and foremost, on what is regarded or *experienced* as repetition. There are different forms of repetition and different forms of difference.

In the essay “Structure and Function in Musical Repetition” (1979), David Lidov identifies three types of repetition. The first type relates to the ways in which repetition contributes to segmentation and hierarchy in Western art music. When repetition works this way, he calls it *formative*, in the sense that it “defines units of a musical work, and establishes their position in a hierarchy of longer and shorter segments” (9). Formative repetition is conventional and necessary; it also attracts little attention as long as the repeated unit corresponds to the constructional units of the hierarchy—as Lidov puts it, “if the repetition is hierarchically conformal, its necessity and sufficiency neutralize its interest. Interest passes to the material” (6). In other words, formative repetition is an almost transparent aspect of musical structure, and its absence is actually much more striking than its presence. In the case of formative repetition, two equal units follow one another in immediate succession; it is transparent but nonetheless fundamental to establishing the hierarchy of sequences in a standard pop tune, where one measure plus another makes a unit of two, two plus another two makes a unit of four, four plus four makes eight, and so on. Most often, those two equal units are not absolutely equal, but this does not alter the effect very much: “varied formative repetition” will, according to Lidov, merely tend to establish “equivalences and oppositions between different features of the material” (9), as, for example, when a phrase is answered by a similar, yet different phrase in a symmetrically organized structural form. In any case, it remains true that one’s focus tends to stay on the aspect that changes, not on the aspect that repeats (e.g., a rhythmic pattern), even when the latter may be described as forming the basic framework of the phrase.

Generally speaking, Lidov analyzes the effects of repetition using the *number of repetitions* as his starting point. When the repeated units exceed two (that is, the typical number for formative repetition), the mere fact that something is repeated will attract attention in itself. Lidov labels this second type of repetition “focal repetition” (15), and he mentions the classical sequence as an example of a form of repetition that attracts attention as such, while being at the same time strongly progressive—in other words, such repetitive structures might give an

impression of the accumulation of time, rather than the opposite. Finally, the third form of repetition that Lidov discusses is textural repetition, which “cancels out its own claim on our attention and, thereby, refers our focus elsewhere (to another voice or to a changing aspect” (21). He suggests that this might already happen by the fourth or fifth repetition. For Lidov, this kind of repetition directs one’s attention to a changing aspect, without the repetition losing its effect—“the figure maintains, nevertheless, a transcendental influence on our musical consciousness” (21). Steve Reich’s minimalist, repetitive music might serve as an example of textural repetition.

Richard Middleton also addresses different forms of repetition in music, but he only identifies two basic forms: “discursive” and “musematic” repetition (1983: 238). Sequence, which “composes time (rather than marking time or obliterating it, as straight repetition, especially if musematic, seems to do),” is his primary example of discursive repetition (Middleton 1990: 273–75). Focusing solely on the length of the repeated unit, he does not discuss the role of the musical context—for example, the harmonic context or the number of repetitions. One objection is thus that he underestimates the role of other musical parameters in the effect of repetition. In a classical sequence, for example, the tonal and harmonic relationships between different repeated units are hugely important, and the number of repetitions is almost predetermined—a sequence commonly stops after three repetitions or is considerably varied in the fourth. Combined with functional harmonic progressions, this produces the “marking of time” in tonal classical music.

The effects of repetition and difference are highly dependent on context and emerge in combination with other musical aspects. For example, it is not variation *per se* that produces the goal-directedness of classical tonal music, or repetition *per se* that causes the different states of being commonly associated with repetitive music. Repetition is not automatically equal to nonhierarchical or nonlinear forms, or to different trancelike, meditative, or regressive conditions (depending upon one’s perspective), and variation is not automatically equal to linear, discursive, or teleological forms. Instead, it is particular combinations of repetition and variation, and their interaction with other musical parameters, that produce such effects.

### **Repetition with a difference: locking the rhythm of a groove**

Although repetition is encountered in all types of music, groove-based music may be said to rely on repetition to an extreme extent. As I shall discuss toward the end of the present chapter, it also supplies the basic structuring principle for such music’s overall form. The question as to whether this repetitive structure is actually *heard as repetition*, however, depends on several factors. The first factor might be described as listeners’ “resolution” in the way they “process” the groove: if one’s resolution is high—that is, if one is sufficiently attuned to details and other events at the microlevel of the groove—there will almost always be something new to attend to when a pattern is repeated. Conversely, a low-resolution, non-confident listener will probably tend to hear the “same thing,” despite considerable differences from one repetition to the next. The second factor is the extent to which one’s listening experience is directed toward difference rather than sameness. An important aesthetic orientation in African American culture is to “repeat with a difference” (Gates 1988: xxii–iii), which means that the repetitive structure is a vehicle for

performative qualities—repetition is there to make it possible to experience performative difference. Repetition in a groove that is performed may thus be characterized as a form of microlevel “signifyin(g),” to borrow a term from Henry Louis Gates Jr.: it is repetition and revision in one and the same maneuver. The aim, here, is twofold: on the one hand, it is important that the same repeats every time (that is, the same should be recognized or categorized as such); on the other hand, it is equally important that this same is different. Yet this difference must not exhaust the category: instead, it should occur in the form of what might be described as “intracategorical variation”—the difference is a difference within the repeated. Even though extensive repetition may be found in groove-based music, the *focus* is on difference—not difference in itself but difference stepping forward in relation to the same, to a figure, a formality or convention, or perhaps even a tradition. (In practice, a tradition will also contain the expectation of difference.) A clear and sturdy structure allows the personal touch to come forward and directs attention toward performative qualities rather than compositional structure.

Even a strictly repetitive tune such as, for example, “The Payback” (1974) by James Brown is a “changing same” (Jones 1971). If we compare the beginning with the end (see figure 1), the groove has clearly changed. First of all, the response guitar “develops” by gradually extending the funky wah-wah riff using more and bigger gestures that occupy more space and more time. The density of events is higher, and there is more energy overall in the groove toward the end. The tempo has also increased from approximately 97 to 100 beats per minute. We do not actually perceive this change as change, however, probably because it is the result of an ongoing act of producing the same. For this very reason, it would be more appropriate to call it optimization than variation—an optimization of the different elements so that they become even more integrated and comfortable within the whole. This continuous optimization is often described as “locking” or “nailing the rhythm.” It is not a carefully considered process, and it never really ends; instead, it goes on automatically, continuously, manifesting in the form of better or worse periods of interaction. In better periods, the technical skills of musicians and dancers are completely absent. In fact, the only times when skills such as accurate articulation and precision in timing tend to be audible are when they are lacking—ideally, they attract no attention at all.

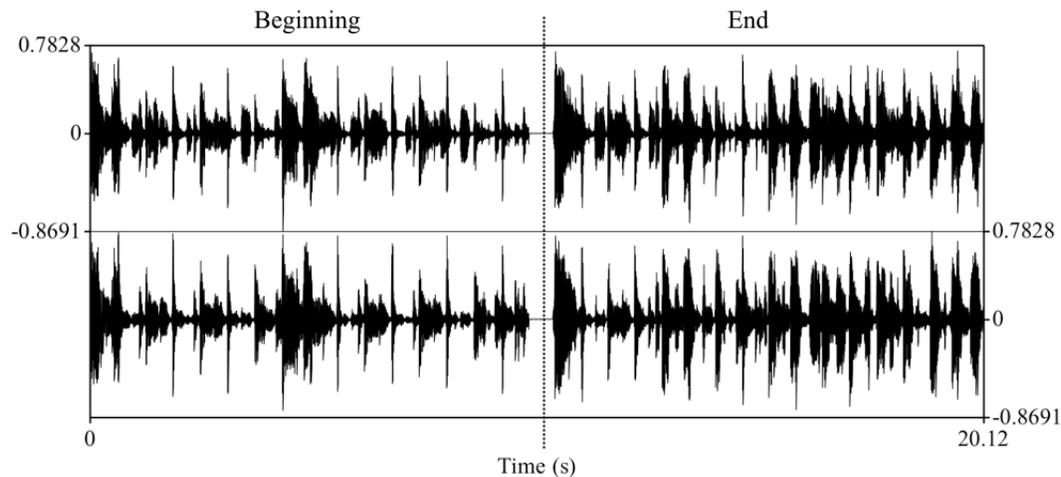


Figure 1. Waveform of beginning (0:50–0:60) and end (6:18–6:28) of “The Payback.”

### Repetition as production

How can the repetitive optimization described above be understood from a phenomenological point of view? What is repetition when one is actually achieving it or experiencing it—that is, when one is taking part not from a distance but from a position inside the process? To put it differently: What is repetition when it is unfolding in time?

One of Gilles Deleuze’s core insights is that each repetition is produced and thus is always already difference in the first place. In chapter 2 of *Difference and Repetition* (1994), Deleuze identifies three instances of repetition. He calls the first one “repetition in itself,” but as he points out, this leaves repetition unthinkable. Repetition has no “in itself”: it cannot be attributed to the object repeated but rather, according to Hume, “change[s] something in the mind which contemplates it” (Hume, quoted in Deleuze 1994: 70). The second instance of repetition relates to this last effect of repetition and implies a “passive synthesis in time,” as Deleuze says, which is not carried out by the mind but occurs in the mind as it contemplates, prior to all memory and all reflection. On this level, repetition occurs but is not recognized as such; it is still repetition for itself, or rather, repetition before the act of understanding repetition. The third instance of repetition is repetition constituted as such, as “repetition for us,” but this act of understanding is, as Deleuze points out, superimposed upon and supported by the two underlying levels (71).

In line with Deleuze, we might say that when actually doing repetition (through either

listening, playing, or dancing), repetition remains “repetition for itself” and never becomes “repetition for us.” This can be explained by the fact that repetition is production in the first place, and when one is *in the process of creating* a repetition, repetition cannot be explained by identity between different instances of repetition, because this act would require a position outside the process. Deleuze gives the following example:

Consider . . . the repetition of a decorative motif: a figure is reproduced, while the concept remains absolutely identical . . . However, this is not how artists proceed in reality. They do not juxtapose instances of the figure, but rather each time combine an element of one instance with *another* element of a following instance. They introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, dissymmetry or gap of some kind which appears only in the overall effect. (1994: 19)

As Deleuze points out, the process is fueled by what he calls a *productive dissymmetry*, and the whole process is a sign of this force at work. At the same time, however, this force is *not* in the process, because the very goal of the process is to cancel it.

Along these lines, Deleuze finds it necessary to distinguish between dynamic and static repetition (20), which correspond to repetition as experienced from a position inside and outside the process, respectively. The latter concerns only the overall static effect—it results from the work and refers back to a single concept. The former concerns the acting cause, the productive process, and is the repetition of an internal dynamics or difference within that which is repeated. According to this interior perspective, a repetition—the pattern or figure that is repeated—is not shaped at once but rather comes into being like the “evolution” of a bodily movement such as a gesture.

Within a groove, as well, repetition is production in the sense that one is continuously producing, or coproducing, rhythmic gestures in an ongoing process. In the groove mode, the entire rhythmic pattern is neither played nor experienced at once but instead over *time*. Every gesture has to be effected, and, in one sense, repetition is like a kind of continual *re-petition*—a re-appeal or request requiring a follow-up. The request takes place every single time, and it happens over and over again in the form of the same, but all the same *new*, (re)petition. It has to be done, and it has to be done in time, sequentially. Rather than repeating a prefabricated figure, one repeats an internal difference. One makes up one part and answers with another in an eternal rhythmic dialogue. Every time, the answer is the same, but this may only be because it is the right answer. The groove requires exactly that answer at that point; a different answer would take the whole process off course, and the entire fabric of rhythm might fall apart.

### **The inner dynamics of a groove**

Many features of James Brown and P-Funk’s funk grooves may be seen as contributing to a productive dissymmetry in the sense of Deleuze. One such feature is the structural tension between rhythm and counter-rhythm, the latter often tending toward cross-rhythm—that is, when a pattern of four strokes is played against a three-beat pattern. This *four against three* pattern can

be played by the guitar, the bass, or the bass drum, or even a combination of several instruments (see Danielsen 2006b: 61–72). Another example of productive dissymmetry at the structural level is the *on-and-off* figure, which arises, for example, when strokes are first played on the beats and then off the beats (see figure 2). This figure can be found in the famous bridge from James Brown’s “Sex Machine” (see Danielsen 2006b: 80–82). Both of these rhythmic figures, the four against three and the on-and-off, have a rhythmic structure that destabilizes a groove exactly when a possible synthesis in time could take place—namely at the end of every basic unit, when the metrical structure leads the pattern toward a mini-“closure.” Inducing such instability at the natural point of metric closure has a driving, dynamic effect and leads the process onward.

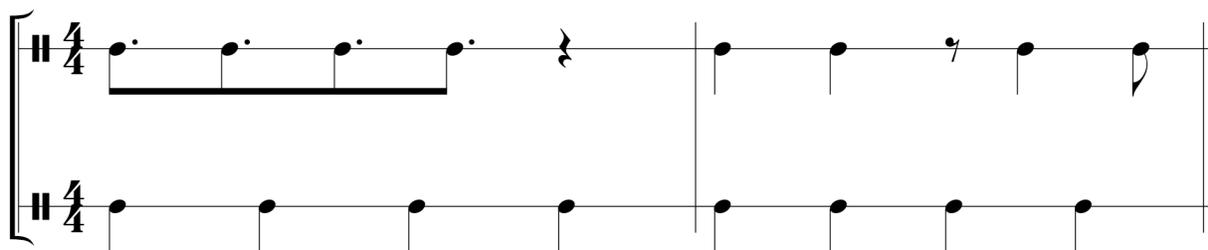


Figure 2. Four-against-three figure (left) and on-and-off figure (right).

The examples above are illustrations of *structural* dissymmetry. In played music it is commonly assumed that the *timing* inflections provided by musicians are likewise responsible for the drive of a groove (see, for example, Keil 1994a; 1994b; 1995; Prögler 1995; Monson 1996; Waadeland 2001; Iyer 2002; Butterfield 2006; Hove et al. 2007). There are two kinds of timing variations that work this way. The first concerns variations from one basic unit to the next.<sup>2</sup> The second is the so-called systematic variation that takes place within each unit and is repeated from unit to unit (Bengtson et al. 1969). The inner dynamic described above, whether it is produced by structural or microrhythmic instability, is of the latter kind and is inherent in the repeated structural or microrhythmic pattern as such. As a rule, it is the same structural or microrhythmic pattern that is repeated each time the basic unit is repeated. The instability is stable and also aesthetically satisfying.

This condition becomes even more conspicuous when one approaches looped *computer-based* grooves—that is, grooves where each basic unit, each repetition, is exactly identical to the previous one. In these grooves, as well, it is important to compose the basic unit in such a way that a compelling inner dynamic drives the groove forward. And, as with the performed grooves discussed above, this can be done either by combining different layers of rhythm at a *structural level* or by introducing *microrhythmic* tension. The former option was the only option for sequencer-based grooves prior to the micromanipulation of rhythmic events enabled by the digital audio workstation, or DAW. Up to the mid-1980s, all events of a sequencer-based groove

<sup>2</sup> With “basic unit,” I am referring to the one- or two-measure pattern that is repeated throughout a groove (see Danielsen 2006b: 43).

had to be on the grid, simply because there were no other options (this constraint for early sequencer-based grooves certainly accounts for the on-the-grid aesthetics that is still governing electronic dance music [EDM] today). Driving such grooves forward could only be done through a structural tension between the basic rhythmic figures of the groove—for example, by constructing a polyrhythmic fabric of rhythms and counter-rhythms. A common example would be the aforementioned four-against-three figure (see figure 2). This can be heard in numerous EDM songs, where isochronous dotted eighth notes on a synth pad are typically juxtaposed against the beats of the four-to-the-floor basic pulse.<sup>3</sup>

The DAW clearly presented new opportunities for optimizing and experimenting with the microrhythmic design of grooves. New tools made it possible to shape the crucial inner dynamics of the groove in completely new ways by taking control of and manipulating events along the temporal axis. Such microrhythmic manipulation of grooves emerged around the turn of the millennium and has now become an almost standardized part of the groove repertoire in contemporary R&B-based pop music.<sup>4</sup> One recent example is Rihanna’s “Needed Me” (the third single from her 2016 album *Anti*). A crucial aspect of this song’s inner dynamics derives from the manipulation of the sounds that constitute the groove foundation of the track (see figure 3). A reversed synth pad accelerates toward the bass drum kick, turning around the dynamics of a traditional bass drum/bass layer, where the kick usually sparks off the more extended sound of the bass. When this motion is reversed, it generates a peculiar rhythmic feel that surprises and engages in every repetition.

---

<sup>3</sup> For more examples and analyses of this and other structural aspects of rhythm in electronic dance music, see Butler 2006 and Zeiner-Henriksen 2010.

<sup>4</sup> For early examples of the extreme microrhythmic manipulation of a groove, see D’Angelo’s album *Voodoo* from 1999 (for analysis, see Bjerke 2010 and Danielsen 2010), Snoop Dogg’s *Rhythm & Gangsta* album from 2004 (see analysis in Carlsen and Witek 2010 and Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen 2016: 101–16), and Brandy’s song “What About Us” on the album *Full Moon* from 2002 (analysis in Carlsen and Witek 2010). All of these examples represent new rhythmic feels that could not have been achieved by live musicians or any preceding technological tools.

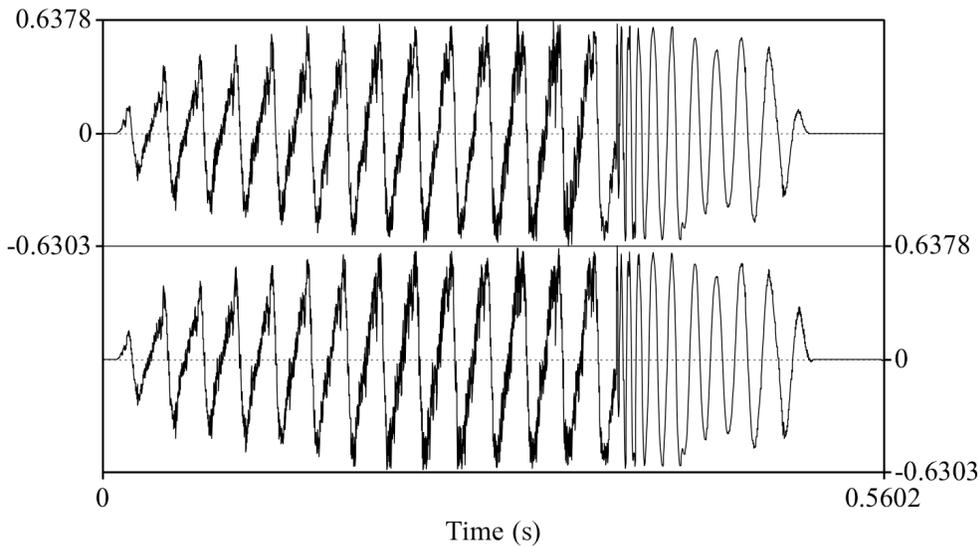


Figure 3. Reversed bass and kick drum from Rihanna’s “Needed Me” (2016).

In all these examples, it is not the difference *between* one repetition and the next that matters, but rather the productive dissymmetry that works from inside the repeated pattern and is experienced from inside the process. In music that is being performed, this is reflected in the fact that a musician has to produce every beat, and, from this perspective, every beat is actually new. In computer-based grooves, this is not the case, since the exact same sound is often used in every measure. And yet *time* is still new. When one is absorbed in the now of the experience, one will move together with the groove from one gesture to the next. This means that even though every new repetition no longer has to be performed by musicians, sounds still need to be perceived, time and again. From a phenomenological perspective, then, every repetition is brand new.

### **Repetition over time: the form of repetitive music**

In the end, we must step out of time and look at the form of repetitive music from a distance. Traditionally, repetitive music has been thought of as formless, because it does not allow for the development of a large-scale harmonic or dynamic structure. However, just as functional harmony goes together with large-scale, organic musical form, groove tends to be paired with its own overall musical course. The dramaturgy of this groove-based form starts with a “consecration phase,” to build up energy and prepare the listener for the groove itself. Once established, the groove may go on almost endlessly, but ultimately, of course, it reaches a point where the energy is on the decline, inducing a self-regulating “winding down.” In the words of Christopher Small,

A performance may go on for several hours or all night, and will have no formal beginning or end; rather it will take some time to gather momentum and probably just fizzle out at the end when the musicians run out of energy or enthusiasm. There is no time limit set. (1996: 55)

Within this time span, the artist has various options for intervening in the musical process, as we can see through a close look at the temporal organization of the aforementioned classic funk tune, “The Payback”—a recorded song that can be heard as a mini-version of a typical groove-based live musical form.<sup>5</sup> The song’s consecration phase is represented by a long introductory gesture, introducing us to the “community” of musicking: the listener/dancer is lifted up to the level of the groove and prepared to enter its flow. The eight-unit intro (each unit equals two measures of 4/4) becomes much more complex toward the end—more and more voices piled atop one other while the amplitude of the vibrato increases. The whole gesture suddenly collapses upon the first beat of the main groove.

This transition from the introductory gesture to the main groove is the first opportunity for the groove to end something without achieving the effect of closure. This is called the *cut*, which traditionally refers to the point in the musical course when one or more tracks or layers depart from the groove so that the remaining voices receive more attention. Yet this impact works in the opposite direction as well, because a voice can also acquire attention as it is itself cut. The beginning of the classic breakbeat in rap is also an instance of the cut. In this case, several voices—and in particular those that have previously attracted the most attention—drop out in order to let the beat proceed on its own for a while. James Snead places the cut within a repetitive, circular setting:

In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is “there for you to pick up when you come back to get it.” If there is a goal (Zweck) in such a culture, it is always deferred; it continually “cuts” back to the start, in the musical meaning of “cut” as an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental da capo) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series. (Snead 1984: 67)

Snead gives many examples from music and literature. In James Brown’s funk, the cut is the return to the groove after a bridge. In John Coltrane’s jazz improvisation, the cut is “the unexpectedness with which the soloist will depart from the ‘head’ or theme and from its normal harmonic sequence or the drummer from the tune’s accepted and familiar primary beat” (Snead 1984: 69). In the field of literature, Snead points to Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo*: “Reed, in the manner of the jazz soloist, cuts frequently between the various subtexts in his novel (headlines, photographs, handwritten letters, italicized writing, advertisements) and the text of his main narrative” (72). In general terms, then, the cut is a pattern of abrupt transfer from one level to another (and, one might add, the latter is never equal to nothing).

In James Brown’s funk tunes, another form of abrupt change may be found: the bridge. Unlike the introduction of a new section in a musical form that is governed by functional

---

<sup>5</sup> The unusual form of this recording is due to the fact that it was originally recorded as the soundtrack to a film. However, the producer did not think it was funky enough and turned it down. In his autobiography, Brown says, “I knew that the song wouldn’t make it without the movie, so I came up with the story line that you could see” (Brown with Tucker 1997: 241). The story he refers to is probably the one printed on the cover of the double album *The Payback*, released in 1974, which anticipates the song by including some of its characteristic verbal expressions.

harmony, the bridge's groove arrives completely unprepared. As John Miller Chernoff describes it when discussing form in a West African drum ensemble: "all the instruments change together and then return to their former relationship" (Chernoff 1979: 115). Chernoff also stresses that rhythmic innovations in themselves are not the main concern within such repetitive groove-based forms; what matters is the continual flow, as well as *when* a given intervention (a cut, a break, or a bridge) occurs.

In sum, even though the repetitive groove may seem devoid of form, when we experience it from within, because of the ways in which listeners, dancers, and musicians are absorbed in the now of the musical course, it *does* in fact have a form—one that is premised on no change but includes various possibilities for intervention. This form is closely related to the absorbed state of being that characterizes a groove experience, because it enhances our presence in the "now" of the groove. The fact that groove-based music is often described as devoid of form should be related to this condition of being in the now of the groove, because when we are in such a state, we do not notice the passing of time. This is not to say that the groove is characterized by standstill, but that we do not notice time because we *move together with time*, co-producing the groove in accordance with its inner dynamics, driving forward the groove and ourselves as listeners and dancers alike.

### **Experience and tradition: a changing same**

Repetition and difference within a groove-based musical framework are very different from repetition and difference within what Kramer would call a linear temporality. When one's listening habitus<sup>6</sup> has been formed by experiences with the latter, it may be difficult to understand the former, and vice versa. If one is not moving together with the groove, taking part in it through perceptual co-production, repetition may soon become repetition without a difference: the same is no longer transparent but rather too pronounced, almost obtrusive, nerve-racking, perhaps similar to what Adorno described as a sort of torture.<sup>7</sup> Viewed this way, intracategorical variation is, as an aesthetic phenomenon, as fundamental to repetition as repetition itself. That is, intracategorical variation is the strictly necessary supplement to repetition. If our habitus is inclined toward goal-directed listening, we will search continually for syntactical structures at an overarching level, such as the periodicity introduced by melodic phrases, chord progressions, and the like. This search for overarching form is in turn an obstacle to the perception of the intracategorical variation produced by the inner dynamics of the groove, and it will inhibit us from "moving together" with the groove. When we are unable to give in to the moment, repetition becomes unbearable—it becomes repetition of the same. To experience "joy in repetition," as Prince once called it,<sup>8</sup> one has to be absorbed in the groove: one has to move, or one has to be moved. This crucial condition of being in the groove also reminds us that even though the groove does not proceed toward a definite goal, it is not standing still; it is, to the last second, in motion.

---

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the notion of musical habitus and the dynamic relationship between aesthetics and culture in this regard, see, for example, Danielsen 2006a and Rimmer 2012.

<sup>7</sup> See Adorno 1941; 1973.

<sup>8</sup> "Joy in Repetition" is the eighth track on Prince's album *Graffiti Bridge* (1990).

To sum up, what might be heard as repetition and variation itself varies with the listener and the musical context. Moreover, contrary to what has sometimes been claimed, whether there is actually variation in the repeated pattern is not decisive as such. In fact, much repetitive music is built up of units that are almost or exactly like the preceding ones, and whether the groove belongs to the former or the latter of these categories is not what decides whether repetition ends up being torture or pleasure. Even in music where the basic units, if taken out of time and placed on top of one another, are identical—for example, music performed by machines and not human beings—every repetition may be experienced as repetition with a difference, because the time is different.<sup>9</sup>

Last but not least, the impossibility to repeat repetitive music also pertains to the act of repeating repetitive music across cultures, and, one might add, across time periods. Even at this larger scale of temporal and cultural difference, repetition is repetition with a difference. Experiencing the grooves of James Brown, for example, is unavoidably a changing same, whether that involves a transposition from the black popular music market to the mainstream pop audience in the cultural context of the 1960s and early 1970s, or from this historical situation to the present time.

## References

- Adorno, T. W. (1941), “On Popular Music,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 9: 17–48.
- Adorno, T. W. (1973), “Leichte Musik,” in *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie: Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen*, 199–218, Frankfurt am Main (Germany): Suhrkamp.
- Bengtsson, I., A. Gabrielsson, and S.-M. Thorsén (1969), “Empirisk rytmforskning,” *Svensk tidskrift för musikforskning* 51: 48–118.
- Bjerke, K. Y. (2010), “Timbral Relationships and Microrhythmic Tension: Shaping the Groove Experience through Sound,” in A. Danielsen (ed.), *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, 85–101, Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Brown, J., with B. Tucker (1997), *James Brown: The Godfather of Soul*, New York, NY: Thunder’s Mouth Press.
- Brøvig-Hanssen, R., and A. Danielsen (2016), *Digital Signatures: The Impact of Digitization on Popular Music Sound*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Butler, M. J. 2006. *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Butterfield, M. W. (2006), “The Power of Anacrusis: Engendered Feeling in Groove-Based Musics,” *Music Theory Online*, 12(4). Available online: <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.06.12.4/mto.06.12.4.butterfield.html> (accessed 6 December 2016).
- Carlsen, K., and M. A. G. Witek (2010), “Simultaneous Rhythmic Events with Different Schematic Affiliations: Microtiming and Dynamic Attending in Two Contemporary R&B

---

<sup>9</sup> This is brilliantly demonstrated in the writings of Søren Kierkegaard—see, for example, his essay “Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology by Constantin Constantius” (Kierkegaard [1843] 1983).

- Grooves,” in A. Danielsen (ed.), *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, 51–68, Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Chernoff, J. M. (1979), *African Rhythm and African Sensibilities: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Danielsen, A. (2006a), “Aesthetic Value, Cultural Significance, and Canon Formation in Popular Music,” *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* 32: 55–72.
- Danielsen, A. (2006b), *Presence and Pleasure: The Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Danielsen, A. (2010), “Here, There and Everywhere: Three Accounts of Pulse in D’Angelo’s ‘Left and Right,’” in A. Danielsen (ed.), *Musical Rhythm in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, 19–35, Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Deleuze, G. ([1968] 1994), *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, London (UK): Athlone Press.
- Gates, H. L. (1988), *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Iyer, V. (2002), “Embodied Mind, Situated Cognition, and Expressive Microtiming in African-American Music,” *Music Perception* 19(3): 387–414.
- Jones, L. (1971), “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music),” in A. J. Gayle (ed.), *The Black Aesthetic*, 112–25, New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Keil, C. (1995), “The Theory of Participatory Discrepancies: A Progress Report,” *Ethnomusicology* 39(1): 1–20.
- Kierkegaard, S. ([1843] 1983), “Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology by Constantin Constantius,” *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong, 125–31, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kramer, J. D. (1988), *The Time of Music*, New York, NY: Schirmer.
- Lidov, D. (1979), “Structure and Function in Musical Repetition,” *Journal of the Canadian Association of University Schools of Music* 8(1): 1–32.
- Middleton, R. (1983), “‘Play It Again Sam’: Some Notes on the Productivity of Repetition,” *Popular Music* 3: 235–70.
- Middleton, R. (1990), *Studying Popular Music*, Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Monson, I. (1996), *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Prögler, J. A. (1995), “Searching for Swing: Participatory Discrepancies in the Jazz Rhythm Section,” *Ethnomusicology* 39(1): 21–54.
- Rimmer, M. (2012), “Beyond Omnivores and Univores: The Promise of a Concept of Musical Habitus,” *Cultural Sociology* 6(3): 299–318.
- Small, C. (1996), *Music, Society, Education*, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press.
- Snead, J. A. (1984), “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” in H. L. J. Gates (ed.), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, 59–80, New York, NY: Methuen.
- Snyder, B. (2000), *Music and Memory: An Introduction*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Waadeland, C. H. (2001), “‘It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing’: Simulating Expressive Timing by Modulated Movements,” *Journal of New Music Research* 30(1): 23–37.
- Zeiner-Henriksen, H. T. (2010), “The PoumTchak Pattern: Correspondences Between Rhythm, Sound, and Movement in Electronic Dance Music,” PhD diss., University of Oslo.