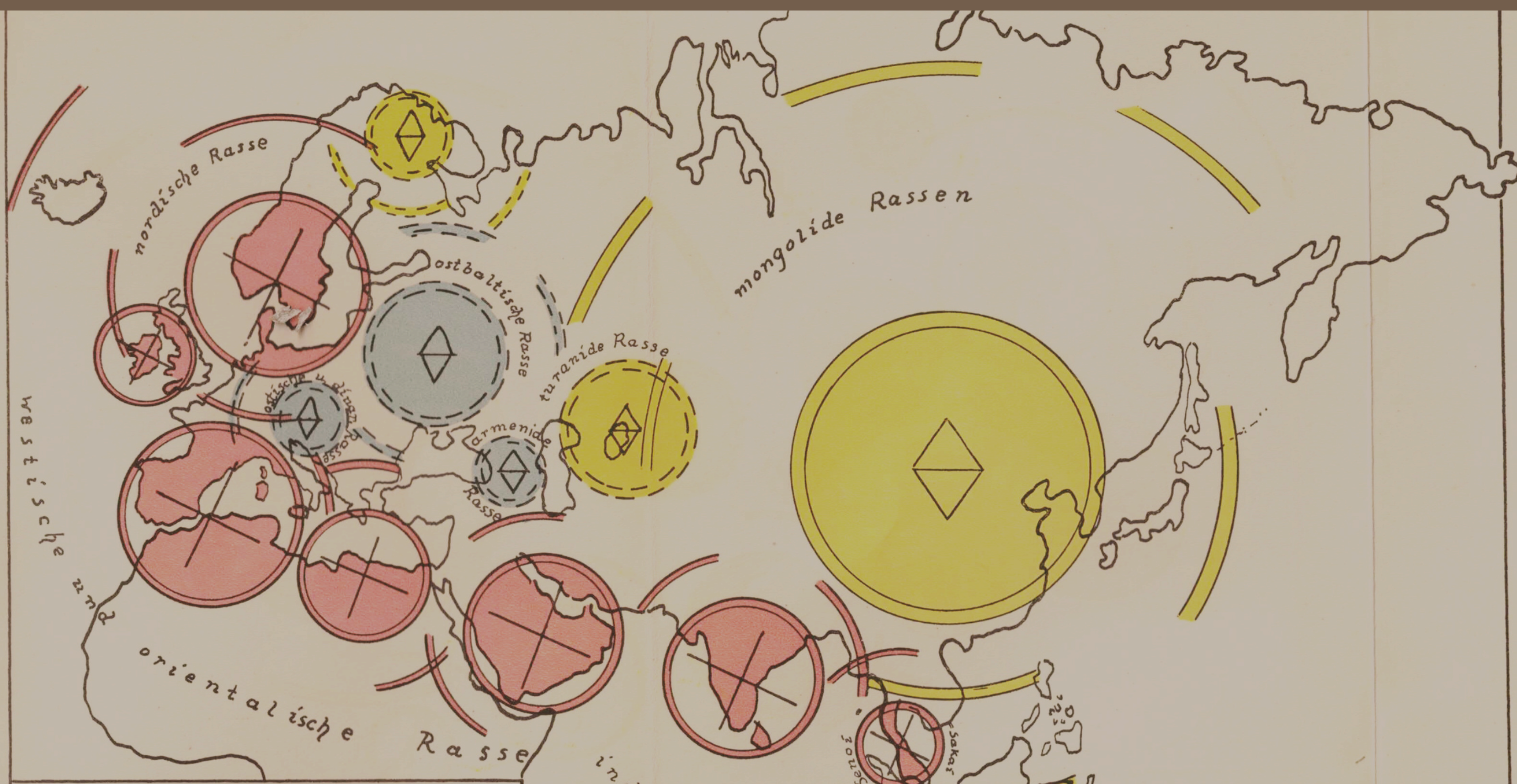


Critical Perspectives on Comparative Musicology and Music Studies, 1885–1950



October 28th–30th, 2025

Program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are thankful to the Universität Wien and the College at the University of Chicago for their support of this workshop.

Collaborators and organizers include: Drs. Julio Mendívil, Martin Ringsmut, Rodrigo Chocano (UWien) and Drs. Phil Bohlman and Vicky Mogollón Montagne (UChicago).

For assistance, please reach out to Vicky Mogollón Montagne at vickymm@uchicago.edu

Schedule

Tuesday, October 28th
Goodspeed Hall

5pm-6pm - Presentation by Lute Legends (in collaboration with EthNoise!)
Location: Goodspeed Hall 402

6:30pm - Doors open at Fulton Hall in Goodspeed, 4th floor

7pm-8:30pm - Performance: Lute Legends w/student guest musicians

8:30pm-9pm - Reception

Event Description

Lute Legends Collective | Borderlands: Music on the Edge

This transfixing musical journey is anchored by a triangle of distinct traditions: the evocative depiction of nature in ancient China, the multilayered ornamentation of the European Renaissance, and the improvisatory brilliance of Middle Eastern maqam. The performance explores the uncharted geographical and stylistic spaces between the points of that triangle. Through diverse repertoire such as haunting Uyghur folk tunes from Xinjiang, polyphonic songs from the Iberian Peninsula, and classical forms from the Ottoman court, we experience moments across time, borders, and race when these three musical cultures engage with one another.

Wednesday, October 29th

Tea Room, Social Science Research Building

12:30pm – Welcome / Opening remarks

1pm–2:30pm – Panel 1

1pm–1:30pm: Dr. Christian Friedrich Poske

1:30pm–2pm: Pramantha Tagore

2pm–2:30pm: Dr. Rodrigo Chocano

2:30pm–3pm – Coffee and Tea Break

3pm–4:15pm – Roundtable: “To Be a Musicologist, To Be Racialized: Still Living with the Enemy?”

4:15pm–5pm – Reception

Thursday, October 30th

Franke Institute, Regenstein Library

11am–12:30pm – Panel 2

11am–11:30pm: Dr. Martin Ringsmut

11:30am–12pm: Dr. Julio Mendiivil

12pm–12:30pm: Dr. Alex Cowan

12:30pm–2pm – Lunch break

2pm–3pm – Panel 3

Dr. Phil Bohlman + discussants

3pm–4:15pm – Keynote: Dr. Ronald Radano

4:15pm–4:30pm – Coffee and Tea Break

4:30pm–5:30pm – Book Release: Dr. Ronald Radano in conversation with Drs. Jessica Swanston Baker and Travis Jackson

5:30pm–6:30pm – Reception

Abstracts and Bios

Wednesday, October 29th

Panel 1

From Europe to South Asia: The Influence of Cultural Evolutionism and Comparative Musicology on Indian Musicology

This paper examines the formative impact of cultural evolutionist and comparative musicological theories on Indian musicological thought, tracing their discursive trajectories from the 1870s to the present day. Drawing on textual sources, it illustrates how the presumed “tribal » folk » classical” continuum of South Asian performing arts, one of the core tenets of contemporary Indian musicology, can be retraced to the writings of comparative musicologists (Stumpf 1911; Sachs 1943) influenced by cultural evolutionism (Darwin 1871; Tylor 1871).

While research has addressed the influence of early anthropology and racial theory on comparative musicology (e.g., Schneider 1976; Graf 1985; Trumpener 2000) and the impact of Nazi rule on its institutional development on both sides of the Atlantic (e.g., Bose 1963; Christensen 1991), there are hardly any studies on the effect of comparative musicology on musicological traditions outside the Western world, including in South Asia. Western musicological thinking influenced Indian music reformers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Clayton 2007; Dutta and Robinson 1995). However, the lasting impact of cultural evolutionism and comparative musicology on Indian music theory remains unexplored. Concepts of *mārga* (“rule-based”) and *deśī* (“regional”) musical modes and rhythms, first outlined in the *Bṛhaddeśī* (c. 6th – 8th century A.D.), have been known in India for centuries. Nonetheless, theories on the presumed evolutionary development of South Asian performing arts emerged only in the second half of the 20th century. Examining selected Indian musicological works (e.g., Gosvami 1957; Prajnanananda 1960, 1979; Deodhar 1966; Gautam 1993 [1989]; Barthakur 2003), this study investigates how Indian music scholars have referenced works of early comparative musicology and continue to apply cultural-evolutionist theories to underpin their argumentations, often devaluing South Asian Indigenous performing arts as “primitive”. In doing so, it highlights the enduring influence of colonial musicological epistemologies on musicological traditions in the Global South.

Christian Poske is an ethnomusicologist investigating the performing arts of East and Northeast India, as well as Bangladesh. His research interests include Indian classical music, Indigenous performing arts, ecomusicology, applied ethnomusicology, and historical ethnomusicology. After acquiring his BA and MA in Instrumental Music (Sitar) at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata, he completed his PhD in Music at SOAS University of London and the British Library, where he worked as an Audio Cataloguer and Bengali Cataloguer. Currently, he pursues a three-year project at the Music and Minorities Research Center (Vienna), exploring the relations between music, conflict, and trauma in the context of Naga history and culture. Since 2024, he has been a Co-Chair of the SEM Special Interest Group for Music and Violence. In 2025, he taught a course on South Asian religious music traditions at the University of Vienna and gave guest lectures at the University of Ljubljana and UCLA.

Borderland Instruments, Racialized Taxonomies:
S. M. Tagore, Mahillon, and the Colonial Genealogies of Organology (1885–1930)

My paper reframes Sourindro Mohun Tagore’s transimperial instrument collections as “borderland instruments”, i.e., objects engineered to travel, mediate, and translate across colonial contact zones, eventually shaping how music was classified and racialised between 1885 and 1950. Reading Tagore’s Bengali–Sanskrit modernist writings alongside museum catalogues and acquisition files (Berlin/Brussels/London/Melbourne), I trace plausible pathways by which his classificatory models and pedagogic pamphlets were read and appropriated in European institutions. I argue that Victor Mahillon’s system at Brussels and, indirectly, the Hornbostel–Sachs typology, must be understood within these circuits of exchange, where South Asian expertise coexisted with, and was often subsumed by, colonial curatorial practices.

Aligned with the workshop’s direction to interrogate imperialism, colonial epistemologies, and the racialization of musical “others,” my paper demonstrates how instrument (and instrument collection) typologies depended on non-European knowledge and naturalised hierarchies of race, time, and craft. I further examine Tagore’s elite positionality in the colonial public domain in British-administered India, and the classed and gendered labour (craftspeople, copyists, performers) that underwrote the collections later foundational to comparative musicology.

I also develop a methodology that combines archival reconstruction with Georgina Born’s “relational musicology” to model organology as a mediated formation spanning bodies, materials, institutions, and theory. Given this framing, I adopt a borderland analytic (after Bohlman) to track silence, mediation, and contact in the social life of these objects in the past and their shifting meanings today. A brief coda reads contemporary displays (e.g., Humboldt Forum) where Tagore’s instruments appear adjacent to Hornbostel–Sachs groupings, making visible the colonial genealogies of classification while recognising and recentring South Asian agency in the field.

Pramantha Tagore is a Neubauer Family Foundation Distinguished Doctoral Fellow in Ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago, where he also serves as Co-director of the university's South Asian Music Ensemble. His research explores musical practices in modern South Asia, with particular attention to cultures of music production, pedagogy, and circulation in nineteenth-century Bengal. Through this work, he seeks to highlight how South Asian intellectual and material contributions influenced global musicological frameworks, while also foregrounding the colonial conditions which structured such exchanges.

Research infrastructures and comparative music research in the Americas, 1939–1952

The period between 1930 and 1952 was critical for comparative music research in the Americas, featuring a significant increase of musical scholarship, field recording collections, and transnational collaborations. The resources and institutional support for these developments largely originated from the United States' scientific cooperation initiatives in Latin America, designed not only to counter Nazi influence during World War II but also to expand the U.S. geopolitical sphere of influence (Hart, 2013; Salvatore, 2016). Yet, despite the importance of governmental resources, institutional arrangements, and networks in enabling research endeavors in the U.S. and Latin America during that period, their impact in the resulting research inquiries, methods and theories remains underexplored. This gap becomes even more significant when considering that ethnomusicology as a discipline emerged at the end of that era, prompting questions about the infrastructural impact of U.S. “soft colonialism” (Salvatore 2016) on the development of the field.

This paper is an initial approach to the study of the importance of research infrastructures to the development of comparative music research in the Americas. Defined as the institutionalized assemblages that enable research and knowledge production (Larkin 2013; Oba 2020), research infrastructures both reflect the existing power structures and delimit what researchers can do—and hence the knowledge they can produce. Focused on cases in the U.S. and Peru, the paper explores how the U.S. geopolitical agenda impacted musical knowledge production not only ideologically and epistemologically but also through the resources, institutional support, and networks fueling comparative music research. I argue that research infrastructures set the conditions of possibility for knowledge production in comparative music research of the mid-1950s. This study is an effort to understand the material foundations of comparative music research and early ethnomusicology in the Americas during the first half of the 20th century.

Rodrigo Chocano is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the Musicology Institute of the University of Vienna. He obtained a PhD in Ethnomusicology from Indiana University. His research studies the intersection between music, racialization, and heritage, with a focus on Afro-Latin-American communities. He authored two books and several articles in English and Spanish exploring the connections between music, cultural heritage, and race and ethnicity in Latin America.

Thursday, October 30th

Panel 2

Fritz Bose and the Concept of Race in Comparative Musicology

This paper examines the treatment of race and racial theories in comparative musicology during the Nazi era, with a focus on the work of German ethnomusicologist Fritz Bose. I argue that Ethnomusicology in German-speaking countries has largely overlooked its past, particularly its contributions to the theorization of race in culture. Existing literature often neglects or minimizes the significance of the period between 1933 and 1945 (cf. Reinhard 1976; Christensen 1991; Koch 2020). Few, more recent studies have begun to address ethnomusicology's past, focusing on researchers' affiliations, institutional involvement, and ideological stances (Bleibinger 2001; Mildner 2003; Nußbaumer 2001).

Rather than providing a comprehensive analysis of Bose's personal involvement with the Nazi regime or offering new archival evidence, this paper centers on Bose's academic writings, his methods, and the ideas he espoused. Through an examination of his publications before, during, and after the Nazi period, I demonstrate how continuities and developments in comparative musicological research, theory, and concepts challenge the notion of a disciplinary hiatus. I explore the role of race as a concept in Bose's writings and its intersection with other social categorizations and theories such as Evolutionism and Kulturkreislehre. Lastly, I address the persistence of race as a determining factor in human musicking well into the post-war era.

By shedding light on Bose's scholarly contributions and the broader context of comparative musicology during the Nazi era, this paper aims to contribute to the discipline's historiography of ideas and initiate a broader discussion about the implications for contemporary scholarship.

Martin Ringsmut is an Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of Vienna. His research focuses on the music of Cabo Verde, Lusophone Africa, and the Sinti and Roma in Europe. He holds an M.A. in Musicology, Philosophy, and German Studies, and a Ph.D. in Musicology from the University of Cologne. Since 2013, he has taught ethnomusicology at several German universities. His recent monograph, *Cabo Verdean Rhythms* (Routledge, 2025), examines music, postcolonialism, and social spatiality in Cabo Verde. His current research focuses on questions of cultural memory among Sinti and Roma communities in Europe.

Voice, Body, and Soul: Marius Schneider and the Racial Imagination in the Origins of Polyphony

For adherents of comparative musicology, the concept of race was regarded as one of the biological factors determining musical abilities. Central figures of the emerging discipline—such as Hornbostel and Abraham (1904), Hornbostel (1906, 1921), or Lach (1924)—devoted considerable effort to establishing a supposed correlation between race and musical aptitude. Likewise, the second generation of scholars who gained academic recognition during the National Socialist period, including Marius Schneider and Fritz Bose, were inclined toward *Rassenforschung*, following the path opened by Friedrich Blume for German-speaking musicology (1938, 1944).

This paper focuses on the writings of the German comparative musicologist Marius Schneider to examine his conception of race within his studies on the origins of polyphony. I argue that in his works (1946a, 1946b, 1951, 1969), race emerges as a concept intertwined with both the body—and thus the voice it produces—and the soul. Through a critical reading of these texts, I explore how Schneider's thought exemplifies a broader racial imagination that shaped the epistemological foundations of comparative musicology.

Julio Mendiivil is a Peruvian ethnomusicologist, charango player, and writer based in Austria. He studied ethnomusicology at the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Institute of Musicology at the University of Cologne (1994–2000), Germany. He has been a researcher and adjunct professor in ethnomusicology at the University of Cologne and the University of Music and Theatre in Hannover, as well as a visiting professor at various universities in both Europe and Latin America. He held the Chair of Ethnomusicology at the University of Cologne (2008–2012) and the Center for World Music at the University of Hildesheim (2013–2015). He was President of IASPM-AL (International Association for the Study of Popular Music – Latin American Branch) from 2012 to 2016, and President of the IASPM worldwide in 2017. From 2015 to 2017, he held the Chair of Ethnomusicology at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. Since 2017, he has been a full professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Vienna.

Unsound: A Cultural History of Music and Eugenics

This paper will present some introductory material and major case-studies from my manuscript-in-progress, *Unsound: A Cultural History of Music and Eugenics*. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, music-scientific and eugenic research formed an unlikely and pernicious alliance. Examining a range of historical and contemporary texts, from the first writings of movement founder Francis Galton to those of modern-day inheritors like *The Bell Curve* author Charles Murray, I identify a persistent trope in eugenic writing concerning musical ability: that it is an especially obvious example of a hereditary gift, and from it there follows proof of a general theory of hereditary capacity.

The book traces this trope from eugenics's origins in Victorian Britain, through the development of psychometric tests for hereditary musical aptitude in the US in the 1910s and '20s, and these tests' subsequent racialized deployment, showing how Victorian ideas about innate musical genius were continually refashioned to persuade a sceptical public of the truth of eugenic claims. In so doing I offer an alternate history of music psychology, drawing on original archival research to situate key figures such as James McKeen Cattell and Carl E. Seashore in the context of eugenic intellectual and funding networks, and to show how ideas of efficiency and modernity in music education guided the proliferation of a particular scientific-racial ideology, the impact of which continues to be felt in musical research.

Alexander W. Cowan is an Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Chicago. Prior to joining the Department of Music, he was a Research Fellow in the Arts at Jesus College, Cambridge, and he received his PhD from Harvard University in 2023. Research on this project has been supported by the American Musicological Society, the Society for American Music, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies.

Panel 3

Who, What, and Where Was Comparative Musicology?

A Reader and a Reading of the Zeitschrift für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft

Discussions of comparative musicology, vergleichende Musikwissenschaft, most often identify it by what it was not rather than by what it was. Historiographically situated, comparative musicology preceded ethnomusicology, which succeeded because it ridded comparative musicology of its false assumptions and weaknesses. There are other claims that the hallmark of comparative musicology never fell out of favor, but rather just morphed into different methods, for example, multi-sited ethnography. The criticisms of comparative musicology sometimes arose from claims of skewed and absent data. Comparative ethnomusicology thus was neither systematic nor scientific, leading some of its defenders, such as Dieter Christensen (1991), to posit that, as a specific discipline, it never existed.

Except that it did, at least in the pages of the Zeitschrift für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft (Journal of Comparative Musicology), which was published in Berlin in three issues from 1933 to 1935. The editor of the journal, Robert Lachmann, and the collaborative editors used the journal to make the case that the field of comparative musicology had come of age. Close examination of the journal's contents only confirms the assertions of Lachmann and his collaborators. The range of subjects and methods was enormous, truly global, and many of the most important theories of modern ethnomusicology appeared in what would be groundbreaking essays and analyses.

Its foundational role notwithstanding, it ceased publication in 1935, quite obviously because most of the scholars associated with it were Jewish. In my presentation of a reader of selected essays and the accompanying discussion, I wish to reflect on a remarkable moment in which a paradigm shift was poised to take place, but did not. I approach that moment by reading and rereading articles from the journal in which comparative musicology sought to realize its own disciplinary identity, a moment, however, that was never fully realized.

Phil Bohlman is the Ludwig Rosenberger Distinguished Service Professor in Jewish Music in the Department of Music at the University of Chicago. His research in the intellectual history of music studies has appeared in many different places, especially in collaboratively co-edited volumes such as *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History* (1991, with Bruno Nettl), *Disciplining Music* (1992, with Katherine Bergeron), and *Music and the Racial Imagination* (2001, with Ronald Radano). He held visiting professorships at the University of Vienna in 1995–96 and 1991.

Keynote

Incredible Materialities: The Embodied Origins of Black Sound-Objects

Ronald Radano
University of Wisconsin-Madison

This paper offers a new take on the concept of the sound-object by positioning it within the contexts of Africa's colonization and the US era of Jim Crow. It features two seminal cylinder recordings produced in worlds apart (German-occupied East Africa and a recording studio in Newark, NJ) that become aligned in a peculiar valuation: both recordings arise as things produced by a people who historically were also perceived as things: reified subjects of labor (human sound-objects) deemed inferior because of their classification as "Negro." In both instances, what is devalued as inferior produces its opposite: a sound whose material attachment to the Black body realizes incredible form.

Ronald Radano is Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he taught music studies and cultural theory in the Department of African Cultural Studies and the graduate program in ethnomusicology. He lives in Washington, DC.

Book Release Presentation and Discussion

Alive in the Sound: Black Music as Counterhistory

Dr. Ronald Radano

“In *Alive in the Sound*, Ronald Radano proposes a new understanding of US Black music by focusing on the key matter of value, manifested musically in its seemingly embodied qualities—spirit, soul, and groove. While acknowledging these qualities are always embedded in Black music, Radano shows they developed not simply from performance but from musicians’ status as laborers inhabiting an enduring racial-economic contradiction: Black music originated publicly as an exchangeable property owned by people whose subhuman status granted them—as “natural” musicians—indelible properties of sound. As a contradiction of the rules of ownership, wherein enslaved property was forbidden the right to own, modern Black music emerges after emancipation as a primary possession, moving dialectically into commercial markets and counterhistorically back into Black worlds. Slavery’s seminal contests of ownership underlie modern musical sensations of aliveness, which become the chief measure of value in popular music. By reconceiving US Black music history as a history of value, Radano rethinks the music’s place in US and global culture.”

Discussants

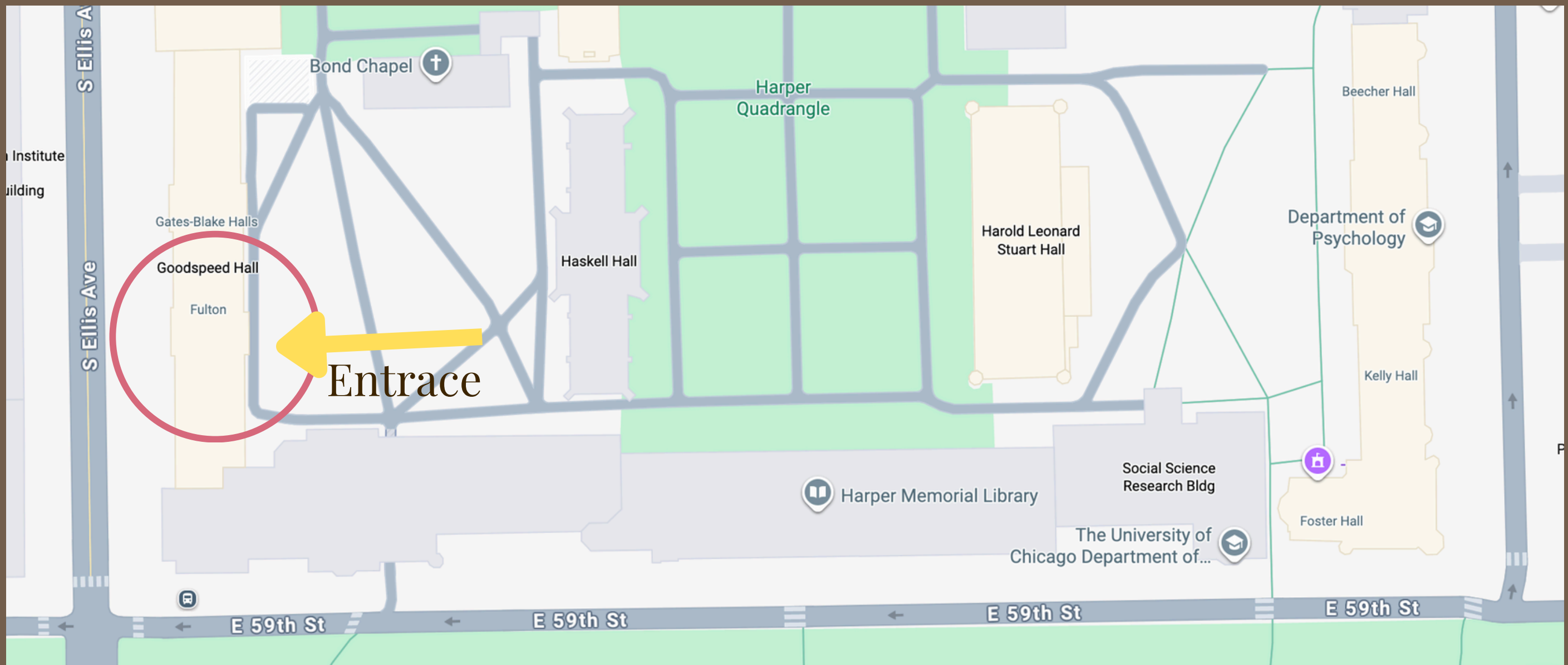
Jessica Swanston Baker is an ethnomusicologist who specializes in contemporary popular music of and in the Circum-Caribbean. Her research and critical interests include tempo and aesthetics, coloniality, decolonization, and race/gender and respectability. As a Caribbeanist, her work focuses on issues within Caribbean theory pertaining to small islands-nations such as representation and invisibility, vulnerability, and sovereignty. Her book, *Island Time: Speed and the Archipelago from St. Kitts and Nevis*, examines the relationship between tempo perception and gendered and raced legacies of colonization. Through historical and ethnographic analysis of polysemantic colloquialisms and music reception, she argues that colonial understandings of black femininity, and Enlightenment notions of musicianship frame local perceptions of wylers, a style of Kittitian-Nevisian popular music, as “too fast.” Jessica holds a PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Pennsylvania and a BM in Vocal Performance from Bucknell University. Prior to her faculty appointment at Chicago, Jessica was the 2015–16 postdoctoral fellow in Critical Caribbean Studies at Rutgers University. Currently, she is Associate Professor in the Department of Music at the University of Chicago.

Travis A. Jackson is an Associate Professor of Music and Humanities at the University of Chicago. Jackson is an ethnomusicologist whose work centers on jazz, rock, and recording technology. His theoretical interests include urban geography, race/culture and identity, ethnographic method, performance and aesthetics. He is author of *Blowin' the Blues Away: Performance and Meaning on the New York Jazz Scene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) as well as articles on topics ranging from the intersection of jazz and poetic performance to the interpretation of meaning in rock.

Practical Information

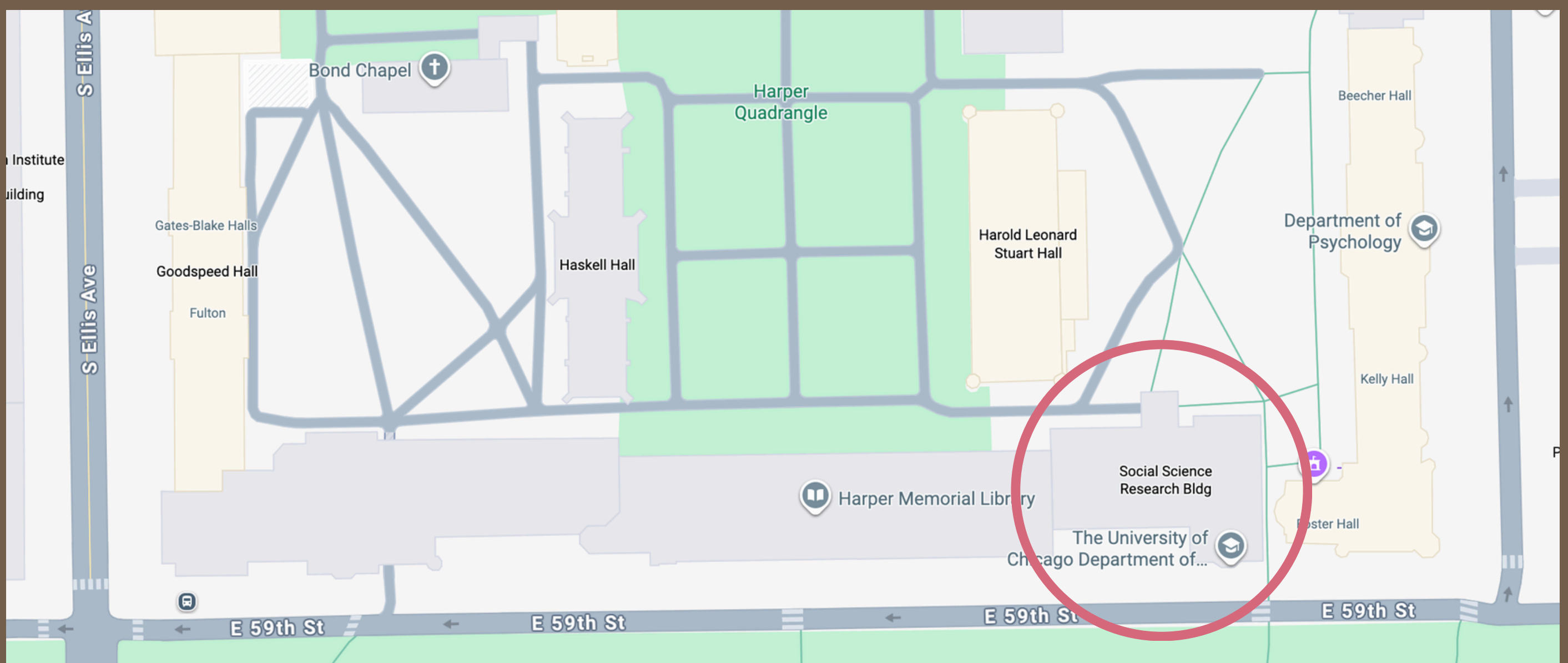
Goodspeed Hall
5645 S. Ellis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60637

****All activities on 4th floor****



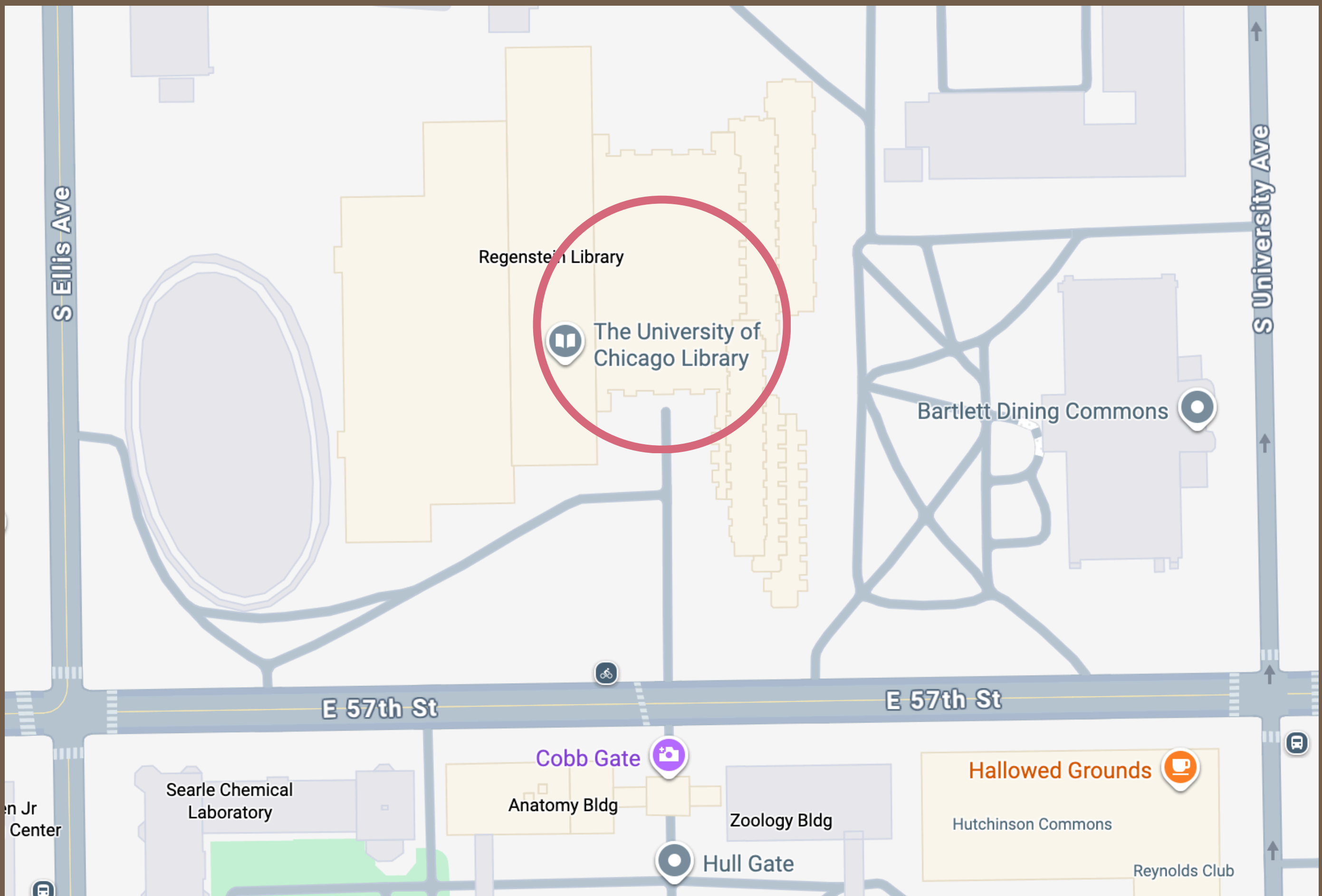
Social Science Research Building
1126 E. 59th St.
Chicago, IL 60637

****Tea Room is on the 2nd floor****



Regenstein Library
1100 E. 57th St.
Chicago, IL 60637

****Franke Institute is on the ground floor. Take a right immediately after the main entrance doors****



All meals and refreshments on the schedule will be provided. If not included in the program, please plan alternatives on your own.