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(Re)notating cultural identities through musique-mixte: A reflection of heterotopian constructs in performance

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Abstract

This paper presents a discussion of performative heterotopia within *musique-mixte*. Heterotopia is proposed as a performance space of connectivity; of interwoven perspectives of experience and practice; and of multiple modes of interaction. Michel Foucault's idea of heterotopia as an ensemble of places with distinct features within cultures and societies that may be juxtaposed, connected to temporalities, inclusions and exclusions, as well as illusions and realities of space, is applied to the music performance space construct and intercultural experience. Correspondences integral to the performance space and the concept of making, of dialogue and telling as experiences become entwined, are discussed. Intercultural studies are outlined as pathways to developing a model for heterotopian reflective analysis of processes and negotiations arising in the performance space, and questions of mixed reality and illusion are briefly considered. Exemplars of compositions utilizing Western flute, fixed sound and live electronics provide a context for an investigation of intercultural parameters and the potential for creative exchange. Synthesis and divergences of timbre are explored through aesthetic and sonic characteristics of serunai, pensol flute, concert flute, and DSP – juxtaposing cultures and space. Consideration of dominance and responses of volume include saturation/minimization of electronic sound, micro-sounds and multiplication, and aspects of distance and proximity, relating to Foucault's opening and closing of a space. Shifts of cultural identity and new understandings emerging within the temporal in situ performance (Foucault's "slice of time") are described from the inside, the living experience of negotiating distinct musical and cultural behaviours.

Performance space as heterotopia: Introduction

The word heterotopia, taken from the Greek: heteros, meaning other; and topos, meaning place[1] has become in this research an evocative and invigorating concept for considering aspects of performance space activity, particularly within interactive electroacoustic settings. Michel Foucault's original idea of heterotopia consisted of a place of activity with or without physical borders or boundaries. In his talk, *Of Other Spaces, heterotopias*, Foucault said:

> As for the heterotopias as such, how can they be described? What meaning do they have? We might imagine a sort of systematic description [...] that would, in a given society, take as its object the study, analysis, description, and 'reading' […] of these different spaces, of these

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[1] http://www.collinsdictionary.com (last accessed 12/17).
[2] Michel Foucault, "Des Espaces Autres", lecture at the Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967, printed in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5, 1984, pp. 46-49; "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias / Des

other places. As a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, this description could be called heterotopology.[2]

Heterotopian spaces in an art context have been described as "a space of intangible otherness, a particular type of space that reflects the slippage between the familiar and the unfamiliar between reality and utopia" (Röda Sten Konsthall exhibition material[3]). A definition of heterotopia proposed by this author (2015 and 2016) as a "place of connectivity, of the interweaving of different experiential perspectives of practice, of modes of interaction, and as a place of others as seen through the self"[4] reflects comparable perspectives that emerge from the centre of music performance. This space affords a capacity for transformation and generation of "understandings of subtle differences in sound, of cultural narratives, of the inner space experienced through gesture and the body and the outer space of external relationships"[5].

Foucault's heterotopias have several main principles: they are a feature of all cultures and societies; they are capable of juxtaposing several spaces within one; they are connected to a slice of time; they assume a system of opening and closing; and, "they have a function in relation to all the space that remains - either to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, or, to create a space that is other, another real space"[6]. The notion of an ensemble of juxtaposing spaces, located in a specific time, able to open and close, both functional and illusory, can be applied to the performance space where the performance may articulate diverse relationships and interactions through the integration and juxtaposition of acoustic and electronic elements, as well as connections of place, time, cultures, boundaries and imagination. The live *musique-mixte* performance is temporal – it occurs within a 'slice of time'; it can juxtapose multiple sounds, spatial designs, cultural artefacts, and modes of interaction; it can create a system of opening and closing to performers, to audience, and to the materials of the music; it can represent illusions and realities of environment and connectivity; and interweave different experiential perspectives of practice and identity.

Nicholas Bourriaud recounts in his introduction to Foucault's Manet and the Object of Painting that Foucault developed the concept of 'heterotopia' as a way of representing "a constant among all human groups, [which] can be described as 'anti-location'". It consists of an ensemble of "places outside of all places, even though they are at the same time localizable"[7]. A perspective that includes multiple elements contributing to and activated within a performance reveals a collection of spaces that can be both located or physically situated, and transitory or metaphorical. These include:

- the actual space – the stage, sonic presence and spatialization, and performer's presence;

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[2] Michel Foucault, "Des Espaces Autres", lecture at the Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 mars 1967, printed in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, 5, 1984, pp. 46-49; "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias / Des espaces autres, Hétérotopies", in *Michel Foucault Info*, https://foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault-heterotopia-en-html (last accessed 12/17).

[3] http://www.rodasten.com/rs_events/view/Ylva_ogland_eng/?lang=en (last accessed 12/17).

[4] Jean Penny, "The mediated space: Voices of interculturalism in music for flute", in *The Routledge International Handbook of Intercultural Research*, Pamela Burnard et al. (eds), Routledge, Abingdon (Oxfordshire, UK) and New York, 2016, p. 159.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 166.

[6] Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*

[7] Nicolas Bourriaud, "Introduction", in *Manet and the Object of Painting*, Michel Foucault, translated from French by Matthew Barr, London, Tate Publishing, 2009, p. 17.

- the internal space – the performer's space, related to events occurring in situ, as well as to processes and intentions;
- the enclosed space – belonging to participants, and the collaborations between active partners – the interactivity and negotiations;
- the open space – including the audience, responders, informers and contributors;
- the mediated space – the flexible, multi-layered, and transformed space;
- and a possible virtual space – perhaps created by technology, which may generate new musical forms, reflections, perceptions, and experience.

Our applications of heterotopian ideas to flute and electronics works and performance has included explorations of the synthesis and divergences of timbre through aesthetic and sonic characteristics of instruments such as serunai, pensol flute, concert flute, vocalisation and DSP – in reality, a juxtaposition of cultures and space. Considerations of dominance and volume have included saturation and minimization of electronic sound, micro-sounds and multiplication, and aspects of distance and proximity – relating to Foucault's opening and closing of the space. Opening and closing of the space also occurred from listeners' perspectives in relation to recognition of sounds and gestures, as well as differences in expectation and particular belief structures. Shifts of cultural identity and new understandings emerging within the temporal performance (Foucault's 'slice of time') when described from the inside (i.e. from the performer's perspective) reflect the experience of negotiating distinct musical and cultural behaviours. In this location, these elements evolve as significant correspondences in the space.

Figure 1: Applying principles of heterotopia to the performance space

Performance space as Heterotopia: Correspondences

Iterations of correspondence may include performer to performer sonic interplay, composer to performer trajectories, as well as correspondence with a score. Yolande Harris refers to the score as the "relationship between time and space, the visual and the sonic, one person and another"[8]. She argues that sound "binds people together in space in a contextual manner". This notion of the score as a set of relationships matches our collective experience with *musique-mixte* works where the multiple layers and functions of sounds can be altered and

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[8] Yolande Harris, "Score as relationship: From scores to score spaces to scorescapes", in S*ound & score: Essays on sound, score and notation*, Paulo de Assis et al. (eds), Leuven (Belgium), Leuven University Press, 2014, 196.

challenged, understandings of location and ensemble altered, and interaction with script, text, image and conventional music notation disrupted and reconfigured. These relationships include connections between performer and notation, between composer and performer, between memories, communications, live sound, recorded sound, gesture, or cultural practices.

British anthropologist, Tim Ingold talks about the musical instrument 'corresponding with sound', the instrument as a transducer that 'converts ductus into material flux'[9]. He contends that musical instruments correspond with the sound in the way that materials correspond with the maker; that correspondence is a dialogue, carried forward through gestures and traces – a 'telling' that can occur through making. This analogy transfers into a music performance narrative, as the music becomes a way of thinking and telling. The score might create the impulse or setting for this thinking and telling. Ingold further says, "A […] thing […] is a 'going on', or better a place where several goings on become entwined. To observe a thing is not to be locked out but to be invited in to the gathering"[10]. The performance space creates this open site, a location of participation at multiple levels of engagement.

A recent study of intercultural music performance I led in Malaysia was entitled *The Imaginary Space: Developing Models for an Emergent Malaysian/Western Electroacoustic Music* and was funded by the Malaysian Government Fundamental Research Grant Scheme 2012-14. This project aimed to make artistic and cultural connections through the medium of new works for flute and electronics, to experience and absorb contemporary and traditional music practices of Malaysia, and to examine aspects of interculturality in this context. New compositions and performances that created various levels of interchange and symbiosis between West and East (or, more specifically, Australian and Malaysian) were created and examined as ways of connecting and learning. Using the framework of works for flute and electronics situated the explorations in the centre of performance – a place in my personal experience as a flautist that has engendered new modalities of reflection as perspectives of cultures interweave, dissolve, emerge, and develop.

The music developed in this project all involved compositions by Malaysians using fixed sound that included traditional Malaysian sounds (both environmental and instrumental) combined with live Western flute and DSP. Heterotopia emerged in this context as a performance space of juxtaposition, interconnection, evaluation and self-reflection. The idea of an intercultural heterotopia came out of this research.

Performance space as Heterotopia: Interculturality

In this project, we described intercultural heterotopia as a set of relational interactions in a mediated space, where the performer's understandings, the negotiations and relationships created both within and outside the performance, converge as a 'way of living' that becomes a shared experience of cultural diversity[11] (see Penny and Blackburn, 2015). Cultural flux,

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[9] Timothy Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Abingdon (Oxfordshire, UK) & New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 128.

[10] Timothy Ingold, *Bringing things to life: Creative entanglements in a world of materials*, Aberdeen, Universty of Aberdeen, Department of Anthropology, working paper, 2008, p. 4.

[11] Jean Penny and Andrew Blackburn, *The Imaginary Space: Developing Models for a Malaysian/Western Electroacoustic Music,* Malaysian Government Fundamental Research Grant Scheme 2012, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris 2012-2014, 2015, http://www.jeanpenny.com/uploads/5/5/4/3/55434199/the_imaginary_space_frgs_2014_(july_2015).pdf (last accessed 12/17).

rather than cultural appropriation of sonic or other artefacts, became an integral part of the creative and performance processes as ideas and knowledge of others was revealed, absorbed and expressed through the realisation of the music. What actually happened in negotiations, composition development and performances applies to our definition of "heterotopia": where cultural signs are drawn together through a mediation of suggestiveness and evocation; where these signs continue to exist on their own without imposing themselves or being reduced, but interacting in ways that create new relationships and meanings; where the ebb and flow of materials (in performances) reveal insights and new ways.

An example of these processes occurred in the development of a work, *The Curse of the Screaming Serunai* of Affendi Ramli. This work features a fixed soundscape from the Malaysian environment and traditional instruments – including the serunai, a quadruple reed wind instrument that originated in Persia and the bonang, a small horizontal knobbed gong originating in Javanese gamelan, with Western flute and live electronics. The performance environment of this work is a dynamic context of evolving and fluctuating energy, shifting perceptions of identity and disrupted expectations of cultural 'norms', in both composition structure and sonority. As the flautist engages in a dialogical interplay with the fixed sounds, the live electronics create a spatiality and location, enlarging and reducing the saturation of sound and dominance of one sound or representation of culture over another. In this way, each culture becomes sharply defined as the encounter takes place.


Figure 2: Composer and flautist in rehearsal
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The sound units of the fixed sound have particularly strong associations of meaning for Malaysian listeners: and this was demonstrated in audience responses to the use of the recognizable and locally important cultural sounds at every performance we gave in Malaysia. Performing the work again recently in Melbourne, Australia, the audience reacted much more to a perceived exoticism, and the challenge presented by foreign sounds and musical structures. Shifting perceptions and disrupted expectations emerged in all performances of this piece, where a melding of styles and timbres, and a stepping in and out of familiar sound worlds and cultural habitats occurs. Strange awkwardness in performance can alternate with a desire for immersion in other sound worlds, propelled by reflections on the aesthetic and expression of the angry and desolate sounds of the serunai, and negotiations between meld and differentiation with that tone and aesthetic. Physical sensations and gestures enlarged by the electronics, add a changing sense of location and balance within the space, and ultimately

become something of a commentary on, and mediator for, cross cultural connections through the relationships that converge as a shared experience of this diversity.

A heterotopian model developed from the zones of interaction shown in this and other works (see Figure 3), provides a useful model for reflective analysis of the processes and elements of this context. Based on electronic and notated scores, the instrumental, fixed sound and live electronic components came together as negotiations and relationships in performance, drawing out a network of cultural hierarchies (sonic and personal), values and communication. New perceptions of sonorities, location, characters and cultures in turn generated deep self-reflection in the performer – challenging the ownership and identity of sound, and activating new interchanges through a fusion of practices and cultures.
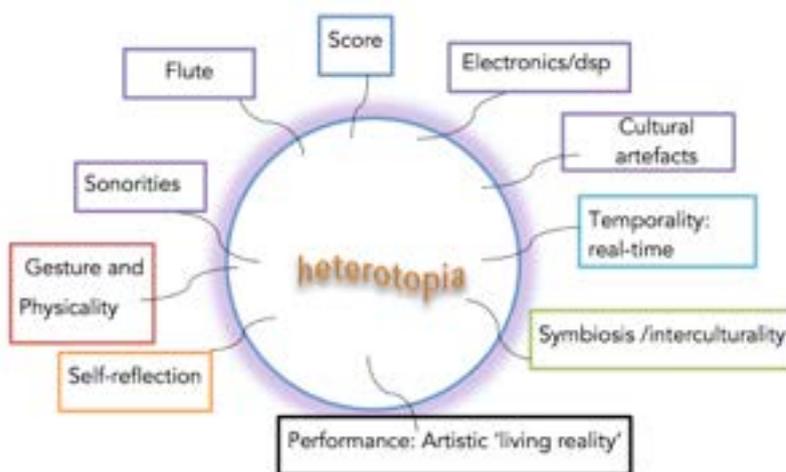
Figure 3: Model of heterotopia elements applied to reflective analysis in intercultural scores

The examples used here emerged from intercultural research based around music performance – ultimately viewing the performance as an artistic living reality. The space for this living reality might be, however, something of a virtual space – does it truly exist as a place of reciprocated understanding and exchange, or is it aspirational, or imaginative, or a metaphorical mirror?

Mirrors, metaphors & mixed reality

In Foucault's words, the mirror is a placeless place that sits somewhere between utopias and heterotopias – "In the mirror (he states) I see myself there where I am not…" and further,

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[12]

The mirror implies an absence, a shift into a virtual space, flowing from an absolute reality. We can apply this analogy to the expanded sound-world that creates illusions of space, presence and location.

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[12] Michel Foucault, *op. cit.*

A performative heterotopia is an absolute reality: it is located in a space; it activates modes of connectivity; and may provoke explorations of place; of difference and similarity. A performative heterotopia situated in a *musique-mixte* context may further engage a network of mixed realities that challenge traditional categories, bringing identity, location, knowledge and experience into a state of flux; it may prompt engagement with the experience of negotiating differing musical and cultural behaviours; and it may represent a virtual space of others as seen through the self. Sonic metaphors might be similarly perceived: a spatialized or timbrally altered sound that may seem ambiguous; a fusion or "an electronic synthesis that creates metaphors for other worldly states"[13]. An intercultural performative heterotopia, where divergent histories, sounds and behaviours meet, inspires idealism in participation and negotiations, in 'knowing' your own culture and 'knowing' another culture, and working between these with perseverance and flexibility. In this setting, ambiguities abound and impromptu creative practices thrive.

Our connectivity and modes of interaction, whether real or illusory, create transformation through self-examination and reflection of processes, and a mixing of reality in ways that forge new understandings through the interweaving of our different perspectives, experience and practice. Johnson states that

> "[…] like mirrors, heterotopias evoke a sense of being there and not there, here and not here. Heterotopias have this quality in different ways, sites of intense time (fleeting […], permanent […], fixed […], [or] indeterminate […]) or intense space ([such as in a] theatre […], garden […], [or travel] […]), or intense time-space (utopian colony, primitive vacation village, museum, individual graves or cells) which alter or disrupt us as we enter."[14]

Applied to the performance space, questions of location and 'anti-location' relating to spatialisation of sound, reappraisal of sonorities, or temporal shifts between cultures, foster a dynamic ebb and flow of illusion and reality of both place and relationship.

Closing Thoughts

The aim of this research is to uncover understandings of processes, and develop insights into performance practice by focusing on specific aspects of interaction and place. Taking the view of the insider – the performer – has facilitated the articulation of influences within active, transformative spaces, and has emphasized the value of description in artistic research. Descriptive methods have further provided insight into the intersections and symbiosis occurring through differing approaches to sonorities, techniques, gestures of breath and approaches that can shift the performer from one culture to another and one performance mode to another.

The *musique-mixte* performance space is a malleable and adjustable force, subject to imagination and electricity, and new relationships with participants and audiences result as diffusion, sound and performer location, components of sounds, the physicality of performance, the stillness or energy, the visible and invisible elements create different experience. The model of heterotopia has assisted by providing a method for investigation of this evolving, enactive performance practice, and by stimulating new ways of thinking.

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[13] See Katharine Norman, *Sounding Art: Eight Literary Excursions Through Electronic Music* (book and CD), Aldershot (Hampshire, UK), Ashgate, 2004.

[14] Peter Johnson, "Anti-Location", in *Heterotopian Studies – Michel Foucault's ideas on heterotopia*, 13 March 2013, http://www.heterotopiastudies.com/2013/03/ (last accessed 12/17).

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