‘Where next?
New music, new musicology’

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Asymmetric exchange - shades of the 1920s

Experimental electronica, laptop mix, glitch, noise art, lower case are well over a decade old, arriving with the ubiquitous computing power of the 1990s. The relationship of some of these with the ‘art’ tradition of electroacoustic music is not always an easy one and is at best ambiguous. The crossover and hybridisation which is often claimed is not usually mutual and some of it is unconscious.

A parallel with the jazz-classical exchange from the 1920s is interesting. We can list many composers to have taken aspects of jazz and other popular forms (straightened out) into their technique, and it was musical impressionism which made its way in the opposite direction as jazz moved up market into song and concert styles. Both directions of this exchange caused difficulties with theorists of modernism and its discontents. Both Schoenberg ((1975) - with respect to any vernacular music) and Adorno ((2002) – with respect especially to jazz and other ‘commercial’ music) saw these as incompatible intruders into the modern project.

Polystylism

Appropriation is not a new phenomenon and is at the basis of most musical exchange. But there are many variations. Firstly there is quotation and reference of a variety of musical genres with little attempt at integration into existing practice. Many different styles may be used in an iconic sense carrying with them cultural references which are indicated in some way. These point to a place, time, social group or culture. There is an implied *double coding* (after Charles Jencks (1986)). This was the dominant approach in early (so-called) postmodernism – not only in electroacoustic music.

Juxtaposition and superposition of different musical styles created a kind of ‘cultural tension’ which often replaced other kinds of musical tension. For example, Berio’s *Sinfonia* and Stockhausen’s *Hymnen*, often thought of as part of the canon of high modernism, are only a hair’s breadth away from works of Schnittke and Pärt, seen as pioneers of a postmodern ‘polystylism’.

One aspect of this, in popular and experimental music (made with technology) became known as *plunderphonics* (Cutler 2000). Especially when it stems from the borrowing of non-western musics ethnomusicologists have tended to call this ‘musical tourism’. There may be an equivalent ‘musical slumming’ when art music

composers visit the entertainment music (club) world and appropriate some of what they hear - with the same lack of understanding of its working - into concert works. But this too is not new.

Creative misappropriation

Bartok described Liszt's view of Hungarian folk music as coming either through 'amateur composers' folk melodies' or through urbanised and commercialised 'gypsy music' (Bartok 1976: 68-69). Stravinsky made ragtime and jazz 'his own' by stripping it of its spontaneity through notation[1]. Perhaps this results in the 'warm glow' of contact with the 'high energy' flux of the *Zeitgeist* (nationalism for Liszt, the jazz age for Stravinsky). This is as true today, in addition to a direct relationship with popular culture which seems to promise such composers an 'open sesame' to the world of communication with a wider audience.

But this is not a musical criticism – partly or badly understood quotation of another genre does not necessarily result in bad music.

Eclecticism

But there is a more subtle and understanding crossover and cross-reference: a music not alluding to but *drawing on* the experience of other genres – often born of personal practice. This may appear polystylistic but comes from altogether different premises.

Many of today's younger composers do not 'play at a distance with' the styles and musics they hear, it is their primary practice. The world has always been (for them) a mix of musics – if any practices are dominant this is transitory. Notice I said 'mix' not 'remix' - if you do not know the original in its proper context then a re-mix is … well … a mix!

From Polystylism to Eclecticism

Polystylism (not as a word but as a historically defined practice) may retrospectively be seen as a primary practice into which material from some other source outside this practice has been imported.

This is not the case with the later approach I have called *eclecticism*. Here material *may* carry additional cultural meaning but is not 'played with' in the sense of the polystylistic approach. The composer may be attempting simply to bring together (maybe to integrate, maybe not) the various components, not playing with any of the elements as iconic of something else, just as 'material'. Both these practices may be examined as intertext, of course. We are interested in what exactly goes into the mix. What generates and informs the choices composers and performers make is very

[1] From the *Ragtime* (from *The Soldier's Tale*) (1918) to *Ebony Concerto* (1945). In fact, at first, he got to know much of it through sheet music, probably making its 'style' easier to absorb into his own (White 1979: 67).

much our concern.

There may be an 'intention/reception' problem here (see Landy 2006). For an uninformed listener the sonic differences between polystylism and eclecticism may not be very great. Composers' intentionality may be important to us in unravelling the differences. But nonetheless I am claiming a serious shift in these intertext relationships in moving from polystylism to eclecticism.

Intergenerational struggle – the Oedipus hybrid

To examine the relationship of these two approaches to practice may reveal a deep-rooted historical process. At first the process seems new in the sense that the tools for its production, performance and dissemination are radically renewing themselves currently. But it is also profoundly old in the parallels with other inter-generational struggles of genres and approaches both within and between traditions over the centuries.

I am arguing for the existence of a kind of 'Oedipus hybrid'. Here is an attempt at a degendered description (something Freud might have denied was possible):

> This hybrid is not one which simply combines two inputs in a genetic birth process but one which comes to, maybe, too close a relationship with one parent while violently rejecting (even denying and destroying) the other.

Parental logic

Here is a concrete example. In a now well-known exchange, Stockhausen comments on a piece by Aphex Twin (Richard James):

> "I wish those musicians would not allow themselves any repetitions, and would go faster in developing their ideas or their findings, because I don't appreciate at all this permanent repetitive language. […] I think it would be very helpful if he [Aphex Twin/Richard James] listens to my work *Song of the Youth*[*s*] … Because he would then immediately stop with all these post-African repetitions and he would look for changing tempi and changing rhythms, […]" (Stockhausen et al. 2004: 382 (original (1995))

To which James replies (in a kind of 'faint praise then damn') -

> "Mental! I've heard that song before; I like it. I didn't agree with him. I thought he should listen to a couple of tracks of mine: "Didgeridoo", then he'd stop making abstract, random patterns you can't dance to. Do you reckon he can dance? You could dance to *Song of the Youth*[*s*], but it hasn't got a groove in it, there's no bass line." (ibid: 383)

Thus while acknowledging the necessity of both parents, one dominates (post-Dance repetition).

Performance practices - shifting locations (sites)

These relations are, however, not only grounded in material of the sound as projected, but in its presentation, its performance practice. No 'new musicology' can address material without practice. The practice creates the work in the act of its performance and perception. This in turn helps define the genre (which is in perpetual evolution).

Such a performance has many possible places. A genre often (but not always) has a primary focus, or a primary location for its definition. But this is flexible and often permeates into subsidiary locations that might gain in importance and focus, eventually gaining precedence. As an example, the remixes of the works of Steve Reich for his recent 70th birthday come to mind[2]. These do not simply displace the original as concert music but are located 'elsewhere'.

Total poietics of composition must include performance

To complete the circle (or perhaps it is a spiral) there is a relationship with the act of composition. Here we have a field of great complexity, misunderstanding and yet potential creativity. In examining the relationship of materials which crossover between genres we must account for their performance locations and practices. The intertext approaches we described above change meaning with performance context. Materials do not just relate to each other in abstract but in performance acts. Especially if decisions are made on the fly, context is crucial.

For improvisers and live electronic performers, composition and performance are so strongly integrated that, for some, they are barely separable. Of course, material may be prepared, but may only be finally formed in the moment of performance. Yet again, new versions of very old processes emerge – recycling of materials, reliance on techniques that are known to work (although these are in tension with the renewal that taking risks in the moment also brings).

Where is the artwork?

There remain those who claim a more traditional and transcendental artwork, where the work is fully formed before its presentation to an audience. However this platonic ideal (from the European – especially German – tradition) is subverted by one of Pierre Schaeffer's fundamental tenets: 'Primacy of the ear!' (following Messiaen) – the work is finally created only in the act of listening and comprehending (Schaeffer 1973: 29-30). But Schaeffer also argued 'from the *concrète* to the abstract' (ibid: 16-17). Did he, too, actually believe a perfect work exists independent of any instance of its performance?

Or alternatively, we might argue following ideas of John Blacking (1973) and Christopher Small (1998) that, as the meaning of music is articulated as much

[2] And remixes of Xenakis, Henry, Parmegiani and others in recent years.

through *participant* as *sonic* relationships then an entire western symphonic concert could be perceived as being 'the same music' throughout.

Dynamic choice and rough reinforcement

Historically, creating the material (*sons fixés*), the 'forming' (*montage-mixage*), and the performance practice (*diffusion*), were easily identifiable and designed to reinforce each other to create 'the work'. But real time performance practice collapses this world removing a feedback-judgement loop – or at least displacing it to a simple pre-performance choice of materials – you cannot correct a performance time decision (if you think it was a mistake) although you gain from the experience for future performances.

All ideals are perpetually challenged in practice, often deliberately. Circuit hackers (Collins 2006), glitch (Cascone 2000), infra-instruments (Bowers and Archer 2005)), live coding (Collins et al. 2003), all subvert the traditional separation of material, interface and performance. They can only be made sense of with a poietics of 'the total musical fact' (Nattiez 1990).

Summary and conclusion

The new musicology of electronically created musics must be an empirical and humanistic science, examining what is, within a context of constant change and flux.

Polystylism, in which a central traditional practice 'plays with' other genres and styles, may give way to *eclecticism*, in which multi-styles mix and exchange on a more equal footing simply as material, experienced from practice.

Hybridisation may be asymmetric. It may be more than simply combination-interpenetration and may involve strong forces of attraction or repulsion - what is rejected may be as important as what is accepted. This suggests the possibility of an *Oedipus hybrid* – owing to two[3] sources, but strongly embracing one while strongly rejecting the other.

To examine much of this new music a musicology of *musical practice* must inevitably replace a musicology of *the work*.

An analytical practice – and we hope some sort of consequent understanding – will necessarily embrace aspects of the social practices of performance, venue and material formation in a dynamic exchange. While this may appear to apply more to real-time, improvisatory and open works, it should be seen as applicable to a wide variety of genres.

[3] Or in fact more! The binary parenting parallel should not be exaggerated.

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