Abstract

This article seeks to explore, from a personal perspective, three main themes relating to public performance of composed music in the current cultural climate: the significance of certain ritualistic and visual aspects of public performance in a context dominated by a wide range of mediated forms; aspects of the interplay between the signifiers embedded in 'live' performance, the performance space and those relating to specific musical content; and, finally, the transformation of the role of the composer and composition in the light of emergent technologies, modes of communication and cultural preferences.

Biography: Mike Vaughan studied at Dartington College of Arts with James Fulkerson and Frank Denyer and at Nottingham University with Nigel Osborne and Peter Nelson where he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1989 for work based on the use of general compositional algorithms. In 1988 he was awarded an Arts Council bursary to continue research in compositional strategies for solo instrument and fixed media at Birmingham University, and in 1994 was nominated for a major Arts Foundation award. From 1987 he worked as a freelance composer and lecturer in composition and Music Technology before moving to Keele University in 1991 to help develop and launch the first undergraduate programme in Electronic Music. He currently teaches on both Music and Music Technology courses.

His main research area is in composition, including a variety of electroacoustic works in addition to solo and ensemble instrumental pieces. These have been performed or broadcast in the UK and worldwide and have received recognition in the form of prizes in a number of international competitions, including the Bourges festival of electroacoustic music (1987 and 1991), the Prix Ars Electronica (1992 and 1994) as well as programming in international events. These include the International Computer Music Conference (1990, 1993, 1996, 1997 and 2001) and the Festival Internacional de Music Electroacustica, Havana (1998, 2004). They have been performed by a variety of well-established ensembles, soloists and organisations including Lontano, L'itineraire, Elision, Yoshikazu Iwamoto, Gianpaolo Antongirolami, Susanna Borsch, Mieko Kanno, Jane Chapman, Ensemble Synergy, Christoph Kirschke and Primoz Parovel. These research activities include a number of 'related and on-going composition 'projects', each with its own particular focus

Dead or Alive?: Performance and Dissemination Strategies in the 21st Century

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Introduction

Within the conventions of the relatively unusual musical practice that might loosely be termed 'composed art music' the role and fate of the composer and performer are inextricably linked. Since medieval times, the constitution, variety and sustainability of performance groups, along with the degree of public spectacle and cost, have been linked and influenced by the availability of religious, private and state patronage. At the time of writing, the practice of maintaining orchestras, opera houses and the commissioning of new repertoire from composers (whose relationship with the musical text, its interpreters and audiences predominantly follow a nineteenth-century model), is looking distinctly jaded and anachronistic. When coupled with reductions in state support for instrumental tuition at a formative stage the progressive decline of these institutions can appear to be inevitable where linked exclusively to such traditional creative paradigms, despite the relatively encouraging number of initiatives aimed at raising the profile of the arts in general.

Although it is tempting to point to the interactive nature of recent developments in the digital entertainment industry as a primary cause of any audience reluctance to engage with traditional 'live' performance there is also a broader historical context whereby the mediated performance, in the form of a recording, has shifted from the status of evidence or documentation of an event to one where the creative output is the recording itself. This transformation has had a significant impact on not only modes of composing and the dissemination of work but also on the role and on identity of the performer; notably in the absence of those visual signifiers that are intrinsic to a wide range of interpretative and expressive aspects of music-making. For those listeners or viewers who still regard the concert environment as the primary source of musical experience the recording can still function as an aid to the imagination in linking the sound to the aggregate of prior experience. Alternatively, the formal concert may be regarded as just another construct of the past that can be dispensed with along with many other first-hand collective experiences (including sporting events and off-line shopping) in exchange for the prioritisation of individual and needs characteristic of interactive TV and the Internet.

This article (or possibly composition) seeks to explore three main themes: the significance of certain ritualistic and visual aspects of public performance in a context dominated by a wide

range of mediated forms; aspects of the interplay between the signifiers embedded in 'live' performance, the performance space and those relating to specific musical content; and, finally, the transformation of the role of the composer and composition in the light of emergent technologies, modes of communication and cultural preferences.

1 Historical Perspective

Logically, and given audience demographics for much concert music, there must be a point where the music of the 19th, early 20th and late 18th century slips off the cultural horizon of the 21st. However, cultural preferences are generally embedded in wider social and political agendas. For example, divisions between contemporary 'composed' music and its audience in the second half of the twentieth century could be viewed as primarily a function of the fracturing of the cultural landscape consistent with post-modernism or, alternatively, as a consequence of the political imperatives of centralised artistic patronage framed by Cold War politics[1]. Also, in line with political and social change, there has been an increase in the popularity and support for musical initiatives that claim traditional practice from other cultures as influences[2]. These often seek to engage directly with traditional musicians in a form of musical multiculturalism[3] or attempt to create musical environments in which the tensions between different traditions and the primacy of 'notation' are sought to be resolved. Such practices provide examples of forms of globalised musical practice that either seek to reference or integrate musical material from other cultures or - particularly in the case of recorded music - to engage with the signifiers embedded in characteristic production, recording and sound processing techniques[4]. In such performance contexts it is often the nature of the cultural interplay or 'fusion' that is foregrounded rather than 'the composition'; the accretion of a wide range of small paradigmatic shifts of this kind results in a form of critique of the composer's traditional role that is embedded within the concept of the musical work.

At a higher level, economic structures that favour sponsorship of the 'one-off' thematic event also present particular challenges to conventional modes of developing musical repertoire. Such events tend to foreground criteria considered to be of primary significance with respect to 'audience-building'. However, whilst such initiatives do indeed provide a wide range of interesting musical experiences, they can also result in a reduction of the opportunities for repeat performances of new repertoire; traditionally, such repetition not only leads to more proficient performances of a new work, but also assists its evaluation against a range of aesthetic, technical and cultural criteria.

[1]Such policies favouring 'the avant-garde', not only for its foregrounding of the technological, but also through ways in which its support and partial absorption into 'the mainstream' could be used as a metaphor for political tolerance.

[2]For example, Kevin Volans *White Man Sleeps*, recorded by the Kronos String Quartet in 1987 - in which the central concern is one of reconciling African and European aesthetics - was immensely successful, both in terms of popularity and critical acclaim.

[3]One example of this tendency is the the 'Karnatic Lab', based in Amsterdam. Essentially this is '... a concert series devoted to exploring specific elements taken from Karnatic Music (Classical Music from South India). Those elements are advanced development of rhythm; microtonality and the use of ornamentation.' www.karnaticlab.com

[4]The transformation of specific production technique into a global cliché, with respect to Cher's 1998 hit *I believe* is elaborated in Fischman, R.A. (2008) *Divine diversification or grey goo?* Sonic Ideas - *Ideas Sónicas.* 1(1)

In this rather uneven context the cultural preference for music of a particular period, or one that adopts its technical and aesthetic language, is only assured for as long as it represents a network of cultural meanings that have significance for dominant social groups. In this case, groups who are able to satisfy their cultural needs through securing access to state funding, or as a result of the commercial viability of their preferences. Music that presents a critical view, yet is still 'composed' in a conventional sense, can still appear reactionary with respect to its basic relationship structures however well it succeeds in deploying a subversive musical language[5]

This underlying tension was an inevitable characteristic of those modernist tendencies that prioritised research and technology for which particular support structures were put in place from the 1950s to 1980s[6]. However, more recently, central support has often evolved in accordance with overall cultural and political imperatives rather than unconditional support for established performance paradigms and notions of what constitutes musical research. Consequently, the 'value' of the traditional relationship between composer, performer and audience, and how it meets wider political and social agendas, is something that is increasingly questioned in the context of funding decisions, both at the level of the Research Council and state-sponsored support for individuals and organisations[7] .

One explanation as to why much contemporary time-based art (excluding film) cannot be sustained without significant levels of subsidy centres on the ritualistic nature of 'the performance', particularly the traditional concert. If 'the media' has replaced religion as the background noise of our cultural existence then some categories of time-based art (such as music and that strand of multimedia originating from video art) adhere more closely to the ritualistic nature of their religious pre-cursors than others - at least with respect to their structures of dissemination. Irrespective of content, the demands which a time-based art form places on an audience, with respect to the giving up of control of what might enter our perceptual orbit, places it at a distinct disadvantage with respect to competing forms of cultural consumption which are centred more on the constant expression of personal choice. Similarly, the impact of the transient nature of the ritualised musical performance can appear insignificant with respect to more readily-commodified comparators in the world of Visual Arts, where the art object itself is the unit of currency (as opposed to the abstraction represented by musical notation).

This analysis suggests that whilst live performance remains an essential dissemination mode for new musical ideas, its common contexts remain largely unchanged from the nineteenth-century (and earlier), with associated meanings increasingly remote from the experience and expectations of new audiences. Similarly, the conventions of instrumental ensembles – from solo piano to string quartets to orchestras – are loaded with cultural meanings that can be at odds with those relating to the musical discourse embedded in the score. For this reason, the primary function of many performances of new music – whether contemporary chamber music

[5]For the purpose of this discussion these relationships are primarily those that exist between the composer/producer (of the musical text), the score itself (sometimes viewed as 'imposed' material), the performer/interpreter and the audience (both real and virtual).

[6]For example, the Darmstadt Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue musik, established in 1946 and the Insitutut de Recherche et Coordination de Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), established in Paris in 1977 and, until 1992, directed by Pierre Boulez - IRCAM has been extensively analysed by Georgina Born in (1995) *Rationalising Culture: IRCAM, Boulez and the Institutionalisation of the Musical Avant-Garde.*. In Italy, Centro Tempo Reale, was established by Luciano Berio in 1987 as a centre for musical research, production and education.

[7]Examples of eligibility criteria for support for the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) and the Arts Council of England can be viewed at www.ahrc.ac.uk and www.artscouncil.org.uk respectively.

or free improvisation – can appear to be as much to do with social bonding, peer approval and professional networking as reaching out to new audiences.

From the latter part of the twentieth century there is no shortage of analyses of the audience for composed contemporary music (or rather, the lack of it); for example, Milton Babbitt (1958)[8] and a rather different analysis by Rajmil Fischman (1994)[9]. Often the arguments revolve either around the notion of aesthetic 'lag' between new and established practice or the idea of composition as 'blue skies research' – a scientific model which signifies both a justification for funding and also a possibility of failure. However, the everyday reality of composing and performing 'new' music is that it involves a disproportionately high degree of creative and administrative input in order to realise a performance that often reaches a very small constituency in the context of its overall potential for effective dissemination.

One way of responding to this dilemma has been to regard the recorded/multiple broadcast medium as the primary form of dissemination; in addition to commercially-recorded CD/DVDs and more conventional radio broadcasts this includes live web-casts, pod-casts of performances and interactive web-based works in which the audience/listener/viewer can modify the transmitted output in some way. However, such a shift not only affects the strategic concerns relating to a work's detailed realisation, but also has a significant impact on the relationship between composer, performer and audience.

Even in the case of a conventional recording of a familiar piece of chamber music there are complications. Once the spectacle of performance has been removed (leaving only the sonic trace of the performer's endeavour) our understanding of the 'performance' relies heavily on our contextual first-hand knowledge of such situations to fully appreciate the range of meanings that the performer contributes to the performance. However, for new audiences, without the contextual knowledge resulting from a wide experience of the ritualistic nature of the first-hand encounter, what is the meaning of performance in this context? Can the performer simply lose their identity as a 'violinist' or 'pianist' and become a more generalised surrogate for musical meaning through the energy profile of the music alone, or is a propensity to respond to the essentially human connection between performer and instrument (whether 'real' or 'virtual'[10]) part of our cultural 'hard-wiring', and in some way essential? Also, from the composer's point of view, does this provide more opportunities for creating music that is optimised for repeated and selective listening in the same way that some films might be edited or designed for the wider DVD market? Furthermore, does it signify the end of the need to consider and make judgements on the limits of the physical and mental endurance of performers when composing new work, through the certain knowledge that a 'fictitious' recorded performance can be retrieved in the studio from a range of 'edits'?

From this overall perspective, it is evident that the relationship between composer, performers and modes of performance are likely to evolve at an increased rate, both in line with changes arising within musical communities themselves and also developments in the technologies through which they are disseminated. The following discussion focuses on a number of key issues relevant to this debate whilst assuming that 'live' performance will remain central to the development of new repertoire, if not to its mass dissemination.

[8]Babbitt, M. (1958) Who cares if you listen. *High Fidelity* (Feb. 1958).

[9]Fischman, R.A. (1994) *Music for the Masses.* Journal of New Music Research. 23(3). Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger. pp.245-264.

[10]An example is the use of the 'drum machine' in popular dance music; whether implemented in hardware or software still alludes to the physicality of 'drumming'.

2 Performance Rituals

Although in some musical traditions the performer is viewed more as acting as a conduit through which music is made manifest,[11] the composition of music involves musician(s) realising and interpreting 'a score' that represents a conceptual framework formulated sometime in the past. The performance itself takes place in a specific space and time in the presence of a specific audience, and the performance itself is conditioned by the interaction of the performer with all of these variables. In the case of a recording of such an event, there is a relationship between the role of the loudspeaker or headphones in rendering audible a stored version of the same event and performers making manifest a music which already exists in a conceptual or abstracted form. Similarly, the process by which a musical score can be 'read' and understood by a skilled musician outside of a performance context is also a form of controlled replay – in this case unconstrained by the temporal unfolding of the music. However, in both cases, the 'on-demand' recall of stored music, in whatever form, is no direct substitute for the rituals of live performance

2.1 Performance Signifiers

A conventional instrumental performance is replete with signifiers that establish the ritualistic aura of a 'performance'. These range from the relationship between 'the stage' and 'the audience' (and the parallels with organised religion) to the way in which 'effort', as well as physical and mental agility, is conveyed. There is also the underlying drama of how the taming of the beast is played out (whether or not the beast in question is the instrument or the score). Traces of these contexts and narratives run through high-level musical structures as well as (at a lower level) in subtle variations in the morphology of spectrum and overall timbre of the instruments being played[12]. The way in which religious, competitive/sporting and celebratory elements combine in the performance ritual is often reinforced by venue – the majority of concerts taking place in spaces other than purpose-built concert halls.

In some forms of musical performance the competitive/redemptive metaphors embedded in performance are particularly strong. The nature of the interplay between musicians – whether soloists within larger ensembles, or within ensemble performance itself – can often appear to draw energy from competitive elements in this way. There are anecdotal examples of how specific sporting metaphors might contribute to defining certain behavioural characteristics in jazz. For example, a recent DVD release showing Mile Davis' 1970 Isle of Wight concert[13] has an inter-

[11] Lewis Rowell summarises the 'central core' to the idea of sound in Early Northern Indian philosophy as "... a quality ... which pervades both the outer spaces of the world and the inner spaces of the body. It is one, universal, eternal, causal (but not caused), permeating both personal and transpersonal consciousness, and manifested along the human pathway from inner to outer space. Its discharge in the form of human breath is both an act of worship and an affirmation of universal process."(Rowell p.41).

A composition that engages with this idea explicitly is Joji Yuasa's *Projection for Electric Guitar(s) - Arrogance of the Dead*, which takes as its point of departure the idea of the koto at rest. When a breeze is allowed to agitate the strings it acts as a portal between the physical and the spirit world. In this work the electric guitar is amplified to a high level but the instructions to the performer indicate that all sounds to be produced are very quiet creating an effective tension between the intended and the contingent.

[12] Most often signified by overall amplitude in conjunction with the number of overtones present with a significant amplitude.

[13] Miles Davis (2004) *Miles electric: a different kind of blue* , Eagle Vision EREDV263.

esting interview with Dave Leibman - a saxophonist who played with Davis during a particularly interesting period in the late 1970s. Leibman comments both on Davis' interest in boxing and the way in which it can be viewed as a metaphor for the interactive nature of improvisation[14]:

Leibman: There really is a connection between boxing and his way of playing, the block, feint, jab and everything ... it's the speed, the 'in and out', the reaction time and the feinting, the moves, the combination....... Boxing is a real art – this was something that Miles was really able to see – and it went right along with his thing – the timing and nuance..... We [improvisers] are trained to be fast, fast technically, fast thinking, fast theory?, fast reaction – ability to perceive what is coming, what seems to be coming.

[Carlos] Santana: the last note's where everything's at – it's like 'jab, jab, jab' and then the main punch.

Miles: If you see a good boxer it's a form of art – like Sugar Ray Robinson with the jab and the hook, that combination, he'd know it was coming. He gave 'em a hook and a right hand PAM PAM!

This provides an insight into how an extremely tactile and competitive form of human interaction can function as a metaphor for a specific form of highly theorised musical practice and how, within the relative freedom of improvisation, the constant reconfiguring of moves in conjunction with a lexicon of gestures, creates meaningful musical content at a very fundamental level. In improvised traditions, the theoretical and metaphorical systems that generate musical meaning are dynamic, in the sense that they can be viewed as providing a series of rule-based protocols and networks of possibilities that are deployed in the course of realising a performance[15].

One of the central problems with composition is how to convey the organic and dynamic within something that is essentially 'fixed', whilst allowing the performer the space to function as the metaphor for humanity within an essentially theoretical conceit. This challenge is worked out in the context of a particular aesthetic perspective and realised through the grid of available expressive (and non-expressive) sounds defined by the sonic properties and cultural associations of the available instruments, in conjunction with the physiology and accumulated experience of performers.

The level to which the cluster of meanings associated with a performance activity is interpreted or understood by those listening to a recording (as opposed to the performance itself) will vary considerably. There is a continuum between two extreme positions; one where the recording functions as a 'prompt' in the context of the memory of all witnessed performances, and one whereby its meanings are limited to those conveyed by the de-contextualised musical content only (by an audience with little or no experience of the performance conventions of the original mode of dissemination).

The ability to use recordings as 'soundtracks for life' (by placing the subject at centre) considerably reduces the strength of the network of metaphors embedded in the performance

[14]Miles Davis also produced a soundtrack album for William Cayton's 1970 documentary, Jack Johnson. Johnson won the world heavyweight boxing title in 1908 and, as a black American, became a symbol for both white envy and black freedom. Miles Davis (1992(CD)) A tribute to Jack Johnson Columbia CK 47036.

[15]A cognitive formulation of the improvisation process is given in Pressing, J (1988/2000) Improvisation: Methods and Models. In: *Generative Processes in Music.* John A. Sloboda Ed.) pp. 129-178. New York: Oxford University Press.

itself[16]. Such modes of listening are clearly very different to the more meditative and reflective context of a concert performance which, when combined with designed musical content, can produce a particular depth of experience to which certain audiences are still drawn.

The contrasting nature of performances and recordings of performances, and the way that they function in conveying musical meaning, is just one example of how the relationship between composers and performers in contemporary society are bounded by cultural values that are subject to both evolution and radical change. These changes often occur on a different timescale to those that affect both the predominant modes of delivering a 'performance' and relevant technological innovation. For example, whilst the conventions of instrumental performance are reasonably well understood, signifiers of 'performance' in the context of recent forms of electronic/digital and even web-based art are still largely under construction. In terms of electroacoustic music with no live performers, Denis Smalley has identified different levels of 'surrogacy' whereby musical meaning is conveyed[17]. However, in the world of laptop performance/improvisation that rejects the 'fixed medium' aesthetic of the acousmatic composition the conventions are still being developed. Some recent observations include exaggerated physical gestures when moving a mouse or the knobs of a small mixing desk – presumably in an attempt to relate to the physical gestures of instrumental performance; a certain 'busy-ness' that evokes the activities of the stock exchange; and an almost contemplative stillness of the performer(s). Such visual cues often acts as a metaphor for other production/commercial environments for which computers are optimised[18], as much as they signify links to the conventions of instrumental performance[19]

2.2 The supernatural: new music in old contexts

Some relatively new forms of composition have sought (consciously or not) to engage with the latent religious connotations that reside in the conventional relationship between performer, composer and audience through technologies that remove the need for the physical presence of a

[16]There are various recent examples in which aspects of designed musical programmes are reconstructed, thereby neutralising the cumulative effect of a sequence of recorded performances. These range from the long-playing 'sampler' album of the 1960s and 1970s in which record companies released a single track from a disparate range of long-playing records as an inexpensive promotional device; the idea of cassette and CD compilations, central to Nick Hornby's novel 'High Fidelity' and the possibilities afforded by individual track downloads and 'shuffle-mode' playback. The equivalent in the concert hall is the performance of individual movements of works, or individual works that are designed to form part of a larger cycle.

[17]Smalley identifies four levels of surrogacy: first order surrogacy, in which '. . . musical instruments and their sounding gestures act as stand-ins for non-musical gestures' to (an unviable) dislocated surrogacy where the 'loss of tangibility created by the severance of direct gestural ties' can present problems for listeners in comprehending the resulting musical discourse (Smalley, 1986, p.82-83).

[18]This latter issue arose within Popular music during the 1970/80s, particularly with early synthesizer-based groups such as Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk. Some performers not only removed the range of flamboyant gestures which were common currency for the time but also adopted a dress code which was more at home in a commercial/industrial environment than on the stage of a Rock concert, however avant-garde.

[19]In Smalley's terms the link between the exaggerated gesture and the energy profile of the sound creates a form of 'feedback loop'. The sound has an energy profile from which the nature of the original gesture can be surmised – placing it in the category of Smalley's second order surrogacy (Smalley, (1986), p. 82) but the performer gesture in this example is more of a mimicking of the energy profile, or at least an amplification of it, rather than its origin. This 'gluing together' of the visual and the sonic, presumably, is intended at assisting audience comprehension.

performer altogether. This occurs most obviously in the presentation of acousmatic electroacoustic music where, typically, the audience is seated as for a conventional instrumental performance with the ‘sound diffuser’ acting as a mediator - in the form of an interpreter - between the encoded sound on the fixed digital or analogue medium and its manifestation into a physical audible reality. Although this has some superficial similarities with the realisation of a score by a performer, the important difference is that the source of the sounds emanating from the loudspeaker systems remains unseen and largely unrecognised. Whilst this is part of the intended drama of the way in which the music is understood[20], its lack of visual focus seems to demand an even more contemplative or meditative mode of listening that has distinct parallels with an act of collective worship.

Although early compositions and performances of electro-acoustic music tended to focus on one of three pathways[21], more recent developments have tended to conflate these different approaches as well as engaging with the way in which de-contextualised sound is used within the sampling culture of some strands of popular music and the conventions of film and advertising. This has contributed further to the sense of conflicting cultures that can sometimes be experienced in formal concerts of acousmatic music, particularly when they are located in venues that have strong associations with mainstream repertoire.

It might be argued that the meanings associated with at least some forms of electroacoustic music have changed so much in recent years that it is fast becoming obsolete. This can be viewed both in terms of its common performance paradigms as well as in terms of the transformation of domestic technology.

Electroacoustic music reached a peak of potency when the technology for its reproduction in the concert space allowed a quality and volume of sound that approached ‘the sublime’ within the context of everyday experience, i.e. where the equivalent domestic technology was either simply not available, or prohibitively expensive[22]. Currently, it might be argued that a domestic multi-loudspeaker system linked to a modest PC or DVD player can reproduce an equally compelling listening experience from a suitably encoded CD/DVD than that derived from most ‘live’ acousmatic concerts – especially given the vexed issue of ‘sweet spots’[23]The ‘sweet spot’ refers to the (usually) relatively small area within the concert space that provides the optimum

[20]Although the listening strategy of ‘reduced listening’, originally proposed by Pierre Schaeffer, is specific to acousmatic music, the more obvious point is that this music allows for a displacement between the time and place of a sonic event and its re-production in a concert hall. Although very common in the visual arts, through photography and film, it is only with electroacoustic music post-1945 that this became a possibility for concert music (as distinct from the recordings of a concert.)

[21]The French tradition of *musique concrète*; the fore-grounding of technical means to be found in the early electronic works of Stockhausen, leading in turn to the development of ‘computer music’ in the US etc.; a focus on the exploration of the mimetic properties of sound, leading to the conventions of sound design as well as ‘sound ecology’.

[22]It is also worth noting here that electro-acoustic music rose in ascendancy at a time (as recently as the early 1980s) when the necessary research environment was affordable for the average University Music department. By the early 1990s, sufficient high quality software was available for the then three predominant platforms - MAC, PC and, briefly, the Atari ST, along with a massive drop in price of both memory and hard drives, that allowed a large number of individuals to participate for the equivalent cost of a medium-quality musical instrument. Since then, the price of participation has fallen dramatically. However, equivalent cost reductions have not occurred to the same extent in the case of high quality audio equipment. Consequently, the primary form of dissemination has remained the formal concert because, until recently, this was the only place you could hear multi-track or diffused stereo work.

[23]

listening experience.. With the 'wow' factor of the naked technology removed, fulfilment lies in the content of the musical discourse alone and in the way in which the piece is 'performed' by the sound diffuser. From the periphery of the optimum listening zone it can start to feel like we are 'just listening to a recording', rather than apprehending an example of an art form which, by definition, uses the recorded medium for its main dissemination strategy. It is in this situation that the role of the sound diffuser as performer is potentially the most significant. S/he can turn a relatively ordinary piece into a remarkable listening experience through expert knowledge and understanding of the musical, technical and contextual aspects of the repertoire and 'instrument' – in this case the array of equipment constituting the sound diffusion system.

The case of the sound diffuser in electroacoustic music highlights a more general issue of the conflation of roles of presenter/performer/composer in a number of different genres in which material is either recorded specifically for the composition or is created from pre-recorded or sampled sounds. The sound diffuser functions as an interpreter of the composition - although not in the sense of an instrumental performer - and the DJ in different forms of popular dance music carries out procedures which, in the context of electroacoustic music, would be regarded as 'composition'. Similarly, the 'producer' of 1980s popular music sometimes 'composed' the music out of raw material recorded by the performer, combined with tracks of sequenced material. In this latter case, 'authorship' was rarely claimed as, presumably, this would have a negative effect on the economic value attached to the 'performer' and their subsequent value on the popular music transfer market[24].

3 Sustainability

It is useful to be able to predict in some way what the future holds, however difficult this might be. Recognising the wide and ever-increasing diversity of practice, an appropriate goal might be a culturally-sustainable art practice where there is some recognisable correspondence between the amount of work going into projects and the degree to which they are disseminated - a form of ecology linked to working environments in which the underlying 'ideas', rather than the production of objects are foregrounded. Such an approach would seem to be consistent with the more fractured and multi-layered world in which we live, the contingent nature of performance opportunities for most practitioners.

In the case of the electronic arts, there are a number of key areas to address in terms of sustainability of practice including the ever-present problem of technology advancing at a considerably faster rate than the ability of an artistic community to create outputs that exploit such change. The dislocation between the generation of interesting tools and correspondingly interesting repertoire is not necessarily inevitable, and some practitioners even forge their identity based on a rejection of the pursuit of remaining 'up-to-date'. Part of the problem is associated with funding mechanisms, whether state or commercial, which often appear to favour the production and exploitation of 'tools', rather than 'outputs'. Through their focus on the 'new' these projects can also contribute to the shortening of the technological redundancy cycle.

Although the practical and logistical problems relating to performance in this context are concerned largely with equipment obsolescence (including computer hardware and software) this

[24] The foregrounding of the identity of the DJ in some 'remixes' of the 1990s is illustrative of a shift in the balance of power between the originator of the source material (composer) performer and its 'interpretation' in the context of an event with a specific function.

is only symptomatic of a broader issue relating to the sustainability of the outputs of creative practice. This is encountered when inflexible performance directions (the score), meet very specific technical requirements, which are only readily available for a short space of time – a period of a few years might not be long in the life of a piece but can be a lifetime in terms of the technology required for its support and realisation. Illustrative of the depth of concern and anxiety that such issues can raise is a recent call for articles from the UK-based journal 'Organised Sound' which included the following subject areas[25]:

- Planning ahead for portability to evolving systems and platforms
- keeping older computer music repertoire in circulation
- continuity of tools: recycling of old code and concepts, maintaining development threads
- strategies for coping with an electronic music industry that requires obsolescence to drive new purchases
- a sustainable performance practice: building bridges between tradition and innovation, developing a tradition of electronic music performance (incorporating traditional performance, as well as incorporating diffusion techniques, novel controller designs, and so forth)
- cultural sustainability: after the initial excitement fades, can we maintain interest in new forms of electronic art?[26]

The interesting thing about this list is its rather schizophrenic engagement with the two elements most characteristic of a modernist aesthetic – here articulated by the desire to 'preserve traditions' (or the engineering of musical canons) whilst simultaneously, through technological innovation, preserving the idea of the novel and innovative. The final question is revealing in that it acknowledges that the fore-grounding of technological means above content can run the danger of generating creative works with a relatively short shelf-life. Similarly, there is an impression of attempting to legitimise the electronic or 'virtual' component in terms of a 'real' performance experience[27]. In general, the questions reveal a continuing preoccupation with the semi-religious aspects of the more conventional performance ritual rather than, for example, the more subject-orientated possibilities of web-based access to performance. This at least suggests the possibility that 'performance' (and also the performer) is expected to remain predominantly within its conventional ritualistic paradigms, and that any significant innovation will be regarded as 'something else'[28]. In terms of the earlier discussion of what constitutes performance signifiers it also raises the questions as to what constitutes an appropriate lexicon - not only for traditional instrumental performers within new performance contexts, but also for purely technologically-based interactive performance such as lap-top improvisation. This has a parallel with respect to the relevance and portability of various aspects of performance practice in the context of realising new instrumental music.

[25]http://uk.cambridge.org/journals/oso/os@dmu.ac.uk

[26]This call was received via the Electronic Music Foundation EMF/Seamus Opportunities list (http://www.emf.org/)

[27]This 'real' performance is likely to remain virtual in the sense that the predominant mode of reception will probably be through the medium of a recording in the context of the journal distribution.

[28]It is often surprising that the term 'composer' still persists in a digital arts context, as opposed to 'sonic' or 'time-based' artist - terms that are often used in relation to creative practice that includes a visual component.

Of particular interest with respect to the sustainability of modes of performance are the genres of electroacoustic music that mix instrumental components and fixed media (tape) or live sound processing (using software such as MaxMSP[29] or Ableton 'Live'[30]). The combination of music comprising sounds that have an obvious human agency and those that do not - a differentiation completely lost when the performance is rendered to CD/DVD – can be both engaging and frustrating in equal measures. Whilst this category of composition often promises the sort of bridge-building between tradition and innovation that is necessary to create a more inclusive mainstream, the range of skills required to produce a work which demonstrates both competence and innovation in instrumental writing along with a high level of conceptual integrity and technological flair and expertise is quite daunting.

Irrespective of the possibilities that technological innovation affords, and the shifts in identity and role of performers and composers, there still appears to be a cultural preference to focus on some form of human agency as having main (if not sole) responsibility for the musical experience that we share. This might be a performer in the conventional sense, a sound diffuser or DJ, or the operator of a computer in an interactive environment. The tantalising question is whether the ritual of performance will be fundamentally reshaped or whether the enduring attraction of conventional performance itself is reflective of the need for such rituals in the context of an ever-changing cultural surface.

One response to the relative lack of certainty regarding the immediate future of contemporary composed music is a gradual shift from the composer as the creator of art works that are entirely fixed, to the creator of contexts in which something interesting might happen. Interactive works, in the broadest sense, can represent the conflation of traditional modes of performance, non-determinacy and improvisation in a way that echoes the fracturing and contingency of contemporary experience. Those that rely on transient technologies may suffer from problems with portability, continuity and functionality but perhaps sustainability only becomes a real concern in the context of the formation of canonical repertoire and the expectation of a number of repeat performances.

4 Composers, Performers, Publishing and the Canon

The continuing viability of a canonical model for establishing new repertoire - and consequently the dissemination of new music - is still a key concern for performers and composers alike. Of particular importance is how performers make choices in allocating time to learn new work as part of their ongoing professional development, as opposed to the needs of a specific sequence of professional engagements.

The availability of scores and related materials has been considerably democratised in recent years through the Internet and music publishing software such as 'Finale[31]' and 'Sibelius[32]'. where the conventional publishing model – rooted as it is in the commodification of all elements of musical practice – is giving way to forms of 'self-maintained' catalogues. This is a response both to the nature of professional publishing, whereby many aspects of publishers' work can be viewed as simply irrelevant, and the lack of practical support given to a small minority, even

[29] www.cycling74.com
[30] www.ableton.com
[31] www.finalemusic.com
[32] www.sibelius.com

within the select group of published composers. However, the availability of such a huge range of un-sieved musical data creates a new set of problems for performers with respect to accessing materials of interest. This has been responded to in a centralised manner, through state-funded libraries and digitisation projects[33], and also through the growth in subscription websites that function in a similar way to musical agents[34]. As neither approach contains any real element of peer-review – and there are many reasons why this would be undesirable – the development of effective access tools is essential if the intended outcome of the ready availability of such material can be achieved (more performances of a wider range of work).

From the composer's point of view, aided by the various forms of computer notation packages on the one hand, and software for generating and performing different forms of electroacoustic music on the other, the ability to disseminate scores and a range of other work via the web and via email represents a considerable advantage. However, such a catalogue inevitably generates the need for ongoing systems maintenance as part of the composers' regular pattern of activities. This can include:

- Ensuring that scores/applications still work with the latest software releases and that visual appearance and sound has not changed.
- Movement between software applications
- Movement between hardware platforms
- Ensuring adequate back-up
- Ensuring adequate on-going documentation, including web-links etc.

This encourages a number of activities, not focused on the conceptualisation and writing of music, which resemble the activities of a curator in a museum who has also invented all the artefacts on display – i.e. a personal canon. However, such administrative engagement is essential if an on-going dialogue between performers and other sources of performances (festivals etc.) are to be maintained.

A second shift, relating specifically to the production of electro-acoustic music, is the need to maintain hardware and software, not just for the purpose of efficiency and delivery of 'the notation', but in order to retain the preferred theatrical elements in performance[35]. A consequence of the short technical redundancy cycle is that it is simply unreasonable to expect performers to have access to, let alone purchase, the wide array of equipment necessary for most of the current modes of collaborative performance[36]. This often results in the necessity for a high degree of

[33]For example, 'the Collection' hosted by the British Music Information Centre (BMIC) as part of a major digitisation project at www.bmic.co.uk; the initiative to situate the Phonothèque of the Institut international de musique électroacoustique de Bourges (IMEB) within the context of the National Library of France; the reference library of the Gaudeamus foundation in Amsterdam.

[34]34 Subscription websites replace the need for the commercial success of the musical product to generate income, with a guaranteed fixed income generated by the sale of promotional space on the website. The degree to which 'content' is controlled is variable.

[35]A recent toured version of Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study II* performed by Neil Hyde and Paul Archbold used a contemporary implementation of the complex Live Electronics rather than the technology for which the piece was originally designed. Though functionally equivalent – a doubtless much more efficient - this is now a rather different piece to the original.

[36]This might be contrasted with the of the role electric guitarist in popular music whose needs have remained remarkably unchanged over the last 40 years. In addition to instruments and amplifiers, many

performer/composer collaboration – a very positive development – along with a greater expectation that both parties might individually, as well as collectively, be responsible for searching out and developing performance opportunities.

Trying to establish canons, even for relatively new performance contexts, is seemingly hard to resist. For example, in Britain, the Society for the Promotion of New Music[37], the British Music Information Centre[38] and, to a lesser extent, Sonic Arts Network[39] all appear to promote the notion of canons through various programmes focused either on the promotion of specific works or a particular group of composers[40], ahead of tackling the future of 'performance' head-on. Although these organisations carry out an extremely valuable role in terms of providing opportunities and education projects, their success in building audiences for conventional concert programmes has been somewhat patchy. Whilst this can be explained in general terms by the degree to which 'modern art' is fashionable at any particular time it can also be traced to deeper-rooted relationships and anxieties that exist between the consumer and the successful, authoritative and 'genuine' product - whether this is felt to be embodied in the music itself, signified by the composer or through the endorsement of a particular performer. The dynamics of this relationship and the way it plays out in the context of the 'culture industry' is famously developed by Adorno in his piece 'On the fetish character in music and the regression in listening'.

The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the Toscanini concert. He has literally 'made' the success which he reifies and accepts as an objective criterion, without recognising himself in it. But he has not 'made' it by liking the concert, but rather by buying the ticket. (Adorno: 34)

In contemporary terms the 'objective criterion of success' is more difficult to define as it has largely dissolved into a variety of diffuse indicators. However, although Adorno was writing with respect to audiences of the mid-twentieth century, unsurprisingly (and regrettably) his analysis still very much applicable today as critics and funding bodies struggle to establish criteria for evaluating content. Not only is the 'value' of new music that is 'difficult' for whatever reason often unclear to a more general audience but there is a suspicion that, in this context at least, the 'authentic' art object can easily be counterfeited.

5 The Performance Space

There are two particular aspects of performance spaces that, although apparently quite different, represent a form of 'micro-' and 'macro-' perspective of a single condition. These might be summarised as follows:

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of which are based on models and technologies that emerged in the 1950s, relatively few accessories are required. Developments such as the 'MIDI' guitar have made relatively little impact on the musical world at large.

[37]www.spnm.org.uk.

[38]www.bmic.co.uk

[39]www.sonicartsnetwork.org

[40]The BMIC has two projects aimed at the promotion of 'a rising generation of composers' as well as a concert series 'the cutting edge'. '[New voices]... concentrates on promoting a smaller number of composers, with the aim of raising profile for emerging talent that is mostly finding its way without the support of commercial publishers or record companies'. 'New Voices' progress to a second project 'Contemporary Voices' which focuses mainly on issues relating to availability and dissemination of works.

- The topography of the performance space in terms of design ((e.g.) a planned installation for a specific event or a contingent space), and the resulting consonance or dissonance with respect to clashes of cultural signifiers.
- The ecology of sustainable ensembles and groupings at the local level of mixed rural/urban communities – i.e., the social environment that we inhabit most of the time, which is usually separate from but complementary to those public spaces which are used for the more centralised delivery of art[41].

Central to the difficulty in evaluating the 'success' of a new work or performance on first hearing (and its claim for inclusion any repertoire), is an embedded contradiction between critical, innovative art taking place in spaces that are often designed for promoting very different value systems. This creates a compromised presentation that, at worst, can create a sense of general unease and can also contribute to the erosion of difference between individual works in a programme. It is as if the performance space creates a grid or veil through which the music, in its conceptual form, is heard[42].

In the case of contemporary chamber music there is often a significant dissonance between the aesthetic context of the performance space and the music being performed. A simple example would be the clash between neo-classical pillars of venue 'x' with the late-modernist concerns of programme 'y'. Whilst we can chose to attempt to ignore this, it clearly does have an impact on how music is apprehended, as indeed does a range of other social and cultural signifiers - from the dress code of the performers to the associations and repertoire of the instruments of the ensemble. It is also worth remembering that the combination of performers, programme, performance space, audience, and even average ambient temperature is likely to be unique for any given performance.

A recent concert I experienced in mainland Europe threw all of this all into sharp relief with proceedings following a familiar trajectory. In this case, the pieces were all recent compositions by a range of British composers that contrasted significantly in aesthetic. The ensemble consisted of piano, saxophone, trumpet and percussion and the programme included works for the quartet, duos and a solo piece for saxophone. The rehearsal focused as much on logistical issues as the meanings contained within the music and this impression was heightened by the functionality of clothing and lighting, as well as the inevitable discontinuities that disrupt such performances during rehearsal time.

The particular juxtaposition of instruments created an interesting interplay of expectations. With this particular combination, the ensemble looked as much like a jazz group as a chamber ensemble. Ironically, some of the programme focused on music of a generic nature (i.e. with unspecified instrumentation) – much in the same way as early ensemble music is instrument (timbre) independent. However, this simply emphasised the manner in which instrumental timbre combines with the cultural associations of the ensemble as a whole to act as a form of 'glue' that bounds both sonic experience and the limits of audience expectation.

[41] This distinction is often difficult to define in practice. However, a town or village' music club' or public house can be viewed as part of the local environment whereas a town or city municipal concert hall is part of a more centralised public provision.

[42] The way in which the performance space influences the perception of a performance is related to the how the instrument, the performer and the composition can compete for attention at the point of realisation; whether we feel we are listening to a specific composition, a specific performer or (e.g.) piano music.

At the time of the concert things were rather different. Casual clothing and demeanour had given way to a more formal dress code that set the ensemble apart from the audience and emphasised commitment to the task[43]. Specific lighting added to the sense of 'distance' between performers and the audience – especially the way in which the audience remain 'in the dark' and the ensemble 'in the light'. At the end of the concert this 'distance' between audience and performers was consciously swept away during the 'debrief' in the bar afterwards during which bonding, networking and the consumption of alcohol also played a part.

At all stages, the performance space itself was far from 'neutral'. Its origins as a railway station resonated favourably with the sense of diversity and creative exploration represented by the programme throughout. During rehearsal, the architecture of the former public space and remnants of the station emphasised functionality whereas, in performance, it gave the impression more of an intimate theatre, with pieces as 'acts' in a single play. Afterwards, the zoning of the space assisted the effective transition from formal to informal relationships between performers and audience/friends. The accretion of experience, both of the performance and the context, involved the interplay of a range of signifiers in patterns that are complex and difficult to unpick entirely. However, a recording is clearly no substitute.

This description focuses on the presentation of contemporary art music in one of a huge range of small performance spaces, each of which can impose their own character on the performance. Additionally, in the case of mixed electroacoustic music, as well as a dissonance between the signifiers carried by the instrument and the architecture of the performance space there is the effect of the presence of the electronic 'plumbing'. These 'clashes' of meanings can be engaged with consciously, ignored, or left to have a contingent effect on the performance[44]. Similarly, specific musical practices that have their roots in political as well as musical radicalism often carry a resonance of these origins into characteristic performance spaces. For example, some of the venues for free improvisation in Europe, along with various combinations of high and low performance technologies, can create an almost post-apocalyptic ambiance which not only evokes the dystopian genre of film but also the origins from which such venues have evolved (e.g. organised squats).

Similarly, the upstairs rooms of public houses in the UK that often provide the venues for jazz and other improvised music still carry something of the air of a subversive meeting place. Either situation provides a quite different experience to the sanitised uniformity of the 'designed' concert venue.

Such observations serve to highlight the function of concerts, and concert venues, as sites of social bonding, professional networking and other complex social transactions as well as a forum for the dissemination of cultural meanings via the medium of music and the spaces in which it is performed. They also reveal the level to which 'live performance', and the specific relationship between performers, audience and composers that enables the development of musical linguistics, is fundamentally different from the consumption of music through the recorded medium - however

[43] According to Cook "... the idea that performer's role is to reproduce what the composer has created builds an authoritarian power structure into musical culture ... " (Cook: 26). This leads to traditional performance dress code indicating a degree of subservience. However, in the case of contemporary chamber music, it is just as likely that the performers will have a higher status, at least as far as the audience is concerned, than the composers represented in the programme.

[44] This aspect of the interplay between the performance space and the technical means of realisation is described with respect to Crosscurrents, (one of my own works for harpsichord and tape) in Vaughan, M. (2000) *A two-part (Re)invention: The Harpsichord in a Contemporary Music Context.* Contemporary Music Review 19(4) pp. 7-37

ubiquitous the latter has become. However, this shift in values could also be part of a more general transformation whereby preferences will evolve in which music must be rendered into a more malleable, subject-orientated form in order to meet the needs of contemporary consumption patterns.

6 Musical Content: Music as Anti-Language

The previous discussion has focused on the way in which the understanding of new music is influenced by its modes of dissemination and how the site of a performance, and the broader cultural significance of performance itself modifies the meanings of the music being performed. Many of the themes explored in this context also have a relationship to the way in which specific forms of musical language create a focus around which performers and composers form (often long-lasting) relationships. Such relationships allow participants to assert the cultural viability of performance that exhibits specific aesthetic preferences outside of the musical mainstream (i.e. those not supported routinely by state patronage, or whose members view themselves as outside of some real or imaginary privileged group). Such relationships often result in clearer social 'bondings' between composer and performers as they are driven essentially by ideological rather than economic imperatives[45]. Alongside aesthetic preferences often sit political polemics, which frequently challenge what is often viewed as an increasingly irrelevant and unrepresentative musical establishment. Such oppositions and tensions can be observed at a high level - in the bureaucratic arrangements that manage the consumption of different musical practices and genres – as well as at the level of musical material itself, and how it is organised. One example concerns the way in which the demands of notation define a specific power relationship between composer and performer.

In the past, the improvisation and composition of music have been seen as complementary skills. However, the rise of the 'score' as the definitive account of a musical work (as opposed to the sonorous equivalent generated in the course of a performance[46]) has, from time to time, resulted in a general polarisation - if not outright antagonism and hostility - between practitioners of these two musical activities. A contributory factor in the late twentieth century has been the methods and techniques developed and practiced by late modernist composers. This polarisation seemed to reach a peak during the 1980s, between the practitioners of European 'free improvisation' – an abstract form of improvisation arising from a rejection, both musically and politically, of mainstream musical practice – and a school of composing that became known as the 'new complexity'[47]. These practices often derived in part from broader philosophical concerns that had little to do with the more conventional relationships between composer, notation and performer[48]

[45] With the increased use of the Internet to make contacts, disseminate work, and identify performance opportunities, such networks are just as likely to be international in character as local.

[46] The complexities of the identity of the 'musical work' and whether this lies in the score or the performance is explored by Nattiez in terms of musical semiology. One key issue is that the whilst the score is 'an invariable physical reality' there are '... as many acoustic realisations as there are performances'. The performer does not strictly speaking create the work, but instead gives it access to a sonorous existence. (Nattiez: 72)

[47] Where notational complexity not only created extreme technical demands on performers but tested the limits of information that could be processed in real-time performance.

[48] There is a relationship here with reactions to the evolution of 'be-bop' in the 1940s and 1950s – an improvisational form focusing on extension of harmonic space, virtuosity and complex melodies and

In a response to the demands placed on performers by such works the improviser Eddie Prévost, a founding member of the group AMM, delivered the following criticism of Time and Motion Study II - a piece for 'cello and electronics by the English composer Brian Ferneyhough - at a Festival of Improvised Music at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London in 1981:

"... here the main purpose seems to be an exhaustive examination of how far the performer can be driven by noise and impossible scoring before he is broken down and destroyed. In this sense it is an ugly and de-humanising piece. It exemplifies the way in which the composer-musician relationship can be pushed, and the antithesis of the aspirations associated with contemporary improvised music; yet (to my anger) such pieces generally acquire more credibility as 'works of art [than improvisation]'". (Prévost: 34)

Although Prévost focuses on notational demands as a way of asserting and controlling the balance of power between composer and performer, the focus of the composition, viewed in its entirety, lies in the theatre that arises from attempting to realise the score 'accurately' as a metaphor for industrial efficiency in a very hostile sonic environment – what the composer calls "... the memory of a production process ..." (Ferneyhough: 107).

In its conceptual and actual complexity the score engages with a number of important ideas of general interest, for example, "... what place can music realistically claim in the task of critically observing the world around us?" (Ferneyhough: 112). So, in many ways, the position adopted by Prévost, although highly critical, is consistent with the aims and objectives of the piece. His criticism primarily concerns whether or not such an engagement between composer and performer is 'ethical' - whether or not the act of performing such a work constitutes 'informed consent'. His perspective is one whereby at least some forms of improvisation are viewed historically as born out of a " ... desire for a means to express human dignity" (Prévost: 36) and where "[improvisation] ... is an assertion of the legitimate aspirations of collective human will over the crude determinism that masquerades as the fairness of laissez-faire." (Prévost: 37). By contrast, 'the composition' and 'the composer' remain firmly embedded in the capitalist model of production, distribution and consumption on one hand and occupy part of an alternative extra-musical critique on the other.

Ironically, both were in the business of questioning existing structures and practices – both musically and politically – and, at a fundamental level, the sound-world occupied by the form of improvisation practiced by Prévost and that of Time and Motion Study II will, to many listeners, share a significant amount of common ground. For example, both use a non-tonal musical language, where musical discourse is carried at least as much by timbre and the relationship between musical gestures as it is through the more conventional matrix of pitch rhythm and tempo, and both can tend toward a disembodied, alienated sound world when viewed alongside dominant musical discourses of the time. However, both musical practices, though ideologically opposed, were important in presenting a significant and rewarding challenge to audiences by demanding new listening strategies and providing new conceptual frameworks for understanding music.

Since, 1981, when Prevost's written piece appeared, it could be argued that the philosophical distance between improvised and composed music has shrunk considerably. This is partly as a result of a cultural climate in which the barriers between different traditions and styles have been eroded. Contributory factors include the aesthetic contexts of post-modernism, including

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breakneck speed with compositions often based on 'standards'.

those which foreground the use of various performance technologies; improved communications and as a general consequence of globalisation.

A further factor concerns the decline in cultural status over recent years of the outputs of compositional practice that lies outside of the musical mainstream. Consequently, many established and emerging artists see themselves as members of wider broad-based international interest groups, assisted in the creation and dissemination of their work by technology and the Internet, rather than being constrained by local demand, or hindered by restrictive commercial publishing practices based on 19th-century models of production[49].

The evolution of musical language within such disparate artistic alliances has much in common with the way in which everyday language is used to articulate power structures within society as a whole. This is particularly striking in genres, or compositional practices, that are characterised by a resistance to being assimilated into the cultural preferences of dominant social groups (i.e. they have little or no commercial 'value') and that fail to act as signifiers for the meanings that support these dominant positions.

In his 1976 article Antilanguages[50], Halliday expounds a theory whereby specific language variants are adopted to illustrate membership of a group and to express certain values or ranges of experience. Central to this theory is the contention that "In all languages, words, sounds and structures tend to be charged with social value . . . " (Halliday:165). Such linguistic variants are prevalent in social groupings in both 'high' and 'low' categories. For example, excluded or criminal groups on the one hand and the jargonisation of speech that is characteristic of 'business-speak' and its underlying insecurities on the other.

In that the use of language can be viewed as reflective of the power structures within society as a whole, so musical conventions can be reflective of similar tensions. In the same way that the use of language is charged with social values, certain musical constructs are deemed to be 'high', 'low', compromised (or corrupt), globalised or engendered. It is in this context where musicians can form innovative critiques - through performance, composition and the juxtaposition of works in programmes - not only of musical practice, but also of the social and political values that underpin them.

One very important aspect of such an analysis is that the meanings associated with musical conventions are highly sensitive to the time and place in which performances occur. For example, one of the characteristics of the free improvisers of the 1960s and 70s was their avoidance of what might be regarded as musical conventions associated with the 'mainstream'. To many this created a 'trap' where many characteristics of the soundworld they grew to inhabit became conventions of their own. Such musical 'antilanguages' often have a relatively short shelf life - not only due to their susceptibility to partial assimilation into the musical mainstream[51], but also because the semiotic value of certain musical ideas also dissipate and transform over time.

Characteristics of an 'antilanguage' in a musical context also extend to the physical properties of sound in addition to the way that it is organised. One example is the way in which loudness

[49]Effectively, this a complementary process to the ability to communicate across international boundaries via the Internet without leaving home. Having made the contacts, the interaction between performers, composer and venue requires a physical presence (through travel) to 'make it real'.

[50]Halliday, M.A.K. (1963/1978) AntiLanguages. Language as Social Semiotic. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

[51]For example, Madonna's use of 'rap' techniques on her 2003 recording *American Life*. Maverick/Warner Bros. 9362-48439-2.

(volume) was very much part both of the development of rock music in the mid-1960s and the presentation of electroacoustic music in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As noted elsewhere in this article, due to developments in domestic technology, volume and studio quality reproduction are no longer the preserve of the performance space and the signification of ‘loud’ ceases to convey the same meanings as it was once imbued. Similarly, the duration of musical compositions and performances have particular cultural significance, whether Morton Feldman’s late string quartets, of four hours duration or more[52], the extended improvisations which began to appear in popular music in the late 1960s[53] or Jem Finer’s 1000 year long piece of music which began to play on 1st January 2000 and is intended to finish on 31st December 2999[54]. Each of these examples represent a degree of ‘transgression’ from normative values that can often result the in evolution of a genre, but here the most striking aspect is the duration of the musical event with respect to its norms and the consequent dissemination difficulties, rather than the language of its content.

The susceptibility of the meanings associated with musical language to change when displaced culturally or geographically can be illustrated by the use of ‘jazz’ inflections in some of the music composed in Soviet Russia pre-1989, whereas its significance for western audiences at the same time would have been markedly different. In both dimensions (historical and geographical) it can be argued that both the musical language and the working out of musical material is embedded with signifiers which operate, at least at some levels, in a parallel way to Halliday’s notion of ‘antilanguage’.

The concept can also be applied to the way in which groups of composers and performers define and maintain musical communities. According to Halliday, ‘. . . the simplest form taken by an antilanguage is that of new words for old; it is ’language relexicalised’ (Halliday: 165). One example of this is the way in which the be-bop standards of the 1940s and 1950s were often based on the chord progressions of other popular songs, for example Charlie Parker’s *ornithology* and Morgan Lewis’ *how high the moon*[55]. A further example could be the serially composed surface of works based on structural models from the baroque and classical periods in the work of Arnold Schöenberg. Additionally the idea that antilanguages are most often deployed in those areas of meaning that are, “. . . central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the established society” (Halliday: 165) resonates not only with the evolution of atonality as an aesthetic within composed music (based on extensions of the tonal language), but also (for example) with the focus of the punk movement of the late 1970s on the transformation of ‘singing’[56] (in many respects the instrumental components of the music were consistent with the structures and timbres exploited by earlier Rhythm and Blues and Rock groups).

In terms of sustaining the many musical communities set up outside of the musical ‘mainstream’ the development of a specific ‘antilanguage’ might be reflected in the decision to specialise in a particular repertoire, or, in the case of an improvised music, the particular way in which musical meaning is conveyed through the sequencing of musical gestures - such sequencing corresponding to the consistent relexicalisation and overlexicalisation characteristic of antilanguages.

[52]e.g. For Philip Guston (1984) and String Quartet II (1985).

[53]e.g. Cream’s 17-minute version of Willie Dixon’s Spoonful on the 1968 recording Wheels of Fire.

[54]See http://longplayer.org

[55]Harmonic and scaler substitution rules and practices in be-bop improvisation can also be viewed as a form of ‘relexicalisation’ as can its focus on extensions of harmonic space, virtuosity and complex melodies.

[56]The transgressive nature of ‘punk’ could also be detected in a number of high-profile instrumental compositions of the period.

Certainly, the 'super-human' density of some musical practice is reflective of the 'show' aspect of antilanguage and can be readily observed in various forms of popular music as well as in the foregrounding of virtuosity in the classical/romantic and contemporary repertoire.

When Halliday suggests that "One may view the individual's everyday life in terms of the working away of a conversational apparatus that ongoingly maintains, modifies and reconstructs his subjective reality" (Halliday: 169) it is tempting to view this 'conversational apparatus' as being able to include the composition, performance and reaction to musical events that form and underpin the subjective reality of 'being a musician'. Certainly if a work of literature can be viewed as its "... author's contribution to the reality-generating conversation of society" (Halliday: 182) then so can a musical performance. That composers and performers form partnerships to create and present alternative realities to the received model is one way in which musical language, and cultural critique through music, develops – the characteristics of the musical language used reflecting its particular status. This process also highlights the essential nature of ongoing communication between composers and performers in developing new musical practices that in some small way contribute to the transformation of the meanings by which we negotiate our lives.

7 Response

Individual responses to the situation in which we find ourselves will vary considerable. As Nicholas Cook observes, 'The concept of music being a kind of commodity naturally gives the composer a position of centrality, as the generator of the core product' (Cook: 24). However, this really only applies to those situations where the composer's activity generates a surplus of capital – either in financial or cultural terms – whereas, in most cases, there is a continual struggle to find contexts in which this 'core product' can be revealed. Clearly there are far fewer formal performance opportunities than necessary to sustain the number of individuals who would describe themselves as composers – a situation that will result in an acceleration of the transformation of roles and the nature of creative outputs that is already well underway. Key issues for such transformations are varied but include:

- The 'Rules of Engagement' – the breakdown of the 'central' position of the composer and democratisation of the creative process
- A challenge to the primacy of the fixed musical text
- The composition as a fixed, or more likely, dynamic environment
- The recession of notions of authority in the context of sustainable co-operative groupings of musicians

Also likely is the conflation of different skills and techniques whereby, for example, 'the reaction times' of improvised music can substitute for knowledge of an obsolete core repertoire and the confluence of notation and software into a broad concept of a musical 'application' has a tendency to replace the 'score'. What is being sought is a culturally sustainable art practice where there is a degree of correspondence between the work going into projects and the extent to which these ideas are effectively disseminated. In conjunction with such practice is the development of working relationships between performers and composers that are appropriate to this ongoing transformation of roles.

Figure 1: 12 Landscapes:extract from section 8

By way of an extended postscript, my own practice has sought to address some of these issues in a variety of modest ways, always within the context of the conventional score/realisation paradigm.

12 Landscapes - a recent work for a trio consisting of soprano saxophone, accordion and 'cello - seeks to address issues of performance and the 'writing' of music in a variety of ways which are simple but have a distinct effect on the way that the piece is performed[57]. The strategy is one that tries to engage the performers in taking a degree of responsibility for the outcome of the overall structure of the work, as well as exercising a relatively high degree of performer choice within a number of short sections within it.

Essentially the work consists of 12 miniatures which, if all played sequentially, results in a piece of around 15 minute duration. Within the group of 12, there are different categories of 'miniatures' that display different characteristics: Some works are through-composed trios whereas others are solos or duets and some have a A and B section – a 'dark' side and a 'light' side at which point the instrumentation changes – e.g. from a duo for accordion and saxophone to a solo saxophone part. The different micro-movements can be assembled in any order or divided into groups to fit between other programme items; the solos can be played in extended form as pieces in their own right[58].

Included within the 12 miniatures are three 'solo' sections referred to as 'improvisations'. These consist of multiple pathways through sections of composed material whereby the performer

[57] *12 Landscapes* was premiered on 26 June 2006 by Christoph Kirschke, Primo Primoval and Imke Frank at the Elisabeth-Schneider-Siftung, Freiburg.

[58] A recording of the piece has been made where each of the 12 movements are allocated an individual track number. The variety of possibilities inherent in the ordering of the movements from performance to performance can be crudely simulated by using the CD 'shuffle' facility.

Figure 2: 12 Landscapes: extract from section 7 - can be played simultaneously with section 8 (see fig. 1)

has a considerable amount of choice as to 'how' to play, and in what order to play material (but not 'what' to play). Fig. 1 shows the beginning of movement 8 for solo saxophone. The performer has a considerable amount of freedom in how to interpret what appears to be very prescriptive notation. Where alternative paths are available then one path can be chosen or, alternatively, each alternative might be played in succession (or omitted altogether). The tempo and dynamic of each phrase is left up to the performer. Sections can be repeated or ignored and the performance can start at any point in the score. With such a range of options this small sub-section of the work can be over in a flash, or have a significant duration. Different performers have a very different approach to this: some will make a 'realisation' from the score and others will use it dynamically as described above – either approach is fine, as they both contribute to a wide range of performance outcomes from the same score segment.

As a final option the improvisations can be 'layered up' and combined to provide a more interactive performance environment, framed by the detail of the notation. Similarly, individual 'improvisations' can be combined with through-composed 'duos' for the remaining two instruments (see Fig. 2)

Overall, this work provides an environment where some of the responsibilities normally associated with the composer are placed with the performer in order to optimise certain aspects of the performance, but within the context of notated music.

Many of the techniques used in this work stem from an interest in introducing different elements of controlled indeterminacy into music that is predominantly 'composed'[59] as well as consciously segregating those areas of the work which conform to formal systems and those which unfold more spontaneously.

[59]For example, providing various optional pathways for performers to select at the point of performance in conjunction with techniques such as the re-mapping of phrases to different harmonic fields (providing a link to practices in jazz improvisation such as chord substitution).

These polarities reflect one of the key differences between composed music and improvised music in that one unfolds in time according to a fixed temporal road-map whilst the other tends to follow a sequence of directions which may be altered by contingent events along the way. In general terms, the 'fuzziness' of the underlying logic of this process seems to be much more in keeping with the aesthetics of the 21st century than the conventional score.

In the end, whether or not music is 'composed' or 'improvised' (and the exact meaning of such definitions) is less important than whether the illusion of spontaneity – 'the magic' - can be maintained throughout a performance, or even a recording of a performance. Whilst the responsibility for this will most often lie with the performer, these examples show (in some small way) how it can be promoted in the creation of musical environments and in the choice of techniques deployed during the compositional process[60].

Conclusion

Whilst sound waves can be described as 'a transfer of energy without a transfer of matter' sound organised into music might similarly be described in terms of a transfer of emotive state without anything happening to us - communicated by perturbations in the air molecules in which we are all immersed. The 'virtual experience' thing is a key aspect of what attracts us to music; it is also something that attracts composers - the idea that we might create patterns of sonic reality, which provide a mental gymnasium for our perceptions. Interrogating the limits of what might constitute an interesting, stimulating or rewarding experience is an integral part. The physics of human performance also underpins the essential relationship between composers and performers, whereby the conceptual constructs - formulated and notated at some point in the past – are transferred into the present by way of a mechanically generated sonic reality that can immediately affect the way we perceive the quality of the moment – clearly a form of alchemy.

The enduring challenge of 'composing' music, along with performing and listening to music whose micro and macro levels have been organised and set in time, suggests that (as a form of criticism) composition itself will continue to survive, even if the methods and means of dissemination are significantly transformed. Most performances are 'unique', in the sense that the combination of performer, programme, venue and audience is unlikely to be repeated, and changes in any of these variables can alter the significance of the event for all participants and observers. It is partly to celebrate this 'uniqueness' of experience that we participate in live performance (in whatever capacity) even though, pragmatically, there are many more convenient modes of musical consumption. Whether these alternatives provide replacements for live performance or are simply surrogates for 'the real thing' is often simply a question of genre and consumer demography – there is no clear answer. However, current experience demonstrates that audiences, in the broader sense, favour more control over what they hear and when they hear it, and that the context of live performance in popular culture has remained most resistant to change when it represents a homage to celebrity as much as it does to specific musical repertoire.

In 2005, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Master of the Queen's Music, revealingly chose the title "Will Serious Music Become Extinct" for his Royal Philharmonic Lecture. The composer questioned the condition of 'serious' music in our society, with particular reference to political and

[60] The broader compositional techniques deployed in *12 Landscapes* were formulated as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) funded project Compositional sub-strata derived from analyses of improvisation (2003).

commercial pressures, mass communication, education and the multiple functions of the composer. Whilst the answer to this might well be 'yes' in the form of 19th century paradigms of the relationship between composer, audience and performer, there is every possibility that these roles will simply become transformed in accordance with the networks of communication that have become possible as we enter the 21st century. As in the case of science fiction, visions of the future tend to be revolutionary rather than evolutionary and the same might apply to what we might imagine that the future holds for orchestral and chamber music. Similarly, the impact of music technology is huge, but its contribution to the evolution of the current musical landscape is often hidden, simply because it is directed at fulfilling familiar functions and technical and creative paradigms more efficiently. Most importantly, all music, whether baroque, popular or contemporary composed music, exists within the broader context of popular culture in which many of the original meanings are erased and other signifiers attached as part of new synchronic relationships and clusters of meanings - specific only to the moment of observation.

Within this broader context, the dominant formal model for creating new work by composers for performers to play can still be characterised as essentially an economic transaction; an organisation confers value on a composer's oeuvre by 'commissioning' a new work. The nature of this transaction is such that consent is given to the limitations placed on the imagination by the forces and duration imposed by the commission in exchange for the certainty of a performance and the possible inclusion of the work in that part of the solo/ensemble/orchestral repertoire.

Informal systems and relationships that seek to establish sustainable modes of practice outside of the mainstream are often co-operative, cell-like, and responsive to change, both technical and ideological. Although this is partly a predictable consequence of the breaking down of musical canons and the consequent diversity of practice it is also a response to technologies and structures that foreground control and selectivity over what we listen to (ranging from download music stores to the politics of concert programming).

By continuing to celebrate the idea of uniqueness in the individual performance - and the range of 'acoustic realities' that might result from the single invariable physical reality that we term the score - key questions of identity and function arises. For example, are our lives enriched by musical encounters designed by musicians or do we just collect around us music that reinforces our notions of who we are or would like to be, in a similar way to many other patterns of consumption arising out of insecurities prompted by advertising? The progressive marketisation of music has not only resulted in forms of normalisation within genres but also the voices in which they speak and for many composers and performers these are difficult times. Eddie Prévost, in his 1981 lecture, reminds us that, "... beneath all cultural preferences there lies a system of politics. In choosing our art we choose a model for life" (Prévost: 37).

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