City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

'What Does it Mean to be a Self-Reflexive Practitioner?'

Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester
5 February 2020

Dr Ian Pace,
Reader in Music
City, University of London
ian.pace.1@city.ac.uk

Key Concepts

- *Practice-as-Research*

Some Research Questions for Performers

- What tempo should be used for various large-scale sections of the score in question?

- How much flexibility should be employed within these broad tempi?

- On a smaller scale, what forms of stylisation and elasticity would be most appropriate for playing various types of rhythms?

- In music with a relatively stable metre, should one at least slightly stress notes which fall on strong beats, and play those on weak beats less?

- Should dissonant pitches receive special emphasis, and if so, how much?

- When might the dynamic envelope for a line serve to emphasise its contours, or be otherwise?

- What is the dynamic range desired for the piece (e.g. how quiet are dynamics such as *ppp* and how loud *fff*)?

- Through various combinations of accentuation, articulation and rhythm, to what extent, and where, should one tend towards continuity of line, or more angular approaches?

Some Research Questions for Performers

- In polyphonic or contrapuntal textures, to what extent should one be aiming to project a singular voice which is foregrounded above others, or a greater degree of dynamic equilibrium between parts?

- How exact should synchronisation between hands or parts be? Are there occasions where staggering of different pitches and lines can be fruitfully employed?

- In a piano work, where should one employ the right pedal? Should the 'basic sound' in legato passages be pedalled, or might it be used more selectively? Should pedalling be allowed to carry across changes in harmonies, and if so, when?

- What sort of technical approach to one's instrument is appropriate for this music (it may be several)? In the case of the piano, might one tend towards higher fingers and a clear, well-articulated sound, or play closer to the keys?

- Should one aim for a singular prominent climactic point within a movement, or can there be several of roughly equal prominence?

- (and many more)

Key Concepts

- *Practice-as-Research*

- *Autoethnography*

Ethnography and Autoethnography

- *Ethnography*: the study of peoples, social and cultural practices, values and environments, in the form of writing.

- *Autoethnography*: turns the lens on the researcher themselves and their own cultural milieu, practices, values and ideologies. Sometimes (wrongly in my opinion) conceived primarily as a *method*.

- Ethnography commonly employed as a strategy by ethnomusicologists.

- Classic ethnographies grew from immersion within the cultural environment being investigated, then detailed analysis of the data found.

- But now the term is used to denote almost any research with data sourced from living participants.

Anonymous (ethnographically sourced) senior UK musicologist on ethnomusicological work

'The best ethnomusicologists I have worked with have strong critiques of authenticity narratives, skepticism about the general way the ethnographic method is conducted, read books (including historical writing and writing about history) and use various kinds of theory that pervade other kinds of humanities scholarship. The worst simply show what look like lovely holiday snaps, give a pseudo-literary, 'atmospheric' narrative about their trip, and quote their interlocutors at length, nodding sagely.'

My definitions

1. Ethnography of a community of which the research is a part.
2. Self-documentation, often for cathartic or therapeutic purposes.
3. Self-documentation accompanied by wider contextualisation and critical self-reflection.

3 can be called *self-critical practice and critical writing on practice*.

For performers, simply *critical performance*.

My definitions

1. Ethnography of a community of which the research is a part.
2. Self-documentation, often for cathartic or therapeutic purposes.
3. Self-documentation accompanied by wider contextualisation and critical self-reflection.

3 can be called *self-critical practice and critical writing on practice*.

For performers, simply *critical performance*.

'The conscious and deliberate *exploration* of an artist's aesthetic universe is how I define "artistic research." It is obvious that, since artists are the only ones who have unmediated, direct access to their own aesthetic universe, artistic research can only be performed by those artists themselves.'

Bart Vanhecke, 'A New Path to Music: Experimental Exploration and Expression of an Aesthetic Universe', in Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (eds.), *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), p. 94.

Key Concepts

- *Practice-as-Research*

- *Autoethnography*

- *Experimentation*

Experimentation

Model from Michael Schwab, in various essays in Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore (eds.), *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), drawing on philosopher of science Hans-Jörg Rheinberg. Three key terms:

Experimental systems: the smallest units of empirical research, designed 'to given unknown answers to questions that the experimenters themselves are not yet able to ask'. Schwab argues that the outcomes of these matter more than the means by which they are arrived at.

Technical objects: fixed and accessible objects, sometimes the results of previous experimentation, which condition and limit experimental systems and 'embody the knowledge of a given research field at a given time'.

Epistemic things: the results of experimental systems.

Notation

Ian Pace, 'Notation, Time and the Performer's Relationship to the Score in Contemporary Music', in Darla Crispin (ed.), *Unfolding Time: Studies in Temporality in Twentieth-Century Music* (Leuven: Leuven University press, 2009), pp. 151-192.

- Rejection of 'positivistic' model of notation as indicating a singular result, then stylisation, interpretation is an added extra.

- Fundamental question of how one *reads* notation.

- Notation instead delineates a range of possible practices by a process of exclusion and difference.

- No 'right' way to play a triplet, but there are some ways which would definitely be 'wrong'.
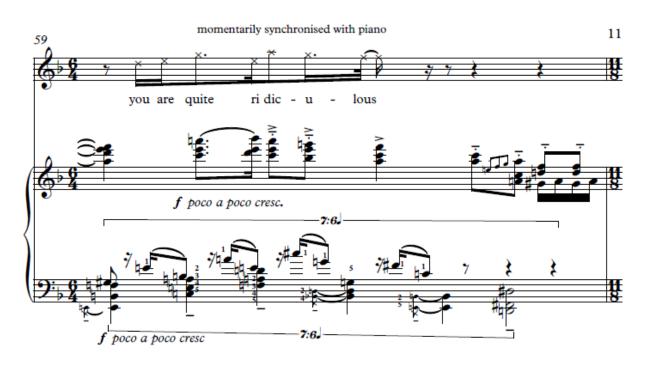
Notation

- Developed this model out of frustration with positivistic assumptions about notation and scores in existing performance cultures, and which also informed some theoretical writings, such as those of Roger Marsh or Roger Heaton, or some of the empirical musicology of Nicholas Cook and others.

- To simply 'hear what one writes' assumes some singularity of what is 'heard'. Removes the performer from the equation.

- Myopic model of performance, resembles some of Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt's polemics from the mid-1920s on the virtues of mechanical instruments.

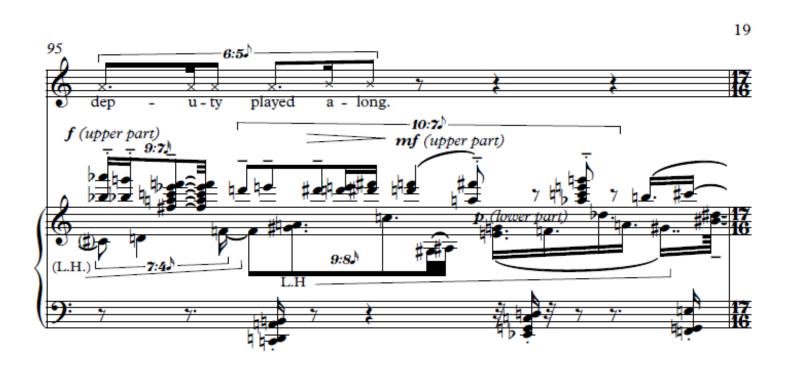# Brian Ferneyhough, *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* (1981)
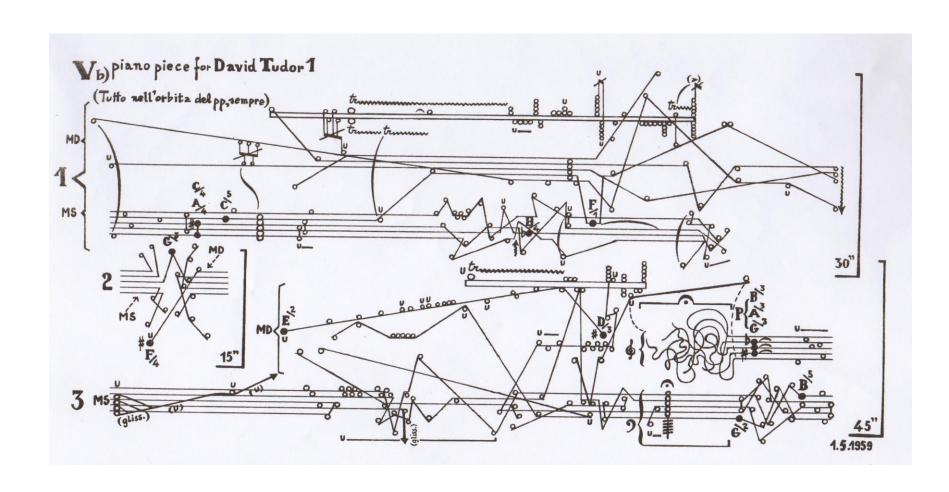
Ian Pace, *Das hat Rrrrasss* (2018)

Ian Pace, *Das hat Rrrrasss* (2018)

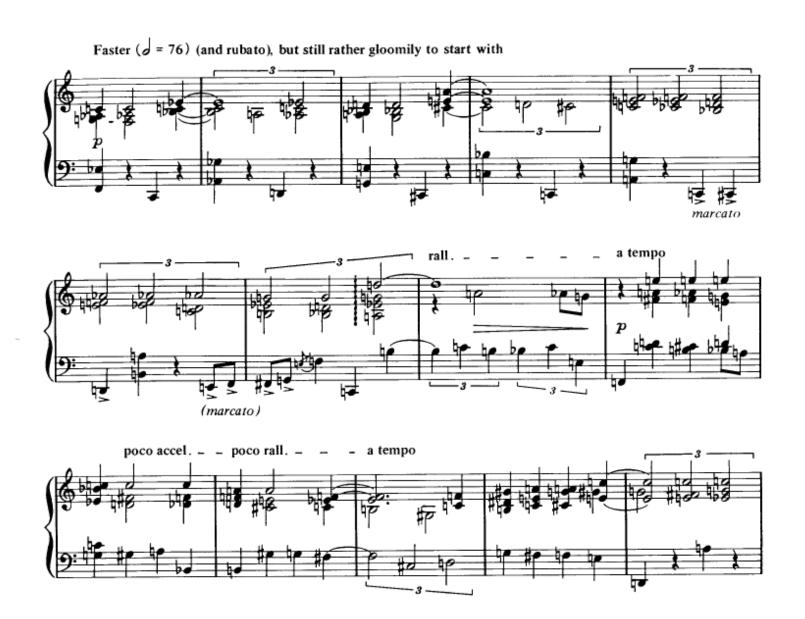# Sylvano Bussotti, *Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1959)

Sylvano Bussotti, *Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor* (1959)

Michael Finnissy, 'A foggy day in London town'

Michael Finnissy, 'Embraceable you'

Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

- Fragmentation, non-reconciliation, opposition to nineteenth-century ideals of organicism and totality.

Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

- Fragmentation, non-reconciliation, opposition to nineteenth-century ideals of organicism and totality.

- Avoiding *Hauptstimme*, downplaying Gershwin melodies. Also not playing rhythmic disjunctions as written-out *rubati*.

Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

- Fragmentation, non-reconciliation, opposition to nineteenth-century ideals of organicism and totality.

- Avoiding *Hauptstimme*, downplaying Gershwin melodies. Also not playing rhythmic disjunctions as written-out *rubati*.

- Addition of 'Performance Note'.

Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

- Fragmentation, non-reconciliation, opposition to nineteenth-century ideals of organicism and totality.

- Avoiding *Hauptstimme*, downplaying Gershwin melodies. Also not playing rhythmic disjunctions as written-out *rubati*.

- Addition of 'Performance Note'.

- Dissatisfaction: flat and monochrome textures; didacticism of rhythms; overly bleak; music becomes a dogmatic aesthetic-political statement.

Finnissy, Gershwin Arrangements – considerations and approaches

- Attempting to assert Finnissy's modernity, in the face of some scepticism about his then-later work (by the mid-1990s).

- Fragmentation, non-reconciliation, opposition to nineteenth-century ideals of organicism and totality.

- Avoiding *Hauptstimme*, downplaying Gershwin melodies. Also not playing rhythmic disjunctions as written-out *rubati*.

- Addition of 'Performance Note'.

- Dissatisfaction: flat and monochrome textures; didacticism of rhythms; overly bleak; music becomes a dogmatic aesthetic-political statement.

- Anti-romanticism: related to experiences at Chetham's School of Music, and its association with toxic, charismatic and abusive teachers. Able to gain more measured view after campaigning on abuse there.