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Ian Pace, 'Autoethnography as Critically Engaged Practice: Methodological Concerns and Case Studies relating to Notation, Genre, and Aesthetic'

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Abstract

In this paper, I will outline my own definitions and understandings of autoethnography for musicians, involving above all an eschewal of *method*, in the sense of any prescribed strategy (though without precluding the flexible adoption of techniques which have an existing provenance), as a defining factor, in favour of this being a critical *attitude* taken by artistic researchers towards their own practice and those of others. I present this in the context of a somewhat sceptical attitude towards some varieties of ethnography in general, mentioning briefly some of its limitations and some of the more exalted claims made by its proponents. Included within this is a brief consideration of the conflicting claims placed upon artistic researchers who also compete within cultural economies external to academia.

In the second half of the paper, I relate these perspectives to case studies from my own work, with demonstrations at the piano, including of music of Debussy, Ives, Feldman and Finnissy. I elaborate on a model of musical notation (first set out in a 2009 article published in the Orpheus Institute collection *Unfolding Time*) and the role of the score (in distinction to the work-concept) as negation of habit and stimulus for interpretation as creative practice. I also consider briefly the role of musical genre for performers of contemporary music, as an unavoidable component of performing and listening, and discuss how one might navigate both generic context and the mediating actions of individual composers between such a context and the score encountered by the performer, drawing upon a forthcoming article on Finnissy. Finally, I draw these concerns together to draw some conclusions about the often quite fundamentally aesthetic nature of artistic research questions.

Paper

Ethnography and Autoethnography

At the most basic level, *Ethnography* is the study of peoples and their 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. Autoethnography is sometimes conceived primarily as a *method*, which in a musical context can take the form of practice or rehearsal diaries, narrative accounts of collaborations with other musicians, blow-by-blow accounts of the compositional process, and so on.

Ethnography more generally is obviously a common strategy employed by ethnomusicologists, whether or not working on musical traditions and cultures from outside the Western world. Classic ethnographies emerged from a long process of immersion within the cultural environment being investigated by the ethnographer, and then very detailed analysis of the data gleaned in the process. Nowadays I believe the term has become somewhat degraded, and is used to denote practically any type of

research which entails sourcing data from living participants with whom the researcher has direct contact.

I wish to quote the view of one senior musicologist (sourced anonymously) on some 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.[1]

It is understandable that Western ethnomusicologists and anthropologists might feel a post-colonial reticence about engaging critically with non-Western music and culture. But when this attitude is carried over into the study of Western art music, it leads to a type of musicology-on-the-cheap, padded out with texts or documentaries with quotations, often from not very articulate participants, without much commentary, critique or analysis. And a similar situation can occur with auto-ethnography. The historian Richard J. Evans has argued that there is a difference between being a *historian* and a *chronicler*, and has even gone so far as to suggest some of the work of the late Martin Gilbert (one of his own teachers) might fall into the latter category.[2] I would suggest a similar divide separates some of the work in these domains from critical scholarship.

The term *autoethnography* began to gain currency in the 1970s, in prominent writings such as a 1975 anthropological article by Karl G. Heider about the people of the Grand Valley Dani of Irian Jaya, Indonesia,[3] in which he asked a range of school children 'What do people do?', and a 1979 article entitled 'Auto-Ethnography' by David M. Hayano.[4] Heider used 'auto' to mean *autochthonous* and also *automatic*, to refer to the fact that the account was from Dani inhabitants themselves, and the means of eliciting the data was routine, while Hayano's definition (which he references back to a 1966 seminar by Sir Raymond Firth) referred to anthropologists studying a group of people of which they are themselves a part, and associated methodology and theory. Around the same time, however Stanley Brandes wrote of 'ethnographic autobiography', which simply meant a first-person narrative.[5]

By 1995 John Van Maanen could still delineate four categories of ethnography which he differentiated from 'ethnographic realism':

1. Confessional ethnographies

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[1] Cited in Ian Pace, 'Ethnographically sourced experience of Ethnomusicology – a further response to the debate' (August 14, 2016), at https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2016/08/14/ethnographically-sourced-experiences-of-ethnomusicology-a-further-response-to-the-debate/ .

[2] In a talk entitled 'Meet the historian' at Australian National University, July 25, 2015, online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMmtZVRSAHM (accessed September 5, 2016).

[3] Karl G. Heider, 'What Do People Do? Dani Auto-Ethnography', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 31/1 (Spring 1975), pp. 3-17.

[4] David M. Hayano, 'Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects', *Human Organization* 38/1 (Spring 1979), pp. 99-104.

[5] Stanley Brandes, 'Ethnographic autobiographies in American Anthropology', *Central Issues in Anthropology* 3/1-2 (1979), pp. 1-15.

2. Dramatic ethnography
3. Critical Ethnographies
4. Self- or Auto-ethnographies

The last of these maintained the definition of Hayano, simply delineating a type of writing when the ethnographer is a native.[6] But it was Brandes' conception which would become more influential. It was echoed in 1989 by Norman Denzin, who called auto-ethnography 'an ethnographic statement which writes the ethnographer into the text in an autobiographical manner'.[7]

In 1996, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Boechner published for the first time their edited collection *Composing Ethnography*,[8] which featured a wide range of highly subjective writings by the various authors all dealing with themselves and their own lives. Some of these were presented in 'experimental' formats, right down to the introduction, written in the form of a scripted dialogue (including stage directions, relating amongst other things to the behaviour of two dogs) between the two editors. Nonetheless, this book and many which followed in its wake never provided any sort of coherent or rigorous definition of the term autoethnography, only some very impressionistic statements about 'divided selves longing for a sense of place and stability in the fragments and discontinuities of modernity' and the like.[9] The following year, Deborah Reed-Danahay did attempt a stronger definition and traced earlier ones, presenting her own as 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context', which 'is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography'.[10] But this definition is excessively broad, only excludes narratives that do *not* place the self in such a context, and could account for any amount of 'life-writing', however narcissistic. The same year, Ellis published an essay on 'evocative autoethnography',[11] which had a much greater influence. Ellis tempted fate and unflattering comparisons by herself evoking the Tolstoy's tale 'The Death of Ivan Ilych' as an inspiration. By this stage and since, a good deal of autoethnographic writing is permeated by appeals to emotivity, intense subjectivity, and assumptions of value through first person authenticity, sometimes resulting in quite narcissistic forms of creative writing, of which there are many examples.

Critics of this sort of work include Leon Anderson, who without directly attacking the 'evocative or emotional autoethnography' of Ellis et al, distinguished this from 'analytic autoethnography', which he defined as:

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[6] John Van Maanen, 'An End to Innocence: The Ethnography of Ethnography', in Van Mannen (ed.), *Representation in Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks, CA, London and New Delhi: Sage, 1995), pp. 8-9; cited in Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, 'Introduction', in Reed-Danahay (ed.), *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), p. 5.

[7] Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Biography* (Newbury Park, London and New Delhi: Sage, 1989), p. 34.

[8] Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Boechner (eds.), *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (Walnut Creek, CA, London and New Delhi: AltaMira Press, 1996)).

[9] Mark Neumann, 'Collecting Ourselves at the End of the Century', in Ellis and Boechner, *Composing Ethnography*, pp. 173-4.

[10] Deborah Reed-Danahay, 'Introduction', in *Auto/Ethnography*, pp. 4-9 (quote p. 9).

[11] Carolyn Ellis, 'Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Emotionally about our Lives', in William G. Tierney and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Representation and the Text: Re-Framing the Narrative Voice* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 115-42.

…ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.[12]

The key features of this were to be:

(1) complete member researcher (CMR) status, (2) analytic reflexivity, (3) narrative visibility of the researcher's self, (4) dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (5) commitment to theoretical analysis.[13]

Before researching the definitions, I already arrived at three species of work which can all be fairly called autoethnography. The first is the classic definition as outlined by Hayano and Reed-Danahay, the second Ellis's relating to 'evocative autoethnography' and lots of subsequent work of this type, the third a broader category which would include Anderson's 'analytic autoethnography'.

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

It is worth noting that in a musical context, categories 2 and 3 need not necessarily involve practice, as the term is conventionally understood. They could relate to listening and listening experiences (and in this sense could constitute a form of musical analysis), could relate to a musician's experiences dealing with institutions to which they are beholden in various ways, or even could relate to a musician's experiences of domestic life, struggles with alcoholism, estrangement from family, relatives or partner, issues finding affordable housing in which they can practice, and so on. These latter forms of autoethnography absolutely have the potential to be high-level research, though I believe they stand on the border of what might be considered *musicology*. They would be undertaken by a musician, but do not necessarily involve the direct application of music-specific skills, though also could not be done by someone who does not have at least some such skills, in order for them to be a musician, by definition. On the other hand, there is no particular reason to think that such research requires any background in wider musicology.

The third category is the most appropriate for my own work, or at least the verbal articulation I will provide of some activities. I might have used the term *critical autoethnography*, were it not for the fact that the term has already been by Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe for the collection of essays they edited, *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), in which it has more concrete political meanings. So I think in many ways a wordy title like *self-critical practice and critical writing on practice* may be the best I can do.

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[12] Leon Anderson, 'Analytic Autoethnography' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35/4 (August 2006), p. 375.
[13] Ibid. p. 378.

Thus, I offer as a definition of scholarly autoethnography *critical self-reflection and contextualisation of one's own practices and experiences.* It can involve data collected in various ways: through diaries, interviews, sketches, recordings, videos, questionnaires, e-mails, phone texts or social media interactions. The results of processing such data can be presented as traditional scholarly articles, web publications, CD- or DVD-ROMs or even new artistic creations.

But I believe the major mistake frequently made is to the simple employment of such techniques of data collection, or even presentation of outputs in certain form, as being a sufficient condition for something to be considered autoethnography. The inclusion of footnotes is far from a sufficient condition for an article to be considered scholarly, nor should method be fetishized for autoethnography. At stake is not simply the question of how data is collected or presented, but the attitudes and approaches employed to analysing and contextualising it. By asking critical research questions about one's experiences, and examining their relationship to wider issues and contexts, one can produce research with relevance and significance for others. This corresponds with the model of artistic research by Bart Vanhecke in the volume *Artistic Experimentation in Music*, edited by Darla Crispin and Bob Gilmore –as *critically self-reflexive practice*.[14] This involves an attitude towards one's practice rather than any prescribed method for investigating it.

It could be asked whether this is not what most decent practitioners do already, in the course of producing their work, they reflect upon it, assess its successes and failures and modify it accordingly, consider its relationship to other work? I believe this is the case, except perhaps for some jobbing session musicians who have a system in place which can be pursued without too much thought or reflection. Performers of notated music continuously make detailed and intricate decisions on questions of tempo and its flexibility, rhythmic stylisation and elasticity, articulation, accentuation, voicing, balance, synchronisation and much else – the questions for performers of non-notated music are no less intricate even if the relationship between preparation and performance can differ. I do not see why these are different to other types of research questions, or those asked by composers.

Personally, I do not generally keep practice diaries or the like. I did try doing so when learning one piece a few years ago, but found what I wrote to be pretty unremarkable, so stopped after a while. Much of it I could easily reconstruct without requiring a diary, in terms of the technical process, as my own methods are mostly quite regular and well-ingrained – one would end up reading a lot of uninteresting things like 'practised this passage at medium-tempo for 20 minutes, sped it up a little, but still have to practise it some more before I feel comfortable with it at concert speed'. Questions of interpretation are much more complex, but ongoing, in the sense that they do not stop at the point of performance. I personally can generally retrace the questions I have addressed consciously without much difficult some time after the event, and articulate the successes and failure of various provisional answers to them as enacted in performance.

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[14] Reference.

However, practitioner-scholars also compete within cultural economies external to academia, some of which may value conformity more than critical questioning and self-questioning, they can become caught between conflicting forces. I believe this is a major motivation for the production of blandly descriptive musical ethnography, autoethnography and artistic research. As I have argued in another paper and forthcoming article, 'When Ethnography becomes Hagiography', this can often take the form of simple presentation of data with minimal interpretation or critical analysis, or unremarkable findings. The following two examples of work on the 'collaborative process' (which I will keep anonymous) demonstrate these types of problems:

Within the existing literature, the collaborative practice's ability to affect the individual is regularly reflected on: nevertheless I was surprised at the length to which this particular collaboration developed my own understanding of my instrument. My excitement at this process of discovery had an element of the childlike to it as I playfully explored new aspects of contemporary technique. Firstly, this process drastically reduced the distance between the composer and the instrument: included in my exploration, X was able to join in my excitement and able to include the results of this in the piece. Secondly, there was an increased feeling of intimacy with the work. I was invested in the project in an even more committed way, as it had expanded my own understanding. The details of this process will be further explained and explored below.[15]

Music notation (whether in the score of the sketches) was the principal field of exchange and negotiation. In any working session, members of the quartet had to ensure that they grasped the intention behind Y's demanding writing, could track potential errors or problems in notation, and at the same time could find a fingering that would enable them to deliver an acceptable performance on the fly. Conversely, in the immediacy of hearing the musicians' sonic production, Y had to judge the degree to which it matched her intentions, and to decide whether any shortcomings either were a temporary consequence of the sight-reading process or stemmed from a more serious misunderstanding that needed her intervention. Every plenary session therefore displayed its fair share of mutual analysis through reading and listening, sometimes leading to substantial interactions and verbalizations that would break the forward momentum of the rehearsal and call for decision-making.[16]

So the performers played from the score, sometimes sight-reading, and Y had to work out whether they couldn't quite play it yet, or were making other mistakes. She listened to them and they talked during the course of rehearsals. There is no questioning of the major assumption that the role of the performer is primarily to realise the 'composer's intention'.

Much of such work focuses on pragmatic questions, or simply relating what has happened, rather than necessarily asking whether it might have been otherwise. Many practitioner-scholars collaborate with those with whom they have an obvious interest in maintaining good relations, which can lead to a degree of self-censorship when documenting collaboration. One rarely reads in detail about fraught or unpleasant moments in collaboration, yet these can often be far from uncommon. The situation is

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[15] Heather Roche, 'Dialogue and Collaboration in the Creation of New Works for Clarinet' (PhD dissertation: University of Huddersfield, 2011), pp. 58-9.

[16] Nicolas Donin, 'Domesticating gesture. The collaborative creative process of Florence Baschet's *Streicherkreis* for 'augmented' string quartet (2006-08)', in Eric F. Clarke and Mark Doffman (eds.), *Distributed Creativity: Collaboration and Improvisation in Contemporary Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 74.

similar to that with a scholar collaborating with an external institution, perhaps a commercial one towards which they are beholden for research prestige or even funding. At the same time, when practitioners themselves have an image and reputation to project outside of academia, this could compromise the academic outputs they present, making them more about self-promotion than critical self-examination (and I am sure I am no exception in this respect). I do believe that further consideration of scholarly independence is required in this context.

In the remainder of this paper, I wish to expand upon a few examples of how my own autoethnographic experiences have led me to the development of wider theoretical models which relate to performance and can hopefully be of use to others as well as myself.

Notation

In an article published in 2009 in the Orpheus Institution collection *Unfolding Time*, I outlined what I described as a structuralist model of notation.[17] In essence, this was an attempt on my part to reject what I characterise as a 'positivistic' model of notation which I felt to be prevalent in a good deal of thinking and writing on the subject. By the positivistic model, the score specifies an essentially singular type of result, with stylised rhythms, rubato, tempo modifications, phrasing, etc., as a type of added extra on top of this. This model continues to inform a good deal of empirical musicology, not least work which assesses performances of rhythmically detailed contemporary music by measurements of the positioning of attacks, to be gauged against a particular quantifiable view of what the notation supposedly tells the performer to do.[18]

In contrast to this, I argued that notation does not imply a singular result, especially with respect to rhythm. A metronomically even interpretation of a periodic rhythm is just one of many ways of *reading* that rhythm, which at least historically may have had limited utility. Some of you may be familiar with the views of fortepianist Malcolm Bilson on *reading* a historical score, which have certainly informed this model I am presenting. Many forms of musical notation have been interpreted in a variety of stylised ways, which can very difficult to codify in a failsafe manner, as those who have attempted to reconstruct historical performance styles simply by following a set of 'rules' will know. Even given a basic stylistic non-metronomic basic stylistic framework, there is often huge scope for individual variation. A similar model can be applied to phrasing, voicing, pedalling, employment and type of vibrato, and most other musical parameters.

I theorised this model in a manner influenced by structuralist and post-structuralist models of language: the symbols of musical notation do not imply singular sounding results, but rather delineate a range of possible practices on the part of the interpreter. However, this is not simply some free-for-all, but rather a range of correspondences which are *bounded* by the notation. Just because the notation can imply multiple possibilities does not mean it can mean anything; instead the delineation works by

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[17] 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. 151-92.
[18] Examples: Roger Marsh and others on Ferneyhough. Nicholas Cook's comments in *Beyond the Score*.

means of *excluding* some interpretations, and thus defining the range of possible results in terms of *difference*. While there is no obvious answer to what a 'correct' way might be to play a notated triplet, there are some things which clearly lay beyond the boundaries of what could be reasonably considered as such. By indicating three triplet quavers, the notation negates the possibility of, say, a metronomic dotted crotchet followed by two quavers, or a clear syncopated rhythm. Precisely where the boundaries are to be drawn is not always easy to discern (there are, for example, accounts of Chopin playing music in three such that some believed it to be in four), but they do exist. Exactly where, within a spectrum from black to white, one decides black ends and grey begins, or grey ends and white begins, will always be a subjective decision, but one can fairly say that jet black or other hues nearby could never be classified as white. On a non-discretely-tuned instrument, there might be various ways of tuning an A-flat, depending upon the tuning system used, its harmonic function, the possibilities of expressive notation, and so on, but at some point it would cease to be a plausible A-flat and become categorizable as a G or A, or possible G quarter-sharp or A quarter-flat.

If I emphasise rhythm, it is because I arrived at this model as the result of long-term attempt to theorise the performance of rhythm in so-called 'complex' music characterised by a large degree of notated detail in this respect. Here what already existed, as for example in the writings of Roger Marsh or Roger Heaton, was heavily reliant upon the positivistic model. Heaton described as 'faking' a common practice, which I myself continue to use especially in music involving other players. This involves indicating where the positions of beats in an extended passage with complex rhythms. But the result is only a 'fake' if contrasted with a supposedly 'authentic' alternative, presumably involving an attempt to measure where each attack should come, or perhaps as others have advocated, have a computer or other mechanical device execute it, with a human player simply trying to best approximate the aural result. Similarly, a common demand made by some freelance performers of composers that they 'hear what they write' also assumes some singularity of what the composers are supposed to 'hear' in each case.

I find this attitude myopic. It renders the performer as little more than a second-best machine, and denies many possibilities of flexibility, spontaneity and creativity of interpretation. Ultimately, I cannot see much of a positive role for human performers when such a model is maintained, and as such it appears to me emblematic of the jaded and disenchanted freelance performance culture which I encountered from the beginning of my career, especially amongst British musicians. In the mid-1920s a young Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt published a range of polemics advocating in a somewhat fundamentalist manner the replacement of human performers with machines so as to eliminate human imperfection, vulnerability and so on. I do not personally see these necessarily as negative qualities by any means, and never accepted that, as some might maintain, the best sort of performer is one who suppresses all such things – which is not by any means to say that one should not learn control, self-discipline, and means of channelling these non-machinic human qualities to best effect.

But let me give a relatively straightforward example of how I would apply this notational model to a passage from Brian Ferneyhough's piano piece *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*. Look at the gestures on both staves encompassed by the first crotchet or

quarter-note duration. The dynamic indication is *ffff* accompanied by *tutta la forza*, whilst all the notes of chords in either hand or accented except for the A5/E-flat6 dyad in the right hand, which is also the conclusion of a slur, and the two grace notes, one of which is indicated *sffz* instead. Because this is written for a discretely-tuned instrument, the pitches are unambiguous and do indeed indicate a singular result (which is why a 'wrong note' is a clearly discernible category on the piano). The dynamics however certainly exclude any approaches which would not seem to involve the performer using a degree of physical force somewhere in the upper limits – though the indication of *fffff* on the following system certainly implies some flexibility in what *tutta la forza* means. Between the first three right hand chords, there are plethora of relative dynamics possible, all very loud, but with varying differences between them – I would question whether there is an easy way of discerning whether they are played at a common dynamic because of how the aural result is conditioned by harmony, tessitura, register and so on. It would not be unreasonable to treat the G-flat7/B-flat7 as a peak of a phrase, from which the next chords descend, or to stress to the maximum the initial F#6/G7, not least so it sounds clearly above the bass with which it coincides. Another approach would be to treat the final right hand G4/C#5/F#5 as the most forceful, to avoid a sense of any slacking of dynamic as the chord sequence descends and also give an impetus for the following right hand diminuendo. The A5/E-flat6 dyad is certainly *not* indicated at quite as forceful a dynamic as the other chords, but the precise way of playing this can take various forms.

If one looks at the rhythms, within a group of five quintuplet semiquavers in the right hand, there are two semiquavers, then four dotted demisemiquavers, also with the G#3/A6 grace note breaking up the latter group, whilst the beaming does not simply mirror the grouping of durations, instead separating two groups divided by that grace

note. I believe there are numerous ways of playing this rhythm, though I am sure this result is definitely excluded by the notation.

[Play with RH as two semiquavers followed by four demis.]

Even worse would be.

[Play same with two hands synchronised]

The notation indicates much about the *relative* durations: the four dotted demisemiquaver chords in the right hand must be shorter than the first two semiquavers, but within certain limits, not like these two examples, where they are simply double the tempo. But they can be played with various nuances of exact duration to account for the beaming or the grace note, or for that matter as a response to some of the felicities of live performance. The 7:4 semiquavers in the left hand must not be the same speed as the right hand dyads, while the final triplet group should have some palpable rhythmic relation to these. As ever, I could not say what an 'accurate' way of playing these rhythms would be in a singular manner, but I can definitely identifies ways which are clearly 'inaccurate'.

This may not be one of the most complex examples, but the principle can be applied to passages with a greater degree of notated detail, as I have done with the opening of Ferneyhough's *Opus Contra Naturam*, which features four levels of nested tuplet groups. The principle is the same: discovering a space for interpretation by excluding more familiar or habituated responses which the notation negates.

When I first started learning *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*, when I was a student in New York City, I did try calculating exact durations for some sections, and even time points, but quickly abandoned this approach. For one thing, the results were just numbers, with no wider musical sense, and in the circumstances of live performance, it was hard to see how any performer would be likely to be able to render them into sound. And I came gradually to see how this was to neglect the question of *why* the composer has chosen to notate in this manner. Ferneyhough has been clear in interview about how notation is a way of channelling the performer away from more habituated practices, especially those established at conservatory level. I see no reason to dispute Ferneyhough's model here, and it provided part of the foundations for my own. Ultimately, this model of notation provides a way of making such music *playable* without disregarding its nuances.

In a piece of my own, *Das hat Rrrrasss* for speaker and piano, which I premiered with Alwynne Pritchard on Tuesday, there are some polyrhythms here which might seem challenging to perform, but I don't believe they necessarily are. The 16:11 tuplet in the left hand of bar 60 is simply a way to contain the pair of anacruses and tremolo chords within the allocated space, relative to a right hand which should be played quite steadily (as I indicate in the score). All that really matters is that the two halves of the bar for the left hand are roughly equal in duration, and that the attacks occur around the positions indicated, so as not to coincide with those in the right hand.

Similar principles apply to a somewhat more complex passage like that in bar 95.

As I indicated before, my approach to notation grew in part from disillusionment with the axiomatic strictures which I found operative within a performance culture which I inhabited. Adhering to such strictures was seen as a badge of membership within the realms of 'professional' performers. To question them would only attract dismissal or

even ridicule, not to mention disparaging charges of over-intellectualism. But the positivistic model never really explained how two players could play what they thought of as 'just the notes' or 'just what is written', yet the results would be very different. The only performance parameter in which some degree of latitude was acknowledged was timbre, so that differences could be attributed almost exclusively to a performer's 'individual sound'.

At the same time, I also encountered a different set of attitudes within a conservative critical culture around new music performance in the UK. This tended to assign most positive value to those performances which exhibited normative stylistic practices such as were generally associated with more mainstream repertoire. On the piano, these included clear hierarchies of parts in contrapuntal textures, top-voicing of chords, the avoidance of staccato playing with a too-clear attack, a further avoidance of extremely loud or extremely quiet dynamics, and especially of the risks associated with splitting notes or their not sounding in this regions, continuity of line and minimal fragmentation, and so on. At one point, frustration with these homogenising attitudes, and a lack of interest in more strongly individuated musical possibilities from either composers or performers, led me towards a more belligerent approach to interpretation which could consciously try and avoid much such practices. Indeed, even back in 2009, the examples I give of contemporary repertoire are framed in a somewhat more dogmatic fashion than that I would advocate today. But I continue to stand by the essentials of the notational model I presented then. It does not exclude more traditionally-rooted approaches to interpretation by any means, but nor does it disregard the particularities of each notated score. It provides an alternative, perhaps even a sublation, of the dichotomy between 'playing something like a real piece of music', or 'just playing the notes' against which I fought for some years as a performer. It can also be applied to very different scores including those in graphic or text form. Scores like the following, from Sylvano Bussotti's *Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor*, certainly involve a high degree of performer input as affects the result, but they can be defined in terms of how they demarcate a range of possibilities much more specifically than any type of wholly free improvisation.
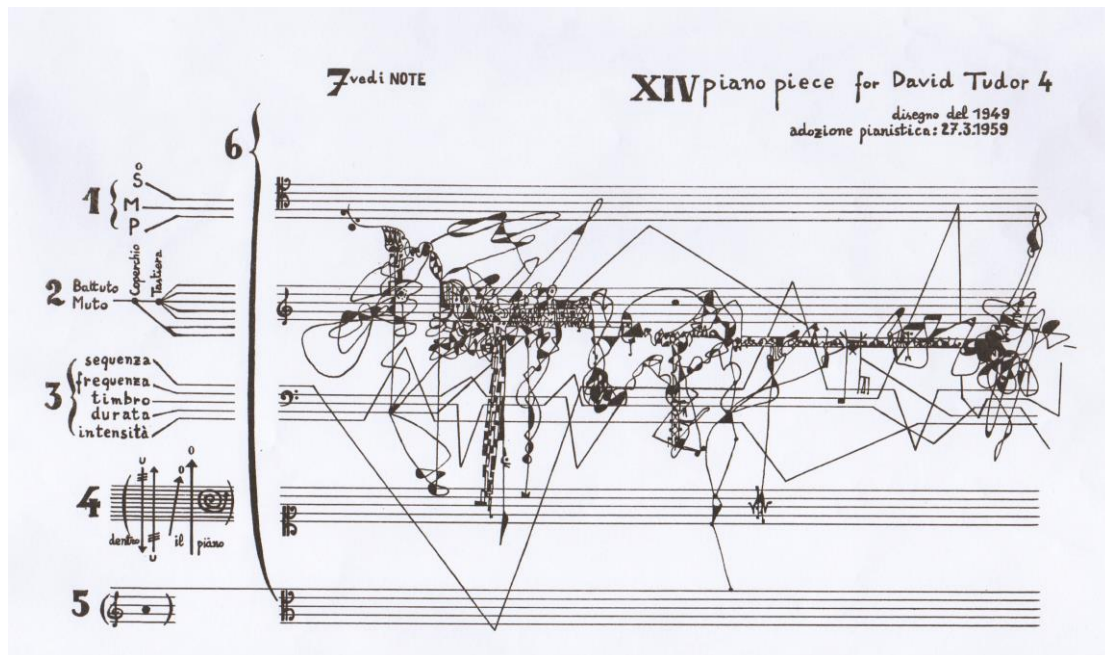
Genre

A related issue, which I will deal with much more briefly, has to do with genre in new music. My thoughts on this have come in part from reading a good deal of literature on the subject in musical and other artistic contexts, from Carl Dahlhaus, Jim Samson, Jeffrey Kallberg, Laurence Dreyfus, Eric Drott, Jason Toynbee, Allan Moore, Benedetto Croce, Theodor Adorno, Hans Robert Jauss, Heather Dubrow, John Frow, Rick Altman and others. To summarise, I find the views of Drott, Toynbee and to some extent Dahlhaus problematic, tend to gravitate more towards Adorno's model of of a necessary dialectic between genre and particularity, whilst also recognising social dimensions of the 'generic contract' identified by Jauss between composer and listener (which I would also extend to performers) and developed by Samson and Kallberg. Furthermore, the distinction between genre and *style*, a dichotomy explored by Moore, I view on two levels: firstly, style entails a range of music-immanent attributes observable at a localised level as distinct to *structural* features, while genre can relate to both of these categories. Secondly, style and structure become genre when they can be observed over a large body of works or performances with a degree of consistency.

But my thinking about genre, especially in contemporary music, has equally come from experience of navigating, as a performer, the types of cultural pressures described above. Nowhere is this more obvious than with the music of Michael Finnissy, with which I am closely associated. The issue of generic contracts does arise even with the relatively small communities of listeners – at least small compared to many of those for more mainstream classical, let alone popular, music - which exist for Finnissy's music and that of others. One group of Finnissy acolytes see him as the spiritual heir to the likes of Charles Valentin Alkan, Ferruccio Busoni, Leopold Godowsky, Percy Grainger, Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji; many of these listeners have only a limited interest in, or are even estranged from, the more hard-line varieties of post-1945 musical modernism. At the same time, parts of a community drawn to the

latter have sometimes championed Finnissy (generally the earlier rather than more allusion-rich later works), but for quite different reasons. Both have their expectations for performers; personally I have some sympathies with both camps but would not wholly identify with either. Finnissy's music could be said to fulfil both generic contracts in part, but never completely fulfil either. This is a common situation as Kallberg has argued: throughout history, deviations from generic norms and expectations have played a major role in the communicative process. Music – and performance – has challenged listeners in many ways, though not necessarily in a manner which would have made the work incomprehensible in terms of the generic contracts.

In other talks, I have often spoken about Finnissy's *Gershwin Arrangements* in this context, so I will use a different example here. Here are two passages from the third of his *Strauss-Walzer*, the first versions of which constitute some of his earlier 'transcriptions'. First I will show you some of how he derives his materials from the Strauss waltz in question, *Geschichten aus dem Wiener-Wald*:

Johann Strauss II, *Geschichten aus dem Wiener-Wald*, op. 325.
From Introduction

Second Waltz

Michael Finnissy, *Strauss-Walzer. 3. Geschichte aus dem Wienerwald*

Further derivations
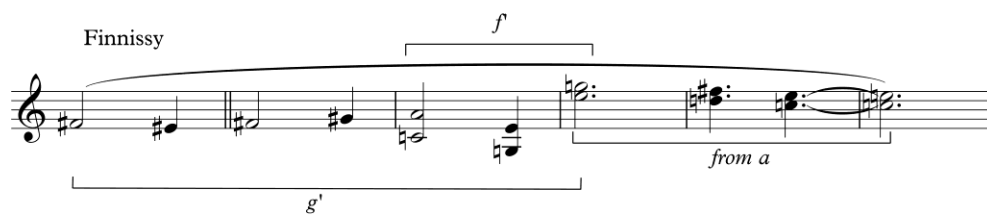
Now here are sections from Finnissy's final piece:

Sostenuto

And

And
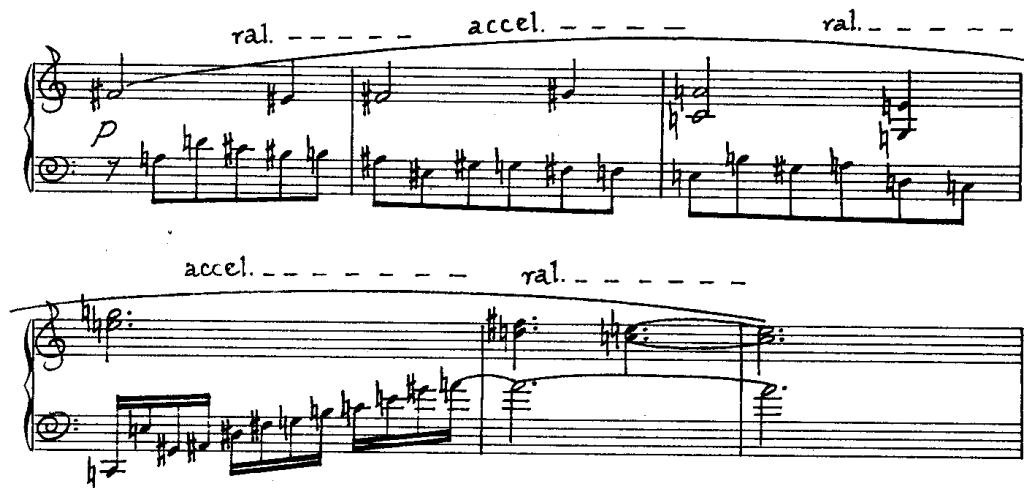
In the last case I have deliberately given the preceding few bars, a time of climax of elaboration within this piece, in order to demonstrate how much the section beginning on the right hand F# differs from these.

For the opening of the piece, generic aspects of performance practice of Johann Strauss II would include an expectation of a strong holding back on the opening figure and parallel passages, then a picking up of the tempo the following bars. To some extent the amount of ostentatious detail in the second and four bars already works this into the texture, but knowledge of the genre can help one to 'locate' the piece as such, without denying its deeply individual qualities. In the second example, a knowledge of the types of stylised rhythms common in performance of this piece, with some elongation of the second beat of a 3/4 bar and concomitant shortening of the first and third, can help to differentiate the two parts in Finnissy's version.

Yet in the last example, I would not necessarily attempt to mimic the rather jaunty qualities associated with Strauss's original waltz in this sudden shift to a much sparser and somewhat desolate form of writing, which sets the previous bars into relief. Rather, I am guided by Finnissy's addition of a cello-like lower part, its own harmonic direction, and the indicated tempo modifications. This is a case where, to my mind, Finnissy's mediation between the original source and his final score would be the primary stylistic motivator rather than the generic qualities of the former.

This is a fundamental question not only for music like this employing explicit allusions, but other works which interact with known genres – in which category I would place a good deal of music. Another piece of Finnissy, *Snowdrift*, contains streams of high grace notes which might imply some sort of quasi-impressionistic 'snowscape' because of the title, yet can equally be related to, say, the comparable passages at the end of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück IX*, which are indicated by the composer to be played in a highly varied and uneven fashion. Here one is faced not simply with questions of possible musical representation, but also generic conventions for such representations (there is no necessary reason why the Stockhausen might not be conceptualised in terms of something to do with snow, if one is inclined to think of such music in evocative rather primarily abstract terms).
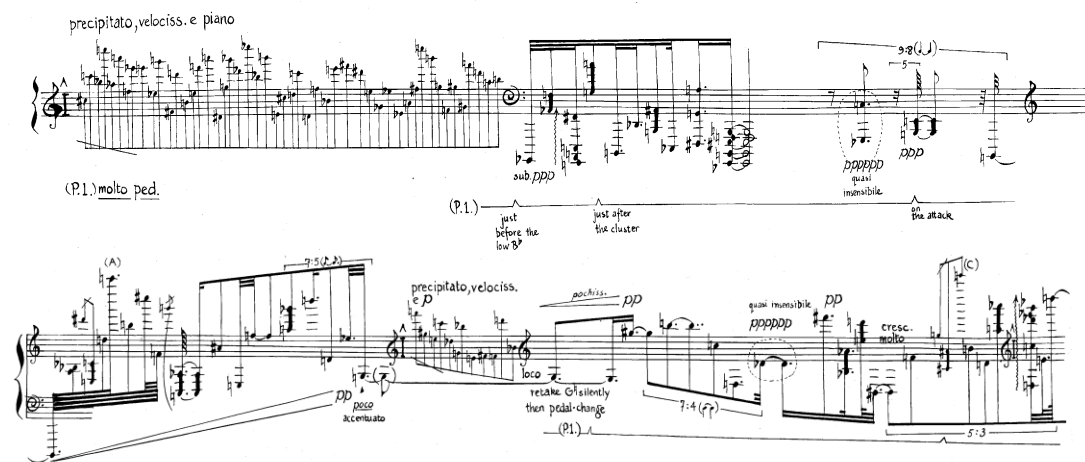
Aesthetics

Now *Snowdrift* is a work about which I have been writing recently as part of an article exploring Finnissy's relationship to cinematic traditions and their associated aesthetics. Many of the properties of and interactions between types of materials can be conceptualised in terms of montage, zooms, shifts of focus, superimpositions, imperfections of a film and so on. To be sure, such an approach has its limitations in terms of explanation of more intricate harmonic or rhythmic factors. Furthermore, as one critic of writers exploring 'cinematic analogies' in music, Scott D. Paulin, has pointed out, many such analogies are almost exclusively rooted in the theories of Sergei Eisenstein and his followers, stressing discontinuity and transitions, and cinema abounding in these, rather than alternative priorities, such as the longer shots and smoother transitions valued by film theorist André Bazin. Nonetheless, I continue to find them valuable for suggesting approaches to performance in the work of earlier composers including Debussy and Ives, distinct from those rooted in nineteenth-century conceptions of long continuous line or *melos*.

I have played much of Debussy's piano music since I was young, but have found it interesting to return to him in light of playing composers such as Finnissy, Salvatore Sciarrino, Giacinto Scelsi, Bussotti, Tristan Murail, Pascal Dusapin and others. This need not necessarily imply the imposition of some modernist sensibility upon older music, but simply the perception of elements there which foreshadow aspects of composition developed more extensively by later generations.

Several scholars, including Richard Langham Smith, Rebecca Leydon and Mark McFarland, have noted Debussy's comments, after Louis Feuillade's 1913 film *L'agonie de Byzance*, about renewing symphonic music through applying 'cinematographic techniques' (see below for questions of translation), and how moments of cinema had passed his mind when composing.[19] As a result, they have identified aspects of Debussy's work which can be related to cinema. Paulin in particular has been critical of this tendency, claiming that Debussy's *traitement du cinématographe* is better translated as 'cinematographic treatment', and referred to a

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[19] Claude Debussy, 'Concerts Colonne', in François Lésure and Richard Langham Smith (ed. and trans.), *Debussy on Music: The Critical Writings of the Great Composer Claude Debussy* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), p. 298.

desire on Debussy's part actually to make film rather than apply cinematic techniques to music. Some of Leydon's analogies in particular are rather far-fetched, presenting antecedent/consequent relationships as 'cross-cutting', or a transition between *pizzicato* and *arco* as a 'shot/reverse-shot'. Whether or not Debussy's intention was to mimic cinema, or whether some such techniques have a much older provenance in pre-romantic music, as I believe they do, nonetheless I still find such models can be valuable for me as stimulant for performance strategies. This example, from the seventh of Debussy's Debussy's *Préludes*, Book 2 (1911-13), '…La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune', shows a transition from a texture spanning the whole compass of the keyboard (albeit with only one note in the lower two-and-a-half octaves, though this can be accounted for through Debussy's characteristic concern with timbral balance), to a focus on dense chords within a roughly three-octave tessitura in the upper half of the instrument, combined with wide-voiced bass octaves with a fifth. But then there is a major shift in focus at the *Un peu anime* towards the central registers, accentuated by other aspects of the change of character from mysticism to playfulness. If the pianist releases the low bass sonorities at this point, a whole layer of sound evaporates, adding extra clarity to the new material, exactly analogous to either a cinematic zoom or at least shift of focus (the repeated low B-flat in the second bar of the new section becomes just a residue of the preceding section, no longer given the focus provided by the earlier voicing).

Similarly in the passage from the first movement, 'Emerson', from Ives's *Concord* Sonata shown here, there is a relatively clear distinction between an upper melodic line and an accompaniment. Nonetheless, the main lyrical theme from the movement is fragmented and reassembled with notable shifts of register. Many performances I have heard attempt to contain this material within some sense of continuous line, but I perceive instead another quasi-cinematic interplay between distinct layers. Through voicing, rhythm, and phrasing, I prefer to separate these out as if they constitute a type of musical montage, with some continuity between the strands only achieved on the second system.

Main 'Emerson' lyrical theme.

The examples from Debussy and Ives are of course purely personal interpretive decisions, which not all would necessarily favour. I mention them here as examples of how an ongoing critical reflection upon the implications of particular musical aesthetics for performance, and how such reflection can expand a repertory of interpretive possibilities.

It may seem rather excessive to frame basic interpretive decisions in terms of the grandiose concept of autoethnography. But I hope I may have convinced you that on my own part these would not necessarily have been possible without wider critical reflection on inherited performance styles and genres, or wider contextual knowledge brought to bear upon the act of performing. This is, I believe, at the heart of the autoethnographic project.