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Ian Pace, Keynote Lecture, 'Spin, Self-Promotion, Institutional Recognition and Critical Performance: Notes from the Diary of a Performer-Scholar'.

Conference on 'Beyond "Mesearch": Autoethnography, Self-Reflexivity, and Personal Experience as Academic Research in Music Studies', Institute of Musical Research, Senate House, London, 16-17 April 2018.

The concept of autoethnography has become somewhat ubiquitous amongst practitioner-scholars, meaning those whose practice either itself forms an intrinsic part of their research output, informs written outputs, or where more conventional outputs inform one's own or others' practice– research through, for or into practice respectively, to use Christopher Frayling's 1993 tripartite model. As a practitioner – a professional pianist specialising in avant-garde work – who also produced written outputs from the beginning of his pianistic career, but only entered academia at a later stage, and as such now has to interact with the research 'economy' in operation in academic institutions, I have been involved with the various questions relating to this area for a long time. Furthermore, I have elsewhere presented and written some sceptical perspectives about ethnography in general, addressing its limitations and some of the more exalted claims made by its proponents.

Central to my investigations is the question of *parity*, how practice-related outputs can be viewed as equivalent to other forms of research. Autoethnography provides one way of presenting one's practice so that it may appear closer to other types of research-based investigation. In this talk, I will consider not so much the question of whether practice, possibly accompanied by documentation, can be considered research (which I believe ultimately to be a rather banal question), but instead on what basis one might assert it to exhibit a comparable degree of significance, originality, rigour, and indeed effort and expertise, as other types of research often thought to be of high value, and the role of autoethnography in this process. Drawing upon my own work and experiences as a performer – and indeed as a performer active in academia – I argue that autoethnography, in the sense of self-investigation and documentation of practice, can indeed produce work of the highest level, but on the other hand it can equally easily produce work characterised primarily by 'spin' and self-promotion. Furthermore, when 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. This can however be a danger for other types of scholars, as was demonstrated in a recent conference on 'Writing on Contemporary Artists'. Furthermore, some forms of autoethnography can amount to a type of mystification, by clothing unremarkable findings in jargon so as to lend them a scholarly veneer, though this can also characterise other forms of ethnography. I conclude by offering a series of suggestions for ways in which autoethnography can serve as a valuable *supplement* to practice on one hand, where the practice itself is a central part of the research, but also how it can become a vital output in its own right when characterised by a high degree of critical self-engagement, so that the work can have research value for others almost independently of the quality or otherwise of the practice. I also argue that many of the problems at stake come about as a result of inflexible structures in academic institutions within which practitioner-scholars can struggle for recognition, and draw some lessons from this.

Opening

I noted in my abstract how the very concept of 'autoethnography' has become quite ubiquitous amongst practitioner-scholars, not least musical performers and composers. I am a practitioner-scholar myself and have been in various sense for around 25 years, even though I only entered academia mid-career. Some of you who know of some of my papers and contributions to debates will also know that I have been quite outspoken as a critic of the body of literature applying ethnomusicological to Western art music, in the context of a public debate at my institution in 2016, which is available to view online, as well as various follow-up statements. More recently, at the conference on 'Writing on Contemporary Artists' in October of last year, I gave another paper entitled 'When Ethnography becomes Hagiography: Uncritical Musical Perspectives', whose title should be reasonably self-explanatory. My arguments made in both of these are not idly dismissive of ethnographic approaches, but I believe one should be more acutely aware of their limitations, and the ways the concept of ethnography is frequently used to spin work which is idly bureaucratic, hagiographic, unfalsifiable or simply touristic. I will return to some of these points later.

Yet I myself am, I believe, also engaged in a particular form of *auto*-ethnographic work as a performer-scholar, and have been through much of my career. Furthermore, I have also been very publicly involved, through publications, public debates, and blogging, in the debates about practice-as-research, which I think are closely linked, if not synonymous, with those we are considering at this conference. So today I want to consider in autoethnographic fashion - my own work of various types, as a pianist, research-active historical musicologist, teacher of undergraduate and postgraduate students, activist and researcher, especially with respect to sexual and other abuse in musical education and elsewhere, piano pedagogue, occasional composer, and presence on social media, not least through blogging, and how various of these activities combine to produce research outputs. But I want to do this within a critical framework which interrogates definitions of autoethnography, considers how various of its manifestations can fall prey not only to the problems I mentioned previously, but can also become proxy for a type of way of spinning artistic work artificially, or simply serve as self-promotion, and how these various concerns relate to the issues of institutional recognition for practice-based work. I do this not to suggest that my own work or actions relating to it are somehow free from all of this – far from it – but rather in order to help delineate which subsets of such work and actions might belong in an autoethnography category with which I am comfortable.

Definitions

I had originally written here 'Over the last day, we have encountered lots of definitions of autoethnography', but I am not wholly sure if this has been the case, at least during the papers I have attended. I want to begin with a brief overview of the provenance of this term as a context for my own understanding of it.

Prominent early appearances in print were a 1975 anthropological article by Karl G. Heider about the people of the Grand Valley Dani of Irian Jaya, Indonesia,[1] in which he asked a range of school children 'What do people do?', and a 1979 article entitled 'Auto-Ethnography' by David M. Hayano.[2] 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.[3]

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

1. Confessional ethnographies
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.[4] 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'.[5] In 1996, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Boechner published for the first time their edited collection *Composing Ethnography*,[6] which featured a wide range of highly subjective writings by the various authors all dealing with themselves and their own lives. This important collection featured a variety of 'experimental' formats, right down to the introduction, which is 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. However, this book and many which followed in its wake never provided any sort of coherent or rigorous definition of the term autoethnography, other than occasional statements such as the following:

> As a term of textual analysis and as an orientation to textual production, *autoethnography* renames a familiar story of divided selves longing for a sense of place and stability in the fragments and discontinuities of modernity. Writing and reading such stories has long been a means of collecting

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

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

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

[4] 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.

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

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

ourselves, of seeking order and meaning in a world that often conspires against continuity, and of actively confronting the vague empty spaces of modem life…[7]

In 1997, Deborah Reed-Danahay did try better to define autoethnography in the first major collection of essays on the subject,[8] tracing earlier definitions, and 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’.[9] The problem with this definition is its excessive breadth, only excluding any such narrative that does *not* place the self in such a context, which could only amount to a form of hyper-solipsism. The same year, Ellis published an essay on ‘evocative autoethnography’,[10] which had a much greater influence. Ellis tempted fate more than a little by herself evoking the Tolstoy’s tale ‘The Death of Ivan Ilych’ as an inspiration (inviting comparisons of her work with this may not be something she now recalls without regret). Appeals to emotivity, intense subjectivity, and assumptions of value through first person authenticity enabled very extravagant claims to be made for this genre, as in the following from a 2005 essay by Sheryl Holman Jones:

'This is a chapter about how a personal text can move writers and readers, subjects, and objects, tellers and listeners into this space of dialogue, debate, and change. It does not speak alone.

This chapter is meant for more than one voice, for more than personal release and discovery, and for more than the pleasures of the text. It is not a text alone.

This chapter is meant for public display, for an audience. It is not meant to be left alone.

This chapter is an ensemble piece. It asks that you read it with other texts, in other contexts, and with others. It asks for a performance, one in which we might discover that our autoethnographic texts are not alone. It is a performance that asks how our personal accounts count.

[…..]

Autoethnography is….

Setting a scene, telling a story, weaying intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation: ... and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives.

Making a text present. Demanding attention and participation. Implication all involved. Refusing closure or categorisation.

Witnessing experience and testifying about power without foreclosure – of pleasure, of difference, of efficacy.

Believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts *is* to change the world.[11]

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[7] Mark Neumann, ‘Collecting Ourselves at the End of the Century’, in Ellis and Boechner, *Composing Ethnography*, pp. 173-4.
[8] Deborah Reed-Danahay (ed.), *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).
[9] Deborah Reed-Danahay, ‘Introduction’, in *Auto/Ethnography*, pp. 4-9 (quote p. 9).
[10] 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.
[11] Sheryl Holman Jones, ‘Autoethnography: making the personal political’, in Norman Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, third edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), p. 765.

Other examples:

"Your bags are light. That's good." The dark-complected, clean-shaven, 40-ish-looking man scurries around the Royal Cab to load my small, softsided bag and laptop backpack. I nod in appreciation as I talk on my cell phone, which has become my lifeline during the last week. "I am at the rental car agency in Richmond now," I explain into the phone. "The taxi is here to take me to the airport. I must go."
"Take no chances," my husband Art implores, resisting my attempt to end the conversation.
"Don't worry. I'll be careful." I hang up and get into the backseat of the cab.
"I lost my suitcase," I reply once I am settled. "When I went to visit my mother to help her return home from a stay in a nursing home, she gave me this small bag and a few of her clothes."
"It'll be easier to get on the plane," the man says, "faster without so many bags."
"Will they let me take my things on the plane?"
"I don't think so. That's what I heard on TV."
"I was on a plane Tuesday morning," I say. Noting the man's Middle Eastern appearance, I wait to see how he will respond.
"If you see a group of Muslim-looking men together, turn and head in the other direction," my husband, worried that I was flying home to Tampa alone, had instructed on the phone. "If they're getting on your flight, don't get on. Take no chances."
"I doubt I'll be the only person watching out for Muslim men," I had replied.
"I guess you're right," he acknowledged. "Just take no chances. Be a good ethnographer. Pay attention to your surroundings."
"I haven't been able to talk for 3 days," the dark-complected man says now, as he pulls into traffic. "I am so distressed. I can't sleep. Nothing."'[12]

Or:

Ready to pen the intricacies of my experience, I am lost in the complexity of the enormous task I have established for myself. With these thoughts, I marinate, masticate, meditate:
I (re)search myself
Inside and out
Above and below
I learn myself
Who I am
What I can create
I feel myself
Warm, soft skin
Textured, folded, scarred
I perform myself
For you
For me
I find myself
wanting more
Wording my desires leaves me blushing. Flushed.
Do I even possess the words to articulate the essence of my experience?
[….]
Utilizing a layered account,1 I employ asterisks to denote shifts between my poetic and academic voices (Pelias, 2004; Rambo, 2007a, 2007b; Ronai, 1992, 1995). In doing so, I hope to challenge these divisions by engaging with tantric writing-doing, my aim being to create space for both erotic stimulation and relaxation. I write erotically about writing to bring masturbation into autoethnography and to autoethnographically show and tell about masturbation.[13]

Such writing, when published in scholarly journals, was inevitably going to attract critics. One of the most eloquent of these was Leon Anderson, who without directly

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[12] Carolyn Ellis, 'Take no Chances', *Qualitative Inquiry* 8/2 (2002), p. 170.
[13] Kristen C Blinne, 'Auto(erotic)ethnography', *Sexualities* 15/8 (2012), pp. 953-5.

attacking the 'evocative or emotional autoethnography' of Ellis et al, distinguished this from 'analytic autoethnography', which he defined as:

> …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.[14]

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.[15]

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

But one might reasonably ask about the first part of this title - *self-critical practice* (for which an alternative term for performers I would suggest is *critical performance*) - 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.

Yet this common form of self-reflection is not generally recognised by many academic institutions. Neil Heyde spoke yesterday about the demands made more recently upon composers in UK academia to document their practice, but I think actually composers continue to have a relatively privileged situation there compared both to some musicologists whose works are generally required to embed self-reflexivity as a matter of course, but especially performers, some of whom are not recognised as producing 'scholarly' outputs.

In my contribution to a debate on 'Can Composition and Performance be Research?' on 25 November 2015,[16] I measured the percentages of faculty in UK universities with regular music degrees (not including conservatories). I divided these into Russell Group, Mid-Ranking, and Post-1992 institutions, the mid-ranking ones incorporating all which did not fall into the other two categories. For composers the figures were 28.1%, 28.4% and 29.6% respectively, so similar numbers, but for performers 6.6%, 8.1% and 19.7%, a very significant discrepancy. Composition, like Fine Art, has long been accepted as a respectable area of university study, but performance has been seen as a technical skill not necessarily attached to a degree. Those who teach composition will often be full faculty members in university departments, but the situation is often different for those teaching flute, trumpet, guitar, piano, voice, etc. In France, composers can be academics, not performers. The boundaries between universities and conservatories have become more blurred in the UK than most elsewhere (especially compared to the highly formalised distinction in Germany), enabling some performers to gain academic positions. But their own fortunes in these contexts can also vary there, and some will not accept performance-based outputs as grounds for permanent research-based contracts or promotion.

Regardless of how many peer-reviewed articles might have been produced, I would say Heyde has been a research-active performer throughout his career, and that could be said of many others, including myself. So I want to tell you about my first case study in this respect, which I believe constitutes a critical take on self-critical practice.

[16] See Ian Pace, 'Video of Research Seminar on Composition and Performance as Research, and some wider responses to John Croft and others' (9 December 2015), at https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2015/12/09/video-of-research-seminar-on-composition-and-performance-as-research-and-some-wider-responses-to-john-croft-and-others/ (accessed 16 April 2018).

Case Study 1

I first performed the two books of Michael Finnissy's *Gershwin Arrangements* in 1996 in London, as part of a series of the complete piano music to celebrate the composer's then 50th birthday. Two years later, I made the first complete recording of the pieces, which was released the following year by the Metier label.

Those familiar with Finnissy's large body of work based upon the music of others may know that in these works, compared in particular to his *Verdi Transcriptions* (at least those of these which had been written by that time), the original Gershwin melodies are generally clearly identifiable. Furthermore, while the accompaniments of other configurations can be highly chromatic and fragmented in comparison to functional harmony, also featuring irregularities and discontinuities of rhythm, nonetheless these are still clearly rooted in certain tonal and popular idioms – sometimes simply those used in the composer's published arrangements. As such, they have sometimes gained performers and listeners who might not be so well-disposed towards other parts of Finnissy's output, especially not what might be considered his more 'high modernist' compositions from the 1970s.

Now, at the time of presenting my 1996 series, I had encountered a lot of scepticism about Finnissy's work from 'modernist' quarters in both the UK and abroad – some of that scepticism certainly still exists – including from some other composers with whom he had been categorised as part of the 'New Complexity'. Such scepticism was fuelled in particular by various works from the early 1990s engaging with religious themes, sustained modality and plainchant, seen by some as an aesthetic retreat or even capitulation. I also recall a view expressed by one 'New Complexity' composer by which Finnissy was a type of latter-day Percy Grainger, an Anglophone eccentric composer dabbling in various areas, but without wider historical or aesthetic significance. Similar comparisons were made with the likes of Leopold Godowsky or Kaikshoru Shapurij Sorabji, again apparently an interesting contextualisation, but ultimately a strategy for portraying relative marginality, especially from a continental European perspective.

For this reason, I was at this time hostile to these musical and aesthetic contextualisations of Finnissy, and to concomitant interpretive strategies which I felt served to reinforce them. I believed strongly that Finnissy was as important an international figure as, say, Brian Ferneyhough or James Dillon or Richard Barrett, the first two of whom in particular at this stage were more readily accepted in this respect. And I felt the Gershwin Arrangements to be just as significant a component of Finnissy's output in this respect as most of his other works. But I could see at the same time that the elements of the music which inhabited more traditional or familiar idioms (or simply constituted known melodies) would for this reason generate an immediacy for listeners which might not be the case for those other more obscure aspects – an issue pertinent to any music involving clearly perceptible quotation or stylistic allusion. In these works, as in the example shown on the slide, especially the *marcato* bass line on the second system, I saw how the inner parts served not simply to decorate or enrich the melodies, but actually created new dissonances or contrapuntal conflict which either offset or otherwise transform those melodies.

Faster (𝅗𝅥 = 76) (and rubato), but still rather gloomily to start with

p

marcato

rall. a tempo

p

(marcato)

poco accel. poco rall. a tempo

Similarly, rhythmic irregularities disrupted a sense of a steady pulse, and thus created a destabilising effect, as shown in this example.

faster

5:4

I understood all of these things in terms of modernist ideas of fragmentation, non-reconcilation and non-resolution of inner force fields (to use Adornian language!), and in general resistance to what I would then have portrayed as nineteenth-century ideals of organicism and totality.

So, in performances from that time, I made a conscious decision to *downplay* the Gershwin melodies, most definitely not to play them as a type of *Hauptstimme*, but rather as just one voice within fundamentally polyphonic textures, given no priority and even played less prominently than other voices. I saw this as a way of foregrounding the elements which I thought to be most particular to Finnissy, rather than those inherited from Gershwin. Similarly, I aimed for clarity and precision of rhythmic disjunctions, in no sense playing them as certain types of written-out *rubati* which might expand or contract, but not break, a continuous line. To do this, I would avoid pre-empting the shifts in the surrounding material, so the breaks would be more abrupt. I included a 'Performance Note' with the CD attempting to explain these and other aspects of what I was trying to do, perhaps as an attempt to pre-empt and forestall potential criticism from what might be more conservatively-minded critics. I had in mind performance notes included in some historically-informed recordings.

But nowadays, I am dissatisfied with the results from then. The lack of a *Hauptstimme* in many places created flat and rather monochrome textures (something I have heard criticised in Walter Gieseking's recordings of the Bach 48 Preludes and Fugues – I am not for a moment trying to compare my work with Gieseking's, but certainly this type of playing was an influence). The disjunct rhythms – and some sharp dynamic contrasts – sounded overly didactic, while the bleaker or at least bittersweet potential of the music felt too all-encompassing. In general, a set of pieces filled with many possible expressive, emotive, evocative qualities were being appropriated in the name of a rather dogmatic aesthetic-political statement.

With hindsight, I can see there was another motivation fuelling a wider anti-romantic aesthetic of performance – perhaps subliminally - which I can relate back to my time studying at Chetham's School of Music from 1978 to 1986. This was a deeply unhappy period at what was then a toxic institution at which musical life was directed by Michael Brewer, an unctuous but somewhat charismatic individual whose affected musical 'taste' – allied to what I now see was a rather unthinking blanket tame late romantic aesthetic – served to mask and even fuel a pattern of exploitation, bullying and sexual abuse, for which he later received a six-year jail sentence. Brewer was responsible for assembling a range of other staff often in his own image, and to cut a long story short, I can see how I – in some ways unfairly – associated a whole species of 'musicality' with this corroded place, and also with associated class politics (automatic equations made between 'musicality' and individuals' class background) and so on. After several years from 2013 working as an activist and researcher looking at abusive practices in UK specialist music schools (about which I am currently writing a monograph), and other wider institutions, I was able to establish a more measured perspective upon an aesthetic world which I had vehemently rejected.

As time went on, and especially when I played the complete cycles again in my 70th birthday series of Finnissy's complete piano music in 2016-17, I did not wholly abandon these approaches, but tried to become less doctrinaire in approach, as well as

aiming for more varied forms of contrapuntal textures, with various inner parts and the Gershwin melodies weaving in and out of the foreground.

One thing I might omit, were I to record these pieces in the studio again, is the performance note. This is because I felt the problems of that recording related in part to a possible reduction of a sonic realisation to a by-product of an abstract idea, and the subsumation of many possibilities of spontaneity, elements of relative musical autonomy, to this.

As an aside to this, I have become somewhat hostile to species of musicology – including various things associated with the New Musicology – which deny the possibility of relative musical autonomy, and as such can be pursued without engagement with musical material. A parallel argument could be made for other art forms. I know of no music or other art of any value for which every single detail can be accounted for in terms of abstract concepts (I will bracket out explicit 'conceptual art' or *Konzeptuelle Musik* just to avoid this argument being too convoluted), and for which the sound or other specific property of the medium does not have some value 'in itself'. If these were the case, I wonder why one needs an art work or species of creative practice at all?

But that enables me to segue into some wider questions about practice-*as*-research. Here and elsewhere I adopt Christopher Frayling's trichotomy of research *into*, *through*, and *for* practice,[17] which map onto practice-based research, practice-as-research and research-based practice respectively. While a recording such of mine as a purely sonic document can be considered as practice-as-research, the incorporation of a performance note can draw the output into one or both of the other categories as well. Also, such a note can be viewed negatively for other reasons, such as (a) an argument which some familiar with the writings of Richard Taruskin, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Nicholas Cook on performance will probably have encountered: it renders sonic practice secondary to a type of academic discourse, and seeks to claim aesthetic privilege for reasons other than the qualities of the sounding result; (b) as a result, it tends to imply that other performances without explicitly articulated ideological foundations and/or documentation of process are somehow of lesser value (for if not, what purpose does such articulation serve?); and (c) the relationship between documentation (in the form of the performance note) and performance is didactic rather than dialectical. Of these, I find (c) the most compelling argument. (a) is less convincing because it rests upon what I believe is a false dichotomy between 'taught' and 'untaught' modes of listening, while (b) denies the possibility that such documentation can serve not so much to condition reception but facilitate further creative practice, perhaps produced by others, which seeks to build upon the achievements (or limitations or failures) of one particular sonic output, by rendering more transparent the process by which it was achieved. An argument in support of documenting and explaining/interpreting compositional process through sketch study – whereby it can be of value for other composers who want to learn from such a thing – is to me of a similar nature.

[17] Christopher Frayling, 'Research in Art and Design', Royal College of Art Research Papers 1/1 (1993–94), p. 5.

It should hopefully be clear how this all relates to wider questions of the value – or otherwise – of the autoethnographic feature of documenting artistic process in general, especially in verbal form. Some, including Robin Nelson, author of one of the most prominent pieces of writing on practice-as-research,[18] has argued for the necessity of what he calls 'complementary writing' in order for practice to be considered as such. An example of this would be the 300-word statements which, for reasons I have argued elsewhere,[19] can be assumed to be mandatory for REF submissions.

I have mixed feelings about these. I can see the value of other forms of documentation for the reasons given above, but remain concerned about implicit assumptions that one medium – writing – is more 'research-like' than others, and also by the possibility that the 300-word statements become a substitute for sustained critical listening to work, and constitute an attempt to 'spin' work, not least through the use of voguish jargon or registering of systematic or technologically-based approaches, such as might sound closer to a STEM-based model of research.

The question of whether musical composition, or performance or other practice-based output (and in other creative fields) 'are' research is to me banal, as I argued in my response to John Croft's notorious article.[20] Any type of activity which involves some investigation in order to answer questions germane to that activity can be considered a type of research. Rather I ask about the quality of such research, and when and whether it can be considered equivalent to other more well-established forms of research in arts disciplines in terms of depth of thought, rigour of application, scope, ambition, contextual sophistication, critical and self-critical awareness, and so on. To answer these questions in a comprehensive fashion as they affect either practice-as-research or autoethnography is well beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to talk briefly about some types of work in which I am more sceptical about such equivalence, so as to nuance my third category.

(Auto)-Ethnography as Petty Bureaucracy

The subtitle of this keynote, 'Notes from the Diary of a Performance-Scholar', may be misleading. I don't 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'.

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[18] Robin Nelson, 'Supervision, Documentation and Other Aspects of Praxis', in Nelson (ed.), *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 71–92.

[19] Ian Pace, 'Those 300-word statements on Practice-as-Research for the RAE/REF – origins and stipulations – 'academic butt-covering' or more problematic?' (16 December 2015), at https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2015/12/16/those-300-word-statements-on-practice-as-research-for-the-raeref-origins-and-stipulations-academic-butt-covering-or-more-problematic/ (accessed 16 April 2018).

[20] John Croft, 'Composition is not Research', *TEMPO* 69/272 (2015), pp. 6-11; Ian Pace, 'Composition and Performance can be, and often have been, Research', *TEMPO* 70/275 (2015), pp. 60-70.

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.

I do think we need to question some assumptions of value in simple documentation of process, including diaries, and especially an approach to wider ethnography which I criticised in my Surrey paper, whereby the 'ethnography' amounts primarily to data collection. Such data is then presented in unexpurgated form with often minimal interpretation or critical analysis (in distinction to many classic ethnographies), just organised into bureaucratic boxes. This can be a 'safe' option, as data collection is at least 'objective', unlike interpretation and the drawing of conclusions, which then would be assessed by others. The growth of this species of ethnography enables the production of work which seems self-legitimating simply by being. And there is no reason why autoethnography of a similar type should be viewed differently. A stronger rationale is needed for inclusion of documentation of process than simply the fact that it 'happened'.

The Collaborative Process

One major growth area for autoethnography involves documentation of the 'collaborative process'. In principle, the idea of investigating what goes on when artists of one type or another collaborate, one of whom might be oneself, could have a fair amount of potential to identify wider factors of relevance to others engaging in collaboration. Yet, while there are some important publications of this type, such work can often deliver much less than it promises. The slides show a few (anonymised) typical passages which mostly recount rather basic observations.

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.[21]

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

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

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.[22]

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. The author 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'.

There are many more such examples I could give from ethnographies or autoethnographies of collaboration. Many are focused on pragmatic questions, or simply relating what has happened, rather than necessarily asking whether it might have been otherwise. But there are other factors which can make me sceptical. Many practitioner-scholars collaborate with those with whom they have an obvious interest in maintaining good relations (especially with composers with fragile egos), 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 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.

Case Study 2

My second autoethnographic documentation of a case study has to do with a composition, my piece '*…quasi una fantasmagoria op. 120 no. 2…..*', composed in 2002 for the clarinettist Carl Rosman and myself. I wrote this near-30-minute piece quickly, though was the product of a large number of experiences, reflections and ideas over an extended period which all came together at one time. It is for two performers, a clarinettist and a pianist, both of whom speak throughout the piece. Their musical and textual parts follow relatively independent trajectories, though they also interact; I configure them in the hope of generating some synergetic meaning.

The clarinettist's part came about as a result of my observance of a range of performers (Rosman was not really one of them) over a period of time, and in particular my sense of how their imperative was generally to please, rather than necessarily challenge, an audience, an imperative I disdained at least when it became overwhelming. But I made notes to myself at a series of concerts on particular approaches to shaping phrases and the like, but also small quasi-theatrical gestures made during the course of performance, which I believed served primarily to woo, titillate and seduce audiences. With this, I was able to realise a planned Brechtian

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[22] 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.

strategy – to have a performer not actually *do* these things (through music and theatre) but *describe* doing them, as if reading out stage directions rather than enacting them. I envisaged a young, perhaps somewhat naïve, performer who had been drilled by some teacher as to what they had to do to 'win audiences over'. This performer only really knew *what* they had to do, not why, and so I had them read these generally in a quite blank tone of voice in between playing musical gestures.

But then, in order to sustain the piece beyond the initial novelty of this, I hit upon the idea of making them into a tragic figure, somewhat in the mode of the character of Canio in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* – made to act as a type of performing monkey while dealing with some traumatic inner feelings quite at odds with the persona they are required to project. This took the form of a gradually-revealed terrible story of abusive behaviour leading to imprisonment and suicide on the part of an imaginary close friend of the clarinettist towards whom he may have had homoerotic desires. Hints of this start to infiltrate the text and become more frequent, off-setting the other part-humorous elements, until by about two-thirds of the way through, the music slows down drastically, and a piano chord progression is vastly expanded to provide a slow series of recitative-like punctuation for a long clarinet monologue in which the terrible story is finally revealed. Structurally, my inspiration there was the long and harrowing monologue revealed by the character of Aston in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*. Afterwards, the clarinettist returns to describing their canned gestures, but with a much more bitter quality.

The musical content is derived from one of the most familiar works for clarinet and piano, Brahms's Second Clarinet Sonata in E-flat, op. 120 no. 2, which would be a typical piece heard at a recital such as that I imagined being performed by such a figure. I pared Brahms's material down, sometimes reducing it to fragments, extracting counter-intuitive threads (somewhat informed by my study of Finnissy's use of similar compositional techniques), distorting it through microtones, extended techniques, or various rhythmic and harmonic modifications, so as to enable a critical and thoroughly modern take on this.

The piano part had its origins in earlier reflections, to do with my own study with the wonderful pianist György Sándor at The Juilliard School in the early 1990s, having discovered his excellent book *On Piano Playing* four years previously, which is at the basis of many aspects of how I play and teach to this day. I contrasted this with many other methods I had encountered, especially some collected in what I find a dreadful volume edited by Dean Elder, former editor of *Clavier* magazine, called *Pianists at Play*. In this one finds a range of tortuous and tendonitis-inducing technical regimes laid out, the values of which are presented as self-evident in a thoroughly dogmatic manner by what appear clearly patronising and bullying teachers who might humiliate any students who dare to dissent – the figure of Adele Marcus, for a long time a prominent piano teacher at Juilliard, and an arch-enemy of Sándor, seemed quite archetypal in this respect.

Yet these approaches had some traction, and those who taught them were held in some mystical awe (something I had witnessed at Juilliard). These considerations, together with wider perspectives drawn from sado-masochistic-related theories, led me to conceive of a certain teacher-pupil relationship, and also certain physical approaches, in such terms. Thus I hit upon the idea of making the pianist suffer physical discomfort for the majority of the piece's near-30 minute duration, by playing with books wedged between their arms and torso (once a common prescription for practice), whilst playing a tortuously awkward piano part which extracted part of the Brahms, and literally re-wrote it in the form of technical exercises (derived from a mixture of those in the Elder volume and some of Brahms's own 53 exercises).

At the same time, the pianist reads in a part-flamboyant, part-demented manner, a text about the need to suffer for his or her art, idolising some Slavic teacher who inflicts such suffering, sometimes drawing upon masochistic texts from Baudelaire and Swinburne to express this, though this ultimately leads to disillusionment and bitterness, which in the last few minutes leads them to remove the books and stretch their arms out to play only on the wood at the end of the keys.

I don't unfortunately have a recording to play you – the first performance was recorded, but it was of very poor quality and I do not have it in digital format.

[Mention Ferneyhough and rhythm if there is time]

Case Study 3

My final case study relates to something I have been working in simultaneously whilst preparing this keynote – a concert I will be giving this Friday at City University, the first of several relating to my recent 50th birthday, here featuring a whole 23 world premieres, but also a series of early twentieth-century piano works in the first half. One of these is the First Piano Sonata by Roger Sessions.

Andante (♪ = 92)

cantabile ma semplice e senza qualsiasi "rubato"
piena voce
p *molto tranquillo*

5

10

In a range of recordings I have listened to of this, different pianists employ differing degrees of rhythmic desynchronization between the melody and the accompaniment, a general practice which was still reasonably common in 1930, when the work was written, though it was beginning to go out of fashion. I could make my own decision as to the extent to do this in terms of what I felt to be most historically important – this certainly influences a decision to use such a device at all – but I am thinking as much about the effects of different approaches. The desynchronization can serve as an alternative to exaggerated dynamics for the upper part (as it will sing out more when the attacks do not coincide with the bass), can be used to give expressive emphasis to particular melodic pitches, to give a general sense of rhythmic fluidity and limpidity if used quite continuously, or of stylistic archaism if done in a slightly arch manner. I have not made a firm decision yet, but may do so when I practise this later today or maybe tomorrow.

I could also talk to you about the *Deux Poèmes* op. 8 by Arthur Lourié which I will be playing, and my questions of the extent to which I might create a thread in certain passages by sustaining bass notes with the pedal, and more generally maintain a sense of harmonic continuity without fragmentation or discontinuity, and all this implies in terms of Lourié's ambivalent relationship to modernity.

[If time, also mention Ferneyhough]

The stylistic questions involved here have implications for me in terms of generation of knowledge which I can apply to wider repertory, and I also learn from studying others' approaches, reading more about the works, including from analytical perspectives, historical, intellectual and cultural context, and so on. So I would say that the performance questions with which I am engaged do have applications beyond simply how I play single works, and the many possible answers are informed by wider considerations too.

I am still in two minds about the value of making these explicit as I have been doing. But I offer such articulation as a species of autoethnography which hopefully avoids most of the problems I have outlined and does entail a critical approach to creative practice.