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14 December 2011
CCTP725

The Creation of Memory through the Classical Hybrid

*The discourses, genres, kinds of expression, and art works of the past are **our contemporaries**, in the deep memory of all we receive as meaningful.* – Martin Irvine

Beyond Linear Narratives: Time through the Music Remix

Whether speaking of principles of intertextuality, dialogism, or semiosis, modern culture has assumed the "always-already" condition of "hybridity/remix/appropriation" in art and its interpretation (Irvine). In other words, art creation is accepted as "'appropriative,' as acts that presuppose, subsume, and reference prior and concurrent expression" (Irvine). Such concepts allow a collapse/expansion of a perceived linear history and cultural hierarchies through both the visible and unconscious exchange of the influence of the past with contemporary "texts" (Kristeva)/ digital referencing to create networks of dialogic relationships. While this is hardly a substantive summary of these principles, these concepts depart from the modern linear narratives of a history of progress to allow for a reexamination of time and memory in music (although not solely applicable to this genre or art form).

Music provides a unique case study for a postmodern exploration of progress and time. Providing disruptive frameworks for viewing history or the past, postmodern theorists such as Jann Pasler, in "Postmodernism, narrativity, and the art of memory", argue postmodern musical works move away from the notion of time as "something to embrace or reject or something upon which to build in spiraling toward the future…as an abstract Kantian category of knowledge"(Pasler 4-5). Suggesting a perception of history in "spatial" rather "temporal concerns"(Pasler 5), Frederic Jameson likewise suggests a move towards an experienced-based narrative. Jameson proposes a postmodern theoretical frameworks work of:

A consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose 'schizophrenic' structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone -- what I will call "intensities" -- which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep constitutive relationships of all this to a whole new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system; and, after a brief account of postmodernist mutations in the lived experience of built space itself…(Jameson)

Rather than focus on a "perpetual return" to the past, Pasler suggests these works create time through what she terms"kaleidoscope" logic (4).   Following this network logic, many postmodern musical compositions open binary/linear historical arcs to cultural production/interpretation as, "an interactive experience involving personal and social meaning" and as a "repository of memory" (Pasler 4-5).

Music as Communication

Drawing from listener participation/understanding, music creates a platform for connections of perception. In other words, both the private/intimate and public/collective create a possible communication toolset between the composer/listener/and collective audience. Such deployments in music composition act as a "tool for reflecting on the world and turning sense impressions into understanding" (Pasler 5). Rather than a categorical construction of meaning making under the construction of artist, both "narrativity" and meaning are drawn from evolving experience, memory and the active participation of the listener. Pasler writes:

Postmodernist works of reaction or resistance, like modernist ones, depend on the 'experienced' perceiver's knowledge and understanding of the 'cultural libraries' to which Boulez refers, the images, gestures, and conventions of the past repertories being revived and commented on. (19)

Echoing principles of dialogism/interextuality, Pasler continues:

The possibility of creating unique pieces that reflect one coherent, consistent voice is evaporating as it becomes clear to these postmodernists that artistic creations can only serve as pretexts for what the reader/listener may bring to the work and create of it. The belief these postmodernists have in the heterogeneity of any work's meaning has become a priori as has the idea that no work can be a closed system. (26)

Through the formation of a collective memory, music creates a communication "tool for reflecting on the world and turning sense impressions into understanding" (Pasler 5). Boiled down, Pasler and others argue an artistic focus on memory, and the non-linear narrativity such focus illicits, leads to new associations and thought perceptions of both artist/audience, listeners/composers.

Space, Performance & Imagination

While contemporary musical mixes/sampling appears to focus on additive principals, technical compositional *choices* create new spaces and focus. In a post-modernist fashion, Paul D. Miller (DJ Spooky) plays with the idea of adding and subtracting elements of music and cultural experience to produce a collapse of binaries:

> I love the word 'syncopation.' Syncope means a small gap in consciousness, and when you play with those gaps and make a mesh out of those presences and absences, that's a beat. Everything is about pulling together these disparate fragments. If there was one thing that African-American experience is about, it's pulling together these tasty fragments of the shattered culture. (Davis)

Although speaking of dub music, Miller's approach to the concept of erasure is applicable to hybridization/cross-over/sampling of any musical genre. Music theorists propose, " A good dub is one that takes out what is unnecessary but keeps what is necessary ... (Bush); "Dub speaks from erasure, the voice fragmented and left to drift on the shards of itself that are left when its body is taken away"(Miller 53). Through erasure and shift in musical focus, new spacial experiences are composed, achieving the "multiplex-consciousness" Miller speaks of.

As part of the shift toward new spaces, musical theorists often speak of imaginative realms or additional dimensions opened through these plays of time, performance, and associative experience:

> By taking out the vocals and emphasizing the rhythm, the focus of the music shifts from conscious awareness and cerebral stimulation. Instead, it centers around the resonant quality of the rhythm, and the emphasis lies in the emotions that it conjures in the listener and the body movements induced by it. However, by constantly reshuffling the

various instruments and vocals of the whole mix, the mind remains occupied as
different aspects of the music are constantly being pointed out to the listener. (<u>Bush</u>)

Through the interactive roles of composition, listening, and memory recall, an imaginative space opens

in response to "syncopation" in time (see Pasler 24).

The Memory Palace

Pasler takes credit for terming, "the memory palace", an "open, non-tradition structure" or

artistic creation dependent on the active role of listener and a unique meaning-making through each

performance (Pasler 26). Such a structure provides a framework for describing many post-modern

musical composition attempting to express memory/"history", through the use of, "the past to suggest

meaning in the present, a meaning that may provide models for understanding the future.'   This is very

much lodged in the synchronic connections, the 'inter-referentiality,' that the spatial dimension of these

palaces reveal" (Pasler 26).

Structure and Technology

Departing from strict, linear narrative frameworks, hybrid post-modern musical structures focus

on, "making or suggesting connections within a synchronic situation" versus "creating continuity or

discontinuity within a work or a tradition, establishing and fulfilling or subverting goals" (Pasler 5). In

such an open framework, one that, "does not necessarily refer exclusively to a macrostructure or

specific syntax"(Pasler 5), Parsler argues "narrativity" can still exist even within "anti-narratives and non-

narratives", citing examples of "organizing principle[s]" which permit "discussion[s] of multiple kinds of

meaning" (Pasler 5). Such narrativity, argues Pasler, relies on the ability of the artist to connect with

listeners through Lyotard's concept of "know-how", where, the composer, "plug[s] into the listeners'

mind, to engage his or her memory" (Pasler 5).

Technology, then, becomes a catalyst for the construction of music in building connections in an

increasingly globalized environment. "Connections are neither easy nor evident," argues Pasler, "an

important tool for making them is memory" (5). Miller traces the ability of the machine/technology to communicate a globalized, collective memory back to Edison and the phonograph, where, through the recording of voices into a "prosthetic realism" (32), the production of a "memory machine" (68) became possible. Still echoed through technology and the process of artistic creation today, specifically referencing sampling in contemporary music creation, Miller argues:

> Today the voice you speak with may not be your own. The mechanization of war, the electro-colonization of information, the hypercommidification of culture, the exponential growth of mass media – all of these point to a mechanic/semiotic hierarchy of representation that models human thought as a distributed network. Rhythm science is performed in a place where consciousness itself becomes an object of 'material memory'. (69)

Still, Miller, similar to Pasler, calls for an open "narrativity"(Pasler) in the hybridization of "found object[s]" resulting in the associative chains necessary for global communication and to avoid "subjective implosion" (Miller 25-29):

> Somehow the technology has conditioned the very way we communicate. It's like a different kind of language. A lot of times people use dead words, so to speak, and that's when a mix doesn't work. What you do as a DJ is to breathe new life into it and see what happens, and that's what sampling's about. It's speaking with the voices of the dead, playing with that sense of presence and absence. If the mix doesn't evoke something, it doesn't work. (Davis)

Digital sampling, modification, delay, etc. possible through technology, along with production and sharing, then permits a polyphonic layering of subjectivity and time in music, resulting in new musical assemblages of memory and experience.

The Role of the Post-Modern Composer – Memory Construction through the Tools of Technology & the Cultural Library

Through the play of technology, music composition, and performance, "old hierarchies of linear thought" (Miller 33) come into question through both form and content while the possibility of a new network of meanings is created. Codes communicated through linear models of communication, for instance the idea of Roland Barthe's "semiology" of the "Signifier", "Signified", and "Sign", become

areas of "unlimited nodal positions" (Irvine). Such dialogism in music rests not only on the ability of

technology to manipulate and layer sources and sounds, but on, "creating seamless interpolations

between objects of thought to fabricate a zone of representation in which the interplay of the one and

the many, the original and its double all come under question"(Miller 33). As new connections build

through associative memory and experience in both composer and listener(s), a new awareness is

formed through music.

In this postmodern musical framework the role of the author becomes one of a curator, both of

individual and a collective memory/experience library. Umberto Eco, in his concept of the "cultural

encyclopedia," describes the "always already happening and always reconfiguring codes and symbolic

associations" in a culture's memory. Rather than fixed or "correct" associations, "individual

reader/interpreters can intervene and develop new interpretations" from those "signs and symbols" in

"constantly accruing..reconfiguring" networks ("Cultural Encyclopedia").

Extending from DuBoi's idea of the double consciousness, Miller describes the systems culture

or a "multiplex-consciousness" available through technology, music, and the hybridization of sources

(Miller 61-64). Here, "sound/writing…in an era of rhythm science both serve as recursive aspects of

information collage where everything from personal identity to the codes used to create art or music

are available for the mix"(Miller 64). Describing the turntable as a "memory permutatation machine",

meaning becomes associative in time/space, not only for the listeners, but for composers as well. Miller

writes, "as an artist, writer, and musician, it seemed that turntables were somehow imbued with the art

of being memory permutation machines. They changed how I remembered sounds and always made

me think of a different experience with each listening" (45). Drawing on the "cultural encyclopedia" and

digital technology to communicate a networked history, the post-modern composer creates music that

not only, "speaks louder than any individual voice" (Miller 65), but draws on the interplay of

technology/time/and association to create new entries by drawing on and creating new and existing individual and collective memories.

Case Studies: Classical Hybrids and the Construction of Memory

Specifically, I wish to explore the classical genre and contemporary productions in the construction of Pasler's "memory palaces". Pasler describes a draw towards "neo-romantic works", as a "postmodernism of reaction"; she writes, "The time of 'terminal prestige' and aesthetic distancing is ending: many of those returning to the romantic sentiment, narrative curve, or simple melody wish to entice audiences back to the concert hall" (17). Through certain compositions, however, this nostalgia for the classical form construes new meaning through both technical construction and in the goal of memory creation.

Works which expand "the notion of postmodernist as bricoleur" (Pasler 19) succeed in developing relationships in the listener and between the composer and listener, whether these relationships are between time, place, or association, or the " 'interpenetration' of different domains", as John Cage describes this process (Pasler 19). As the listener's participation with a work is perceived through his or her own memory, Pasler calls the new awareness raised by these connections as the "emancipation of the realm of memory" (19).

Pauline Oliver: (Re)Creating Memory

Pauline Oliver continues to explore new methods for re-focus listeners to music, a process she calls "deep listening" and "sonic mediation"(Maus 345). Oliver's performances are said to "go far beyond the ordinary boundaries of musical composition" as they transform the listener to alternate spaces and surprise the listener with the unexpected through the "manipulation of various electronic devices", such as through her live performances with the accordion (Maus 346). In *Bonn Feier,* Oliver "transforms a city, over as much as a year, into the setting for a range of activities that subvert

comfortable assumptions about everyday life", while, in other compositions, Oliver deploys "unscripted sound interactions in resonant spaces (Tarpaper Cave in New York and the Ford Worden cistern in Washington State, with its decay time of about forty-five seconds" (Maus 346).

Oliver's *DreamHorseSpiel* (1990), specifically focuses on "memory and the relationship between perception and thought" (Pasler 23). Through "prerecorded short stories, referential sounds and images, and simple tunes", Oliver layers sounds associated with the memory of the horse through various cultural associations: "dreams and experiences about horses she collected from a variety of people" "speaking and singing in their own languages", "horse sounds", "horse clichés", "horse related – things" (Pasler 23). Pasler describes the polyphonic memory associations through both composer and listener, as "almost no word, image, or sound is without allusion to something the listener has or could have seen or hear – visual images like 'horse face,' 'horse tail,' and 'horse lips,' experiences like 'horse ride'"(Pasler 23). Memories and "dreams" include references to smells, images, tunes, clichés, and different languages, as the:

> Horse calls to mind the period before the industrial revolution, before machines took its place, before 'the change to an information society'; when it was a daily companion, a work animal, as well as a source of food; when [the horse's] presence was important. (Pasler 23)

Through the performance of these sounds, Oliver focuses on time/space sequencing and the ability of technology to act as a "mirror" in the replication of different sounds and instruments. Pasler describes the transference of listener to space as Oliver:

> Allow(s) the work to go into or become any space, outdoors or indoors, small, large, cavernous, cathedral, closet'…by delaying the sound or extending it from a millisecond to eight full seconds, the composer can use the experience of the sound to communicate different kinds of space, those associated with the memory of different kinds of places. (Pasler 24)

In order for the listener to "experience the past, present, and future simultaneously" (Pasler 24), Oliver deploys not only "digital delay" and "artificial reverberation", but repeats material strategically "in complete or only partial segments" so that the material becomes associated "with the images and sounds of its new context" (Pasler 23). Olivero serves as case study and precursor for artists who deploy sounds and music to create transference of time and place. Perhaps more importantly, through this process and the "unusual juxtapositions of tone, spirit, and meaning", hybrids of recorded memory create new "sense impressions" and thus become "a way of stimulating thought" (Pasler 23).

The Classical Hybrid: John Adam's Memory Palace

On the Transmigration of Souls, composed by John Adams and commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to honor the victims of the September 11th attacks, attempts to both preserve and create collective memory. Adams, similar to many of his classical contemporaries, strives to give, "the symphony orchestra, that nineteenth-century artifact, a twenty-first-century sound" (Schiff). By "superimposing layers of instrumental oscillations and pulses" Adams breaks apart and extends the traditional narrative hierarchy of historical story-telling and the classical style, tone, and form often associated with the composer's genre. Such technological innovation gives Adam's composition:

> A metallic, post-industrial sound, far from the traditional lush impressionist palette—
> like going from oil paint to acrylic. The density of sound (Adams writes thousands of
> notes) and the emphasis on the bright upper register make the live orchestra seem
> electronically synthesized, as if from a THX sound system. (Schiff)

Self- describing the piece as "a memory space", Adam's strategically layers the twenty-five minute *Transmigration* which "superimposes pre-recorded street sounds and the reading of victims' names by friends and family members, also pre-recorded, on live performances by a children's chorus, an adult chorus, and a large orchestra" (Schiff). Adams is credited with taking the "high-tech sound into a spiritual realm", through the creation of an "orchestral alchemy" consisting of "extra-musical" elements

and, in effect, "redefining the relation of music to non-music and of the concert hall to everyday

life"(Schiff).

Inspired by Charles Ives, a classical predecessor who, "created imaginary utopian venues, usually

by layering different sounds," Adams deploys contemporary technology, "to balance and coordinate the

musical and extra-musical elements" within his own piece (Schiff) .   As a result, *Transmigation* creats a

new space for the old and the new, the "visionary and familiar", in a nodular structure:

> *Transmigration* seems more modernistic than earlier Adams: more disjunct and
> nondirectional, much more dissonant. Yet, without sounding in any way like popular
> music—as with the bad old modern music, the work has no memorable musical theme
> or melody—it is more successfully populist. Its sound-over-sound texture connects it to
> the mass media. We know this ambiance from Ken Burns documentaries, from CNN,
> from rap music, from the movies. Like Ives but in an entirely new way, Adams extends
> our sense of music—there is music in the sound bites and the street noises, music in our
> own state of sensory overload. (Schiff)

While both Adam's multiplicity of sound samples and overall complex "narrativity" will draw

associations to each listeners' unique "cultural encyclopedia" and individual memory, Adams

composition builds a new collective experience:

> In the months that followed the catastrophe, 9/11 became a source more of civic pride
> than of nationalism. The heroes were policemen and firemen, not soldiers; a mayor, not
> a President. The names read on television and the short biographies in the *Times*
> reminded New Yorkers of their diversity and their commonality. In *Transmigration*,
> Adams breaks down the divide between the high-bourgeois culture that created
> orchestras like the New York Philharmonic (and the repertory they play) in the
> nineteenth century and the mass culture that took its place in the twentieth. He has
> created a music that mirrors and exalts the public wisdom. (Schiff)

Tori Amos and the Myth of the Narrative Arch

Although many contemporary artists draw on classical educations and hybridizations of the

classical genre at large, Tori Amos, in her album, "Night of Hunters," explores the archeology of the

classics alongside a play of other traditional "texts."   Specifically, Amos explores the narrative arcs of

story-telling, mythology, and the "themes" of her classical predecessors, "such as Chopin, Schubert,

Satie and Debussy" (Pearson). Through a play of traditional form, style, content, meaning, and

structure, Amos mimics the classical "song cycle" as she heads, "to Ancient Ireland, where she delves

into Celtic mythology" (Lopez).

Juxtaposed, however, to these archetypes steeped in hierarchal/linear associations, Amos,

untraditionally, sets lyrics to the classical composition, while the words themselves unravel subjectivity,

time, meaning, and the traditional passive role of the audience:

> The heroine finds herself in a dying relationship. We go on a journey with her as she
> discovers the end of her relationship and reinvents herself," she says. "I wanted to show
> how she was both the hunter and the hunted, and how those two sides exist in all of us.
> (Lopez)

Describing the need to both recuperate and create from the "sonic architect" of her predecessors, Amos

describes her choice of lyrics:

> Amos' first instinct was to source her lyrics from 19th and 20th century poets like
> Goethe or Emily Dickinson, the method favored by classical composers. "I thought it was
> too dangerous to put my own words to classical themes that existed, but Alex argued
> with me and said if I used [old] poetry, then [the cycle] wasn't active. (Adair)

Once heard in completion, the listener understands a narrative of "the tradition of great Romantic

epics":

> In a nutshell, a woman from the New World sails to Ireland with her Old World lover.
> They fight, she questions herself and her relationship, and meets a wise creature who
> shape-shifts into a goose and a fox. A peyote trip and a realization that there are
> problems more pressing than her own quotidian drama resolve the tension. (Adair)

Despite this allusion to the arch of the epic, the listener begins at the explosion of drama, disrupting

time and place. Amos juxtaposes the expectations of a classical story arch, "a pair of lovers in crisis" to

displacements of time and space; through "past civilizations and mythologies — placing them in ancient

Celtic wars, ship voyages to the New World and deserts with mystically powerful cactus elixirs"

(Pearson), and unusual plays of technical structure and sources. Sound hybridization juxtaposes classical

elements with associations both at once familiar to the contemporary audience and yet unique to the

classical sound. Listeners' hear the voice of Amos' daughter, as the "wise creature" of the story, along

with instrumental additions such as "flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and contrabassoon", and Amos'

contemporary lyrical associations (Adair).

Amos explains the active requirements of her audience, as she explains, "The story doesn't have

to be understood in a linear fashion, but more from an emotional place"(Pearson). Despite the

"pungent, pastoral and restless" aesthetic and motive to draw to emotion, Amos describes these

characteristics as not simply driven by a neo-romantic tendency:

> Amos hopes the lovers' story arc serves as a springboard for other couples to examine
> themselves.
>
> 'We get so distracted by the traumas that are happening in the world,' she commented.
> 'It's not as if they shouldn't command our attention. But our own relationships have to
> command our attention as well. If there's no healing within the sacred relationship of
> the home, then there's no way we can have peace outside in the world.' (Pearson)

Through her connecting to a contemporary memory, Amos aspires to draw a new awareness on the

importance of modern relationships in a global view. To achieve such a feat, the composer creates a

hybridization of the classical form and memory.

Conclusion

While new concepts of style and production are driven by advances in technological

composition, composers seek methods to create new works and new meanings from an always already

hybrid culture. Postmodern frameworks, through the hybrid musical form, acknowledge cultural

production succeeds by connecting an audience to its awareness of the present through a past, "lodged

in our experience of the present, even the physical present, more than in our expectations about the

future" (Pasler 4). Composers are now placed with a new burden, "not to criticize, educate, or elevate

morally, but to empower us to create our own memory palaces" (Pasler 19-20). By displaying a

polyphonic interplay of the past and present, the collective and the individual, the traditional and the

innovative, contemporary hybrid forms of the classical genre succeed in, "suggesting links between memories recorded in different, apparently unrelated categories" (Pasler 20), each other, and global cultural communities of memory. Post-modern hybrid music, through the construction of memory, provides an ever-evolving platform for creating new consciousness about ourselves, each other, the past, present and our future.

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