

Chapter 1

Motivation

The present chapter formulates a theoretical framework in which concepts described in [Chapter 2](#) are elaborated further in an attempt to establish a discourse that clarifies the motivations behind the submitted creative work. Taking into consideration the philosophical and historical background previously elaborated, I will therefore undertake the difficult task of proposing a new attitude towards music creation that at once takes into consideration the shortcomings ascribed to the notion of *modernism* and simultaneously acknowledges the importance of the original vision of the avant-garde. The musical stance I propose, also recognizes the misguided intentions of the *modernist* anti-mimetic position and the consequences it brought to musical discourse—a criticism now credited to the first generation of artists that became associated with the label of *postmodernism*. At the same time, I acknowledge that so called *postmodern music* has recently started to signify an artistic approach which encourages false notions of plurality and open-mindedness and—by aimlessly questioning notions of progress and universality in music—promotes a deceiving impression that nothing new can be achieved through musical creativity. I will contend this position first, by introducing Rancière’s idiosyncratic notion of the avant-garde and by pointing to the relationship that exists between music and other forms of subjectivity. I will therefore explain Rancière’s concepts of the *strategic* and *aesthetic* types of avant-garde with the purpose of suggesting that the confusion between these two kinds of avant-gardes is what has led to the ideas behind the development of the notions of *modernism* and *postmodernism* in music. Moreover, I will attempt to apply Rancière’s concepts regarding the types of avant-garde to music with the purpose of clarifying misunderstandings regarding the relationship between politics and music. Additionally, by looking at the ethical functions of music and the role they take in basic human endeavors, I will propose that there is an implicit ethical core in the definition of music. I will further argue that the shared purpose that music and language have—which is to convey emotion and meaning through sound—makes music a vital human act that is deep-rooted in

our evolutionary past. This points to the understanding that music conveys knowledge, thoughts and feelings that are not exclusive to music, but relate to other forms of human action and experience. Moreover, the ethical functions attributed to music also compromise the attempts at expanding the definition of *what music is* that is characteristic of the *aesthetic regime of art*. As a consequence of the relationship that exists between new types of music and new forms of human experience, innovation in music is often seen skeptically by most people if it ceases to perform its ethical functions. Nevertheless, I will propose that there is an ethical function *in itself* in music that lies within the *aesthetic regime*, that is: to inspire new sensible forms that relate to other aspects of human activity. I will therefore argue that an important role of the musical avant-garde today is to reestablish an agreement of trust with a wider range of contemporary society by demonstrating through music that the purpose of new musical forms, concepts and definitions is to inspire new ideas, opinions, desires and emotions and not to undermine the ethical function music already performs. Finally, I will argue that because of the link that exists between what Rancière calls the *aesthetic* and *strategic* types of avant-garde, a huge potential exists in rethinking musical strategies that deal explicitly with musical groups (institutions, movements, ensembles, audiences, *etc*) as well as how they relate to each other and with each other, to radically change the fundamental aspects in the way we create and perceive music. I believe it is through a major reevaluation of these musical strategies (taking in consideration the ethical functions associated with the concept of music) that the agreement of trust between the musical avant-garde and the wider public may be reestablished. As a consequence, this also would give rise to a broader acknowledgement and understanding of the importance of the *aesthetic regime* in music.

1.1 Redefining the Musical Subject?

I will start explaining the basic motivations surrounding the submitted musical output by considering a position I believe to be prevalent today between people concerned with music. This dominant position is characterized by a skeptical and often cynical attitude towards new forms of thought in music. However, this attitude is dominant not without a reason: it has to do with the notion that today music is—as Alain Badiou has stated—‘negatively defined’. Badiou clearly expresses this view in his essay entitled ‘Scholium: A Musical Variant of the Metaphysics of the Subject’.

Today, the music-world is negatively defined. The classical subject and its romantic avatars are entirely saturated, and it is not the plurality of ‘musics’—folklore, classicism, pop, exoticism, jazz and baroque reaction in the same festive bag—which will be able to

resuscitate them. But the serial subject is equally unpromising, and has been for at least twenty years. Today's musician, delivered over to the solitude of the interval—where the old coherent world of tonality together with the hard dodecaphonic world that produced its truth are scattered into unorganized bodies and vain ceremonies—can only heroically repeat, in his very works: 'I go on, in order to think and push to their paradoxical radiance the reasons that I would have for not going on'.¹

Here, Badiou precisely delineates the situation in which so called 'art music' or 'contemporary music' is created and received today, where the only two main options seem to embrace either the joyful and permissive attitude towards mixing genres and styles now commonly ascribed to *postmodern music* or the desolate notion of *modernism* that for over thirty years, has heroically stood in 'life support'.

The skepticism regarding innovation in relationship to music creation today is related not only to the perceived notion of failure associated with the aesthetics of *modernism* in music, but to the argument put forward by the so called *postmodern* position, which questions the idea that it is possible to achieve something new through music. However, the problem with the position associated with *postmodernism* is that it reduces music only to a mediation of already existing musical styles and forms and to a multiplicity of musical 'games' that aimlessly mixes and remixes past notions of music and musical thought. This concept of music also fails to tackle notions of emancipation, logic, universality and risk within music² and ceases to respond to the original premise of the *modernist* vision of the musical avant-garde, which establishes a connection between new forms of music and new types of subjectivity. I also believe it is very important to find an alternative to the main two options that seem to be dominating 'contemporary music' today as both of them seem unable at the present time to inspire a profound change in the way we create, perform, perceive and think about music.

I think Rancière's analysis gives us strong theoretical tools to imagine an alternative which would involve reinvigorating the *modernist* idea of the avant-garde in music without falling back to the misunderstandings that led to the 'crisis of modernity'. Nevertheless, Rancière's notion of the *avant-garde* is considerably different from the conventional one, and in order to understand his definition and relate it to music, it is important to separate it from its former association to a particular movement in music history. Even though the idea of the avant-garde in music emerged as it became associated to a group of 'modernist' composers, the concept remains useful to us now only as a

¹Badiou (2009), p. 89.

²This argument stems from a modification of the philosophical position Badiou puts forward in his article 'Philosophy and Desire'. See Badiou (2006), pp.30-35.

way of understanding the importance of the *aesthetic regime* in the relationship between music and other types of subjectivity and forms of thought. Additionally, Rancière's idiosyncratic notion of the avant-garde is also at the center of his attempt to establish a link between aesthetics and politics.

1.2 Rethinking the Avant-garde

Rancière has persuasively argued that if there is a connection to be established between the aesthetic and the political, it is suggested by the original *modernist* vision of the avant-garde. The basis for this association is not the connection between artistic innovation and politically motivated change, but the suggestion of a link between two different kinds of 'avant-gardes'. The first kind being characterized by an abstract and militant notion of a movement that symbolizes a force that chooses a historical direction and ideological position—the embodiment of a type of subjectivity (political or artistic) to a specific form (a party or an artistic movement). The second kind of avant-garde is rooted in Schiller's model of *aesthetics* as a projection of the future. The meaning of the avant-garde in the *aesthetic regime of art* is therefore not that of artistic innovation as seen by a particular movement that links artistic subjectivity to a determinate form, but the idea of "the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come".³ This is where the aesthetic avant-garde may inform, inspire and encourage the political avant-garde and bring about transformations in the anticipation of the future. Moreover, Rancière makes a very interesting theoretical observation when he draws a parallel between these two kinds of avant-garde and two forms of political philosophy:

The history of the relations between political parties and aesthetic movements is first of all the history of confusion, sometimes complacently maintained, at other times violently denounced, between these two ideas of the avant-garde, which are in fact two different ideas of political subjectivity: the archi-political idea of a party, that is to say the idea of a form of political intelligence that sums up the essential conditions for change, and the meta-political idea of global political subjectivity, the idea of the potentiality inherent in the innovative sensible modes of experience that anticipate a community to come.⁴

The ideas that have led to the notions of *modernism* and *postmodernism* in the arts—as well as to the 'crisis of art' as ascribed by many—have therefore developed as a consequence of the confusion caused by a division which exists between the *strategic* and *aesthetic* conceptions of the avant-garde as manifested in art. This division of the avant-garde is also to be found within the political sphere

³Rancière (2004), p. 29.

⁴Ibid., p. 30.

and is in fact considered as two different forms of political philosophy, which not only clarifies the presence of aesthetics in politics, but also the inherent politicized within the artistic disciplines.⁵

Here, I would like to attempt to explain how these two kinds of ‘avant-gardes’ can be found in music with the purpose of conceptualizing not only the differences between the two, but also to point at how one might relate to the other. I think that the link between the two avant-gardes might also help to understand the importance collectivity and relationships may have on the *aesthetic* result in music. Moreover, the distinction between the two types of avant-garde can also be useful clearing certain confusions that might arise when thinking about the relationship between music and politics.

1.2.1 *Strategic and Aesthetic Types of Avant-garde in Music*

The *strategic* type of avant-garde as manifested in music is an idea that serves as a driving force that leads a particular collection of people involved in music (composers, performers, critics and other people who make, think and/or listen to music) to consolidate itself as a group (musical institution, movement, ensemble, *etc*). It is important to remember that this idea holds a core set of values that have a common ideological position which sums up a type of subjectivity that triggers the conception of this group.⁶ On the other hand, the *aesthetic* type of avant-garde as manifested in music is an idea that—through new ways of thinking and making music as expressed by the creation of new musical forms and structures—has the capacity to inspire and encourage new forms of thought about the life to come. Furthermore, it is crucial that the *strategic* type of avant-garde is not confused with the *aesthetic* type in as much as it will lead to further misunderstandings within the music-world.

It is important to notice that one can find these two ideas or types of avant-gardes both in the musical and political spheres (as well as in the other artistic disciplines). Additionally, as they manifest themselves in music, the *aesthetic* and *strategic* types of avant-garde are intrinsically related; but only in as much as music is concerned. This relationship becomes evident in the causality that exists between musical groups, institutions and movements; and the creation and reception of music that lies within the *aesthetic regime*. In other words, the ideas that prompt the formation of a musical collective relate to the idea of the aesthetic type of avant-garde only in as much as they may

⁵See Rancière (2009), *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, ‘Aesthetics as Politics’, pp. 19-44, for a further discussion about the relationship between the ‘aesthetics of politics’ and the ‘politics or aesthetics’.

⁶Slovoj Žižek has repeatedly emphasized how ideology is not an abstract notion or theory one simply ascribes to, but a type of subjectivity that is reflected in the way we act, on how we behave and carry ourselves on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, a musical ‘movement’ doesn’t necessarily have to be one in which there is a ‘conscious’ or openly declared agenda that follows a particular position of objectified consensus. See Žižek (2006), *The Žižek Reader*, ‘The Spectacle of Ideology’, for Žižek’s own examination of the concept of *ideology*.

contribute in the consolidation of the conditions of exchange necessary for the creation of new forms of subjectivity for the future. The *strategic* avant-garde as manifested in music is therefore useful to the political sphere only as much as it contributes to the *aesthetic* avant-garde—specifically as it provides a platform for the creation of ‘new sensible forms and structures’. Hence, the way in which the two types of avant-gardes dwell within music can not be directly compared to the way in which they reside in politics. Here lies another vital point one can induce from Rancière’s enquiry: the *strategic* type of avant-garde manifests itself *differently* in music as it does in politics. In other words, the ideas that give rise to the establishment of groups in music and politics are different from each other and do not reflect a relationship between the two disciplines. From this, one can conclude for example that the activism of a musician or group of musicians as they become directly involved in politics does not reflect a relationship between music and politics, but only the involvement of a group of people—which happen to have the same occupation—in a political movement. The true relationship between music and politics is rather reflected in the *aesthetic* type of avant-garde. This argument makes evident why it is misleading to attempt to identify a movement with concerns that are specific to music with a particular political affiliation or party. The position put forward by some critics of *modernism* in music—which concludes that the emancipatory project which seeks the autonomy of music leads to totalitarianism—is therefore flawed.

Moreover, I will claim that it is very important to consider the intrinsic relationship between the two types of avant-gardes, exclusively as they manifest themselves within music. The basis of this way of thinking stems from the assertion that the *strategic* type of avant-garde has a considerable effect on the *aesthetic* type precisely because the subjective force that brings a group together influences the new aesthetic forms it produces. Furthermore, the impact that musical movements, institutions, ensembles and other organized groups of musicians and people dealing with music, have on the actual musical results, is often underrated. Too often, people involved in creating (particularly composers in my experience) and experiencing music avoid or forget how these forms of collectivity condition and influence the aesthetic result. I will even go as far as to suggest that, in music, the type of subjectivity that is synthesized in the *strategic* avant-garde is reflected or ‘embodied’ in the *aesthetic* avant-garde. That is to say, the ideology of the people involved in the creation, presentation and dissemination of music is expressed in the musical modes of action, production, perception and thought. Furthermore, the notion that the composer is the only person whose ideology is reflected in the music and that the *musical work*⁷ is the only carrier of meaning—an idea that up to this moment is still widespread in western culture—is also misleading. Thus, to avoid misunderstandings I will

⁷See [Goehr \(2007\)](#), for a thorough discussion on the philosophy of musical works.

introduce the notion of a *musical result* (as opposed to the more limited concept of *musical work*) as that which describes the complex set of percepts given by all aspects of a musical experience. These include for example: all sorts of aural and visual elements in music performance; the space and time in which music is performed; the way in which music is presented to the audience (including their role and participation in the musical experience); different modes of action in performance (performance practice) and composition (act of composing); the relationships established between composer, performer and audience; the context (cultural, sociological, political) in which music is presented; the way music is created, consumed and distributed; *etc.* A particular kind of *musical result* consequently discloses a type of collective subjectivity which encompasses the ideology of the people involved in the music.⁸ Additionally, within the *musical result* lies a system of elaborate symbols that synthesizes the relationships between the people involved in the collective act of music-making.

Musicking

According to Christopher Small, the set of complex relationships that are formed between people involved in music is that which gives meaning to music. His interest lies particularly on the collective action surrounding music and defines this activity as *musicking*.

The act of *musicking* establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part . . . relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world.⁹

By giving priority to the verb *to music*, as opposed to the noun *music*, he also questions the notion of the *musical work* and gives emphasis to the human action of *musicking*. Small argues that music is not an object and that *musical works* only give material for the musicians to perform, in contrast to the notion (developed as a consequence of western concert music) of performance only as a presentation of a *musical work*. He also defines the verb *to music* to include any type of action that contributes to a musical performance, which includes performing, listening, practicing, composing and dancing.

⁸I am not implying however that the ideology of *all* the people is represented *equally* in the *musical result*. The question of how much an individual is represented widely depends on the role they take within the *musical result* and the audience's interpretation of it.

⁹Small (1998), p. 13.

He goes as far as to include actions such as selling and collecting tickets and cleaning the concert hall after a performance within his notion of *musicking*. Therefore, *musicking* encompasses all social relationships and actions that are related to music-making. Furthermore, he argues that *musicking*, together with speaking, are characteristics that are at the very core of what makes us human.

I am certain, first, that to take part in a music act is of central importance to our very humanness, as important as taking part in the act of speech, which it so resembles (but from which it also differs in important ways), and second, that everyone, every normally endowed human being, is born with the gift of music no less than with the gift of speech.¹⁰

Recent scientific studies in a variety of specialities including neuroscience, psychology, archaeology, anthropology and cognitive musicology have also pointed towards the same hypothesis. The idea put forward by Steven Pinker that music is ‘auditory cheesecake’—that it is only a byproduct of evolution and has no biological value for humans¹¹—has been challenged recently within the scientific community. These studies have shown how music plays an important role, amongst other things, in human communication, social bonding, cooperation, sexual selection, conveying emotions, psychological well-being, development of coordination and motor skills, expression of empathy, communication between infants and parents and exercising intelligence.¹² In addition, various theories have emerged regarding the relationship between music and language; some of them even suggesting that ‘proto-language’¹³ (the predecessor of language) was a pre-linguistic, non-verbal form of communication that was a ‘musical’ form of action and thought.¹⁴ It appears that language and music have a similar evolutionary starting-point and the common purpose of communicating emotion and meaning through sound. From this research one can infer that Small is correct in suggesting that *musicking*, like speaking, is at the core of being human and performs important social, cultural and biological functions.

1.3 The Definition of Music and the *Ethical Regime*

The important functions music performs in the development of individuals and the way in which they establish and nurture relationships within a community is what defines music as a vital human act. Perhaps this is the reason why in the musical domain—going back to Rancière’s notion of ‘the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 8.

¹¹See Pinker (1998), pp. 528-538.

¹²See Mithen (2006), for an overview of these studies.

¹³Mithen prefers the term ‘Hmmm’ over ‘proto-language as ...

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 147-150.

regimes of art'¹⁵—music is still defined as such within the *ethical regime*. In other words, if one goes back to the question of why within music there is no change of identification with the break between the *ethical* and *poetic* regimes; I will suggest that it is because there is a strong ethical core implicit in the very meaning of *what music is*. That is to say, as opposed to the definition of the other arts, the definition of music has been tied to the ethical functions that it performs for individuals and their communities. It is worth mentioning that only dance, like music, can also be defined as such within the *ethical regime*, which points towards the deep-rooted relationship between both disciplines. On the contrary, other artistic disciplines including ‘fine’ art, poetry and theater are identified as such only with the break between the *ethical* and *poetic* regimes.

The ability that human beings have to communicate and perceive emotion and meaning through music is also tied to music’s identification and to the ethical functions it performs. It is by no coincidence that already in Ancient Greece, Aristotle observed that music has an immense power to change people’s state of character and that different types of music affect audiences in different ways. According to Aristotle, music represents various types of emotions and actions that closely resemble those that the listener undergoes in reality as a result of the performance.¹⁶ It is as a consequence of this link between music and human experience, emotion and action that communities have attempted to regulate and evaluate music according to the ethical functions it performs. One could consequently argue that music that lies within the *ethical regime* is evaluated for its ability to affect people in a way that is considered appropriate by the community, given a particular situation. This argument also points towards one of the reasons why labeling music as different ‘styles’ or ‘genres’ seems to be a dominant practice within communities: by knowing what kind of music to expect from a specific ‘style’, it is possible to anticipate the type of experience the audience will go through. This is also one of the reasons why innovation in music has been discouraged and even censured by communities for centuries. The modification of musical styles within the perspective of the *ethical regime* implies an unexpected change in one’s experience and a potential threat to the community’s consensus of what is considered to be the appropriate way in which people are to be affected by music. Furthermore, innovation in music has been perceived as a political threat in the past since new forms of music produce new experiences that might stimulate behavior outside the political order.

Plato, in his *Republic* already warns about the danger that innovation in music might pose to the order of the State:

Put briefly, then, those charged with care of the city must hold fast to this, so that the city

¹⁵See pp. 4-8.

¹⁶See Aristotle (1995), ‘The Aims and Methods of Education in Music’, pp. 309-310.

may not be corrupted unawares; but beyond all else, they must guard against innovation in gymnastic and music contrary to the established order, and to the best of their ability be on guard lest when someone says that people care more “for the newest song on the singer’s lips”, the poet may be understood to mean not new songs but a new style of singing, and to comment it. One must not praise such a thing, nor so interpret the poet, but guard against changing to a new form of music, as endangering the whole. For styles of music are nowhere disturbed without disturbing the most important laws and customs of political order—as Damos says and I believe.¹⁷

Therefore, the Platonic view regarding innovation in music is that it is threatening to the social agreements and political organization of the State. Even though the idea that innovation in music might endanger the political and social contracts of the community today might seem hard to imagine, it still gives us a clue towards an attitude that up to this day is still widespread, that is: that innovation in music regarding its own rules, hierarchies, subject matter and genres is still received with reservation, suspicion and even fear amongst the community (if compared to the visual arts for example). In my opinion, this is due in the most part for two main reasons. First, considering the implication that music performs certain ethical functions, innovation can be seen with skepticism as it could lead to confusion, uncertainty and even irritation, if music ceases to perform the functions expected by the community successfully or does so less efficiently. Secondly, given the immersive and participatory (either by listening or performing) aspects implied by the definition of music that establishes a link between music and human action and experience, innovation in music can be associated with new and unpredictable experiences and behavior. Therefore, it is not surprising that some people would be distrustful in allowing themselves experience something they are not familiar with or are uncertain about.¹⁸

1.4 An Ethical Function within the *Aesthetic Regime*?

Going back to Rancière’s notion of the regimes of art, if one considers the ethical core implicit in the definition of music simultaneously with music that falls within the *aesthetic regime*, one might run into a deadlock: if music is to be evaluated *only* by the functions it already performs within the community (and innovation in music is seen as a disruption of these functions), music that lies within

¹⁷Plato (2006), ‘Music and the Constitution’, p. 117.

¹⁸On a related note: according to recent research in cognitive science, most people stop acquiring new musical tastes by the time they are around twenty years old. This might be as a result that as people grow older, they seem less open to new experiences. See Levitin (2006), ‘My Favorite Things’, pp. 231-233.

the *aesthetic regime* appears as having no apparent noble purpose. To resolve this problem one needs to point towards the relationship that exists between music and other forms of human endeavor. If music is evaluated and appreciated for its capacity to inspire new ideas, opinions, beliefs and desires, then one can argue that there is an ethical position implicit in music that falls within the *aesthetic regime*. In other words, there is an ethical function *in itself* in breaking with previous models of music making and in questioning the very notion of *what music is*. This function is precisely that of imagining and experiencing through music, new forms of action, production, perception and thought.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the *aesthetic regime* in music, which redefines the ‘musician’ as a practitioner of whatever falls into the category of ‘music’, has still not been spread out through a wider range of contemporary society. The reason, I believe, is that the agreement of trust between the wider public and the musical avant-garde has been weakened as a consequence of the practice of some musicians that can be associated with the notion of *modernism* (mainly, those seeking music’s ‘purity’ in composition through a militant anti-mimetic attitude and those who only advocate ‘authenticity’ and ‘sterility’ in performance practice). These practices have also generated an attitude commonly held by many musicians today, which avoids addressing the most basic ethical functions that the community associates to music while pursuing only their individual musical priorities. If the *aesthetic regime* in music is to be acknowledged and appreciated widely, an agreement of trust needs to be reestablished between the musical avant-garde and the wider public. Considering the ethical core implicit in music’s definition, it is likely that the community will be unwilling to be open to new musical experiences if they fear that the ethical functions music already performs within the community will be disrupted or negatively altered. Therefore, this agreement needs to demonstrate that the purpose of creating new music is not to betray its ethical functions, but to inspire and experience new forms of subjectivity—and *this in itself has an underlying ethical function*¹⁹. Additionally, if this agreement with a wider range of contemporary society is to be reached, it needs to be embedded within the *musical result* and cannot only be expressed theoretically through verbal and written forms of public dissemination.

1.5 Reworking Musical Strategies

Revise this. . . Finally, I will argue that because of the link that exists between what Rancière calls the *aesthetic* and *strategic* types of avant-garde, a huge potential exists in rethinking musical strategies that deal explicitly with musical groups (institutions, movements, ensembles, audiences, *etc*) as well

¹⁹Adorno also says this

as how they relate to each other and with each other, to radically change the fundamental aspects in the way we create and perceive music. I believe it is through a major reevaluation of these musical strategies (taking in consideration the ethical functions associated with the concept of music) that the agreement of trust between the musical avant-garde and a wider range of contemporary society may be reestablished. As a consequence, this also would give rise to a broader acknowledgement and understanding of the importance of the *aesthetic regime* in music.

If a positive redefinition of music is to take place, and an agreement of trust to be reestablished between the musical avant-garde and the wider public, it is crucial to examine the fundamental aspects of how music is created, performed, presented and disseminated today. This includes a significant revision of musical strategies that provide a social and collective space in which human relationships are established. Considering the link that exists between the *aesthetic* type of avant-garde, the *strategic* type of avant-garde, it is vital to rethink how to reinvigorate the

In other words, in order to reinvigorate (within the musical sphere) the *aesthetic* type of avant-garde, the *strategic* type of avant-garde also needs to be rethought and reworked. Furthermore, if the agreement of trust between the musical avant-garde and the community is to be regained, I believe it is important to consider the ethical core implicit in the definition of music in parallel with a strong desire towards innovation and change in all aspects of music-making. In other words, while acknowledging the audience and their perception of what the fundamental ethical functions of music are—by making them experience something that they would associate with their idea of music-making within the *musical result*—at the same time challenging these very notions and putting into question the fundamental aspects of music-making. If one subscribes to this position, one should also consider the role musical groups, institutions, ensembles, industry and movements might have in the *musical result* one is involved with, in order to determine whether these groups might help in the establishment of new *aesthetic* forms. Moreover, it is vital to consider the audience as well as the context, time and space where the music is to be presented as this too has a direct causality with the *aesthetic* result and its visibility, and plays a significant part in the disclosure of a particular type of experience.

Additionally, I believe that the creative process in music should also involve devising and composing these *strategic* aspects of music-making into the *musical result* by creatively reworking the modes of performance, composition, presentation and dissemination of music and rethinking the relationships between composer, performer and audience. Innovation within the *strategic* avant-garde can be achieved through many different approaches and might involve a diverse set of practices.

Some examples of how these strategies may be used as a creative tool are here described: Leave

this to the next chapter! (In the following chapter, I will propose and discuss some strategies

Erase this?

Composers and performers may have a role determining the type of musicians and ensembles they collaborate with—one may contemplate the possibility of collaborating with musicians from different backgrounds and traditions, whether they are trained to read notation or they come from an improvisation background. One might work with traditional (already existing group of musicians from a specific tradition) or mixed (musicians from different backgrounds) ensembles and devise how its members may interact with each other (making decisions on the performance dynamic). Communicating with other musicians through a musical score or by other forms of transmission could also be considered as creative decisions. The use of different types and combinations of scores (traditional, graphic, etc), practicing and rehearsal strategies and the use of aural and visual cues might also be taken into account. New strategies in the act of composing a score (using new compositional processes, algorithms or tricks) or an electro-acoustic composition (different ways of recording, triggering and processing audio) may also be examined. The specific venue (considering its historical and social context as well as its acoustic and visual characteristics), clothes, styling, lightning and other theatrical elements in a performance as well as the role of audience and its relationship to the *musical result*, are decisions that one might contemplate as belonging to the musician's creative process. Finally, choosing the way in which music is documented, produced and distributed—by choosing for example the type of media (video/audio recordings, printed CDs, MP3s, digital/printed scores, etc), how it is produced (low/high budget, produced at a professional or home studio, low/high definition, etc), combined (audio/visual, acoustic/electronic, printed/digital) and disseminated (through the internet, printed through a publisher or CD label, self-published, etc)—may also be seen as part of the musician's creative output.

If these strategies are used creatively, they can be instrumental in radically changing the ways in which we make and experience music. Moreover, they have a direct impact on the *musical result* and might contribute—if carefully examined and put into practice—to the emergence of new aesthetic forms. I believe 'art music' or 'contemporary music' can be positively redefined through the sensible use of these strategies and without falling back to the anti-mimetic stand commonly ascribed to *modernism* or the permissive attitude which doesn't seek to achieve anything new that is associated to *postmodernism*. At the same time if these strategies are used reasonably, they can also help strengthening the agreement of trust between the musical avant-garde and the wider public.

Maybe a bit more on how nevertheless, these strategies alone cannot do that if the aesthetic forms it generates are not 'new'. In other words, it is possible to make something 'old' from a 'new'

strategy... for example the use of technology to make 'old forms' of music (pop, whatever...)

Chapter 2

Technology and Strategy

In this chapter I will discuss the impact that technology might bring to musical strategies.

This discussion also points to my approach to technology.

2.1 Technological vs. Musical Innovation

Before discussing my views on how technology might have an important function in rethinking musical strategies, I would like to examine some problems that might arise regarding the use of recent technology in music. As a musician, one of my concerns regarding the relationship between technology and music is that on many occasions scientific innovation and technological curiosity are given priority over musical creativity and aesthetics. Luciano Berio has eloquently expressed the same position:

If in the past—even the distant past—music was often the testing bench and the stimulus for scientific research, and thus music tended to draw scientific knowledge to it, in more recent years you get the impression that it’s now science that draws music to it and takes possession of it. Indeed, you often get the impression that a scientific creativity applicable to music has substituted itself for musical creativity, and that musical thought has regressed to the level of the (invariably squalid) opinions that an electronic engineer from Bell Telephone or a Stanford “software man” may have about music.¹

The attitude of giving more importance to technological (as opposed to musical) innovation while creating music has also increased with the complexity and development of the tools themselves. Scientists and technologists often create music with the sole purpose of demonstrating new developments in music technology. Additionally, musicians that are interested in using technology to a

¹ Berio (1985), p. 121.

higher level of sophistication very often need to immerse themselves in intricate technological subjects. These circumstances can be misleading for the musician if his priorities shift from a position in which technology is researched and developed for its creative potential in music, to a position in which technological innovation becomes the driving force behind musical creativity. The shift of attention might even happen without the musician's awareness as a consequence of the effort one needs to go through in understanding the complexity of the technological tools and research developed in this field. This can be deceiving and even 'dangerous' if music becomes just a showcase of new technological advancements.

The experience gained by musicians during the second half of the twentieth century who worked closely with technology can also be very valuable to us today as a warning of the possible problems that working with technology might lead to. Looking back at Berio's account of his experience on this issue, one can grasp how the notion that new technological developments lead to important musical progress is erroneous. On his account, Berio describes how the advancements which permitted the creation of new sounds with electronic means did not by themselves produce any meaningful musical results.

Thus many of the more sensitive musicians quickly realized that it was as easy as it was superfluous to produce new sounds that were not the product of musical thought, just as it's easy nowadays to develop and 'improve' the technologies of electronics music when there are devoid of any real and profound *raison d'être*.²

He goes on to describe how music that was motivated by technological developments instead of musical thought resulted in a spectacle that did not address the complex set of relationships and conventions that take place in music.

It was recognized, for example, that the spectacle of a public gathered together to listen to loudspeakers was not a particularly cheerful one, and that, yet again, the experience of public musical listening was made up of many different conventions, and was rooted in many different aspects of social and cultural life: it was not made up merely of a piece, a musical object to listen to, even if it proposed "new sounds". By its very nature, a piece of music by itself cannot easily transform listening conventions and socio-musical relations in general.³

²Ibid., p. 122.

³Ibid., pp. 122,123.

The lesson to learn from Berio's statement is clear: musical and technological innovation are inherently different from each other and if one's interest lies in creating music, one needs to guide technological interests and development with priorities that will be relevant to the desired *musical result*. That is not to say of course, that scientific research or technological development regarding music is not valuable. On the contrary, my position is that technology can have a vital role in musical innovation if it is developed with a critical approach and considering the complex social, cultural and philosophical aspects inherent in music's definition. Moreover, if technology is developed imaginatively with the purpose of creating new musical strategies for the future, it might help reshaping the way in which we make and experience music.

2.2 Reshaping Relationships in Music Through Technology

Even though technology may play a key role in rethinking many aspects that form part of a *musical result*, here I will focus specifically on new strategies concerning the relationships between composer, performer and audience. Therefore, I am not going to go into detail into subjects that are not related to this specific area of interest as this would be out of the scope of this commentary. Nevertheless, I believe that there is huge potential and work to be done in these areas, which include concerns such as how technology may radically change the way in which musical institutions operate; the visual elements related to the performative aspects of music; how music is recorded, distributed, advertised and consumed. However, what I will concentrate on here is how technology brings a unique opportunity to envision new compositional and performative strategies based on reshaping relationships that have been established traditionally through compositional and performance-practice conventions. I will therefore start by examining the possibilities technology could bring in revising the way in which musical knowledge is transferred by imagining a new type of score that would combine oral and visual traditions within a multimedia experience.

2.2.1 The Score in the Digital Age

By now, much has been written about the limitations and advantages of the traditional score as a form of communication between composer and performer in western music.⁴ Through research in ethnomusicology and other music practices that incorporate improvisation, an increasing attention has been given to other forms of knowledge transfer in performance-practice that do not utilize a written score. These might include oral traditions that include such practices as transferring music

⁴See, for instance [Goehr \(2007\)](#), [Emmerson \(2000\)](#), [Small \(1998\)](#), [Wishart \(1996\)](#) and [Hamilton \(2008\)](#).

from one generation to another through a master-apprentice relationship or the increasing convention of studying recordings as a method of learning a particular song, style, genre or performance-practice. It has also been argued that the score is a medium that is highly individual and ‘isolates’ the performer not only from the audience but also when playing within a group of musicians.⁵ On the other hand, the idea of using notation has been defended as well for its capacity of capturing complex musical ideas and thoroughly worked structures, establishing a particular relationship between composer and performer, providing points of reference and facilitating synchronicity.⁶ My position regarding this matter is that the score is still a valuable tool for communicating with musicians trained within western tradition and it is worth expanding the notion of the score to include new strategies that can be developed through technology that might enhance or facilitate communication between composer and performer. In this respect, I completely agree with Simon Emmerson, who argues that technology can serve as a tool in generating new forms of notation that can encapsulate different forms of transferring musical knowledge.

But we have one new invention which may hinder and help our endeavor: the computer. Its power was rapidly applied to western music in all the forms we have discussed. Composition, analysis, transcription, sound production, processing, storage and distribution are all now in one way or another within its domain. . . . An unaddressed need remains: the development of more flexible notation systems; these may also be stimulated by the development of a new generation of music interfaces. . . . We should dream of a technology which bypasses some of these constraints: a combination of ear and eye—a new ‘superscore’.⁷

Emmerson’s idea of a ‘superscore’ combines oral and visual forms of communication within a multimedia object combining traditional notation, extended notation, recordings of example material from the live performer, electroacoustic materials, software for performance, patches for live electronic treatment, examples of live electronic treatment, an example recorded performance, written and

⁵See [Emmerson \(2000\)](#), p. 121.

⁶See, for example [Ferneyhough \(1995\)](#), for an in depth discussion not only about the difficulties implicit in the practice of notation (the impossibility of depicting sound as visual representation), but its potential as a vehicle to express ideological concerns and to achieve auto-introspection, as well as the role it might have as a common denominator in different fields of musical interests. According to Ferneyhough, the score contributes to the *act of composing* as an exercise in self-analysis through the process of notation, and to the *act of performance* by establishing the (social and contextual) conditions of its realization.

⁷[Emmerson \(2000\)](#), pp. 121-122.

spoken commentary, video performance material, video example material and graphical material.⁸

Taking Emerson's idea further, one could easily imagine the 'superscore' as a package that combines performance materials with documentation (including video tutorials, audio examples (sampled mock-up performances or real performances), recordings, interviews, *etc.*) residing on the Internet. Additionally, with the increasing accessibility of laptops, one could easily imagine replacing a score that is printed on paper, with one that is displayed on a computer monitor. This would bring the opportunity of exploring the potential to communicate musical meaning through a computer display, which would add movement to the expressive palette of a conventional score. By using animated graphics, scores, pictures, as well as other types visual cues and timed written directions, the composer could enhance the way in which he communicates musical ideas and knowledge through the computer display. In addition, the performer could receive other types of audio information through headphones complimenting the visual input with an 'aural score'. This could comprise from spoken directions and sounding cues (click tracks, reference pitches, etc) to recordings of acoustic or electroacoustic music that the performer would have to react to or improvise with. Moreover, with the development of real-time processing technologies and generative algorithms, the notion of a *fixed* score could also be contested by a score that is *dynamic*, thereby creating a composition that may change its content (pitches, rhythms, etc) each time it is performed. Real-time scoring could be explored further by combining elements of real-time animation and graphics display with new advancements in machine listening technologies, thereby generating a score that responds to the sonic and acoustic context of a specific performance and space. The possibility of creating a network including several computers could also provide instant communication between performers and the option for the composer or conductor to send directions that would be specific to a particular performance. With the increasing popularity of wireless networks and new types of interfaces and gadgets, portable devices like the iPad or iPhone could be used to implement the 'superscore', making it easier to carry and even place in a music stand.

In addition to enhancing communication with musicians trained within the western tradition, the 'superscore' could also foster new collaborative possibilities between performers of different cultures. By sending information that is specifically devised and customized for a particular type of performer, the 'superscore' could provide the opportunity for musicians from different backgrounds and traditions to share the stage simultaneously in a computer-mediated performance. A group of performers from mixed backgrounds could therefore play together within a predetermined structure by receiving different types of visual and aural stimuli. The collaborative opportunities this could bring are vast

⁸Ibid., pp. 128-129.

as technology could facilitate and even solve problems that until now have made it difficult (if not impossible) for musicians from different backgrounds to play together.

2.2.2 Crossing Cultural Borders?

Given the opportunities technology brings for a diverse group of musicians to share the stage despite previous incompatible performance conventions, important questions arise concerning the types of relationship established during collaboration. These relationships might become particularly sensitive if one is collaborating with musicians from different cultures. In his article *Crossing Cultural Boundaries through Technology*, Simon Emmerson already expresses some concerns as a composer when dealing with cross-cultural collaborations and ‘ensembles with ethnic instruments’. He argues that the western composer often appropriates music from different cultures through ‘strongly filtered sources’ and cultural misunderstandings, frequently resulting in ‘cultural murder’.

There are plenty of examples of composers killing stone dead the spontaneity and vitality which they themselves admire in non-western music through insensitive appropriation of surface technique (usually, once again, through an inadequate notation system and inadequate formalized ‘rules’). Too simple an understanding of acculturation may hinder the very process we aim to foster.⁹

Emmerson suggests the western composer should undergo a process that surpasses the initial first impression of the other culture’s music—which is solely based on our previous expectations and experience—to develop a process where ‘new measures of significance’ are created. According to Emmerson, this stage is crucial: if the western composer declares intentions to define the meaning of the musical result (based on misconceptions and misunderstandings of the other culture), he might reinforce “the purely western basis for the evaluation of such projects thus defeating much of their object”.¹⁰ He therefore promotes a positive attitude towards ‘successful acculturation’ through education, practical experience, mutual understanding and respect.¹¹

Even though Emmerson’s position appears to be sincere and well-intentioned, a danger exists if it lends itself to an attitude analogous to the notion of *multiculturalism*, which Slavoj Žižek has rightfully criticized. According to Žižek, *multiculturalism* is a tendency that has spread in western nations through globalization that treats local (other) cultures with ‘respect’ and displays an interest in studying, understanding and preserving their traditions. Nevertheless, this arrangement is established

⁹Ibid., p. 126-127.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 126.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 115-134.

through a hegemonic relationship—imposed by western nations and from a western perspective—by maintaining a condescending distance between the dominant and repressed cultures.

Multiculturalism involves patronizing Eurocentrist distance and/or respect for local cultures without roots in one's own particular culture. In other words, multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a 'racism with a distance'—it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving of the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position. Multiculturalism is a racism which empties its own position of all positive content (the multiculturalist is not a direct racist, he doesn't oppose to the Other the *particular* values of his won culture), but nonetheless retains this position as the privileged *empty point of universality* from which one is able to appreciate (and depreciate) properly other particular cultures—the multiculturalist respect for the Other's specificity is the very form of asserting one's own superiority.¹²

Emmerson's approach towards intercultural projects might become misleading if it is assumed that through a process of education and experience with music/musicians from 'other' cultures, these projects will lose their western basis and become productive or successful cultural exchanges. Moreover, this process of study and practical exchange might in itself become the basis of establishing a relationship of power and an attitude that reflects—as Žižek would say—the way 'the colonizer treats colonized people'.¹³ I will therefore suggest that a more 'honest' form of exchange is to approach intercultural projects with skepticism and self-awareness; without distancing oneself from the musicians from 'other cultures' by treating them with special respect or with a fake notion of open-mindedness. I would propose dealing with these musicians as one would deal with other musicians within our own culture (we are not usually particularly concerned with treating people within our own culture with special 'respect' or distance), by collaborating with them (without assuming a patronizing distance) towards one's desired musical result. One should also assume that there will be a struggle involved in the process of intercultural collaboration as there are always different types of violence and relationships of power that emerge during cultural exchanges.

The way in which we deal with music and musicians from different cultures underlines a wider problem, that is, how should we as creative musicians should approach the act of appropriation.

¹²Žižek (2006), *The Universal Exception*, 'Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism', p.170-172.

¹³Ibid., p. 170.

Nevertheless, before engaging in such discussion,¹⁴ I would first like to consider how technology—and more specifically real-time computer processing—may offer new applications that challenge the conventional notion of a musical performance and the relationships established traditionally in music-making.

2.3 Live Electronic Music Performance

The introduction of the computer to live performance offers the possibility to establish new relationships regarding the way in which we perceive a musical performance. The causality inherent in traditional music produced with mechanical means,¹⁵ which follows ‘well-understood Newtonian mechanics of action and reaction, motion, energy, friction and damping,’¹⁶ does not need to apply to live electronic music performance. In electronic music, the causal relationships found in our acoustic surroundings are usually not clearly revealed, given that sound may be produced with little evidence of mechanical production (with the exception of the vibrating cone of the loudspeaker). Nevertheless, considering that most of our sonic experience lies within our acoustic environment, we usually seek to form causal relationships (even within the electronic medium). Therefore, many efforts have been made to reestablish causal relationships that are characteristic of traditional music through mechanical means in electronic music performance. This has been attempted through the continuing development of interfaces that attempt to reestablish an instrumental approach to electronic music (for example synthesizers, Midi samplers, electric guitars, *etc*). Nevertheless, electronic music performance also offers new opportunities to form other types of relationships as perceived by the listener. This specific feature of the electronic medium may challenge conventional notions of what a musical performance is as it may form new types of relationships that go beyond the traditional instrumental approach. Therefore, when dealing with electronic music performance, the composer may decide what types of relationships he/she wants to establish—for instance, how different sonic and visual aspects of a performance may relate with each other or how the human body and movement may be associated to sound.

Simon Emmerson, in his book *Living electronic music*, describes different approaches the musician may take towards electronic music performance based on how the audience may perceive the actions of the human performer in relationship to the sounding result. First, he describes what he calls the ‘Local/Field Distinction’, in an attempt to conceptualize differently relationships that seem to have

¹⁴See [Chapter 5](#), for a discussion about appropriation in music.

¹⁵This includes traditional means of producing vocal, instrumental and mechanical music.

¹⁶[Emmerson \(2009\)](#), p. xiv.

a perceived causality between a human performer's action and the sounding result, and those that don't.

Local controls and functions seek to extend (but not to break) the perceived relation of human performer action to sounding result. *Field* functions create a context, a landscape or an environment within which *local* activity may be found. It is important to emphasize that the *field* as defined above *can contain other agencies*, in other words, it is not merely a 'reverberant field' in the crude sense but an area in which the entire panoply of both pre-composed and real-time electro-acoustic music may be found. . . . This definition aims to separate out the truly live element as clearly the 'local agency' in order to reform more coherently the relationship with this open stage area, which may surround the audience and extend outside.¹⁷

This distinction is useful to the musician as it encourages reflection on how the presentation of electronic music performance—particularly aural/visual relationships concerning causality and human presence—might influence the listeners perception of the overall *musical result*. Additionally, given the particularities of the medium, the electronic musician is encouraged to rethink important aspects about performance (for instance, how it might look like, what function might the musicians perform onstage, what types of human/machine interaction might be established, *etc*). This distinction can also be helpful if it is considered creatively as a parameter within a composition: the distinction between *local* and *field* could be emphasized or blurred according to the desired musical moment, the extremes could be alternated or even morphed between each other, an extreme might be embraced as the other is sublimated, *etc*. In addition, Emmerson also makes a difference between *real* and *imaginary* relationships that may be *local* or *field*. According to Emmerson, *real* relationships are also 'real-time' and have direct relation with the *real* cause as perceived by the audience (a sonic result that can be followed by the listener). This may include processing the 'live' sound, abstracting a gesture through an interface or sensor, or through other types of analysis (audio or video). *Imaginary* relationships, on the other hand, are 'prepared in advance (soundfiles, control sequences, *etc.*) in such a way as to *imply* a causal link of sound to performer action in the *imagination* of the listener'.¹⁸ Emmerson also emphasizes that the difference between *real* and *imaginary* relationships might be different for the listener as they are for the composer (or as they are in reality). Even though I find Emmerson's terminology slightly confusing,¹⁹ I think it points towards an issue that I

¹⁷Emmerson (2009), p. 92.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 93.

¹⁹His distinction I don't find very useful as it seems to make a link between *real* relationships with 'real-time'

think is important to anyone dealing with electronic music performance, that is, what should concern us is what *appears* to be real or not to the listener, and not whether technological processes are taking place ‘in reality’ (real-time) or have been prepared before hand. Consequently, the question of whether to use ‘real-time’ processing or not should stem from aesthetic concerns in relationship to the listener’s perception of the performance and not from ‘technical authenticity’, or to cling to a set of technological concepts.

The opportunities that electronic music gives in forming new relationships between the performer’s action and the sounding result, gives the composer the option of thinking creatively about how a performance might be presented. The cognitive dissonance that might arise between aural and visual elements of the performance could be used as a performative element, creating meaning out of the apparent sensorial disjunction. This approach could even be exaggerated, for instance, by suggesting causal relationships that may be only observed and have no corresponding sounding result, or by creating a visually static performance while having a sounding result that would suggest frenetic activity. This slightly more idiosyncratic approaches towards the presentation of electronic music may also encourage people to reflect on the subject of how the performer relates to a technological object, which at the same time may prompt a deeper question, mainly, how we as human beings relate through technology.

2.3.1 Interactivity or Interpassivity?

The conventional viewpoint regarding the relationship between human beings and technological objects is that we relate with them through interaction. However, Slavoj Žižek has proposed the alternative notion of *interpassivity* (to describe the opposite of *interactivity*) regarding the duality between active and passive relationships that might be formed between a person and a technological object.

Interpassivity, like interactivity, thus subverts the standard opposition between activity and passivity: if in interactivity (or the ‘cunning of Reason’), I am passive while being active through another, in interpassivity, I am active while being passive through another.

More precisely, the term ‘interactivity’ is currently used in two senses: (1) *interacting* processing and *imaginary* relationships with ‘fixed’ or prepared material. I think this is misleading, as ‘real-time’ processes usually contain large amount of prepared or ‘fixed’ elements (for instance, computer programs, patches, data bases, etc., that have been prepared in advance) that also create what Emerson calls *imaginary* relationships and an *illusion* of causality. That is to say, his terminology might lead to misunderstandings as it equates types of relationships the listener makes to whether an electroacoustic part is influenced by a performer or is autonomous.

with the medium—that is, not being just a passive consumer; (2) *acting through* another agent, so that my job is done, while I sit back and remain passive, just observing the game. While the opposite of the first mode of interactivity is also a kind of interpassivity, the mutual passivity of two subjects, like two lovers passively observing each other and merely enjoying each others presence, the proper notion of interpassivity aims at the reversal of the second meaning of interactivity: the distinguishing feature of interpassivity is that, in it, the subject is incessantly—frenetically even—active, while displacing on to another the fundamental passivity of his or her being.²⁰

Therefore, Žižek implies that we not only form *interactive*, but also *interpassive* relationships with technological objects. That is to say, while the ordinary stance regarding the way we relate to technology is by using its objects for our own purpose, what Žižek suggests is that today technological objects might actually demand something from us instead. Therefore, the ‘user’²¹ not only *uses* technology, but is also *used* through technology. Moreover, Žižek elaborates his argument further by using Lacanian psychoanalysis. He claims that *interpassivity* implies that while we are obsessively active by the object’s demands, we also rely on the object to be passive for us. This transfer implies a game that goes on in our minds, in which we imagine the object as the Other, whose desire we subvert through our activity in order to put off our recognition that enjoyment cannot be achieved in full. It is for this reason—according to Žižek—that the notion of *interpassivity* is vital in understanding the artistic possibilities of digital technology.²²

Žižek’s definitions may also be applied to the way in which a performer might relate to technology in a live electronic musical performance. The performer therefore might form *interactive* relationships with a technological object if he/she seems to remain passive while technology appears to be active. For instance, when a performer plays a note or presses a button that sets an active chain of sound, or the ‘typical’ laptop performer’s role of sitting behind the computer appearing to be passive while triggering musical events that suggest activity. The performer might also form *interpassive* relationships with technology, when a technological object appears to remain passive while making the performer appear frantically active. This concept hasn’t been explored thoroughly by composers using technology but can be found for example in cases where the performer receives directions from a technological object (through a computer display or through headphones) directing the performer towards frenetic activity. I think a potential exists to further develop musical applications that

²⁰Žižek (2006), *The Žižek Reader*, ‘The Fantasy in Cyberspace’, p. 105.

²¹Here, I am referring to the term ‘user’ as applied commonly in the development of computer technologies.

²²See Ibid., pp. 104-110.

establish *interpassive* relationships between performer and technological objects through computer-mediated performances or more experimental methods, such as involuntary bodily movement²³ or by radically altering the sound of a performer playing an electronic instrument (which produces no considerable audible sound that is not generated electronically) such that the initial physical effort of the performer is reduced or striped to silence by computer processing (giving the impression of human activity being subverted through technology).

Additionally, the musician might also establish *interactive* as well as *interpassive* relationships with the audience through technology. *Interpassive* relationships might be established by following a model whereby the performer displays intense activity through technology—for example, by using electronic instruments, interfaces, sensors or other forms of tracking human movement—following the concert hall format, where the audience remains seated as passive spectators of the action onstage. On the other hand, *interactive* relationships may be formed if the audience becomes active through technology, while the performer seems to remain passive. This is the case for example of the laptop performer or DJ—which play music that encourages the audience to become active by dancing frenetically—while staying behind their computer offering no clue that they are in actuality producing the sound. However, it could be argued that this apparent activity displayed by the audience through bodily motion at the same time might shift the audience’s attention away from certain musical content, resulting in a type of passivity. In other words, by becoming active through movement, the audience might stop focusing on certain aspects of the music as their attention shifts towards physical activity, resulting in a reversal of Žižek’s first definition of *interactivity*. A reversal could also be applied regarding the engagement of the audience within the concert hall model: while the audience seemingly takes the role of passive spectator and the musicians displays activity through their virtuosity; in actuality, the audience might be the one engaging with the music, rendering emotional and intellectual activity through the performance, while the performers ‘stops listening’ as they concentrate on bodily movement.

2.3.2 New Relationships with the Audience

The particularities of live electronic performance also encourage new ways of thinking about the relationships that may be established between musicians and audience during a performance. Due to the increasing development of technologies that have an impact on the performer/audience relationship, today we have at our disposal a considerable amount of tools that enable us to reconsider and rethink this exchange. The traditional forms by which the audience experiences music, may

²³See Stelarc (2004).

therefore be expanded by establishing new conditions for exchange mediated by technological tools. Thus, with the creative use of new technologies we are able to change the traditional way in which the audience participates in a musical performance. What's more, through technology composers can devise a piece of music partially based on these conditions of exchange, which could evolve and change during the performance.

Seeking to form new types of relationships between musicians and audience through technology could also lead to developing new interactive possibilities in a musical performance. The audience could take an active role making decisions as far as how they want to experience the performance. These decisions could go as far as what type of content a composition may have and how it might unravel. Interactive elements usually associated with installation work, could be incorporated within a musical performance: the audience could explore the performing space triggering and modifying musical events by interacting in different ways with each other, the space and performers. In other words, the performance could become immersive and the audience could directly influence its outcome. Another musical strategy that could be developed through technology is something close to what Nicolas Bourriaud has called *Relational Art*, which refers to “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.”²⁴ In other words, a musical performance could be contemplated for its potential as a collective space in which members of the audience could engage with each other in different ways. Technology could mediate this platform of exchange by facilitating tools by which individuals within the audience could communicate with each other and establish new kinds of transactions.

However, these strategies by themselves do not guarantee a type of activity from the audience that suggests reflection and encourages critical thinking and creativity. As it was suggested earlier, the illusion of activity and passivity might be deceiving—the appearance of this opposition might in reality be its reversal. What is conventionally associated with passivity, in actuality could suggest a different type of activity and *vice versa*. These are some of the questions Rancière addresses in his book *The Emancipated Spectator*, where he challenges preconceived notions that associate listening and observation to passivity and identifies the audience as inactive. Rancière therefore proposes a vision for a spectator that, while seating and listening, is active—fabricating his/her own interpretation and understanding of the performance, associating it with his/her own ideas about the world and the future. This kind of spectator is emancipated in as much as he/she is not manipulated by the performance, but maintains a critical distance and independence from what he experiences as

²⁴Bourriaud (2002), p. 113.

an observer.

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way—by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has read or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them.²⁵

Rancière's positive image of an emancipated spectator therefore resists the notion of a spectator that is passive, submissive and dominated by the stimuli that is thrown at him/her. Furthermore, Rancière questions strategies that attempt to break with the hegemony established by what Debord describes as 'the society of the spectacle'²⁶ through practices that for instance invert the position between audience and performers (or blurs the line between the two), change the space of the performance (presenting it outside traditional spaces) and blur the line between everyday occasions and the performance.²⁷ Even though these practices might be interesting for aesthetic purposes, they do not deal directly with the idea of a performance as having as its principal aim to assemble spectators that end the hegemonic relationships of the spectacle. That is to say, these strategies only 'redistribute positions and spaces' and do not by themselves encourage the audience to actively listen, observe or think critically during a musical performance.

2.4 Technology and New Practices in Composition

Recent developments in computer technologies have already had direct implications in the practices of music composition. Today composers use computers for a wide variety of purposes, from score

²⁵Rancière (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 13.

²⁶Where the spectacle (entertainment, mass media, *etc.*) serves as a tool for power and domination of the masses.

See Debord (1994).

²⁷See Rancière (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 15.

editing and Midi sequencing (to create ‘mock-ups’ of instrumental compositions) to algorithmic composition and electroacoustic (‘fixed’ or real-time) compositions. Moreover, the computer at present time provides an amount of processing power for musical computation never imagined before by composers. Modern computation provides the composer the possibility of executing calculations that for a human would be extremely tedious or impossible in a matter of milliseconds. Composers can take advantage of capabilities provided by digital technology to save time otherwise devoted to calculations that computers perform more efficiently than humans (e.g. iteration), and focus on tasks that humans excel at and that are impossible for computers to perform at present time (e.g. analytical/aesthetic decisions within a cultural framework). If a critical evaluation of technology becomes part of the composer’s criteria—taking in consideration the possibilities and limitations of the tools implemented—the repercussions these new innovations may bring to music composition are bound to be significant. The use of computers to compose music not only is changing the way composers write music, but also rises new questions regarding the notion of what it means to compose music.

One of the consequences of the increasing processing speed developed for computers in the last two decades has been the ability to execute complex algorithms within the immediacy of a musical performance. The speed at which these calculations are processed brings a whole new set of possibilities in the practices of musical composition. Robert Rowe has enthusiastically described the possibilities real-time computation brings to music composition and human-machine interaction in music-making:

Composers have used algorithms in the creation of music for centuries. The speed with which such algorithms can now be executed by digital computers, however, eases their use during the performance itself. Once they are part of a performance, they can change their behavior as a function of the musical context going on around them. For me, this versatility represents the essence of interaction and an intriguing expansion of the craft of composition. An equally important motivation for me, however, is the fact that interactive systems require the participation of humans making music to work.²⁸

Not only can the computer make calculations in real-time that formerly would have been made by the composer prior to the performance, but the results of these calculations can change each time the composition is performed. The immediacy of real-time computation therefore brings new possibilities for the composer, who can—instead of imagining a ‘fixed’ composition (at least regarding the set of musical events described by a traditional score)—formulate an algorithmic system which generates

²⁸Rowe (2001), p. 4.

different possible musical outcomes.²⁹ In addition, the possible outcomes may vary according to the sonic environment and musical situation of each specific performance. An important point in Rowe's statement is also that interactive systems reestablish human performers at the center of computer music. The role of the human performer is not limited to triggering and manipulating computer generated/processed sound but can be extended to interacting with computer systems with a traditional acoustic instrument or voice. Not only may human action influence the computer's response in a wide variety of ways—by using different types of audio and visual analysis as well as physical gesture tracking³⁰—but the human performer himself/herself may be influenced by the computer's reaction. In addition, another human agent in computer music can be the composer himself/herself taking part in the performance, leaving some compositional decisions to be made during the performance itself. Xenakis' vision of a composer as a sort of pilot who presses buttons, directs the morphology of sound and general form of a composition by making global decisions and leaving the details to the computer,³¹ today is possible within the immediacy of a live performance. The composer's role therefore may broaden to include decision-making during the performance itself. As a result, the action of deciding which elements of the composition are 'pre-composed' and which ones are taken during the performance may become central to the compositional process. Therefore, real-time computation opens-up the possibility for the composer to explore and formalize the relationship between premeditated and spontaneous decisions and the dialog between improvisation and composition in live electronic performance. Live electronic music that uses real-time computation and interactive systems may be characterized as *generative*, *temporal* and *relational*—notions that are at the same time at the core of improvisation. For this reason, there are many common interests and concerns between the two fields and today they also often overlap. This explains why at present time musicians dealing with improvisation have become attracted to using real-time computation, as well as composers using these technologies have increasingly started to collaborate with improvisers, incorporate improvisatory elements in their work and improvise themselves. Furthermore, the inclusion of composers using computers within the performance, as well as the type of decisions they make regarding details in sound production,³² also questions the separation between performer and composer that emerged during the twentieth century. In other words, as a consequence of the possibility of making

²⁹This type of real-time composition is sometimes referred to as *generative music*. See [Eno\(1996\)](#), for a brief introduction to ideas behind *generative music*.

³⁰Physical gesture tracking has gained attention in the computer music community recently and the development of sophisticated interfaces and sensors has considerably increased in the past few years.

³¹See [Xenakis \(1992\)](#), p. 144.

³²For instance, details regarding timing, articulation, timbral changes, *etc*, formerly made mostly by performers.

‘compositional’ decisions within the immediacy provided by real-time computation and because of the nature of these decisions, the clear division between composition and performance has been blurred in live electronic performance.

I believe that a model of a composer who is involved in performance, improvises, directs and is actively engaged in all aspects of music-making³³ will reemerge partly as a consequence of the inclusion of computers in live performance. The notion of the composer as a musician who specializes only in writing scores, will be replaced in favor of a concept of a creative musician who, through technology, engages in a diverse set of practices. I am convinced that amongst these practices, programming computer applications will become a crucial activity for the composer. Computer code, not only is becoming a new way of documenting music but also has a similar function to the musical score in terms of its influence over the creative process: mainly, the act of writing computer code may serve as a medium towards self-reflection and criticism regarding the *musical result*. Additionally, coding may become a collaborative practice through the Internet: by using version control systems (VCS)³⁴ musicians may be able to share compositional ideas with each other, as well as strategies on how to implement them technically. The act of composition might become a collective practice in itself if composers collaborate as a group on the creation of a single piece of music through the Internet. Instant feedback from the performers could influence the result of the composition as well, by giving valuable information regarding the practicality of the performative aspects of the music at an early stage in the creative process.³⁵ Therefore, sharing information would be facilitated at all stages of the creative process through the use of the Internet as a collaborative platform. I am confident that new composition practices will soon emerge reflecting the agile forms of communication and collaboration fostered by the development of digital technologies and the Internet. Increasingly, the notion of a single composer making all decisions regarding the creation of one piece of music, in my view, will be replaced by other models of collaboration in which a team of musicians with

³³This vision of the composer is closer to that of the baroque and classical periods in contrast to the twentieth century model of the composer as a specialist who only writes scores.

³⁴Version control systems are used in software development to manage changes that are made to computer code, documents and other computer files. Revisions are made to files at different points in their development and can be altered by many people. The changes to the files are tracked and the system provides control over the changes by locking, backtracking, merging, duplicating, branching and cloning different versions. Revision control software such as [Subversion \(2000\)](#) and [Git \(2005\)](#) encourage social coding and are open-source (free). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revision_control, for more information on VCS.

³⁵This information could include specialized information regarding instrumentation and performance practice, for example, whether the desired sounds sit comfortably in the instrument or whether they are impossible to perform.

different specialities³⁶ may work towards the same musical output.

Conclusion . . .

³⁶Possibly, this team could also include experts in other areas as well, including for example computer science, engineering, architecture, acoustics, mathematics, anthropology, *etc*, that could give valuable feedback into the compositional process.

Chapter 3

Appropriation and (Post)-postproduction

3.1 Musical Appropriation

The contemporary era constantly proclaims itself as post-ideological, but this denial of ideology only provides the ultimate proof that we are more than ever embedded in ideology. Ideology is always a field of struggle—among other things, the struggle for appropriating past traditions.¹

Start on appropriation and past traditions...

Consumption is simultaneously also production, just as in nature the production of a plant involves the consumption of elemental forces and chemical material²

Starting with the language imposed upon us (the system of production), we construct our own sentences (acts of everyday life), thereby reappropriating for ourselves, through these clandestine microbricolages, the last word in the productive chain.³

3.1.1 Appropriation and Postproduction in the Digital Age

By listening to music or reading a book, we produce new material, we become producers. And each day we benefit from more ways in which to organize this production: remote controls, VCRs, computers, MP3s, tools that allow us to select, reconstruct, and edit. Postproduction artists are agents of this evolution, the specialized workers of cultural reappropriation.⁴

¹Žižek (2009), 'It's Ideology, Stupid!', p. 37.

²Karl Marx

³Bourriaud (2005), p.

⁴Ibid. p. ?

Throughout the eighties, the democratization of computers and the appearance of sampling allowed for the emergence of a new cultural configuration, whose figures are the programmer and DJ. The remixer has become more important than the instrumentalist, the rave more exciting than the concert hall. The supremacy of cultures of appropriation and the reprocessing of forms calls for an ethics: to paraphrase Philippe Thomas, artworks belong to everyone. Contemporary art tends to abolish the ownership of forms, or in any case to shake up the old jurisprudence. Are we heading toward a culture that would do away with copyright in favor of a policy allowing free access to works, a sort of blueprint for a communism of forms?⁵

3.1.2 criticisms

3.1.3 The liberal-comunists: Open Source, etc.

There is no music by John Oswald on the net free to download. Hypocrisy from the appropriator? Or does he fall into the logic of late-capitalism - no communism of forms? I plunder but dont plunder me. Or, at least not for free?

I propose an attitude towards music appropriation similar to that of hacker communities and the open source initiative. Not with the purpose of suggesting a communist utopia, but of being consequent with my creative process. By giving away my music, recorded sounds and experiments, code, etc, through the net, I will hopefully instigate others to do so as well. If this attitude is followed, it could promote the organization of music cyber communities that would plunder, engage with and promote each other, hopefully producing more subversive types of music.

We are far from the Bourriauds utopia. The only people how have access to (artistic) shareware are commoditized people, mostly in western countries. Isnt the DJ approach towards plunderphonics one that appropriates to make more profit and diminish costs only to thereafter feed back their product into the music industry system?

3.2 Musical Appropriation through Technology

I will continue by examining different strategies and practices used in my work that use technology as means to appropriate, derive from and transform existing music by other musicians. It is only logical, considering that music is not an object but a complex set of actions, productions, perceptions

⁵Ibid. p. ?

and thoughts,⁶ that the act of appropriation of existing music can manifest itself in many different ways and take lots of unexpected guises. Therefore, I will propose that the appropriation of existing music *does not* refer exclusively to ‘borrowing’ or ‘stealing’ from *musical works* by other composers but to Moreover, when dealing with appropriation, I will claim that there are certain fundamental questions that both music creators and listeners should ask themselves. According to David Metzter, Stockhausen (while referring to *Hymnen*) emphasized the importance of asking the questions of “what” and “how” regarding the practice of ‘borrowing’ or ‘quoting’ from other music.

According to him [*Stockhausen*], the practice involves a rich exchange between the “what” and the “how”, that is, the gesture has us hear “what” music has been borrowed and “how” it has been changed. The more familiar and obvious the “what”, the more we are drawn into the “how”, and the more captivating the “how”, the more we can appreciate anew the “what”. It is the ways in which quotation handles the “what” and the “how” that make it so effective a cultural agent.⁷

I agree with Stockhausen’s claim because Nevertheless, I would also add : the difference between “what” and “who” also “from where”. but most importantly “why”, Why = motivations. The motivations regarding musical appropriation can be very varied and also reflect ideological positions that in many cases reflect more the beliefs and feelings of the appropriator than the appropriated. Therefore, I will attempt to explain my viewpoint regarding the motivations and ways in which I use other music within my own work. In doing so, I will also examine other composers work that deals with musical appropriation in ways that I consider valid, interesting and intriguing.

Technology

Will do so by examining other composers work dealing with this issues... that I find valid, interesting, intriguing, stimulating(?)...

3.2.1 Musica Derivata and Plunderphonics

“A good composer does not imitate; he steals” I. Stravinsky

Musica Derivata:

“music that is compositionally based on other music” (K. Barlow)

⁶See pp 13-45 for a discussion regarding my preference of the notion of a *musical result* versus the more widely use concept of *musical work*.

⁷Metzter (2003), p. 6.

3.2.2 plunderphones, ideology and the use of references

While some start up a prolonged lamentation for the lost image, others reopen their albums to rediscover the pure enchantment of images- that is, the alterity of the *was*, between the pleasure of pure presence and the bit of the absolute Other.

Evidence of exhibitions devoted to ‘images’, but also the dialectic that affects each type of image and mixes its legitimations and powers with those of the other two.

Plunderphones reflect ideology . . . Žižek/Adorno but. . . . The artist can present their own view of these references by rearranging them modifying them. The plunderphonics artist doesn’t necessarily adhere to the ideology of the appropriated material, but reflects it by the use of the plunderphones - how are they presented, modified, etc?

3.2.3 On Musical Appropriation

What?

Code, compositional techniques, what piece of music? Do we plunder from the “flea market or (the) airport shopping mall”? (N. Bourriaud). From the top 20 list - J. Oswald approach-, or from the hidden CDs at the back of the music store?

Who?

Music Industry? Pop/commercial? Historical (dead composers)? Music from different cultures?

Appropriation of the Other. What relationship do we want to establish with the Other? Impersonal like the 1st/3rd World relationships?

Liberal multiculturalists approach? “Other deprived of its Otherness (the idealized Other who dances fascinating dances and has an ecologically sound holistic approach to reality, while features like wife beating remain out of sight)?” (Slavoj Žižek, 2003)

Why?

For the meaning of the cultural object you are appropriating? For its symbolism? To suggest a metaphor?

For its use? “Don’t look for the meaning, look for the use” - L. Wittgenstein - for example for the sonic qualities of the appropriation (intonation, groove, etc.)

How?

3.3 Typologies of Musical Appropriation

3.3.1 Copyrights Violation

3.3.2 Scores

The first strategy considered is Clarence Barlow's concept of *Musica Derivata*, which refers to the idea of transforming existing music with Computer Aided Composition (CAC) tools to create "music that is compositionally based on other music"⁸ This approach seems to take as a starting point mostly notated material (but in some occasions spectral information from recordings) from music by other composers.

Midi

me

3.3.3 Recordings

Plunderphonics

Plunderphonics:

John Oswald, 1985. "Plunderphonics, or Audio Piracy as Compositional Prerogative"

Use of audio samples as a technique for composition.

Different from *Musica Derivata* in that it appropriates the recording of the original musical source. Information from recording (timbre, rhythm, performance practice, etc) is plundered from the original source to create a new composition.

"As a listener my own preference is the option to experiment. My listening system has a mixer instead of a receiver, an infinitely variable speed turntable, filters, reverse capability, and a pair of ears. An active listener might speed up a piece of music in order to perceive more clearly its macrostructure, or slow it down to hear articulation and detail more precisely".⁹

Sound Transformations

"With the power of the computer, we can transform sounds in such radical ways that we can no longer assert that the goal sound is related to the source sound merely because we have derived one from the other". (T. Wishart)

In my work, sound transformations are used for the transformation of existing music.

⁸Barlow (2000).

⁹Oswald (1985).

Why transformation of musical sources? Because they may carry complex cultural symbolism.

The amount of processing can affect our ability to recognize the source sound or musical sample. Therefore, there is a wide palette of derivative music available to us: from the radically processed less recognizable source more ‘abstract’ extreme; to the less processed more recognizable source more ‘referential’ and quotation type music.

Performance practice and other sonic characteristics of many original musical sources is lost in the transcription to a fully notated score for ensembles of western classically trained musicians. Many aspects of sound production (intonation, groove, spectral characteristics of instruments/voices, etc) is lost via this process.

Process of derivation and sound transformation is not directly apparent to the audience. The act of appropriation is not transparent.

3.3.4 Spectral Information

To generate sc

3.3.5 Computer Code

Max patches, Computer Code.

3.3.6 Real Performances

3.3.7 Real-Time Plunderphonics

Appropriation of audio signals from live music performances as material for a new composition

Creates a cognitive dissonance between audio and visuals.

The amount of processing of the audio signals is visible. The more processed the performances are, the more contrasting they will look in relationship with what is heard through speakers.

In contrast to acousmatic tradition, Real-Time Plunderphonics makes the process of appropriation transparent to the audience through the cognitive association between audio and visuals.

Changes relationship with the appropriated Other: The performer becomes an accomplice in the process of appropriation (or themselves).

Deals with the problematic of the lack of visual clues and theatrical elements in electronic music performance by introducing a dynamic group of live performers and an interesting and unusual visual scenario.

Some ideas of how to plunder

Get to know what and who you are plundering and figure why you are doing so before you decide how to plunder. (Know your performers, their music and why you want to work with them)

Appropriate and plunder yourself.

Plundering not as central purpose of the creative process, but rather a tool for creating new idiosyncratic audio/visual result.

Use “from raw to cooked” (Lévi-Strauss) techniques to create a narrative that navigates, in literary terms, between the real (actual performance) and the ‘surreal’ (extreme processed audio).

Combinations of Real-Time Plunderphonics, (Real-Time) Musica Derivata and Sound Transformations

Use plunderphones as data: reprogram, not just remix.

Micro and macro plundering.

Use also Non Real-Time tools (Scores, Samples, etc.) if suitable.

Using plunderphones as data

An example: Use FFT data of your plunderphone to trigger samples of recorded instruments.

Micro and Macro Plundering

Microplunderphonics

Plundering just microelements of sound. Not the whole spectrum of the original sound file.

Generate noise with your plunderphones and use it instead of white noise for sound synthesis

Macroplundering

Appropriate a compositions form. Use the structure as blueprint for a new composition.

Use variables of the appropriated piece (pitch, dynamics, etc.) as control structures for new output.