
Editorial

'Remember you heard it here first: ants don't need passports!', said the BBC *Today* presenter, rounding off a piece about a London gallery which was exhibiting a new work by a Japanese artist. The work in question had been created by tracing, with a red wax crayon on eight square metres of the gallery floor, the erratic journeys of an ant. After six days there was an intricate and delicate interweaving of thin red lines, at its most dense in the corners where the ant had sought refuge from the vast unknown. 'It's something like looking at a city from the air or at blood vessels', the gallery director suggested; but the interviewer was off on a different tack. 'People will want to know how you can justify spending public money in this way. Are you thinking of trying this with other animals?' (Imagination boggles: ostriches, perhaps?)

Why do radio journalists have to trivialize everything? Must they really ask such stupid questions? But presumably these are carefully considered techniques, designed to provoke listeners' reactions and to provide opportunities for those being interviewed to clear up misunderstandings. In this case, the gallery director's response was impressive. The public should try to understand that imagination cannot be constrained: artists must be able to explore new possibilities; to move freely across uncharted territory, as the ant had been free to move, not held within boundaries: 'Ants don't need passports.' That was good. Nevertheless, the interviewer's shrewdly contrived but seemingly banal observations were disturbing in the way they appeared to reflect what many listeners must have felt they wanted: not enlightenment but information. It was an English meadow ant; the artist had followed it around for eight hours each day; he'd had a break every twenty minutes; there were in fact six ants working in shifts; the red lines would be washed away when the exhibition ended . . . Information for its own sake; but can any of us, hand on heart, say that we have never been intrigued by such details? The problem is that, for some, these snippets of information are their only point of contact with art. Is it ignorance or is it a defence? Are we so ill-at-ease with what art and music may reveal that we find it safer to concentrate on equipment and techniques than on artistic outcome? Perhaps, in 'these most brisk and giddy-paced times' – yes, you can be sure that Shakespeare knew all about such problems! – isn't Information Technology the ultimate in how to put means before ends? Even our interest in the much-vaunted Information itself is at one remove from the processes of getting it ('accessing' it, in the ghastly, and probably now unavoidable, jargon); doing something imaginative with it is altogether another matter.

Yet new technology need not be alienating: throughout the centuries, in the development of musical instruments, for example, musicians have never hesitated to use creatively whatever has been available. All the articles in this issue of *BjME* are about the use of computer technology in musical education. Not surprisingly, there are descriptions of equipment, and of what it can and cannot do; and there are warnings for unwary teachers ('If there's a knob they'll turn it; if there's a switch they'll

press it!'). But also, we are reminded frequently that IT is a *means* not an end, supporting 'the quest for genuinely musical activities'. 'Performing and listening skills [are] being stretched'. Children with learning difficulties 'listen closely', 'with care and enjoyment', and 'act creatively'. It offers 'opportunities to explore different timbres' and to create 'individual interpretations' of music, and it can 'shift the view towards new and developing musical aesthetics'. These are the thoughts to keep in mind; here are the ideals we must not lose sight of. Used imaginatively – and, it is to be hoped, free of the unhelpful jargon – this is not IT for IT's sake but rather 'technology *in the service of music*'.

JOHN PAYNTER