
EDITORIAL

The theory of electroacoustic music has often focused, especially in the past, on the 'object' (music/technology) rather than on the impact of electroacoustic means on human beings and their notion and experience of music, but we can't avoid these issues if we want to understand what is happening to our world. (Cipriani 1995: 7)

In the past electroacoustic music was created in special laboratories and centres. Today electroacoustic music is mainly produced in home studios and even in the virtual domain. Composers may be totally isolated in their local environment, and yet they can interact with thousands of other composers and musicians through the Internet. They can cross the boundaries of their local environment and 'exist' in the context of a global network of electroacoustic music enthusiasts and creative professionals. Therefore, many local 'oases' can form a network.

One of the effects of globalisation is that different spaces and different identities, even those that were formerly incompatible, can be combined. This has produced a new approach to electroacoustic music over the last 20 years, in particular in terms of local issues and cultures; an approach that belongs both to the global village and to the local community. A word has been invented for this new context: glocal, expressing a paradoxical synthesis between local and global.

This issue of *Organised Sound* explores various different facets of the relationship between electroacoustic music and global/local culture. The concepts of local and global are not unequivocal, and they cut across many disciplines and areas of study, ranging from the theoretical and political to philosophy, art, and so on. In each of the articles we present in this issue there is a different point of view about these concepts and their relationship with electroacoustic music. Before describing the themes of the individual articles, I feel it is necessary briefly to address two important issues:

- How the flexibility and availability of electroacoustic tools and networks have changed the experience of music both as regards its creation and its utilisation.
- How, due to their easy availability, sonic copies of 'other' music and 'other' sounds have for a long time been penetrating the field of electroacoustic music.

The experience of music has been changed

In this context the following aspects must be considered:

- *The separation of the time and place of execution from those of listening.*
- *The loss of the unity of time and place of composition*, which can occur in a succession of stages and due to the action of a number of subjects operating in different places and times (apart from the composer) and in non-musical contexts (e.g. soundscapes).
- *The loss of the unity of the time and place of performance*, which can occur in a succession of multiple stages and due to the action of a number of subjects operating in different places and times. The following elements should be considered in this context:
 - a) the possibility for the listener to interact with a system and change in real-time what he himself hears, conducting interactive operations on sound signals in a network;
 - b) the possibility of collective and interdependent live performance; and
 - c) the consequent 'migration of music-making centres from physical to virtual locations' (Betty 2008: 1).
- *The possibility, in any work, of reuniting the above-mentioned levels in another way*: for example, a sound installation that allows the listener to interact with its sonic results can recreate in a certain sense, at least partially, a sense of unity of time and place of the composition, the performance and the act of listening.

Sonic copies of 'other' music

In this sense 'the history of electroacoustic music' is breaking up, even more than before, into a plurality of stories. To trace these stories one will need not just a map, but 'a map made of the crossings of other maps, that we must try to read transparently' (Gaiarin 2000: 1).

In fact, many of the words that recur in these articles refer to the idea of travel, meeting, discovery, and the

geographies of virtual or real locations. The idea of the 'Silk Road', for example, is taken up by Dominique Richard, who reminds us in his article that musicians have always been travellers. 'The Silk Road is a network of roads spanning the entire Eurasian continent [...] because of the unforgiving nature of this environment it can only remain viable thanks to the existence of isolated oases...' (pp. 97–8). The oasis is compared to today's virtual and real places where the conditions arise at certain moments, in our interconnected world, for experiencing the 'other'. On the Silk Road, in fact, the oasis was the place where musicians from different areas of the continent could play together and have the opportunity to 'co-create new musical idioms which transformed their respective native music'. 'Other' is perhaps the key word most used in the articles of this thematic issue and Richard also insists on the concept of 'being with others'.

The encounter between electroacoustic music and local forms of music and soundscapes is linked to the dialogue between the possibility of technological evolution, and a form of research driven by a desire for knowledge of the 'other than oneself'; of what we do not know, or of what cannot be completely encoded. Sometimes the desire to gain control is hidden behind the push to develop new technological means and instruments, which reflects a fear of not being able to truly fathom and dominate life. In this case one searches for a certainty and concentrates on how to encode life, and how to reproduce it and substitute it in order to make copies that are more 'controllable'.

Instead it is not easy to inhabit the territory of uncertainty and of the encounter with the 'other', but it is precisely this element of discovery and travel which this thematic issue will concentrate on. In this sense 'electroacoustic music presents itself as a territory of global exchange [...] which is continually being (re)defined also because of the continual relationship with local music and soundscapes' (p. 91).

My article written in collaboration with Giulio Latini fits into this context, since we recount and describe our decades of experience of human, cultural and musical exchange with musicians from cultures and ways of life which are far removed from our own. With these musicians we have created several musical and audio-visual works that are described in the article. Our experience has also led to the creation of some soundscape works in which otherness was experienced more in diachronic terms of distance in time than in those of geographical remoteness. The juxtaposition with the 'other' in our article is described starting from the impossibility for two musicians from two different cultures to perceive a musical passage, or rather music itself, in the same way. 'In the world there are several thousand "musical cultures", all of them different. They consist of multiple practices that are very rarely grouped within a concept comparable to what we mean by music'

(Nattiez and Molino 2005: 331). It is precisely the comparison with 'other' ideas of music that can persuade a musician to question his or her way of listening, or of composing music.

Barry Truax, for example, after considering the differences between electroacoustic composition and soundscape music from the point of view of the context, explains that it is possible to listen to a soundscape as if it were music, but he suggests that it is also possible to listen to electroacoustic music 'as if it were a soundscape, even if an imaginary one' (p. 108). For many years Truax has been bringing attention to the importance of creating 'works that are contextually based, as distinct from those that remain abstract' (Truax 2003: 123). In this article the novelty is that of addressing the question of context not so much in the *poietic* dimension (i.e. that of creation), as in the *aesthetic* dimension (i.e. that of listening) and that of analysis. Truax basically proposes connecting the act of listening to an electroacoustic piece, even if it is totally abstract, with the context of the adventure (whether acoustic or not) of the listener. By means of this approach unexplored possibilities can open up in the relationship between abstract music and the association with a context. In this case a way of listening to music, based on the stimuli deriving from the encounter with the soundscape, is questioned.

I believe we should always consider that the environment in which every listener has lived influences his or her acoustical perceptions. The cognitive system, in fact, elaborates the faculties of analysing and receiving with particular attention those sonic events one has already been exposed to in the past. These sounds may re-emerge from a nearly forgotten memory or awaken relations between the different sonic or musical experiences one has had in one's own life. In this sense we can imagine that the environment of the listening is also the inner one that has been influenced and 'informed' by our individual and social adventure. In this sense a 'soundscape' also exists within ourselves. The same physical sound heard by me and by an Eskimo will not be heard in the same way, because it enters and echoes inside us even before we can say that we have perceived it. From this point of view the reflection on the local/global dialectic is very important, since our experience and our knowledge are ever increasingly renewed by means of the information technology network, and less and less through the events of direct experience. A part of our acoustic adventure, especially that of the younger generations, is therefore actually shared with human beings who are geographically distant. Also, here the theme of the journey (also metaphorical or virtual) and of the encounter between the sound and its context is at the centre of reflection regarding the present situation.

These considerations are important to introduce the only article that is not specifically on the theme of this issue. This was written by Rajmil Fischman, who

proposes elaborating an instrument of analysis for the study of mimetic material, a multidimensional *mimetic space*, and defining a ‘paradigmatic axis’ in this mimetic space. Of course, in order to detect the mimetic dimension of a sonic object it is necessary to bring what one is listening to into relation with one’s experience of the world. Consequently, a mimetic space as an instrument of analysis (or composition) becomes important insofar as it can be assumed that such a space is shared – that is to say based on an experience of similar acoustic events which one has in common with other listeners. Perhaps this scenario becomes credible more today than in the past precisely because of the many global traits of our existence. In a context within which the global and local traits of our condition as listeners are reconsidered and rebalanced, an approach such as Fischman’s can find its right and appropriate place and that is why his article naturally belongs in this issue.

On the theme of different cultures and different ways of connecting the sound to the *corpus* of our knowledge, the article by Fabio Cifariello Ciardi investigates, by means of categories based on those of the field of linguistics, those aspects of connotation that can influence the composition and the perceptive strategies of listening, particularly in the electroacoustic field. Both of these articles (by Fischman and Cifariello Ciardi) deal with the network of relationships between the sound, its morphological characteristics, and the network of knowledge, qualities and experiences that sound refers to. While Fischman’s article is certainly useful for whoever wishes to analyse in depth the mimetic traits of an electroacoustic composition, that of Cifariello Ciardi provides some interesting reflections to describe the possible strategies with which the composer can articulate this network, and it also proposes various suggestions on how these strategies can be detected by the listener. ‘In order for the semantic dimensions at the roots of the global or local nature of the sound to be explored it is necessary for the composer first of all to take up a challenge: to evaluate the homogenous cultural features that transform a generic set of individuals into a certain fairly well-defined group of listeners’ (p. 134). Starting from these considerations Cifariello Ciardi proposes, as Truax does in other ways, a discussion of how to listen to music. He suggests that it is no longer important to ‘understand’ music, if by ‘understand’ we mean the listener’s ability to pick up information that is traditionally deemed essential. This ability involves receiving information regarded as ‘musical’ in the strictest sense while ignoring ‘other information that is usually considered to be insignificant or even detrimental to musical understanding’ (p. 134) – that is to say any data traditionally seen as ‘extramusical’ which contributes towards defining the connotation of a sonic object.

Such ideas lead us naturally on to speak of Trevor Wishart’s article, which describes ‘three recent compositional projects which attempt to form a bridge between the local – the use of language or speech in particular communities [...] – and the global – the organisation of this material into a work that can be appreciated independently of the locality in which it originated’ (p. 138). In his study of language Wishart tries to individuate various attributes common to different human languages which, being abstract in some way, can facilitate the encounter with listeners, even those belonging to ‘other’ cultures. In this case the study of extramusical aspects becomes strongly and consciously interwoven with compositional strategies and assumptions regarding the reception of one’s creations. Wishart’s article conveys a direct compositional experience supported by various different sound examples. This is important so that a dialogue between theoretical reflection and compositional practice can be stimulated in this issue of our journal.

The article by Robert Gluck fits into this dialectic exchange between theory and practice, since it proposes what the author terms a ‘reflective compositional process’. By means of this process, the composer who wishes to work with materials outside his or her culture can engage in an activity of self-questioning about motivation, relationship with the materials and the culture in question, strategies for crosscultural engagement, and so on.

The idea of addressing this issue primarily through the questions one should ask oneself, rather than through the responses one should give, seems to me particularly appropriate for the theme of the relationship between cultures. Such questions can be very stimulating for those who have to tackle this kind of compositional work. A further reflection for the composer is exemplified in my article written with Giulio Latini and it concerns the need to “to give something in return” to the place that offers its own sounds or to the person who donates his or her own music’ (p. 93). This applies not only from an economic point of view, but more generally from a cultural, ecological, social and human standpoint.

The idea of *reflexivity*, for example, has been more extensively studied in anthropology than in music. In recent years anthropologists have tended, in interviews with local informants,¹ to reflect not only *on or about* the individual but also *together* with the individual. The latter thus in some way comes to participate in and share the conclusions that the anthropologist comes to. The anthropologist more and more often includes the reflections of the informant in ethnographic reports intended for publication. The latest anthropological

¹The word ‘informant’ in anthropology is a common (though somewhat disputed) term for an individual a researcher meets in the field and gets information from.

research methodologies are therefore mainly based on a more sensitive and responsive encounter with the other. This approach makes it possible for both subjects to understand one another and for the researcher to reach a greater depth of knowledge thanks to this exchange.

In a similar way, we can say that in the work of electroacoustic composition one can reach a greater understanding of the sound object with which one is working thanks to a mutual exchange with the other. Only together, in fact, can we attempt to overcome the barriers set up by the 'reduction to an object' of a sonic event connected to a culture. In her article Tatjana Böhme-Mehner speaks of this reduction. On the theme of the recording of soundscapes and their use in a piece of music, Böhme-Mehner affirms that, by sampling, in addition to the sound itself the impact of the recording techniques and the observer's standpoint (the composer or sound artist) are also recorded. Further reflections are then added by the listeners. The sampled sound is therefore 'independent not only from its locality but also from its temporality [...] a construction referring to *real reality*, but never being it' (p. 157). One of the various topics covered in this very informative article brings us back to the original discourse, that of the Silk Road, something which in itself contains the idea of the global and of various locations. The processes of globalisation, 'integrating and connecting communities and organisations in new space-time combinations' (p. 159), lead to the definition of a reality in which the concepts of local and global are no longer 'useable as antipodes, but as oscillating parts of a socially constitutive difference' (p. 159). For Böhme-Mehner local and global are therefore only constructions and frameworks which

are necessary 'to organise perception in a complex environment, keeping an endless number of possibilities open and available'.

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FURTHER READING

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