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Issue 4

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SCCS



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Japan,) by S.Silva-Aras
Images for *Finding Pippo* by Nadia Buyse**

Welcome to the 4th Issue of the Bulletin of the Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies.

We wish you a good start for this new year.

In this looking-up-to Spring number we have **News, Events, Working papers** and **Reviews**.

We are working through the upcoming launch of the website for the **Cultural Analysis** programme, that already is running a **series of seminars** (on-line and in campus) about the **State of Cultural Analysis**. More, soon.

In the Autumn term, the SCCS has hosted the following events:

In **October** 2024: Museum Games “changing the Game”.

In **November**: the featuring of the film *She the Steadfast*, directed by a member of the SCCS filmmaker Joyce Stacey.

In **December**, as part of the State of Cultural Analysis seminars series, *AI and the affective ideologies of common sense*, a presentation by Carolyn Pedwell with a response by Tanya Kant.

Coming soon

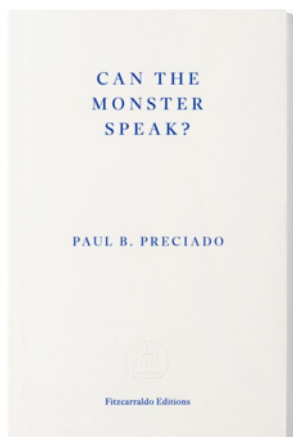
February 6th: In the series of State of Cultural Analysis series, *Climate Aesthetics: Mediating Immediacy in a Blazing World*, with a presentation by Anna Kornbluh with a response from Malcom James.

March 7th: as a collaboration between the Sussex Centre for Cultural Studies and the Digital Humanities Lab at University of Sussex, *Finding PIPPO, a generative Opera* will be presented in a public exhibition of works. Read more about it in the next pages of this Issue.

We hope you enjoy our working papers and other materials in this Issue.

Psychoanalysis Reading Group

For those able to get to Sussex's campus, a small reading group is convening to think about the possibilities and limits of using psychoanalysis across the humanities and social sciences, and to discuss texts that draw on psychoanalytic concepts and methodologies. Texts discussed thus far include Paul Preciado's *Can the Monster Speak?* and Avgi Saketopoulou and Ann Pellegrini's *Gender without Identity*. For details of the next session please email Rob on r.sharp@sussex.ac.uk



Popular culture, ways of struggle and the alternative, through Charli XCX and hyperpop music

By Malcolm James

Introduction

Coronavirus 'lockdown' was a moment of capitalist acceleration. As Modernity's vehicles ground to a halt, Instagram, Snap Chat, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok networked videos and narratives accumulated; TikTok's meteoric rise was only really a symptom of a wider and more profound shift in which networked videos and narratives captured just about every aspect of popular culture, psychic energy, and social reflex.

This working paper addresses one dimension of this transformation; the reformation of sound culture, and does so through the story of the Essex hyperpop star Charli XCX, now better known for 'Brat Summer' and her endorsement of Kamala Harris as president.

Four years earlier, during the pandemic, Charli XCX was the subject of a television documentary produced by the BBC. The documentary Charli XCX: Alone Together was largely self-shot in Los Angeles where Charli was isolating with her then partner Huck Wong, both privately educated at Bishops Stortford College, Essex, UK. The documentary's plot hinges on the anticipated release of her fourth studio album *How I'm Feeling Now*, and her struggle with mental ill-health.

Compounded by the isolation of the pandemic, the documentary shows how during the album-making process these struggles were extended empathically with a largely LGBTQ+ fanbase – 'Charli's Angels' – who are also looking for connection, community, and "to feel human again". The shared language is largely therapeutic. Through live streams, Charli, 'the Queen of Hyperpop', opens up the raw creativity of the album-making process to her fans. The production of music with online followers, and the unity it affords, offers release from the isolation of lockdown and heteronormative society, and that folds

back onto crushing self-doubt as Charli openly questions her musical talent, her relationships and her physical appearance.

For the purpose of this presentation, the documentary shows how music is made meaningful within a shared culture of videos, text, sound and narrative composed through social media. If MTV of the 1980s was the turning point in which sound culture was cannibalized by TV and video, what Charli XCX's hyperpop of the 2020s shows is that sound culture has been re-digested by social media and their computational systems, becoming hypersound.

Sound clutter, events and loops

Hypersound culture is composed of euphoric events mediated by YouTube, Snap Chat and TikTok. The intensity and regularity of these euphoric events are experienced as a normalised affective assault. As media scholar Jodi Dean noted, "[b]logs, social networks, Twitter, YouTube... produce and circulate affect as a binding technique", capturing and ensnaring users in its endless loops.¹ Applications like Snap Chat, TikTok and Instagram on which Charli XCX's hyperpop is composed maximise this loop-based popular culture, such that the hyperpop of Charli XCX music is inseparable from its condition.

This looped event culture casts social fractures in high contrast for content consumers. The sheer quantity of these oppositions is organised by consumption-driven algorithms which privilege the starkest divisions. Habitual knowledge of those algorithmic processes is tactically gamed by music artists and their teams in content production. As any residual Modern feeling for radical universalism is reduced to violent flashpoints, destructive energies hold sway with resentment², narcissism and sadism characterising the contemporary structure of feeling.³

To quote Anna Kornbluh, as the flash bulb triggers, "The gray falls away... as everything flickers good or bad, relatable or hateable."⁴

¹ Jodi Dean, "Affective networks," *Media Tropes* 2, no. 2 (2010), p.21, 42

² From Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* via Nietzsche. Resentment (left in the French) is distinct from resentment, in that it does not only refer to a state of being that wants what others have, but is also a more vengeful petty-minded political disposition that, without seeking remedy, wants others not to have something.

³ Tanya Kant, *Making it personal: algorithmic personalization, identity, and everyday life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).; Forrest Stuart, *Ballad of the bullet: gangs, drill music, and the power of online infamy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁴ Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy or, the style of too late capitalism* (London: Verso), p.60.

A hermeneutics of hypersound

In hyperpop, these technologically driven negations are filled out in particular ways. The documentary *Alone Together* shows how Charli XCX is constituted through mental health struggles and the rejection of normies. In her music, the use of Saw Synth instrumentals, Auto-Tune vocals⁵ “[s]hiny, cutesy aesthetics” and “angst-ridden lyrics” perform kitsch dystopia on those terms.⁶

This performance of struggle shapes her fan culture too. In her music videos and wider media output, non-normativity is maintained by negatively identifying and rejecting authority, patriarchy, neuro- and hetero-normativity. This provides for an array of pastiche counter-cultural references through which the inside of hyperpop is coded. Mental health, body discomfort and precarious romantic attachments endorse non-normative neurology, physicality and sexuality. Punkish style and brattiness reject parental institutions, the nuclear family, clean living TikTok femininities and provide an individualist rebel identity. The routine use of Auto-Tune voice modulation queers normative white masculinity while establishing a non-normative subjectivity through which hyperpop fans and Charli XCX know themselves. The totality of external negation generates positive internal meaning as a resistive response to marginalisation.

This negative hermeneutics relies on a strong anti-figure – the straight white normie, also referred to as “hyperpop’s bogeyman”.⁷ In Charli XCX’s music videos, the straight white normie has multiple guises. In ‘Von Dutch’ (2024) he is the rockstar, ironically celebrated by Charli who plays the character, arriving by private jet at an international airport. Through a series of catastrophic scenes, the rockstar is injured on travelators and dragged across the floor by a baggage trolley. In the music video for ‘Hot in it’ (2023) the normie is the Coachella figure. In ‘360’ (2024) he is allegorised as the ‘hot’ TikTok influencer.

Struggle thereby shapes hyperpop’s rebellious identity, and as the rebel turns the gaze back on the bogeyman and his allegories, the euphoric-strobe condition of social media generates hackneyed and essentialised images. The limitation of this form of cultural-political struggle is most notable when the straight white normie is allegorised as black femininity. In ‘Vroom Vroom’ (2020), and elsewhere, he

⁵ "A. G. Cook is changing popular music as we know it," *American Song Writer*, 2020, accessed 15th July, 2024, <https://americansongwriter.com/a-g-cook-is-changing-popular-music-as-we-know-it/>.

⁶ "Hyperpop or overhyped? The rise of 2020’s most maximal sound," *Independent*, 2020, accessed 15th July, 2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/hyperpop-genre-2020-charli-xcx-rina-sawayama-b1775025.html>.

⁷ "Noisy, ugly, and addictive," *The Atlantic*, 2021, accessed 15th July, 2024, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/03/hyperpop/617795/>.

Working Papers

is found in the sexualised black femininities that appear in drill, trap, rap and dancehall videos. Conditioned in this way, the black expressive femininities of rap and dancehall are not interpreted as complex black female expressive cultures within a history of racism and patriarchy, but as negative images of hyperpop's white non-normativity which frames them resentfully as examples of normative patriarchy. These more telling examples reveal how Charli XCX's emphatic anti-normie posture is at the same time a new normie form of commercial capitalism, in which histories of working class, queer and feminist struggle gives way to an aestheticization of alterity and counter-culture.

In contradiction to these negative hermeneutics are forms of enjoyment that can be considered 'alternative' in cultural-political terms – to borrow from Raymond Williams.⁸ mHere, hyperpop's principal alternative register is enjoyment. Pleasure and enjoyment in queer studies address how queer culture is not only formed in the negative image of heteronormative society but also exceeds it, as a form of presence or persistence.⁹ While pleasure and enjoyment are sometimes used interchangeably, enjoyment is more than libidinal drives. It is excessive, and its excess gives it, as Todd McGowan says, "potential political radicality",¹⁰ that moves it from the particular to the universal.¹¹

This version of queer enjoyment in Charli XCX is demonstrated in the documentary *Alone Together*. The opening sequence for the documentary presents cute, kitsch and queer imagery. A neon pink sign, cuts to a magenta/lavender-coloured city in which isolated individual bodies, text bubbles and jellyfish float over the manga city's skyline. That scene 'signals' queer and trans pandemic-internet culture¹² and is overlaid by spoken and subtitled quotes from Charli's fans explaining the connection they found in hyperpop during the Covid-19 pandemic.

[Archi] "We don't realize how often we crave human touch"

[Ellen] "It's been really tough, it's been really hard"

⁸ The 'alternative' is a concept developed by Raymond Williams to explain how cultural manifestations of Marxian humanist freedom or justice, not only arise from negation (ways of struggle) but have their own historical persistence. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p.162

¹⁰ Todd McGowan, *Enjoyment Right & Left* (East Germany: Sublation Press, 2022), p.3; Also researched as Queer Joy "Queering the web: Reshaping digital culture with queer joy," *DIVA Magazine*, 2024, accessed 20th July, 2024, <https://diva-magazine.com/2024/03/01/queering-the-web/>.

¹¹ Ahmed, *The cultural politics of emotion*.

¹² "Queer community online and the rise of TikTok," Medium, 2022, accessed 20th July, 2024, <https://medium.com/@natalie.h.streeter/queer-community-online-and-the-rise-of-tiktok-735f459a4f61>; "How TikTok became a haven for queer and questioning kids: Queer signaling in the age of TikTok," 2021, accessed 20th July, 2024, <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22606245/tiktok-queer-fluid-bisexuality-nonbinary-filter>.

[Ronald] "It makes me realise how much I miss that emotional connection I have with people in real life"

[Poison Oakland] "I never knew how much I needed people around me to feel alive"

In this sequence, Archi vocalises a tactile invitation to feel human together, and to redress a patriarchal sense schema in which the visual and signifying dominate.¹³ In the loneliness and lifelessness of the pandemic, touch overcomes the absence of presence,¹⁴ moving beyond a struggle against abjection towards connectivity and aliveness, which is the basis of enjoyment in hyperpop. Collective touch occurs through Zoom, Instagram Live Stream, and YouTube music videos which connects the material bodies of fans¹⁵ articulating a form common feeling, at once dislocated and universalist.

This sense of enjoyment is repeated in Charli XCX's music. 'Von Dutch' (2024) is a high-tempo dancefloor banger; 'Rewind' (2024) slower and glitchy; 'Forever' (2020) is gritty and sparse; 'Claws' (2020) is a love song, and 'Detonate' (2020) a break-up song. These very different songs are enjoyable for similar reasons. One of those, is that they are kitsch and bratty. For their shininess, tacky nostalgia and nerdy agonism, they generate a sense of un-stoic and un-knowing excess.

¹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching feeling: affect, pedagogy, performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Cathryn Vasseleu, "Resistances of touch," *Signs: journal of women in culture and society* 40, no. 295-300 (2015), p.296

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the cybernetic fold: reading Silvan Tomkins," in *Shame and its sisters : a Silvan Tomkins reader*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham, N.C. ; London: Duke University Press, 1995), 1-28.



From sound to hypersound

The title of Charli XCX's documentary *Alone Together* suggests a generational quality, that we have never been so connected or so alone. However, this motif also points to something more telling – that popular sound culture is social media culture; that social media is popular music's common condition. To understand this motif below its surface presentation, the historical transformation of sound culture matters. The journey of sound from 1980s to the present day; through the evolution of pop music television and reggae sound systems, towards 'hypersound' is significant. The shift to forms of

popular music culture in which image, video, text and computational processes predominate is of profound cultural and political consequence; as is the evolution of meaning-making from flows and euphoric events and affective-social media loops. These transformations have not only re-coloured the properties of beats, instrumentals and lyrics, and moved consumption from listening to watching, but have placed sound in secondary relation to recursive flows of data and their affective inputs.

The alternative cultural politics of hypersound cannot then be evaluated on the former terms by which sound culture was privileged. Rather, as genuinely popular sound culture has become part of social media culture more broadly, the identification of alternatives and the evaluation of their relative weight needs to be placed elsewhere, and that task is no less important.

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Events and Publications

“Cinema, literature and looking at the world from Naples”. A conversation with multi-award winner Italian Film Director Mario Martone

Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies, 12:4 (2024)

By Ambra Moroncini

Italian film director Mario Martone needs no introduction. With an impressive record of acclaimed and award-winning films and documentaries, Martone is internationally renowned for being a “tremendous” film director who “beautifully shoots” and superbly composes films “on the edge of something special” (Peter Brandshaw, *The Guardian*, 2022). He writes, or better co-writes, the scripts of his films, and he is also one of the most respected Italian stage directors. I happened to get in touch with Martone after the publication of a book I cowrote and co-edited, where an essay on the poet Giacomo Leopardi, written by the late Bruno Moroncini, was included. Bruno Moroncini, philosopher and expert on Giacomo Leopardi’s work, dedicated his illuminating essay to Mario Martone, with whom he had collaborated on a project on Pier Paolo Pasolini. I was more than honoured when Martone generously accepted to discuss his work at the University of Sussex on 8 December 2023. The article “Cinema, literature and looking at the world from Naples” – recently published in the *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies*, 12:4 (2024), pp.599-612 – is the transcript of our conversation on his cinematic strategies to allow literature to be “viewed”. By discussing the inspiration behind some of his most successful films – specifically *L’amore molesto* (*Troubling Love*) (1995), adapted from Elena Ferrante’s first novel; his biopic on Giacomo Leopardi (2014); his recent film *Nostalgia* (2022), adapted from Ermanno Rea’s last novel, and official submission of Italy for the 2023 Oscar for “Best International Feature Film” – the British audience (in-person and online) gained first-hand insights by one of the most prominent cultural voices in Italy today into the fascinating relationship between cinema and literature.

The role that the cultural milieu of Martone’s birthplace, Naples, had in his career and artistic creativity also helped to understand both the realistic and mythological dimensions of his cinema.



The role that the cultural milieu of Martone's birthplace, Naples, had in his career and artistic creativity also helped to understand both the realistic and mythological dimensions of his cinema.

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University of Sussex Education Awards Winner 2024

Reviews

Review of: Jean-Loup Amselle's *The West knows the drill. World music and ethnomusicology* ("L'Occident connaît la musique. Musique du Monde et ethnomusicologie") Mimésis, Oct. 2024.

By Silvina Silva Aras

A long time ago in the bottom of the world as we used to call my home country, I enjoyed being the co-host of a Radio show called "Otras músicas" (*Other music*). A student of my African Studies module had suggested that I could collaborate and incorporate some African music into the show that his girlfriend was running. The host, who later became a close friend, intended to showcase music from different parts of the world that were largely unknown to audiences; partly through the difficulty in acquiring musical material from abroad. As the show was broadcast from a pirate radio station, everything was possible in some way. Even in its state of marginality, Radio La Tribu was one of the most listened to and professionally organised of the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, with an eager and curious following.

My co-host, a musicologist who conceived the show, taught at the same University as me and we immediately discovered many shared interests in what we can call "other, non-western, material cultures". Although both coming from the South, we had both studied music, following the same "western classical music" pathway, at the two main conservatories in the city. Incidentally, both are named after two significant composers from the 19th century - López Bouchardo and Manuel de Falla- who although increasingly uncredited produced a vast corpus of pieces in the classical area, borrowing rhythms and influences from traditional pieces from Spain and Argentina.

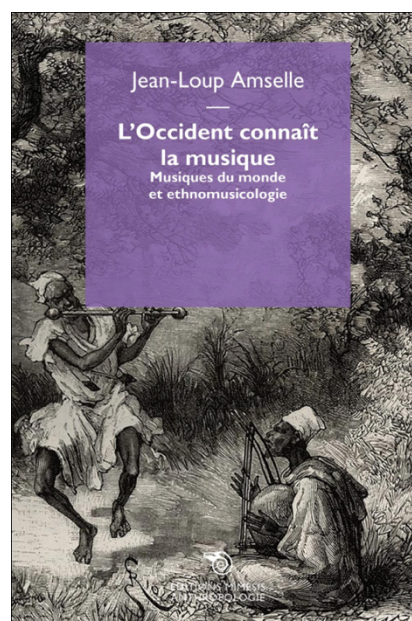
This short anecdote aims to illustrate one of the many paths that the recently published book by Jean-Loup Amselle about music and the implicit questions that arise in the concept of "World Music" inspired in me. As we know, there are numerous texts on the subject. However, in this case, the approach and analysis of what world music has become is inherently related to the topics, some of them extremely current, that characterise Amselle's pen, particularly over the last fifteen years.

Jean-Loup Amselle, for those who don't know him, is huge figure within French anthropology, specialising in African Studies. Currently he sits as emeritus professor at the EHESS (École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – High School for Social Sciences) in Paris, France. Although many of his books have been translated into English and other languages, many more merit translation. He also happens to have been my thesis supervisor at the EHESS, where I started

my research on multiculturalism, racism and colonial ties in France. All of this to say, that while respectful I hope this review does not come across as too complacent, as he has been an important influence in my work.

Amselle has been a long-standing beacon on the subject and discussions about ethnicity, multiculturalism, and colonial ideas of *métissage*, not only after his celebrated work “In the heart of ethnicity”, shared with E. M’Bokolo, but also over the many years where he has shredded the interpretations about ethnical conflicts, and more recently the implications of ethnical divisions as a fuel for racist narratives and actions in the field of academic studies, or in the public sphere. Amselle delineated the concept of *Branchements*, connections that replace the idea of miscegenation of cultures and refers to a network of cultural and social exchanges, fighting back in this way against the recurrent perspective of exoticism to analyse African cultures. Those works, led directly to his main discussion about racism, where he questions the ideas of separatism, ethnicization or division of races, which he considers part of the same narrative of segregation.¹

Within this same wavelength, Amselle addresses the subject of music as a continuation of this corpus of thoughts and analysis, highlighting the contradictions of a well-established concept of “world music” that, after reading his book I noted, seems to be in desperate need of revision. The connection between ethnically defined cultural material and the new (as with the old, as E. Balibar would say) political perspectives towards the “other” still resonates in the 21st century among new (or not so new) practices of Orientalism, even though we are awash with a trend of narratives of decolonisation, which I would add, contain many contradictions within.



Despite being a collection of articles about music and its links to the history of ethnomusicology there is a thread around world music and its colonial background that resonates today, in the middle of inconsistent but political acts of redemption to stories of subjugation by the West of other continents’ cultures.

The book is divided in three parts with a short concluding section that serves as a summary.

In the first part “Musical Categories” (*Catégories musicales*), Amselle discusses the ideas of “purity” and “the *mélange* of” cultural elements into music, and the mindsets of who stole

¹ This is an interesting topic that shows the difference between Race studies in the UK and the US, and studies about racism in France, that I highlighted in my thesis.

what from where, which might be topic within itself in the field of world music. Examples abound such as Beethoven's take on Turkish music, or in a different twist, the use of Rameau by African musicians. These instances support different explanations, not only to showcase how the West used and at the same time neglected music from non-western productions, but also how today, many called "non-western" musicians make their takes and versions of western (classical) music.

To this, I would add an example that has stayed in my memory, the version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* by the South African Isango ensemble, which I saw at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris back in 2009. These performances, especially in Paris, make more sense when reading Amselle's book, locating France as an avid consumer of these cultural manifestations from the South, raising more questions about the current experiences of self-representation of Southern artists performing to listeners or spectators from the North.

(I would say, that exoticism can sometimes land on well-intentioned terrain, reflecting on the commercialisation of non-western music by the Putumayo record label, a topic which merits more profound research. The history of exoticism to which world music is closely linked, is however still part of postcolonial prejudices.)

Connections to the case of the Malian use of traditional "epic" musical pieces (*Epopées*) draws attention to the multiple ways in which societal differences seep into the field of music (as we know from the history of Classical music in Europe), marking in some way the future of popular music from Mali known in the West (from Salif Keita to Amadou et Mariam, with two very different musical backgrounds). Are these epic stories part of the same scenery that colonial administrators requested to attend? In which ways can what griots call "traditional," be interpreted as another separation from popular and high society cultures? These are questions that Amselle has explored in the complex field of music in Mali, his field of work for many years, with the current implications of how popular Malian music is established today around the world, through its representation.

Towards the end of this part, where purity, colonial and new musical racism appear within the book's sphere of interest, the case of the "decolonising sounds" project called **The uninterrupted song of the city**, within the formerly known as Museum Tervuren or *Africa Museum* in Belgium² is a real treat. Armed with several explanations from different musicians the main objective is to open sound archives from the past (actually recorded by colonial officers at the time) to renew them and make them accessible today. Amselle carefully dismantles the contradictions within such intentions, serving as just one more example of the many trends of "decolonisation" that we are observing from institutions in the North over the last few years.

² The museum houses one of the largest collections of Congolese artifacts, obtained during the colonial era, and is a source of constant surprises in its efforts to erase its own history.

The reflexions about those sounds from the past, actually repeat the conceptions not only of exoticism but also of superiority from the West. Musicians in 21st century Belgium listening to colonial recordings of sounds, searching for purity and traditional (most of them colonial) images of resonances. The leader of the project is the Congolese artist Sinzo Ansa. Amselle reminds us: *"The collection of instruments and the musical recordings made in Africa by colonial agents or ethnomusicologists, were structured under the approach of colonial ethnology, based on the principle of racial or ethnic separation of the material collected or registered.(...) these musical recordings, collected as plants or insects are "produced" as ethnic objects, as masques, or statues collected at the same time and under the same circumstances by colonial staff. Nevertheless, the musicians participating in this project do not seem to realise this and one of them even states, "When the archive starts to broadcast its music, I try to imagine myself there with that people, performing a ritual, and jamming in some way with them"."* (p.78).

The second part of the book concentrates on the primitivism endured by ethnomusicology as a discipline conceived close to colonial endeavours but parallelly claiming purity and traditional folklore in Europe as the last part of the book demonstrates with the renown cases of B. Bartók and Z. Kodály. The pursuit of purity led to the inherent primitivism in ethnomusicologist approaches, not only in 19th century works on the subject but also in recent years. According to Amselle, there is a common thread in ethnomusicologist interests on "other's" music, which lies in the separation of what is conceived as traditional and purely local, correspondent to the ethnical group studied, and making a U-turn transforming it, creating a primitivism of some sort. An invention of tradition, following the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger not coincidentally inspired by African studies of the time.

Going back to my radio experiences with "other music," I remember we played Serge Gainsbourg on one show, as this was somehow "exotic" for our audience, creating another different myth to the real one.

The invention of primitivism, followed by a pursuit of purity and musical tradition, is represented by a binary western model of noted music on one side (Classical or European music) and non-western and not written music from Africa and Asia. According to Amselle this has been a continuous thread shared by many precursors and key figures in the field of ethnomusicology.

The invention of tradition emerges also at the time of African independences, where national states design their prerogatives to constitute their African nations. In this regard, Amselle develops the idea of invention of traditional values exemplified in music, such as the request to avoid the use of guitars (seen as a Western "colonial" element) by Modibo Keita, first president of independent Mali. The use of the kora was promoted as a national symbol of Mali, while it had historically been an instrument of the court, thus mostly elitist and rarely popular. Nevertheless, today, the kora exemplifies the first instrument that comes to mind when we think of "world music" from Mali.

The third and last part of the book addresses “Musical Racism,” particularly in France; based around cases such as the Classical music broadcaster, “Radio Classique,” defined by Amselle as a radio station “producing a white musical culture and in the right tone”.(p.137). He also analyses the controversies around the French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura and her performance at the Olympic Games in Paris last year.

“is there a place in France for non-white singers and for lyrics that are not in the fashionable tone?”, he asked.

Amselle explores this public polemic where ultimately, African representation enjoys a double sense, on the one hand the accepted image of Africa: wild, in contrast with the profile of the National Guard in the background, and on the other hand the condemned image of a primitive Africa linked to Islam and constantly regretted and critiqued by the same public. French President’s intervention in the controversy, exposes the level of exoticism that is publicly accepted as part of a “multicultural” France, while in the end, we are confronting old colonial conceptions of black bodies and music, as was the case with Josephine Baker some time ago.

Amselle’s explorations of Racism in music also address discussions about the African origins of Jazz. This topic, a subject in itself, is tackled by both ethnomusicologists and artists, as in the example of Martin Scorsese’s documentary in search of the Malian roots of American blues; which in Amselle’s perspective, remains unachieved and is highly debatable.

If these seem like current polemics within French daily life, this is precisely what tis author aims to work on and analyse. He does so not only from an anthropologist and Africanist perspective but engaging in plain form with his contemporaneity, a detail not to be overlooked when we consider the isolated world of academic research. Amselle has a long-standing track-record engaging with both worlds and employing his analytic tools to explore the major issues in contemporary France, with an enormous baggage of experience in the field of African Studies, something that is not common -in France, or elsewhere.

The book closes with a short wrap-up summary, adding a parallel with the works of Bartok and Kodály. Presented as precursors in the field of ethnomusicology, they are rarely acknowledged as such, but rather like “folklorists.” This is likely due to the fact that they were interested in Eastern European roots or traditional sounds that would validate the nationalism of their time, making the case for Hungarian music. This reminded me of a brief experience in the home-museum of Z. Kodály in Budapest, where I was not allowed to take any pictures of his collection, neither of the instruments nor of his notes and pictures of his travels in search of music, which I felt as contradiction in itself looking to all the material he collected and photographed.

Some questions that I kept asking myself after reading Amselle’s book have to do with the contradictions of decolonising projects or narratives that are becoming so prevalent in the North in recent years. That aspect merits being discussed through an increasingly Southern perspective, which he does in another of his books “In search of Africa” with S. Bachir Diagne.

Similarly, questions around how racism in the South also affect music education, probably still today.

The book is published by Éditions Mimésis in French and is available on Amazon -and while you can expect it will take some to arrive- it is well worth the wait! In the meantime, while you wait, do check some of the following works from Amselle, which I strongly recommend.

-Affirmative Exclusion

Cultural Pluralism and the Rule of Custom in France (2024)

-Mestizo Logics: Anthropology of Identity in Africa and Elsewhere (Mestizo Spaces/Espaces Metisses (1997)

-In Search of Africa(s): Universalism and Decolonial Thought

With S. B. Diagné (2020)

--L'art de la friche: Essai sur l'art contemporain africain (2020, second edition)

Au coeur de l'ethnie. Ethnies, tribalisme et État en Afrique

With E. M'Bokolo (1985 and many more editions)

-Psychotropiques: La fièvre de l'ayahuasca en forêt amazonienne (2013)

-Branchements: anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures (Sciences humaines)

(2005)

Events and Works in Progress

Finding : a generative opera

By Nadia Buyse

Through co-authoring an article about the Circola Arci network in Italy and the intersections of art/ activism that happens in these socialist private clubs I came to the writing of Alfredo Cospito. The central focus was on the organization's show of solidarity with Anarchist Alfredo Cospito, who is currently being detained in a super max prison system. During his time in Prison Cospito has written letters, essays and texts that are self-distributed in print and online. To gain some understanding of his writing, I used online translators and ChatGPT to translate some of these texts. Concurrently, I started experimenting with generative music approaches, which also led to collaborations with musical AI freeware. During this process, I started to think about the poetry/ prose lost in the process, but also the cognisance gained through this intervention with AI. How do I as a non-Italian speaking person understand/ communicate/ empathize with actions of anti-fascism within this context? More importantly, how could this work lend itself into a methodology for performance and composition as a transformative practice? How could I do similar interventions with different thinkers/ ideologies?



Finding  : a generative opera is a multi-phase music/research/ performance piece that shows documents which aim to break up the boundaries of space, audience, and generative approaches as methods of participation and performance. The first phase of this project begins in 2025 where I will visit different archives and participate in artist residencies to contribute to ongoing ephemera from the experimentation process. Looking to alternate reality games or ARGs as a template, I am experimenting with interactive networked narratives and activities that use the real world and virtual space as a platform for performance and making. As this platforming is

new to me and trans medial, I would benefit from the mentorship, critique and guidance of other artists and thinkers through collaborative workshopping towards a production for live performance.



This work in progress will be presented as a part of a residency in the Digital Humanities lab at Sussex on March the 7th in a public exhibition of works.

PIPP0

