Aesthetics and Experience in Music Performance
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I. Introduction
1. PREFACE

THE FUTURE OF MUSIC RESEARCH IN AUSTRALIA AND THE LEGACY OF MOZART NOTE CRUNCHING

STEVEN KNOPOFF

PRESIDENT, MUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA

Over the past few years the Society has engaged in various debates concerning the perceived relevancy of the Musicological Society of Australia (MSA) and its members’ research projects to the rest of the world of music-related research. The first real awareness I had of these debates came from Stephen Wild’s Presidential address at the Society’s 1998 annual general meeting (AGM) in Adelaide. This address was a clarion call for the Society to embrace a greater variety of research focuses and, in particular, popular music. In tandem with the call for broadening of the purview of the Society’s research focuses, Stephen also proposed that we influence the world-at-larges perception of our work by changing our name to the Australian Society for Music Research. This proposal went as far as a postal referendum, which lost, as I understand it, by a narrow margin.

In 2003 I had a specific albeit second-hand encounter with an outsider’s negative perception of the MSA’s image. In correspondence with a colleague, I learned that a member of another Australian, music-related organisation had expressed a disparaging view concerning the relevancy of the MSA’s research interests. In the context of some possible collaborative interaction with the MSA, this person wondered if some of his organisation’s members wouldn’t want to associate with a bunch of “Mozart note crunchers”.

Whatever was meant by the term “Mozart note cruncher”—and I have no idea whether it was intended seriously or tongue-in-cheek—it does say
two things about at least some outsiders’ perceptions of our work and interests: first, that we are concerned with Mozart or other European Classical music; and second, that we subject notated music (“notes”) to some sort of analysis which is mechanistic or complex and difficult to understand or otherwise un-interesting (“crunching”).

Regardless of what the speaker actually meant, I wondered whether this term (however loosely interpreted) is a fair representation of what MSA is about. At this point I conducted a very quick and unscientific survey of our individual members’ stated research interests. The first thing I did was to place all the research interests into one of two very roughly defined categories, Mozart Note Crunching (hereafter MNC) and Non-Mozart Note Crunching (hereafter NMNC).

As it happens, the aforementioned other music organization is one which by its nature is involved with contemporary forms of music. Partly based on this information, I decided that any pre-twentieth century research interests would be lumped in the MNC category, as would certain other types of music that I guessed might not appeal to someone who didn’t like Mozart Note Crunching, such as European choral and/or religious music and any specifically music-analytic concerns. Rather arbitrarily, interests related to ethnomusicology, feminist theory, and music education were categorized as NMNC—as were specifically contemporary concerns such as popular music and computer/electronic music.

On the NMNC side of the equation I can report that the MSA has at least 23 members with interests in popular music of one sort or another (I actually thought this number might have been higher) and 15 members with interests in things like electronic/computer music, film, sound installations, and sound arts. But the main finding from my quick survey was that out of 293 separate sets of research interests, there was something like 150 members who had interests that fell outside of the MNC category.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this quick survey is that some outsiders aren’t aware of the considerable diversity of the MSA’s current interests. Five years after Stephen Wild’s address there is undoubtedly still a need to expand the Society’s research horizons and a need to alert the outside world to this expansion, but I suspect that both of these changes are already significantly underway. The papers presented at the Brisbane National Workshop provide an excellent case in point of what I am talking about. One of the great successes of the National Workshop is the extent to which it attracted participation from both MSA members and non-members.
working in a variety of areas of music research. Just some of the NMNC interests addressed in the Workshop include popular music studies, computer music and music technology, linguistics, music therapy (and music and medicine more generally), cultural studies, queer studies, music education, and the psychology of music.

A different conclusion that could be drawn from my quick survey is that a rather large number of our members do in fact have interests which broadly correspond to Mozart Note Crunching—more than half, when taking into account members with both MNC and NMNC interests—and so, guilty as charged! On a more serious note, what can we as a Society which desires to broaden its interests and outsider appeal—make of the notion that most of its members have certain traditional musicological interests? One response, of course, is that we can’t please everybody; that as long as we are open to a full range of interests, then we are probably being as progressive as we ought to be. This is true enough, but it seems to me that there is also something subtler at play.

Even as we become an ever-broader church of musical interests, one of the things that distinguishes our Society is that we have historically been, and continue to be, the natural home for Mozart note crunchers. Even amongst those of us who have gravitated towards NMNC work, the education and training of the vast majority of our members has included exposure to the core background of the Mozart note cruncher. Three key features of this background include an aesthetic appreciation for musical “sound itself”; a wide ranging vocabulary and set of analytical tools which allow us to consider music in formal, abstract ways; and a conscious interest in understanding music in particular historical and cultural contexts. These three tendencies—the aural/contemplative, the formal/analytical, and the contextual—are sometimes framed so as to oppose one another (as in various arguments associated with the rise of “new musicology” in the 1980s) but they are all part of the NMC orientation.

Perhaps there is something about this common set of orientations that makes us amenable to a wide range of “non-traditional” research interests. Yes, each of us has particular music- and research-related interests and biases; but as long as a given music/research sounds good or presents interesting structural implications or can be placed in a meaningful historical or cultural context, there is the likelihood that it will appeal to some of our members. In this context it is not surprising that our members (and interested others) have embraced the opportunity to present and engage
with so many different types of music research at events like the National Workshop.

While I think it is clear that Stephen Wild’s call for changes within the Society is already being realized, I also think that further expansion of our research interests (as well as cross-fertilisation of our methodologies) is in the cards. As we move into the future, we should not tire in our quest for the broadest ownership and inclusiveness in music research. At the same time, we would be wise to appreciate the valuable legacy that Mozart Note Crunching has given to the whole of the MSA.
INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

PERFORMANCE, AESTHETICS, EXPERIENCE: THOUGHTS ON YAWULYU MUNGAMUNGA SONGS

LINDA BARWICK

Introduction

In 2000 a CD of Warumungu women’s Yawulyu Mungamunga songs was published by Festival records (Papulu Apparr-kari Aboriginal Language and Culture Centre & Barwick, 2000), and launched in Tennant Creek and in Sydney at the National Conference of the Musicological Society of Australia. In Sydney a large audience of musicologists and academics witnessed the launch of these songs into the national and international arena, an event marked by speeches and ceremonial exchanges of gifts as well as a performance of the songs with dancing by a group of women who had travelled to Sydney for the occasion (see fig. 1.1).

The Sydney CD launch was just one in a long line of performances that Warumungu people have presented for outsiders, and in a canvas painted by E. G. Nakkamarra to celebrate the launch of the CD, cultural precedent was invoked to situate the publication of the CD as ngijinkirri, a Warumungu tradition of ceremonial sharing of food and performances with outsiders (I will say more about this painting below). For centuries, Warumungu people have performed their ceremonies in exchange with neighbouring Aboriginal groups, and ever since the Overland Telegraph Line was established north of present-day Tennant Creek in the 1870s, performances have also been mounted for papulanji (the Warumungu language word for non-Aboriginal people) (Basedow 1926, Elkin & Jones 1958, Giles 1871, Spencer & Gillen 1904/1969). These instances demonstrate that Warumungu people expect their performances to have social and aesthetic power for outsiders as well as for cultural insiders. This article reflects my own aesthetic engagement with these Yawulyu Mungamunga songs, which I first recorded near Tennant Creek in 1996.
Adorno, parataxis, constellation

I have taken Theodor Adorno’s work on aesthetics as a point of departure for my discussion here, not only because of its pertinence to the conference themes of performance, aesthetics and experience, but also because in approaching the ceremonial performances of Indigenous Australia, which typically comprise many small songs relating to a particular theme, I find it stimulating to engage with his thoughts on parataxis, literally “placing side-by-side”, a literary and compositional technique which places independent elements alongside each other without specifying the nature of their relationship (Lanham 1991, 108). Adorno was interested in the potential of this “placing alongside” to point beyond the artwork itself:
Thoughts on *Yawalyu Mungamunga* Songs

The truth of a poem does not exist without the structure of the poem, the totality of its moments, but at the same time it is something that transcends this structure, as a structure of aesthetic semblance; not from the outside through a stated philosophical content, but by virtue of the configuration of moments that taken together signify more than the structure intends (Adorno 1992, 112-113).

This configuration of moments is what Adorno, following Walter Benjamin, developed further into the concept of “constellation”—“a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle” (Jay 1984, 14-15). Adorno struggled to implement this technique in his own writing, to resist the linearity traditionally associated with the book and to create:

A series of partial complexes which are concentrically arranged and have the same weight and relevance. It is the constellation, not the succession one by one, of these paratactical complexes which has to make sense (Adorno 1984, 496).

Here I want to develop further my own previous discussions of aspects of Australian Indigenous song that point to an aesthetics of parataxis or juxtaposition (Barwick 2000, 2003). By presenting sung episodes side-by-side without explicit explanation of the relationships between them, the leaders of a Central Australian ceremony allow the learner or listener to construct by induction his or her own increasingly precise sense of the underlying being, story or ethos. It seems to me that this process of active understanding has much in common with the ideal of aesthetics proposed by Adorno:

Aesthetics deals with reciprocal relations between universal and particular, where the universal is not imposed on the particular from the outside but emerges from the dynamic of particularities themselves (Adorno 1984, 481).

The spaces between the “stars” of particularity give birth to conceptions that cannot be expressed in the language of particularity itself and yet are defined by its configurations. As Engleton has pointed out, the principles of filiation suggested by Adorno’s paratactical aesthetics approach the figurative mode of allegory, “which relates through difference, preserving
the relative autonomy of a set of signifying units while suggesting an affinity with some other range of signifiers” (Eagleton 1990, 356). Allegory’s cousins, metaphor and analogy, also depend on inductive reasoning.

In what follows, I will be interrogating my own aesthetic responses to Yawulyu Mungamunga songs. I will seek “to respond consciously to what [these] art works say and what they keep to themselves” (Adorno 1984, 474): firstly, by engaging with their particularity through analysis of the content and form of the songs and associated expressive media; and secondly, by reflecting on the ways in which the songs “point beyond [their] monadic constitution” (Adorno 1984, 258) through their paratactically arranged constellations. First I will set out some of the ways in which the songs are situated socially, for after all, as Adorno states, “in the last analysis art cannot be understood when its social essence has not been understood” (Adorno 1984, 478).

Yawulyu Mungamunga between the Wirnkarra (Dreaming) and the everyday world

Yawulyu is the name for women’s ceremony in Warumungu and several other Central Australian languages, and the term applies not only to songs but also to the ceremonial objects and actions that surround their performance. Mungamunga is the proper name for this particular set of yawulyu songs, which in around 1930 were given to two Warumungu women of the Nappangarti skin by Mungamunga, Dreaming women who continue to interact with humans today.1

Mungamunga women are profoundly ambiguous beings, who operate in the liminal zone between the Wirnkarra (Dreaming) and the everyday world. In the powerful Dreaming utterances and actions recounted in the songs, the Mungamunga women travel around the country finding water, naming places and performing ceremony. In performance of those songs today, real women mirror the Mungamunga women’s utterances and actions in order to effect change in the social world, by attracting or sending away sexual partners, healing the sick and negotiating changing social relationships between groups of people on such ceremonial occasions as launches of new public facilities (like the opening of the new Nyinkka Nyunyu Cultural Centre in Tennant Creek in 2003). Mungamunga women
are not confined to the past—they continue to interact directly with human beings today. Sometimes glimpsed in the distance at dawn or dusk, they may cause people to become lost, steal children, punish those who displease them by refusing to perform their ceremonies, or appear in dreams to give new songs and dances.

Although the majority of these songs were composed in the 1930s by the two Nappangarti women, new songs continue to enter the repertoire from time to time. Typically, new songs and dances are received while a person (man or woman) is asleep, unconscious or delirious. The Mungamunga women may appear directly to instruct the dreamer, or more commonly an intermediary figure appears to pass on their instructions. In the cases I am aware of, these intermediary figures are the ghosts of deceased relatives or the spirit of a living “clever” man or woman (juurkurlu-jangu). Whoever receives Mungamunga songs should pass them into the custody of the women’s ritual leader. In the case of two of the examples I will be discussing here, the songs were dreamt directly by the women’s ritual leader herself. The Mungamunga women appeared to her in her dream and taught her the songs. Her daughter, who was sleeping in the same room, witnessed her singing in her sleep.

**Yawulyu Mungamunga in the contemporary social world**

In order to understand the social world into which these songs were born, it is necessary to be aware of the Warumungu punttu “skin” kinship system. Many Australian societies have a “skin” system, which divides all of society into kinship classes depending on parentage and determines proper behaviour and marriage partners. Warumungu society has a subsection system of eight “skins” which are grouped into two named patrimoieties, Wurlurru and Kingili. Jampin explains:

In the evening we see the dark and the red glow. These were divided by the Dreaming into the two groups of skin names: Kingili and Wurlurru. The red are Wurlurru and the black are Kingili (M. Jones Jampin, in Nyinkka Nyunyu, 2002).

There are many ways of presenting the complex web of relationships embodied in the punttu system (discussions can be found in Nyinkka Nyunyu 2002; Simpson 2002, 29-36; detailed analysis of the similar
Warlpiri kinship system is in Bell 1993, Appendix 2. In fig. 1.2, I have chosen to present the taxonomy of Warumungu skin names from the point of view of the close kartungunyu (sister-in-law) relationship, because that is my classificatory relationship with K. F. Nappangka, the lead singer of the Yawulyu Mungamunga series.

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 2.2. Women’s skin names in the Warumungu punttu kinship system, arranged to highlight kartungunyu (sister-in-law) relationships, also termed panji or “mate”**

Because affiliations to country and associated Dreamings are inherited patrilineally, sisters-in-law provide daughters to carry on each other’s Dreamings. Nappanangka’s Nakkamarra daughters inherit their aunty Narrurlu’s Dreamings while Narrurlu’s Nappangarti daughters inherit their aunty Nappanangka’s Dreamings.

Although the Mungamunga women themselves do not have Warumungu skin names, as soon as the songs are dreamt they must enter into the everyday world governed by punttu laws. The two patrimoieties have complementary roles in holding and maintaining the songs (see fig. 1.2). These roles of “owner” (mangayi or kampaju in Warumungu) and “manager” (purlungalkki or kurtungurlu in Warumungu), have been described in many other accounts of Central Australian ceremonies. For example, they are known respectively as kirda and kurdungurlu in Warlpiri (Bell 1993, 20; Meggitt 1962).