
Towards a Phenomenology of Musical Borrowing

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In discourse on the topic, the question of what constitutes a musical ‘borrowing’, if raised at all, is usually restricted in scope and framed as one of terminology – that is, of determining the right term to characterise a particular borrowing act. In this way has arisen a welter of terms that, however expressive of nuance, have precluded evaluation of the phenomenon as such. This is in part a consequence of general disregard for the fact that to conceive of musical borrowing entails correlative concepts, all of which precondition it, yet none self-evidently. Further preclusive of clarity, the musico-analytic lens of borrowing is typically invoked only in counterpoint to a quintessentially Western aesthetic category of composition *ex nihilo*. As a consequence, the fundamental role played by borrowing in musical domains situated at the periphery of the Western art music tradition, specifically pre-modern polyphony and twentieth-century *musique concrète*, has been overlooked. This article seeks to bridge such lacunae in our understanding of musical borrowing via phenomenological investigation into its conceptual and historical foundations. A more comprehensive evaluation of musical borrowing, one capable of accounting for its diverse instantiations while simultaneously disclosing what makes all of them ‘borrowings’ in the first place, is thereby attainable.

1. INTRODUCTION

No matter how original, how different a composer may seem, [they have] only grafted a little bit ... onto the old plant. (Varèse and Wen-chung 1966: 15)

To minds intent on accounting for the constellation of materials, techniques and aims that constitute musical composition in our historical present, the idea of ‘borrowing’ has repeatedly sprung. This is observable in debates about authorship of, and authority over, musical phenomena precipitated in recent memory by the ease with which sound is now digitally encoded, replicated and circulated. That said, to conceptualise composition as the elaboration of pre-existent material is not unprecedented. Questions thus arise: To what extent do current valences of the term ‘borrowing’ in relation to music emerge from contemporary developments in audio technologies? Conversely: Which dimensions of musical borrowing now touted as novel are in fact variations on an age-old theme?

Granted, such questions have been broached, albeit obliquely, in discourse on the topic. Much scholarship

in this area has engaged to varying degrees with hip-hop. Here it has been advanced that the act of borrowing, while construed as aberrational in Western art music, is fundamental to hip-hop *qua* musico-cultural practice (Schloss 2004; Williams 2013). The notion of copyright has also garnered attention, often – and appropriately, given its challenge to traditional aesthetic categories – in relation to sample-based music (Sinnreich 2010; Sewell 2014; more generally, cf. Vaidhyanathan 2001). As for so-called ‘art’ music, many scholars have chronicled how modernist and post-modernist composers alike embraced borrowing tactics to critique aesthetic and cultural norms (Losada 2009; Knyt 2010; Beirens 2014). Finally, the notion of borrowing has been invoked to analyse works by ‘canonical’ composers such as Handel, Ives and Stravinsky¹ (Carroll 1978; Taruskin 1980; Burkholder 1994).

On the whole, however, such efforts leave the phenomenologist with three main concerns. Of the first: thinking about musical borrowing tends to treat the act itself as an anomaly. That is, scholars have defined musical borrowing according to what it is not, specifically through comparison, however tacit, to an assumptive norm of composition *ex nihilo*. Of the second: in attempting to account for a spectrum of borrowing methods either within or across musical repertoires, such thinking tends to be centrifugal, and thus unwieldy. Finally, of the third, itself alternately cause and effect of the other two: thinking about musical borrowing has, however intentionally, foregone reflection on the very conditions of its own possibility – that is, the idea itself of musical borrowing.

Accordingly, in this article I intend to outline a *centripetal* phenomenology of musical borrowing aimed at disclosing its essence as an intentional compositional act. Along the way, I will grapple with the following questions: What kind of thing is borrowed in an act of musical borrowing? How ought we to conceive of the musical entity from which one borrows? How do musical communities endow the act of

¹To Stravinsky is sometimes attributed the maxim: ‘Good artists copy; great ones steal.’

borrowing with meaning, and what type of value do they cultivate in the process? Finally: How ought we to construe musical borrowing as a variety of the act in general, and what light does it shed on the nature of composition at large?

A few preliminary issues are worth raising. In addressing these questions, I will perforce confront a constellation of sedimented distinctions between generally sonic phenomena on the one hand and specifically musical phenomena on the other. Insofar as such distinctions are held to demarcate mutually exclusive ontological realms (i.e., of sound *qua* physical energy versus *qua* artistic medium), I will be led to critique them in exploring conceptions of musical borrowing articulated by musicians with divergent views on such issues. As a result, I will be led further to critically examine how technology mediates the musical borrowing act. For although electronic audio technologies have allowed for greater facility in borrowing musically, they have not occasioned proportionate reflection on how *what* one borrows therewith might be construed as a 'borrowing' in the first place. I will thus proceed with sound per se as the ultimate frame of reference for a phenomenology of musical borrowing, invoking narrower conceptions of sound prejudged to be 'aesthetic' only ever tendentiously.

So much for ontological concerns. As for epistemological ones: I will begin by investigating three concepts necessarily antecedent to any theorisation of musical borrowing. These will then serve as points of departure for two case studies in musical borrowing drawn from the history of Western art music. The question may arise: Why a *phenomenology* of musical borrowing? Because borrowing is, by nature, an intentional act. As phenomenology is, in its original form, a theory of intentionality, it is ideally suited to the task.² Furthermore, phenomenological enquiry is characteristically undertaken in search of an essence shared across all instances of its object. The aim, then, is to trace an eidetic thread unifying the compositional tradition of borrowing in Western art music from monophonic plainchant to polyphonic synthesisers. So traced, this thread will be examined by way of conclusion for its potential valences vis-à-vis broader questions of aesthetics and ethics, musical and otherwise.

²Here we may peremptorily address a line of thinking inaugurated by Derrida's influential critique of Husserl (Derrida 1979). This critique constitutes a fork in the road for those who would follow in phenomenological footsteps – either one shares in Husserl's commitment to transcendental consciousness, or, like Derrida, does not. On this dimension of Husserl's thought in relation to 'temporal objects', of which musical phenomena are exemplary, cf. Husserl 1991. For a critique of the Husserlian dimension of Schaeffer's thought, the lattermost of which is later to be discussed in this article, cf. Kane 2007, 2012.

2. CONCEPTS

Before undertaking such investigations, however, it will be useful to consider a few terms other than 'borrowing' that are often applied to our object of study. Most noteworthy are 'sampling', 'quotation' and 'plundering'. Each not only denotes a specific variety of the musical borrowing act but also confers a value judgement upon it. Indeed, the range of meanings encompassed by these terms, let alone others, makes it difficult to argue for using any single one as a catchall. 'Plundering', for instance, imputes a transgressive intent absent from many musical borrowings; 'quotation', meanwhile, implies precision of method likewise often lacking. Finally, 'sampling' is so bound up with discourses predicated on affordances of electronic audio technologies that prioritising it would obscure vital links between current and precedent (i.e. pre-electronic) borrowing practices.

Faced with these difficulties, one might justify a preference for 'borrowing' on grounds that it is the most neutral, and thus best, term available for denoting *all* 'uses of pre-existent music'. In such a spirit has this lattermost phrase been advanced (Burkholder 2018: 226) as the optimal way to refer to the phenomenon *in toto*. And yet, such embrace of vagueness *faute de mieux* is why a phenomenology of musical borrowing is needed. Rather than try to resolve such difficulties via categorical assertion, we will proceed in phenomenological fashion to imaginatively explore the following question: What do all such terms assume, conceptually? In short: all rely a priori on conceptualisations of musical materiality, the aesthetic idea and compositional originality.

2.1. Musical materiality

Of these three concepts, the first would seem the most fundamental to the idea of musical borrowing. This is because, generally construed, 'borrowing' involves a number of notions regarding 'ownership'. That is, our conventional notion of borrowing entails an owner of a thing who, *qua* intentional agent, authorises its use by another such agent. Indeed, how this works in the quotidian realm of tangible things and agents who own them is straightforward. Nor does it seem difficult to conceive, by extension, of a musical owner, one possessed of authority over uses of some musical thing. And yet, further reflection uncovers difficulties. This is because it is an entirely different task to conceive of the type of thing borrowed in an act of musical borrowing.

Common sense tells us the material of music is sound. Yet what is sound? The aural perception of vibrations in a medium. To speak of 'materiality' in relation to music, then, is in some sense to speak of 'mediumicity'. To conceive of such mediumicity as

endowed with the potential to function as material possessable in a manner characteristic of an object borrowed, however, raises further difficulties. Sound is transmitted by mechanical waves; thus, as energy, it is, in a physical sense, neither created nor destroyed, only ever transmuted in an infinite chain of flux. In other words, although mechanical waves need a physical medium through which to propagate, no one perceiving their effect *qua* sound would mistake *them* for *it*, much less for the molecules, atoms or sub-atomic particles conventionally held to comprise it in turn.

The same, however, cannot be said of a different kind of medium, the one by virtue of which musical works are now most customarily circulated. Specifically, I am referring to the type of medium into or onto which sounds are transduced from the physical world as signals. Granted, we tend to think already from the first instance of any such signal, be it encoded as continuously varying electrical voltage or in binary units of discrete value, as a ‘copy’ of some ‘original’ sound, assuming this latter, however consciously, to be prior to, and thus transcendent of, its transduction. To put this observation in phenomenological terms: in no scenario is the entirety – or, if you will, the ‘essence’ – of any sound so transduced reducible to its material substrate, however that substrate be construed.

Such difficulties notwithstanding, Western culture has long operated with a normative conception of musical materiality, one serving a regulatory function outside the realm of the strictly musical under the guise of copyright. Originally, copyright pertained to musical form as inherent in a composition’s published (i.e., notated) format. (My frame of reference is US copyright law; of course, laws vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the premise underlying all copyright, that of the ‘ownability’ of eidetic-musical phenomena, remains the same.) Today, while copyright still governs the circulation of notated copies of musical works (not to mention performances that actualise them) under the rubric of ‘publishing rights’, the most common arena in which it is applied is that of recorded sound.

And yet, regardless of material sphere of application, the logic of copyright gives rise to intractable paradoxes concerning the aesthetic relationship between part and whole. To begin: At what point does a fragment start, and cease, to be identifiable with the totality from which it has been extracted? Furthermore, by what criteria ought we to evaluate such identifiability? For instance, ought we to consider infinitesimal extracts just as proprietary of musical objects as the totalities to which they belong? One might incline to say no. However, as any dedicated radio listener knows, even the briefest of extracts are identifiable as constituents of a thoroughly familiar

recording (on the implications of this dynamic for sample-based composition, cf. Oswald 1985).

A cluster of aesthetic and ethical issues thus arise concomitantly around the notion of ‘ownership’ constitutive of musical copyright – too many to treat here. Suffice it to say that, despite the normative force of copyright in the socio-juridical realm, the concepts of authority and authorship constitutive of the idea of musical borrowing cannot be assimilated to its logic. This is because, by the logic of copyright, that which is copyrightable inheres in the aesthetic object, be it represented in notation or transduced as signal. Evaluation of a claim of copyright infringement can therefore only ever be settled *analytically*. Evaluation of an act of musical borrowing, however, must account not only analytically for the dimensions of the sound object borrowed and the methods of its borrowing, but also, and more fundamentally, *synthetically* for the intentions of the agents engaging dialogically through it.

For the idea of musical borrowing to cohere, then, a reified artefact is necessary. And yet, whether *qua* physical medium or media format, any conceptualisation of musical materiality as wholly determinant of the essence of the object so artefactualised is, for our purposes, insufficient. Rather, such artefacts must be further qualified as material *mediators* of immaterial intentionality. This takes us away from the concrete and towards the abstract.

2.2. The aesthetic idea

Let us stay within the preceding frame of reference for a moment, however, and consider the ostensible self-evidence of a musical borrowing enacted at the structural level of the fragment. Not only will this demonstrate how such matters are more complex than on first glance; it will also allow for a consideration of musical borrowing vis-à-vis the totality of a composition *qua* aesthetic idea.

Granted, it might seem elementary to imagine a musical borrowing mediated through a motive, phrase or melody, be they recorded or notated. In attempting to determine the structural level at which such a borrowing becomes sufficiently substantive to merit characterisation as such, however, we must reckon with a web of aesthetic categories inextricably bound up with hierarchies of value. To illustrate this point, let us revive a classic thought experiment (cf. Oswald 1985): Does using a factory-programmed setting on an analog synthesiser constitute an act of musical borrowing? Most Western musicians would say no. Why?

In brief: because Western aestheticians have long prioritised the analytic parameters of pitch and duration – or, more to the point, the structural phenomena that they give rise to (e.g., melody,

harmony and rhythm) – as most distinctive of the essence of the musical work. Time-honoured musical practices like transcription and arrangement testify to this fact, insofar as they presume a composition to remain self-same across a plurality of iterations, each differentiable from the next only by virtue of the instruments that realise its constituent sounds. Governing musical activity in this case not uniquely is some abstract idea, the metaphysical certainty of which serves as the ultimate criterion for determining authorship of, and by that virtue authority over, musical artefacts. In other words, although we might isolate elements from a musical work in order to analyse them in their particularity, the essence of said work is contingent solely on our perception of the intentionality that gave rise to it as a whole.

This insight gained, objections to why pitch- and duration-based dimensions take precedence in determining the essences of musico-aesthetic ideas begin to ramify. For instance, why do we not consider spatiotemporal uniqueness as inherent in the physical resounding of a given composition to be an essential quality thereof? Take Cage's *4'33"* (1952). Its spatiotemporal uniqueness *is* its essence, and, as such, is unabstractable from it. It would seem an aporia, then, whether one could borrow from *4'33"*. Might different 'versions' (i.e., 'performances') of it be construed as so many 'borrowings' from its animating idea? No – and the reason is analogous to that in the case of transcription and arrangement. Might these be characterised as modes of musical borrowing? They cannot, as they do not proceed from the act of fragmentation *qua* extraction of some part from an integral whole that inaugurates every act of musical borrowing.

Apart from Cage's critique, categorical challenges to traditional Western thinking about such musico-ontological hierarchies came with the advent of electronic means for recording, transforming and transmitting sound. Preconditioned thereby, the French tradition of *musique concrète* articulates a critique of such thinking by virtue of its focus on irreducibly complex (i.e., concretely unabstractable) recorded sound as its compositional point of departure. And yet, such critiques notwithstanding, conventional beliefs still prevail. To return to our thought experiment: a pre-programmed synthesiser setting, while surely infused with 'intentionality' by the sound engineer (not, note, 'composer') who made it, remains relegated to the realm of 'craft' on the conventional view, since the intentions involved in making it, according to such logic, could only ever be such as to produce 'aesthetic character', not an 'aesthetic idea'.

As in the case of musical materiality, then, difficulties crop up around a commonsensical conception of the aesthetic idea. Musical borrowing, it seems,

involves more than *just* musical material, though *just* an aesthetic idea is also insufficient. Hence the problem: in music, borrowing necessarily takes place at the structural level of the fragment, though what that fragment constitutes, and how distinctive we take it to be of the totality from which it has been extracted, varies from case to case. Moreover, although the act of musical borrowing necessarily involves an integral totality, the manner in which it does so seems to vary in kind.

2.3. Compositional originality

How, then, is one to proceed in evaluating the phenomenon of musical borrowing when its conceptual preconditions present such variability? One way would be to identify that which preconditions these concepts in turn. Indeed, musical materiality and the aesthetic idea may only be understood in light of an antecedent concept: compositional originality. To intuit the nature of musical borrowing as an intentional compositional act, then, we must explore what constitutes 'originality' in the making of a musical work.

As normatively construed in Western art music, 'originality' is supposed to involve the invention of hitherto non-existent aesthetic phenomena. In this sense, it may be discerned in structural elements extracted *from* a musical totality (e.g., in a melody, harmonic progression, or some other characteristic pattern), as well as, at the same time, predicated *of* that totality. And yet, what if two compositions differ in, say, instrumentation, but feature the same melodico-harmonic pattern? The Western musician will reflexively reply that one *must* be an adaptation of the other – that is, that one and only one was and ever could be 'original'.

Where does this reflex come from? As aforementioned, *qua* ontological constituent of musical sound, qualitative timbre has been traditionally accorded less value by Western aestheticians than its quantifiable counterparts. How did this hierarchy acquire normative force? Through historical reinforcement by musical notation, the representational dimensions of which were originally confined to pitch and duration. In this way, compositional originality came gradually to be identified with the devising of aesthetic structures reducible to such dimensions. What is more, the abstract nature of such structures, as opposed to, say, the concrete relationship between timbre perceived and material sound source, fostered the myth that to compose is to conjure such structures 'out of nothing'. Indeed, this absolutising notion of originality is a (if not *the*) major ideological cornerstone of Western musical aesthetics. As such, it is not valid for all musical cultures, nor at all times.

To wit: our conventional conceptualisation of ‘compositional originality’ as the invention of ‘aesthetic ideas’ mediated through ‘musical material’ is inapt as a framework for evaluating the phenomenon of musical borrowing. Such an evaluation cannot be made deductively; some historical context is necessary.

3. HISTORY

In surveying the history of Western art music, two repertoires stand out for their exemplary embrace of borrowing practices – Medieval polyphony and music-concrete. Granted, these domains seem to have little in common. As regards musico-aesthetic qualities such as timbre and form, let alone cultural practices such as performance convention and ritual function, this is so. And yet, by virtue of their dual function as parallel bookends in narrative accounts of Western compositional tradition, each domain sheds unique light on the conceptual and historical dimensions of musical borrowing. We will proceed to examine the musical worldview underpinning each, then, through the lens of the preceding conceptual rubrics.

3.1. Medieval polyphony

Excepting the monophonic corpus of plainchant upon which it built, Medieval polyphony conventionally marks for historians the beginning of Western compositional tradition. Yet what can it tell us about musical borrowing? First, as a repertory that emerged concurrently with – and in many ways by virtue of – the technological invention of mensural notation, it invites us to reflect on how graphic conventions of representing sound came to precondition our understanding of composition as a whole. Second: as the product of a culture governed by an understanding of compositional originality divergent from ours, it allows us to interrogate the role played by that aesthetic category in our evaluation of musical borrowing.

3.1.1. Compositional originality

Indeed, arguably the most salient feature of what could be collectively termed ‘pre-modern’ Western music is its lack of commitment to the distinctly ‘modern’ aesthetic notion of composition *ex nihilo*. Scholars have long chronicled how composers of the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries habitually adapted elements from pre-existent works in making their ‘own’ music. Specific borrowing methods observable in music of the era include composition from a cantus firmus; paraphrase and parody technique; contrafactum; and thematic variation, to name only a few (cf. Karp 1962; Zimmerman 1966; Falck 1979). Meanwhile,

specific arenas in which borrowing techniques played a central role include the *déploration* (Hallowell 2013), in which fragments of a departed composer’s music were often incorporated into posthumous tributes thereto; various traditions of elaborating polyphonic masses on monophonic tunes (e.g., *L’homme armé*); and, more generally, the many imbricated complexes of secular polyphony that ramify across the era (cf. Steib 1996; Plumley 2003). In fact, one finds so many exoteric cases of borrowing in pre-modern music, let alone of its more esoteric modes such as imitation, emulation and homage (cf. Brown 1982; Meconi 1994), that it soon appears impossible to disentangle what is ‘original’ from what is ‘derivative’ therein.

Rather than assimilate this fact at face value, however, it is for our purposes important to note that our notion of ‘originality’ is, as applied to pre-modern music, an anachronism. To counteract its normative force, we might ask: By what criteria do we evaluate ‘originality’ in pre-modern music? We typically do so by identifying, comparing and assessing the aesthetic qualities of notated musical entities. In other words, we appeal, however explicitly, to our conventional conception of compositional originality as the devising of unique pitch- and duration-based musical structures. And yet, these dimensions by no means exhaust the conception of compositional originality espoused by Medieval musicians. To grasp the significance of this fact, we need to reconstruct *their* understanding of the aesthetic idea.

3.1.2. The aesthetic idea

To reformulate the preceding question: How does our modern conception of musical ontology affect our understanding of borrowing as it was practised by pre-modern composers? As a case study, let us consider a complex of interconnected fifteenth-century works – Gilles Binchois’s chanson *De plus en plus*, Leonel Power’s motet *Anima mea liquefacta est* and Johannes Ockeghem’s *Missa De plus en plus*.

First, the ‘original’. Binchois (c.1400–60) was a Franco-Flemish composer, mostly of secular music. *De plus en plus* is one of Binchois’s best-known chansons. It is a rondeau, marked by repeating music setting different stanzas of poetry. The poem is conventional; it describes, in the courtly tradition, the lyrical persona’s desire for the beloved, which, as the incipit relates, ‘more and more renews again’. As for the music, the work is for three voices, with the *discantus* or uppermost voice setting the text melodically, and both the tenor and contratenor, each bearing marks of an instrumental idiom, untexted.

Although transmitted in manuscript, Binchois’s music, through connections obtaining between European aristocratic courts, travelled far. It is surely in this way that it reached Power (c.1370–1445), an

English composer a few decades Binchois's elder. Evidence of the latter's influence on the former may be discerned in Power's adaptation of elements from *De plus en plus* into a 'new' composition that sets a Marian antiphon from the Song of Songs. What type of borrowing do we discern in Power's motet? To answer this question, we must say something of the performance conventions of the fifteenth-century motet and chanson, respectively.

Chansons were usually performed in small groups, often for audiences of other musicians. By contrast, motets, although frequently performed in such contexts, originally served a liturgical function (masses, meanwhile, always served such a function). Differences in social function, however, did not prevent composers from using 'secular' material in 'sacred' works, nor vice versa. On the contrary, such differences were considered by composers (if not ecclesiastical authorities) as opportunities to elaborate layers of intertextual meaning. This is clearly the case with Power's motet, the Latin verse of which evokes themes of the French poem set by Binchois. Specifically, the text of *Anima mea liquefacta est*, a meditation on spiritual longing, acquires a new, worldly register through its recasting in musical material borrowed from Binchois's chanson.

Something of this registral distinctness translates to the music itself. On first listen to Power's motet, stylistic differences between it and Binchois's chanson are salient. At the same time, however, a certain similarity between the works is audibly discernable. Upon deeper listening, it is apparent that Power has adapted snippets of Binchois's part-writing in a mosaic-like manner, such that vestiges of the chanson may be heard scattered throughout the motet. And yet, in addition to the relatively direct employment of such fragments, one discerns in Power's borrowing more subtle gestures, such as the crafting of analogous melodic contours, the importing of structural relationships, and the modelling of macroscopic textures (for analysis of these features, cf. Burstyn 1976). Overall, listening to these works through the conceptual filter of musical borrowing gives an effect of vague yet essential similarity, one that proves more striking than might seem from mere examination of the notes.

Like Binchois, Ockeghem (c.1440–97) was a Franco-Flemish musician who lived and worked in aristocratic service. The two may thus have crossed paths. At any rate, *De plus en plus* had less far to travel to reach Ockeghem than Power. Apart from such vagaries of transmission, how does Ockeghem's borrowing differ from Power's? In keeping with the personal style of each composer, Ockeghem's is more involved. Unlike Power, who adapts fragmentary elements of Binchois's work into something bearing audible resemblance thereto, Ockeghem borrows just a single voice therefrom, specifically the tenor, which,

owing to the hierarchical texture of the chanson, is of a less distinctive character than the others. Moreover, whereas Power draws from Binchois's counterpoint in an ad hoc manner, Ockeghem deploys the borrowed tenor systematically as architectonic foundation for a four-voiced edifice. As a result, the borrowed voice remains perceptually in the background throughout the mass, providing a continual contrapuntal point of reference, yet never dominating the texture.

Moreover, Ockeghem alters the musical material borrowed in ways significant to the literary conceit of Binchois's chanson. Specifically, the dynamic of 'perpetual renewal' that serves as the poem's thematic emblem is rendered audible in the most salient feature of Binchois's work as borrowed from by Ockeghem – that is, its ambiguous ending. This ambiguity arises from the final sonority of the chanson, which is pitched on 'D' rather than on the 'G' expected from its opening. Ockeghem, by contrast, ends each movement of the mass on 'G', adhering throughout to part-writing conventions associated with the mode built around that final. In so doing, Ockeghem transforms Binchois's tenor in various ways so as to ensure it reinforces the divergent pitch plan of the mass (for analysis of this transformation and speculation regarding the motives behind it, cf. Sherr 2010).

Ockeghem thus demonstrates technical skill that rivals that of the composer from whom the mass borrows, suggesting the work was intended more as *agon* than homage. Indeed, it is tempting to conclude that Ockeghem and Power were primarily interested in demonstrating exemplary ability, and thereby 'personal style', in their repurposing of borrowed musical elements. And yet, what seems to us to convey a sense of originality would have been to the Medieval mind proof that no music originates entirely with an individual composer. This is illuminated by the Medieval concept of *auctoritas*, or the invocation of precedent authority to legitimate one's own work. Despite the seemingly worldly nature of this concept, it had for Medieval artists an inherently, and primarily, metaphysical dimension. Indeed, for them such invocation transcended the mundane sphere of human affairs while nevertheless remaining perceptible in concrete aesthetic objects. To grasp the significance of *auctoritas* to Medieval composers, then, we must understand how the aesthetic idea *qua* metaphysical object was for them mediated through a fundamentally different conceptualisation of musical materiality.

3.1.3. Musical materiality

Through academic training in the Medieval tradition of the seven liberal arts – that is, the three of language (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and four of number (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music) – fifteenth-century composers such as Binchois, Power

and Ockeghem would have been well versed in Pythagorean ideas concerning the nature of musical sound. According to a Pythagorean ontology, musical sound, insofar as it is a physical phenomenon, may be ultimately reduced to – that is, is ‘made up’ of – number. More precisely, such sound is held by Pythagoreans to originate in relationships of ratio and proportion that animate musical form by participating in a transcendental realm of numbers endowed with mystical force. For a Pythagorean, then, to compose and perform music is to harness the power of such numerical properties on multiple hierarchically differentiated structural levels simultaneously. What is more, the materials with which a Pythagorean musician works are, paradoxically, of immaterial, metaphysical substance.

This allows us to rephrase an earlier question: In the Medieval worldview, how, in the context of a given musical work, are we to distinguish features attributable to an individual composer from those of perennial metaphysical origin? As literary theorist Umberto Eco has observed in regard to ‘artistic originality’ in the sense of ‘individual particularity’ as it figures in the scheme of aesthetics and metaphysics characteristic of the European Middle Ages:

[T]he furnishing or fitting out of the world (*ornatus mundi*) consists in the ordering of creation; it flourishes whenever the matter of creation begins to differentiate itself according to weight and number, and to take on shape and colour in its proper milieu within the universe. So, even in a cosmological theory like this the term *ornatus* seems to connote an individuating structure in things. (Eco 2002: 34)

On this view, all art, and music especially, consists in the elaboration of pre-given metaphysical order. This attitude may be emblematised by the Ancient Greek phrase *cosmos cosmetos*, or ‘order adorned’, which conveys an anagogic appreciation for the way in which both metaphysical form and its aesthetic perception are unlocked by a pancalistic (*pan*, ‘all’ + *kalos*, ‘beautiful’) embrace of the universe.

In light of all this, it is unsurprising that our modern notions of compositional originality, the aesthetic idea and musical materiality are incompatible with those of Binchois, Power and Ockeghem. Extrapolating from this fact, if transplanted to a culture such as theirs, our notion of musical borrowing would likewise seem destined to be lost in translation. This is because we assume a quality of ‘ownability’ to be possessed of aesthetic phenomena that is anathema to Medieval musicians. To them, adapting, say, part of some pre-existent melody to a new musical context was in no way an arrogation of ‘property’. Rather, they held such material to consist ultimately of abstract relationships of ratio and proportion originating in, and therefore perpetually derivable from, an a priori metaphysical source.

3.2. Musique concrète

In this respect, Medieval musicians are not alone. Such principled insistence on the pancalistic origins of the musical material with which the composer works is shared by, inter alia, Pierre Schaeffer (1910–95), pioneer of *musique concrète* roughly a half-millennium after the heyday of Binchois, Power and Ockeghem. Such a congruence of beliefs prevails despite the fact that musical materiality was held in the Middle Ages to consist paradoxically of number, whereas in the case of *musique concrète* the point of departure for composition is conceived of in a polar opposite manner.

3.2.1. Musical materiality

To wit: ‘[T]he concrete experiment in music consists in constructing sound objects, no longer from the interplay of numbers and metronomically marked seconds, but with pieces of time wrested from the cosmos’ (Schaeffer 2012: 66). As it emerged in practices and theories developed by Schaeffer and the Groupe de recherches musicales, then, *musique concrète* adapted on principle recorded sounds as concrete phenomena to be worked upon directly by the composer:

I have coined the term *Musique Concrète* for this commitment to compose with materials taken from ‘given’ experimental sound in order to emphasize our dependence, no longer on preconceived sound abstractions, but on sound fragments that exist in reality and that are considered as discrete and complete sound objects, even if and above all when they do not fit in with the elementary definitions of music theory. (Schaeffer 2012: 14)

What does this conception of *musique concrète* imply for composition at large? Most noteworthy is that it renders the notion of composition *ex nihilo* unsalvageable. In Schaeffer’s conception as in those of Binchois, Power and Ockeghem, then, musical composition consists in the elaboration of pre-existent material, be it a notated cantus firmus or a recorded sound object.

3.2.2. The aesthetic idea

To explore such a conception further, let us consider Schaeffer’s *Étude aux chemins de fer* (1948), which is made up entirely of recorded sounds of trains in operation. Given the aim of our investigation, it is worth asking: How might we construe Schaeffer’s *Étude* as an instance of musical borrowing?

For the recorded sounds of Schaeffer’s *Étude* to be construed as material borrowed, we first need to expand our conception of the type of aesthetic intentionality potentially involved therein. To do this, we must account for Schaeffer’s understanding of the relationship between the sound object *qua* musical material and the

compositional work *qua* aesthetic idea. How does Schaeffer understand the aesthetic idea? This question must be answered through the lens of what Schaeffer sought to achieve by composition from pre-existent sound. To understand what Schaeffer sought to achieve thereby, it is helpful, counterintuitively, to consider that which stood in the way of such an achievement.

The *Étude aux chemins de fer* is a prime example of the unique compositional challenges posed by *musique concrète*, challenges arising from what Schaeffer termed the ‘dramatic’ or ‘anecdotal’ character of sound fragments extracted from the ‘real world’. This dynamic would ultimately be formulated by Schaeffer’s disciple Michel Chion as one of ‘causal’ as opposed to ‘reduced’ modes of listening (Chion 2012). Indeed, the difficulty Schaeffer had with such fragments is that they seem ineluctably indexical, inducing ‘causal’ listening so automatically that to bracket the hypothesised origins we reflexively ascribe to them appears impossible (on this dimension of Schaeffer’s work and that of the GRM more generally, cf. Thomas 2007).

Nonetheless, it was only by working through such difficulties that Schaeffer came to discern the greatest value, and ultimate aim, of *musique concrète*. Pertaining the *Étude*, this is encapsulated in the way mechanical noise is transfigured into musical sound. Listening to the *Étude*, a perceptual oscillation between the physically dynamic mechanical processes of trains in operation and the musico-aesthetic qualities they give off continually strikes the ear. Such oscillation emblematises the aesthetic idea for Schaeffer, and, in this case, it is conveyed with the barest of technical means. That is, the educing of rhythmic patterns and melodic contours from the recorded sounds of trains in operation is achieved solely through segmentation and repetition. Generalising from this particular case, composition becomes a two-step process. The first involves listening for aesthetic potential in pre-given sound. Per Schaeffer: ‘Sound material in itself has inexhaustible potential. This power makes you think of the atom and the reservoir of energy hidden in its particles, ready to burst out as soon as it is split’ (Schaeffer 2012: 15). In the next step, the composer must move beyond the role of intentional listener to deploy the *techné* required to unlock such ‘hidden energy’.

And yet, however much the foregoing might afford us insight into Schaeffer’s conception of *musique concrète*, it has not told us much about how composing from pre-existent material in this manner might be construed as a type of borrowing. In contrast to the insights gained in relation to Medieval polyphony, what is ‘borrowed’ in this instance is not obvious; that is, it is not already a commonly acknowledged musical phenomenon, nor does it exhibit clear relation to conventional notions of musical authorship and authority.

The lesson of *musique concrète* so far, then, is that objects that appear to be void of aesthetic *intentionality* may still disclose aesthetic *potentiality*. That they can do so has to do with their origins.

3.2.3. Compositional originality

This brings us to a question: What value did Schaeffer discern in such pre-given sounds? Contrary to what might be imagined, Schaeffer generally valued sound objects neither for their ‘musical’ qualities, nor for their ‘material’ qualities more broadly construed.³ To grasp the value Schaeffer discerned in such sounds, rather, we must first consider the ‘originality’ of *musique concrète* from both exoteric and esoteric perspectives. Regarding the first: it has been argued (Battier 2007) that the distinctive feature of *musique concrète* is its novel valuation of technology *per se*. This is, however, only part of the story. It is not so much an attitude of ‘technology for technology’s sake’ that sets *musique concrète* apart from that which came before it, but an unprecedented emphasis on *techné*, or abstract technique and material technology dialectically bound, that does so.⁴ An oft-cited offspring of this dialectic is Schaeffer’s invention of the *sillon fermé*, by means of which sounds were recorded to shellac records cut with closed rather than spiralling grooves in order to be looped indefinitely.

Over-accenting the novelty of such technologically inspired compositional techniques, historical accounts often conjure radical discontinuity to separate *musique concrète* from the musical tradition that preceded it. And yet, Schaeffer did not think of *musique concrète* as discontinuous with the compositional past. Rather, Schaeffer’s understanding of musical tradition is continuous. This is above all evident in what Schaeffer considered of utmost importance in conceiving of the *concrète* work – the aesthetic entities constitutive of *every* musical experience:

[F]or there to be music, all that is needed is that a relationship be established between subject and object, and the initial act in music is willed hearing, i.e. selecting from the chaotic hubbub of sounds a sound fragment that one has decided to consider. (Schaeffer 2012: 66)

For Schaeffer, then, the starting point of composition is always already some fragment extracted from a pre-existent totality. Latent in every such fragment is an as-yet-unactualised universe beyond it: ‘[A]n atom cut into pieces is no longer the same atom. It becomes

³I use the phrase ‘sound object’ in its enduring sense of ‘an extract of recorded sound with which one works’. As Kane (2013) has observed, Schaeffer’s formulation of the sound object was, in the early years of *musique concrète*, still fluid.

⁴On the role of this dialectic in challenges to traditional musico-aesthetic categories posed by recorded sound, cf. Murail 2005. For an account of how this dialectic has conditioned the history of electro-acoustic composition, cf. Manning 2006.

another material, gives off expected energy' (Schaeffer 2012: 42). In Schaeffer's view, it is such an experimental process of moving dialectically between micro- and macrocosm that generates music in all its forms.

In sum: Schaeffer conceives of the sound object as at once circumscribed by an originary act of intentional listening and constitutive of an aesthetic realm transcendent thereof. To compose from pre-given sound is to initiate a dialogue beyond the self: '[T]he miracle of concrete music ... is that, in the course of experimentation, things begin to speak for themselves, as if they were bringing a message from a world unknown to us and outside us' (Schaeffer 2012: 91–2). This dialectical movement distinctive of *musique concrète*, in other words, goes from 'the world of found objects to the world of intended objects' (Schaeffer 2012: 147).⁵ Begot in an act of intentional listening, every work of *musique concrète* articulates a relationship between compositional self and aesthetic other.

4. CONCLUSION

To pick up the thread we set out to trace at the outset – conventional wisdom about musical borrowing might seem to suggest that our conception of it is only as coherent as the individual practices we take to be exemplary. And yet, our investigations have shown that, by comparing ostensibly unrelated acts of borrowing across musical traditions and epochs, we may attain a more fundamental understanding of the phenomenon as such.⁶ More specifically, we have discovered that to borrow musically is never just an aesthetic act, but always an ethical one as well. Note that our conventional conceptualisation of borrowing encompasses both these aspects already: to borrow is to borrow *something* from *someone*. Insofar as one does something intentional with that thing borrowed, it is an aesthetic (or in quotidian terms, a utilitarian) act; insofar as in doing something with that thing one takes into consideration the intentionality of the entity by virtue of which it originated, it is an ethical act.

This brings us to the most important question this article set out to answer: What type of value is cultivated in an act of musical borrowing? Simply put: the value so cultivated is of a communal, not an individual, character. How are we to distinguish between individual and communal types of value in regard to musical borrowing? Whereas the value that

figures in conventional forms of *quid pro quo* exchange is held individually and exclusively, in our case it is held both commonly and communally – so much so that one ought not to characterise it as 'holdable' at all. What is more, what is borrowed in our musical case is not a thing to be used and then returned *tel quel*, but rather to be transfigured into something new. This something may be 'original' in conception and manner of execution, though it could never have been made without its 'derivative' (i.e., borrowed) elements.

And yet, such opposition of 'original' to 'derivative' is misleading. This is because the type of 'originality' in question is an *objective*, not a subjective, phenomenon. Paradoxically, that is, such originality is not to be evaluated within our conventional conceptualisation of it as the individualistic devising of aesthetic structures, but rather according to an ideal 'origin' conceived of as generative source of all musical phenomena. In the words of Knud Jeppesen, theorist of pre-modern counterpoint:

The following rule may be set up as a primary law in the evolution of music: From a certain form A, one arrives at a new form B, by varying A gradually until finally it is so far varied that it becomes the new form B. From this viewpoint, one may, with a certain justification, regard all music ... as an unending chain of variations, all naturally standing in more or less obvious relation to the theme, but all having one thing in common, namely, the visible or invisible, actual or ideal *cantus firmus*, to which they are linked and upon which they continue to build. (Jeppesen 1992: 36)

In contrast to its other socio-cultural permutations, then, an act of *musical* borrowing involves something belonging, originally, to no one; the value it cultivates is something that belongs, in principle, to everyone. The operative difference here has to do with that in meaning between 'use' and 'use up', and with that in intent between musical composition undertaken as the dutiful elaboration of pre-given material versus the purported creation of 'new' forms *ex nihilo*. Indeed, in the musical worldview common to *musique concrète* and Medieval polyphony, never is there any *nihil* from which a composer might begin.

In conclusion: What of value is cultivated in an act of musical borrowing? In short: a musical community. Every act of musical borrowing cultivates a musical community. Thus constituted, such a community consists of intentional agents engaging one another in compositional dialogue mediated via musical material alternately borrowed and elaborated upon, giving form in turn to aesthetic ideas 'old' and 'new', overlaid and interwoven. Rather than conceive of musical borrowing as an anomaly in need of qualification, then, we ought to promote it as an act of intentional connection, the ultimate form of creativity.

⁵It is interesting to compare Schaeffer's thoughts in this regard with those of artists working in realm of sound art, which is often built upon field recordings of sounds not easily categorisable along traditional aesthetic lines (Demers 2009).

⁶Burkholder formulates this point succinctly: 'If we see all kinds of borrowing as interrelated, and pay attention to all the uses of existing music in any particular work, we can only enhance our understanding of each borrowing procedure, each composer or era, and each piece' (Burkholder 1994: 859).

Acknowledgements

I thank the anonymous reviewers of this journal for their thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this article.

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