How Can Non-Social Anthropology Help Us Better Understand
the Collective Experience of Musical Performance?
A Case Study in the Recording Studio

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Non-social anthropology?

Last year, an anthology called *Detachment. Essays on the Limits of Relational Thinking*[1], was published by Manchester University Press. This excerpt from the introduction succinctly illustrates its objective: "Going against the grain of recent theoretical celebrations of engagement, this book challenges us to re-think the relational basis of social theory. In so, doing it brings to light the productive aspects of disconnection, distance and detachment. […] Taken together, [our empirical studies and theoretical comments] illustrate the range of contexts in which distance and disconnection can offer meaningful frameworks for action".

Later in the book, this observation is said to be "at the cutting edge of social theory", which, in two ways, it is. Firstly, in the sense intended by the authors, since this empirical interest in disconnection, distance, and detachment is quite recent. Secondly, in the literal sense where the edge makes a cut between what is and isn't social. In other words, although this anthology presents itself as a work on "social and cultural anthropology" or "the social sciences", what they're really heading towards is something I call "non-social anthropology". I say this because to interest oneself, in a situation, not to engagement or connection, but rather to disconnection, is to turn away from that which is social within experience.

Non-social anthropology is clearly not incompatible with social anthropology. As the editors of the book state, "Taking detachment seriously does not equate to rejection of

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1 CANDEA Matei, COOK Jo, TRUNDLE Catherine & YARROW Thomas (eds.) (2015) *Detachment. Essays on the Limits of Relational Thinking*, Manchester, MUP.

relational theories and approaches. […] What we are asking, however, is that detachment be allowed the same ethnographic and conceptual air-time as its opposites".

Music performance studies & social anthropology

In these last years, the social sciences have taken on an increasingly central role in music performance studies. If we limit ourselves to live performances in action, we can easily show that role by citing a few instances of open collaboration among musicologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. These include: Amanda Bayley and the social anthropologist Beth Elverdam in England[2]; Hyacinthe Ravet and sociologist Howard Becker[3], or Nicolas Donin and cognitive anthropologist Jacques Theureau[4], in the French setting with which I'm most familiar. After reading these, and many other works, I've come to a conclusion: in most cases, when the analysis of collective musical playing thrives on social sciences, it's mostly when interactionist, cooperationist, and communicationist models are mobilized.

When analyzing the collaboration between the composer and performers in the context of creation, or the work of performers among themselves, what becomes clear, before everything else, is the order of interaction: music, words, gestures, etc. To return to the concepts put forward in the anthology I began with, the anthropology of musical performance is partially relational and is concerned with the interactions in which the musicians are engaged. As a result, I propose that we see if we can also use disconnection, distance, and detachment to attain better critical insights into musical performances.

I've been working in this area for my PhD dissertation and, since there are many tracks to be followed, I suggest that I present one of them to you and put it up for discussion.

Theoretical clarification: Albert Piette

One last theoretical clarification before we examine this case study: the anthology *Detachment* seems to be the first book in the English-speaking field of anthropology that has looked deeply into these questions. And, if I'm not mistaken, the Cambridge

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2   *Cf.* A. Bayley and B. Elverdam's papers in the two last PSN international conferences : "Rehearsal analysis of Finissy's *Third String Quartet*" (2011), "Rehearsal as Creative Process" (2013).

3   RAVET Hyacinthe (2015) *L'orchestre au travail. Interactions, négociations, coopérations*, prefaced by Howard Becker, Paris, Vrin, coll. "MusicologieS".

4   DONIN Nicolas & THEUREAU Jacques (2006) « L'interprétation comme lecture ? L'exemple des annotations et commentaires d'une partition par Pierre-André Valade », in *Musimédiane*, n° 2 (http://www.musimediane.com/spip.php?article52).

Interdisciplinary Performance Network has granted it a session in April. I have allowed myself to authoritatively qualify this anthropology as non-social, which is perhaps not entirely pertinent. However, there is an anthropologist in the Francophone sector, who very willingly accepts this idea of non-social anthropology. His name is Albert Piette, and he's developed a methodology that on the whole, revolves around these same ideas. The title of his book *Contre le relationnisme*[5] (*Against Relationism*) is, in this sense, quite explicit.

For a few years now, Albert Piette has been moving forward on a ground that's very similar to what I've already discussed, although he's brought a different epistemology, one that's at the intersection between phenomenology and existential philosophy. I'll sum up his idea as such: an existence – or, on a smaller scale, an experience – is singular, and thus, is worthy of interest, because of what it is by itself, not because of the interactions that come after it. That's because interactions are rarely unique and are often interchangeable: whatever I live has already been lived by others before me, and will continue to be lived by others after me. What makes a life or an experience singular is more the way in which, from one action to another action, individuals are never totally engaged, attached, in connection, etc.

Case study: introduction

Let's now look at a two-minute excerpt from a recording session that I filmed two years ago. I followed a French Renaissance music ensemble, which spent a week in the famous Chambord Castle to record polyphonic songs of the sixteenth century. The ensemble's numbers vary from one song to another, and it consists here of two singers and one lutenist who performed Didier Lupi's "Susanne un jour", a two-minute song meant for four voices, which came out in 1548 (and which inspired a huge number of composers). From left to right: Brigitte (lutenist), Gauthier (singer), and Erik (singer). In a booth next door, the director and the producer are supervising the recording, mostly by using an analogue telephone to communicate with the musicians.

I suggest that we watch this excerpt once before I give you a frame of reference. You'll be free to concentrate on what interests you and to consider potential lines of study. One last thing: the excerpt that I've chosen is taken from around the halfway mark of the 40-minute recording, meaning that the technical tuning has been completed, the overall direction of the performance has been decided, and we're progressively making our way towards satisfactory takes.

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5 PIETTE Albert (2014) *Contre le relationnisme. Lettre aux anthropologues*, Paris, Le Bord de l'Eau, coll. "Perspectives anthropologiques".

I'm guessing that no one here spent the last two minutes continuously looking at just one of the three musicians. We all have a tendency to move our eyes from one individual to another, from one action to another, etc. Maybe it's because we want to retain a general overview of the situation. The problem is that "the" situation, as we observe it, doesn't exist in that form for those who live it. We, as observers, create that artifact, by ceaselessly moving from one actor to another, from one action to another, as if everything was made up of links and relationships that weave "the" situation together.

Now that you've seen the excerpt once, I'd like to show it to you again and ask you to consider the situation not in its overall sense, but as it was lived by one of the musicians. Let's follow Gauthier, the countertenor in the middle. Obviously, Gauthier isn't a monad, and we'll have to occasionally divert our attention towards whomever he's interacting with – whenever he interacts with someone else. Our focal point should remain Gauthier, so we'll now have to understand the progression of his actions and non-actions.

Case study: description

I said before that musicologists working on live performances are heavily dependant on very "relationist" social sciences. In addition (and it's perhaps not unrelated), these musicologists don't take the time to describe or reproduce in detail what they've observed. But, as we've just experienced, there are very different ways in which to observe a situation, and description represents the only way that a reader or a listener can know how the situation has been observed, and thus on which "reality" the analysis is based. Given how crucial this descriptive phase is, I've decided to provide you with one such description that focuses on Gauthier.

> Gauthier takes a drink of water, closes the bottle and puts it on the floor. He places himself in front of his music stand and looking at the sheet music, tugs on his sweater, clears his throat, stretches, and loudly breathes out twice, as if preparing for a challenging exercise. He smiles, looking at Erik on his left, and then looking again at his sheet music, gets his whole body ready to take a deep breath, in order to sing the piece from the beginning. He nevertheless interrupts himself, and looks inquisitively towards the door of the booth where the director

and the producer are. Are they ready for a new take? Not getting an answer, Gauthier takes the initiative and says, "We're ready. Let's go." to the personnel in the booth, who certainly hear him, because of the microphones, but also because of Erik and Brigitte. Then the phone rings, and Gauthier has to bend down to answer it and check with the producer: "We're agreed that the code is, you ring once…? Huh? Ok. That's fine." He hangs up and gets up, amused at the situation. He sits back down in front of the music stand, eyes trained on the sheet music, takes a breath, and begins to sing.

When he sings, his eyes never leave the score, his left arm lies steadily against his body (his hand is in his pocket) and his chest and legs are relatively still. In direct contrast, his right arm is creating a choreography that accompanies the vocal performance and behind which we sense the beat of the measure. This choreography is not meant for his colleagues, however. More than a beat, it's an informal way for Gauthier to carve into his body the phrasing and the variations in singing. We sometimes pick up on a gesture that has a more exact meaning, such as when his raised index finger reveals a problem with pitch—but this gesture is also not meant for his colleagues.

Between the third and fourth verse, the telephone interrupts the take; no one had heard it ring the first time. Unlike Erik, who stops immediately, Gauthier sings the first syllable before also stopping. As for Brigitte, she takes the time to finish the part that she had just begun. Gauthier takes the telephone and immediately repeats aloud the comment that's been made to him: "We're too slow. Okay." He hangs up while glancing at Brigitte. He sits back down in front of the music stand, clears his throat, takes a breath, and sings the first notes by himself, in order to test out the more energetic tempo (this time, he accompanies himself with the choreography of both his arms). He quickly breaks off, delivers the first word "Susanne", then tries again with the notes until the end of the first musical period. He unlocks his shoulders and suspends his movements (left hand on his hip, right arm lightly stretched behind), ready to give the signal. He waits until Erik has replaced his sheets on his music stand. Once that's done, he breathes and launches into the new take, and the two other musicians join him.

This time, his chest is less still and very lightly accompanies the tempo, as if to embody the requested increase. Again, he raises his index finger at a problem of intonation at the end of the first verse. But this time, he breaks off, turns towards Erik (who, along with Brigitte, had intended to begin the second verse) and asks "Can we do it again, for me? Sorry." (He emphasizes his request with a circular hand gesture.) He gets back into position and gives the signal to start again.

Analysis 1: interactions

Initially in my analysis, I want to review sociologist Erving Goffman's definition of interaction as "that class of events which occurs during co-presence and by virtue of co-presence"[6]. Over the course of the two minutes that we've described, everything obviously occurs during co-presence. But does everything occur because of, or by virtue of, co-presence? Not really.

- Let's go back to the description's first paragraph, where it's easy to identify interaction when Gauthier speaks to the personnel in the booth, who respond by making the phone ring, to which Gauthier responds by picking up the phone and speaking with them. Here, interaction thrives on successive reciprocities, and usually, when we use the term "interaction", we're thinking of this kind of situation.

- When Gauthier takes a breath and starts singing, he expects his colleagues to do the same. So, he does it "by virtue of co-presence". And yet, he doesn't directly address them. I propose that we consider this to be another class of interaction.

- Let's move on to an additional step: there's a moment when Gauthier smiles at Erik "by virtue of co-presence" but Erik doesn't see it. We must thus recognize a third category of interaction, where one doesn't observe the reciprocity…Can we still truly speak of interaction? I would rather call it a failed interaction.

- If we look at the first two sentences, Gauthier is here interacting with his bottle of water and his sweater. No matter what, I don't see any clues here that indicate a relationship with another human being, although they remain co-present.

- Finally, we have moments where Gauthier doesn't interact at all, be it with a human being or an object. In those moments, he addresses no one, and no one addresses him.

My aim here is not to propose a new theory of interaction; there are already many that exist. But detailing all of Gauthier's actions in this paragraph allows me to critically reread a large part of the musicological literature that has been dedicated to situations of group playing. Concentrating exclusively on exchanges of words, gestures, and musical sounds leads to forgetting that a lot of words, gestures, and sounds are not "exchanged", but simply "produced", without reciprocity, without any perception, or even without being meant for another person. As a result, these words, gestures, and sounds have different statuses in any given situation, depending on whether they're part of a real interaction, a failed interaction,

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6 GOFFMAN Erving (1967) *Interaction Ritual. Essays in Face to Face Behavior*, Garolen City (N. Y.), Anchor/Doubleday, p. 1.

or an action that hasn't been addressed to anyone. And in fact, unless we have a very, very flexible definition of interaction, we cannot maintain that situations are only comprised of interactions.

Analysis 2: what makes Gauthier the leader ?

As I've already stated in other terms, Gauthier's actions here are not specific to him. Taken one by one, they've perhaps already been done by other people, in other situations, and will continue to be done in the future. Quantifying them and creating a typology out of them seems to be the most convincing way to draw concrete conclusions, but it's extremely difficult. Here, I'd like to demonstrate that there's another way to analyze all of this, which would fully take into account the specificities of this situation and the singularity of Gauthier.

Let's look at the gestures that Gauthier made when he was singing which, by the way, were not produced "by virtue of the co-presence" of Brigitte and Erik; when Gauthier sings alone, we observe a similar choreography. But these gestures, although not interactions in the Goffmanian sense, very probably still influence the musical performances of Brigitte and Erik. At the start of the song, the fact that Gauthier takes a deep breath allows Brigitte and Erik to synchronize themselves with him. And during the song, Brigitte and Erik can't be completely indifferent to the fact that the movements of Gauthier, in their line of sight, mark the pulse.

Is Gauthier leading the performance? Analysis of his movements might make one think so, and if we compare him to Brigitte and Erik, who give no signal at the beginning, and make no movements which are visible to their colleagues, we might feel confirmed in that analysis. As such, we can study the power structure in this performance, not forgetting of course that the director and the producer play an important role in that structure. This kind of analysis, based on the modalities of interaction, is often seen in performance studies, and especially in the more recent conducting studies.

Interestingly, the leader position of Gauthier has never been the object of discussion. In fact, I don't think that Brigitte and Erik are aware that Gauthier is leading them; and to tell the truth, I don't think that Gauthier himself is aware that he's leading his colleagues. He doesn't behave like the leader. And it's here that non-social anthropology comes into play.

When describing the totality of Gauthier's actions in their continuity, and the way in which these actions concatenate with each other, we give ourselves the key to better understanding

the basis for his unconscious leadership position, not in the capacity of a mere "interactor" but in connection with a way to be. He addresses absolutely nothing to his colleagues, apart from when he makes a mistake at the end of the excerpt and asks them for a second try (and even then, he turns mostly towards Erik). He's not visibly looking to synchronize them with himself. When he sings, he's never looking at them, not even at the beginning. When he speaks on the telephone with the director, he doesn't involve Brigitte and Erik in the conversation, and he doesn't look at them, not even when he says, "We're too slow", almost as if he's repeating it for himself. If he plays the part of an answering service, it's because he likes doing it while Brigitte doesn't and because Erik, a Czech national, isn't very comfortable speaking in French.

In fact, a close reading of the description and his rhythm allows us to see that Gauthier is engaged, from start to finish, in the musical activity and its requirements, including those of coordination with the personnel in the booth, but, conversely, is a little detached from Brigitte and Erik. In short, Gauthier's position of leader is to be taken here as the result of a way in which he, individually, plays on successive takes. Brigitte and Erik also have their own ways of playing, which could be the object of analogous descriptions, and which could be described as different, more discreet, more attentive to others. This is where their way of trusting Gauthier, of joining with him, of following his lead comes from.

With a little more time, we could of course expand on what I've said, establish more exact diagrams about detachment, etc. But I prefer to conclude by going back to musical activity, in its strictest sense.

Analysis 3 * Conclusion: but what about the music ?

It will not have escaped you that in my description, the moments dedicated to musical playing are the least detailed, not at all proportional with the duration of these moments. We find here a recurring problem in the analysis of actions that take place in a musical situation: what should be described? We can, of course, raise the point of the exchanged glances and the gestures used by performers to interact with each other. But there's none of that in the excerpt that we've been looking at. The only notable gestures are those of which we've already spoken, and which I've tried to characterize.

I've underlined the fact that, without intending it, and without establishing eye contact with his colleagues, Gauthier is the only visual referent when the three musicians play together. Even his gesture to signal a fault in pitch is only meant for himself!

But on another hand, in the framework of sound, it's very clear that musical activity is highly interactional, from one moment to another. It's maybe even one of the things that distinguishes music from other human activities. In this framework, Gauthier is thus happily attentive to Brigitte and Erik and is forever adjusting himself to fit with them. He visualizes his colleagues, in a way, on his score (which is a full score) and visualizes the interactions among the different voices, but it's in the domain of sound that constant interactions are spread out. And there, it's not a sure thing that Gauthier is the only answer to questions about leadership.

Thus, we'll quickly become limited if we restrict ourselves to video, which is only a secondary support. The interaction to be analyzed is mainly musical and the tools that would permit this kind of analysis are still underdeveloped. They exist, of course, for the analysis of relationships between different voices on a score, but what do we do for a performance? In the context of improvised music, it's possible to evaluate how the improvisation of one person influences that of another. And early music opens doors to improvisation, but, in the case we're looking at, only the lutenist takes advantage of that possibility. The two singers content themselves with approaching the song as if its text was inflexible, from first to last note. So, must we go so far as to observe very closely how agogics vary, how pitches fit with each other, etc?

I won't go any further in this direction. Firstly, because an entire paper could be written on the subject, but especially because I've wandered into an interactional grid, when my initial aim was the non-social. But on another occasion, it might be a good idea to explore whether this non-social approach, whose usefulness I hope I've demonstrated, could be applied to musical performance in its strictest sense. Much like how non-social anthropology makes the paradigm of purely relational humanity fall apart, might non-social musicology allow notions of disconnection, detachment, and distance to be introduced into the analysis of collective musical performances? Or at least prove that music is not only about relation and engagement, in spite of my previous hypothesis?