THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

Mediating Music/Sound: Discourses, Technologies, Socialities

<u>Programme</u>

Date: November 30 to December 1, 2018 (Friday & Saturday)

Time: November 30 (Fri) – 18:00 to 20:00
            December 1 (Sat) – 9:30 to 17:30

Venue: November 30 (Fri) – Rayson Huang Theatre, Main Campus, The
            University of Hong Kong
            December 1 (Sat) – Function Room, 11/F, The Jockey Club Tower,
            Centennial Campus, The University of Hong Kong

November 30, 2018 (Friday)
Keynote address

Georgina Born (Oxford University and Aarhus University)

How is Music Social? Social movements, entrepreneurialism, experimental economies, and musical labor

How is music social? Ethnomusicology, popular music studies and musicology all now recognise that we need a social musicology – that we need to understand music's social mediation. But the nature of this 'social' is undecided. On the one hand are macrosociological approaches like Pierre Bourdieu's; on the other hand are the microsociologies of musical performance and process of Thomas Turino, Tia DeNora and Antoine Hennion. Neither are sufficient. Instead, we urgently need an expanded analytical framework encompassing what I call four planes of music's social mediation, and to think these four planes in their complex and generative interrelations. I exemplify my case with reference to ethnographic studies of the transformations of music by digitisation in India, Kenya, Argentina, and Montreal. This framework responds to the enlarged creative preoccupations of today's musicians, while being attuned to the diversity of politics of contemporary music. But reconceived in this way, music answers a wider challenge in social theory to reconceptualise the very nature of the 'social'. In doing so, music emerges from its apparent seclusion as the most a-social and abstract of the arts to proffer generative solutions.

December 1, 2018 (Saturday)

Time	Programme
09:30	Opening and Registration
Morning Session: Music's Social and Political Mediations	
10:00	*Amerikanismus* in America: Zeitoper across borders of nation, race, and media **John Gabriel (The University of Hong Kong)**
10:40	Atomic resonances of Ph.D. music: Babbitt, IAS, and the Cold War's compositional determinacy **Jeffrey Levenberg (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)**
11:20	What is this thing called protest music? **Eric Drott (University of Texas, Austin)**
12:00	Radical participation: The politics of performance in Chinese punk-rock concerts **Nathanel Amar (The University of Hong Kong)**
12:40	Music, exchange and the production of value: A case study of Hindustani music **Anna Morcom (University of California, Los Angeles)**
13:20	Lunch Break
Afternoon Session: Material and Immaterial Media as Mediation – From Scores and Recordings to Algorithms and Cochlear Implants	
14:20	Notation and the networking of musical spacetime **Roger Moseley (Cornell University)**
15:00	Callas unplugged? The Juilliard master classes (1971-72) **Giorgio Biancorosso (The University of Hong Kong)**
15:40	Interpretability, or learning to listen to algorithms **Nick Seaver (Tufts University)**
16:20	Voice, signal, implant. Do 'unmediated' sounds matter anymore? **David Trippett (Cambridge University)**
17:00	Concluding Remarks **Georgina Born (Oxford University and Aarhus University)**
17:30	Symposium ends

Abstracts

Amerikanismus in America: *Zeitoper* across borders of nation, race, and media

John Gabriel (The University of Hong Kong)

In this paper, I analyze how the reception of the German genre of *Zeitoper* in the United States in the late 1920s was socially mediated by constructions of nation, race, and high versus popular art. *Zeitoper* was the operatic expression of Weimar Republic Germany's cultural obsession with the United States, a phenomenon known as *Amerikanismus*. While the way these works expressed the German cultural imaginary of America has been well studied, their reception in America has been treated only in passing. Two elements of this reception are worthy of closer examination. First, how these operas were adapted in order to bring their representation of the German imaginary of the United States more in line with American's own self-image. Second, how these operatic representations of America were then taken up by American composers as models in their own efforts to create a new kind of explicitly American modern music, freed of European influence. This influence was made possible by a shared interest by Germans and Americans in the United States as the embodiment of modern life and technology, but neither the representation of the United States, nor the attempt to revitalize modernist art with an infusion of the popular translated well. I examine this dynamic by juxtaposing two German *Zeitopern* and two American *Zeitopern* they inspired: Paul Hindemith's *Hin und Zurück*, Marc Blitzstein's *Triple-sec* (inspired by Hindemith's opera), Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*, and the unsuccessful effort to stage George Antheil's *Transatlantic* (modeled on *Jonny* and revised under the mentorship of Krenek) in New York.

Atomic resonances of Ph.D. music: Babbitt, IAS, and the Cold War's compositional determinacy

Jeffrey Levenberg (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

In tandem with the infamous 1948 crackdown on formalist composers, Soviet censors initiated a purge in the sciences that would further alter the trajectory of modernist music: they moved to ban musical formulations from atomic physics. As charged, atomic physics was corrupted by bourgeois musical metaphysics about "resonance," "tuning," and other inaudible phenomena that were antithetical to Marxist dialectical materialism. The musical theories of the atom postulated by idealist pre-war physicists were now but immaterial obstacles to winning the arms race. While the ensuing "Anti-Resonance Campaign" effectively muted musical discourses in the exact sciences on the Soviet side of the wall, it inevitably amplified them on the American side. Within the context of this war of words, those American composers seeking to establish music as a scientific discipline would find some extra sympathetic ears among their role models.

This paper reconsiders the institutionalization of music as a science during the Cold War, focusing in particular on the foundation of the Ph.D. in composition at Princeton. Extending the work of Brody and Taruskin, I move beyond the well-traversed matters of Babbitt's philosophy of science and political aesthetics; I seek out concrete mediations between Cold War exact science, Ph.D. music, and their discourses. In line with Born's seminal work on IRCAM, I scrutinize layers of computer music programs and expose the presence of an application from nuclear physics that was devised by Babbitt's own dissertation advisor. I moreover suggest that Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) provided the perfect accompaniment to Ph.D. music while it trumpeted the music of atoms out from the ivory tower to the American intelligentsia. While not necessarily the primary determinant of Ph.D. music, Cold War science and its discourse validated the degree.

What is this thing called protest music?

Eric Drott (University of Texas, Austin)

This paper reconsiders what is signified by the term "protest music," taking as its point of departure an ephemeral performance of sorts that took place during the 2016 protests against the *loi travail* in France. During a march in Paris on May 26, a bottleneck resulting from the confrontation of protesters and police led a handful of activists who found themselves pressed against a corrugated partition to begin beating out a rhythm on the aluminum sheets, imitating the scansion of one of the more popular chants of the protest movement. This incident—which was over less than a minute after it begun—raises a number of questions. Does this fleeting, impromptu performance count as protest music? If it does not, why not? If it does, what are the conditions that would have to be satisfied to recognize it as such? And what, if anything, is gained by revising our notion of protest music so that we might hear it as such?

In pursuing these questions, this paper enters into dialogue with a number of scholars who have drawn attention to the limitations that terms "protest music" and "protest anthem" have historically imposed on musicking and politicking alike (Brooks 2015; Bohlman 2017; Tausig forthcoming). The paper begins by examining some of the unspoken ontological commitments embedded in received notions of protest music, before suggesting an alternative way of conceiving the interaction of protest and music, one premised on their reciprocal mediation. It then turns to the conditions whereby forms of sonic dissent can be recognized as such, considering the way in which genre (in the case of music) and tactical repertoires (in the case of protest) furnish normative horizons of action and expectation, and how the interaction of the two may reshape our conceptions of what counts as music, what counts as protest, and what counts as musical protest. The final portion of this paper explores the question of how protest tactics may be evolving at present, including sound-based ones, and considers what the responsibility of music scholars may be in tracking such changes.

Radical participation: The politics of performance in Chinese punk-rock concerts

Nathanel Amar (The University of Hong Kong)

As in many punk communities abroad, the Chinese punk movement tries to eliminate the physical and metaphorical barrier between the audience and the artists during live performances. A successful punk performance requires the total implication of the audience – through the pogo ritual, the invasion of the stage by members of the audience or when the musicians leave their original place on the stage to mingle with the audience. These performances go far beyond the notion of active listening – the audience is also creating the musical performance alongside the bands. In the Chinese context this participation of the audience has a strong political meaning, while official musical performances, in concert halls or during festivals, are highly surveilled by the police and every action of the audience is repressed, sometimes physically. Through several case studies in different venues – underground and official – this paper aims at understanding the specificity of Chinese punk-rock regarding the relation between the performers and the audience during a live concert, which might lead us to develop the notion of "political listening".

Music, exchange and the production of value: A case study of Hindustani music

Anna Morcom (University of California, Los Angeles)

Music has been recognized as mediating social life in a number of ways, such as through serving as a means of communication or expression and symbolizing and embodying group identities. In this paper, I explore music and mediation in a new way, through analyzing music as a form of intersubjective exchange and value production. To do this, I take an action-based theory of value deriving from the work of Nancy Munn (1986), later developed by David Graeber (2001). I develop this approach through the case study of Hindustani music. I identify Hindustani music as a classic intangible example of what Annette Weiner terms an 'inalienable possession', an object of 'transcendent value' (1992) and I analyse the forms of exchange and 'work' that is done to make it and remake it as such, those too, over immense social, political and economic changes. My approach thus develops theory from economic anthropology, which has overwhelmingly focused on tangible or material objects, for the study of the intangible activity of performance. Looking at the creation of value in musical performance as lying in a myriad forms of exchange involving performers, audience, participants, patrons and musical sounds and structures evades commonly restrictive paradigms that focus on either production or consumption or of music as commodity versus music as art or vocation. This approach enables us to see the intersubjective substance of musical performance in new ways and thus its social mediational power, and to connect aspects of music that are traditionally seen as economic (such as payments) with those which are not.

Notation and the networking of musical spacetime

Roger Moseley (Cornell University)

It has become a truism to acknowledge that no musical score stands alone, material idiosyncrasies or claims to aesthetic autonomy notwithstanding. But through and beyond their cultural and socio-technological entanglements, how are scores connected across space and time, and how do they reflect and construct geographical and historical realities? This paper addresses these linked questions by proposing a genealogical basis for considering how scores both represent and instantiate networks of various kinds via elements of Euclidean geometry. Drawing on examples of machine- and human-readable notation from the 17th through the 21st centuries, I contend that scores and the lines that compose them do more than encode, prompt, and trace spatiotemporal musical experience: they sustain the epistemological conditions under which such experience can be rendered legible, sharable, and even conceivable.

Callas unplugged? The Juilliard master classes (1971-2)

Giorgio Biancorosso (The University of Hong Kong)

Much has been written on recordings as trace, index, and representation; their role in creating new forms of reception; and their inability to capture all the facets of a musical performance. The recent and much touted release of Warner's *Maria Callas: The Studio Recordings, 1949-1969* (2015) provides a unique opportunity to revisit another important question that impinges on the role of recordings in musical culture, namely the oft-cited cliché that live performances have at times become indistinguishable from their recorded counterparts: liveness without performativity. At stake in this process of convergence is the very nature of performance as an event. For the studio recording of an opera is not simply an ideal performance from which the visual and scenic components have been subtracted. Comparisons with live recordings indicate that even when onstage, Callas sought to achieve a level of proficiency such that the performance was no longer the virtuosic realisation of a work but the striving toward an ideal associated with the practice of studio recording. This is indicated not only by the enormous breadth of her repertory but also the almost exaggerated, and broadly admired, projection of textual and dramatic values. Hence the significance of Callas's idiosyncratic tone color or breathing, and even her mistakes—inevitable when pursuing a theoretical ideal dictated by the aesthetics of recording. It is by listening to her vocalizations in the famous recordings of her Juilliard School master classes that one fully regains a sense of Callas's performances as situated events. They are the counterpart, in classical music terms, of the celebrated recording sessions of the Beatles in the Abbey Road studios.

Interpretability, or learning to listen to algorithms

Nick Seaver (Tufts University)

How do algorithms work? As algorithmic systems—from Google's search engine to Spotify's music recommender—have become objects of popular concern, this question has proven vexing. Not only are these black boxes hidden from public view and illegible to the untrained eye, they are also complex, distributed systems. With the advent of techniques like deep learning, algorithmic systems are often described as "uninterpretable"—so complex that it is impossible, even for insider experts, to explain their outputs. And yet, engineers, like ordinary users, are tenacious interpreters, eager to make sense of algorithmic behavior, regardless of its internal complexity. In this talk, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork with developers of algorithmic music recommenders in the US to theorize "interpretability," describing how engineers interpret supposedly uninterpretable systems. Music and listening offer useful models for making sense of this interpretive work, for the engineers as well as outside critics. Developers are not uniquely able to "see" inside algorithmic black boxes but rather learn to listen to them, and their own musical sensibilities are knit into the supposedly rational and quantitative operations of algorithmic systems.

Voice, signal, implant. Do 'unmediated' sounds matter anymore?

 David Trippett (Cambridge University)

Access to sound in the 21st century is typically mediated by degrees of electronic signal transduction. What we perceive as sound has typically been treated to forms of energy conversion that occur beyond the scope of the biological body. The ubiquity of current devices for transmitting, storing, amplifying or otherwise converting the energy from acoustic vibrations to electrical impulses sit alongside nearly 60 years of research into cochlear implant technology in this respect. Recent implant technologies have sought to bypass the acoustic environment at both ends: Cochlear's Nucleus 7 streams music and speech directly from Apple's iPhone, while electronic music written for Cochlear implants has been pioneered at Southampton University. This raises the question of whether seemingly unmediated sounds, acoustic sounds that have not undergone artificial transduction before they are experienced as sound, continue to have a role for musical culture. At stake is what—after Walter Benjamin—might be called the unique distance of acoustic sound. On the one hand, our digital culture is enmeshed in the technologies that mediate sound electronically, while on the other hand, these relatively new devices do not necessarily offer a new principle. The doctrine of aesthetics itself is based on mediation via the senses. This talk explores the interdependency of the categories 'body' and 'sound' in this context.