



Music, Performance and Identity

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door; he has not said four sentences before Gerald Gold, chairperson of the next session (an Open Forum on Disability) drives his motorized wheelchair down the central aisle of the room and flags Obeyesekere down. Meanwhile, James Fernandez, discussant for a session concerning 'Current Theory in the Anthropology of Religion', manages to measure out his final pronouncements, to give his tropes their proper cadence, above the hubbub (no doubt familiar to him) of Hispanic voices at the door, anxious to take over the space for a session on Puerto Rican Identity.

*Futures:* Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff call us to an appreciation of the culture of all our futures as this manifests itself in the 'youth culture' of today; here, surely, is culture both fecund and diverse for anthropology to comprehend. Then again, Andrew Dawson and fellows (Allison James, Ladislav Holy, Jonathan Hearn, Sandra Wallman, Robert Paine, N.J. Other) set forth a proposal to explore 'home' (physical and cognitive) as an analytical category in the context of the new Europe, and examine the changing relations between home and movement (physical and

cognitive) in the construction of contemporary identity. While on the margins of Europe, Graham McFarlane and fellows (Babis Kasimis, John Hutson, Sally Shortall, Mark Shutes, David Guillet) identify strategizing activities in agricultural domains geared alike towards institutionalized change. And Jonathan Benthall, invited to discuss a session considering relations between missionaries and human rights, predicts a rehabilitation of missionaries in anthropological consciousness in the future and (akin to a rapprochement between anthropology and travel-writing) an admittance of the close kinship between their dual histories and their works.

*Envoi:* To close this framing of the Atlanta Meetings – while acknowledging the (Simmelian) caveat that closure is only ever to be achieved subjectively, individually, since a subject will otherwise escape itself being made whole – the sense I came away with was of a lauding of epistemological pluralism over epistemological essentialism. The study of culture should, by rights, give onto an ongoing democratic conversation between a diversity of epistemes. 'There's no call to piss on the past', as Clifford

Geertz put the proposition alliteratively; 'beware the presentation of today as "never before" by the media', Robert Paine advised temperately, 'for today's ideas are part of an ongoing, age-old narrative'. And one implication of this narrative is an appreciation of the tautology of epistemological essentialism on the one hand, and the potential transcendence of epistemological pluralism on the other. For, as was variously (humourously, analytically, advocationally) proposed by participants:

'Every decoding is also an encoding (*après* David Lodge)...

'When everything is explained by culture, nothing is...'

'If all knowledge is culturally constructed, then the opposite is also true: all culture is a matter of situated knowing...'

'We are all multi-culturalists in the world today, speaking the language of a number of different micro-cultures and switching between them situationally and strategically...'

'A democracy – both political and analytical – derives from a conversation between equal and equally heard voices...' □

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## MUSIC, PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY

'Music, performance and identity' was the theme for the 1994 one-day conference of the UK Chapter of the International Council for Traditional Music. Convened by Carole Pegg, co-sponsored by the Cambridge University Department of Social Anthropology, and attended by about 75 people representing a range of disciplines, the meeting took place at King's College on 19 November. Ruth Finnegan opened the day by asking what is meant by 'identity'. The word was used in several ways.

First, how do participants distinguish themselves in social action? Helmi Jaerviluoma has studied an amateur folk band in Finland and reported that rehearsal was organized around gender roles common to other contexts of everyday life. Jan Fairley, to the contrary, found that the exiled Chileans whom she followed promoted a particular vision throughout their peregrinations, altering songs' meanings in response to changing conditions in the mother country. Their exile ended, the band lost its purpose and split up. Carole Pegg reported that, in Mongolia, musicians are now reviving and developing both legends and styles of performance in order to assert ethnic identities that the previous government sought to suppress. The contrast between the Finns and the Chileans and Mongols is not just that of professionals and amateurs: not all the Mongols are professional performers; and Finnegan reminded the meeting that her own research shows that amateur activity can be at least as critical as 'work'.<sup>1</sup> Nor is Finland a placid cultural environment: Jaerviluoma explained contemporary 'folk' as a response to rapid social and economic change.

How, then, do circumstances select for one genre of expression or another? Several contributors have found affinities of meaning or 'identities' between different dimensions of culture. Fairley and Pegg showed how music can express political interest. Reporting on the responses of South Asian children at London schools to lessons in Indian music, Gerry Farrel (working with Graham Welch) presented some evidence that the music evokes ethnic symbols or is part of a web of such symbols. Henry Stobart argued that, among Quechua-speaking communities in Bolivia, keening and flute music are among a range of sounds for negotiating between different conditions. Thus melodic keening marks the living room the dead and *pinkillu* music distinguishes the dry season and the rains. However, in this account, the underlying pattern of associations remains implicit for the people themselves.

Third, do musical events create a sense of community? Stephen Cottrell argued that the formalities of symphony concerts do achieve it by tacit prescription, subsuming audiences' variety in a sense of the occasion. He argued that there are distinct effects for different types of concert. Both he and Fairley affirmed that some part of the respective event's effect is intended to endure beyond the occasion itself; but, in Cottrell's interpretation, like Jaerviluoma's, the effect is more or less determined by prior expectations where, in Fairley's, it depended on how the performance went.

Likewise, the main finding by Farrell and Welch is that the children's musical experiences vary with the particular technique of instruction. Martin Stokes

reported on how the Irish made sense of their guests'.<sup>2</sup> Musical incompatibility was skirted by discovering common national images for presenting the visitors' performances. Nell Catchpole described how the leader of an eclectic Palestinian band tries to control organizers' presentations: images of the band itself and of Palestinian culture are articulated through manipulations of the immediate circumstances.

By listening to both musicians and audience, Stokes could specify how and why the Turks' performances succeeded. His remark that 'world music means quite different things in different contexts'<sup>3</sup> echoed in Catchpole's account; but, apart from Cottrell's formalist analysis, only Stokes's paper dealt with reception as well as performance. The problems of method, here (as well as theory), beset other fields of enquiry too. Finnegan dwelt, at the outset, on observation. The meeting was too short to assess different findings by comparing methods in detail. Yet, replete with plenty of audio and video illustration – lonely mountain cemetery, jostling school room, packed steppe tent, urgent city crowds – it made a compelling case for ethnography finely attuned to motives and settings and for the anthropology of music. □

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1. *The Hidden Musicians*. Cambridge: C.U.P. 1989.
2. See his 'Place, exchange and meaning', *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, editor M. Stokes. Oxford: Berg 1984.
3. Cf. his 'Instruction' to *ibid.* p.21.