

Performance as frame for pluriculturality

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Pluriculturality and performance

- Pluriculturality: the coexistence of multiple complex identities within the individual and society (Moore & Gajo 2009)
- Pervasive context for performance: ceremonies of intergroup diplomacy, exchange, contest (Nettl 2000)
- Enactment of intergroup encounter within the frame of performance
 - Historical battles in Maggio sung popular theatre (Italy)

Moore, Danièle, and Laurent Gajo. "Introduction – French Voices on Plurilingualism and Pluriculturalism: Theory, Significance and Perspectives." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 6, no. 2 (May 1, 2009): 137–53.
Nettl, Bruno. "An Ethnomusicologist Contemplates Universals in Musical Sound and Musical Culture." In *The Origins of Music*, edited by Nils L. Wallin, Björn Merker, and Steven Brown, 463–72. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000.



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SLIDE 1: Pluriculturality and performance

The concept of pluriculturality, or pluriculturalism, goes beyond multiculturalism to emphasize the active choices made in a given social situation to communicate effectively by drawing upon a diverse range of available cultural codes (Moore & Gajo 2009). It recognises that cultural identities are neither uniform nor static, but ‘fluid, plural and ambiguous’, as Ien Ang commented this morning.

Worldwide, music is one of the social codes most often chosen to represent social identity in contexts where different social groups encounter each other in ceremonies of diplomacy, exchange or contest (Nettl 2000). But here I want to focus on an example of intergroup encounter represented within a single performance.

(I apologise that I am constrained to only one of the two examples mentioned in my abstract.)

Performance and cultural difference

- Idealised cultural identity presented to the other and also to the group itself (Turner 1982)
- Functions of music in intercultural settings (Hammarlund 1990)
 - *Emblematic* function – directed outwards, representing cultural identity to outsiders
 - *Catalytic* function - directed inwards, forging group identity and cohesiveness

Hammarlund, Anders. 1990. "Från gudstjänarnas berg till folkets hus". *Musik och kultur*. Owe Ronström (ed.). Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp. 65-98. Cited in Folkestad, G. "National identity and music" in R. McDonald, D. Hargreaves & D. Miell (eds) *Musical Identities*. OUP, 2002, pp 151-62.
Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.



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SLIDE 2: Performance and cultural difference

Victor Turner (1982) recognised that in intercultural performance, an idealized cultural identity is not only presented to the other, but also to the group itself. The Swedish cultural historian and ethnomusicologist Anders Hammarlund (1990) distinguishes two functions of music in intercultural settings: the emblematic function, directed outwards, representing cultural identity to outsiders, and the catalytic function, directed inwards to forge group identity and foster cohesiveness.

Maggio garfagnino

- Amateur sung popular theatre performed (until 2016) in Garfagnana and neighbouring areas of Emilia
 - Massive emigration (postwar), ongoing depopulation, few young residents
- Written verse texts by local authors, edited for performance with recurrent themes (ritual battles, sentimental love stories)
- Performed outdoors in the round with on-stage prompt, minimal props, same costumes year to year, patterned sword play
- Singing style marked by melisma (*gorgheggio*) and free rhythm, supported by heterophonic instrumental accompaniment
- My documentation in Garfagnana 1992-1998, 2000, 2002, 2006



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SLIDE 3: Maggio garfagnino

The example I will be using today is drawn from my documentation of maggio, a form of sung popular theatre performed until recently in the Garfagnana region, in the valley of the Serchio river of northwestern Tuscany, Italy, and held as emblematic of Garfagnino identity. The recent cessation of performances is attributed to the ongoing depopulation of the area, whose young residents have for generations been forced to emigrate for work and education (Barwick 2012).

Written verse texts by local authors draw on various sources (most commonly the chivalrous epics), and must include battles between opposing groups and sentimental love stories. Self-consciously archaic performance conventions include an on-stage prompt, minimal props, an elaborate melismatic singing style with unusual modal characteristics, and interaction with the audience, which surrounds the outdoor performance space.

Maggio «Le sventure di Tristano e Isotta», st.140



GALLINAZZO [Luigi Coletti]
Già che estinto è il mio germano
Tu per lui paghi la pena

ANCILLOTTO [Giuseppe Malaspina]
Per dar termine alla scena
Il tuo sangue bagni il piano

*Now that my brother is dead / may
you pay the price*

*To finish off the scene / may your
blood bathe the plain*

Compagnia Piazza al Serchio, Uglianaldo, 16 August 1996, video Barwick/Marett

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SLIDE 4: Maggio «Le sventure di Tristano e Isotta», st.140

The example you are about to see and hear is an excerpt from the Piazza al Serchio company's 1996 performance of an anonymous author's text, the "Sventure di Tristano e Isotta", based on the Arthurian legends of the Round Table. The episode enacted here is a subplot of the main story about Tristan and Isolde. Here the knight Lancelot (in blue) defeats the second of two evil (pagan) giants (in red). As you will see, this field recording attempts to document interactions with the audience, as well as the on-stage action.

PLAY EXAMPLE (Maggio «Le sventure di Tristano e Isotta», st.140): (55 seconds)

GALLINAZZO [Luigi Coletti]

Già che estinto è il mio germano

Now that my brother is dead

Tu per lui paghi la pena

you shall pay the price

ANCILLOTTO [Giuseppe Malaspina]

Per dar termine alla scena


To finish off the scene

Il tuo sangue bagni il piano

Your blood shall bathe the plain

Tensions and rivalries

Frame		
Text	Ancilotto (hero)	Gallinasso (villain)
Performance styles	Regnano (Lunigiana)	Roggio (Garfagnana)
Companies	Piazza al Serchio	Acqua Bianca
Performers/Audience	Locals/remainers	Emigrants/Outsiders
Orientation	Tradition	Contemporary
Age group	Old and very young	Middle generations



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SLIDE 5: Tensions and rivalries

To understand the pluriculturality of this performance, some local knowledge is needed.

For local audiences, singing style differentiates the two singers as from two different areas: in upper Garfagnana (Luigi) and Lunigiana (Giuseppe). Campanilismo, the rivalry between neighbouring villages, marked in this text by the payback or ‘blood price’ mentality of the giant Galinasso, is thus strongly evoked.

The performance venue is Uglianaldo, a remote hamlet on a ridge of the Apuan Alps, which each year at Pentecost commissions a maggio performance from a local group. On this occasion the Piazza al Serchio company has won the commission over a rival splinter company, and poached some of its star performers. The resultant feuds and tensions are well known to members of the audience.

Another layer of tension exists between the performers, locals who have remained to carry on the maggio tradition, and the audience. At a practical level, the performers depend on the audience to fund their travel through donations made during or after the 3-hour-long performance (no entry fees are charged). Some audience members are returned emigrants who fund the performances in various ways, and others are holidaymakers visiting from outside the area (including many Anglophones, some the children and grandchildren of the returned emigrants). The audience member who clowns, drawing audience attention to the artifice of the giant 'dying' onto a conveniently placed chair, entreats sympathy for the heroic efforts of the performers to maintain archaic cultural norms in the face of modernity.

These are some of the ways that the on-stage enactment of intercultural battle makes contemporary relevance. Sometimes, as a Yorta Yorta friend of mine recently remarked, choosing to be traditional can be a radical act.

Multiple layers

- Emblematic and catalytic functions coexist in performance frame
- Multiple layers of identification and contestation
- Enabled by intertextuality and 'semantic indeterminacy' (Cross 2008) of performance conventions
- Not so much 'clash' as containment of difference through codification

Cross, Ian. "Musicality and the Human Capacity for Culture." *Musicae Scientiae* 12.1 (2008): 147-67.

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SLIDE 6: Multiple layers

In maggio performances, the emblematic and catalytic functions coexist. An idealized archaic social identity is represented to outsiders, while for cultural insiders multiple layers of identification and contestation may be evoked by its ritual battles and love scenes.

The music psychologist Ian Cross (2008) has speculated that music's semantic indeterminacy enables groups to develop a sense of shared intentionality and thus cooperativity.

While Cross refers to the semantic indeterminacy of instrumental music, that is, music without words, I would argue that performance WITH words can enable a similar effect. Providing an arena for representation of intercultural tension that is displaced to familiar yet distant times and places allows for plural interpretations and responses. The frame of performance affords a broad sense of containment and resolution without specifying the tensions or rivalries.

I'd like to finish by acknowledging that my own pluriculturality has shaped my research, as indeed all research is fundamentally pluricultural. Spending formative years as a non-Christian cultural outsider in the midst of a Marchigiano emigrant community established on Kaurna country in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide, and subsequent education through the University of Adelaide's Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, has drawn me into a lifetime of engagement with cultural difference through the arts. I want to acknowledge the many friends, colleagues and co-performers who have guided me and shaped my approach, including my collaborators in Wadeye (Northern Territory) who would have provided my second example.

With First Nations colleagues in south-eastern Australia, I am currently engaged in an ARC-funded project 'Reclaiming performance under assimilation'. The focus is the years 1935-1975, which embrace the period into which I was born and grew up. Our project aims to contribute to truth-telling through contemporary re-interpretation of assimilation-era records of public performances by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A major research outcome will be a collaborative pluricultural performance that aims to provide a radical decentring of the mindset that frames cultural difference as 'Clash of Civilisations'.

References

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