

march 11, 2010

long walk from soweto \polokwane to houghton \ sandown

filed under: [mphutlane wa bofelo](#), [politics](#) — [abraxas @ 4:51 pm](#)

(malema's reading of the freedom charter's nationalization clause is mandela's)

in the wake of media exposure of his lavish and opulent lifestyle as well as business interest mostly sustained by government tenders, anc youth league president , julius "juju magic" malema has suddenly come out in the clear about what he and the anc nationalists mean by nationalization (of the mines). the anc youth league chief recently told a press briefing that all his organization is calling for is public-private partnerships: "we are saying the state must have a majority shareholding and we want the formation of a state-owned mining company....some people call it public-private partnerships, we call it nationalization".

it is not a surprise that malema's call for nationalization did not elicit from big capital the amount of consternation and uproar that followed mandela's statement on nationalization upon his release in 1990. then there was such a hue-cry that mandela had to recant his pronouncement the day after he made them. mandela was compelled to reassure local and global capital by declaring that nationalization has never been a policy of the anc and will never be. but the anc youth league's pro-nationalization statement did not elicit the same amount of anxiety from big business or any negative response from the almighty 'markets'. there was no high-powered delegation of the captains of capital to the current president of the anc. in the actual fact one mine owner in the name of patrick motsepe was quoted in the press saying he would have no problem if the african national congress government chose to nationalise the mines.

i can only think of one explanation for the relatively muted response of big capital to the present calls for nationalization within the ranks of the anc. after fifteen years of anc government the owners of capital now know that the radical leftist terminology that the anc uses is just a rhetorical spin to sell rightwing programs. in the past fifteen years most of the bourgeoisie class and white racists in general have come to the realization that they should in fact have backed-up and expedited the reformist negotiated settlement that saw the anc in political office much earlier. elements within the "old" national party and the white liberal fraternity who called for negotiations much earlier were able to read and understand the bourgeoisie nationalist undertones of the nationalization clause and other clauses of the freedom charter. they had the insight and foresight to understand that white capitalist interests and global capitalist interests would be better served by capitalism without racialist fetters. they understood that the economic advancement of an african middle-class and the creation of a black bourgeoisie would provide a buffer against black working class uprising, as the black governing and upper-classes would be more effective in getting the consent of the masses and in entrenching their legitimacy and hegemony.

if anyone had a problem in understanding that the freedom charter did not call for socialization and public ownership of the mines but the transference of ownership from white and foreign bourgeoisie to the african and local bourgeoisie, mandela's lengthy explanation at the rivonia trial clarified this for them:" the most important

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political document ever adopted by the anc is the 'freedom charter'. it is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state. it calls for redistribution, but not nationalization, of land; it provides for nationalization of mines, banks, and monopoly industry, because big monopolies are owned by one race only, and without such nationalization racial domination would be perpetuated despite the spread of political power. it would be a hollow gesture to repeal the gold law prohibitions against africans when all gold mines are owned by european companies."

mandela made it succinctly clear that land will remain under private ownership and that nationalization will be a tool of 'de-racializing' ownership of big monopolies and to give africans and the local bourgeoisie in general a stake in the mines and the banks. mandela went on to reassure the afrikaner that the congress movement's version of nationalization is akin the nationalist project pursued by the national party to affirm and empower afrikaner capitalists against foreign capital. "in this respect the anc's policy corresponds with the old policy of the present nationalist party which, for many years, had as part of its programme the nationalization of the gold mines which, at that time, were controlled by foreign capital."

the chief architect of the current neo-apartheid, neo-colonial, neo-liberal capitalist dispensation went further to stress that "under the freedom charter, nationalization would take place in an economy based on private enterprise. the realization of the freedom charter would open up fresh fields for a prosperous african population of all classes, including the middle class"

it is very clear from mandela's pronouncements that the envisaged and expected outcome of the nationalization project was not an egalitarian society but a stratified society in which prosperity will continue to be hierarchical, albeit not along strictly racial lines. madiba did not mince his words in asserting that the anc stands for reform and not total overhaul of apartheid-capitalism. he ambiguously declared: "the anc has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society."

according to the best recollections of the most authoritative figure within and on the anc, the anc has never ever condemned capitalist society. yet the root causes of the global economic depression, the massive inequalities and injustices, rampant corruption, individualistic greed and crass materialism, gluttonous consumerism and the moral decay and rot in society lie in capitalism. the opulent lifestyle of the propertied and the governing classes is an integral part of the traditions and culture of capitalism. the sweeteners and "gifts" that corporate capital give to government officials and bureaucrats and the proverbial "drink" public servants ask from citizens are part and parcel of capitalist culture \ morality.

the rent-a- black face and tenderpreneur trend and the phenomenon of senior and influential members of the ruling party doing business with government directly or through fronts are all corrupt practices that are sure to thrive in a capitalist society where the individual is placed above the collective. as long as we operate within the framework of capitalism, nationalization and \ or state ownership will invariably mean state capitalism, leading to the fattening of a narrow black middle-class which is dominant in the state and the well-connected scrounging local bourgeoisie. in the soviet nationalization and state ownership resulted into state capitalism and the emergence of the nomenklatura. this replicated itself in many countries going by the label socialist\communist, people's republic or some variant thereof. very often, it was the case of the state\party prescribing socialism for the masses and capitalism for itself.

already the anc youth league is saying there's nothing wrong with powerful and influential members of the tripartite alliance doing business with government. the point the league misses – deliberately – is that malema and ilk do not get the tenders because their companies surpass other contenders in service and expertise. once the tender committee gets wind that company x belongs to the brother \ sister who has the clout and power to decide the fate of government officials (and by extension the

fate of the bureaucrats) , it is more than likely to use its “commonsense” .

in defense of the right of malema to do business through government tenders the anc youth league’s treasurer, pule mabe says “the best way to do business is through government.” mabe’s comment gives you the idea that the middle-class and aspirant bourgeoisie within the congress movement are calling for nationalization so that they can (ab)use the colour of their skin, struggle credentials, office-power and political connections to get a foothold on the mines, the banks and big monopolies. once this cream of the cream from the black population has made it to the top most of the capitalist society, the logic is that they should live\play the part and live as far as possible away from the masses, geographically\physically, socially and economically. after-all, their entire dream is to be the “black diamonds” . they want to shine and glitter, far away from the black hole....the ghetto. they want to be like white kids, drive snazzy cars in the northern suburbs , own villas in europe, play golf, take up fishing as a sport, go as tourists to the township or as a campaigning entourage – under heavy protection and surveillance by the army and the police. (and don’t you dare point a middle-finger at he opulence and indifference to the suffering of the poor).

just a message to the under-class black fellow who think that having black ownership of the mines, banks and big monopolies is for the collective pride and dignity of all black people. the logic of capitalism is that once you are rich you should stay as far as possible from the poor. if anyone holds the illusion that corporate and political elites brought about by the struggles of the poor and their utilization of public office for corporate gain will be any different, steven ngobeni of the youth league has a message for them: “malema cannot have the lifestyle of the poor just because he champions the poor” this is the logic of neo-liberal capitalism. we can all be free but with different degrees of freedom.

and malema and his friends are not breaking any party tradition by operating within the capitalist framework of crass materialism, hoarding, and keeping a safe distance from the poor. the father of the nation has said it all “the anc has never ever condemned socialist society. black artists of the calibre of hugh masekela struggle like hell to have five minutes with mandela. it is a walk in the park for any american to have a full sitting with madiba. seasoned black artists curtain-raise for american has-bees or wanna-bees at gigs organised by the nelson mandela foundation. just the other day john kani was complaining about south african\black artist never being offered a chance to play nelsons mandela and winnie mandela. mr kani, there is a long distance between orlando west and houghton. black workers, if you dream of malema going beyond the call for nationalization to proposing practical ways of ensuring that state ownership is for public ownership and that there are mechanisms for the socialization of the mineral wealth beyond formal state control, get a grip. it’s a long walk and huge chasm between mankweni and sandown.

[comments off on long walk from soweto \polokwane to houghton \ sandown](#)

triumph of the cyborg composer

filed under: [music](#) — [abraxas @ 7:39 am](#)

david cope’s software creates beautiful, original music. why are people so angry about that?

by: ryan blitstein

the office looks like the aftermath of a surrealistic earthquake, as if david cope’s brain has spewed out decades of memories all over the carpet, the door, the walls, even the ceiling. books and papers, music scores and magazines are all strewn about in ragged piles. a semi-functional apple power mac 7500 (discontinued april 1, 1996) sits in the corner, its lemon-lime monitor buzzing. drawings filled with concepts for a never-constructed musical-radio-space telescope dominate half of one wall. russian dolls and an exercise bike, not to mention random pieces from homemade

board games, peek out from the intellectual rubble. above, something like 200 sets of wind chimes from around the world hang, ringing oddly congruent melodies.

and in the center, the old university of california, santa cruz, emeritus professor reclines in his desk chair, black socks pulled up over his pants cuffs, a thin mustache and thick beard lending him the look of an amish grandfather.



it was here, half a dozen years ago, that cope put emmy to sleep. she was just a software program, a jumble of code he'd originally dubbed experiments in musical intelligence (emi, hence "emmy"). still — though cope struggles not to anthropomorphize her — he speaks of emmy wistfully, as if she were a deceased child.

emmy was once the world's most advanced artificially intelligent composer, and because he'd managed to breathe a sort of life into her, he became a modern-day musical dr. frankenstein. she produced thousands of scores in the style of classical heavyweights, scores so impressive that classical music scholars failed to identify them as computer-created. cope attracted praise from musicians and computer scientists, but his creation raised troubling questions: if a machine could write a mozart sonata every bit as good as the originals, then what was so special about mozart? and was there really any soul behind the great works, or were beethoven and his ilk just clever mathematical manipulators of notes?

cope's answers — not much, and yes — made some people very angry. he was so often criticized for these views that colleagues nicknamed him "the tin man," after the wizard of oz character without a heart. for a time, such condemnation fueled his creativity, but eventually, after years of hemming and hawing, cope dragged emmy into the trash folder.

this month, he is scheduled to unveil the results of a successor effort that's already generating the controversy and high expectations that emmy once drew. dubbed "emily howell," the daughter program aims to do what many said emmy couldn't: create original, modern music. its compositions are innovative, unique and — according to some in the small community of listeners who've heard them performed live — superb.

sample of emily howell — track 1

[click here to listen without quicktime](#)

sample of emily howell — track 2

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with emily howell, cope is, once again, challenging the assumptions of artists and philosophers, exposing revered composers as unknowing plagiarists and opening the door to a world of creative machines good enough to compete with human artists. but even cope still wonders whether his decades of innovative, thought-provoking research have brought him any closer to his ultimate goal: composing an immortal, life-changing piece of music.

cope's earliest memory is looking up at the underside of a grand piano as his mother played. he began lessons at the age of 2, eventually picking up the cello and a range of other instruments, even building a few himself. the cope family often played "the game" — his mother would put on a classical record, and the children would try to divine the period, the style, the composer and the name of works they'd read about but hadn't heard. the music of masters like rachmaninov and stravinsky instilled in him a sense of awe and wonder.

nothing, though, affected cope like tchaikovsky's romeo and juliet, which he first heard around age 12. its unconventional chord changes and awesome sturm und drang sound gave him goose bumps. from then on, he had only one goal: writing a piece that some day, somewhere, would move some child the same way tchaikovsky moved him. "that, just simply, was the orgasm of my life," cope says.

he begged his parents to pay for the score, brought it home and translated it to piano; he studied intensely and bought theory books, divining, scientifically, what made it work. it was then he knew he had to become a composer.

cope sailed through music schooling at arizona state university and the university of southern california, and by the mid-1970s, he had settled into a tenured position at miami university of ohio's prestigious music department. his compositions were performed in carnegie hall and the kennedy center for the performing arts, and internationally from lima, peru, to bialystok, poland. he built a notable electronic music studio and toured the country, wowing academics with demonstrations of the then-new synthesizer. he was among the foremost academic authorities on the experimental compositions of the 1960s, a period during which a fired-up jet engine and sounds derived from placing electrodes on plants were considered music.

david cope in his home office. [click the photo to view of his unique workspace.](#)
(catherine karnow)

when cope moved to uc santa cruz in 1977 to take a position in its music department, he could've put his career on autopilot and been remembered as a composer and author. instead, a brutal case of composer's block sent him on a different path.

in 1980, cope was commissioned to write an opera. at the time, he and his wife, mary (also a santa cruz music faculty member), were supporting four children, and they'd quickly spent the commission money on household essentials like food and clothes. but no matter what he tried, the right notes just wouldn't come. he felt he'd lost all ability to make aesthetic judgments. terrified and desperate, cope turned to computers.

along with his work on synthesis, or using machines to create sounds, cope had dabbled in the use of software to compose music. inspired by the field of artificial intelligence, he thought there might be a way to create a virtual david cope software to create new pieces in his style.

the effort fit into a long tradition of what would come to be called algorithmic composition. algorithmic composers use a list of instructions — as opposed to sheer inspiration — to create their works. during the 18th century, joseph haydn and others created scores for a musical dice game called musikalisches würfelspiel, in which players rolled dice to determine which of 272 measures of music would be played in a certain order. more recently, 1950s-era university of illinois researchers

lejaren hiller and leonard isaacson programmed stylistic parameters into the illiac computer to create the illiac suite, and greek composer iannis xenakis used probability equations. much of modern popular music is a sort of algorithm, with improvisation (think guitar solos) over the constraints of simple, prescribed chord structures.

few of cope's major works, save a dalliance with navajo-style compositions, had strayed far from classical music, so he wasn't a likely candidate to rely on software to write. but he did have an engineer's mind, composing using note-card outlines and a level of planning that's rare among free-spirited musicians. he even claims to have created his first algorithmic composition in 1955, instigated by the singing of wind over guide wires on a radio tower.

cope emptied santa cruz's libraries of books on artificial intelligence, sat in on classes and slowly learned to program. he built simple rules-based software to replicate his own taste, but it didn't take long before he realized the task was too difficult. he turned to a more realistic challenge: writing chorales (four-part vocal hymns) in the style of johann sebastian bach, a childhood favorite. after a year's work, his program could compose chorales at the level of a c-student college sophomore. it was correctly following the rules, smoothly connecting chords, but it lacked vibrancy. as ai software, it was a minor triumph. as a method of producing creative music, it was awful.

cope wrestled with the problem for months, almost giving up several times. and then one day, on the way to the drug store, cope remembered that bach wasn't a machine — once in a while, he broke his rules for the sake of aesthetics. the program didn't break any rules; cope hadn't asked it to.

the best way to replicate bach's process was for the software to derive his rules — both the standard techniques and the behavior of breaking them. cope spent months converting 300 bach chorales into a database, note by note. then he wrote a program that segmented the bits into digital objects and reassembled them the way bach tended to put them together.

the results were a great improvement. yet as cope tested the recombining software on bach, he noticed that the music would often wander and lacked an overall logic. more important, the output seemed to be missing some ineffable essence.

again, cope hit the books, hoping to discover research into what that something was. for hundreds of years, musicologists had analyzed the rules of composition at a superficial level. yet few had explored the details of musical style; their descriptions of terms like "dynamic," for example, were so vague as to be unprogrammable. so cope developed his own types of musical phenomena to capture each composer's tendencies — for instance, how often a series of notes shows up, or how a series may signal a change in key. he also classified chords, phrases and entire sections of a piece based on his own grammar of musical storytelling and tension and release: statement, preparation, extension, antecedent, consequent. the system is analogous to examining the way a piece of writing functions. for example, a word may be a noun in preparation for a verb, within a sentence meant to be a declarative statement, within a paragraph that's a consequent near the conclusion of a piece.

finally, cope's program could divine what made bach sound like bach and create music in that style. it broke rules just as bach had broken them, and made the result sound musical. it was as if the software had somehow captured bach's spirit — and it performed just as well in producing new mozart compositions and shakespeare sonnets. one afternoon, a few years after he'd begun work on emmy, cope clicked a button and went out for a sandwich, and she spit out 5,000 beautiful, artificial bach chorales, work that would've taken him several lifetimes to produce by hand.

when emmy's bach pieces were first performed, at the university of illinois at urbana-champaign in 1987, they were met with stunned silence. two years later, a series of performances at the santa cruz baroque festival was panned by a music critic — two weeks before the performance. when cope played "the game" in front

of an audience, asking which pieces were real bach and which were emmy-written bach, most people couldn't tell the difference. many were angry; few understood the point of the exercise.

cope tried to get emmy a recording contract, but classical record companies said, "we don't do contemporary music," and contemporary record companies said the opposite. when he finally did land a deal, no musician would play the music. he had to record it with a disklavier (a modern player piano), a process so taxing he nearly suffered a nervous breakdown.

though musicians and composers were often skeptical, cope soon attracted worldwide notice, especially from scientists interested in artificial intelligence and the small, promising field called artificial creativity. other "ac" researchers have written programs that paint pictures; that tell mexican folk tales or write detective novels; and that come up with funny jokes. they have varying goals, though most seek to better understand human creativity by modeling it in a machine.

to many in the ac community, including the university of sussex's margaret boden, doyenne of the field, emmy was an incredible accomplishment. there's a test, named for world war ii-era british computer scientist alan turing, that's a simple check for so-called artificial intelligence: whether or not a person interacting with a machine and a human can tell the difference. given its success in "the game," it could be argued that emmy passed the turing test.

cope had taken an unconventional approach. many artificial creativity programs use a more sophisticated version of the method cope first tried with bach. it's called intelligent misuse — they program sets of rules, and then let the computer introduce randomness. cope, however, had stumbled upon a different way of understanding creativity.

in his view, all music — and, really, any creative pursuit — is largely based on previously created works. call it standing on the shoulders of giants; call it plagiarism. everything we create is just a product of recombination.

in cope's fascinating hovel of a home office on a wednesday afternoon, i ask him how exactly he knows that's true. just because he built a program that can write music using his model, how can he be so certain that that's the way man creates?

cope offers a simple thought experiment: put aside the idea that humans are spiritually and creatively endowed, because we'll probably never fully be able to understand that. just look at the zillions of pieces of music out there.

"where are they going to come up with sounds that they themselves create without hearing them first?" he asks. "if they're hearing them for the first time, what's the author of them? is it birds, is it airplane sounds?"

of course, some composers probably have taken dictation from birds. yet the most likely explanation, cope believes, is that music comes from other works composers have heard, which they slice and dice subconsciously and piece together in novel ways. how else could a style like classical music last over three or four centuries?

to prove his point, cope has even reverse-engineered works by famous composers, tracing the tropes, phrases and ideas back to compositions by their forebears.

"nobody's original," cope says. "we are what we eat, and in music, we are what we hear. what we do is look through history and listen to music. everybody copies from everybody. the skill is in how large a fragment you choose to copy and how elegantly you can put them together."

cope's claims, taken to their logical conclusions, disturb a lot of people. one of them is douglas hofstadter, a pulitzer prize-winning cognitive scientist at indiana university and a reluctant champion of cope's work. as hofstadter has recounted in dozens of lectures around the globe during the past two decades, emmy really scares him.

the ancient apple work station where cope refines his music. (catherine karnow)

like many arts aficionados, hofstadter views music as a fundamental way for humans to communicate profound emotional information. machines, no matter how sophisticated their mathematical abilities, should not be able to possess that spiritual power. as he wrote in *Virtual Music*, an anthology of debates about cope's research, hofstadter worries emmy proves that "things that touch me at my deepest core — pieces of music most of all, which i have always taken as direct soul-to-soul messages — might be effectively produced by mechanisms thousands if not millions of times simpler than the intricate biological machinery that gives rise to a human soul."

i ask cope whether emmy bothers him. this is a man who averages about four daily hours of hardcore music listening, who's touched so deeply by a handful of notes on the piano as to shut his eyes in reverie.

"i can understand why it's an issue if you've got an extremely romanticized view of what art is," he says. "but bach peed, and he shat, and he had a lot of kids. we're all just people."

as cope sees it, bach merely had an extraordinary ability to manipulate notes in a way that made people who heard his music have intense emotional reactions. he describes his sometimes flabbergasting conversations with hofstadter: "i'd pull down a score and say, 'look at this. what's on this page?' and he'd say, 'that's beethoven, that's music of great spirit and great soul.' and i'd say, 'wow, isn't that incredible! to me, it's a bunch of black dots and black lines on white paper! where's the soul in there?'"

cope thinks the old cliché of beauty in the eye of the beholder explains the situation well: "the dots and lines on paper are merely triggers that set things off in our mind, do all the wonderful things that give us excitement and love of the music, and we falsely believe that somewhere in that music is the thing we're feeling," he says. "i don't know what the hell 'soul' is. i don't know that we have any of it. i'm looking to get off on life. and music gets me off a lot of the time. i really, really, really am moved by it. i don't care who wrote it."

he does, of course, see emmy as a success. he just thinks of her as a tool. everything emmy created, she created because of software he devised. if cope had infinite time, he could have written 5,000 bach-style chorales. the program just did it much faster.

"all the computer is is just an extension of me," cope says. "they're nothing but wonderfully organized shovels. i wouldn't give credit to the shovel for digging the hole. would you?"

cope has a complex relationship with his critics, and with people like hofstadter who are simultaneously awed and disturbed by his work. he denounces some as focused on the wrong issues. he describes others as racists, prejudiced against all music created by a computer. yet he thrives on the controversy. if not for the harsh reaction to the early bach chorales, cope says, he probably would have abandoned the project. instead, he decided to "ram emmy down their throats," recording five more albums of the software's compositions, including an ambitious rachmaninov concerto that nearly led to another nervous breakdown from lack of sleep and overwork.

for the next decade, he fed off the anger and confusion and kudos from colleagues and admirers. years after the 1981 opera was to be completed, cope fed a database of his own works into emmy. the resulting score was performed to the best reviews of his life. emmy's principles of recombination and pattern recognition were adapted by architects and stock traders, and cope experienced a brief burst of fame in the late 1990s, when the *New York Times* and a handful of other publications highlighted his work. insights from emmy percolated the literature of musical style and creativity — particularly emmy's proof-by-example that a common grammar and language underlie almost all music, from asian to western classical styles.

eleanor selfridge-field, senior researcher at stanford university's center for computer assisted research in the humanities, likens cope's discoveries to the findings from molecular biology that altered the field of biology.

"he has revealed a lot of essential elements of musical style, and the definition of musical works, and of individual contributions to the evolution of music, that simply haven't been made evident by any other process," she says. "that really is an important contribution to our understanding of music, revealing some things that are really worth knowing."

nevertheless, by 2004, cope had received too many calls from well-known musicians who wanted to perform emmy's compositions but felt her works weren't "special" enough. he'd produced more than 1,000 in the style of several composers, an endless spigot of material that rendered each one almost commonplace. he feared his emmy work made him another vivaldi, the famous composer often criticized for writing the same pieces over and over again. cope, too, felt emmy had cheated him out of years of productivity as a composer.

"i knew that, eventually, emmy was going to have to die," he says. during the course of weeks, cope found every copy of the many databases that comprised emmy and trashed them. he saved a slice of the data and the emmy program itself, so he could demonstrate it for academic purposes, and he saved the scores she wrote, so others could play them. but he'd never use emmy to write again. she was gone.

for years, cope had been experimenting with a different kind of virtual composer. instead of software based on re-creation, he hoped to build something with its own personality.

emily howell has a musical conversation that includes "words" (white nodes) and the connections between them. (catherine karnow)

this program would write music in an odd sort of way. instead of spitting out a full score, it converses with cope through the keyboard and mouse. he asks it a musical question, feeding in some compositions or a musical phrase. the program responds with its own musical statement. he says "yes" or "no," and he'll send it more information and then look at the output. the program builds what's called an association network — certain musical statements and relationships between notes are weighted as "good," others as "bad." eventually, the exchange produces a score, either in sections or as one long piece.

most of the scores cope fed in came from emmy, the once-removed music from history's great composers. the results, however, sound nothing like emmy or her forebears. "if you stick mozart with joplin, they're both tonal, but the output," cope says, "is going to sound like something rather different."

because the software was emmy's "daughter" — and because he wanted to mess with his detractors — cope gave it the human-sounding name emily howell. with cope's help, emily howell has written three original opuses of varying length and style, with another trio in development. although the first recordings won't be released until february, reactions to live performances and rough cuts have been mixed. one listener compared an emily howell work to stravinsky; others (most of whom have heard only short excerpts online) continue to attack the very idea of computer composition, with fierce debates breaking out in internet forums around the world.

at one santa cruz concert, the program notes neglected to mention that emily howell wasn't a human being, and a chemistry professor and music aficionado in the audience described the performance of a howell composition as one of the most moving experiences of his musical life. six months later, when the same professor attended a lecture of cope's on emily howell and heard the same concert played from a recording, cope remembers him saying, "you know, that's pretty music, but i could tell absolutely, immediately that it was computer-composed. there's no heart or soul or depth to the piece."

that sentiment — present in many recent articles, blog posts and comments about emily howell — frustrates cope. “most of what i’ve heard [and read] is the same old crap,” he complains. “it’s all about machines versus humans, and ‘aren’t you taking away the last little thing we have left that we can call unique to human beings — creativity?’ i just find this so laborious and uncreative.”

emily howell isn’t stealing creativity from people, he says. it’s just expressing itself. cope claims it produced musical ideas he never would have thought about. he’s now convinced that, in many ways, machines can be more creative than people. they’re able to introduce random notions and reassemble old elements in new ways, without any of the hang-ups or preconceptions of humanity.

“we are so damned biased, even those of us who spend all our lives attempting not to be biased. just the mere fact that when we like the taste of something, we tend to eat it more than we should. we have our physical body telling us things, and we can’t intellectually govern it the way we’d like to,” he says.

in other words, humans are more robotic than machines. “the question,” cope says, “isn’t whether computers have a soul, but whether humans have a soul.”

cope hopes such queries will attract more composers to give his research another chance. “one of the criticisms composers had of emmy was: why the hell was i doing it? what’s the point of creating more music, supposedly in the style of composers who are dead? they couldn’t understand why i was wasting my time doing this,” cope says.

that’s already changed.

“they’re seeing this now as competition for themselves. they see it as, ‘these works are now in a style we can identify as current, as something that is serious and unique and possibly competitive to our own work,’” cope says. “if you can compose works fast that are good and that the audience likes, then this is something.”

i ask cope whether he’s actually heard well-known composers say they feel threatened by emily howell.

“not yet,” he tells me. “the record hasn’t come out.”

the following afternoon, we walk into cope’s campus office, which seems like another college dorm room/psychic dump, with stacks of compact discs and scores growing from the floor like stalagmites, and empty plastic juice bottles scattered about. the one thing that looks brand-new is the black upright piano against the near wall.

cope pulls up a chair, removes his indiana jones hat and eagerly explains the latest phase of his explorations into musical intelligence. though he’s still poking around with emily howell, he’s now spending the bulk of his composition time employing on-the-fly programs.

here’s how this cyborg-esque composing technique works: cope comes up with an idea. for instance, he’ll want to have five voices, each of which alternates singing groups of four notes. or perhaps he’ll want to write a piece that moves quickly from the bottom of the piano keyboard to the top, and then back down. he’ll rapidly code a program to create a chunk of music that follows those directions.

after working with emmy and emily howell for nearly 30 years and composing for about twice that many, cope is fast enough to hear something in his head in the bathtub, dry off and get dressed, move to the computer and 10 minutes later have a whole movement of 100 measures ready. it may not be any good, but it’s the fastest way to translate his thoughts into a solid rough draft.

“i listen with creative ears, and i hear the music that i want to hear and say, ‘you know? that’s going to be fabulous,’ or ‘you know ... ’” — he makes a spitting noise — “‘in the toilet.’ and i haven’t lost much, even though i’ve got a whole piece that’s in

notation immediately.”

he compares the process to a sculptor who chops raw shapes out of a block of marble before he teases out the details. using quick-and-dirty programs as an extension of his brain has made him extraordinarily prolific. it’s a process close to what he was hoping for back when he first started working on software to save him from composer’s block.

as complex as cope’s current method is, he believes it heralds the future of a new kind of musical creation: armies of computers composing (or helping people compose) original scores.

“i think it’s going to happen,” cope says. “i don’t believe that composers are stupid people. ultimately, they’re going to use any tool at their disposal to get what they’re after, which is, after all, good music they themselves like to listen to. there will be initial withdrawal, but eventually it’s going to happen — whether we want it to or not.”

already, at least one prominent pop group — he’s signed a confidentiality agreement, so he can’t say which one — asked him to use software to help them write new songs. he also points to services like pandora, which uses algorithms to suggest new music to listeners.

if cope’s vision does come true, it won’t be due to any publicity efforts on his part. he’ll answer questions from anyone, but he refuses to proactively promote his ideas. he still hasn’t told most of his colleagues or close friends about tinman, a memoir he clandestinely published last year. the attitude, which he settled on at a young age, is to “treat myself as if i’m dead,” so he won’t affect how his work is received. “if you have to promote it to get people to like it,” he asks, “then what have you really achieved?”

cope has sold tens of thousands of books, had his works performed in prestigious venues and taught many students who evangelize his ideas around the world. yet he doesn’t think it adds up to much. all he ever wanted was to write something truly wonderful, and he doesn’t think that’s happened yet. as a composer, cope laments, he remains a “frustrated loser,” confused by the fact that he burned so much time on a project that stole him away from composing. he still just wants to create that one piece that changes someone’s life — it doesn’t matter whether it’s composed by one of his programs, or in collaboration with a machine, or with pencil on a sheet of paper.

“i want that little boy or girl to have access to my music so they can play it and get the same thrill i got when i was a kid,” he says. “and if that isn’t gonna happen, then i’ve completely failed.”

this article first appeared here

comments (1)

march 10, 2010

inspirasie uit wisselwerking

filed under: afrikaaps — abraxas @ 6:30 pm

laetitia pople

kaapstad

’n eietydse kaapse hiphopera wat die storie van afrikaans in die 1600’s gaan haal, ’n multidissiplinêre gemeenskaps opera wat in taxi’s afspeel en geskep is deur 20 jong studente van soweto, asook gereelde besoeke van nederland se voorste

klassiekemusici, jazzers en teaterlui om hul vaardighede hier in te ploeg, is die jongste wisselwerking tussen suid-afrika en nederland.

die omvangryke projek staan as interaksie sa-nl bekend en het eintlik informeel verlede jaar al begin met die sterk nederlandse betrokkenheid by die kknk. dit behels benewens die gereelde besoek van nederlandse musiek-, dans- en teatergroepe aan suid-afrika ook 'n uitgebreide program van slypskole, lesings en meesterklasse deur nederlandse kunstenaars. die kunstenaars gaan met jong suid-afrikaanse talent werk, maar ook met suid-afrika se voorste kunstenaars en geselskappe om grensverskuiwende produksies die lig te laat sien.

vennote sluit onder meer in die melody-musieksentrum in soweto, mike van graan, die ipelegeng-gemeenskapsentrum in soweto, die markteater en die kaapse filharmoniese orkes.

die doel van die projek is die daarstelling van innoverende teater-, dans- en musikale produksies wat deur die suid-afrikaanse kultuur geïnspireer is.

die produksies sal op verskeie feeste, sale en teaters in suid-afrika opgevoer word, waaronder op infecting the city, kknk, die nasionale kunstefees in grahamstad, opvoerings in die baxter-teater, die markteater in johannesburg, die voorkamerfees in darling en die oppikoppi-fees.

* die eerste groot ko-produksie is die hiphopera afrikaaps wat van 1 tot 4 april op die kknk en van 7 tot 25 april in die baxter-teater in kaapstad opgevoer word.

die produksie, wat die wortels van afrikaans naspeur, smee die talente van die hiphop-digter en kunstenaar jitsvinger, die digter blaq pearl en die jazzpianis kyle sheperd saam. dit sal afspeel in 'n digitale landskap en die musiekstyle en genres sal oorkruis. benewens hiphop sal kaapse style soos ghoema en die musiek van die kaapse klopse ook gehoor word.

die dramaturg is aryan kaganof en die regisseur is catherine henegan, medestigter van the glasshouse in amsterdam.

first published on m.24.com

comments off on [inspirasie uit wisselwerking](#)

march 6, 2010

the miss adventures of lillith fairbrush – a tale of ten quickies (and then some..)

[filed under: literature, mick raubenheimer](#) — [abraxas @ 12:19 pm](#)

gasp twenty-six: footsie.

mr. green became a mute beast moving in some other zone of sentience, some ether of pre-consciousness. lillith's physical soul reacted with instant, primitive recognition to his slow, concentrated trance; her skin already sheening. let us, for a moment, consider the brute's throbbing, swaying perspective: the moment he saw lillith slip her shoes off – those sharp, inquisitorial eyes of hers flashing across his features to spy the transformation, the becoming – a new he took shape out of he; his musculature twitched; his throat swelled shut (he dumbly, distractedly scratched at it), and all of his arteries began swelling with gush.

>from a scientific point of view, from dr. white's frame then, the effect was essentially a crippling one. were green to be placed, in his present stupor, in any other social or functional context, he would blindly collapse about like some moon-shone zombie. imagine, as dr. white does, expecting of this sub-human form to

execute some childishly simple task – like making milo, or tying his shoes (see the porcelaine smash into the wall, the shoes torn in tway, gutted; dead).

mr. green gasped hoarsely, sending a flutterby through lillith's tummy-tum, and staggered forward through gelatinous air – all of his radia of sense trained on three mistily beating loci: her slow twirling feet, trailing maroon tails of warmth (upon her now, his face was already deeply buried – paraplegically nourished – by the complex valley of her left instep; soon he is slow gorging on her toes, lillith flailing), and beyond them – demoniacally linked to these twin hearts, her shimmering centre.. the cradle of profound release.

but first he has to consume her feet. the process was strict – agonizingly ritualistic in ascension.

lillith, hyper-sympathetic erotic being that she was, had long slipped along and was gasping and slashing in the same tumultuous air as he, kicking him involuntarily, harshly, to deeper access his hunger, her feet tingling like the extensions of clitori they had become..

when (pausing alarmingly to sup on her calves, from where he wielded her like a quaint doll,) at last, he plunged forward and applied his delirium to her wet heat, she flickered in and out of consciousness.

her reality – sober and crisp no more than three minutes earlier – a liquid crush of colour.

comments (1)

march 3, 2010

louise voss bendix interviews aryan kaganof about mobile film making

filed under: [mobile filming](#) — [abraxas @ 12:18 am](#)

-in terms of what i am doing with mobile film making: since i purchased the nokia n95 i have been using it constantly in my film practice. using it as a “camera stylo” – taking it everywhere with me, a constant cinematic apparatus. i have been incorporating the material with other , more formal, shoots done on hdv and it is amazing how well the image and, particularly, sound of that nokia stand up in comparison to professional video equipment.

1. why make mobile films?

it can be for political or aesthetic reasons. political because of the complete freedom it gives you from the “official” (redundant) production process. aesthetic because of the wonderful possibilities that have emerged in terms of hand held imagery, in terms of the use of the super close-up, in terms of otherwise impossible set-ups and stunts (thinking here particularly of skateboarders who use the mobile phones to such dramatic effect). all sorts of ways, it's a real pandora's box.

2. what do you think of the connection ‘dogma’ and ‘mobile’?

this i know nothing about.

3. what is the biggest advantage of filming on a mobile phone?

there are so many. i think the most attractive aspect for me is that i become an invisible filmer, a fly on the wall, and nobody expects the results to be any good so they are always so dramatically surprised.

4. in the process of making sms-sugarman, what was the greatest challenge?

the greatest challenge for me was always working with producers. that was my only mistake on that film. producers who come from the “official” (redundant) film

making world are trained in corruption and thievery. that's what they know and that's what they do. but i have learned my lesson and for me mobile film making must take place on an entirely new front in terms of how the films are produced.

5. what is your best advice to the young filmmakers taking up the dogma mobile challenge?

don't work with corrupt producers. produce the work yourself and make sure you only and always do what you believe in.

6. how do you see the future of mobile filmmaking?

the future is right now. it's happening all around us. there's no going back.

[comments off on louise voss bendix interviews aryan kaganof about mobile film making](#)

march 1, 2010

helgé janssen reviews craig matthew's "welcome nelson"

[filed under: craig matthew,films edited by kaganof,helgé janssen,politics,south african cinema — abraxas @ 10:48 pm](#)

review: welcome nelson viewed as first step to freedom

e tv 11 february 2010

produced and directed by craig matthew

the pre-release press splurb was very mischievous.

footage of mandela:

"being taken completely by surprise at his release."

huh?

"tragically identifying with his white warders in what must be one of the most acute cases of stockholm syndrome in history."

huh?

in 1980 craig matthew had a major international scoop when he leopard crawled through the undergrowth with his huge camera to film apartheid style demolition/forced removal tactics (guguletu/khayelitsha?) after a tip-off at 2 am. those around at that time would be aware how extremely life threatening this activity was. it is to craig's eternal credit that he tackled this task with gusto. i shared a communal house with him and 3 others, situated in kennilworth, a 'coloured' area on the 'un' side of harfield village in cape town. it was a lively time of political and philosophical discussion.

with craig's journalistic nose for being in the right spot at the right time, i had a good sense that i was about to watch something authentic and well centred. i was not disappointed.

underlying footage of the immense historical import of this event, is an interview with mandela, cross referenced with an interview with a cameraman at the event, chris everson. the interview with mandela shows him to be an extremely astute politician, in spite of the fact that he had been insufficiently prepared for his release (the political expedience was obvious) and that he had known very little of the type of impact his release would have. in this sense mandela, being the compassionate

gentleman that his is, was thinking that he would need to bid farewell to his prison warders when he left. the frenzy of the day made sure this was never going to happen. mandela mentions this fact in contrast to the smallness of his everydayness within the confines of prison, in relation to his sense of intimidation at having to face the world at a press conference. this hardly has anything to do with 'stockholm syndrome' – after 27 years in prison!!?? the document points out that the nationalist party manipulated a media coup in releasing the first photograph of nelson mandela in 27 years, standing next to f.w. de klerk. well, given that they had to face the dissolution as an illegitimate ruling party, it is little wonder that they had to try and save face. and what a monolithic afrikaner face that was! f.w. de klerk while just breaking short of being patronising, never the less comes across as a lotto announcer placidly trying to convince somebody of their win. in hindsight it becomes clear that p.w. knew he was doing exactly that: the anc (elite) have not won the country – they have won the lotto. yet, as we now face the paternalism of the anc, the paternalism of the nationalist party was hardly any different. apartheid kept an entire nation shackled to the past, in a vain attempt to promote the interests of a few. thus, when apartheid came tumbling down, an entire world rushed in. everybody had to suddenly make a huge paradigm shift. 20 years later, and many are still struggling. mandela also makes the point that the nationalist party had not given him enough time to prepare for his release and not that he was 'taken completely by surprise'. funny how meanings can be misread!

in the interesting cross reference interview with chris everson, we get insights into the media frenzy plus rapid, almost glib 'reminders' of what it was like under apartheid. i say 'almost glib' because the following 20 years have flown by so rapidly and it seems as if we are being spin doctored into thinking that 'apartheid wasn't that bad'. however, many of us are now wondering: where/how has it since gone so wrong? i wonder how many south africans fully appreciate the immense diplomatic task that faced nelson mandela on his release? quite clearly it wasn't just a case of 'now you can rule'!

the documentary quite chillingly shows that at exactly the same time as mandela was being released, the grand parade in cape town was fraught with thronging masses, and apartheid-style control mechanisms (still evidenced today by the anc). if anybody needed any proof of the revolutionary pressure that had long since exceeded boiling point, the dense aggregation and events at the grand parade bear testimony. chris everson makes the point that the media and the international press undoubtedly played a huge part in freeing this country. it goes without saying that the black population of this country provided the reason! it was also interesting to note that the throng of international journalists were almost 100% white.

make no mistake, those times were fraught with a peculiar insanity. the tensions, that hatred – 20 years later and we still have a long, long way to go. this is said not to undermine the enormous strides this country has made, nor to disrespect the fact that for the first time in south african history, the entire nation is free.

helgé janssen

[comments off on helgé janssen reviews craig matthew's "welcome nelson"](#)

sequel – jean pierre de la porte on music and exile

[filed under: jean-pierre de la porte,music and exile symposium — abraxas @ 12:33 am](#)



the music in exile conference produced several reactions in people. these can be sampled in the sequel discussions on kagablog which served as a post facto clarification of what the conference was about.

my first impression of the conference brief was that it overstretched exile the way academic conferences of yesteryear once stretched already tenuous things like freud into complete vacuity by applying them.

i wondered if edward said's recent discussion of exile- a revaluation of the concept beyond its customary biblical and literary focus – had been deliberately ignored, making its omission a polemic or if it had simply been unnoticed.

i decided that either way said on exile was the appropriate starting point for a

contemporary discussion of music and exile for much the same reasons i believe a discussion of music and religion should take messiaen or music and philosophy take adorno or at very least kivy or scruton as their starting points.

this was a mistake. only christine lucia and i mentioned said as i recall and if not for aryan kaganof reproducing howard yoder's excellent discussion of said on exile we would have continued to have got puzzled stares for our trouble. discussion was in fact dominated by two versions of south africa in the twentieth century and played itself out in their incompatibilities: the conference turned on the rival potentials of stalin and hitler as ways of articulating south africa's musical past.

the parallax view of south africa formed between the two great masters of undemocratic power was fascinating -with tim jackson's untroubled reminders of the systematic nazi strand in apartheid south africa and several former exiles telling of how they sidestepped or danced with the ogre of soviet communism during the anc's most vulnerable moments.

powerfully reminded that south africa scraped past alternate tyrannies by the skin of its teeth it seems better to forget about setting up exile for discussion in its contemporary sense defined by said and his critics and focus on the more fascinating and anyway far more urgent thought that exile in its south african context played out an immense battle for integrity between neo-nazi white utopian harassment and neo-stalinist courtship.

it may well be south africa's most cosmopolitan moment- not because exiles were so widely scattered but because they formed the stratum between the twentieth centuries two defining pathologies of power; fascism and soviet communism.

the situation of non exiles was equally cramped by ideologically powerful and homogenous complexes; between a fake ethnicity and a fake republic veneered onto the old colonial framework. these vast configurations certainly set the programme for more than musicological research. the haze in which the presentations and discussions at the conference seemed to evolve was actually caused by the underlying problematics of nazism and stalinism, fake ethnicity and fake republicanism surfacing faster than they could be recognized and thought about around the theme of exile.

obviously much needs to be done to understand the ways south african music resisted or capitulated to the force field of the soviet vision of anti-imperialist struggle . just as much needs to be done to understand the extent and inherence of nazi conceptions of society, of race-unique modernization, of aryan manifest destiny, of cultural and educative frameworks and of mono-racial civil society in apartheid south africa. a third research programme in musicology would be needed to understand the role of scholars like anthropologists or art and music historians and philosophers, jurists, economists and the media in bringing about the fake ethnicity and invented traditions of the 'bantustans'. finally the way the white republic constructed itself out of the elements and styles of colonial administration while appearing to combat these is scarcely understood.



Michael Moerane, Thabo Mbeki's uncle,
supervising his son, Kabeli, at the piano, Scanlan
Street, Queenstown, mid-1950s.

(COURTESY OF SOPHIE MOERANE)

despite the exile conference producing acuter awareness of these framing issues, exile as a theme may not be the most effective way to explore all of them. my own interest in the conference was as an occasion to discuss mosoeu moerane. i owe much of my growing understanding of this composer to the generosity of my friend and colleague composer mokale koapeng and also to the insights of christine lucia and the late mary rorich. in my initial discussion i compared moerane to the great and equally easily misconstrued painter george pemba. both seem to take their bearings in an inherited and conservative-seeming western style but both stand out by making this pre-given language resonate with south african reality in an almost inexplicably powerful way- a power denied their contemporaries whose imaginations often seem simply westernized and colonized by comparison.

the ideas of deleuze and guattari about kafka- ideas that circulate under the rubric of minor literature -seemed a useful way to understand how situating yourself in the language of the oppressor can give access to a new and subversive way of feeling, thinking and formulating rather than the expected mannerism, co-optation, stifling and sterility.

to explore this theme for music it is necessary to understand what cramped and exceptional circumstances force people into imposed languages – languages which are part of the greater systems by which colonies supplant existing experience with norms and coordinates of their own. it is also necessary to show that the stance of moerane – the creation of a voice through deliberate restriction – is an inherent and available potential of music and has been used to great effect as a strategy despite being mis-recognized as extraterritorial or naive art or as aesthetic conservatism.

what follows is merely a sketch of how such an argument may be developed around moerane and how its assumptions fare when applied to other better known composers who i also regard as minor in the deleuzian sense while being absolutely major in the way they still dominate musical discussion:

gustav mahler, charles ives and conlon nancarrow



cramped creation

juan de pareja was diego velasquez' black slave and colour mixer. he was not allowed to handle a brush. in some versions of the story he practiced drawing in secret and emulated velasquez from a distance. one day , expecting the kings studio visit, he placed one of his paintings on display. when the king reached it juan de pareja dropped to his knees and begged that he be allowed to paint. the king responded that nobody of such talent could possibly be a slave and velasquez was obliged to grant his 'indentured servant' freedom.

mosoeu moerane was not that fortunate. there was no king in south africa, only bureaucrats who were so witless about their job that they had to import hundreds of ex nazis to talk them through the running of their rebaptised colony (now a whites-only utopia) and help staff universities. moerane – heir of one of the worlds longest unbroken music traditions – had to seek assistance from one such redeployed fascist, friedrich hartmann, in order to receive the white mans music degree; the apartheid states way of granting black teachers a kind of license to speak in its territories.. velasquez and the king had an easier time than hartmann and his watchdog university because juan de pareja, as far as we know, did not carry the legacy of one of the great african traditions of design into his captivity with velasquez. possibly generations of slavery had obliterated any way of transmitting such traditions. it's tempting to imagine de pareja, who has already been the subject of a novel, sitting in his tiny room, the great autodidact exhausted by a day of pigment grinding and colour blending, bent over a copy of vasari's the lives of the artists -absorbing that saga of individual discovery as a single line from giotto to michelangelo.

perhaps de pareja reflected on this adventure of appearances captured like himself and thanked what slight luck he had that instead of being the property of a blacksmith or pig farmer, he was the chattel of a man he could secretly observe extending this great vasarian ambition of conquering the way the world looks.

de pareja was fortunate too that the king didn't believe as the architects of separate development did, that only a certain kind of art and culture was appropriate to him by virtue of the accident of his colour and insisted that he weave baskets or string beads or run a cultural centre in his new found autonomy. as a result of his more enlightened era, juan de pareja was eventually allowed to speak in the language of his captors, to paint their world in his own name, out of hiding and more than in the incidentals to velasquez own canvases. some smirking western commentators still remark that de pareja did not learn much from his master velasquez. his the calling of saint matthew shows something far more interesting than a secondary velasquian though.



it openly shows velasquez world at its most conventional and bizarre . its is baroque painting become unconcernedly artificial and indiscreet ; figures from raphael's the school of athens stand around philosophizing behind christ who himself seems to have walked straight off the set of a bellini painting. holbein's ambassadors rug supports a meeting of fences or pawn shop operators , three of whom are dressed as bourgeois dandys. manet would be admired and chided centuries later for showing spanish realist painting in all its latent artifice and disarray- his only precursor is de pareja.

we meet around st matthew the stock characters of baroque painting: humans frozen as types and versatile extras stretching back to the renaissance in an unbroken string of conventional roles. they return without the disguise of individual portraits in de pareja hands. all around these usually hidden human props of the painter , the vasarian myth of mastered appearances is evident in literal property which overshadows the generic people ; velvet on a drape coming to show itself out of nowhere marble, leather, gold light and shade, smoky figures in a mirror. these are the surfaces of goods and possessions seen by a painter who had recently been just such a subtle piece of property himself – one which could add value by opulently painting opulence and who now presents it in scarcely hidden tatters and seams.

mosoeru moerane's problem was not simple capture in an identity as property along with cattle, goods or other slaves in his time colonialism was revised into an a stream and a b stream both consisting of humans. both streams were realized as 'nations' rather than as owners and slaves although in fact they were nothing more than two classes; white supremacists emulating nazis and a working class administered into ethnicities as spurious as verwoerd's own.

moerane was unlucky to be part of a creative state- something far worse than a merely repressive one. he found himself reflected in the overnight state creation of white civil society with its orchestras, virtuosos, prizes and pretensions to white style, opinion, taste, culture urbanity and civility – another polishing nazi touch. against this, spurious ethnicities were created, vast administrative and tactical stereotypes within the existing colonial manifest destiny. moerane could not default from the nouveau-white glitz to his own tradition because that tradition was occupied and driven by racist social science and apartheid eugenics.

velasquez court of philip iv was brutal but at least genuine, not reinvented with every generation of brainstorming colonial bourgeois. when juan de pareja was part of it – either as chattel or as free agent – he was at least part of something actual. when a slave spoke to a king it was not also through two layers of nazi and colonial ventriloquism hastily knocked together into a republic.

towards a minor music

moerane's double state-administered identity, double style veneers and double layer colonial class war was the map of his unique migration -from the vernacular space of an unbroken oral tradition to the caricatural curriculum of the school, to the white culture-vault of the university, to the fascist meister, to the colonial missionary space of sacred music which may have seemed a liberated zone beside its claustrophobic neighbors.

when scholars get beyond the sheer paleography of moerane's fatso la heso (who wrote what, could moerane have managed it all or was it hartmann sketching in solutions to get rid of his untermensch pupil and have a laugh at examining academics etc) they will hear in its hesitations as much as its glibnesses the same things they see but seem not to see in the great painting of juan de pareja the slave.

there is something specific – certainly a genre- in the work of women, homosexuals, colonized people, workers, slaves -of all who are forced in one way or another to speak in the language of their oppressor. that the vast literature of this condition has not been focused on moerane is surprising franz kafka epitomized this condition by writing in the language of the occupier. this feature of his work was what gilles deleuze and felix guattari believed they captured in the notion of a minor literature.

kafka captures the dimensions of his own situation in his story a report to an academy. he tells of an ape captured and transported on board ship in a cramped cage. during this passage the ape is faced with fading away in despair or escaping to leap overboard in suicide. it uses its enforced waiting to observe the humans around it so closely that it is able to copy, comprehend and reproduce their behavior and thoughts; it even seems to capture part of the soul of the distracted sailor who comes to feed it. this vast learning is undertaken to assist it to escape from its cage. instead, on reaching a destination the ape is confronted with life in a zoological garden or life in the music hall. choosing the latter it uses a succession of teachers to reach so high a skill in imitation that it reports- now under the name of red peter- to a scientific academy on its metamorphosis- so complete that it can no longer describe its emotions and experiences as an ape.

red peter's report is the model of the minor – understood as a relation to the majority which it embraces and dissents from in the same gesture.

gustav mahler suffered the earliest forms of the antisemitism that would eventually grow to sweep away his world. his conversion was his primary bid for a place within a majority, his music endlessly rescinded this conversion as much as red peter –

another converts- wry report rescinds his. the fertile anomalies in mahler still occupy us far more than whatever arguments still surround his place in the succession of western music.

his finest biographer, henry-louis de la grange, wrote that mahler 'cannot be classed in any definite category .those who consider him a post romantic ,late offspring of the wagnerian tradition are infallibly disappointed by the neoclassicism of the fourth symphony. those who think of him as prolonging bruckner's monumental neoclassicism and who admire his prodigious craftsmanship and supreme mastery of form must concede that his art is more subjective than objective and that his aim like the romantics, is to convey a message by awakening the listeners emotions. and finally those who take him as a modern forerunner of the viennese school and prophet of the future are disconcerted by the banality of his themes and by his fidelity to traditional form and diatonic harmony' (h-l de la grange mahler -a biography introduction xv gollancz 1974).

in this a stasis is described in mahler's music and his reputation arising from existing between idioms . twentieth century composing , performance and recording culture is filled with interpretations designed to push mahler out of this stasis and towards an idiom. bernstein construed mahler between a jewish past of popular music and a prophecy of twentieth century disasters. bernstein's mahler becomes as sincere as himself, leaving no room for mahler's obvious irony. abbado's mahler is filled with irony-but all suitably historicist as if coming directly from dialogues between the conductor and luigi nono. levine arrives on cue with subjective irony which then all but disappears again into detailed musical tectonics with gielen.

the inexhaustible demand for mahler cycles is part of this ongoing hermeneutic obligation to strongly construe mahler one way or another, as if he were troublesome evidence in a court case where sets of performances serve as closing arguments to the jury.

mahler is also forced into blanket redefinition by composers: boulez sees musical narrative in him and a new way of approaching berg , shostakovitch sees him as his particularly deep rooted contemporary , stockhausen sees him encapsulating human experience in a way ready for visitors from another planet to comprehend.

multiple mahlers result from his inclusion in so many idioms while belonging to none. thus spectralized mahler becomes mythic -either as a monster made of different parts or a transcending spirit drawing them all together: at the same moment ken russell portrays the mahler-monster, david holbrook interprets him as the kleinian quest for spiritual integration.

mahler is modernity's zellig or chancy gardener, a cause of endless projections, famous because he is pervasive but pervasive because he is everywhere and nowhere -nameless- a perfectly modern vacant universal. de la granges subtle antinomies turn into an epic biography which stockhausen called a vast detective story in which anything might be a clue. in this sustained ambiguous perspective the only thing clear is that there is never going to be a definitive mahler- neither in performance nor in some clarified canon. he inhabits several incompatible idioms at once each one a lure to the hasty interpreter and he leaves these idioms untouched, unlike any modernist or postmodern successor. for mahler the contemporary of giovanni morelli, sherlock holmes. charles peirce and sigmund freud reality consists entirely of details.

through technical mastery mahler possesses several languages- recrossing their terrain many times as a conductor, a reader and composer . he never takes the various escape routes he himself marks out in his music ; routes which sibelius, nielsen, shostakovitch, zemlinsky and schoenberg each make their own. he begins in the same place over again bounded by the same triangle of romanticism classicism and modernism. this is what prompted schoenberg to say that mahler wrote the same symphony nine times.

but mahler the great objective reader, particularly of himself, finds elbow room in

incongruities between different languages. incongruities that would disappear if he imagined a more coherent and consistent language at their point of convergence and moved towards this by elimination as sibelius and webern did.

ives is as determined as mahler to exist between host languages while letting them be themselves. an exasperated boulez is referring to this when he calls ives an amateur unable to impose a single body of technique on his material. taking advantage of an american performance tradition not yet ossified or commercialized ives easily situates himself across the entire spectrum occupied by music of his time : a vernacular, a commercial, a learned and a sacred language exist as unconnected layers in him and each language migrates freely between these conditions.

unlike a modernist, ives does not see in these varied states of music different meanings -in the way stravinsky finds in jazz , fairground music or village wedding chants a distinctness which can only be drawn together in a collage.

in central park in the dark we do not hear a place filled with different types of music but a music made up of different types of places . the act of moving between these places is presented in over the pavements. ives contains no collages and nor does mahler : like a soul caught in the wrong body and signaling this dilemma with unexpected twitches and stumbles both inhabit existing languages and force them to blurt out what lies against their grain. these blurts are not the unexpected distortions, and exaggerations of expressionism- they are as carefully prepared and deliberated over as fireworks.

these blurts are also very specific conlon nancarrow devises a technique and an aesthetic to produce and study them. they appear in him as virtual harmonic motions without literal pitches below them and durations irresolvable into rhythm or metre.

everybody notices these things in nancarrow but mistakes them for contrasts to the frozen melodies and modular phrases of his music- as if he were a minimalist become ornate. the legible surfaces of nancarrow are like the stuffed goat and tyre in robert rauschenberg's combine- not the subject of his painting but a frame for the daubs dropping down from the goats face which continue punctuating the hidden words and images it stands on.

nancarrow's neatly stuffed melodies and phrases are also defaced by smears of diminutions, superpositions and motion blur accelerandi which scatter off them to make a different musical plane. paul griffiths remarked that nancarrow works like an animator, carefully designing legible transitions between music frames which when played back fast are stretched on the rack of mathematically assured nonproportion. melodies attached to these warping grids become unrecognizable at breaking point and snap back to dots ,layers of polyphony form out of a shower of notes and are shaken off like water. nancarrow's cartoon physics, which no doubt comes from the technical matrix shared by cellular animation and piano rolls , hides under its freedoms the strangulated position he occupies.

he writes a score, transcribes it into another code giving the same microscopic control over its performed surface as any electronic music – this code is read by one or two pianos which have been altered to render the density of the music . for all the freedom of design and specificity this promises it also binds nancarrow tightly in a three step transcription between layers which do not resemble each other . these are the strata nancarrow must cut into at different points, a kind viscous layer which nancarrow ingeniously instructs or coaxes along its way; the inertial dead music moving in the ingenious automaton of virtually alive music which he is famous for.

nancarrow in his basement – pinned between nineteenth century music , a pianola code that speaks to no human eye or ear and fading obsolete instruments – dramatizes the way the intact layers of language in mahler and ives also constantly and uncomfortably partition their composing. a musicologist from mars would have no difficulty seeing mahler ives and nancarrow as working with profoundly conservative languages, much as they would see thomas mann or pierre bonnard

working with genres and idioms of the past.

but of course none of these seeming conservatives have conservative consequences in their work or conservative followers- therefore what are they doing?
an indication comes from deleuze and guattari's discussion of kafka where we learn that minor literature is one which does mostly three things:

it unpredictably alters a major languages relationship to context and reference ('deterritorialises' it) by being written in the major language but from a marginalized or minoritarian point of view.

it has an immediately political effect because in its cramped spaces what is individual and what is social are inextricable.

it has a collective value because what each author says individually also constitutes a common objective.

compare any mahler adagio to strauss 'tod und verklarung' to see that that mahler shifts the language he shares with strauss far from its customary capacity for declaration and expression a mahler adagio is strauss off the wagner-strauss-sibelius line on which he habitually travels . not that mahler's adagios effect this by lying or being ironic , they are often intensely sincere and literal but are also quite simply elsewhere , unable to go on coding or conveying whatever they were designed for . they are not beside or beyond themselves at an extremity of the language in the expressionist manner, they are in a blurred or suspended relation to the entire history they gave rise to- hollowing from within its language and possibilities of use. in short mahler deterritorialised the major language of his time by remaining within it.

the way ives dissolves existing codes by means of themselves is apparent in all his music but especially where it pretends to be compendious and encyclopedic -in his orchestral works. here a simple question must be asked : where this music is taking place? in a form? in a style? in a narrative? in an allegory? in a confession or a memory? in a tectonic continuity of technique? the impossibility of answering any of these questions means ives evasion of the language he is in by means of itself is so complete that he threat ens to silently eviscerate even subsequent languages and hence the anxious concern of the avant-garde and post minimalists with him.

nancarrow is marginal , an exile from american anticommunism working in obscurity. his music, which starts in earnest around his thirty fifth year, is a map of his alienation existing like the kind of forceps used to handle nuclear waste , reassembling at a distance the shell of mainstream music already pulverized by jazz, eroding that shells own internal forces of cohesion and presenting it in an altered state inside his machine, in its own afterlife as nancarrow's zombie.

by the second criterion of minor music it is immediately political because in its cramped spaces the individual is inextricable from the socius: the thoroughly, immediately political mahler is not something hidden behind the massive cult of subjectivity surrounding him. it is that subjectivity. the mahler biography is a rich compound of institutional power, antisemitic forces, generational bids for autonomy beneath aesthetic guises, patronage and deep hypocrisy all spun into a narrative center of gravity which stockhausen, accurately called a myth which was only transiently mahler and which may quite appropriately live on without him.

ives space is so cramped that he cannot fit an identity as a composer into it or any of the musical legitimations or aesthetics of his day – he has to make do with a matrix remembered from baseball. the forensic tone of ives scholarship indicates that he is nowhere present on the surface of his music – not even as its proprietor. his own social and patriotic writings delve back to the bloomsbury of america, to thoreau, emerson, hawthorn and the alcotts ,suggesting that he experiences himself as the locus of an audience that has yet to come into being: where the people are missing (kafka) you must freely shape them from your own void.

on the third criterion minor music has a collective value because what each composer says individually already constitutes a common action:

this predicts that mahler, ives and nancarrow's music becomes a tool of collective identity- and this certainly happened many times over . mahler was the collective noun for soviet symphonism as well as for the western avant-garde's conquest of complexity . ives constituted an instant americana and then became the hub of the american experimental tradition , nancarrow precipitated cunningham in the sixties and frank zappa in the seventies then became an idol to ligeti and a universal precedent to american post-minimalism.

Below: Michael Moerane's 'African Springtime Orchestra' in the garden of his Scanlan Street home, mid-1950s.

(COURTESY OF SOPHIE MOERANE)



in this construction it is possible to begin imagining moerane not as the composer of a sparse thread in sacred and western orchestral music but as a maker of pieces so resoundingly odd, identical to their host languages but indiscernibly different as to cast the identity and direction of the host in doubt – the way mahler denatures wagner or ives makes the synthetic symphonic genre appear like it was merely eavesdropping all along. in moerane the identity of the composer fades as we approach it closely and where it stood we are sucked instead into the literal tempo of the moebius apartheid strip of pseudo western and pseudo ethnic events – and then we glimpse moerane again- but as if an era had grown a personality and a face.

moerane becomes the collective name for a project- of which mokale koapeng and a few others are co-heirs -pioneers of first hearing and then writing a south african minor music – ie. a properly revolutionary because properly unsettling music- beyond stalin , beyond hitler, beyond ethnicity and beyond the genteel colonial white music world- a world which today is merely the waxworks of apartheid culture.

this project- which is a reading of moerane which some will see as his deliberate travesty, does not free itself of stalins, hitlers mangopes and verwoerds as much as invites them to saturate one another, to blend indiscernibly into a south african present no longer hidden by yuppie fog or deluded rainbows. it is a language caught only in the blur of their languages, another voice heard clearly in the fiery furnace of their old voices. moseou moerane, like all people too great not to be minor, is in the process of being born posthumously.

comments (3)

february 19, 2010

the last day of my so-called life

filed under: [dave chislett,literature](#) — [abraxas @ 11:50 am](#)

for some perverse reason i am awake at 4am. but worse than this, the metallic grey false dawn light is tainted with the soundtrack of maudlin 70's love song, "the day before you came". it's ricocheting around my skull. some woman is warbling it over and over in precisely the overly sentimental way that two years of singledom has resulted in me hating. i stare resentfully at the monochrome beige curtains until i subside into the last hour or so of sleep, dreading the technicolor immediacy of the dreams i know it must bring. my last waking thought is, 'well maybe it is.'

when the alarm rings at 6am, i am waist deep in amorphous green/blue goo, wielding a strangely light-filled broad sword and baying at the top of my lungs while joyfully cleaving heads from the bodies of weird alien beasts. it takes several bleats from the cellphone alarm to calm my racing heart. i open my eyes slowly. the familiar dimensions of the bedroom assert themselves upon my unwilling consciousness. it might have been crazy, but slaughtering those beasts was fun. do i want to return to the mundanity of my four, somewhat dirty white walls, beige curtains and hideously mis-matched bedding? i am groggy from the sudden intensity of the hour or so's sleep. it takes me ten minutes to remember waking up previously. it is only in the shower that i recall the song, and sing, 'this is the first day of the rest of my life' ironically under my breath to myself. i soap my pits, my balls, my arse; vigorously scrub my leg, chest and back surfaces and my arms, before hosing myself off in the pungently chemical city water supply. invigorated i step from the shower, whip a razor across my chops and look to don my armour for a day in the world.

popular wisdom would have one live each day as if it was your last. and while i relate to the sentiment, i cannot see that having sex all day every day is really going to make for much of a life. but the idea of noting the exact nature of every passing mote of time and detail registers a harmonic in me. to make every detail important and to celebrate it. a series of tiny, static nows that are examined and remembered, as opposed to bundled into minutes and hours which are devoured by the processes of being alive and making plans to live. my buddhist under-mind smiles as my reptilian mind recoils and i am left smiling humourlessly at the idea of holding down a job while making every moment of life holy. but i feel that if this is the last day of life as i know it, because it is the day before she arrives into my existence, maybe i should be recording it. maybe i will need it later to remember what it was that i left behind. one always needs to know where one came from. primarily to stop you from heading back there i feel, but mainly in order to have some sense of progression. nature tends towards inertia, decay, but consciousness strives for change. my body and mind war with each other over these drives while i hold down the job that buys us the luxury of time to have the debate. it would be nice to have some other source of

meaning in the ritualised actions of my days.

none the less, i am mindful as i drink my fruit juice and chew my banana. i count every stroke of my toothbrush as i clean my teeth. the sun feels comfortably warm on my back as i close the door to my flat and walk to my car. in fact, the sky is a clear crisp blue that looks like brand new tissue paper, begging to be wrinkled. the sun is bright and my shoes make a musical scrunching on the concrete. bird song drowns out the traffic noises from the main road. i press my remote control and with a smart chirp, the car springs open, deactivating the alarm and the immobiliser. i reflect for a second that, on the last day of my life as i have known it, it would be so much more perfect if i didn't have to think about the mundanities of actually staying alive.

when the day is the last, the sky takes on a whole other texture. trees stand out in stark relief, more like sculptures than paintings against a background. cars shine and gleam as they pass by in the road. by the time i have driven to work i am aware of two things. one i am very, very wide awake. and conversely, interestingly, i am tired. my head feels like an over-full letterbox. the combination of the two sensations is like an effervescent multi vitamin going off in my heart. i am elated, i am clear headed. the fatigue feels good. i sit at my desk wallowing in this for a few minutes while my machine boots up, the virus scan runs and the updates download. every single day begins like this. i have not altered my routine; i have merely paid attention to it. what an interesting world i live in. i haven't spoken to another living soul, and already i feel more at home in the tiny corner of the world i have carved myself. i don't feel like i am peeping out from between curtains at a parade anymore, i feel like i am handing out cookies from my front door as the participants file by, smiling. ridiculous, i think.

if i was to die tomorrow, this day would have been wonderful. i haven't had sex, i haven't got high, and i haven't bought any toys. i just started taking mental note of everything. looking right at things instead of through. it's not possible to live like this everyday, is it? you'd take so long to do anything. you'd be sidetracked and unfocussed. right now though, i am not sure i care much about those side effects. i decide to make a cup of coffee while my email downloads. my day is ordinary. i have two or so hours now to write some reports, to reply to emails, answering queries and so on. then i have a couple of calls to make, quotes to chase, information to gather. then i have a lunch with a client, and the afternoon has been cleared for admin. i need to catch up on paperwork. i look at my to-do list as i sip my coffee. i know most of the people i am about to call. my client is male. i know all the staff here. if this is the day before she comes, i am not sure where she is coming from. realising my mistake, i look at tomorrow's diary. pretty much more of the same. i am not doing anything after hours on either night. i am just living this life. this life that until today i had thought was mundane. if tomorrow she is in my life, what is she going to see? my boredom and repetitions of the same actions and ideas? or my new excitement at the colour and depth around what i do with my time? what would i like her to see? if today is the day before she comes, isn't there a good chance that i already know her, i muse. i mean, my dairy shows no opportunity for meeting anyone new. will i bump into her in the check out queue at pick 'n pay? at the atm? will we do the strangers tango in some public place, each starting in the same direction as the other until we laugh and look into each others eyes? will one of my phone calls result in an unexpected meeting, and it's her? will... ah. ja, whatever.

the time until lunch flies by. and even though i am focussed on my work, i am conscious of writing my emails differently, i am conscious of patience; of perspective of the time i have to do things. before i know it, my outlook calendar pops up my 30 minute reminder to go to lunch. i stand; pick up my folder and notes for the meeting. i look around my office, straighten papers on my desk, push the chair in, walk out and close the door. its autumn and the crispness of seasonal change has crept into the highveld air. it's not cold, but i am not moving in a pool of heat and oil like two weeks ago. i note the sensation of cooler air across my lungs. my chest seems to expand easier, i suck in more oxygen, my eye sight sharpens, as if the water content of the air has dropped and my vision tweaked accordingly. the short walk to

the car is full of sensations: the feel of things through my shoes, concrete, stones, cracking of dry leaves. i look around the car park but i am the only one here. a hadeda squawks by in the sky, calling for its mate. the car alarm pips twice. i open one door and slide back inside its familiar cocooning.

i am early for the meeting, having left too much time to get to the restaurant. as i walk in, i note the hostess. she is tall, brunette, beautiful. i think for ten seconds. i am 40 years old. she must be 25. i shrug and approach the front desk. she smiles at me. "good afternoon sir. do you have a reservation?"

the smile is perfect, but her eyes maintain the same constant glow. there is nothing in front of her that she is waiting for. "yes, for 1pm," i reply and give her the client name. she picks up 3 menus and escorts me to the table.

"would you like something to drink while you wait?" she asks.

i order a glass of water, lemon, no ice, and she leaves to relay my order to our waiter. i look around. the joint is half full and there are women dotted around the room at various tables. i tally up how many fall into the right age bracket and so on before stopping myself. if this is the last day of my life before she comes, isn't it true to say that she is a factor about which i don't know? again, is it someone i know or not? i just don't know. then she is just as likely to be 21 as 45 and therefore any sectioning of the women i see might be to begat the process. i sigh and sip my water. i'll just talk to everyone.

ten minutes later a woman approaches my table. she is about 30-ish, attractive, and smartly dressed. i was engrossed in my cell phone and didn't notice until her body cast a shadow over my table. i look up, see her and smile.

"hi." she says

"hi." i reply, wondering what this is about.

"um, you're not victor are you?" she asks, realising that i am clearly not expecting to meet someone i don't recognise.

"no." i reply, but realising her predicament, i add, "but i get mistaken for him all the time."

she smiles, clearly uncomfortable, but grateful, "oh, i am so sorry, thank you," and heads off to the table a few down from me where another man sits alone. this one is right, she sits.

the client arrives and all chance to observe the world around me is obliterated. the meeting proceeds.

as we are wrapping up, another woman approaches our table, an ex colleague of my client's assistant, they talk, hurried introductions are made. our eyes meet, she looks away. 2 minutes later she is gone and the bill is paid and we are walking out the restaurant. at the door, we part and i turn and bump into another patron on the way in. it's a woman. we both apologise, pat each other reassuringly, hurry off away from the scene as quickly as possible. back in my car, i tally up four new faces. some i considered, some i did not. there was no electricity and no-one seemed to want to stay to find out more, and i felt compelled to detain no-one. i shrug, start the car, head back to the office.

the building is quiet. it is nearly 4pm, and i have an hour to get on with some admin. the brighter ones have set up 4 o'clock meetings so as to be able to go straight home. i pull the tray of paper towards me and start to process. at five thirty, one of the pa's on the floor pops her head in to say she is leaving and i am the last one left. i start, looking at the time.

"oh," i remark inanely to her smiling face, "lost track of the time! i will be leaving now too then."

"ok" she smiles; "i'll start turning the lights and things off then."

i smile back and start to shut down my machine. once that is complete, i grab my jacket and car keys, lock my door behind me and fall instep with the pa as we leave the office. she's been here a while, but i don't know her name. she nice though. not that one is ever interested in colleagues, way more trouble than it is worth. i smile at the thought. my last working day before she came is now over and i am walking out the office ticking women off an imaginary list. she catches me smiling.

"what's so funny then?" she asks with a smile of her own.

i laugh, "oh nothing really, i just feel a bit silly for losing track of the time there." i reply, putting any words into the spot between inverted comma's so as not to have to say what i am thinking.

she laughs, "well, don't worry, my lift is often late for the same reasons!"

we reach the exit to the building, and there is no car outside for her. "like today," she adds, "no lift yet."

it's getting dark, and we don't work in a very nice part of town. i volunteer to stay until her lift arrives.

she looks at me as if gauging my reasons. "you really don't have to you know." she says soberly, "i can stay inside the building until she arrives."

"i know," i say, "but at least this way you'll have some company."

we wait together for a companionable 15 minutes, exchanging inane small talk until a blue honda civic pulls up. we push through the doors into the street, and she opens the door, hops smartly in and winds down the window, "thank you for waiting with me, it was kind of you!"

"and i am sorry you had to," chirps another voice from the driver's side.

i bend over so as to be able to see in through the window.

"i..." i manage.

the driver blushes

"it was my pleasure." i choke out.

"sorry," says the driver, still blushing and looking up and down fast. then our eyes lock.

"i'll be early tomorrow, just to be sure," she says to me.

her sister laughs

"i'll be out here waiting." i say

she smiles and bites her lip slightly.

"i'll be here," i repeat.

she throws her head back and laughs, engages gear and drives off. both women wave.

here? there seem to be a few too many words for such a punchy ending – done]

tomorrow, i think, what am i doing tomorrow?

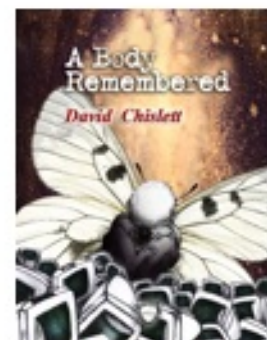
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[comments off on the last day of my so-called life](#)

word play – by julian jonker

filed under: poetry — abraxas @ 9:05 am

in the beginning was the word, word up, and, word is you've got to listen up to the

at the beginning was the word. word up. and, word is you've got to listen up to the new generation of local and international spoken word artists. but, writes julian jonker, the word already has a long history off the page.

i fell in love with spoken word on one of those sweltering summer cape town days hanging out at greenmarket square. a friend of mine, like a hundred soap-box evangelists before him, stood and yelled the words of alan ginsberg's famous poem howl at passing saturday morning shoppers. i'm still not sure why – my friend, like myself, was a wannabe high-school beat. we would hang out in coffee shops swopping battered copies of jack kerouac and tapes of weird underground music. anything to disrupt the city's saturday morning complacency, anything to prick ears. the next weekend my friend was approached by somebody who told him he had done just that. i was sold.

poetry is meant to be read – aloud. poets are meant to speak. this is something i first suspected years ago when i heard a recording of dylan thomas once in a high school english class. in europe literacy acted as a class divide, and eventually created a divide between 'high' and 'pop' culture. spoken word, with the fierce energy of a-literacy, is exciting because it ignores that divide. spoken word favours the disfavoured, it empowers the disempowered. it draws power from the musicality and rhythm of patois and accent and anything that is non-standard language.



yet traditions of performed literature stretch far back before slam poetry, before hip-hop, before even dylan thomas and other dead poets. in africa and the diaspora, spoken word is neither novel nor faddish. in south africa the tradition of izibongi – or praise poets – is continued by poets such as zolani mkhize, madiba's praise singer. the tradition found an updated form during the 80s in poet of the people mzwakhe mbuli, whose voice, reverberating at rallies and funerals during the struggle, became synonymous with defiance.

figures similar to the imbongi exist in countries further north. the most widely known example is the west african djeli, better known by the french term griot. the djeli belongs to a special caste of musician-storytellers, and acts also as an oral historian of the community. traditions such as this are also mirrored in the african diaspora, in forms such as brazil's cordel literature: poetry printed on newspaper and hung out on washing lines strung up outside the poets' stalls, read aloud to passers-by. in the caribbean, calypso singers challenge each other to duels of words, a practice influenced in by ceremonial kalinda fighting.

similar traditions exists across the world, and are brought together with contemporary forms every two years at an event in new york city. this event, the peoples poetry gathering, is curated by one of the original slam poets, bob holman. holman's involvement is indicative: slam poetry has in many ways been playing an integral role in bringing the various traditions and movements of spoken word into

public awareness.

slam poetry, a movement originating in the us, involves setting poets against each other in competition and allowing the crowd to participate, raucously if possible. it is an antithesis to the academic anaemia of traditional poetry readings. the term 'slam poetry' is now often used simply to refer to a style of poetry that has emerged from these settings to become the public face of spoken word.

slam started in a run-down bar in chicago called the green mill tavern when poet marc smith held a series of readings with rowdy audience participation in the mid-80s. the chicago scene had roots further back than this. in 1980 poet jerome salla, who was reading poems like "give piss a chance", inspired by john lennon's recent death, was reading at a chicago venue when local musician jimmy desmond tried to knock him over the head with a chair. desmond later challenged salla to a fight to the death – by poetry. the two dressed up in boxing gear and battled while bikini-clad women roamed the ring, and the audience held up score cards as if at a genuine boxing match.

both salla and desmond came from the chicago punk rock scene, and it was the confrontational, chaotic energy of punk that informed the early anti-academic, anti-art tendencies of slam.

spoken word has always been an element of punk and post-punk hardcore music, perhaps because of its political possibilities. jello biafra, one time leader of the seminal punk band the dead kennedys, is an example of a punk rocker who has moved entirely into spoken word territory, regularly delivering his counter-establishment rants to audiences around the world.

spoken word was also an integral part of punk's evolution into post-punk experimentalism. this progression was typified by poet and singer patti smith, who started out giving public 'readings' of improvised poetry in the early 70s, before carrying on to become the darling of the new york art-rock scene. smith paved the way for the strange incantations of 90s rock experimenters sonic youth. in a similarly experimental vein, we have our own buckfever underground, an outfit from grahamstown who specialise in reciting poetry over feedback-bleeding guitars.

punk rockers have not denied their literary influences either. henry rollins, vocalist of the seminal us post-punk band, black flag, has become equally well known through spoken word tours and for setting up his own book press, 2.13.61. besides publishing new work by writers like rollins and nick cave, rollins also pays homage to his influences by republishing works by hubert selby, jr. and henry miller. this association with seminal beat writer miller is an acknowledgement of the influence of the 'beat generation', a group of counter-cultural writers who glorified the speed of jazz, cheap highs and living on the road, and which came to be typified by.

the beats, including characters such as jack kerouac, alan ginsberg, and william burroughs, were the white anti-establishment of 50s america. in ginsberg's words, they were "angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection/to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night..." they wrote in a stream of consciousness mode that is often invoked by spoken word forms, and their poetry was strongly influenced by the wild energy of be-bop performance. for kerouac the actual writing of each book was a performance, as he raced to finish them on a battered typewriter in qaalude and alcohol fuelled marathons. kerouac was the high prophet of the road, whitman on amphetamines. but the definitive text produced by this generation was a poem by allan ginsberg called howl, which my friend one day yelled at passersby one saturday morning.

if subsequently the charisma of slam has become more closely associated with hip-hop than beat poetry or even punk, it's because hip-hop always had the best lines anyway. hip-hop first revitalised poetry in the 80s when kids turned their baseball caps back to front and started rhyming over beats. due in no small amount to the influence of spoken word, there is now a growing consciousness of hip-hop's continued vitality amongst a new generation of artists. mzansi hip-hop too, with the

complex word play of new groups like fifth floor and the twisted rhymes of cape town mc mutated lung. meanwhile mitchells-plain based mc native sword rhymes in cape ghetto patois about “aktualiteite/feite/van werklose mense/in flêtse sonder ruite”.

in any case, hip-hop and spoken word have a long shared history. the punk-bred slam scene met its hip-hop roots when it spread to new york, where it found a natural home at a spot in alphabet city called the nuyorican poets café. one of the founders of the nuyorican was poet and playwright ntozake shange, one of a generation of artists who came to inspire both hip-hop and spoken word during the 70s.

at the age of 19 shange had already made a series of suicide attempts, including sticking her head in an oven and attempting to drive her car into the pacific. she never succeeded, and several years later penned her groundbreaking classic, for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf, which combined the rhythmicity of poetry with theatre to form what she called a ‘choreo poem’. shange’s poetry was all about “rappin’ a english we make up as we go along/turnin’ nouns into verbs braids into crowns”.

there were other performers taking inspiration from black consciousness during this period, most notably gil scott-heron and the last poets. the last poets combined street poetry and social commentary chanted over drumming, and are now often name-checked as the roots of hip-hop. the group took its name from a struggle poem by south african poet koerapetse kgositsile : “when the moment hatches in time’s womb / there will be no art talk / the only poem you will hear will be the spearpoint / pivoted in the punctured marrow of the villain / ...therefore we are the last poets of the world.”

there is a satisfying circularity in kgositsile’s appearance with the urban voices festival alongside the last poet’s descendants, sarah jones and saul williams. the festival featured another older icon, mutabaruka, who is known for a form of spoken word called dub poetry: socio-political commentary, often black conscious influenced, chanted to the stubborn riffs of reggae in the style of the toasting that accompanied jamaican sound systems. often credited with the ‘invention’ of this style is reggae artist and poet linton kwesi johnson, who forsook rastafarianism for a more militant socialist stance, often opening for british punk bands in the late 70s.

the influence of lkj and dub poetry can be seen on those working outside of the reggae scene, most notably our own maverick oral poet lesego rampolokeng, who performed his brutally graphic poetry with the kalahari surfers during the early nineties. rampolokeng’s brand of incendiary lyrics was also influenced by earlier south african poets such as ingoapele madingoane and lefifi tladi, who currently performs with jazz heavy weight zim ngqawana. meanwhile warrick sony, who was the kalahari surfers in its entirety, had also been turning out stream of consciousness verse over dub and punk influenced tape experiments during the 80s.

south african poets have not been quiet since. in the cape we have the goema inspired poetry of loit sols and jethro louw, who recently joined forces with other poets and musicians to form the khoi konnexion. the khoi konnexion poets play with cape patois and phonetic spelling much like the dub poets do with jamaican patois. the poetry scene in jozi is busy with hip-hop influenced shows by organix and kush collective. in cape town experimentalists like croc-e-moses in cape town, and theatre-influenced performers like warona seane and malaika ndlovu thrive. even breyten breytenbach recently released an album in which he recites his poems to music.

spoken word is vibrant, unapologetic and now! slam poetry especially is television literature, blaring technical rhymes for the satellite generation. as slam pioneer bob holman pointed out, it is also democratic: “the universal remote control is being passed into your hands.” perhaps then the revolution will be televised. locally we’ve already seen television ad campaigns for metro fm and yfm using spoken word poetry, taking cues from similar campaigns by the gap in the us. more substantial

perhaps is the international success of marc levin's movie slam, plus the making of a documentary on the slam scene called slam nation. it's a new dawn, either for literature or for pop culture. these days even mtv stages poetry tours.

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[comments \(4\)](#)

the last shall be first: an innerview with umar bin hassan of the last poets

[filed under: music,music and exile symposium,politics — abraxas @ 9:03 am](#)



by jr

although new york dominated the early hip hop scene and told the world that people like bambaataa and the furious five were some of the founding mcs, decades later those historians stand to be corrected. at least a decade before breakdancing and djing hit the scene, you had people like the legendary wordsmiths gil scott-heron and the last poets on the scene ripping and rhyming and putting down revolutionary mc'ing to complement the times.

a time when james brown was rapping, say it loud, i m black and i m proud over a break beat, that people today would say is a hip hop beat, and the black panther party was in the streets arming the black community with revolutionary teaching and ways of solving our problems. many people will say mistakenly that the music that we call hip hop didn't come out of this, but in reality the last poets were some of

the first rappers with their raw words and revolutionary lyrics that set the stage for songs like the message to be made. so for all of ya ll that are hip hopped out, bow down and let our elder umar bin hassan of the last poets teach ya ll something

jr: you are out at the malcolm x jazz festival, and it is kind of like a reunion with you and people like amiri baraka and tarika lewis out here – how does it feel to be black in the bay?

umar: aah, brotha, please, back when we were younger back up in harlem, we was going through all kind of things together, amiri baraka and the last poets. that s when the cultural thing was going. basically when the sistas was in the dashikis, the sistas was in the geles, we was ready, man. we were trying to make some changes in the society, you know.

and there was days where we went up against the police – sometimes we went up against ourselves – we were trying to bring the black community up. but as you lately know, they found a way to bring in the crack and the bling-bling and the gangster rap to bring us down again, but this (malcolm x jazz festival) is important for black people to come together culturally with some real culture to share with each other, because there are some of us who need this, man, who are looking for the real stuff again. so it s a blessing to be here and i am grateful to be here. thank the almighty.

jr: what part does culture play in educating our people, specifically black people?

umar: well, brotha, if you don t know who you are, then you don t know where you are going. culture tells you where you come from, where you should be at now, and where you should be going. culture is very important to us, man, because you know they stripped us of our culture when we came here. they stripped us of our religions, our names, our sense of music, our sense of who we are, our sense of how we were craftsmen. they took it all from us, like you are slaves in that sense. so this has been a monumental journey and battle for us to come back here, to try to bring things back together again. so culture is very important, man. it s about who you are and what you should be doing in the future.

jr: what s the importance of events like this in relation to educating the community? and why are you here?

umar: because it brings people together and i am anywhere where people are together, because i am a people person, because i grew up in the streets as a young boy, a young hustler through junior high school and high school. i love being amongst the people. matter of fact, i am the only person in the last poets who was voted into the group by people. everybody else joined or became a member, but the people elected and voted me into the group. so i guess that s why i hang out with them, because i got to represent, since i am the people s poet. i represent.

jr: how long has the last poets been around, and how did you get into poetry?

umar: we ve been around since 1968. it started in marcus garvey park in new york city on may 19, malcolm x s birthday. some brothas, abiodun, my partner who works with me now but is not here, gylan kane and david nelson – they were going around harlem doing poems, and they said why don t we get together and do some stuff together on malcolm s birthday. so they got together on may 19 at marcus garvey park in harlem, and they did some stuff and it went along pretty well.

so they said that we are going to need a name. what are we going to call ourselves? so david nelson, who was reading a poem, some poetry work about a brotha little willie kgositsile from south africa, he read one of his poems called a walk toward the sun, and in that poem little willie kgositsile says that these will be the last days of our talk, music and dance, so therefore we are the last poets of this age. so that s how the name came about.

when the moment hatches in time s womb, there will be no art talk. the only poem you will hear will be the spearpoint pivoted in the punctured marrow of the villain.

... therefore we are the last poets of the world.

i got into it, when i saw them brothas at a black arts festival in college in yellow springs, ohio. i was head of security, guarding the people and protecting them from any outside influences during the festival, and i saw the brothas on stage. i said, wow. after they came off stage, i said that i m writing some stuff too. i want to do what ya ll do. hook me up. they said, well, if you get some time, come up to our loft at the easter inn in harlem on 125th street. i made it that way, and bloom, blam, blam, bloom, and one thing led to another.

jr: how does it feel being an elder and looking back and seeing hip hop artists like dead prez and those that are trying to keep it real in ya ll s vein? how does it feel?

umar: well i m glad cuz, you know, stic and m-1, these are young brothas that we done worked with and dealt with, and we probably will in the future. and plus chuck d of public enemy – as a matter of fact i got a cd over there now that the company america records put out with chuck d on it, and they didn t promote. i m selling them now. so we work with these young brothas, and we re glad that they are out there and still projecting us. they just did a documentary on us on tv, bravo (channel), and krs-1 gave us a nice big plus too. so we respect and we love those brothas, and we re grateful to be here in their time, too.

jr: if your grandchildren were seeking some fulfillment in music or through words, who are some of the people that you listen to?

umar: first of all, if anybody is seeking knowledge, go to the library and get a book. always get a book because you know that there is that joke, if you want to keep something away from black people, put it in a book, because we don t read. so that s the first thing: go get a book. some of the people that i listen to are miles davis, charlie parker, louis armstrong. richard pryor was one of my favorites, the temptations, the whole motown sound. that s what inspired me to want to get up and see my genius come into the fold and see my talent and imagination serve the people, because i have those before me. and being a young boy back then, i always gave respect to those who came before me, not like some of these young kids do, because they think that they created everything, but they haven t. so once you learn how to do that, to have respect for those that came before you, you too will move forward, you know.

jr: in your work, what has motivated you?

umar: well first off, i came out of the hood, and the poem that i wrote, niggers is scared of revolution, everybody said, wow, i don t know how you wrote that. i used to be a real nigger. i just took some of the things around my environment and my circumstances and put them into intellectual and cultural and uplifting ways to try to change niggers, you know? cuz i know how niggers act, i didn t use the word nigger to be cute or to be casual, but i wanted to use the word nigger to expunge the niggerness out of us. so we could change into black people, into africans, into human beings. but yeah, everything that is around you is available for you to grasp and for you to share with other human beings.

jr: do you have anything new that s out?

umar: i got a new cd, solo.

jr: what s the solo called?

umar: it s called down to the last.

jr: any concluding thoughts?

umar: yeah, i m glad to be here and i am grateful. thank allah for letting me be here to do this and be able to speak to you and share some thoughts and opinions with you and your listeners. peace.

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this innerview first published here

comments off on the last shall be first: an innerview with umar bin hassan of the last poets

february 17, 2010

discussion between kendell geers, daniel buren and nicolas bourriaud

filed under: art — abraxas @ 10:35 pm

april 2004

nb: kendell, what is your relationship to daniel buren and why did you want to take part in this discussion?

kg: one of the first significant works that i made as an artist took the form of an extremely abstract idea that is also absolutely non-physical in that it cannot be reduced to an object. in 1993, just after the venice biennale, i changed my date of birth to may 1968. this referred to the political challenges that took place in prague, mexico and san francisco in that month, and especially the consequences of the paris uprising. at the same time there were also protests in venice against apartheid and south africa's participation in the biennale. that was the last year south africa was invited to the biennale until 1993, so the date effectively marked the beginning of the cultural boycott specifically for the plastic arts. it was also the month in which marcel duchamp died. in changing the date of the most fundamental event of my life, i was trying to articulate a sense that we are more than the sum of our days, that events outside our control can influence and change us perhaps more radically than familial ties. i was trying to locate my origins within a particular psychological, political, philosophical and aesthetic space that has nothing to do with my biological parents or cultural heredity. i was always interested in the spirit of may '68, the idea of being subversive, a utopian conception of art. i remember images from may '68 in which the proclamations of the situationist international and daniel buren's stripes were juxtaposed on the same billboards. for me this represented a very strong historical moment in which art was able to function intelligently within a social context, where it was political and yet still functioned as art. in this way daniel has been a very strong influence on my thinking, as have the situationists.

nb: and daniel, what interests you about kendell's work?

db: listening to what has been said, i suddenly feel much older than i did before – or perhaps kendell is much younger than i thought! i remember the first time we met, on a bus trip in japan. it was a good opportunity to exchange ideas, and from what i have subsequently seen of his work i think it touches on topics that i am very interested in. i have some questions, not as an artist but in relation to the possible ways in which the activity of the artwork can exist or function. so there is a double curiosity. art touches on something very sensitive and difficult when political or sociological problems are introduced, not in terms of sociological problems but in relation to the field of art and how aesthetically such an investigation takes place. my difficulty with this is quite personal, but it immediately opens up a lot of questions about the position of anyone who directly confronts these problems through objects. this automatically takes one back to something which for me has to be extremely concrete. that is what these objects are, because you are not only dealing with the theoretical. but perhaps i can develop this more clearly later in the discussion.

nb: i remember a text you wrote, daniel, in which you said that the first thing one must deal with in art is architecture. you were considering this on one hand from the point of view of the building, and on the other in terms of context. of course, the

artist does not come from the moon and suddenly walk into an idealised space. what you are dealing with is not apolitical, and it is not an asocial reality either. but you have two different ways to refuse this idealistic position, two different answers to the notion of context.

db: we must not forget that when i started to make those comments or texts, the museums and galleries where i was exhibiting were very idealistic spaces. i think that today these spaces are still idealistic but much, much less so. today we have to be more cautious because we can no longer do whatever we like in these places. there is still idealism, but not as much as there was maybe 35 years ago.

kg: i think that anything is possible today – and perhaps this is the difference between our sensibilities and approaches to art within different moments in time. you can do absolutely anything, but i don't see the gallery or museum space (and to me they are interchangeable today) as being in any way idealistic. i see them as being economic. this is fundamental.

db: i was trying to say that the prevailing spirit in the museum at that time was this sense of idealism where you could do more or less what you wanted to. certainly today, this is no longer the case.

nb: this is a personal belief, but i really think that the generation of the 1960s, like yourself or michael asher or jon knight, considered the art space, the gallery, the museum, as a metaphor for society. i think the generation that appeared in the 1990s does not consider the art space as a metaphor or symbol of society, but as a part of society that is fully integrated into the system – just as a bakery is part of the city. i agree that idealism was previously much stronger.

db: in fact, for me the art space was never accepted as metaphorical. it was generally seen as a metaphor for something, maybe an ideal position, an ideal work of art. particularly at that time i thought it was very important and necessary to show that the museum or gallery was a part of society like anything else because this was not taken for granted at all. nobody was thinking about the envelope, the architecture, which was real, which was always there and yet was absent from the discussions. what does this envelope mean? does it have any meaning for the world or not? like the museum's metaphorical position as a whole. does the person who puts the show together have any influence on the space, even if they are just putting paintings on the wall? it was certainly my tendency to criticise and somehow to show that this idealism was completely false. i agree with kendell that it is no longer like that today, that this idealism has been shattered and the economy has become much more important, much more of a problem.

nb: kendell, your work counteracts a very different type of idealism to that which daniel was dealing with then. how would you categorise it?

kg: the biggest struggle for me as an artist has been trying to negotiate my way through a space that is economically determined, and to create a voice that is my own to speak with. it's a very big issue, being spoken for or speaking for yourself. this can be extremely frustrating because the first thing that an economically determined structure does, if you try to question it, is "buy" you in. after that it reduces you to just another aspect of its economy. of course it's a double bind because one needs this economy to an extent in order to exist, to make work, to find a voice. i have tried over the years to create works of art that are either impossible to sell, such as changing my date of birth, or else very difficult to live with psychologically, emotionally or physically. the very real threat or physical danger to one's life within a work of art that uses a 6 000 volt electric fence prevents the reduction of the work to an economic function. i have been asked numerous times to show that work again outside of south africa but without the electricity running, and the answer is always "no". there is something ironic about refusing to exhibit a work of art that in a museum cannot be touched, on the grounds that it may be touched. there is a great deal of the idealism that daniel speaks about in my work because of the circumstances of my education. growing up in apartheid south africa, i would read through the archives and magazines and art history books trying to learn about what was happening in the world, and i was very much engaged with that moment in time,

that idealistic moment. i skipped over the 1980s and the neo-geo stuff because it just did not seem applicable in south africa. within the context of apartheid one had no other option but to be critical and idealistic and to use art as a way to question structures, whether social or aesthetic. it was from this perspective that i developed my practice. at the same time i'm part of a generation that grew up watching mtv, dallas and dynasty, like anyone living in paris or elsewhere in the world. from the very beginning i was trying to bring those two things together and deal with questions of values and economy. how does the economy intersect with art and how does one avoid the dangers of a fashion-based system that assimilates every potential threat? the greater the risk to the status quo, the faster you will be assimilated as the latest fashion. how does one escape that?

db: i think it's a never-ending struggle and also one of the most difficult struggles for an artist – even if you are aware of the problem, because i think there are artists who would prefer to be assimilated, to be fashionable. in fact i think the majority of artists would prefer this. most just don't see the problem, or don't care, and then there are a very few who both care about it and try to fight it, even in their own production. this is one of the biggest problems as you cannot allow yourself to get lost, to be forced into suicide, because the majority of people within the system will push you in that direction if you attempt such a path. you have to continue to work and think critically and that is the most difficult thing at any time.

nb: isn't there a paradox for this generation of artists and curators, including myself, who, as kendell said, grew up in front of mtv and are always trying to escape it, but for whom being assimilated is completely inevitable?

db: it is very difficult but it demonstrates a difference in time, a different reaction – a difference also of origins, even if we are in the same world. there are the specific problems of where you live and work, but it's important to see that certain goals are really the same, even if you cannot fight with the same weapons. it is interesting that the more time passes, the more difficult it becomes for the artist, but occasionally you begin to see echoes in the work of younger artists with similar intentions. this is one of the things i see in kendell's work and it gives me the strength to say that perhaps it was not totally wrong to think the way i did back then. i think that is what you learn from a younger generation. i also have to deal with things that are in some ways completely antagonistic. for example, kendell stressed the need to fight against being drawn into something that ultimately means you lose control of your own production. this is something i try to do in my work, and i think i succeed, at least objectively, with the idea of works that are specific to place, etc. with some exceptions from the very early years this means that if a collector buys a piece, 90 percent of the time the piece cannot be resold. not because there is no right to resell but because physically it is totally impossible. that was my way of working around this problem. it is very difficult to economically speculate on these works. when you produce a work where you do everything you can to make it impossible for it to be touched, physically speaking, it would seem to be for very similar reasons. it is also interesting to compare, not whether one is better than the other, but the obligation to participate in the creation of your work after it has been exhibited or sold. what is your position, for example, when you make a work which is dangerous to somebody else?

kg: the implications of danger are extremely important to the psychology of most of my production, because it is really about trying to make the viewing of art conscious and active, rather than passive. so when the viewer walks into a situation where they feel or become fragile, it's a psychological or emotional situation. the danger is often more in your head than in reality. when you are feeling fragile or vulnerable, be it physically or emotionally, you become aware of yourself in that space, of your body. for the show in rome there is broken glass everywhere, and if you go blindly running about the space you'll hurt yourself, but then again you're not going to go running precisely because it's dangerous and you feel insecure within the architecture. you walk carefully, and in your disorientation and sense of fragility you start becoming aware of your value system, of how you are constructed inside language or a particular culture, and how you are defined by your taboos. what is considered

violent or dangerous in one culture is not in another. i work with danger, violence, transgression and taboo because i believe it's the only way to confront the ideological makeup of a person. at the end of the 1960s there was a global debate about the political use of violence, with the passive resistance of people like gandhi on the one hand and the call to arms "by any means necessary" by people like nelson mandela, malcolm x and frantz fanon on the other. based on my experiences in south africa i believe that the passive option does not work, and did not work there even for gandhi. it's not about using violence as an image, or even about an aestheticisation of violence, for i am totally opposed to work like that, but an embodiment of real violence.

nb: even violence can be appropriated by society – it's sellable. the capitalist system is such an effective machine of assimilation that we could ask ourselves, is it worth trying not to be "recuperated"? could there be another way of fighting the system?

kg: that is the problem, the contradiction, so i try to create objects which are very difficult to resell, or very difficult to transport or put in a domestic environment, and that has worked until now. my work is not highly collectable. some of it does get collected but then people don't know how to live with it. they don't know how to process and digest that violence. the day will come when it gets digested and i hope i'm not alive to witness that.

db: i accept that when you work consciously with certain aspects, such as the possible danger of the work, you automatically control the reception of it to a degree. i am thinking about the work of joseph beuys and how when he was still alive he agreed to have his fat corners replaced with plastic imitations that looked the same but were fundamentally the opposite of what he said he was trying to do. i always think that, if the artist accepts such a thing in their lifetime, agrees to destroy what i thought was the key point of the piece – the decaying, the smell, the impossibility of conserving it – then all the artist's work is compromised and their ideas are destroyed. where does the work of art exist? if my reading of the work was correct, that it existed outside of the aesthetic, it was about this decaying stuff ... i think it's a great idea to make a work which is decaying, but when a museum says that they have to use "plastic surgery" and make an imitation that looks the same but is completely different, then i honestly think the project is a failure. for as long as you are still alive, when you present a work that uses danger as a medium, and i know this does not apply to all your work, these works will remain outside the normal, social, fashionable, consuming art world. a piece of broken glass that is dangerous will remain dangerous forever. unless you compromise it will always be understood that such a work has to exist within a specific context, your context. you have found a way to make being transformed into an aesthetic commodity very difficult – but perhaps then the piece can never be shown and might never be accepted as a work of art.

kg: it is not really my concern to prevent the works from being sold as much as it is to resist being recuperated in the form of fashion, to reduce my ideas to their material aesthetic form. my work is a simultaneous expression of destruction and construction. my challenge is not to the world in general but very precisely and specifically to the system of art. from within the context of this very rarefied social world i am interested in the psychology of violence, danger and taboo. there are also some more poetic aspects to my work but this poetry very often also relies on the expression of a violence or transgression inserted within the domain of verbal language. for my show *terrorealismus* in zurich there was a neon piece that read "danger", but the "d" was broken and flickering so it transformed into "anger". the same for "terror" and "error", or "border" and "order". it is about the psychology of things you can't control. i am drawn to the things that art cannot touch: extreme phenomena, emotional states, things that are supposed to remain beyond the space of the white cube. i drag those things in from reality, into the white cube, like a dog after the hunt, as a form of contamination. it's interesting that wherever i show works with broken glass and concrete somebody will tell me that they remember from their childhood how this technique was used on walls as a form of security. the practice has long since disappeared because in reality it's quite ineffective today.

except in an art gallery it seems very quaint today and perhaps that's the point – being in the art gallery where it does not seem to belong makes a world of difference. the art gallery is the precise space of the transgression in which the violence is acted out and that makes a huge difference. i always said that i became an artist to keep out of jail and i was not speaking metaphorically. you can do these things in art and nowhere else, and that's interesting.

nb: i recently read a very good book about art written by the french sociologist pierre-michel menger (1): he writes that the art world functions exactly the way that capitalism should function, especially its “working system by project”. it's organised like a type of mutating capitalist micro-system that could be a role model.

kg: my conception of the object is as an embodiment of an ideological structure. whether it's a broken bottle or a security sign or a border fence, the object is the material manifestation of an ideological system, and especially when somebody is prepared to exhibit it and somebody else is prepared to buy it ... the work is in fact a kind of garbage. a broken bottle whose use value has been depleted which is then sold as art is the ultimate embodiment of the social system that secreted that object. in a way it's about where language and value systems become physical. i think of objects and the ways they fit or don't fit into the social world but are then hijacked into the art system, a system that is itself the purest embodiment of excess capital.

nb: the fact remains that subversive or engaged art cannot be appreciated from the market point of view because capitalism has proved itself to be the perfect recuperation machine. it can recuperate anything, even what is not sellable. everything can be turned into a commodity so we are fighting against something that is impossible to beat. the way the machine operates today in terms of fashion means that everything can be turned into an object or a commodity and sold. but the machine cannot be psychologically appropriated. are there things that won't fit into the machine, like a grain of sand? does the battle have to shift elsewhere?

kg: one of the things that i know you are interested in is the idea of post-production. for much of my production, and especially the video work, i don't make things so much as steal them, shifting their context and hijacking them to a different end. when i work with an existing image or object and shift it, i don't conceive of it as sampling in a dj sense, or even plagiarism as the situationists did, but as pure theft. it is about stealing the images from hollywood, from cnn, literally taking images and reworking them. it's about taking my experience of that media world and making my experience physical. i don't make a distinction between the realities inside the television and those outside it, for both affect and change us equally. i am very consciously trying to not resist that economy of images so much as reverse the process of consuming into a cannibalisation of the image. the question of copyright is very much connected to what i believe are my rights as a consumer, and the right to digest or assimilate what you devour.

db: but with such a position, with this type of work, you are excluded completely from almost any kind of public work.

kg: absolutely. that is absolutely true.

nb: in the last show i curated, playlist, there was a work by sam durant that deliberately uses a robert smithson piece from the mid-1970s. or take other artists who are “duplicating” the work of older artists. in a way art is the last place where such behaviour is possible. it's basically a much freer system, the art world still does not have the same copyright problems, but the bad thing is that the reason for this might be the lack of financial stakes ...

db: i don't know. our society, as a capitalist society, can accept and buy absolutely everything. but in reality i think we see that a lot of things are completely rejected, and the best or worst of these are rejected forever, which means they are really going nowhere. there's no example that jumps to mind but i think that the majority of work produced is rejected. some things are brought back and there seems to be a capacity to finally accept some ideas many years after they were first rejected. so

even if something is rejected, we are not absolutely sure if the rejection is forever or for a couple of decades or centuries. and from that point i would like to jump to something that i am always thinking about, which for me is one of the most tragic aspects of an artist's production. as soon as the creation of a work of art is directly related to a specific political event or idea, we encounter something that i would like to talk about. consider the history of artists who have been directly involved in showing extremely strong political situations, like goya. or picasso's guernica, to take two concrete examples. what we have today, which was certainly the case as soon as it was made, is that when you stand in front of such a work, you know that it is a chef-d'oeuvre, a masterpiece, and the strength of the work becomes, with time, more important than the reason it was made. i don't doubt that the artists made the works not only because they were artists but as their best way of responding to something that was incomprehensible to them, something politically unbearable. but when so many other artists approach the same type of theme – and of course hundreds of them do – it's clear that they don't have the same talent. what they do has the same emotional quality but not the strength to survive time. i don't see any other way out: either you make a chef-d'oeuvre, and one way or another this chef-d'oeuvre will also express a political idea or remain a symbol of peace, or the work will effectively function as propaganda and be washed away at the end of the strike or the war.

kg: i think that art is political not in the way that it expresses the sentiments or political opinion of its creator but in the way that the viewer relates to it. the best political art demands a response from us, demands a position of us in a way that is far bigger than the specific subject. i am interested in how history acts upon us and how we respond to histories as artists. when i look at the work being produced today, there is so much that blatantly rips off the past without it being a quotation or even a reference, being neither iconoclastic nor even a homage. it seems perfectly normal today for artists to rip one another off, freeloading off history and basically reducing everything to a style. there seems to be no honour among thieves, as artists rape and pillage styles and languages that in their original context were precise and of consequence, emptying out all the politics by reducing them to the decorative.

nb: the fact is that this notion of history discriminates between interesting artists and bad ones. in a funny way the values of modernity and the avant-garde and everything that interested me since the beginning of my conscious life were in a way very distant because it was the present that was the focus and priority. in contemporary art the present is the absolute value, but the fact is that the present is totally determined by the past. history, and the way we remember the past, becomes very important because you need the memory of it in order to forget it. if you consider the most interesting artists, they are always working with an idea of history. but there are also those who work in an amnesiac way, who are the vast majority.

kg: this drives me crazy. i make a work in which i take chevron tape, which is basically red and white stripes, and wrap specific historical objects and nobody asks if there's a connection to daniel buren, ever! for me it's obvious, like a neon sign flashing, but there's never a discussion about it, which drives me crazy because you put all this effort into the work, and references, and the work is conceived of as a matrix. but i am an iconoclast. i hate history, i try to destroy history, but at the same time i know the history i am trying to destroy. i am not copying buren but quoting him, "killing the father", saying that i am a product of histories and that to understand my relation to the present it's necessary to understand how the past intersects with it too.

nb: among the younger generation of artists, many are trying to be fashionable and have reached that point where anything at all is possible for the sake of fashion.

db: what i don't like about a part of the art world, which is very personal and not very objective, is this incredible confusion between the worlds of fashion and pop music and art. even in the 1960s i was shocked by this attitude. it was one of the things that someone like bob morris was trying to do in the late 1960s. he was doing everything possible to stay ahead after having been a strong minimalist. for example

he made posters of himself with the extremely naive idea of competing with the beatles – with another world where things are much more popular than they could ever be in art. it seems to me that today many artists dream of being pop stars, and so of course they have to make works of art that are like that: loud, quick, spectacular, like advertising, all things we know and that are in themselves quite interesting. where this fails is because these artists do not want to take the same risks as pop stars who mostly disappear after five years. they still want to be like an artist who continues to be interesting even when they are 60. i'm not saying that we should take older people more seriously, but when you see someone who has a body of 30 or 40 years' serious work, he or she gets a lot more respect than someone who has done only 10 years. and that has always been something to consider, whether the quality of work has been consistently good for 40 years.

nb: in general, what did the last documenta tell us? there was huge competition with films and documentaries everywhere, videos about indian-pakistani borders, life in albania – hundreds of examples of it ...

db: not even as good as a report in paris match!

nb: much worse actually, and that is the problem.

db: it looks as though artists today are trying to compete with entertainment, like music, television, cinema, and they seem to have a fantasy about being a film director or fashion designer and this is very dangerous.

nb: it is very dangerous, above all for those who are playing with the concept. i think there could even be a future for this – it could evolve into a new cultural phenomenon, with all the risks and conditions that this implies. so we forget art history as we know it today. we forget the art market as it is today, and we turn to another art market that still doesn't exist.

db: the supermarket?

nb: yes, for example.

db: but that has nothing to do with making 200 million works, like andy warhol, even if people always use this as a reference. i think it is completely different.

kg: i have a question for daniel, because this is the world that we're living in now, the world that, as an artist, i have to take cognisance of. as i said i often steal images from cnn and mtv because they are on my horizon and unavoidably part of my reality. now i want to go back to those images from may '68 when paris was burning and those posters were being put up. it's interesting for me how you, as an artist, were able to be so focused in such an explosive context. you kept your purity and created something that, for me, outlives a lot of the images from that period – and there were a lot of very strong images. you were in that world, in that context, and you made a very beautiful logic out of it. how did you manage that?

db: i don't know if this is an answer, but i started to do the poster project as an activity about 10 months before may '68 and then at the time of the protests i became, like many people, directly involved. but what was happening in the art world was also interesting to see. i would go, for example, to a meeting in the sorbonne with workers and academics and someone with something to say would begin, "i am so and so, working ..." but the audience would respond, "shut up, we don't care who you are, please make your speech." everyone was trying to say something. and then i would go to a meeting with 600 artists also at the sorbonne but in another room. as soon as you started talking about what needed to be done to change the museum, to understand the priorities, why as artists we were treated like stupid arseholes, they would respond: "but who are you? who are you?" there was a guy called julio le parc and when he spoke there was silence because at the time he was an important artist in paris. then the guy next to him tried to say something and everybody would ask, "but who are you?" and they did not listen because they did not know him and thus did not care.

nb: so the truth was that the artists were those most alienated in may '68?

db: that is an example i witnessed with my own eyes and it was absolutely incredible how this huge world and this small art world were on completely different planets. but then once it all began the artists declared: "the city is for us – we can use the wall, this space." i was very frustrated as i had already been doing this for almost a year, and i thought then that my project was over, that i couldn't do it any more. i know this could be understood as my saying i wanted to compete by being "original". but it was not only about that. it was also because the meaning of what i wanted to do with my work at that time would have been completely reduced because everyone was putting their posters or paintings of cows and trees and even abstract works on the streets of paris. if it had been my intention to start making that work, and then '68 had happened before i was able to start, i would never have done it. i stopped doing it because it became something fashionable being done by everybody. then as soon as the artists lost interest in the streets and wanted to show their work in galleries or museums i started to do it again.

kg: those works were very much in the spirit of '68 and yet they survived as works in themselves. i don't think it was luck, i think it was about understanding the time, even before the time. it's that chef-d'oeuvre you were speaking about. but the question for my generation is how to make sense of the logic of mtv – that is of "empty v" or "empty vision" where everything is possible and therefore nothing has consequence. the problem today is that absolutely anything is possible and everything is equal.

nb: this reminds me of a discussion we had before your sympathy for the devil show here at the palais de tokyo: you told me that you were sensing a void, that there was no content, no meaning any more in art, and you wanted to reactivate meaning by going back, trying to recapture what you called the "spirit of the renaissance", if i remember correctly. what did you do with that? was it productive?

kg: that show came at the end of one year of my not producing any new work. i made a decision because of my own personal crisis and frustration with the art system to stop making art and instead to read and think about art, life, politics and so forth. i looked back through history trying to understand why artists made work and what their relation was to the world they lived in. i became much more interested in renaissance and pre-renaissance art – people like jan van eyck, lucas cranach or the so-called flemish primitives, dante, marlowe, goethe and leonardo da vinci of all people. i saw their works through the eyes of great occultists like papus, agrippa, bruno, levi, the golden dawn and so forth. i was drawn to the concentration of meaning in their works where nothing was left to chance, where if you put a flower in the corner of a painting it has such significance that it completely changes the meaning of the work. if it's a lily or an iris or a rose it's all very different and it has consequence, it has power, it's a symbol with a deep-rooted meaning. it's not just there for decoration. i have never really spoken publicly about this before but it is very much implicit in all of my production. i have tried to develop a logic that functions in a similar way with social and cultural symbols, references to history, a matrix of information. in a way a work like the terrorist's apprentice was the turning point and about infinite potential, the beginning of a new journey for me. i would say that one of the things that is ominously absent from contemporary art is spirituality or any belief system beyond the material and physical. i have resisted speaking of this because it's very easy to misunderstand what i am saying.

nb: you are talking about spirituality as opposed to a very cynical, vulgar definition of materialism.

kg: i mean a belief system. when i talk about spirituality, it's more like edmund burke's concept of the "sublime" in that historical moment, a sense of vertigo, a belief in something beyond the physical materialism of the present, a feeling of fear perhaps, or the exhilaration of violent change. even though i am not a christian and completely reject the church or for that matter any form of organised religion, the church has taught me a great deal about emotions. it was there that i begin to understand fear, guilt, anger and so many of the things that i felt lacking in my life

and in art. when i go to the louvre i see guilt and fear and anger in the paintings, i see pain and suffering, hunger, riots, murder, mayhem, things that the artists felt very deeply and believed in, love and death. when i go to contemporary art museums, i see nothing, just pretty colours, stupid videos with pretty colours.

db: perhaps it requires a generation of artists who are fighting for something, which is not the case today.

kg: to be even more precise, it was extremely important for me at that time to understand the power of the image. growing up in a media-saturated world where we are bombarded with images every day, the image loses its power to affect us, the text even loses its meaning. then in my research i discovered tarot cards and became quite obsessed by them. there are 78 cards and each has its own images, colours, symbols, codes and meanings. but these images are images you see around you every day. there's a woman with a lion, justice, a man hanging upside down, a burning tower and so forth. they are on the façades of every old building in paris or brussels or london but they are also on television and in the news and in our dreams. the tarot cards became a way of understanding the symbolic structure of the occidental imagination. it's a can of worms, a pandora's box, because once opened there is no going back. i am not interested in using the cards to read into the future, although that possibility remains. i am much more interested in the symbolism of the languages that we have lost or forgotten, and in trying to translate this back into my art, into my practice as a contemporary artist. this is not to try and turn back the clock to the renaissance in terms of the logic of the image, but in terms of the psychology and the structure of the image in relation to the world in which it is created. a burning tower, for instance, has a different meaning after september 11. the violence in my work thus assumes an entirely different meaning if you consider it more as a birth by fire than an anti-social statement

nb: certain themes are recurring. you are saying: let's face history again, and let's get rid of the really strange feeling that there is nothing left to fight against because of this great power of recuperation, the massive force with which the system assimilates everything that is against it. we have to rebuild the system of references in such a way as to be able to fight against something again.

db: that could be interesting as a means of relocating yourself within a position of resistance.

nb: one can illustrate this quite simply. during the cold war, cultural life was much more hierarchical. there was a clear hierarchy between values, between the different cultural systems. there was an important distinction between high culture and low culture. and then there was a need for deconstruction, for a more open situation. today everything has collapsed, not because of this analytical deconstruction but under the barrage of mass media and corporate culture. doesn't one have to rebuild a different type of hierarchy?

kg: i will give you an example of the conundrum of the present which is very surreal. in the 1960s and certainly before that, if you wanted to read about the kabbalah you had to speak to a rabbi or find a book in an antique shop or join a secret organisation. today, if you listen carefully to the latest songs of madonna, she's singing about it. everything has collapsed onto an even horizon and everything is open for abuse, from the kabbalah to kylie minogue, from popcorn to alchemy, bubblegum, whatever.

db: and this gives weaker spirits the opportunity to be reactionary ...

nb: we have to rebuild something on this horizon, after this huge collapse. i mean artists who use history as a toolbox, not those who are using it as a supermarket.

kg: i want to ask nicolas about the growing "cult of the curator" which was so well articulated in the last documenta. it was a sad day for me when we started to see curators on the front covers of magazines, and documenta was very much the tip of that iceberg so far.

nb: it is a very logical evolution somehow: if you consider the biggest stars in music today, the djs are on the same level as the musicians. organising material and objects that are already produced, curating the cultural chaos, has the most value today. trying to make people consume selected things is a major virtue in today's world. there is the level of production, and then there is a new kind of hero telling you what you should consume. now the curator is organising and arranging the consumption of art. but they can also provide grids to make art production understandable; they can articulate the works and make ideas go further.

kg: but there is a point where the curator becomes more important than the exhibition, the work of art or even the artist.

db: i wrote a text about that, about the organiser becoming the artist of the show, in 1972. it has gone a step beyond that today, as many organisers now call themselves "authors". when i wrote that article about harald szeemann, he told me that it was stupid, that it was very far from the truth, that it was just an idea, pure theory. and i responded that i had written this because it was what i could see; it was not something i was dreaming about. today he refers to himself as the "author" of an exhibition, and i think the only reason he didn't do it before was because artists in 1972 were still strong enough not to accept it. we would never have accepted an organiser who dared to say, "i am the author of this exhibition." even if he thought that, he would never have said it. but 25 or 30 years later he takes on this label. but i don't want to refer to szeemann only, because he is doing what many others have done before him. but we should not forget – and for me this is the key point about how artists think today – that if the curator can do this, it's only because the artists allow it.

nb: let's go back to what i said at the beginning about economics. most curators today are by-products of an economically driven system which is centred on entertainment, on keeping people happy for 15 seconds – it's not even 15 minutes any more – when they go to shows like the venice biennale. most of them are not even looking for art. they go to venice to be entertained, and if the art can entertain them that's a bonus, because in reality they want to go on this or that boat, or to a party ...

db: unfortunately almost all artists who are invited agree to exhibit in this context. if you speak to them, most will agree with your reservations, and yet confronted by the situation they will say, "no, it's beautiful to show it like that." in theory they are completely against it, but in the end they all participate and the machine continues to work with the effectiveness of a tank.

this interview first published on kendell geers' website

comments off on discussion between kendell geers, daniel buren and nicolas bourriaud

het alternatieve uitgaan. – de roxy

filed under: rob schroder — abraxas @ 3:40 pm

bij het afbranden van de roxy verloor amsterdam een kwaliteit; het alternatieve uitgaan. wat er overbleef is de commercie. internationaal is amsterdam alleen nog "sex en drug"s. amsterdam is zijn internationale positie als alternatieve, vernieuwende uitgaansplek dus allang kwijt. in europa heeft berlijn en sinds de crisis, sinds kort dus, londen die positie overgenomen. commercie heeft het uitgaansleven totaal overgenomen. er is geen ruimte meer voor een soort half informele plek waar mensen kunnen doen wat ze willen, waar kunst en uitgaan samen komen. waar je niet verplicht bent je klem te zuipen voor veel geld.

de ultieme documentaire over de roxy zou een stimulans kunnen zijn voor een volgende stap in het culturele uitgaansleven van amsterdam. terug kijken naar die bijzondere plek met bijzondere mensen moet een monument van die tijd worden en doet eer aan de mensen die het veroorzaakt hebben, maar moet dus ook als

voorbeeld kunnen dienen voor nieuwe initiatieven. uitgaan is ook cultuur en niet maar alleen commercie, uitgaan kan ook kunst zijn.

de invloed die de roxy had op het culturele leven van amsterdam en daar buiten is groot geweest. ook in mijn directe omgeving was dat duidelijk; je sprak af in de roxy voor werk en plezier. een aantal initiatiefnemers voor de roxy, zoals peter giele, waren mijn vrienden, dus was het voor mij makkelijk om binnen te komen op de avonden die ik wilde.

buitenlandse vrienden en collega's nam je met trots mee naar die plek, zij keken hun ogen uit. vaak leide het ook tot felle discussies; "te veel drugs" ... "dansen op de vulkaan" "teveel uiterlijk vertoon" "één grote schijnbeweging in de treurige tijd van de wereldleiders margaret tatcher en ronald reagen".

leeg is het nu in de binnenstad. niet alleen qua gevoel, er staat ook weer veel leeg. "nieuwe kansen, nieuwe rondon". laat dat uiteindelijk het motto zijn van de echte documentaire over de roxy.

comments off on het alternatieve uitgaan. – de roxy

winterland

filed under: dick tuinder — abraxas @ 3:28 pm



regie: dick tuinder

met een inleiding van de regisseur.

winterland is, na tientallen korte films, het speelfilmdebuut van dick tuinder.

in dit verhaal, dat ondanks ruimtereizen, vreemde planeten, een topcast, uitzinnige decors, muziek en animatie maar niet wil beginnen en dat aan het einde van de film feitelijk niet heeft plaatsgevonden, spelen stripfiguren naast echte acteurs die zichzelf moeten spelen maar hopeloos in de tekst en omgeving van de studio verdwalen.



winterland, nl 2010

regie & scenario: dick tuinder

prod. column film & silent woods industries

met: tara elders, kiriko mechanicus, tom jansen, marcel faber, lotte proot, ralph wingens, michiel huisman, gijs van de westelaken, femi dawkins, patrick priest, parker g. tuinder en dick tuinder.

muziek: sonja van hamel, ookoi, femi dawkins, the children.



persstemmen:

“winterland is een fascinerend debuut, een fantasierijke combinatie van live action, animatie, film-in-een-film, een duizelingwekkende opeenhoping van meerdere lagen realiteit en fantasie. beginnend met een jules verne-achtig verhaal over een stel excentrieke personages die een ruimtereis maken, zien we acteurs die verdwalen in een mysterieus bos, en beelden van de filmploeg tijdens de bewogen opnametijd. de première van winterland op het festival zorgde voor enthousiasme en discussie. want waar gaat deze film in hemelsnaam over? een film over een film in een film, een prikkelend spel tussen realiteit en fantasie.” ulrik van tongeren (ravagedigitaal.org)

“in de wereld van dick tuinder is het echte fictief en het fictieve echt. en zodra je ergens je vinger op legt, verschuift alles. hij trekt een betoverend, surrealistisch landschap op uit zelfgemaakte decorstukken, maar als het zo uitkomt, toont hij net zo lief de bordkartonnen achterkant.” bor beekman (de volkskrant)

trailer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgvc5vqjtje>

op de set bij winterland:

<http://www.cinema.nl/media/4082742>

www.dicktuinder.com

aanvang: 20 uur

toegang 3,-

weteringschans 173 amsterdam 020-3208412

comments off on winterland

nicki

filed under: danila botha,literature — abraxas @ 8:28 am

i didn't leave him because it hurt, because i was scared he'd do it again, or because i

couldn't defend myself against him.

i didn't do it because of the anger that twisted his features, that burned in his retinas, that shot with little balls of spit from his mouth, that bent his fingers into a fist when he punched my face.

i didn't do it because in that moment he didn't seem human, or because in that moment or the ones leading up to it, he was deaf to anything i said, snarling, jumping down my throat.

i didn't fight back, because i wanted him to hurt me. i wanted it to be over.

that was the easy part, does that make sense?

i wanted him to hurt me, to do his worst, so that we were both sure it was over. because for a few weeks, that's what i'd known without a shadow of a doubt.

i didn't love him anymore. i wasn't sure i ever had.

i was just waiting, waiting for the right time to get out.

waiting for the right moment to re evaluate my life. trying to figure out what my next move should be, where i should go.

it wasn't a question of if, but when. does that sound cold? i know i cared about him, of course. but i'd been slowly detaching for weeks, slowly getting my life back. i knew what he was capable of. he'd hit me before, and i tried, tried so hard to say it was ok, to understand it.

for the first time in a long time the future looked too wide open, too full of possibility.

i didn't know what to do so for a month i did nothing.

i moved in to a backpackers hostel at spadina and king to get away from him. i didn't have a lot of stuff- just clothes and cds, a few books, my camera, canvas, art supplies. i never had any furniture.

i took sleeping pills at night to help me fall asleep.

i used an internet cafe nearby to contact friends. i went to work, but i changed my shift hours so he couldn't find me. i went for walks by myself, or with anika, the girl i work with. if we got off work at a decent hour, we'd take the streetcar east on queen and go for walks down by cherry beach.

we make jokes about it- about the water you can't actually swim in, the lack of waves, the e coli, the tons of sand the bulldozers must have brought in to make it look like a real beach.

it's beautiful though. we'd take our shoes off, sink our feet into the sand, listen to the water softly hit the rocks, the seagulls cawing.

it's the closest thing to nature, to the beaches near our hometowns that we can get here. it's both of our favourite places in this city.

she'd bring vodka or whiskey in a metal flask. she taught me how to drink the hard stuff.

it turns out that she's been dating our boss, dez, for almost a year. it was kind of a secret for a long time, then they broke up but now they're thinking of getting back together.

it's amazing how little you know sometimes about people you see every day.

do you trust him, i asked her one night. she looked down at her hands. i guess i have

to, she said.

no, but i mean, in your heart, do you really believe he'll never cheat on you?

her eyes were focused on the water. honestly? i don't know. i want to believe that i can trust him. i really do.

i mean, she looked at me- you remember what he was like when we first started working there? all the girls at work he'd hook up with? i nodded. yeah, i said, of course. everyone knew about that. i think girls would come to the bar just try to sleep with him. there were so many of them, and some of them were young, younger than us for sure.

i thought about it for a second. but then he just kind of stopped, i said.

right, she interrupted, and smiled. since we got really involved all those months ago.

that, or he got more discreet about it, i said. you have to admit that it's possible.

i mean, she paused. of course. of course it's possible. she sighed.

i didn't want to hurt her. but we were friends now. i wanted to protect her. i wanted to make sure she wasn't being deceived.

it'd be hard for anyone to break a pattern of that many years, i said. i mean, i'm sure he didn't just start doing that a year ago. i hate to say it, an. he probably did it to other women too.

her grey eyes looked soft and watery.

i wish i could explain it to you, or even to myself in a way that made sense. it just feels like one of those things i have to do. it's a risk i have to take. there's something i feel for him that's special. something i've never felt before. i went through this terrible thing, this attack that took me out of myself for so long. i was so afraid of everything, especially of guys. something in my gut told me it was ok to trust him. so i did. that has to count for something right? there's something unique about the way we connect, she said. there's something comfortable about it, i can talk to him in a way i've never been able to talk to anyone else. i can be myself, and it's ok.

do you know what i mean, she asked me. i did, but i didn't say anything.

she continued. it's worth it to hope against hope sometimes, you know? if i'm right, if he's trustworthy, he could be the love of my life. if i'm wrong, and he cheats on me, at least i'll know i tried. i really love him, nicki- i have to try.

i held her hands as they shook. she was so brave.

i mean, i'll only know if i survive jumping off the cliff if i actually jump, right? and that's the thing nicki, that's the thing i realized after all this time apart. maybe i will get hurt, but i'm not going to die.

maybe it won't work out, but at least i won't have missed out on anything. i'm done living my life in fear of everything bad. it doesn't protect you. it just stops you from living.

i told her how much i admired her.

she laughed. you could do it, too, she said. i hadn't told her about nir yet, and i didn't want to until i spoke to him. when i got home that night i used the internet cafe to email him.

i didn't have a subject line, and just wrote one line in the body. ani mitgaga'at eilecha. i wrote. i miss you. he wrote back two hours later, just one line.

gam ani, it said. me too.

february 14, 2010

hilde roos on opera in exile: the eoan group

filed under: [2013 - an inconsolable memory](#), [music](#), [music and exile symposium](#) — abraxas @ 9:14 pm

when the archive of the eoan group became available for scholarly research at the documentation centre for music at the university of Stellenbosch in 2008, my surprise was twofold; the archive contained exceptionally rich material and these documents were virtually untouched. as if forgotten, the documents had been stowed away underneath the orchestra pit in the auditorium of the Joseph Stone Theatre in Athlone since the group moved there in 1969; almost forty years. this, despite the fact that the eoan group to this day continued its cultural activities in that building and that many of those who frequented the Joseph Stone Theatre during these years were familiar with the illustrious past this organization has had. the same curious memory lapse occurs on the organization's website: under its history section there is no mention whatsoever that eoan ever performed opera. last year the organization celebrated its 75th anniversary and although some attempts have been made to commemorate their past, these occasions have mostly happened within the circle of eoan groupers. very little attention has been given in the public domain to the group, its past or its legacy. as i will illustrate in today's paper, the conscious (or maybe unconscious) stowing away of eoan's extraordinary history, is part and parcel of the exile that this organization has experienced thus far.

let's go back in time to around 1950. at this point in the history of opera in South Africa, local opera production could be described as an inconsistent flow of productions by various amateur bodies that came and went in the main centres of the country. all of them were following their own cultural or political agenda, most of them aspired to national status and all of them functioned without financial support from the state. some of these organizations were short lived and others experienced more productive periods. due to time constraints of today's paper, i cannot venture into more detail about these organizations, so i will suffice by mentioning the main ones: the National Opera Company, the National Opera Society, the National Theatre Organization, the National Opera Association of South Africa, Die Opervereniging van Suid-Afrika, the South African Opera Federation as well as Die Opera-Organisasie van Suid-Afrika. in addition, in 1952 Erik Chisholm, dean of the College of Music at the UCT, started the University of Cape Town Opera School. managers, singers and audience support for these organizations stemmed of course predominantly from the white population in the country.

imagine the surprise to all and sundry when in March 1956 the eoan group, a cultural organization based in District Six, (and this means a group of people who predominantly came from a disadvantaged background and who were not white), appeared on the opera scene with nine full length productions of Verdi's *La Traviata*, sung in Italian. the event proved to be most successful: within the first day of booking all tickets for the first performance were sold out (approximately 1000 seats). eight more performances followed before the end of that month, including a special performance of *La Traviata* held for government dignitaries. the reviews were overwhelming and eoan seemed to have taken the city by storm. well known critic Charlie Weich of *Die Burger* wrote that, had he not seen with his own eyes what a coloured opera company had achieved on the night of 10 March 1956 in the City Hall, he would not have believed it. the voices of May Abrahamse and Lionel Fourie and the décor and costumes were specially mentioned as outstanding. behind the scenes, the production was driven by local Italians: the opera was produced by Alessandro Rota and Joseph Manca conducted the all white Cape Town Municipal Orchestra.

the opera production was just one part of an arts festival that included a children's version of *The Mikado*, the South African premiere of the musical comedy *Zip Goes a*

million, a performance of handel's elijah, performances of the play johnny belinda and many other cultural activities such as greek and classical ballet shows and flower exhibitions. the festival's productions were spread over six month and came to a close in august 1956. the entire festival was held in the cape town city hall, the only venue where eoan was allowed to perform before racially mixed audiences, although entrances, seats and amenities for white and coloured were kept separate.

who was this group and how did they manage these extraordinary cultural achievements? the eoan group was founded by helen southern-holt in 1933 as a cultural and welfare organization in the former so-called coloured suburb of district six. southern-holt hailed from the uk and motivated her reasons for launching the group as follows: 'my first desire in giving help to the coloured community was to start classes for clear, articulate speech. having had to engage coloured workers as well as european, i knew from experience that the mass of coloured boys and girls entering the labour market were ill-equipped, and had not the power of the spoken word to aid them'. speech classes soon turned into drama classes; physical education and ballet classes were added shortly after and in 1944 southern-holt invited joseph manca, an accountant from italian descent with a passion for opera, to conduct the small choir. in the course of the following 13 years, joseph manca developed the small choir into an amateur opera company.

during the twenty years following the 1956 arts festival, eoan not only annually presented cape town with italian opera, they also toured the country twice, launched a second arts festival in 1962, premiered south africa's first indigenous ballet (the square by stanley glasser) and had the opportunity to tour abroad in 1975. during these years the eoan group was an active part of the cultural life of cape town and the group had a large following, comprising members of the white and coloured population groups. other circumstantial information bears testimony to their exceptional talent and will to overcome: most singers (including various principal singers) could not read music and were taught their roles by rote. none of the singers were familiar with the italian language. by 1971 the group's repertoire included 10 operas: verdi's la traviata, rigoletto and il trovatore, bizet's carmen, puccini's madame butterfly and la boheme, donizetti's l'elisir d'amore, rossini's barber of seville, leoncavallo's i pagliaci and mascagni's cavalleria rusticana. in the late 1960s, the group also premièred the south african productions of three hammerstein musicals: oklahoma, south pacific and carmen jones. throughout these years, none of the singers, trainers, producers or other supporting staff were ever paid for their services. in fact, all activities took place after working hours and over weekends. all vocal training was done by two italians who were active in the local opera scene, alessandro rota and olga magnoni, whilst joseph manca continued as the main organizational driving force behind the group's activities. the group also had active ballet and drama sections throughout this time.

the notion of exile can be explored through this group on more than one level. the most obvious manifestation of exile is the physical exile from cape town. after the group areas act was enforced, the eoan group moved to athlone where they continued with opera activities well into the 1970s. district six and athlone are barely 20 kilometres apart, but the group areas act exiled the eoan group from the central position it held in cape town's cultural life, a role of which i could only give you a glimpse earlier in this paper. although the group areas act was enforced during the 1960s, the preceding decades were littered with legislation that restricted freedom of movement for the group. the physical exile from cape town was a gradual process. as early as 1947 (and this was before the national party came to power) the group bore the brunt during a concert in stellenbosch when the coloured public were not allowed to enter the hall through the same entrance as whites and separate seats were allocated to them, an incident that irked political conscious individuals to such a degree that it spurred a number of newspaper articles as well as a cartoon, accusing the group of compliance with regulations that segregated races.

in cape town the group could only perform in the city hall as it was the only venue that had sufficient infrastructure to cater for separate entrances, seats and toilet facilities to keep white and coloured racial groups apart and from the mid 1960s the

group had to formally apply for a permit to perform in the city hall. when district six was zoned for white occupation in 1966, the eoan group had to give up their own building in hanover street, after which they made use of a building in bree street in cape town. members and artists who lived in district six were forcibly resettled in areas that were far away from cape town and because members were dependant on public transport, the logistics to take part in productions became more complicated.

in 1969 the group found a new home on the cape flats when the joseph stone theatre was built in athlone. although this building offered more facilities than the city hall, the white population that supported eoan, did not travel to athlone to see eoan's opera productions and the group continued to perform in the city hall in cape town. however, in 1973 the city hall was renovated and resulted in a venue that no longer offered the possibility for opera performance. thus, eoan lost this venue as the last physical space where their cultural contribution to the city was recognized. their performances in town were now moved further away, to the green and sea point city hall, a venue which was even more difficult to reach by public transport. furthermore, the ever tightening restrictions on movement for eoan's members is well illustrated in the stipulations of the 1974 permit the group was granted: apart from the usual regulations about separate entrances, seats and amenities, the permit also instructed that no social mingling was allowed between racial groups at their performances.

in these suffocated circumstances it is not surprising that many of eoan's principal artists left the country to seek job opportunities abroad. in cape town the state funded cape performing arts board with its multi million rand nico malan theatre, built in 1971, was a whites-only organization housed in a whites-only building, jobs for coloured artists were not to be had. among those who left were the tenor joseph gabriels (who made his debut at the metropolitan opera house in new york in 1972), the sopranos patricia van graan and abeeda parker, the baritone charles de long, the dancer didi sydow and the conductor and repetiteur gordon jephtas who later enjoyed an illustrious career in europe and america.

however, exile was also experienced by the eoan group from within. as the group became entangled with the apartheid government resulting from financial support they received, the group was gradually exiled from their own community. by accepting funding and complying with the terms put down by the apartheid government, eoan was seen to have capitulated into the apartheid government's policy of coloured culture as a separate social construct, a label that for many implied servitude and a denigration of their identity. in the long run, eoan's liaison with apartheid state funding proved not only dangerous, but lethal.

even before the 1956 arts festival, the organization received funding from government to finance productions. the public was aware of this and several protest letters were directed against them, despite their spectacular success. alex la guma, chairman of the south african coloured people's organisation, wrote to eoan as follows: 'allow us to congratulate you on your magnificent performance of 'la traviata'. you have shown that, given the opportunities, coloured people can excel in the realms of culture on par with all other peoples. however, it [has been] rumoured for some time that your group was financially supported by the government through the coloured affairs department. people can conclude, therefore, that the eoan group supports apartheid. in fact, the whole idea reminds one of the slave period when the farmers hired coloureds to perform for them, their masters. today in the 20th century we do not recognize the white man as our master. this is the land of our birth and we demand government support for all cultural movements. but without apartheid strings.'

it is clear that the organization was conscious of the political compromise it made through accepting funding from the state and after the festival it refused state funding until 1965. by this time, eoan had consolidated its reputation and just completed a second successful tour of the country. it became increasingly clear that the spiralling financial demands of an ever growing amateur opera company could not be met by ticket sales and the odd donation only. at the time the group

experienced grave financial difficulties and decided to again apply for funding from the state. the wide spread implications of this step became clear over time. as political consciousness increased amongst the coloured public, especially during the 1970s, people frowned upon eoan, not because of opera, but because of the organization's perceived ties with the government and at the height of the apartheid era, few politically conscious individuals wanted to be associated with an organization that accepted money from the government. adding to the tragedy of this situation, the amounts given to the group were pittance compared to the state funding that went into e.g. the cape performing arts board. it was barely enough to cover the logistical costs of production; no singer, dancer, actor or director was ever paid a professional fee from these state grants.

in 1977, joseph manca, the main driving force of the group, retired after being with the group for 34 years. his retirement triggered the structural melt down of the organization and specifically of the opera department. by 1980 eoan's opera activities came to a complete standstill. the organization was entangled in a maze of political difficulties and internal divisions, exacerbated by a gap between the older and younger generations. roy stoffels, head of the drama section of eoan, compiled a report entitled 'reasons why the eoan group is no longer a viable arts project'. the report stated amongst others: 'eoan is synonymous with 'coloured culture'; 'coloured culture' is a political offspring of the government of the day; the stigma is indelible because the present generation has been schooled into rejecting eoan; scholars who attend eoan, often have to keep their membership a secret for fear of victimization from fellow students and staff; businesses have failed to respond effectively to appeals for assistance for fear of damaging their own images. we are therefore wholly dependent on government subsidy.' it is evident from the correspondence in the archive that by this time the public (read: the coloured community) no longer supported eoan, a situation that resulted in empty houses at performances.

to conclude, a few comments on what eoan's story tells us about the nature of exile. firstly it does not necessarily imply moving to another country. although athlone is situated 20 kilometers from cape town, eoan's move to athlone translated into banishment to a place cut off from the opportunity to be part of an inclusive society and isolation from the very art they were practising. secondly, the group became alienated from the community as it was deemed politically suspect, despite being an active cultural organization in the heart of athlone. lastly, exile in this specific case is also linked to the issue of coloured identity. with the change to democratic rule in 1994, the coloured community had to reposition itself in relation to the new dominant group who is now black african, and their position as a marginalized group has not changed much. resulting from eoan's relatively privileged past under apartheid rule where they e.g. enjoyed more privileges than black artists, their history in today's political landscape is still viewed as compromised; and so eoan represents exile from the present.

returning to the title of this paper, 'opera in exile', i admit it is misleading. it is not opera that went into exile, but the eoan group as a cultural body and the individuals who took part in eoan's productions over the years. one cannot but observe that there has been no 'home coming' yet for artists who once enjoyed performing opera through the eoan group.

thank you
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comments (1)

on exile: yoder, said, and a theology of land and return

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we travel like other people, but we return to nowhere. as if traveling
is the way of the clouds. we have buried our loved ones in the
darkness of the clouds, between the roots of the trees.
and we said to our wives: go on giving birth to people like us
for hundreds of years so we can complete this journey
to the hour of a country, to a meter of the impossible.
we travel in the carriages of the psalms, sleep in the tents of the
prophets and come out of the speech of the gypsies.
we measure space with a hoopoe's beak or sing to while away the
distance and cleanse the light of the moon.
your path is long so dream of seven women to bear this long path
on your shoulders. shake for them palm trees so as to know their
names and who'll be the mother of the boy of galilee.
we have a country of words. speak speak so we may know the end of
this travel.

— mahmoud darwish, "we travel like other people" (1984)¹

the palestinian poet mahmoud darwish captures well the ambiguities of exile: travel without end; the pain of disconnection and the nostalgia of memory; the realization, encoded in the closing demand to "speak speak," that, for a people who have "a country of words," return from exile, the end of travel, will more likely than not be textual rather than physical. darwish thus shows the reality of millions of palestinians exiled from their land, living without fixed destination and sustained by the tenuous hope of return.

how should palestinian exile, and exile more generally, be understood theologically? how should christians understand the dreams of many exiles, dreams which often appear hopeless, of return to their homes? the late john howard yoder would probably have objected to starting with such general questions; they might have struck him as too "methodologicistic," beginning theological reflection with abstract questions rather than with god's story in scripture and the church.² nevertheless, the drama of exile, especially as displayed in jeremiah's call to the exiles to seek the peace of the city in which they find themselves (jer. 29:7), played a key role in shaping yoder's reading of scripture, his ecclesiology and his missiology. as early as 1973 yoder was probing the fruitfulness of the theme of exile for theology, writing in *Crosscurrents of Exile and Exodus as Two Faces of Liberation*.³ exile, while painful, opens up a new chapter in the history of the people of god's radical reliance on god alone; god's people, for yoder, are called to a nonviolent dependence on god which eschews the sovereignty of the sword in favor of embodying an alternative politics amidst the babylons of the world.

yoder tentatively wondered about the relevance of this exilic, jeremian vision for other exiled peoples. was there "something about this jewish vision of the dignity and ministry of the scattered people of god which might be echoed or replicated by other migrant peoples," yoder asked. "might there even be," he continued, "something helpful in this memory which would speak by a more distant analogy to the condition of peoples overwhelmed by imperial immigration, like the original americans or australians, or the ainu or the maori?"⁴ yoder recognized the potential affront of his question, i believe, and thus phrased it carefully. the provocation remains, however: can those who have been violently uprooted from their lands embrace as good news the prophetic admonition to build houses and plant gardens in exile? what does jeremiah's call mean for a return to one's land, for justice for the exiled refugee? are justice and return endlessly deferred, postponed until the eschaton?

in this paper i seek to answer yoder's question through an examination of the way in which the motif of exile functions in the thought and politics of the palestinian-american critic edward said. after a summary of the role of exile in yoder's reading of scripture and his understanding of the church's mission, i turn to an examination of edward said's multifaceted appraisal of exile: while insisting on the harrowing

character of exile, said also expounds at length on the critical epistemological and moral possibilities opened up by exile. finally, i sketch how an exilic consciousness of not being fully at home in one's home so long as injustice endures can contribute to a theology of living rightly and justly in the land, taking the particular case of justice in the land of palestine/ israel as a springboard for my reflections; the view from exile, i suggest, poses a challenge to exclusionary politics which would deny a just place in the land for both palestinian and israeli.

john howard yoder on the theological politics of exile

just as "constantinianism" named for yoder the perennial threat and temptation for the people of god, so did the jeremian vision of the people of god living faithfully in exile form yoder's positive vision for the church.⁵ grasping the importance of jeremiah's call to the exiles for yoder sheds light on his reading of scripture, his understanding of church history, and his theology of judaism.⁶

let us begin with scripture. any christian reading of the old testament must inevitably grapple with the plurality of voices and genres presented therein, interpreting its multiple strands and perspectives from god's definitive revelation in jesus christ.⁷ the pacifist christian, in particular, must struggle to understand the continuity of the two testaments without resorting to a marcionite dismissal of the god of the old testament and its wars of conquest as different from the god of love incarnated in jesus christ; rather, we must insist that the triune god who reveals the nonviolent "grain of the universe" in jesus' life, death and resurrection is the god of israel.⁸

the theological vision from exile, yoder argued, is one of "not being in charge." the exiles in babylon do not rule the empire, or even a little corner of it, but instead live without sovereignty in the midst of empire. because "god is sovereign over history, there is no need. . .to seize (or subvert) sovereignty in order for god's will to be done." living outside of the land, the community in babylon relies solely on god for the sustaining of its life and becomes nonviolent in style and substance.⁹ the continuity of this exilic vision with yoder's ecclesiology should be clear: the church is the community called to go out into the world, into diaspora (matt. 25), a community which refuses to wield violent force, pointing instead to god's sovereignty and the conviction that jesus has already triumphed over the powers of death, a triumph which will ultimately be revealed to all.¹⁰

if the continuity between jeremiah's vision for the exiles and new testament ecclesiology (as interpreted by yoder) should be clear, the relationship between the call to exile and other parts of the old testament, such as the embrace of sovereign kingship in the land or the violent conquest of the land, might well appear to be one of tension, even conflict.¹¹ yoder resolved this tension by focusing his attention on one thematic strand in the old testament, namely, israel's radical dependence on god alone. yoder did not deny and need not have denied that scripture contains multiple stands, some of them in tension with one another; he did believe, however, that by identifying a strand within scripture which repeatedly insists on god's absolute sovereignty and the people's concomitant dependence on god alone, one could highlight the continuity between yhwh the god of israel and the triune god incarnate in the non-violent messiah.¹²

exile, yoder suggested, did not simply equal punishment in israel's history, but represented a new opportunity for mission in the world and stood in continuity with god's previous gracious acts of dispersal, dispersal which highlighted the people of god's absolute dependence on god. interpreting the babel story in genesis 11, yoder wrote that "diversity was the original divine intent; if god is good and diversity is good, then each of the many diverse identities which resulted from the multiplying of languages and the resultant scattering is also good."¹³ the exile to babylon then becomes on this reading another act of gracious dispersal: while the false prophets preach a premature return to the land, jeremiah calls on the exiles to "seek the peace/salvation (shalom) of the city" (29:7).

just as the exiles in babylon live dependent on god and without reliance on their own sovereignty, so do the narratives of exodus and the conquest of the land in the wars

of yhwh exhibit a radical, completely dependent trust in god. “trust in jhwh[sic]/adonai’ is what opens the door to his saving intervention,” claimed yoder. “it is the opposite of making one’s own political/military arrangements.”¹⁴ when addressing the question of israelite monarchy with its violent exercise of sovereignty, yoder turned to such texts as judges 9, i samuel 8 and deuteronomy 17:14ff, texts which exhibit “the antiroyal strand of the earlier history” of israel which rejected any sovereign other than god. exile, for yoder, was not a brief hiatus between monarchy and the return to the land; rather, monarchy formed a problematic interruption in a history of dispersal as mission. “the move to babylon,” yoder argued, “was not a two-generation parenthesis after which the davidic or solomonic project was supposed to take up again where it had left off. it was rather the beginning, under a firm, fresh prophetic mandate, of a new phase of the mosaic project.”¹⁵ “jeremiah’s abandoning statehood for the future,” yoder continued, “is thus not so much forsaking an earlier hope as it is returning to the original trust in jhwh [sic].”¹⁶

yoder thus identified a strand within the multiplicity of texts in the old testament which insists on complete dependence on god alone. reading back from the resurrection, we can not only observe that this strand stands in continuity with jesus’ nonviolent trust in god unto death, but can identify certain aspects of that strand, such as jeremiah’s counsel to the exiles, as very close to the nonviolent coming of god in jesus.¹⁷ jesus “rounds out” the mitigation of violence within the prophetic portions of the old testament, “and says that what it meant for abraham to let god’s future be in god’s hands, and what it meant for moses and joshua to let the survival of the people be a miracle, means that now we don’t have to kill anybody.” this view is not “evolutionary” in that it does not assume some “survival of the fittest” in a contest of ideas, but yoder concedes that its assumption of “organic growth under guidance” is in some ways similar to models which see evolutionary development within scripture.¹⁸

“how can we sing the lord’s songs in a foreign land?” the psalmist asks. “painful as the question is,” yoder responded, “that is what the jews learned to do, and do well.”¹⁹ exile marked a new beginning in the history of god’s people, one which would continue in the history of the early church and in the life of the jewish people in diaspora. while the church would lose sight of its calling to live as an embodied alternative to the violent politics of empire, becoming entangled in various forms of constantinian compromise, jewish communities in exile more successfully stayed true to the jeremian call. “occasionally privileged after the model of joseph,” yoder noted, “more often emigrating, frequently suffering martyrdom nonviolently, [jews] were able to maintain identity without turf or sword, community without sovereignty. they thereby demonstrated pragmatically the viability of the ethic of jeremiah and jesus. in sum: the jews of the diaspora were for over a millennium the closest thing to the ethic of jesus existing on any significant scale anywhere in christendom.”²⁰ jewish communities in diaspora thus lived as embodied critiques of constantinian christendom. zionism, in contrast, as a late nineteenth-century form of european nationalism, represents a sharp departure from jeremiah’s exilic vision.²¹ an analysis of the ways in which zionist discourse negates the diaspora and an assessment of the possibilities of retrieving an exilic politics after zionism will be my concern in the final part of this paper.

edward said: the moral task of the exilic intellectual

yoder’s appropriation of jeremiah’s call to the exiles has, i believe, undeniable power for a hermeneutics of scripture, for an interpretation of church history, and for the articulation of a nonviolent ecclesiological politics. can the call to seek the peace of the city of one’s exile, however, also be heard as good news, even if only by “distant analogy,” for the millions upon millions of people in the modern period violently uprooted by imperial and colonial practice? is jeremiah’s call compatible with a struggle to return to one’s land, with a struggle for justice? to answer these questions, i turn to a consideration of palestinian dispossession and the writings of the most prolific, provocative, and insightful palestinian intellectual, edward said, whose writings display the agonies and the promise of exile.

an initial caveat: said, given his relentless critique of “religion,” his stark opposition between “religious” (bad) and “secular” (good) criticism, and his desire to keep religion in proper bounds, might appear an odd thinker to bring into conversation with yoder, someone who operated within an explicit theological horizon, who lived under the authority of god’s word and the church, and who resisted liberalism’s attempts to confine the church’s witness.²² apart from noting the similarities in the wide-ranging, “amateur” character of their intellects, what theologically useful observations can possibly come of bringing yoder into conversation with such an aggressive, even dogmatic, secularist?²³ clearly, said’s treatment of religion is problematic at many levels. nevertheless, i maintain that in said’s appropriation of exile we find a “distant analogy” (yoder) to jeremiah’s vision for the people of god in exile; exploring these “distant analogies,” what karl barth called “secular parables of the kingdom,” provides provocative material for reflection as christians seek to articulate theologies of exile, land, and return.²⁴

palestinian existence is at root one of exile. said observes that palestinians form “a community, if at heart a community built on suffering and exile.”²⁵ palestinians are dispersed geographically, separated by borders, exiled from one another. in the arab-israeli war of 1948, in what palestinians call al-nakba (“the catastrophe”), well over 700,000 palestinians fled in fear from the fighting or were driven from their homes by israeli military forces who destroyed over 400 villages: many of these refugees and their descendants now live in unadministered camps throughout the middle east, denied the possibility of returning to their homes and properties. for the palestinians left behind in what became the state of israel, many were classified as “present absentees” under the absentee property law of 1951 and denied return to their land. tens of thousands more palestinians, many of them already refugees, became refugees once more in 1967, driven out of mandate palestine across the jordan river by israeli forces. since 1967, for palestinians in the occupied territories of the west bank, east jerusalem, and the gaza strip, dispossession has taken on a variety of forms: the israeli civil administration confiscates land from palestinians for the construction of colonies illegal under international law; israeli bulldozers destroy palestinian homes and rip up palestinian orchards and vineyards; checkpoints and roadblocks separate palestinian from palestinian, making travel between, say, the west bank and the gaza strip nearly impossible, while travel within the north and south of the west bank becomes excruciatingly long, humiliating, and, at times, dangerous.²⁶

palestinians are thus continually ripped out of their contexts and find themselves travelers in a strange world. “the palestinian is very much a person in transit,” said notes. “suitcase or bundle of possessions in hand, each family vacates territory left behind for others, even as new boundaries are traversed, new opportunities created, new realities set up.”²⁷ if, as said indicates, exile creates “new opportunities,” exile also is profoundly alienating. “exile is a series of portraits without names, without contexts,” said observes. “images that are largely unexplained, nameless, mute.”²⁸ without continuity of place, palestinians experience no continuity of identity. “palestinian life is scattered, discontinuous, marked by the artificial and imposed arrangements of interrupted or confined space, by the dislocations and unsynchronized rhythms of disturbed time,” said explains: “where no straight line leads from home to birthplace to school to maturity, all events are accidents, all progress is a digression, all residence is exile.”²⁹ de-centered, out of place, palestinian life becomes one of travel without fixed destination: “our truest reality is expressed in the way we cross over from one place to another,” said insists. “we are migrants and perhaps hybrids in, but not of, any situation in which we find ourselves. this is the deepest continuity of our lives as a nation in exile and constantly on the move.”³⁰ rupture of continuity is the fate of the defeated, while the victors, the powerful, remain in place. “continuity for them, the dominant population,” said notes, as opposed to “discontinuity for us, the dispossessed and dispersed.”³¹ said’s emphasis on the palestinians’ “privilege of obduracy,” their steadfastness (sumud), the declaration that “here we are, unmoved by your power, proceeding with our lives and with future generations,” is a way of desperately trying to hold on amidst the transit of exile, so that the de-centeredness of exile does not become dissolution.³²

said strenuously objects to any attempt to romanticize exile. "exile is one of the saddest fates," he claims. "there has always been an association between the idea of exile and the terrors of being a leper, a social and moral untouchable."³³ for palestinians, the experience of exile has not only been physically and emotionally painful, but has had negative effects on individual exiles and the exiled community as a whole. "our collective history fil-kharij ('in the exterior') or in the manfa and ghurba ('exile' and 'estrangement') has been singularly unsuccessful," said judges, "progressively graceless, unblessed, more and more eccentric, de-centered, and alienated."³⁴ exile can turn people inwards, generating a form of sectarian withdrawal which shuns those outside the community.³⁵ exile is a "jealous state," said observes, which can create "an exaggerated sense of group solidarity, and a passionate hostility to outsiders, even those who may in fact be in the same predicament as you."³⁶ ripped out of place, the exile often seeks solace in uncritical commitment to political parties and institutions, a tendency which said, as a perpetual critic of the palestine liberation organization, has carefully resisted. those, meanwhile, who resist the temptation to subscribe blindly to political programs face the temptation of individualistic withdrawal away from all communities. exile is marked, said suggests, by "the sheer fact of isolation and displacement, which produces the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community. at this extreme," said warns, "the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments."³⁷

warning against finding a moral within exile, said demands that the reality of life in the refugee camp be given priority over the literature produced by such exiles as james joyce and vladimir nabokov in any evaluation of exile. "exiled poets and writers lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity— to deny an identity to people," said maintains. "to concentrate on exile as a contemporary political punishment," he counsels, "you must therefore map territories of experience beyond those mapped by the literature of exile itself. you must first set aside joyce and nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom un agencies have been created."³⁸ literature and religion, said believes, run the risk of downplaying the horrors of exile in the interests of extracting new insights from exile itself. in contrast, said insists that

on the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as "good for us." is it not true that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical?³⁹

here said would appear to be challenging yoder's theological appropriation of exile directly, accusing this religious view which uncovers a dignity of the vocation of the exilic community of banalizing the losses exile inflicts on those who undergo it.

said's caution about an aesthetic or religious amelioration of exile's pains serves as a needed reminder not to lose sight of the fact that exile does not simply name a concept but names a condition in which millions of people live. that said, however, it is equally important to recognize that, just as yoder articulates a missiological vocation for the people of god in exile, so said argues that exile opens up an intellectual and moral space which provides a place for the intellectual from which to resist attempts to co-opt him or her into becoming an apologist for power and which creates a discomfort with being settled in one's home so long as injustice forces homelessness on others.

exile, said believes, is the proper place for the critic, the intellectual. "if you think about exile as a permanent state," said suggests, "both in the literal and in the intellectual sense, then it's a much more promising, if difficult, thing. then you're really talking about movement, about homelessness in the sense in which [georg]

lukàcs talks about it in the theory of the novel—‘transcendental homelessness’—which can acquire a particular intellectual mission that i associate with criticism.”⁴⁰ while exile, said recognizes, “is an actual condition,” it also functions in said’s thought as “a metaphorical condition.” developing a distinction between insider and outsider intellectuals reminiscent of yoder’s contrast between the constantinian and free churches, said differentiates between

those on the one hand who belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming sense of dissonance or dissent, those who can be called yea-sayers; and on the other hand, the nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned.⁴¹

the responsibility of the intellectual, as articulated by said in his 1993 reith lectures, is to offer a critique from exile. “exile for the intellectual in this meta-physical sense,” said explains, “is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. you cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation.”⁴² even those who have not experienced the pain of being physically uprooted from their homes can be marginal to the powers (of the academy, government, the news media, etc.) which reward uncritical support for policies which oppress, exclude and dispossess. “exile means that you are always going to be marginal,” said claims. “exile is a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea-saying, settling in.”⁴³ furthermore, the exilic intellectual should not succumb to a morose despair. “the intellectual in exile is,” according to said, “necessarily ironic, skeptical, even playful—but not cynical.”⁴⁴

even more than to georg lukàcs’s notion of “transcendental homelessness,” said’s positive appropriation of exile for his construal of the intellectual vocation owes a debt to the reflections of the german jewish theorist theodor adorno on dwelling. in his biographical reflections, *minima moralia*, adorno asserted that:

dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible. the traditional residences we grew up in have grown intolerable: each trait of comfort in them is paid for with a betrayal of knowledge, each vestige of shelter with the musty pact of family interests. . . .the house is past. . .it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home. ⁴⁵

adorno’s insight, amplified by said, is that particular economic and political configurations make the condition of having a home, of landedness one could also say, possible; it is “part of morality,” then, to recognize how these economic and political systems also exclude others from the condition of landedness. in the case of palestine/israel, we will see, this insight can be deployed to suggest that no one, neither palestinian nor israeli, can truly be “at home” in the land so long as the structures which generate homelessness are perpetuated.

adorno, having grasped the impossibility of dwelling securely given the knowledge of the conditions which make such dwelling possible, looked to the text, to literary production, for new dwelling. “in his text, the writer sets up house,” adorno suggested. “for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.” text provides only elusive comfort that “in the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing.”⁴⁶ said develops adorno’s point, noting that the intellectual in his or her writing “achieves at most a provisional satisfaction, which is quickly ambushed by doubt, and a need to rewrite and redo that renders the text uninhabitable.”⁴⁷ a comparison to yoder proves useful at this point: while doubt and existential agony drive said’s exilic intellectual to rewrite her text again and again, the exilic community—the church—for yoder is driven not by doubt but by the workings of the holy spirit to engage continually in the theological, missionary task of bringing the gospel into new thought worlds. lacking any theological horizon, said can only view the poesis of the text as production and construction, whereas for the church the textual task of revising and renewing its proclamation of the gospel occurs within the framework of pathos, of a suffering receptivity to the word of the

said does, it turns out, “redeem” exile by stressing its moral possibilities; in particular, the exile, because she is not at home in her home, can resist accommodation to the powers, intellectual and political, which exclude and dispossess. is this critically beneficial aspect of exile, however, compatible with a struggle to end the physical condition of exile? specifically, in the case of palestinian refugees and other palestinians who have lost their lands, can one work for al-awdah (return) and not lose the moral perspective granted by exile? this question relates to our earlier question of whether or not yoder’s exilic politics could speak to a theology of landedness, of justice in the land. to begin to tackle this question, let us examine how said discusses the right of palestinian refugees to return.

on the one hand, return is clearly not only a metaphorical concept for said. in a volume of essays examining palestinian refugee rights and ways to press for return and compensation, said expresses dismay with what he views as the current palestinian leadership’s historical amnesia and willingness to forgo the demand for return; what palestinians must do, said urges, is to “press the claims for return and compensation in earnest with new leaders.” said cites as exemplary the work of the badil refugee resource center and the palestinian researcher salman abu sitta for their work on developing concrete plans and campaigns for the actual return of refugees.⁴⁹

on the other hand, said also writes about return in a more metaphorical fashion and warns against an easy symmetry between exile and return which threatens to undermine the moral insights exile provides. “all of us speak of awdah, ‘return,’” said notes, “but do we mean that literally, or do we mean ‘we must restore ourselves to ourselves’? the latter is the real point, i think, although i know of many palestinians who want their houses and their way of life back, exactly. but is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences?”⁵⁰ exile, by separating people from place, threatens to separate people from their history, de-centering and disorienting them to the point of threatening their identity. what return would then mean is a “return to oneself, that is to say, a return to history, so that we understand what exactly happened, why it happened, and who we are. that we are a people from that land, maybe not living there, but with important historical claims and roots.”⁵¹ the greatness of palestinian poet mahmoud darwish, said explains, consists in his refusal in his poems to provide the reader with an easy return, with simple closure: darwish’s work, said contends, “amounts to an epic effort to transform the lyrics of loss into the indefinitely postponed drama of return. . . .the pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question.”⁵² a return which forsakes the moral insights of exile, a return which reaches back to retrieve a pristine past without concern for the human cost, must be avoided. the zionist project of a return to bring closure to jewish exile stands for said in marked contrast to the positive dimensions of palestinian exile. darwish, he believes, captures the key dimensions of the exilic experience, dimensions vital to the critical intellectual’s task: “fragments over wholes. restless nomadic activity over the settlements of held territory. criticism over resignation. . . .attention, alertness, focus. to do as others do, but somehow to stand apart. to tell your story in pieces, as it is.”⁵³ the openness of exile presents more powerful political and moral possibilities for the intellectual, said emphasizes, than the closed symmetry of zionist return. the broken story of palestinian exile, said observes, occurs “alongside and intervening in a closed orbit of jewish exile and a recuperated, much-celebrated patriotism of which israel is the emblem. better our wanderings,” said goes on to suggest, “than the horrid, clanging shutters of their return. the open secular element, and not the symmetry of redemption.”⁵⁴

an exilic politics of land and return?

said’s positive appropriation of exile as a critical posture provides, i believe, a positive answer to yoder’s question about whether or not jeremiah’s vision for the exilic community might speak by “distant analogy” to other dispossessed peoples. pressing questions remain, however. can yoder’s exilic politics of the church as the

nonviolent body of christ in diaspora speak to the call for justice and right living in the land, to the desire, the justice, of people returning to their homes? gerald schlabach, in a friendly challenge to yoder's "jeremian" reading of scripture and church history, provides a helpful reminder of the "deuteronomic" admonition to live rightly in the land (cf. deut. 6-9). european- american christians, particularly those in urban and suburban settings whose livelihoods are not dependent on the cultivation of the land, could be tempted to confuse jeremiah's vision for life in exile with the rootless, virtual reality of much postmodernist thought; such confusion would be self-deceptive, in that it would obscure the ways in which general north american prosperity has been built at the expense and on the land of its original inhabitants, and would further avoid the desire of many exiled peoples to return to live justly in the land. schlabach sharply observes that "we do no favor to any dispossessed people if we think of land only in a figurative rather than an earthy sense."⁵⁵

if, however, we do not avoid the challenges of return and justice, can we envision a politics of return, a politics of living rightly in the land, which does not simply replicate injustice and create new exiles in the wake of return? to answer these questions, i will first examine how traditional zionist discourse about a jewish "return" from exile was not only dependent on a binary opposition between exile and return but that such discourse depended on the erasure of the indigenous arab palestinian presence and the positing of an "empty land" in which the drama of the return from exile might unfold.⁵⁶ in practice this discourse translated into the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of palestinians from their homes and continues to underwrite palestinian dispossession today. for a future in palestine/israel which does not depend on the violent uprooting of others, we must paradoxically articulate an exilic politics of land and return. "christians can live rightly in the 'land' that god gives," schlabach suggests, "only if they sustain a tension with landedness itself."⁵⁷ part of this tension, i suggest, is not being fully "at home" in the land so long as others are excluded from the benefits of landedness.

"the binarism of homeland/exile is central to zionism," writes laurence silberstein in his perceptive study of "postzionist" debates within israel.⁵⁸ the homeland of eretz yisrael and the exile of jewish life elsewhere are not complementary in traditional zionist discourse but stand, rather, in tension, even contradiction. sander gilman observes that zionist discourse places the land at the center and diasporic communities on the periphery. this model, however, is not innocent of ideological baggage, however, but "is in truth a symbolic structure of the understanding of the impossibility of a diasporic life within this mod of center and periphery. such a definition," gilman continues, "demands the existence of a 'real' center and thus defines the jews in terms of their relationships to that center."⁵⁹

silberstein delineates a series of binary oppositions issuing from the initial opposition of exile and homeland:

homeland as a source of security, stability, refuge, nurturing, safety/exile as site of danger, insecurity, instability, threat, anxiety; heimlich/unheimlich; homeland is good/exile is bad; homeland is productive/exile is parasitic; homeland is conducive/exile is not conducive to redemption through labor; homeland is welcoming/exile is hostile; homeland is life-giving/exile is life-threatening; homeland is creative/exile is stultifying; homeland is nurturing to jewish national culture/exile is destructive; homeland is unifying/exile is fragmenting.⁶⁰

these oppositions present life in exile as an intolerable condition whose only cure can be found in immigration to the "homeland." the hebrew word for immigration to israel, aliyah, or ascent, encodes the negative valuation which zionism accords life in diaspora; those who grow disenchanting with life in israel, meanwhile, are classified as yoridim, or "those who descend."

zionism, in most of its traditional forms, thus meant the "negation of the diaspora" (shelilat ha-galuth). "the fulfillment of the zionist dream," silberstein explains, "depends upon acts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. . . jews and jewish culture must be deterritorialized from diaspora spaces and reterritorialized in the spaces of the homeland." silberstein also perceptively notes that the

“reterritorialization” of jewish immigrants into mandate palestine eventually involved the “deterritorializing and reterritorializing of large numbers of palestinian arabs, particularly during the 1948 war.”⁶¹ israeli political theorist amnon raz-krakotzkin argues persuasively that the traditional zionist negation of the diaspora went hand-in-hand with a negation of a prior palestinian presence in the land. “the definition of zionist settlement as an expression of ‘shelilat hagalut’ [negation of diaspora] and ‘shivat haam’ [the return of the nation] to its homeland,” raz-krakotzkin contends, “prevented relating to the collective yearnings of the local arab population and its perspective. it [also] undoubtedly made it impossible to turn the fact of this collective’s existence into an essential foundation for establishing a new jewish identity.”⁶² raz-krakotzkin argues that the zionist valorization of a “return to history” accepted the christian and enlightenment perception that exilic existence had been an exclusion from history, an exclusion from grace.⁶³ the zionist “return to history,” sadly, has mirrored much of the christian west’s violent and exclusivist practice. “the historical conception of shelilat hagalut, the emptiness of jewish time that separates the loss of sovereignty over the land and its renewed settlement,” raz-krakotzkin suggests, “is completed in a direct way through the image of the land—the place for the realization and resolution of history—as an ‘empty land.’”⁶⁴ the distance between conceiving of the land as empty and actually emptying the land of its indigenous inhabitants proved unfortunately short.

to counter zionist discourse and practice of dispossession, raz-krakotzkin proposes to recover exile, or galut, as a critical concept. exile as a concept, for raz-krakotzkin, represents an “absence, the consciousness of being in an incomplete present, the consciousness of a blemished world.” the absence, moreover, involves a lack of justice for palestinians. to “return” from exile, then, must mean justice for the dispossessed. to yearn for redemption, raz-krakotzkin maintains, is to engage in political activity “that values the perspective of the oppressed, the only perspective from which a moral stance can develop.”⁶⁵ a recovery of exile as a critical concept demands that israeli jews incorporate the consciousness of exiled palestinians into their own longing for return. as silberstein explicates raz-krakotzkin’s position, “by identifying with and assuming responsibility for, attending to, and responding to ‘the consciousness of the conquered palestinian,’ the jew recovers the ‘principles embodied in the theological concept of galut.’”⁶⁶

the critical use to which a secular political theorist like raz-krakotzkin puts exile finds a theological counterpart in the jewish theologian marc ellis’s recent insistence on exile as the proper place for prophetic jewish communities. for ellis, “the reality of exile is less the return to geography or tradition than it is a journey without return.”⁶⁷ while certainly not downplaying the painful history of many jewish communities in the diaspora, ellis also views as a threat to jewish self-understanding the assimilation of judaism in the united states and in israel to the state and to power, a “constantinian judaism” which threatens to undermine the jewish prophetic voice from exile. noting that “the assimilation to the state and power itself creates a wave of dissent,” and that “there are jews in israel and the united states who oppose injustice and therefore refuse this assimilation,” ellis envisions a community choosing exile from structures of power in order to stand in solidarity with those marginalized and excluded by power. those in the exilic community then work together for a “return” which means justice for all, not simply landedness for some at the expense of others.⁶⁸

a recovery of exile as a critical concept for political theory or for a theology of the people of god seeking shalom for all will be critical not only of exclusivist zionist practice but also of any narrow nationalism, including palestinian nationalism, which would threaten to exclude others from sharing in god’s gift of landed security. in this critique edward said would again be an ally. while typically viewed as a champion of palestinian nationalism, said does not view palestinian statehood as an end in itself, but rather as one potential way for bringing landed security to all in palestine/israel. in recent years, in fact, said has become increasingly critical of political arrangements in palestine/israel based on separation. “the idea of separation is an idea that i’m just sort of terminally opposed to,” said explains, “just as i’m opposed to most forms of nationalism, just as i’m opposed to secession, to isolation, to

separatism of one sort or another.”⁶⁹ politics of separation too easily become a politics of apartheid, with one group enjoying benefits and privileges denied to the other.⁷⁰ as an alternative to the politics of separation, said offers the model of the bi-national state in all of mandate palestine, a state in which jews and palestinians live as equal citizens. in a fascinating interview with ari shavit of the leading israeli newspaper ha’aretz, said connects his appropriation of adorno’s critique of the home with his support for a bi-national state. “adorno says that in the twentieth century the idea of home has been superseded,” said begins.

i suppose part of my critique of zionism is that it attaches too much importance to home. saying, we need a home. and we’ll do anything to get a home, even if it means making others homeless. why do you think i’m so interested in the bi-national state? because i want a rich fabric of some sort, which no one can fully comprehend, and no one can fully own. i never understood the idea of this is my place, and you are out. i do not appreciate going back to the origin, to the pure. even if i were a jew, i’d fight against it. and it won’t last. take it from me ari. take my word for it. i’m older than you. it won’t even be remembered.

shavit replies to said, “you sound very jewish,” to which said playfully and somewhat provocatively responds, “of course. i’m the last jewish intellectual. . . . the only true follower of adorno. let me put it this way: i’m a jewish- palestinian.”⁷¹

said, ellis, and raz-krakotzkin, i believe, all articulate in similar ways an exilic politics of land and return, a politics which embraces the challenge of living rightly in the land and nonviolently struggles for a return to the land of the dispossessed but which maintains an enduring tension with landedness. the late palestinian-israeli writer, emile habiby, summed up the necessary tensions of an exilic politics of land when he spoke of a “freedom of longing for the land within the land.”⁷² this “longing for the land within the land,” suggests raz-krakotzkin, can be “a new starting point of all who dwell in the land, a basis for their partnership.”⁷³

john howard yoder, focused as he was on the church’s calling to embody a nonviolent politics amidst the babylons of the worlds, was wary of attempts to theorize the shape of the ideal state, deeming such efforts as surreptitiously “constantinian” attempts to identify the state rather than the church as the primary bearer of the gospel of reconciliation, renewal and redemption.⁷⁴ yoder probably would have therefore been skeptical of the enthusiasm with which said promotes the bi-national state. that said, yoder did not shy away from ad hoc engagements with the state, encouraging christians to target particular abuses rather than offering up grand political schemes. yoder’s understanding of the people of god as a political body living nonviolently amidst empires while seeking their peace and welfare is, moreover, compatible with the exilic politics of land and return articulated by ellis, raz-krakotzkin, and said, even as it also operates within an eschatological horizon which animates yoder’s vision with more reasons for hope than can be provided by the secular proponents of an exilic politics like said and raz-krakotzkin. christians, together with others, must embrace the challenge of living rightly in the land: this can include calling for just distribution of land (see, for example, yoder’s treatment of the jubilee), and working nonviolently for landed security for refugees.⁷⁵ part of living rightly in the land, however, will mean living lightly: christians, as citizens of the heavenly city on pilgrimage in the babylons of the world, will not use violence to establish justice in the land or to bring about a return to the land. rather than pursue the sovereignty of the sword, they will pray unceasingly and work nonviolently, impelled by a “longing for the land within the land,” for the day when all of god’s children will dwell securely within the land which god so graciously gives.

notes

1. mahmoud darwish, “we travel like other people,” included in larry towell, then palestine (new york: aperture, 1998), 32.
2. for yoder on “methodologism,” see his article, “walk and word: the alternatives to methodologism,” in *theology without foundations: religious practice and the future of theological truth*, ed. stanley hauerwas, nancey murphy, and mark nation (nashville: abingdon press, 1994): 77–90.

3. john howard yoder, "exodus and exile: two faces of liberation," *crosscurrents* (fall 1973): 279–309.

4. yoder, *for the nations: essays public and evangelical* (grand rapids, mi.: wm. b. eerdmans, 1997), 82.

5. for yoder, "constantinianism" did not simply name the church's alliance with and dissolution into the violent politics of empire, but also designated the perennial temptation for the church to abandon discipleship to its nonviolent lord in favor of alignment with other, allegedly wider, social movements. for a nuanced treatment of yoder on "constantinianism," see michael g. cartwright, "radical reform, radical catholicity: john howard yoder's vision of the faithful church," in john howard yoder, *the royal priesthood: essays ecclesiological and ecumenical* (grand rapids, mi.: wm. b. eerdmans, 1994), esp. pp. 5–14. see also craig a. carter, *the politics of the cross: the theology and social ethics of john howard yoder* (grand rapids, mi.: brazos press, 2001), 155–178 and alain epp weaver, "after politics: john howard yoder, body politics, and the witnessing church," *the review of politics* 61/4 (fall 1999), 649–652.

6. yoder's unpublished writings on judaism, mostly consisting of lectures delivered at bethel college in kansas, earlham college in indiana, and the tantur ecumenical institute in jerusalem, were collected by yoder as *the jewish-christian schism revisited: a bundle of old essays* (elkhart, in.: shalom desktop publication, 1996). these pioneering and provocative essays are being edited for publication in the radical traditions series (now with eerdmans press) by michael cartwright and peter ochs under the same title. for a more thorough discussion of yoder's appropriation of jeremiah's call to the exiles for a reading of scripture, an interpretation of church history, and a theology of judaism, see alain epp weaver, *constantinianism, zionism, diaspora: toward a political theology of exile and return* (akron, pa.: mennonite central committee occasional paper #28, 2002), 13–22.

7. while i am sympathetic to those who wish to substitute the term "hebrew bible" for "old testament," i do not believe that "old" necessarily implies a supersessionist approach to judaism: think of the wisdom of elders, for example, or the aging of a fine wine.

8. the phrase, "with the grain of the universe," is yoder's. see his article, "armaments and eschatology," *studies in christian ethics* 1 (1988): 43–61. stanley hauerwas recently appropriated it as the title of his gifford lectures; see hauerwas, *with the grain of the universe: the church's witness and natural theology* (grand rapids, mi.: brazos press, 2001). both yoder and hauerwas assume in their writings that it is the same, triune god to whom both testaments witness and whose nonviolent, self-giving love embodies the true "grain of the universe." for seminal studies which emphasize the identity of the triune god with yhwh, the god of israel, see r. kendall soulen, *the god of israel and christian theology* (minneapolis: fortress press, 1996) and scott bader-saye, *church and israel after christendom: the politics of election* (boulder: westview press, 1996).

9. john howard yoder, "on not being in charge," version of essay in *the jewish-christian schism revisited: a bundle of old essays* (elkhart, in.: shalom desktop publications, 1996), 138–139. this particular essay was also published in *war and its discontents: pacifism and quietism in the abrahamic traditions*, ed. j. patout burns (washington, d.c.: georgetown university press, 1996): 74–90. yoder also drew parallels between jewish communities in diaspora and the "believers church" vision of decentralized communities gathered around scripture and animated by the holy spirit. yoder, "on not being in charge," 138.

10. consider, for example, the following: "that christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of god and the work of jesus christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy has been broken, since the triumph of god comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival."—yoder, *the politics of jesus: vicit agnus noster*, second revised edition (grand rapids, mi.: wm. b. eerdmans, 1994), 239.

11. for a current treatment of the theme of exile in scripture, see the work of one of yoder's students, daniel smith-christopher.—*a biblical theology of exile: overtures to biblical theology* (minneapolis: fortress press, 2002).

12. some might accuse yoder of random selectivity in highlighting this particular strand in his attempt to provide a unified reading of the old testament which stands in continuity with the new. the selectivity was certainly not random, in that yoder

read scripture, as should all christians, through the lens of god incarnate in jesus of nazareth. to those who would reject the attempt to provide a coherent reading of scripture, championing instead a “postmodernist” interplay of competing, conflicting voices within scripture, it can only be answered that the postmodern valorization of a plurality of voices, none with more interpretive weight than the others, is itself a particular way of unifying the texts, one with its own implicit ethical and theological agenda, an agenda, one might add, which does not make the rejection of violence central to god’s purposes in the world.

13. john howard yoder, “see how they go with their face to the sun,” in *for the nations: essays public and evangelical* (grand rapids, mi.: wm. b. eerdmans, 1997), 64. for a more extended engagement with genesis 11, see yoder, “meaning after babble: with jeffrey stout beyond relativism,” *the journal of religious ethics* 24 (spring 1996): 125–39.

14. yoder, “jesus the jewish pacifist,” in *the jewish-christian schism revisited*, 48. yoder did not address, to my knowledge, the question most pressing to palestinian christians when reading the narratives of the exodus and the entry into the land, namely, the genocide of the native inhabitants. yoder’s appropriation of yhwh war is helpful and impressive; what one misses in yoder is any appreciation for how these narratives leave the canaanites and others outside of the sphere of moral concern. one can, of course, follow historical criticism and question the historicity of the exodus or the conquest, but one cannot escape the fact that the voice of the canaanite is simply silent in the texts. instead, their cities and lands are taken over, a vision of landlessness which stands in haunting analogy to the destruction of over 400 palestinian villages in 1948. one can observe, of course, that other parts of scripture clearly bring the nations, the gentiles, within the orbit of god’s redemptive action: what yoder did not do (but, i would contend, should have done) was to argue that other parts of the scriptural witness correct for the partially defective understanding of god present in the narratives of yhwh war. for yoder on exodus and exile, see yoder, “exodus and exile: two faces of liberation,” *crosscurrents* (fall 1973): 279–309. for a classic polemic noting the erasure of canaanites and palestinians from the sphere of moral concern, together with a critique of the attempt of a contemporary jewish political theorist to appropriate exodus as a model for radical politics, see edward said, “michael walzer’s exodus and revolution: a canaanite reading,” in *blaming the victims: spurious scholarship and the palestinian question* (london: verso, 1988): 161–78. finally, for a challenging article noting how the exodus and conquest narratives have underwritten various forms of colonialist practice, see michael prior, “the right to expel: the bible and ethnic cleansing,” in *palestinian refugees: the right of return*, ed. naseer aruri (london: pluto press, 2001): 9–35.

15. yoder, “see how they go,” 53.

16. yoder, “jesus the jewish pacifist,” in *the jewish-christian schism revisited*, 48.

17. yoder, “see how they go,” 74–75. a. james reimer’s critique, borrowing from john w. miller, of yoder’s reading of the old testament, that babylon/ exile never became the “exclusively normative symbol,” either in the old testament or in the post-temple diaspora, does not mount an effective challenge to yoder’s approach.—a. james reimer, “theological orthodoxy and jewish christianity: a personal tribute to john howard yoder,” in *the wisdom of the cross: essays in honor of john howard yoder*, ed. stanley hauerwas, chris huebner, harry huebner, mark nation (grand rapids, mi.: wm. b. eerdmans, 1999), 446. yoder need not claim that the motif of a jeremianic embrace of exile was necessarily dominant, but merely a) that this strand continued both within the scriptural witness and within the history of post-biblical judaism in the diaspora and b) that this strand is the one most in continuity with the gospel message. it should be clear, moreover, from even a cursory reading of yoder’s work, that john w. miller’s characterization of yoder’s theology as “marcionite” is simply misguided and misleading. see miller, “in the footsteps of marcion: notes toward an understanding of john yoder’s theology,” *conrad grebel review* 16 (spring 1998): 82–92.

18. yoder, *christian attitudes towards war, peace, and revolution: a companion to bainton* (elkhart, in.: distributed by co-op bookstore, 1983), 447.

19. yoder, *for the nations*, 56.

20. yoder, “jesus the jewish pacifist,” 60. sephardic jews throughout the arab world also lived in exilic communities, usually prospering and faring much better than jews

under christendom.

21. zionism, for yoder, represents judaism's full assimilation into the christendom of the west: "the culmination of the christianization of judaism, then, is the development of zionism. zionism creates a secular democratic nation state after the model of the nation states of the west. it defines jews, for the purpose of building the state, in such a way that it makes no difference if most of them are unbelieving or unobservant. in america the jews are 'like a church' with a belief structures, life style commitments, and community meetings; in israel judaism is a nation and the belief dimension no longer matters. to be born in the state of israel makes one less of a jew, in the deep historical sense of the term, than to be born in a ghetto."—yoder, "judaism as a non-non- christian religion," in *the jewish-christian schism revisited*, 122. i should stress here that the critique of zionism i offer here is directed at zionist theory and practice insofar as it assumed the necessity to exclude and dispossess palestinians in order to establish jewish sovereignty in eretz yisrael. this does not deny, of course, that zionism was experienced as liberation by, for example, jews who escaped europe during the 1930s and 1940s. nor does it preclude the possibility of "zionisms" which renew jewish life in eretz yisrael in a way which does not exclude and dispossess the native palestinian inhabitants.

22. the religious-secular opposition will surface several times in the following section. rather than attempting to parse the different, and, to my mind, ultimately incoherent ways in which said deploys this opposition, i will only note that i find the opposition to lack critical persuasiveness. for a helpful critique of said on "religious" and "secular" criticism, see william d. hart, *edward said and the religious effects of culture* (cambridge: cambridge university press, 2000). on the question of yoder's relationship to liberalism, oliver o'donovan has claimed that yoder fell prey to the latter's consumerist voluntarism.—o'donovan, *the desire of the nations: rediscovering the roots of political theology* (cambridge: cambridge university press, 1996), 223–224. for critiques of o'donovan's characterization of yoder on this point, see alain epp weaver, "after politics," 658–659 and p. travis kroeker, "why o'donovan's christendom is not constantinian and yoder's voluntareity is not hobbesian: a debate in theological politics redefined," *the annual of the society of christian ethics* 20 (2000): 41–64.

23. said's defense of "amateurism," as an intellectual stance which revels "in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession" (*representations of the intellectual*[london: vintage, 1994], 57) brings to mind yoder's wide-ranging intellect and his fruitful bringing together of scholarship in biblical studies, church history, ethics, theology and beyond.

24. for barth's treatment of "secular parables of the kingdom," see *church dogmatics iv/3:1*, par. 69, sec. 2. both barth and yoder—contrary to some simplistic characterizations—could embrace truth extra muros ecclesiae. see alain epp weaver, "parables of the kingdom and religious plurality: with barth and yoder towards a nonresistant public theology," *the mennonite quarterly review* 72 (july 1998): 411–40.

25. said, *after the last sky: palestinian lives*(london: vintage, 1986), 5.

26. for treatments of the war of 1948 and the palestinian nakba, see *the war for palestine: rewriting the history of 1948*, ed. eugene l. rogan and avi shlaim (cambridge: cambridge university press, 2001); ilan pappe, *the making of the arab-israeli conflict, 1947–1951* (london: i.b. tauris, 1992); benny morris, *the birth of the palestinian refugee problem, 1947–1949*(cambridge: cambridge university press, 1987); avi shlaim, *collusion across the jordan: king abdullah, the zionist movement, and the partition of palestine*(oxford: clarendon press, 1988); nur musalha, *expulsion of the palestinians: the concept of "transfer" in zionist political thought, 1882–1948* (washington, dc: institute for palestine studies, 1992); walid khalidi, ed., *all that remains: the palestinian villages occupied and depopulated by israel in 1948* (washington, dc: institute for palestine studies, 1992); meron benvenisti, *sacred landscape: the buried history of the holy land since 1948*(berkeley: university of california press, 2000). for a recent study which debunks many myths concerning the arab-israeli conflict, see avi shlaim, *the iron wall: israel and the arab world*(new york: w.w. norton, 2000). finally, for a strong collections of essays analyzing the current palestinian uprising, or intifada, against israeli occupation, see *the new intifada: resisting israel's apartheid*, ed. roane carey (london: verso, 2001).

27. said, after the last sky, 130.
28. said, after the last sky, 12. 29. said, after the last sky, 20–21.
30. said, after the last sky, 164.
31. said, after the last sky, 20–21.
32. said, after the last sky, 68.
33. said, representations of the intellectual, 35.
34. said, after the last sky, 51.
35. the endless claims that yoder's theology is "sectarian" in precisely this sense are sorely misguided. for one explanation of why yoder's theology is not sectarian, see my "after politics," 653–656.
36. said, reflections on exile and other essays (cambridge: harvard university press, 2000), 178.37. said, reflections on exile, 183.
38. said, reflections on exile, 175. 39. said, reflections on exile, 174. "secular" in this context appears to mean for said that exile cannot be placed into a larger, transcendental, theological context of meaning; it is an agonizingly concrete situation with no hope for amelioration (other than what the exile him- or herself can produce).
40. said, power, politics, and culture: interviews with edward said, ed. gauri viswanathan (new york: pantheon books 2001), 56.
41. said, representations, 39. for said the critic is tempted not only to be a yea-sayer for the community at large, but within one's own community; said, it should be noted, has been a vociferous critic of the plo and its often misguided handling of the palestinian struggle. yoder, too, was no "yea-sayer," or apologist, for the mennonite community, but rather reserved his most polemical barbs for critiques of the mennonite churches. see, for example, "anabaptist vision and mennonite reality," in consultation on anabaptist-mennonite theology: papers read at the 1969 aspen conference, ed. a.j. klassen (fresno: council of mennonite seminaries, 1970): 1–46.
42. said, representations, 39.
43. said, representations, 46.
44. said, representations, 45.
45. theodor adorno, minima moralia: reflections from damaged life (london: new left books, 1951), 38-39. quoted in said, reflections on exile, 564–565.
46. adorno, minima moralia, 87. quoted in said, reflections on exile, 568. 47. said, reflections on exile, 568.
48. for a highly useful and persuasive discussion of pathos in theology and the role of poeisis within that pathos, see reinhard hütter, suffering divine things: theology as church practice (grand rapids, mi.: wm. b. eerdmans, 2000).
49. said, "introduction: the right of return at last," in palestinian refugees: the right of return, ed. naseer aruri (london: pluto press, 2001), 6.
50. said, after the last sky, 33.
51. said, power, politics, and culture, 429.
52. said, reflections on exile, 179.
53. said, after the last sky, 150.
54. said, after the last sky, 150. note once more said's rather wooden use of the religious-secular opposition. what said cannot imagine is a religious criticism which prizes the "open" character of exile precisely because it confesses god's redeeming defeat of the powers of sin.
55. gerald schlabach, "deuteronomic or constantinian: what is the most basic problem for christian social ethics?" in the wisdom of the cross, 463.
56. i do not mean, through this analysis of the ways in which zionist discourse and practice have worked historically to dispossess palestinians, to deny the possibility that other forms of zionism, zionisms not dependent upon the dispossession of others, might be possible. the "cultural zionism," for example, of an ahad haam or a judah magnes, would be cases in point. in his interview with ari shavit, said rejects any talk of "de-zionization" or a simple dismissal of "zionism" as a valid term. jews should be able to be zionists, said believes, and "assert their jewish identity and their connection to the land, so long as it doesn't keep the others out so manifestly." — said, power, politics, and culture, 451
57. schlabach, 470.
58. laurence silberstein, the postzionism debates: knowledge and power in israeli culture (routledge: new york and london, 1999), 20.

59. sander gilman, "introduction," in jewries at the frontier: accommodation, identity, conflict, ed. sander gilman and milton shain (urbana and chicago: university of illinois press, 1999), 5.
60. silberstein, 22–23.
61. silberstein, 20.
62. quoted and translated in silberstein, 179. for the original hebrew, see amnon raz-krakotzkin, "exile in the midst of sovereignty: a critique of 'shelilat hagalut' in israeli culture," theory and criticism (theoria ve-bikoret) 4 (fall 1993), 44.
63. raz krakotzkin, "redemption and colonialism: exile, history and the nationalization of jewish memory," viewed august 2001 at <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/program/neareast/raz-krakotzkin.html>. this conclusion bears remarkable similarities to yoder's critique of zionism, noted above, as a jewish assimilation to christendom.
64. quoted and translated in silberstein, 178–179; raz-krakotzkin, "exile in the midst of sovereignty," 44.
65. quoted and translated in silberstein, 181; raz-krakotzkin, "exile in the midst of sovereignty," 39.
66. silberstein, 181, citing raz-krakotzkin, "exile in the midst of sovereignty," 49. 67. marc h. ellis, revolutionary forgiveness: essays on judaism, christianity, and the future of religious life(waco, tx.: baylor university press, 2000), 121.
68. ellis, revolutionary forgiveness, 271. see also marc ellis, practicing exile: the religious odyssey of an american jew(minneapolis: fortress press, 2001).
69. said, power, politics, and culture, 425.
70. commentators of various political persuasions increasingly describe the reality in the occupied palestinian territories as one of apartheid. see for example, several of the essays in the new intifada: resisting israel's apartheid, ed. roane carey (london: verso, 2001).
71. edward said, power, politics, and culture, 457–58. some israeli writers share aspects of said's bi- national vision. raz-krakotzkin, for one, believes that galutas a critical concept makes possible "a jewish identity based on the recognition of the potential embodied in the bi-nationality of the land."— quoted and translated in silberstein, 181; raz-krakotzkin, "exile in the midst of sovereignty," 49.
72. quoted and translated in silberstein, 182; emile habiby, ehtayeh, translated from arabic into hebrew by anton shammas (tel aviv: am oved, 1988), 9.
73. quoted and translated in silberstein, 182; raz-krakotzkin, "exile in the midst of sovereignty," 52.
74. see, for example, yoder, the christian witness to the state(newton, ks.: faith and life press, 1964), 77. i discuss yoder's ad hoc approach to engagements with the state in my article, "after politics," 669–671.
75. for yoder's treatment of the jubilee, see the politics of jesus, 60–75. christians, as followers of a nonviolent lord, cannot, of course, support refugee return which would mean the violent displacement of others in turn. for a discussion of the debate on palestinian refugee return, see alain epp weaver, "right of return: can palestinians go back home?" the christian century (may 2, 2001): 8–9.

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comments (1)

one more from the hartmann

filed under: [music,music and exile symposium,politics](#) — [abraxas @ 9:08 am](#)

dear colleagues,

many interesting points have been raised in response to my presentation and comments – points that have made me reflect on a number of issues.

at the end of my précis regarding my research concerning sibelius and nazism, i observed that "the hagiographical picture has been painted over and touched up to

conform to post-war mores, and the fallacious belief that great artists – who are also national heroes – must also be decent people. nor are such issues irrelevant to the interpretation of the music itself. the situation is, of course, special for sibelius who – fortunately – composed his music before the nazis assumed power. nevertheless, it is my contention in my study of ‘sibelius and the ss’ that there was a convergence of ideologies that allowed for a kind of ‘interpenetration’ between his music and their ideology, the significance of which was never lost on either party.”

to be sure, whether sibelius or hartmann were decent people is irrelevant to their significance and impact as artists. my point is that so-called music historians want them to be “humanists” and “paint over” or “suppress” those aspects of their biographies that do not conform to their, i.e., the historians’, own morality: the result is that hagiography and myth-making substitute for biography. but this is an ancillary point; crucial is the central point: the composer’s presentation of his music as a political statement. in sibelius’s case, it is clear that sibelius participated in the exploitation of his music and its concomitant ideology to promote the nazi cause. let us consider the historical record, which, for the reasons just given, has been completely ignored by sibelius scholarship for the past sixty years.

in 1935, helmuth thierfelder conducted sibelius’s second symphony with the frankfurt radio orchestra to celebrate the composer’s seventieth birthday, which coincided with hitler presenting sibelius with the goethe medal. at the same time, in the *allgemeine musikzeitung*, thierfelder published an open letter to sibelius. i present the german original first; there is at least one sentence that is difficult to translate and interpret, which i have placed in bold type.

an jean sibelius

finnlands großem sohne zum 70. geburtstag

verehrter meister!

das junge deutschland gratuliert! und zwar von ganzen herzen! es verspricht alles das gut zu machen, was eine frühere zeit an ihnen, lieber siebzigjähriger meister, versäumte.

die angelsächsischen länder, als siegerstaaten nach dem weltkriege weniger zersetzenden mächten ausgeliefert, haben sie schon eher in ihrer ganzen bedeutung zu erfassen versucht, während man sich bei uns nach dem kriege jahrelang einer ebenso unfruchtbaren wie volksfremden kunstrichtung hingab. sie aber, allein volk und heimat verbunden, schufen inzwischen ein herrliches orchesterwerk nach dem anderen. und so bezwang in jener unseligen zeit die urkraft ihrer tonsprache alle die deutschen menschen, für welche völkische begriffe immer schon ewigkeitswert besessen haben.

was ist nun natürlichler, als daß ihnen dafür besonders das erwachte, junge deutschland aus ehrlichem herzen danken möchte! sie haben in einer zeit gefährlichster umwertung fast aller uns heiligen begriffe in der kleinen front der wenigen großen gestanden, die uns jüngeren den glauben an den endsieg des guten erhielten und die kräfte zum kampf erneuern halfen.

sie, verehrter meister, haben uns den herrlichen beweis erbracht, daß die einzige international tonsprache nur jene ist, die in ihrem charakteristischen ausdruck nicht einen augenblick das temperament der eigenen rasse verleugnet. das gedankengut ihrer großen musikalischen tonschöpfungen entstammt dem boden ihrer an schönen volksliedern so reichen finnischen heimat, ist also volksliedhaft im höchsten sinne – und doch wüßte ich nicht ein volkslied, das ihnen irgendwo zur bequemen unterlage für eines ihrer meisterwerke gedient hätte.

das ausdrucksweise ihres orchesters, die geradezu revolutionär zu nennende klangliche erweiterung ganzer instrumentalgruppen, dann aber auch wieder die alles bezwingende zartheit impressionistischer tonmalerei, benützten gewisse kunstrichter gern zu der feststellung, “daß gegen die instrumentation allerdings

nichts einzuwenden sei," ohne dabei zu ahnen, wie fremd gerade ihnen die sogenannte "kunst des instrumentierens" ist. für sie ist in der tat der glänzendste äußere rahmen nie selbstzweck, sondern das kostbare gefäß eines noch kostbaren inhalts. natur! natur! nichts als natur! da scheint mir der hauptschlüssel für verständnis ihres gesamten musikalischen schaffens zu liegen.

der weg zu ihnen sollte angesichts so erd- und natur-gebundener haltung kaum besonderen schwierigkeiten unterliegen. und doch! wer sie besitzen will, muß sie erwerben, denn wie alles charaktervolle und kompromißlose in der welt ecken und kanten aufweist, so ist auch ihre herrliche musik alles andere als gefällig. das nordisch-grüblerische, aber auch das dämonische zauberwesen finnischer herkunft rührt an die letzten gründe der menschlichkeit, und will nicht nur gehört, sondern auch erkämpft werden.

so wie die helden der kalevala, an ihrer spitze der von ihnen so meisterhaft besungene strahlende lemminkainen, siegreich streitend pohjolas reich durchzogen, so müssen wir uns zum geistigen kampf rüsten, um der ewig geltenden werte ihrer künstlerischen lebensarbeit ganz teilhaftig zu werden.

deutschland fühlt heute mehr denn je die pflicht in sich, den meistern der nordischen, uns verwandten musik eine heimat in seinem herzen zu bereiten; bei ihnen hochgeehrter meister, dürfen wir noch dazu den unschätzbaren künstlerischen gewinn in den vordergrund rücken, den das hörende wie schaffende deutschland aus ihren tonschöpfungen ziehen wird.

helmuth thierfelder

i have translated this letter as follows:

to jean sibelius

finland's great son on his 70th birthday

honored master!

the new germany congratulates you! and from the bottom of [its] heart! it promises to make good for all that an earlier period, dear seventy-year-old master, ignored. the anglo-saxon countries, [who] as victorious states after the world war [were] less at the mercy of subversive elements, for some time already have attempted to comprehend your complete meaning [ihre ganze bedeutung], while in our case after the war for years one was devoted to an artistic direction that was as unfruitful as it was foreign to the people [volksfremd]. but you, bound only to people and homeland, in the meantime created one wonderful orchestral work after the other. and thus, in that unholy time, all of the german people for whom national [völkisch] concepts still had an eternal value were captivated.

what is now more natural than that the aroused, new germany [erwachte deutschland] should want to thank you from the bottom of its heart! in a time of the most dangerous revaluation of almost all of our most holy concepts, you stood in the small front [front] of the few greats who preserved the hope of final victory [endsieg] of the good and helped to renew the power for battle [kampf].

you, honored master, have provided us with the wonderful evidence that only international musical language is that which in its characteristic expression never denies even for a moment the temperament of its own race [rasse]. the body of thought of your great musical creations stems from the soil [boden] of your finnish homeland, so rich in beautiful folksongs, and is therefore folksonglike in the highest sense – and yet i am unaware of a folksong that anywhere served as a comfortable basis for one of your masterworks.

the manner of expression of your orchestration, the frankly revolutionary sonic expansion of whole instrumental groups, but then also by contrast everything compelling delicateness of impressionistic tone painting, led certain critics to

conclude “that there is nothing to object to in the instrumentation,” without suspecting how foreign to you is the so-called “art of instrumentation.” for you, in fact, the most glittering outer framework is never a goal in itself, but rather the precious container for even more precious contents. nature! nature! nothing but nature! this appears to me to be the key to understanding all of your music.

the path to you, in view of your earth- and nature-bound orientation should hardly present special difficulties. and yet! he who would possess your music must earn it, since everything full of character and without compromise in this world presents twists and turns, so in your wonderful music everything is other than obliging. the nordic-brooding, but also the demonic magical being of finnish provenance resides in the last boundaries of humanity and does not only want to be heard but earned through struggle.

thus, like the heroes of the kalevala, at the head of them, the glorious lemminkainen so masterly sung of striding victoriously [siegreich] through pojohla’s kingdom we must arm ourselves for spiritual battles [kämpfe] so as to be able to participate in the eternally valid values of your artistic life’s work.

today, germany feels more than ever the duty to prepare a home in its breast for you, the master of a nordic, related music; further, with you, highly honored master, we may move into the foreground the incalculable artistic benefit that the listening as well as creative germany may draw from your sonic creations.

helmuth thierfelder

my colleague, prof. dr. gerhard splitt (an expert on music in the third reich, and especially richard strauss), agrees with my explanation that thierfelder subscribes to nazi conspiracy theory, namely that everybody and everything is controlled by “international jehry,” “the protocols of the elders of zion,” the communists – the phrase “ebenso unfruchtbare wie volksfremde kunstrichtung” refers to the atonalists, jews, bolsheviks, in short, the cultural and music-bolsheviks [“das sind die atonalen, juden, bolschewisten, kurz: die kultur- bzw. musikbolschewisten”]. splitt clarifies the sentence as follows:

“die angelsächsischen länder, [die] als siegerstaaten nach dem weltkriege weniger zersetzenden mächten ausgeliefert [waren als deutschland], haben sie [deshalb] schon eher in ihrer ganzen bedeutung zu erfassen versucht, während man sich bei uns nach dem kriege jahrelang einer ebenso unfruchtbaren wie volksfremden kunstrichtung hingab.”

he writes that what thierfelder means to say is this: “the anglo-saxons could try earlier to understand sibelius ‘in his complete meaning,’ because after ww i they were less at the mercy of the music-bolsheviks than the germans. the music-bolsheviks are guilty. it is also clear that the anglo-saxons are somewhat unsuccessful; they have attempted to understand sibelius. what is implied: those who really understand sibelius are in fact the germans [“was er sagen will, ist: die angelsachsen konnten früher versuchen, sibelius in seiner ganzen bedeutung zu verstehen, weil sie nach ww i den musikbolschewisten weniger ausgesetzt waren als deutschland. die musikbolschewisten sind schuld. klar aber auch, dass die angelsächsischen länder etwas abbekommen: sie haben immerhin versucht, den sibelius zu verstehen. was implizit meint: die wirklichen sibelius-versteher sind wohl doch die deutschen].

it is noteworthy – and significant – that thierfelder employs the enigmatic phrase “in ihrer ganzen bedeutung zu erfassen” in this open letter from 1935 and again in 1942 in a private letter to sibelius (this letter accompanied nazi newspaper reports on the “finlandkonzert” thierfelder organized in hanover and his guest-conducting and interviews with sibelius in finland). the 1942 letter reads:

may 19, 1942

deeply honored, dear master,

as a small thank-you for the pleasant hours that i was again able to spend with you, i can report today of a new, wonderful success of your works in germany. i hope that i am able to make you happy with this. if i do not find myself applauding everything that the newspapers write, nevertheless most if it is good and correct and will show you with what open-mindedness your wonderful works are received in germany, and how one is concerned to perceive your complete meaning [sie in ihrer ganzen bedeutung zu erfassen].

with many warm and respectful greetings to you, also from my wife,

your truly beholden

helmuth thierfelder

enclosures: interviews and reviews

[hochverehrter, lieber meister!

als kleinen dank für die schönen stunden, die ich wieder bei ihnen verleben durfte, kann ich ihnen heute von einem neuen schönen erfolg ihrer werke in deutschland berichten. ich hoffe, dass ich ihnen damit eine freude machen kann. wenn auch nicht alles, was die zeitungen schreiben, meinen beifall findet, so ist aber doch das meiste gut und richtig und wird ihnen zeigen, mit welchem aufgeschlossenen sinn ihre herlichen werke in deutschland aufgenommen werden, und wie man sich bemüht, sie in ihrer ganzen bedeutung zu erfassen.

mit vielen herzlichen grüssen an die verehrten ihrigen, auch von meiner frau,

ihr ihnen stets true ergebener

helmuth thierfelder]

anl. interviews und kritiken

the topic of sibelius reception in the anglo-saxon lands came up in a discussion between prof. dr. tomi mäkelä and myself concerning his article for our book, and also with dr. antti vihinen. in his article, mäkelä observes regarding early anglo-saxon sibelius reception: “although north-american and british societies and identities are in many respects fundamentally multicultural, regional enthusiasm and local patriotism did become important aspects in both cultures in the 20th century. similar to the german ‘heimatkultur’ – movements around 1900 – particularly in the north of germany – an intellectual reaction to colonialism, internationalism and exoticism, as well as to urbanity and industrialization eventually culminating in the concept of “national revolution” (as understood in germany today, the term ‘national revolution’ signifies the ‘revolutions’ – to date and projected into the future – of the ultra-right wing nationalist fascists; the fascists also apply this term to themselves) – this trend in the english-speaking realms encouraged radically ‘right-wing’ attitudes and even well-organized movements. in my view, a thorough analysis of english and north-american style fascism, pseudo-fascism, and pro-nordic conservatism (often linked with anti-semitism and chauvinism) before and after 1945, should be undertaken in music; only in light of such scholarly study of english and north american fascism can its impact first upon early sibelius reception (above all olin downes and lucien price, to start with) and then later reception, as in wendy hall’s interpretation, be fully evaluated. a thorough analysis of english and north-american style fascism, pseudo-fascism, and pro-nordic conservatism (often linked with anti-semitism and chauvinism) before and after 1945, should be undertaken in music; only in light of such scholarly study of english and north american fascism can its impact first upon early sibelius reception (above all olin downes and lucien price, to start with) and then later reception, as in wendy hall’s interpretation, be fully evaluated.”

in the context of this discussion in 2007, i pointed out the importance of harvard-trained lothrop stoddard, especially his 1922 pamphlet the revolt against civilization: the menace of the under man and that “it is in stoddard’s work – that is, in an

english-speaking american pseudo-scientist of the inter-war period – that you find the original sources of the notions that make hall's work possible – as well as that of downes and price.....these white supremacy theories are deeply rooted in the ivy leagues up through the 1920s. don't forget sibelius's connection with yale....there were signs in the us that read 'no dogs or jews allowed' in this period. only in the later 1930s as people began to see the consequences of this way of thinking, was there a backlash; and the decisive blow was struck only with the actual opening up of the [concentration] camps and nuremburg." as stephen norwood has shown in his study *the third reich in the ivory tower: complicity and conflict on american campuses* (cambridge: cambridge university press, 2009), the upper administrations of these ivy league schools were rife with polite – and sometimes not-so-polite – anti-semitism and racial bigotry.

to return to thierfelder's argument in light of these observations, we now may better grasp thierfelder's point; what he is saying is the following: in the post-ww i period, the americans and british were "less at the mercy of subversive elements," that is, they did not almost have a communist take-over, and also, their music was not infiltrated by atonalists, jews, and communists, and so they would be better positioned to "attempt" to understand sibelius's "complete meaning," namely, that only by rejecting an international modernism of communists and jews in favor of an art rooted in people and soil could there be a "fruitful" artistic direction. that the anglo-saxon lands should ultimately fail to comprehend sibelius's "complete meaning" is presumably because they are too broad-minded, i.e., and more specifically because they have permitted themselves to be infiltrated by "subversive elements" (jewish, left-leaning atonalist émigrés and the like). the "new germany" (i.e., nazi germany), by contrast, alone grasps sibelius's "complete meaning" and possesses the necessary firmness and willpower to permit and encourage only a "völkisch" music like sibelius's.

thierfelder never would have dared publish this open letter in the *allgemeine musikzeitung* without having discussed it first with sibelius and receiving his approval. nor would sibelius's publisher helmuth von hase, the director of *breitkopf und härtel* and also the publisher of the *allgemeine musikzeitung*, have allowed thierfelder's letter to be printed if he had believed it to run contrary to sibelius's wishes. furthermore, if sibelius had objected, we would not expect to see this letter published in the finnish musicology journal a month after its publication in germany. the great preponderance of evidence is that sibelius endorsed thierfelder, and helped him to "spread the gospel," so to speak. post-1938, sibelius never would have intervened in the internal affairs of the reich to help thierfelder if he were put off by thierfelder's nazi orientation and interpretation of his music.

the audience for the original letter would be german rather than finnish. the original german wording makes it look like sibelius is a nazi sympathiser. so, the point would be made to the german public: "sibelius is one of us, i.e., sibelius is a nazi like us." it would not surprise me if it was the german version of the open letter – in combination with other indications – that led adorno to react as he did in his "glossen," although he does not cite the letter. in an article in the munich edition of *der volkische beobachter* by heinrich stahl (1940), that i have never seen cited in any sibelius bibliography, the author claims: "in mehrfacher beziehung darf man sibelius in die bezirke deutscher musik einbeziehen...." ["in many respects, one can draw sibelius into the realm of german music"]. in other words, the intention is to appropriate sibelius to german, i.e., nazi-german music, a process that is now well underway if not complete. now, the argument has been made that the one being appropriated – namely, sibelius – was "passive," having nothing to with those "actively" doing the appropriating – namely, the nazis – for their own purposes. but i believe that this open letter, which thierfelder could not have published without sibelius's approval and remained intimate with him, let alone have it translated and published in finland – in conjunction with a host of other indicators – shows that sibelius approved of this appropriation and encouraged it. and this approval is for me – and for adorno as well – the threshold for involvement: the doorway from passive observer to active participant, from disengagement to engagement. given sibelius's enormous prestige, this act was tremendously significant, both for our

understanding of the man and his music.

the related question now arises as to whether hartmann became engaged in a similar way on behalf of the apartheid regime in south africa; i.e., whether he used his music to further the political goals of the nationalists. my future research will focus – in part – in trying to find an answer. preliminary indications are that hartmann never felt himself to be part of the afrikaner establishment, nor did that party have any allegiance to him, regarding him unfavorably if at all. he did compose a “symphonic fanfare” for the van riebeek festival of apparently four minutes duration in 1952; does this show any commitment to the apartheid regime? my guess is that hartmann’s main political preoccupation was survival, especially since during the war he was suspected – like many german-speaking émigrés, both gentile and jewish – of being a “fifth columnist.”

timothy jackson

comments (2)

nietig

filed under: [melissa adendorff,poetry](#) — [abraxas](#) @ 3:43 am

kaal op die vloer voor jou sit die nietige vorm ‘n uit-aseb gebed en
vluister ...
hande vasgeknoop in ‘n stil bewerasie.
soos lippe sonder geluid beweeg sien jy asem in die koue lug verskyn en
verdwyn ...
net soos die gedagte wat deur die geklemde kake uitglip vir jou om te hoor.
ontverm jou vir die vorm, die gesig sonder ‘n naam.
ontverm jou oor die lyf wat blou word in jou teenwoordigheid.
maar moet net nie daaraan raak nie, die stilte is aansteeklik ... netnou
klou jou hande ook maar aan niks vas nie terwyl jy neer daal in jou eie
skaamte en jou longe met die water van ongevalle trane vul en jou na jou
asem laat smag.
as jy smag smelt jou vorm saam met die ander, op die vloer soos ‘n
standbeeld van geliefdes wat saam in iets glo.
kyk liever weg van nietigheid af en verblind jou aan dit wat voor jou nog
altheid bewe en sug en klou.
kyk neer op die niks wat jy nooit kan wees nie en stap net verby, uit by
‘n deur.

comments off on nietig

february 11, 2010

professor tim jackson responds to professor jean-pierre de la porte regarding sibelius and the nazis

filed under: [jean-pierre de la porte,music,music and exile symposium,politics](#) — [abraxas](#) @
10:40 pm

i truly enjoyed these paragraphs by jean-pierre:

“so far for every piece of evidence led, equally convincing arguments have come from both sides of the dispute. now is the time for character witnesses- the community of sibelius scholars is being asked by tim to significantly revise its biographic conception of sibelius to include the fact of his being a nazi sympathizer.

this is equivalent of asking the golf community to revise their conception of tiger woods from overall mr nice guy to serial philanderer- except in sibelius' case there are no publicity hungry aggrieved mistress having press conferences nor secret mobile phones with naughty messages about assignations. the burden then falls on tim to revise the entire pattern of sibelius biography – a huge network of actions, intentions and events in such a way as to make the nazi episode seem quite consistent,coherent and expected. the burden of circumstantial proof for the the pro sibelius camp is to fortify that same pattern of actions and events so as to exclude or make vanishingly small the probability of sibelius being a nazi sympathiser – with a sibelius of such consistently liberal character, tim's accusations simply cannot stick.”

i think that i do have the historical “glue” in the form of documents to make my assertions about sibelius “stick.”

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Donntag, den 29. Mai 1938

Morgen-Ausgabe

Dr. Goebbels in

Die Reichsmusikfesttage sind eine Festwoche
Musik teilnehmende Volk — Ein nationales

Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels führte in seiner Rede auf der Rundgebung zur Reichsmusikfestwoche in Düsseldorf folgendes aus:

Meine Volksgenossen und Volksgenossinnen!

Zum ersten Male seit dem nationalsozialistischen Umbruch tritt das zeitgenössische deutsche Musikschaffen in einer großen, repräsentativen Generalschau vor die Öffentlichkeit. Bisher zeigte es sich immer nur in mehr oder weniger bedeutsamen Teilbarstellungen. In diesen Tagen ist es anlässlich der Reichsmusikfestwoche in Düsseldorf in seiner Gesamtheit zusammengekommen. Das hat auch seine guten Gründe.

Rückblick auf die Verfallszeit

Der Verfall des deutschen geistigen und künstlerischen Lebens in den Jahren von 1918

Düsseldorf erhält Schlageterhalle

Den Höhepunkt der Reichsmusikfesttage 1938 Düsseldorf Rundgebung am Samstagvormittag im Rittersaal der weissen Hofe des Reichsministers Dr. Goebbels. Im flüchtigen Ganleiter Kantorat Florian als Düsseldorfler der Schlageterhalle und den Bau eines neuen Opernhauses stehen unter der Zehnherrschaft des Reichspropaganda-

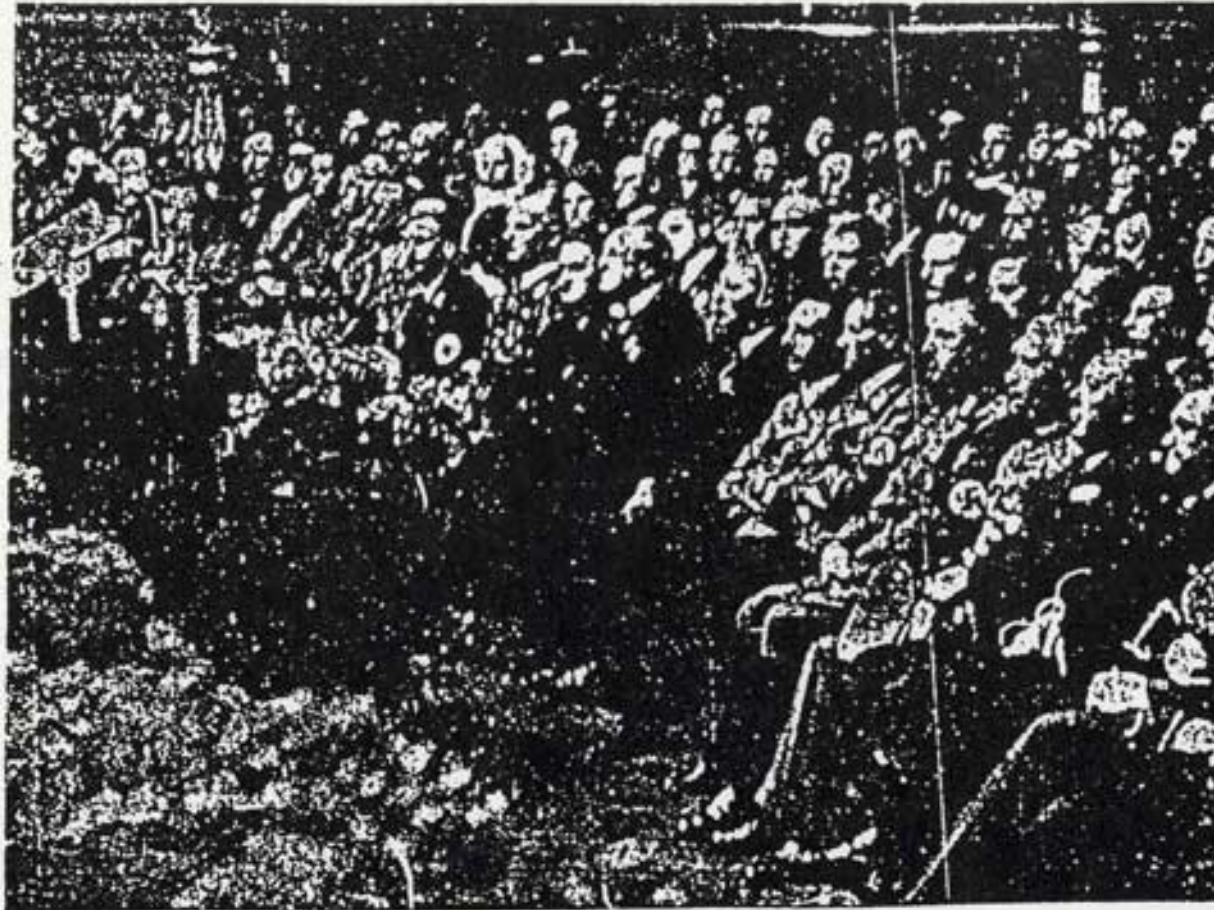
Im Jahre 1933 befand sich das deutsche Musikleben in einer geradezu trostlosen Lage. Ein drohender geistlicher und künstlerischer Zerfall stand unmittelbar bevor. Die Auffassung aller inneren Werte, die in der Vergangenheit der deutschen Musik zu ihrer führenden Stellung in der ganzen Welt verholfen hatten, schien fast unvermeidlich. Die deutschen Meister, die in echter künstlerischer Reife, unsterbliche

liebenden dem wäke private un- alten Meis den Verfal Die so eine ständig Zahl der zusammen

bis 1933 hatte auch vor der Musik nicht haltgemacht. Die großen Sünden der Zeit waren auch hier in die Erscheinung getreten und hatten lurchbarste Verwicklungen angerichtet im Bereiche einer Kunst, die bis dahin in der ganzen Welt als die deutsche angesehen wurde. Es war deshalb notwendig, eine gewisse Übergangszeit dazu anzunehmen, die hier eingerissenen Fehler, Mängel und Verfallserscheinungen durch eine systematische Reform, durch Befestigung der Krankheitsursache und Enttome und durch die Pflege der echten künstlerischen Kräfte unserer deutschen Musik zu beseitigen. In einem künftigen Aufbaue haben wir versucht, die schwere Krise zu überwinden und nach und nach festes Neuland zu gewinnen.

Werte bewahrt zu bewahren geblieben waren durch die marxistische Elemente des internationalen Judentums abgelöst. Die, von ihnen produzierte und propagierte sogenannte Musik mußte naturgemäß auf die Dauer zu einer vollkommenen Schrumpfung der öffentlichen Musikpflege führen. Es fehlte in der Staatsleitung die sichere Hand, die hier Krankhaftes ausscheiden und Geundes fördern konnte oder auch nur wollte. Je mehr aber die Musik selbst sich von der alten deutschen Klarheit des Stils, von der Freundlichkeit des Musizierens, von der Schönheit der Melodie und von der Mannigfaltigkeit und Vielgestaltigkeit der Orchestrierung entfernte, um so stärker geriet sie in Gegensatz zu den Wünschen und Bedürfnissen der breiten Volksmassen, ja mehr noch der musikalischen

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Die Kundgebung zur Reichsmusikwoche im Kaisersaal der Tonhalle.
In der Mitte der ersten Reihe der Ehrengäste: Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels; rechts von ihm: Oberbürgermeister Dr. Dr. Otto, Generalmajor von Prondzinsky, Regierungspräsident Schräpfer, Präsident Dr. Schwilke, Oberst Auleb; links von Dr. Goebbels: Dr. Heinrich Drews, Prof. H.-Obergruppenführer Weitzel.

as the author of the articles "sibelius the political" and "sibelius and the ss" that have elicited a "sibeliusstreit," i thought that i should offer a very brief view of at least part of my research on the connections between sibelius and the nazi regime. the first article is about 100 printed pages with full documentation, to appear in "sibelius the political" in sibelius in the old and new world: aspects of his music, its interpretaton, and reception, eds. timothy l. jackson, veijo murtomäki, colin davis, and tomi mäkelä (peter lang: new york, bern, berlin, bruxelles, frankfurt am main, oxford, wien), forthcoming 2010. it should be out soon.

an important aspect of the original documents that form the basis of my studies is not only their content but their tone. the nazis had their own version of the german language – well described by victor klemperer in his lingua tertii imperii – so that resonances of the original wording is almost impossible to translate; for this reason, in the scholarly versions, i have generally included the german originals in footnotes.

thus, the reader will be able not only to check the accuracy of my translations but also appreciate the mode of address; for example, by reading the german letters between sibelius and g nther raphael, it is possible to contrast the cold officiousness of sibelius's communications to raphael (post-1933) with the warm, friendly obsequiousness of his responses to thierfelder (more about this matter shortly). for a long time it has been asserted that sibelius maintained a strategic distance from the nazi regime, a "hands-off" policy so to speak, counter to goebbels' assertion that the artist must take a position. my research, primarily with documents in german archives – but also with help from finnish colleagues (especially prof. veijo murtom ki, although he has a different viewpoint) – in the finnish archives, demonstrates this not to have been the case.

SUOMEN MUSIIKKILEHTI

1935 December

NUORI SAKSA TOIVOTTA A ONNEA S JEAN SIBELIUKS

Tohtori Helmuth Thierfelder Wiesbadenista kirjoittaa Jean Sibeliuksen 70-vuotisp iv n johdosta m.m.:

Nuori Saksa onnittelee! ja todella t ydest  syd mest ! Se lupaa korjata sen, mit  se aikaisemmin, rakas 70 vuotias mestari, on Teid n kohdaltanne laiminly nyt. Anglosaksilaiset maat, joita maailmansota v hemmin runteli, ovat jo aikaisemmin koettaneet omaksua k sityksen Teid n koko suuruutenne merkityksest , silloin kun me viel  vuosikaudet sodan j lkeen noudattelimme yht  hedelm t nt  kuin kansalle vierasta taidesuuntaa. Mutta Te, jota kiinnostaa vain kansa ja koti, luotte sill  v lin ihanan orkesteriteoksen toisensa j lkeen, ja niinp  tuona onnettoman aikana Teid n s velkielenne alkuvoima tenhosi kaikki ne saksalaiset joille k sityksesi omasta kansasta aina on



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Mutta k

ollut iäisarvoinen. Mikä on nyt luonnollisempaa, kuin että erityisesti herännyt nuori Saksa Teitä vilpittömin mielin siitä kiittää. Te olette aikana, jolloin millei kaikki meille pyhät käsitteet mitä vaarallisimmalla tavalla toisin arvioitiin, seisonut siinä muutamien harvain suurten pienessä rintamassa, joka on meille nuoremmille antanut uskoa hyvän lopulliseen voittoon ja verestänyt voimiamme taisteluun sen puolesta. Te, kunnioitettu mestari, olette antanut meille sen ihanan totuuden, että ainoa kansallinen sävelkieli on se, joka omassa luontehikkuudessaan ei hetkeäkään kiellä rotunsa erikoisuutta. Teidän suurten musikaalisten sävelteostenne perusajatukset juontuvat Teidän kansanlauluista niin rikkaan suomalaisen kolimaanne pohjalta. Ne ovat siis kansanlaulunomaisia sanan korkeimmassa mielessä — ja kumminkaan en voisi osoittaa yhtään kansansävelmää, joka olisi ollut Teidän mestariteostenne mukavana lähtökohtana. Teidän orkesterinne ilmaisutapa, tuo kokonaisten soitinryhmien laajennus soinnullisessa mielessä, jota voi nimittää suorasteen vallankumoukselliseksi, mutta taas toisaalta

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sibelius was friendly with a conductor by the name of helmuth thierfelder, who was a card-carrying nazi and ss member who wanted to propogandize on behalf of the "new germany" in the baltic countries, finland, sweden, and promote the finnish-germany alliance. since he proclaimed himself as a "national socialist conductor" of the "new german" music — as well as of sibelius and the classics — when thierfelder conducted in sweden and lithuania in 1938, he was greeted with resistance both in the press and public.

only in finland, which seems to have been more favorably disposed to nazi germany, was thierfelder's reception warmer. in 1933, he became a member of the ss-berlin, in the stabe of the 6th standarte; since july 1936, when he moved to hamburg, he was in the stabe of the 28th ss standarte. in hamburg, he befriended his chief of the ss there, guenther pancke, then stabsführer ss-oberabschnitt "nord." (pancke had served time during the weimar republic for throwing a gas bomb into a crowded theater showing the film "all quiet on the western front.") in 1937, along with the swedish composer kurt atterberg, and shortly thereafter sibelius, pancke would try to help thierfelder hold onto his job at german radio (see below).

in another, printed version of his curriculum vita, thierfelder proudly writes that from 1929-1933 he "took active part in the cultural-political battles in berlin's musical life against foreign [artfremd] internationalism," a code-phrase for jewish, left-leaning and avant-garde artists and composers. for example, in may 1933, thierfelder signed a public denunciation of leo kestenberg (music advisor in the prussian ministry of education and the arts in the weimar republic, condemned and exiled as a jew) and fritz jöde (a music educator who later became a loyal nazi party member). in october 1933, thierfelder received the knight's cross, first class, from finnish president pehr evind svinhufvud (kivimäki was prime minister at the time) for "his service to german-finnish cultural exchange." in 1935, thierfelder conducted sibelius's second symphony with the frankfurt radio orchestra to celebrate the composer's seventieth birthday, which coincided with hitler presenting sibelius with the goethe medal. at the same time, thierfelder also published an open letter in the main german and finnish music magazines addressed to sibelius in german and finnish – that sibelius must have approved – the text of which makes sibelius a nazi sympathiser; this letter was probably the reason that adorno branded sibelius a nazi sympathiser.

after these 1935 events, for a series of reasons, none of them "political," thierfelder found himself unemployed and in trouble with the reich radio authorities in germany in late 1937 and early 1938. at this point, documents provide evidence for sibelius's intervention on thierfelder's behalf with goebbels' propaganda ministry (promi). on february 6, 1938, four days after meeting with sibelius and receiving a written general recommendation from him, thierfelder penned the following letter to another ss friend hans hinkel, ss oberführer, the (notorious) reichs cultural officer: "two days ago i returned from abroad [finland] and, for some time, have tried to keep my nose above water as a german musician. i have succeeded, although with great difficulty because everywhere sit the emigrant types like fritz busch (stockholm, etc.), who say that after they left germany there are no more up-and-coming conductors. therefore, as a national socialist it is more difficult but better! i hope that you could glance through my report and the foreign press notices and be satisfied with my work." after the meeting with sibelius at the beginning of february, thierfelder decided to appeal directly to goebbels (in march). did sibelius and thierfelder discuss this strategy? could sibelius have mentioned heinz drewes in goebbel's promi, who would become the director of the german sibelius society in 1942? all of a sudden, thierfelder's fortunes took a u-turn for the better. apparently, he was allowed to conduct the berlin philharmonic in the berlin radio hall on the evening before hitler's birthday, april 19, 1938! an internal memo directed to goebbels represents a reversal in the views of the officials within the promi: "dr. thierfelder cannot be successfully employed as previously for cultural-political propaganda work in the nordic countries and baltic bordering states if he does not have some position in the reich. it is especially necessary that his name not disappear totally from the programs of the reich radio company. politically, there are no concerns about dr. thierfelder personally. even if he also first joined the party on may 1, 1933, already since 1930 he was already active for the movement. before the takeover of power he was a member of the kampfband für deutsche kultur. in the years 1931-32, he repeatedly directed his own concerts with the berlin philharmoniker for subscribers to the ns press, especially the "angriff," even though this effort represented for him an economic loss. already in 1930, through jewish machinations, he lost his position at the berlin sinfonie-orchester. considering thierfelder's cultural-politically valuable service, which goes well beyond that of the average conductor, i ask for the authority to signal to dr. glasmeier or a director of

one of the radio stations, to employ dr. thierfelder. in this connection i am thinking above all of the radio stations that cultivate cultural connections with the nordic and baltic states. heil hitler!”



duemling drewes goebbels

after all of these appeals, goebbels decided that no one should be forced to hire thierfelder, but behind the scenes everything should be done to help him. as a result, by the fall of 1938, thierfelder had been engaged as the chief conductor of the niedersachsen orchestra in hanover. with the outbreak of war, in 1939, while serving as a reserve officer training motorcycle-mounted troops on the polish border, thierfelder found himself threatened with being fired and his orchestra being disbanded. and again, there is evidence of intervention by dr. drewes within the promi to preserve the orchestra and thierfelder's position. in 1941, thierfelder was put on the "valuable persons" (uk-) list so that he would never be drafted a second time and instead could continue his "important propaganda work," once more with the support of sibelius's connections in the promi. then, in 1942, thierfelder, with sibelius's backing, organized a "finland concert" with his orchestra to perform some of sibelius's warlike music to celebrate the german-finnish "waffenbruderschaft" – this highly politicized festive concert immediately followed a conducting stint in helsinki and a meeting with sibelius – all events much publicized in the nazi press. on may 10, 1942, the hannoverscher anzeiger, announced excitedly, "in the series – 'music of the peoples' – the lower saxony orchestra of hanover will present on may 14 a 'finland concert,' over which his excellency the finnish ambassador minister professor kivimäki and the gauleiter and higher president lauterbacher will preside. dr. helmuth thierfelder, the conductor of the lower saxony orchestra, in the course of a guest appearance in helsinki, had occasion to visit sibelius and spoke with our special reporter about it." in an article published 12 may, 1942 in the

niedersächsische tageszeitung, sibelius is full of enthusiasm for the founding of the german sibelius society. there can be no question of the composer's aloofness: for the first time, he feels properly appreciated in germany. and he concurs with the author's view of him as a composer who had to wait until the advent of the third reich to find his true place in german concert halls, which had been formerly dominated by "modernists" – read "degenerate musicians." this report also demonstrates a stunning obsequiousness on sibelius's part towards thierfelder: "in april of this year, dr. thierfelder was again invited as guest conductor for two concerts in helsinki. sibelius wrote shortly before from his country seat in järvenpää: 'when you arrive in helsinki, please call me by telephone immediately. you are heartily welcome. i am already looking forward to it.' on the first day of his stay there was no opportunity for this call since the radio concert began immediately after his arrival; thus the telephone greeting had to be postponed to the next day. dr. thierfelder then conducted mozart's g minor symphony, and shortly after the last tones had died away, the telephone rang in the radio studio; professor sibelius is on the line and wishes to speak to the german conductor. 'may you be most welcome,' says sibelius to thierfelder, 'i have just heard your mozart performance and wish to thank you for the wonderful tempi. tomorrow we will meet at my house.' this was a hearty greeting and at the same time a friendly invitation."



Dr. Thierfelder am Dirigentenpult

Photos: W. Hauschild

no expense was spared for the elaborate decoration of the domed hall of the city auditorium (see photograph), a clear indication of the political and cultural significance attached to the event by both nazis and finns. the concert, which took place on may 12, 1942, featured some of sibelius's most nationalistic and pugnacious music, "the song of the athenians" and the complete, newly revised four-movement lemminkainen suite in its german premiere. as andrew barnett observes concerning the text of "the song of the athenians," "the poem [dexippos] depicts the struggle between the culture and civilization of the greeks and the might of the barbarous persians – from the finnish perspective, an obvious analogy with the relationship between finland and russia." how fitting that this text should be sung by hitler youth, infantry and airforce choirs: its contemporary resonances are not lost on the critics, who comment on the appropriateness of these military forces, "joined in the beautiful presentation of a work that glorified war and heroic death [das kampf und

heldentod verherrlicht].” the comparison between the warlike lemminkainen and siegfried resonated with another critic, august uerz, who discerned in lemminkainen the “siegfried-like character from the finnish folk-epic kalevala” (review from friday 15 may, 1942, niedersächsische tageszeitung). on may 19, 1942, thierfelder sent all of these newspaper reviews and reports to sibelius with the following letter: “deeply honored, dear master, as a small thank-you for the pleasant hours that i was again able to spend with you, i can report today of a new, wonderful success of your works in germany. i hope that i am able to make you happy with this. if i do not find myself applauding everything that the newspapers write, nevertheless most if it is good and correct and will show you with what open-mindedness your wonderful works are received in germany, and how one is concerned to perceive your complete meaning [sie in ihrer ganzen bedeutung zu erfassen]. enclosures: interviews and reviews.” thierfelder’s comment that the germans are “concerned to perceive your complete meaning” – or “significance” – is quite striking: he seems to be referring to sibelius’s own interpretation of the contemporary relevance of his music.



letters from raphael to sibelius

my research on sibelius and nazism is composed of many strands. another line of inquiry concerns sibelius's relationship with the composer g nther raphael, the half-jewish grandson of sibelius's former teacher in berlin. on november 16, 1931, raphael, a brilliant young composer who had already had his first symphony performed by furtwangler in 1926 and was teaching at the famous leipzig conservatory, wrote to sibelius asking for help to organize a tour of the nordic countries. sibelius responded enthusiastically: "dear mr. raphael, your worthy name is well known to me. also i have seen you conducting on the podium of the singakademie in berlin, when a choral work of yours was performed. i was unaware that you were the grandson of my highly revered prof. albert becker under whose supervision i wrote so many fugues. it will be a pleasure for me if i could be in any

way helpful to you. today i spoke with the director of the radio orchestra in helsingfors and the engagement in helsinki is definite. please, if possible, immediately write to dr. toivo haapanen with regard to the honorarium etc. concerning reval and riga i do not have personal connections. but you will have my recommendation, revered mr. raphael, always.” the trip in april 1932, which included the radio concert and a meeting with sibelius, was a great success. sibelius again promised to help raphael whenever he might require it, especially with music publishers. well, post-1933, as a half-jew, raphael would desperately need that help. on may 18, 1934, raphael wrote to sibelius asking him to contribute a few lines of reminiscence to a special issue of the “allgemeine musikzeitung” to celebrate on june 13th the 100th birthday of his grandfather becker. the first indication of trouble was sibelius’s one-line reply of may 28, 1934: “young master günter raphael, with the best knowledge [wissen], it is impossible for me. your sincere admirer, jean sibelius.” the context is this: to save his position at the leipzig conservatory, raphael sought help from furtwängler, karl straube, hermann abendroth, rudolf mauersberger, walter davisson (the director of the conservatory), and carl goerdeler (the mayor of leipzig). to their credit, all of these german luminaries did attempt to intervene on raphael’s behalf. it was at this time that raphael also tried to bolster his position by publishing the commemoration of his grandfather’s centennial in the allgemeine musikzeitung. a contribution by sibelius would have lent the becker commemoration – and by extension, raphael himself – considerable prestige; however, sibelius’s curt refusal of may 24, 1934 left raphael without the hoped-for contribution. on june 6, raphael wrote again to sibelius calling attention to the potential importance of his support at this critical juncture (“i regret it all the more, since a few words from you would be of great significance, [and] since the next few days will decide my future”). if – if sibelius had sent a short note of recognition, it would have carried enormous weight for the following reason: furtwängler and other important musicians often came to goebbels begging for protection for favored jewish musicians; but any sign from sibelius – as an “outsider” – that he respected and valued raphael’s work would have been too important for goebbels to ignore. but sibelius did not reconsider his decision and remained silent. on august 16, raphael wrote to sibelius from denmark, where he had gone to visit his wife’s family; this time, because there was no censorship, he could be more open. “highly honored professor, whether you received my last letter, that i sent to you about six weeks ago, i do not know. i wrote to you then that i must leave my position as teacher at the leipzig conservatory because of the aryan paragraph. [raphael discretely does not use “the j-word,” but he meant because he was a half-jew.] that has in the meantime now happened. in spite of all efforts by german musicians – at the head of them richard strauss, wilhelm furtwängler, karl straube and sigmund von hausegger – it was not possible to reverse my termination. the propaganda minister dr. goebbels decided that my dismissal should stand and in his decision nothing will be changed. how far this decision will affect my compositional activities and my position as a musician in germany, i do not know. furtwängler is of the opinion that i can still be performed in germany. however, my present situation just does not look very bright.” raphael went on to ask sibelius whether it might be possible to find some sort of teaching position in finland, to which, in november, sibelius responded negatively. by now the wind had been blowing from a very different direction for some time; sibelius was being wooed by the third reich with prizes and promises of new appreciation in germany with concomitant potentially great financial rewards – and huge sums flowed almost to the very end of the war, not only royalties but a german pension. given the new circumstances, raphael had become for sibelius what in modern parlance is called “a toxic asset;” in spite of repeated pleas for assistance, just a few lines of support or recognition from sibelius (similar to those given by sibelius to thierfelder) would have made all the difference; but sibelius turned his back on raphael. some of my german colleagues believe that sibelius could have acted to support raphael in his “hour of need” without jeopardizing his prospects in nazi germany, but he chose not to take that chance. in an e-mail to various colleagues involved in this “sibeliusstreit,” i remarked upon how few characters were directly involved in the sibelius drama. in 1942, hermann gerigk, the leader of rosenberg’s music department, who was proposed to sibelius as his biographer by his publisher, simultaneously to his discussions with sibelius attempted to have raphael “liquidated.” that raphael survived at all was due both to sheer luck and the

rosenstrasse protest, which caused hitler, goebbels, and himmler to postpone the "final solution" for "mixtures" and jews married to "aryans" (since raphael's wife was danish, he fit into both categories).

Samstag, 16. Mai 1942

KURIER TAGE



Bild links: Regierungsdirektor Hoffmeister überreichte dem finnischen Gesandten Kivimäki das Gesch.
einem hannoverschen Motiv. Bild rechts: Ein Blick auf das Orchesterpodium während des Sibelius-Ko-
gentenpult.

Im Banne der Kale

Musik aus Finnland in der Stadthalle Hannover / Der finnische

Seite an Seite kämpfen im hohen Norden der Ostfront deutsche und finnische Regimenter gegen den gemeinsamen Feind. Es ist nicht ihre erste Waffenbrüderschaft, denn finnische Legionäre haben im Weltkrieg in deutschen Formationen gekämpft und deutsche Soldaten waren es, die Finnland beitreten halfen. Aber die Waffenbrüderschaft dieses Krieges ist noch um vieles herzlicher, weil wir keine schicksalhafte Bedeutung kennen. Es entspringt daher auch keiner Laune, wenn der finnischen Musik in Hannover einmal besonderes Gewicht gegeben wurde, wie der Rahmen der Veranstaltung, die uns im Kuppelssaal der Stadthalle unter dem finnischen und dem Falkenkreuzbanner vereinte, bewies. Schirmherren waren S. E. der finnische Gesandte, Minister Riviimäki, und Gauleiter Lauterbach, die beide dem Konzert beiwohnten. Zahlreich waren die Ehrengäste von Staat, Partei und Wehrmacht, sowie der wirtschaftlichen und kulturellen Organisationen, unter ihnen der Präsident der Deutschen Sibelius-Gesellschaft, Dr. Drewes. Zahlreich war die Menge, die mit wachsender Begeisterung den Kompositionen von Jean Sibelius und S. Palmgren lauschte.

Was leibt ihren Werken die Tiefe einer Gefühls offenbarung? Wir kennen doch auch die Musik Dänemarks, Schwedens und Norwegens. Wir lieben — um nur einen Namen zu nennen — die Werke Griegs und finden sie schön in ihrer nordischen Klanghaftigkeit. Diese elementare Gewalt aber, die bei dem Finnen Sibelius unsere Herzen höher schlagen läßt, fehlt den Scandinaviern. Wer das Konzert in der Stadthalle gehört hat, weiß um den Grund. Hannover befißt in Dr. Thierfelder einen Dirigenten, der seit vielen Jahren finnische Musik interpretiert und uns darum ihren Geist nahebringen kann. Es ist der Geist jenes völkischen Kampfes, der uns wieder schicksalhaft umwittert. Er erfüllt die Geschichte Stanlands wie die unsere. Vor allem aber: er bestimmte die Haltung des finnischen Volkes im letzten Jahrhundert, in dem Scandinavien seinen Kampf mehr kannte. Der finnischen Kunstmusik aber hat er den eigenen Ruch und die elementare Kraft gegeben, die eine Begegnung mit ihr zum fruchtbarsten Erlebnis macht.

Dieses Erlebnis dürfte nicht auf Hannover beschränkt bleiben, sondern — und darin liegt die musikalische Bedeutung dieser Veranstaltung —

auf das Reich ausstrahlen. Gewiß ist uns Jean Sibelius, dessen Werke im Vordergrund dieses Konzertes standen, seit langem kein Fremder mehr. Seine symphonischen Dichtungen tauchen immer wieder in den Konzertprogrammen auf, nur selten aber wagt sich ein Orchester an einen geschlossenen Sibelius-Abend heran. Nur so ist es auch zu erklären, daß wir gleich drei Sibelius-Erstaufführungen erlebten, eine für Hannover, zwei für das Reich. Damit leistet unsere Gaubauptstadt wichtige Pionierarbeit.

Glücklich war der Auftakt mit dem „Gesang der Athener“ für Blasorchester, Männer- und Knabenchor. Glücklich schon deshalb, weil er als musizierende Gemeinschaft ein Trompeterkorps, einen Soldaten- und einen HJ-Chor, also soldatisch ausgerüstete Kräfte, in schöner Dignität einem Werk verbänden sah, das Kampf und Heldentod verherrlicht. Bald darauf standen wir im Banne der Kalevala, jener finnischen Volkssage, die den Helden Lemminkäinen durch die Gebete der Mutter aus dem Todesreich Tuonela befreit sieht, worauf der Held keine Sorgen und Kümmernisse in Streittröffe verwandelt und als Sieger in die Heimat zurückkehrt. Wer vor Jahren Gelegenheit hatte, die Wanderausstellung „Finnische Graphik“ zu sehen, der weiß, welche Rolle die Motive der Kalevala im schöpferischen Leben Finnlands bis zur Gegenwart spielen. Hier nun war die musikalische Deutung, ein Jugendwerk des Komponisten, dessen zweiter und vierter Satz uns bekannt waren, während der erste und dritte Satz als verschollen galten und erst kürzlich aufgefunden wurden. Nach gut vierzig Jahren erlebte die Lemminkäinen-Suite in ihrer Geschlossenheit jetzt in Hannover ihre zweite Ur-aufführung. Und hat man bisher vorwiegend die lyrischen Schönheiten, etwas in der traumhaft schönen Weise des „Säwanen von Tuonela“ bewundert, oder die dynamische Wucht, mit der die Heimkehr des Helden gestaltet wird, wenn das fleischhafte Crescendo sich mit der Kraft der Melodie aus dem brodelnden Klang des Orchesters hebt, so wurde nun das Ganze erschlossen, und dieses Ganze atmete das Geheimnis allen völkischen Werdens, das der Sage verhaftet ist. Man erkannte nun die Zusammenhänge dämonischer Kräfte, und die Wiederkehr der Suite atmete Kampf und wieder Kampf! Keine lyrische Ruhe, die nicht jäh durch fordernde Gewalten in drängendem Laufen hinweggefegt wurde, aber auch keine streitende Macht,

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there are a number of further lines of inquiry that i explore that show sibelius was far from passive, "hands off" in his relations with the third reich. i mentioned that he was close with thierfelder, a member of the ss. more virulent ss intellectuals also met, communicated with, and wrote about sibelius, including one individual, günther thaer, who was employed by rosenberg to advocate for nazism in finland and involved with a german translation of the kalevala for himmler's ahnenerbe; a short monograph on sibelius based on a long political discussion with the composer in his home was prepared by a ss war reporter anton kloss who, in poland in 1940, had belonged to one of the most notorious units in the ss responsible for crimes against humanity. this unit was singled out for special blame by general blaskowitz in a futile complaint to hitler that was later used as evidence in the nuremberg trials. all of the details will be provided.



himmler, august 3, with boehme

was sibelius a humanitarian, was he against anti-semitism? his diary, recently published in swedish, contains remarks that are both anti-semitic but also condemn anti-semitism and the holocaust. some of comments that are recorded in sibelius's diary about mooses pergament seem to fit into the category of what the germans would call "jude, aber anständig" -antisemitismus ["jew, but upright" (kind of) anti-semitism"]. unfortunately, we must not forget that this brand of anti-semitism also played an important part in the thinking of the ss, of men like thierfelder, thaer, kloss, gerigk, etc. let us consider a passage from himmler's infamous recorded speech in posen, poland, delivered on october 6, 1943, to a closed meeting of ss officers. "it is one of those things that is easily said. 'the jewish people is being exterminated,' every party member will tell you, 'perfectly clear, it's part of our plans, we're eliminating the jews, exterminating them, ha!, a small matter.' and then along they all come, all the 80 million upright germans, and each one has his decent jew. they say: all the others are swine, but here is a first-class jew."



himmler, august 2, at kiestiki

professor erik tawaststjerna, the author of the definitive five-volume biography of sibelius, argued that there was “not a scrap of truth to the claim” that sibelius was a nazi sympathiser because nazi doctrines were “completely at odds with sibelius’s inherent humanism.” however, the widely quoted comments from sibelius’s diary about his opposition to nazi racial policies have been presented completely out of context. these cryptic remarks – not unequivocal in their interpretation – require elucidation. when, on march 26, 1943, sibelius writes about the different “perspectives currently here and in germany,” he seems to be contrasting nazi ideology with the finnish viewpoint. that sibelius has nazi racism in mind is clarified by the next entries of august 9 and september 6, where he states that now, in old age, he finds anti-semitism “unacceptable.” the entry for september 12 is mysterious: what tragedy begins? in this case, the tragedy sounds personal; perhaps this entry is connected with that of september 15, which refers to the “trouble i have caused to aino, my dear wife.....” the entry of september 13 may well refer to the still-gestating eighth symphony (“the symphony in my mind”). sibelius complains about hostile reviews; he feels that only “very few in the world” can understand his conception of “the symphonic:” for him, the symphony is not just a remake of old ideas – it is original, the product of “a unique talent.” possibly the entry of september 20 continues the ruminations concerning the gestation of the eighth symphony (“out of the chaos of thoughts perhaps eventually the essential, the true and the wise will crystallize”). sibelius articulated a similar idea with regard to the finale of his third symphony, describing it as “the crystallization of ideas from chaos.”

on september 16, sibelius returns to the issue of nazi racism. he remarks that he himself is not racially pure (“i am not a man of pure race [reinrassig]. neither with regard to heritage, temperament, nor in nature”). he is both fearful and disgusted by what geneologists and racial theorists have said about him (“my heritage – god knows what they have made up!”); this may be a reference to granit ilmoniemi, who appears in the entry for september 20. ilmoniemi had authored an article in 1925 in which he tried to prove that sibelius’s ancestors were finnish-speaking farmers – much to sibelius’s annoyance – since he thought that they had been country noblemen. september 17 finds sibelius in “deep anguish of the soul” over the use of race – something which is beyond individual control (“my inheritance to the children. i am not guilty of this.”) – to determine destiny (“won’t the world realize the unfairness of this predestination”). the phrase, “what bottomless suffering,” may well refer obliquely to the persecution of the jews.



on september 18, 1943, we come to the crux of the issue: the connection between these ruminations on nazi racial policies and financial issues. apparently, stagma has requested that sibelius fill out some kind of questionnaire (fragebogen) to move into a higher payment bracket ("as there is no question of me staying as a lower member of stagma..."). if he wants to get paid, sibelius is being compelled to apply for a higher status in stagma, possibly because of increased revenues generated by the founding of the deutsche sibelius gesellschaft in april 1942. the next sentence suggests that sibelius plans to withdraw from stagma altogether, but this is impossible because he remains cut off from his royalties from allied countries: "but so far the timing makes it impossible since there is war and my plans cannot be realized." the following day, sibelius continues to vent his disgust with the "aryan paragraph," which he sees as a way of preserving mediocrity and excluding gifted jewish composers (like günter raphael); he sarcastically ridicules the nazi regulations,

observing that “in certain countries like germany, the ‘aryan paragraph’ is necessary to get rid of talents.” on september 20, sibelius admonishes himself (“how could you, jean sibelius, have taken seriously these aryan paragraphs?”); rather, as an artist he is “a cultural aristocrat” who should be above such “bad social prejudices.” as he observes on september 22, it is “advantageous to benefit from the good sides of different descents,” i.e., to take advantage of diverse racial and social backgrounds.

sibelius is angry and frustrated with the fact that currently he is not being paid by stagma, presumably because he has hesitated to fill out the fragebogen. this continuing lack of payment would explain the outburst of september 22: “as stagma pays money to other finnish composers (like kajanus [unreadable words]) and leaves me unpaid [unreadable words].” clearly, if he wants to be paid, sibelius must address the issue with stagma (“the thing with stagma must be clarified”). the concluding sentences of the september 22 entry are open to quite different interpretations (“let it be conventional. leave now finally all sentimentality and defend yourself. just be for this time a real man!”) either, sibelius is admonishing himself not to bow to the request to fill in the fragebogen and simply demand payment, or he is telling himself to put aside any scruples he may have had and simply complete the fragebogen as required. (unfortunately, i find the second reading more compelling in light of the entry from september 30 discussed immediately below.) on the 23rd, sibelius seems to be profoundly depressed because he does not know what is happening with stagma (“in such a deep valley, like never before. i cannot figure this out with stagma. they may have their reasons.”) finally, on the 24th, sibelius notes “received a letter from stagma. happy over that.” presumably, in this letter from stagma, the germans indicate that they have moved sibelius to a higher level in the organization, and promise to resume their payment of royalties. the notation from september 30 suggests that sibelius did indeed capitulate to the request to fill in the fragebogen. vaughan williams dedicated his fifth symphony to sibelius and he listens to it broadcast on swedish radio conducted by sargent. williams’s music breaks over sibelius like a “soft touch by the sun” because he hears in it “culture and rich humanity” – qualities he bitterly contrasts with his own “unculture,” i.e., his own moral capitulation in the stagma affair, which he nevertheless justifies as being necessary for survival under the circumstances: “my fatherland has a tragic destiny. we have to resort to the rawness and unculture/lack of culture [in german: endkultur] – or otherwise we will perish.”

after the war, there was a tendency to cover up, hide, and obfuscate the past. every german had to have their “persilschein,” and their one saved jew as an alibi, and then, cleansed by the spruchkammer and with a clean bill of health, they could resume their professional lives as if nothing had happened. additionally, we want to think of our great artists as moral people – as humanitarians. this tradition of associating greatness in a given field with virtue extends back to the ancient greeks. unfortunately, it often proves not to be the case: the greatest artists have worked for and associated with the most vile of masters. in this regard, sibelius, like some other great composers and performers of that period, was no different.

post-war scholars have attempted to distance sibelius, the most important finnish composer, from nazism. in an effort to sanitize him, for the past half-century, for the most part, historians have ignored, suppressed, misrepresented or simply remained ignorant of the primary sources demonstrating sibelius’s nazi sympathies and active support for the nazi regime. the significant “new” evidence showing sibelius’s close engagement with the third reich is “novel” only in the sense that it has – until now – failed to figure prominently, if at all, in sibelius historiography: the hagiographical picture has been painted over and touched up to conform to post-war mores, and the fallacious belief that great artists – who are also national heroes – must also be decent people. nor are such issues irrelevant to the interpretation of the music itself. the situation is, of course, special for sibelius who – fortunately – composed his music before the nazis assumed power. nevertheless, it is my contention in my study of “sibelius and the ss” that there was a convergence of ideologies that allowed for a kind of “interpenetration” between his music and their ideology, the significance of which was never lost on either party.

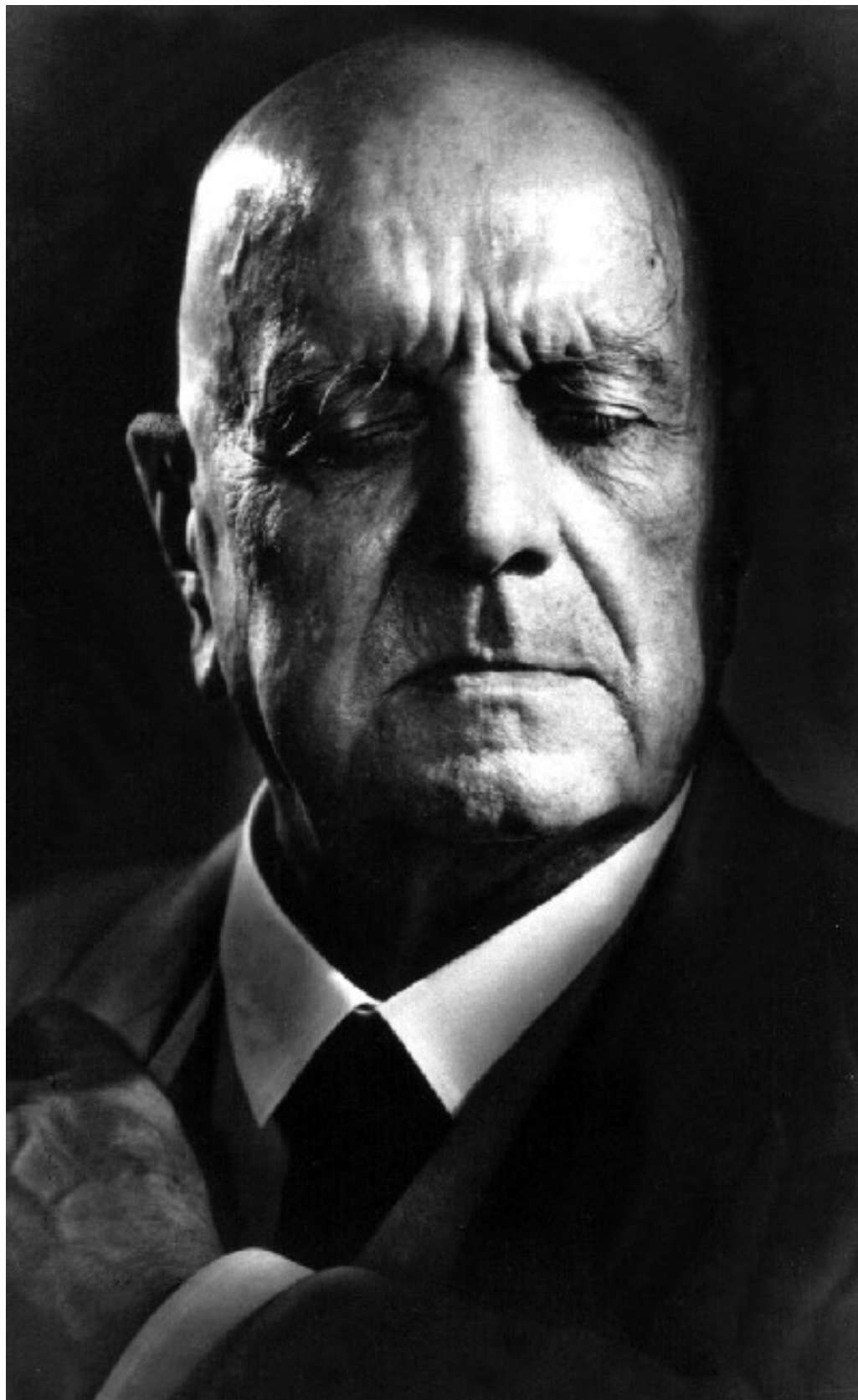
tim

comments (2)

february 10, 2010

sibelius, an impeccable host to the nazis?

filed under: [music](#), [music and exile symposium](#), [politics](#) — [abraxas](#) @ 7:15 am



dear all,

of course very seldom an artist is “unpolitical”, sibelius even did not want to be that as he was always acting for finland. but to to put on his shoulder something like

having acted pro nazi-german is just a product of a lively phantasy. he was comfortable with persons coming from england, italy, france, britain, usa and even soviet union, he had an extensive correspondence with many thousand letters with people from all over the world, having an continuous flow of visitors in ainola etc. he was friendly with german newspaper men and musicologists in the same way he was with all the others too. sibelius was always an impeccable host to anybody and usually he left a visitor in the mood that he had agreed with him or her in everything that during a visit was touched in the course of a discussion. there are simply so many cases that prove that germans were forming just one nation he was friendly with. of course, the finnish-german long friendship/relations going back to the 16th century and the two nations being comrades-in-arms during 1941–44 meant that sibelius had then many german acquaintanceships in order to support the common fight against the bolshevism (the us did nor love especially the communists!). and some of the values sibelius were representing in his music, like nature, nation etc., paralleled with the nazi aesthetics, but we have to remember that sibelius came first and had composed his oeuvre before nazis took the power, so he was only good instrument for the nazis, whose horrible ideas about jews or their destruction etc. sibelius never supported and never accepted. he never praised the nazi leaders or their ideas, but emphasized in his typically very careful way, how he wanted that the “war would be over under the european signs”, in which did mean something more profound, the genuine europeism instead of the vulgarity of the nazi-german version of it.

and before else: sibelius is never lying in his music, it is the product of a true humanist believing in the values of the ancient and classical modern-time culture of europe, for him including all the nations of europe, not just one nation. he was believing 1910s onwards more in british and french music than that of german that had had a brilliant past but the nazi-german version of which he never touched or praised in his statements.

best wishes,

veijo m.

comments (1)

nicki

[filed under: danila botha,literature](#) — [abraxas @ 7:08 am](#)

my parents called me today from israel to tell me that my sister is having a baby.

she's four years younger than me and has been married for less than a year.

the conversation is short, and typical. my dad talks for two minutes, asks me how i am, if i'm making enough money, what my plans are. my mom starts out friendly but soon is angry, hyperventilates, cries and screams. i do not want to go back for the birth, or if it's a boy, for the bris.

i do not want to hear how superior my sister is to me in every way. i do not want anything to do with any of it.

if i had to describe each of my parents in one word, i would say that my dad is distant and my mom is hysterical.

both of them are controlling and rigid in their views.

my parents owned the apartment i grew up in, which in israel, where everyone is in the red, is a big deal. our apartment was a penthouse. it was so huge it took up half a floor, despite the fact that we were only four people. it could've comfortably housed at least eight.

our balcony looped all the way around our apartment, and in the summer, when it was thirty five or thirty seven degrees during the day, and about thirty at night, i'd fall asleep on one of our loungers, surrounded by white marble floors and walls, staring out at the grass and trees behind the parking lot below, the sounds of neighbours talking, stray cats hissing. we had a stray cat problem on our street, even by israeli standards. an old man in my building, he must have at least eighty, shrivelled hanging skin on his face, narrow brown eyes, thin strands of remaining grey hair, only two or three visible teeth, wizened hands. he used to collect fish heads, scraps of bread, half containers of yogurt or milk, and he'd feed them every single day at 3:00. sometimes on fridays he'd buy them discount cat food at the supermarket on the corner of our street. we had at least twenty of them- fat ginger ones, thin calicos, mangy matted tabbies, ones that were missing eyes, or parts of paws, scratched to shit for stepping on other cat's territory or trying to eat its food. they slept on or under people's cars, staring at you lazily in the sun, glaring when you make eye contact, daring you to kick them off. my dad hated them- a cat on his windshield in the mornings made him fly into a rage.

neither of my parents cared much for animals. there's a home video of my dad kicking someone in the family's dog as he walked down the aisle at a wedding. my mom didn't want anything that would make the house dirty- i have enough to do as it is, she would always tell us. ein li coah, she would say, i don't have the strength.

our apartment was once actually two apartments- my parents bought them both, knocked one down and combined them. my dad made his fortune in what we call high tech in israel, but what everyone else in the world calls i.t. he designed software, and created a mapping system for the army to use that they say revolutionized their ability to do tracking. not only did it give him a reputation for being a genius, it gave him a salary and a title to match, as he loves to tell people. now he's a boss, telling programmers what to do. he works for amdocs, a huge company on the border of my town and the next city. he still works at least sixty hours a week, so even when i lived at home, i hardly ever saw him.

my mom works part time in ramat hasharon, a suburb of tel aviv, as a florist. she likes exotic flowers, oranges and reds and purples, shipped in from outside of israel, the kind that cost a fortune. israeli's pride themselves on getting a good deal, so it's a hard sell. she comes home frustrated and complaining, picking me apart, yelling, slamming things. on her days off, she cries and had panic attacks.

my mom does not believe in long term therapy, on in taking medication.

i've given up trying to help her but i've also given up on hearing what a disappointment i am.

my sister noa is twenty. her husband, reuven, is a rabbi. they live in b'nei brak, a city full of people so orthodox they seem amish.

my parents are modern orthodox, but they're at least five rungs closer to heaven on the ladder.

i mean, they keep the sabbath, more or less, and they keep to the laws of being kosher, at least when they're eating at home. they dress like regular people too. my mom wears jeans, my dad wears shorts and t shirts, even to work. israel's pretty casual compared to canada.

my sister wears a wig to cover her hair, floor length denim skirts and long sleeved shirts even in the summer. she won't sit alone in a room with a man who isn't her husband, or see a male doctor or dentist, or shake hands or touch any other man. when they go on vacation, he goes to men's only, and she goes to women's only beaches so they won't be exposed to anyone of the opposite sex. when she has her period, she's not allowed to touch her husband in any way, not even accidentally, like if she brushes his arm when she passes him the milk at breakfast. they're not even allowed to sleep in the same bed at that time, and she has to take a ritual bath once a month, called a mikvah, to clean herself. i didn't want to get involved, i didn't

want to say anything, but how could i not feel angry when she told me about it and then asked me what i thought? god wants you to hate your body, i asked her. god wants you to feel uncomfortable and unclean during a time that's totally natural? god wants you to be a fucking leper?

she shook her head at me. you don't understand, she said, looking away, and i guess i don't.

i guess i don't even want to.

her husband, who walks around in a black coat, white shirt, black pants, and a long beard every day, aside from working in the synagogue, doing rabbi stuff on friday nights and saturdays, professionally studies the old testament. he goes to a yeshiva, a place where holy men get together to sit and study the torah up close, all day. women can't even go inside.

my dad used to call guys like him a drain on our economy- he'd get so angry, claiming his taxes were being spent on supporting people who were too lazy to get real jobs. his favourite example was rashi, a famous rabbi in jewish history who wrote biblical commentary. even he had a job as a winemaker, he'd snap, banging his hands down on the table as he talked.

now all he can do is sing reuven's praises. he's happy to support them, he says. they're performing a mitzvah, a holy deed. they are continuing the jewish race, protecting israelis by increasing our population. gotta keep our numbers up, he says, and he's serious.

how do you argue with that kind of logic? you can't. i'd lose, so i don't even bother.

reuven didn't have to go to the army, because yeshiva guys like him often get a free pass. neither did my sister, who did national service, where she volunteered at a hospital in jerusalem for a year instead.

i don't bother to give my opinion on the unfairness of that either. i keep it to myself, try not to think about it in case it actually kills me.

i started breaking the laws of shabbat, the sabbath, when i was fourteen. i'd skip friday night dinners to go to dance parties in tel aviv, sneak out by saying i was staying over at a friend's, someone who lived down the street. when i got my first car, before the army, when i was eighteen, i'd have to park it around the corner on friday nights or saturdays so they'd think i walked home from wherever i came from. according to the sabbath laws, any work activity, including driving, was strictly forbidden.

i broke the rules, but i started out small. the first time i did it, i remember expecting a bolt of lightning to shoot out of the sky and kill me, and then, when it didn't, i wanted to test it. i wanted to see how far i could go before god or my parents would smite me, wanted to see how hard i could push. there was no joy in my house growing up and i was determined to find some, somewhere. i'd stumble in on a friday night, hair smelling like weed, jacket or t shirt like cigarette smoke, lips and tongue red wine soaked.

nothing bad ever really happened. i got good at tuning out the yelling.

satlan, my sister used to hiss at me, when i passed her door. stoner.

my sister never rebelled, not even once. she never wanted to be anything except a more extreme version of what my parents wanted her to be.

i got my first tattoo after the army. it's a kivsa shchora, a black sheep, on my right hip. i try to wear it proudly. my first boyfriend came with me to get it. he let me squeeze his hand when the needle went in, and kick his foot every time i thought the pain would kill me. i didn't bruise him though. i didn't leave a mark. after we broke up i backpacked through europe for eight months, and ended up in the uk. i was

staying with an israeli friend in a council flat, living on 10 pence instant noodles when my dad called. he offered to pay for a ticket home, and when i said no, he offered to send me to toronto, to stay with a cousin of his. he thought his cousins could set me straight, but i only lasted two months at bathurst and lawrence before moving to queen st. i didn't know a place could have so much personality- from the artists to the street punks who offer to squeegee your car, to the wooden poles covered with thousands of stapled flyers of underground bands, to the musicians, to the saturday street performers, bizarro puppets and mimes, to the crystal ball and palm readers to street painters selling their art on the sidewalks to the record stores and tourists and teenage kids seeing downtown for the first time- i had no idea one street could be so full of arts and culture and individuality. i've always loved it here.

from the moment i saw it for the first time, i knew i'd finally found it. i was home.

comments off on nicki

february 9, 2010

a few points of respectful disagreement and agreement with jean-pierre de la porte's astute comments:

filed under: jean-pierre de la porte,music,music and exile symposium,politics — abraxas @ 7:31 pm

1) "exile is neither creative nor allegorical." as i suggested at the conference, exile can be both creative and allegorical. for composers like schoenberg, stravinsky, hindemith, rathaus, hartmann, weisse, just to name a few forced to leave their homelands, the experience also had positive aspects; new environments prompted reassessments, reinventions, creative reconsiderations, volcanic bursts of artistic activity. "at least none adequate to serve as a voice to suffering collectively borne." no, schoenberg's "a survivor from warsaw" eloquently disproves your point.



2) "characterize anything short of mass political denationalizations like the palestinian disaster is misleading and frivolous." re. the palestinians, reality is always speckled and gray, never black and white. let said simultaneously speak out of both sides of his mouth, let him also address the "disaster of the arab jews:" it is estimated that 800,000 to 1,000,000 jews were either forced from their homes or left the arab countries from 1948 until the early 1970s; 260,000 reached israel between 1948-1951, and 600,000 by 1972. the jews of egypt and libya were expelled while those of iraq, yemen, syria, lebanon and north africa left as a result of physical and political insecurity. most were forced to abandon their property. by 2002, these jews and their descendants constituted about 40% of israel's population. one of the main

representative bodies of this group, the world organization of jews from arab countries, (wojac) estimates that jewish property abandoned in arab countries would be valued today at more than \$300 billion and jewish-owned real-estate left behind in arab lands at 100,000 square kilometers (four times the size of the state of israel). for anyone interested in the “catastrophe” of the arab jews, see: <http://www.theforgottenrefugees.com/>. seeing the documentary footage of arab pogroms against their fellow jewish citizens is believing. do not remain silent! i would revise jean-pierre’s sentence to read: “the cruel political punishment meted out to the palestinians and arab jews and others in their plight.” and, what about the million or so ethnic germans who were thrown out of what is now poland, the czech republic, the baltic states, at the end of ww ii? (here i am not talking about those germans who were settled by the nazis on stolen property, but those who had lived in these lands for centuries, just like some palestinians in what is now israel.) who today says that they should all go “home.” would the poles and czechs take them back? never! truth is not one-sided or simple.

3) “biblical exile- despite its extremely rich theology of covenants, morality for life among strangers and vast pretext for prophecies and condemnations was too identified with zionist nationalists to illuminate other stories of exile without prejudice.” “go down, moses” was the national anthem of the oppressed blacks in the us. there is a long and rich history of jewish-black civil rights struggle successfully employing the biblical exile and zionist narratives. also, in south africa, i believe that jews played an important part in the anti-apartheid movement (including hartmann’s jewish son-in-law, goldstein). consider just one now-famous incident in june 21, 1964, when three young civil rights workers—a 21-year-old black mississippian, james chaney, and two jewish new yorkers, andrew goodman, 20, and michael schwerner, 24—were murdered in nashoba county, mississippi. goodman and schwerner were both undergraduates at the then largely jewish queens college. the three students had been working to register black voters in mississippi during “freedom summer” (again modeled on the biblical narrative) and had gone to investigate the burning of a black church. they were arrested by the police on trumped-up charges, imprisoned for several hours, and then released after dark into the hands of klan, who beat and murdered them. it was later proven in court that a conspiracy existed between members of neshoba county’s law enforcement and the ku klux klan to kill them. see also, bruce feiler’s excellent study, america’s prophet. moses and the american story, 2009.

4) “to rehabilitate his [hartmann’s] political reputation.” no. i do not – did not – seek to “rehabilitate” him. i could have suppressed the information from his file in austria. but since i consider myself a historian rather than a hagiographer, i presented the information. i did not attempt to sanitize him.

let’s assume for the sake of argument that jean-pierre’s second “worse” scenario is true: “b) friedrich hartmann was a deeply sincere fascist. he joined the austrofascist fatherland’s front because it was politically and institutionally dominant – dominant enough under mussolini’s protection to actively persecute nazis as well as communists in the austrian opposition. when it became clear that hitler was in the ascendant, hartmann decided to switch allegiance to the nazi party as more appropriate to his convictions. to achieve this he was prepared to abandon his wife and to persecute jewish students. he sincerely wished for nazi acceptance and was shocked when his former allegiance to the vaterländische front was, despite his sincere zeal, held against him and he was purged from his job. his fascist beliefs led him to chose south africa as more promising frontier for his extreme rightist thinking, using his wife’s half jewish status as a sweetener to his immigration bid he entered south africa under the mask of political exile and joined over six hundred other fascist and nazi diehards who were recruited by the sa nationalist government to man its upcoming state and academic takeover. when the south african government realized that it could achieve its white supremacist goals without retaining now unpopular neo nazi ideologies, hartmann found his role as fascist aesthetic and ideological exemplar undermined. unable to endure the decline of explicit fascist thinking in the wily apartheid state- by then trying to construe itself as a democratic whites only republic- hartmann went back to austria where a strong

neofascist movement had never declined and where he lived in hope of the return of the vf.”

even if scenario b were mostly true, would – and should – this discount the revival of hartmann’s music in south africa or elsewhere?

consider that richard strauss presided over grand larceny whereby, under his leadership of the reichsmusikkammer 1933-35, jewish and left-leaning composers in germany were robbed of their professional existence and their savings, and their pensions were stolen. all this happened under strauss’s watch while he himself raked in the equivalent of millions in today’s dollars. should we still play strauss’s music? strauss hagiographers, both american and german, solve this problem simply by remaining silent about strauss’s most serious crimes. as i have written elsewhere, “looking through the biography and works list of a whole generation of famous and not-so-famous twentieth-century composers in the grove dictionary – and even the new mgg (not to mention the old mgg) – frequently does not tell the whole story regarding what they did – and did not – do during those infamous twelve years 1933-45. consider one example as representative of many. in franz trenner’s richard strauss werkverzeichnis published in 1985, one looks in vain under the entry for feierlicher einzug der ritter des johanniter-ordens, o. op. 103, for any mention of the 1937 reworking as a piece for men’s chorus and large orchestra renamed feierlich anruf with a text by rudolf g. binding (1867-1938) and dedicated to hitler, essentially a panegyric to him: “grossen volkes heiligen rache – tief im schlafe dumpf in fron” (“the holy revenge of a great people, in deep sleep, lumbering in drudgery”). this arrangement, which for copyright reasons could never have been made without strauss’s express permission, and even active collaboration, was premiered on april 18, 1934 in berlin at a ss concert with hitler and goebbels in attendance. surely, the existence of this version should not be concealed – but trenner obviously felt that it was too embarrassing to include in the works list. publications of strauss’s letters have been edited in a similar spirit so as to omit strauss’s offending nazi circumlocutions and expressions; and thus, we still lack reliable, complete transcriptions of his original german letters, not to mention accurate english translations.”

should we perform sibelius, although he was a nazi sympathesizer – i would go further and say collaborator – and also raked in millions of dollars and, most significantly, actively supported goebbels’s propaganda campaign to win over the nordic countries and germans themselves to the nazi cause? should we play bruckner, who was friends with some of the most right-wing and viciously anti-semitic figures in the vienna of his time? one of them even became his official biographer. should we play wagner, whose perverse “philosophy” simmers beneath the surface of his “total artworks.” to say “no” is to equate ethical with artistic values. despite the long western tradition stemming back to antiquity that artists should be virtuous, the connection is untenable. thus, hartmann can be a great artist and a flawed human being and political figure. a great work of art can be – and most often is – shot-through with false ideologies – religious and political. a “holier-than-thou” attitude is impractical. for inescapable historical and artistic reasons, south africa owns hartmann, and hartmann south africa.

5) “it is likely that this evaluation exceeds the capacity and expertise of any one scholar. judgment beyond musicology is required to understand the migrations between the vf and the nazi party- the kind of judgment possessed by general historians of the era such as michael kater and his colleagues. the relation of hartmann to fascist recruits into south african administration and universities needs to be investigated by historians of apartheid structures and of the fascist diaspora.” well, to this point, at last, i agree! but, it may well turn out that hartmann never “chose” to come to south africa at all. the sources indicate a sustained attempt to emigrate to america, which faltered, and south africa was the only country willing to offer him a job and a chance to save himself and his family in time. i am sorry to disappoint, but i strongly suspect that politics had little if nothing to do with hartmann being hired by smeath-jones: rhodes needed someone with great musical expertise whom they found in hartmann and hartmann needed to get out of austria

immediately.

“if b turns out to be well supported then south africa has unwittingly hosted the celebration of a fascist, an apartheid zealot and an unrepentant opportunist.” oh dear! please don't worry too much! in hartmann's case, apparently his only daughter and son-in-law (both scientists) were forced into exile in england because of their anti-apartheid stance. while the father may not have had exactly the same principled ideology as the daughter, fathers do tend to influence daughters – and hartmann apparently was proud of his daughter. all of these considerations, and other factors, suggest “scenario b” to be highly unlikely. my sense of hartmann's biography is that such alarm is unwarranted. but if you really want to worry – and also protect the south african public from exposure to amoral composers like hartmann – then please don't forget to agonize about sibelius, strauss, wagner, bruckner, beethoven, haydn, mozart, and bach, just to name a few unsavory individuals.

with all best wishes,

tim jackson

comments off on a few points of respectful disagreement and agreement with jean-pierre de la porte's astute comments:

jean-pierre de la porte: music and exile – a response to professors lucia, muller and jackson

filed under: [jean-pierre de la porte](#), [music](#), [music and exile symposium](#), [politics](#), [stephanus muller](#) — abraxas @ 9:25 am



a conference on exile organized by musicologists is bound to raise some ambiguities. for a start the term exile exists under leaden skies after edward said : he conducted its most recent examination and concluded that using it to characterize anything short of mass political denationalizations like the palestinian disaster is misleading and frivolous.

this also puts the topoi of literary exile off limits as voluntaristic and too imbued with creative transcendence to characterize the cruel political punishment meted out to the palestinian people and others in their plight.

biblical exile- despite its extremely rich theology of covenants, morality for life among strangers and vast pretext for prophecies and condemnations was too identified with zionist nationalists to illuminate other stories of exile without prejudice.

in sum said was concerned with the way exile entered public opinion and wished to remove certain decoys between the public sense of culpability and the condition of ten million denationalized people whom he felt obliged to speak for.

exile is neither creative nor allegorical, it has no distinct genres – or at least none adequate to serve as a voice to suffering collectively borne. it is not laden with promise or at least with no promise different to the promise of arbeit macht frei or the promise of self determination in homelands for the millions of south africans apartheid white supremacists denationalized between 1950 and 1988.

said's ultimatum -no metaphoric use of exile after the palestinian disaster -has the same weight as adorno's more famous 'all culture after auschwitz is garbage'. neither thinker wants to be thought of as placing the topics of exile or genocide off limits , merely highlighting inappropriate means by which to inquire into them.

now since adorno was a defining figure in musicology and the sociology of fascism and said equally inaugural of postcolonial studies it would be expected that a conference on friedrich hartmann and exile in the then quasi colony of south africa would be an enterprise laced between adorno and said. what occurred was something quite different. a concert of music by a former leader of the austrian fatherlands front – a fascist organization- was played . this was the centerpiece of the

conference which turned out to have been occasioned by the musicological effort of timothy jackson to rehabilitate the music of this controversial figure -friedrich hartmann-and to rehabilitate his political reputation.



jackson , a canadian professor working in texas, argued that hartmann had been relieved of his teaching post in austria because his new nazi overseer did not believe his sincere declarations that he would divorce his half jewish wife in exchange for keeping job. nor was orel , the nazi in question swayed by a student petition instigated by hartmann approvingly describing him persecuting his jewish students. hartmann was at that time a voluntary leader of the australian patriotic front.

hartmann lost his job and came to south africa with his wife and child where he continued his career as an academic and composed the music which jackson aired. subsequently hartmann returned to austria.

now this would be merely one of those sidelights on twentieth century music which illuminate the roads not taken by the renowned composers – except that this all took place in south africa. now few sensibilities are so far off the beaten track as to have not heard of the apartheid government, a white supremacist prolongation of colonial minority rule which hijacked south africa between 1948 and 1994.

this regime imposed its racist separate development policy on over ninety percent of south africans, denationalizing people and forcing them into bogus reserves called native homelands. this event stripped rights from , displaced and deracinated far more people than even the palestinian disaster and counts as one of the largest sustained political harassments in history.

south africa is still counting the cost of this political misadventure which only came to an end when the apartheid government capitulated in a civil war. many people who took part in that war were forced into exile by state terror and assassination programs which they were not spared even far over south africa's borders. some of these people were present when jackson made his case for f. hartmann being an exile too – a fascist exile ironically fleeing nazi persecution to become a civil servant

in the apartheid regime.

from jackson's account, which he never claimed was more than an initial assay, certain facts about hartmann are not yet clear . these facts determine the status of hartmann in both 20 c austrian history (both fascist and nazi) and south african apartheid history. these facts will shape hartmann's reception in south africa and the entire scholarly and aesthetic perspective imaginable towards him.

the role of these facts is best grasped via two divergent historical narratives. we do not yet have the information to choose between these narratives. they are as follows:

a) friedrich hartman sincerely believed that volunteering for a leadership position in the austrian fatherlands front was a reasonable thing to do. since antisemitism was not official policy of the austrofascists he married a half jewish woman. he felt pressured to lie in order to keep his job in nazi austria. these lies included declaring he was in the process of divorce from his wife and also petitioning students to vouch for his zealous persecution of jewish students .

when these lies failed to prevent his dismissal he fled nazi austria for south africa with his wife, presumably not divorced and settled into an academic position where, chastened by his experiences with fascism, he became apolitical and applied himself to composition , administration and teaching. alarmed by the growing intolerance in apartheid south africa and by xenophobic denials of opportunity to him in the musical world, he ended his exile and returned to austria where he spent the rest of his life.

b) friedrich hartmann was a deeply sincere fascist. he joined the austrofascist fatherland's front because it was politically and institutionally dominant- dominant enough under mussolini's protection to actively persecute nazis as well as communists in the austrian opposition.

when it became clear that hitler was in the ascendant, hartmann decided to switch allegiance to the nazi party as more appropriate to his convictions to achieve this he was prepared to abandon his wife and to persecute jewish students. he sincerely wished for nazi acceptance and was shocked when his former allegiance to the vaterländische front was, despite his sincere zeal , held against him and he was purged from his job. his fascist beliefs led him to chose south africa as more promising frontier for his extreme rightist thinking, using his wife's half jewish status as a sweetener to his immigration bid he entered south africa under the mask of political exile and joined over six hundred other fascist and nazi diehards who were recruited by the sa nationalist government to man its upcoming state and academic takeover. when the south african government realized that it could achieve its white supremacist goals without retaining now unpopular neo nazi ideologies , hartmann found his role as fascist aesthetic and ideological exemplar undermined. unable to endure the decline of explicit fascist thinking in the wily apartheid state- by then trying to construe itself as a democratic whites only republic- hartmann went back to austria where a strong neofascist movement had never declined and where he lived in hope of the return of the vf.

both scenarios are over etched, designed to convey the ideal-typical sketches which max weber believed were indispensable to the beginning of any historical or social investigation- ladders which, once climbed, can be thrown away in favor of more subtle hypotheses once the most parsimonious explanations are put in place.

the historical and aesthetic evaluation of hartmann, which tim jackson has begun will not progress until scenario a can convincingly refute scenario b or vice versa.

it is likely that this evaluation exceeds the capacity and expertise of any one scholar. judgment beyond musicology is required to understand the migrations between the vf and the nazi party- the kind of judgment possessed by general historians of the era such as michael kater and his colleagues. the relation of hartmann to fascist recruits into south african administration and universities needs to be investigated by historians of apartheid structures and of the fascist diaspora.

why does any of this matter ? because hartmann's music was presented in south africa on the strength of narrative a. this narrative is based on anecdotal evidence which at the moment is insufficient to rule out the plausibility of narrative b.

if a turns out to be well supported in future then premiering hartmanns music and theming a conference around his then proven exile will seem a commendable exercise in historical objectivity and insight.

if b turns out to be well supported then south africa has unwittingly hosted the celebration of a fascist, an apartheid zealot and an unrepentant opportunist.

the present issue is simply whether the conference rooted in hartmann's exile and promoted alongside a premiere of his music should ever have gone ahead before the musicological, historical and south african political communities had an opportunity to adequately weigh the evidence for a or b. no single scholar, however gifted, can claim to represent consensus on a matter that they themselves have only recently brought to discussion i hope that the decision between a and b is not still simply seen as some scholarly stake because it is a political issue which at worst portrays south africa today as a safe cultural harbor for neofascists.

today we consider the merits and contributions of leni riefenstahl, martin heidegger, gottfried benn, werner von braun, giuseppe terragni, richard strauss, herbert von karajan, paul de man and many others only against a clear understanding of their involvement in fascism . it is only correct that a recently rediscovered composer who shares their provenance should be subject to equal deliberation and scrutiny. this has nothing to do with witch-hunting ; it has everything do with bringing appropriate collateral and contextual information to bear before putting a work of art into candidacy for our appreciation.

the denazification process around heidegger did not turn on the high opinion in which he was held by peers- including sartre- but around his role in the national socialist state and institutions. the german people had a right to deliberate whether they wanted heidegger's ideas to re enter the public realm as authoritative opinion in a society recovering from nazism. south africa held a truth and reconciliation process to deal with apartheid crimes against humanity. its statutes ought to apply to the process of rehabilitating hartmann. certainly no more unilateral construals of hartmann or other apartheid era public figures as exiles or victims ought to be simply accepted at face value. what if , on further examination, hartmann turns out to be hartmann b?

after decades of equivocation few who examine all the facts doubt that heidegger was a sincere nazi. somehow it became possible to imagine germany's best philosopher and nazism as compatible- a perception that eluded earlier generations.

has nazism become more subtle? has heidegger simply slipped out of contemporaneity in being well enough understood and settled more obviously in his era?

when a significant piece of thought, art or music is put into candidacy for our appreciation, it is vital that its provenance be disclosed and understood for this alone confers its identity. this is obvious in those far from rare cases when a painting long attributed to a famous name is revealed as a fake (despite remaining physically identical to itself , it becomes a different work overnight) the great viennese architect adolph loos stands today under consideration as a pedophile.

perhaps everybody who knew loos knew this fact about him. perhaps only today has pedophilia become sufficiently established as a violating criminal occurrence to begin attracting some sense of heinousness to loos? the recent arrest of roman polanski has brought underage sex and the power to evade answerability for it into public debate . nobody can argue that the answer to these questions is irrelevant to our relationship to loos. nowadays he has to be great despite his vice- a complex case to argue, not viceless because he is great.

hartmann's actual stance on nazism and his role in the apartheid state makes a nonnegotiable difference to how we consider his music. riefenstahl's lifelong denial of the extent of her nazi involvement is a salient fact in how we experience her films . her achievement would be different- not better or worse but different (as all historical differences picked out by counterfactual conditional sentences are) if she had even once seriously been puzzled by her former self. if tim jackson wishes to attain historical justice for hartmann, pre-empting reliable consensus by presenting hartmann's music as the music of a victim is not a useful way to do this.

another strand at the exile conference that struck me as interesting but exposed to misunderstanding is the movement to meticulously reconstruct the worlds and idioms of afrikaans composers of the mid twentieth century. flowing from the very innovative stephanus muller a new kind of archival awareness and biographic detail has entered the musicology of the nationalist and apartheid period: it certainly achieves, in that scholar, a tremendous suggestiveness and adventurousness – as in his examination of arnold van wyk via the counterfactual setting of a vast roman a clef. esme berman and karel nel's extraordinary alexis preller monograph and exhibition is of a piece with this fine grained contextual , document and biographic based inquiry, a final dispensing with the thin, allusive generalities that have stalled south african art writing for decades.

but before this kind of study can reveal the fine grain of musical cultures – the way baxandall , podro and alpers revealed the filigree of period visual cultures, the issue of the cultural policies and academic framework of the apartheid state needs to be addressed. this is not from some wish to put an obligatory political ball and chain on this scholarship but to augment its strength and consequences. it is hard to imagine a contemporary study of renaissance painting without an understanding of mercantile capitalism or a study of thoreau which ignored agribusiness or the civil war. the danger in south africa is that apartheid is so central to post 1948 scholarship that it has become a kind of premiss, a background noise to be acknowledged with regret. in recent south african memory, apartheid was the ether in which the spectrum bathed- capitalism, politics, rights, culture.

ironically it regained some of this former pervasiveness after 1994- the study of apartheid seems always to be either completed or to be somebody else's problem.

since 1964, at least , the frame of art and music study has been the elaboration of a world- an art world through which works achieve stable identity or value or a music world such as the ones elaborated in recent ethnographic studies of ircam or the attempts to see darmstadt and die reihe as a discursive formation. there is – following the extraordinary work of mary douglas, bruno latour, david bloor or ian hacking, no way in which even the study of logic, probability or polynomials can evade the methods by which groups achieve cohesion and consensus. the synthetic moderne whites only civil society is a veritable mont blanc on the horizon of worldmaking – of contrivances of cohesiveness- its reach into education and patronage was subtle and filled with paradoxical effects. the school of muller- as i like to imagine it, is as close to a genealogical perspective as sa scholarship has yet come. it is a phenomenon to be strongly supported and encouraged for its subject matter as well as the methodological and stylistic sophistication it brings; nonetheless it stands in the same danger as tim jackson's far more conventional dealings with hartmann- in all these excavations of the personal and the contingent a dimension for analysis of power and the state needs to be reserved not as a concession to south africa's perennial marxism – which like its expressionism missed its moment and lingers on as a ghost- but as an analysis of public life, patronage, civil society and consensus building that can only honor music by illuminating the seductive matrix in which it made its way.

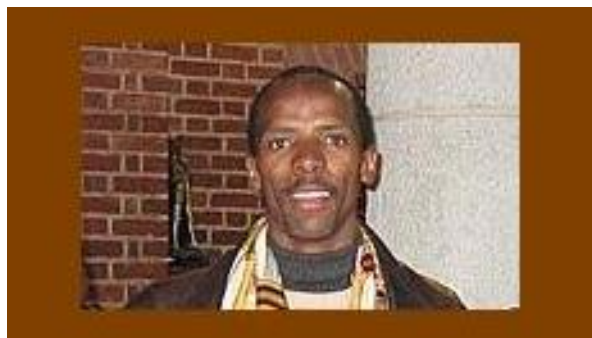
jean-pierre de la porte

comments off on jean-pierre de la porte: music and exile – a response to professors lucia, muller and jackson

february 7, 2010

mokale koapeng

filed under: music,music and exile symposium — abraxas @ 12:36 pm



mokale has performed with some the best known musicians in the country, these include sibongile khumalo, bheki khoza motsumi makhene, wendy mseleku, phillip tabane, gloria bosman, khaya mahlangu and many more.

he has directed musical productions like “rainbow of hope” (a dance revue by nomsa manaka, wits theatre 1991), “swing high, sweet gospel” (arts alive, 1993/4), “sellout” (grahamstown 1995) and arranged the music of sibongile mngoma’s performance at the grahamstown festival (1997). mokale founded the soweto youth jazz orchestra. he toured england and west africa. he also toured canada, usa and wales as the pianist of imilonji ka ntu chorale society.

mokale is the music director of sdasa chorale, a gospel group that released an internationally acclaimed cd “simunye”, with a british vocal group, i fagiolini. the two groups toured europe in may, july 1999, bermuda festival, 2001 and april 2006.

together with motsumi makhene, sibongile khumalo and hugh masekela, mokale co-composed the music of “milestones”, a musical by mandla langa. the musical premiered at the grahamstown festival and had a run at the state theatre. the musical won 1999 fnb sama’s best soundtrack award.

in 2000, he was appointed by the university of pretoria to conduct the up chorale. he held this post till 2005.

mokale has held workshops and lectures in countries like sweden, united kingdom and finland.

he co-developed a concept called “intyilo kantu: melodies of the wise”. the concept involved a french solo ensemble musicatreize and the university of pretoria chorale. the performances were held at the standard bank national festival, grahamstown and octobre -en-normandie, rouen, france in 2001.

together with the university of pretoria chorale and the eastern cape philharmonic, mokale performed the south african premiere of stanley glasser’s cantata; “the chameleon and the lizard”. the performance was at the 2003 new music indaba festival in grahamstown.

he composed and conducted the world premiere of “cantus in memoria ‘76”. this work commemorates the 30th anniversary of events of june 16, 1976. the text of the work is based on poems by don mattera and lesego rampolokeng.

mokale has composed music for the following:

1. simunye “music for a harmonious world” sdasa chorale and i fagiloni
2. milestones, musical by mandla langa
3. “utlwang lefoko la morena” for i fagiolini
4. “tshelo boshha” for the national symphony orchestra
5. “fatlhego sa gago” for soloists, choir and orchestra for nation building massed

choir 2000

6. “ke motshoana, empa ke motle” for up chorale and musicatreize, sbnaf, grahamstown and ‘octobre-en-normandie, france

7. “malerato”, string quartet performed by the fitzwilliam and sontonga string quartets, grahamstown festival 2001/2.

8. “komeng”, string quartet performed by the sontonga string quartet, grahamstown festival 2003. included in the “bow project” cd recorded by the nightingale string quartet from denmark.

9. “motswako”, string quartet, 2003.

10. “abantwana bamahebheru and jesu wen’ ongithandayo” for radio veritas choir competitions 2003.

11. “sedi lame”, commissioned by the university of pretoria. performed by the up chamber singers and chamber orchestra 2003.

12. “african enigma” for oboe, string trio and djembe. commissioned by ‘consonances festival’ in france. 2005

13. “‘gazi lemvana’ co-composed with roderick williams for the “lufthansa festival of baroque music” in london, 2005

14. “cantus in memoria ‘76” for choir and orchestra. commissioned by the national arts festival. 2006

15. “kopano” for choir and percussion. commissioned by the salisbury community choir, uk. 2006

16. “isijabane” for orchestra. commissioned by samro for the south african national youth orchestra.

mokale co-composed an opera, “earthdiving” for the spier festival and it will have its premiere march 2003. the other composers are martin phipps(uk) and peter louis van dijk.

mokale has served as a member of the board of trustees of midi trust (1996-2001), national arts festival, grahamstown (1999 to date) and as vice president and president of newmusicsa an affiliate of international society of contemporary music (iscm).

he currently teaches music at the university of the witwatersrand.

comments (2)

our iron cage of race

filed under: [andile mngxitama](#), [politics](#) — [abraxas](#) @ 12:25 pm



“fuck art!” i found myself screaming in desperation at a panel discussion late in 2009 at the johannesburg art gallery. the occasion was the opening of “remembering black consciousness”, a retro exhibition considered representative of black consciousness resistance art. the disparaging utterance was directed not to all art forms per se, but more specifically at the failures of the visual medium to speak the ambitious and urgent language our times demand, in order to help crack open the code that leads to paths that will enable a realisation of our presently aborted desires for a different world.



in a sense, fuck art! is a cry for help. can art help rip open the intestines of a society which is refusing to free itself from a past that traps its black majority in semi servitude whilst feeding it false hope through staging one form of jamboree after the other: (mandela's majestic march from the brutal 27 years in jail, the first multiracial elections, the first inauguration, the trc, the 1995 rugby world cup and the 1996 african nations victories). now all these jamborees of forgetting will culminate into the fifa 2010 soccer world cup.

then as we are about to gasp for air, we shall be subjected to another round of electioneering noise which will arouse the nation in "defence" of its hard won "freedoms". we shall again surrender our responsibility of enacting a rupture to realise true self-governance to (in)different politicians who are the designated custodians of our desires for a responsive polity . in this way the south african racist status quo remains intact. we swirl in the dizzying glee of staged happiness, hanging from a thin thread that promises to break to expose the silly confection of a nation patched together by lies. can art speak? the spier contemporary provides us with a unique window of opportunity to survey the contemporary national artistic voices. in a sense we have a platform here, however imperfect, to evaluate what contemporary art says to us – if indeed, it speaks at all.

the burden of finding "ways of knowing ourselves" through artistic expressions must necessarily be fore-grounded within the larger burden of knowing what our society actually is. these ways of knowing are already subverted by the manichean truth of a racially divided nation: formal declarations of equality and nationhood

notwithstanding, race obsession in an anti-black world is not therefore a wasted investment, in fact confronting race can't be avoided because this quest towards knowing ourselves must necessarily march through the burning coals of our horror-branded history.

one approaches the products of the spier contemporary with the burden of trying to respond to cornel west's invitation that "we must require of ourselves a more ambitious structural analysis of the present cultural situation", this would in turn help us embrace "... a wholesale inquiry into the personal and institutional operations of power within the academy, mass media and the museums and the gallery networks". (446). from this vast canvas how do we read the selected pieces? alternatively what do those pieces not selected tell us about the contemporary state of art and society? how do we penetrate the thick wall of the silent yet blaring world of the visual medium that comes from artists produced by a racist socio-historical reality? can these divides be bridged? i shall not attempt to answer all these questions, because at times questioning is the most productive method of engagement.

the despair induced by the remembering bc panel was produced by what seemed like the muteness of art, or rather the impotence of art to ignite rebellion instead of simply titillating, amusing and at best, mildly intriguing the old and new accumulating-and-consuming classes in the face of urgent questions that demand answers. how do we move beyond the performative gestures of contemporary art which feign revelation when in fact they are merely part of the superstructure of our racist reality? reading the great yield of the 2010 spier selection and all its racial and gendered inequities, one is confronted, not so much by the ritualistic moralistic indignation which is enacted each time we count black against white, and women against men, against the raced and gendered pyramid of our socio-economic structure that defines society; rather what is of more importance is just how impossible it is to leave aside the racial iron cage we have inherited from the past as we try to know and read the contemporary. the racialised diversity of artistic voices should not lull us into the mandela-esque celebration mantra of "unity in diversity", because they are not, instead one must not flinch from seeing the deep divide clearly marked on the skin of a society marching in two different directions – one white, one black, the twain meeting at the altar of consumerism for a chosen few. it's called the fruit of democracy.

it's hard to shake off the sense that those pieces that lend themselves more readily to being read as delivering an overt political commentary are by and large underpinned by the simple fact that our artists still speak from their racialised realities. how can it be otherwise? take stewart bird's "states of emergency", the piece at first strikes one as a devastating critique of the unfinished business of moving beyond the pre-1994 nightmare, what could be read as indictment of the democratic government's accommodation with white supremacy as represented in our national flag's perfect symmetry with apartheid symbolisms. there is also the possible referencing of close-mindedness suggested by the heavy steel that constitutes the piece. there is the further tantalising invitation to defile the sacredness of the post-1994 deal through the act of walking on the art piece itself. stepping upon nationalism.

but there is also the contrasting sense invoked by a different reading of the "states of emergency". one can see that the piece strives to flatten and then equate the african nationalism of the anc with the afrikaner nationalism of the nationalist party. this drawing of a moral equivalence between the nationalism of those who organised resistance against white supremacy and those who devised and brutally policed white supremacy for the benefit of a few is a very effective mechanism to deny history and therefore divert our attention from demanding justice for the historical atrocities inflicted upon the black body. both propositions seems ironically true though. two competing truths. the anc's democracy is in bed with white supremacy. yet to make this point is to provide cover for white culpability. this difficulty is best captured by rian malan's elegant formulation, south africa, he tells us, is full of contradictions, " a place where mutually annihilating truths can be simultaneously valid" (220). this is perfect material for engaged artists to slash through these

ambiguities to yield a disturbing truth. whose truth matters?

if we stirred a little bit more this stinking pot of our racial shit then we can't avoid the conclusion that the motives that drive a white artist are unavoidably different from those that drive a black one. here we invariably enter the world of the white wine triggered by the perceived lost world, a civilisation based on meritocracy now being squandered by the destructive impulses of the conradian heart of darkness.

the black artist on the other hand seems driven by the perennial call for inclusion into the house of privilege through repeatedly pointing at the race balance sheet. the clamour for inclusion is mobilised through the elevation of 'demographic representativity' discourse into a sacred principle that defines societal good and progress.

what's going on here? it seems as if art in the final analysis is not able to march too far out of the socio-political matrix set by the larger political stage upon which it is hoisted. the whole post-apartheid moment has by and large been driven by a white wine and a black lament regarding exclusion. one has to face the implication of this observation. the power relations between the black and white remains skewed as malan tells us, "apartheid's great triumph was the creation of a generically western moonbase on africa, where whites lived exactly like whites in the capitals of the great white empire" (xi). the black, including the black artist wants in on the racket. given the historically evolved power dynamics the keys to the "white empire" are in white hands. so the black artist resorts to the method perfected by bee merchants – just enough emotional blackmail to be noticed then total silence. the post-1994 commercially successful black artists are those who have sold themselves as anti-political. basically, surrendering to the charms of the money bags. but this is not anti-political at all, it serves the politics of distortion and forgetting in order to render our abnormal society normal.

then there are the not too helpful artistic productions that seek to represent reality "as it is". a catalogue of a myriad of ailments that eat up our society. pointing out without moving beyond the symptoms seem rather a wasted energy. society is not sick because it's sick. artists need to help us plumb the depths of consciousness to lay bare the blood that drips from the corporations' glossy balance sheets, to help us see the structural violence created and perpetuated by corporate greed. they musty simultaneously see who seats at the bottom of the human debris. depicting violence against children and women outside of its structural sources is an exercise in mystification. it's like pointing out the barbarity of a people pressed into a sub-human existence by a civilisation that hypocritically prides itself on being peaceful.

if it's true that there is something fundamentally wrong with our society which continues to reproduce racism in democracy, a society declared the most unequal on earth, it would seem we can't help but desire for art to help in the building up of a rebellion against such society. this is not an authoritarian demand for art to forsake its own internal logic and aesthetic integrity in the service of politics. art that is indifferent to social suffering will continue to be made and celebrated but will not avoid judgement being passed on its undeclared politics of naturalising and beautifying our ugly status quo. for my part i simply value more that art which more or less conforms to the articulation of dmitry vilensky, who argues that " art is that which disrupts the established order, giving rise to a creative chaos from which utopian forms of a new society can emerge. culture renews its development when it sets the goal of transforming society as a whole. this goal is revolutionary in essence".

there is however a huge scepticism as to whether in fact visual art can play this revolutionary role outside of a revolutionary social milieu. it was asked during the bc retro panel that if we took the children of soweto today and placed them before the bc inspired art pieces which are read as resistance art, would the contemporary reader deduce this resistance from the silent language of these paintings? basically, it was suggested that there is nothing revolutionary in the artefacts themselves. it was suggested that revolutionary art is born of revolutionary moments and are given revolutionary readings by a philosophically, politically aroused or aware population

of readers and art consumers. we come to art with our baggage as defined by our reality at the time. we get nothing from art besides that which we ourselves bring to it. therefore, outside of a revolutionary milieu (a revolutionary moment of rupture and a conscious reading informed by such a moment), art pieces are just artefacts, which at best become zones of amusement for the highly specialised academic groupscules who are by and large irrelevant to the larger questions facing a people. from this observation its seem justifiable to give contemporary art the middle finger.

this leads to a further question. can a moment of political imbecility ignite art which is revolutionary, which is counter the dominant culture?

in a moment of political lull as we are in right now. how do you create art that resists cooption and commercialisation? is it possible or are artists mere workers and mercenaries in times such as these? how do we explain the absence of the ongoing at times very violent social struggles for “services delivery” in our artistic productions? right now south africa is amongst those countries considered to have highest volumes of protests in the world. in the past three years it’s said we have seen more than 20 000 such protests. some of these protest have been sustained and are so deep that they threatened to bring local governments down. or perhaps there are artistic expressions out there not yet considered art which are inspired by and inspire such mini-rebellions for dignity? in other words, are those of us in search of art to ignite and feed a rebellion looking at the wrong picture?

once we commit ourselves to engaged art in the south africa post the 1994 “miracle”, we can’t avoid asking the question what are the minimum conditions prerequisite to return art to rebellion for social justice? as things stand the historical weight falls unfortunately on the shoulders of black artists, because they alone can speak from and for an historically injured majority. to date black art has been mute even when it could speak. how to do we enact vilensky’s disruptive art “giving rise to a creative chaos”? our period of silent beautification to lull our senses in the face of democratic injustice is not new. i’m thinking here of the bad idea, an art strike. in 1993 steward home initiated an art strike move, it was not the first, his justification was, “the art strike proves that doing nothing is often more productive than desperately seeking fame and fortune”.

what would such a bad idea entail? it’s better to quote from the 1993 art strike clarion call, “ we call upon artists to put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit or discuss their work from january 1, 1990 to january 1, 1993”. the same call was extended to art schools, theatres, museums, art galleries etc. predictably the art strike failed. but the idea was introduced of a possible radical refusal. reflecting on the strike sadie plant argued that the; “art strike re-introduced a whole range of issues centred around questions of strategy, recuperation and the relation between art and politics”. nothing short of such drastic act will help us rattle our iron cage of race and help us see afresh.

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