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Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte, and Christopher Brent Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention: Messiaen et la technique de l'emprunt* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2017). Illustrations and music. 624 pp. €65.00. (hb). ISBN 9782364850453.

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The French Protestant philosopher Paul Ricœur's thought on metaphor provides an apposite image for his contemporary, the French Catholic composer Olivier Messiaen's "borrowing" or "*l'emprunt*." In an intellectual autobiography, he wrote: "I spoke...of the 'divided,' 'broken' reference: according to this hypothesis, metaphorical expressions were not confined to the creation of meaning, based upon a new semantic relevance, but they contributed to a redescription of the real, and, more generally, of our being-in-the-world, by reason of the correspondence between a seeing--as on the plain of language and a being--as on the ontological plain. ...metaphorical and narrative statements, taken in hand by reading, aim at refiguring reality, in the twofold sense of *uncovering* the concealed dimension of human experience and of *transforming* our vision of the world." [1]

This spectrum of fracturing, elaborating upon, and refiguring the sources of thought is a powerful catalyst of Messiaen's compositional work that applies not only to musical sources, but also to the types of conservative Catholicism and theology that inspired his music. [2] In *Le modèle et l'invention*, the authors show how the different ramifications, variety, and extent of Messiaen's employment of music by his peers, teachers, and historical and ethnographical sources, functioned as "models" that could be adapted and made into Messiaen's own musical "vision of the world." It reveals a "suite of *procedures*" (p. 95, authors' italics) that are much more sophisticated than any kind of musical "pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey" game of attribution.

"Borrowing" is a fascinating concept and has been extensively discussed in musicology. [3] It complements other strands of critical thought, not discussed in this book, including translation theory (since the early 1970s); adaptation theory, which has examined the history, ethics, epistemology, assumptions, and shifting ontologies that inform this theoretical perspective that examines both the change from one artistic medium to another (novels to films for example) and the philosophy of prosthetics. [4] In musicology, "borrowing" is a polite term signalling the appropriation of music or an idea (what in the composer Arnold Schoenberg's thought would be called a *Gestalt* or, in adaptation studies, a "source text" [5]) from one musical source to create another, described in *Le modèle et l'invention* in terms of Barthesian "intertextuality" (pp. 120-121). Messiaen never sought to hide the fact that his interaction and transformation of modes, rhythms, plainchant, and ethnographic sources was fundamental to his work as organist, teacher and composer, but neither did he expose the extent and variety of his use of other composers and

by extension his adaptation, through different modes of intertextuality, of biblical and theological texts, poetry, literature and iconography. These features or symptoms of Messiaen's work represent his collecting and collectivising consciousness which is actualised through a technics of music that becomes a form of "memory support." [6]

Other composers had noticed Messiaen's musical *praxis*. Igor Stravinsky noted Messiaen's employment of his works (in *Le Sacre du printemps* and *Les Noces* especially) and pronounced that: "I am flattered by the attention, of course, but I would prefer to receive royalties." [7] Stravinsky understood Messiaen's plastic adaptations as part of his "naivety," [8] differentiated no doubt from his own synthetic reinvigoration of classicism. He noted tartly that Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1946-1948) crossed the "barrier of taste... [through] a mixture of gamelans, Léhar, and some quite superior film music. ... Little more can be required to write such things than a plentiful supply of ink." [9] For this triumvirate of sources one might substitute some of the subjects in this book: Hindu rhythms and melodies, Hindu or karnatic scales, and material from works by Charles Gounod and Jules Massenet for example; film music implies the opposite dynamic of this book, showing possible "borrowings" from Messiaen.

Writing more generally of the processes of composition, Messiaen's former student Pierre Boulez observed in 1977-1978 that "in every early work much of the creative process is reducible to models, or at least references to models remain apparent, although there is also a degree of irreducibility that reveals the composer's personality." [10] In *Le modèle et l'invention*, Messiaen's work is shown to be an elaboration of "deductive methods to amplify, transform and proliferate" material, as Boulez put it, that are also partly "intuitive" and clearly not only a function of Messiaen's musicality, but essential to his working method. [11] The "library" of models for Messiaen are "unpredictably ablaze, then elusively reborn from its ashes" as Boulez puts it, and this creates in places a somewhat circular, yet also a rhizomatic discourse where the end product—its figuration and recontextualisation—is refreshingly unpredictable. [12] This shows that, for Messiaen, the object or a "source text" as well as the destination, while having the appearance of existing in a certain time and space, were in fact in an ontological flux, a state of being between one point and an unknown future. His work also critiques the notion of an original model as configuration (physiognomy) and essence; Messiaen adapts certain features, qualities, and "boundaries" of the source. [13] There is therefore a relational interior conversation with history that is discussed in the book through Messiaen's use of various types of materials. This process is both richly allusive and concrete at the same time.

In showing how Messiaen changes his models into his own language, this book in fact brings the term "borrowing" into question. If I borrowed my neighbour's lawnmower, for example, she would rightly expect it back after a specified time, but she would not expect me to have dismantled it, perhaps have made an air-compressor, or dry-ice maker out of the components, and added a set of curtains and some icing on top for good measure; she would want her lawnmower back. The strangeness of this analogy illustrates both Messiaen's musical idiolect, and the issue of nomenclature at hand. The authors clearly show that Messiaen had the capacity, to continue the analogy, of making other devices out of the same material, recontextualising it, and even adapting the meaning of one source into his own religious-modernist context, a particularly fascinating element of their work. Messiaen's own notion of the "deforming prism" [14] of his language is a closer approximation of what he does. Yet this language freights his own processes in a somewhat negative vein that, while it figures a certain modernist critical

pedigree, also undermines the element of modernist enchantment that is important to his own discourse.[15] His ideal also perhaps takes account of the symbolist heritage and of the modernist disfiguration as re-creation, but also perhaps sidelines the act of creation through reformation that is also a form of destruction (something that would manifest itself in Boulez's second piano sonata for example).[16]

What I would prefer (positively) to call “creative refiguration,” rather than “borrowing” here, is a locus of fascination, because, as the authors show, it provides a varied lens onto the creativity of the composer and indeed on the way in which his mind seemed to work (a working assumption of this book). While they do not speculate on why this is so, there may be many contemporaneous and historicist reasons for this, including the need to rekindle French patrimony and his inheritance from his teachers, and also, with hindsight, a broader modernist imperative of a radical reshaping of tradition(s). There is a sense in which Messiaen had made the human neuroplastic fascination with semblance and resemblance into a form of creative necessity and cottage industrial “method” (p. 16) to generate his work, and here there is also a danger of overdetermining the role of Messiaen's creative refigurations. There is nevertheless a certain compulsive element to this activity that is shown by the authors through the way Messiaen repeated himself in different ways that border on mannerism, but that were also a means of self-actualisation, of finding a richer originality and even authenticity through his choice of resources. These machinations arguably helped Messiaen create the poetic language of his music intrinsically attached to his theological idealism, which provides another level of semantic “redescription of the real.”[17]

Certainly Messiaen's art reveals a strong personal predilection for certain types of chords, sounds, textures, and procedures, and a certain pedagogical and taxonomical desire for a global organisation that Messiaen had in common with many other modernist composers. But the reader of this book must ask why Messiaen's thought crystallised around certain materials and not others, and what kinds of (perhaps serendipitous) accidents or even misprisions happened? Did Messiaen's models for “borrowing” also sometimes act as “constraints,” both as necessary forms of discipline and as forms of creative limitation?[18] Messiaen is shown in this book as an intrinsically modernist *bricoleur*, a composer whose thought was both plastic and hybridic, cosmopolitan, mondial, ecological, and yet also particular, located in French history, geography, intellectual history, and epistemology. Messiaen's technics belong to and are formed in this episteme.[19] Such concerns should also perhaps be understood as a diasporic product of French colonialism—primitivism and Surrealist acquisitions, for example, are refashioned into a modernism that, like Messiaen's own, could inculcate material and choose the extent of its deterritorialization and consequent reterritorialization.[20]

A particularly refreshing aspect of the book, and one that might raise some eyebrows in certain quarters, is the absence of formalist music theory in the analyses, with all its appendant authoritarian and ideological baggage. The authors are not concerned with continuities or larger-scale systems, but with a form of reification as access to technics (with little sense of evolution). This also, perhaps necessarily, removes temporal considerations (so important to Messiaen) because the subject of this book, despite appearances, is an interior process: assimilation—synthesis—reconfiguration. In a discussion of the relation between technics and culture, the philosopher Bernard Stiegler cites the philosopher André Leroi-Gourhan, who in 1945 wrote that “the borrowed element is incorporated into the technical milieu without significantly changing it: it makes the milieu richer without giving the impression of a transformation...The

progressive accumulation of these discreet borrowed elements ends up in fact changing the interior milieu.”[21] Analysis therefore in this book emerges not as what Boulez calls a “distorted reconstruction” [22], but as a form of critical reflexive process, not as taxonomy or a set of “rules,” but as a recovery of invention and relation between interiority and exteriority and, partly, as a window onto the ways in which these procedures changed Messiaen’s own palette and language.[23]

The absence of formalist theory in this book is perhaps a reminder that the frayed connections between theory and composition that exist in many anglophone institutions have not translated. It also would provide a window into a much-needed debate about the nature of education and the use and transferability of specialised knowledge.[24] In abjuring formalist theory, the authors have followed Messiaen’s own thinking in which analysis and knowledge is inductive and purposeful, and they deepen it with their own theoretical reflections. In doing so, they extend the way in which this thinking can be organically useful (and indeed should be) to composers today, a source that is not an end, but another beginning. Many twentieth-century composers have written about their music, but not many have done so in depth (Elliot Carter is notable here), and indeed some (Harrison Birtwistle, for example) maintained a secrecy about their own creative methods. Messiaen’s theorising is more varied in this regard. Lifting the lid onto a fuller context in this book is not really animated by the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” but by a healthy desire to understand the mechanics of his creativity[25], which can be perceived in the way Messiaen transforms material from different sources and repertoires.

Some of these kinds of transformations are indicated in his *Technique de mon langage musical* (1944) [TMLM], and *Le modèle et l’invention* is perhaps at its most fascinating when the authors parse such transformations through “steps” to elucidate the “compositional procedures” (p. 113), and they show the way materials are reassembled. The authors therefore connect such musical transformations of material through his writings and his theoretical work, and they fill in some of the aporias that Messiaen leaves in his theoretical/analytical texts with incisive re-readings, particularly of *TMLM* and *Vingt Leçons d’Harmonie* (1940). For Messiaen, it appears, the space between presenting material and his willingness to theorise about it created a space for the reader—understood as the would-be composer. Messiaen asks his reader to make these intellectual leaps and thereby learn from the difference. By helping to tease out some of the steps of Messiaen’s creative arcs, they allow his reader to follow his thought more easily.

This, of course, is very attractive on a number of levels. Most importantly, there is an immersion in Messiaen’s music that permeates the book, and a wonderful sense of listening to and listening through Messiaen’s music. The authors are to be congratulated on their musical acuity. This allows a certain prurient eavesdropping, but it also perhaps encourages and allows the listener to engage with Messiaen’s own engagement. It offers the possibility that Messiaen’s own music could be a form of *livre ouvert* used to connect, by extension to other music, and even other traditions of music (pop, jazz and other world musics, not assailed by Messiaen). Some of Messiaen’s ideas are perhaps more re-usable than others. But Messiaen’s music is revealed as having creative entelechy and having both emergent, and prosthetic qualities, realising not merely “the extension of the human body,” but “the constitution of this body,” as Bernard Stiegler states.[26] Steigler’s thought circles around somatics and neuro-physiology, but also acts as an extension of it.[27] Messiaen comes to fulfil an ideal of creativity that underpins the somatic thinker Mosche Feldenkrais’s thought in which a function can be approached and manifested in different ways that embody what the developmental psychologist Esther Thelen has called an

“adaptive flexibility.”[28] What is revealed in this is that Messiaen’s refigurations/disfigurations are not palimpsests, but a vehicle for multiple perspectives on origin and possible meanings encompassed in Gilles Deleuze’s ideal of infinite folds that create the world.[29]

Following this reflexive spirit, it is also clear from the book that the modernity of André Jolivet presented the young composer with a challenge, and this could be extended to think about the degree to which Jolivet’s work in fact caused Messiaen to extricate himself from the idioms and language of his descendants such as other “organ composers”: César Franck, Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne, and Charles Tournemire, and his teachers Paul Dukas and Marcel Dupré. Maurice Emmanuel’s thought also emerges more clearly as a powerful agent in Messiaen’s enactivation.[30] The music of the second Viennese school likewise presented new challenges to which Messiaen was equal both in his ability to understand it and to extend it. Messiaen’s preparatory notes for the *Quatre Études de rythme* (1949-1950), for example, show him writing out chant from Papua New Guinea. He also presents a complete set of series for the “Presto delirando” of Berg’s *Lyrische Suite* and an analysis of the row forms in the third movement, then the first and second movements of Webern’s *Variationen für Klavier* Op. 27 (1935-1936) [31]. The authors of *Le modèle et l’invention* make a fascinating connection to Messiaen’s *Messe de la Pentecôte* in a section uniting other composers (Bach, Chopin and one of Messiaen’s most important but musical mentors: Tournemire) to show the holistic nature of Messiaen’s thought. The authors also provide an investigation into Messiaen’s transformations of plainchant and his transformation of established French philological studies of ethnographic music that will be key to further study of these areas. There is abundant evidence, therefore, that Messiaen’s own research provided him with the means to know a diversity of materials before he could do something with them.

The authors are also alive to the degree of separation between Messiaen’s creations and his models, and it is good to see that the publisher allowed the authors great scope with musical examples. Through this we can trace something of Messiaen’s reconfigurative process and, crucially, we can trace a critical engagement where Messiaen’s own artistic research has enabled him to make evaluative differentiations and recontextualisations. Messiaen’s own formulae are then employed with different degrees of formulaicism to establish new levels of authenticity.

Pierre Boulez wrote that “musical language thus establishes hierarchies by force in order to dominate its material, giving it unity and homogeneity. The hierarchies are maintained by centralising laws that codify the form of the work and direct our perceptions of it.”[32] Messiaen’s works inculcate the dialectic of his theorising transcending or even negating “the original idea.”[33] Crucially, the “characteristic vocabulary” of the original is transformed, so that the style of the original is effaced.[34] This is where Igor Stravinsky’s assertions (above) are brought into question, especially considering his own “appropriations of other means...seeking out...objects to work with and change,” as Boulez puts it.[35]

Much in Messiaen escapes classification—this book is therefore necessarily an incomplete project, which makes it all the more worthwhile. It provides further material for reflection on Messiaen’s capacity to redescribe his historical circumstances, to reinvent his own language. Ricoeur’s statement above opens up another possibility, that Messiaen’s creative refigurations in fact have a theological role that probed and expanded the immanence of (the composer’s) subjectivity. They not only transform our vision of the world, but provide vistas onto the possibilities of (an)others.

## NOTES

[1] Paul Ricœur, "Intellectual Autobiography," in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Illinois, IL.: Open Court, 1995), p. 46. Ricœur's italics.

[2] See Stephen Schloesser, *Visions of Amen: The Early Life and Music of Olivier Messiaen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014).

[3] See especially J. Peter Burkholder, "Musical Borrowing or Curious Coincidence?: Testing the Evidence," *Journal of Musicology* 35/2 (2018): 223-266 and Martha M. Hyde, "Neoclassic and Anachronistic Impulses in Twentieth-Century Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/2 (Autumn, 1996): 200-235. Looking back further, see: Frits R. Noske "Musical Quotation as a Dramatic Device: The Fourth Act of *Le Nozze di Figaro*," *The Musical Quarterly* 54/2 (April 1968), pp. 185-198.

[4] See Laurence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Thomas Leitch, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (New York: Oxford, 2017); and Marquand Smith and Joanne Morra, eds., *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthuman present to a Biocultural Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[5] See Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea and the Logic, Technique, and Art of its Presentation*, edited and translated by Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Thomas Leitch, "Introduction," *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 15.

[6] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. by Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 131.

[7] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Episodes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 15.

[8] Robert Craft, entry for 18 October 1958, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship 1948-1971* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972), p. 72.

[9] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Themes and Conclusions* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), pp. 27-28.

[10] Pierre Boulez, "Idea, Realisation, Craft," (1977-1978), in Pierre Boulez, *Music Lessons: The Collège de France Lectures*, trans. by Jonathan Dunsby, Jonathan Goldman, and Arnold Whittall (London: Faber & Faber, 2018), p. 29.

[11] Boulez, "Composition and Its Various Gestures," (1979-1980) in *Music Lessons*, p. 87.

[12] Boulez, "Memory and Creation," (1988-1990) in *Music Lessons*, p. 409.

[13] Dennis Cutchins, "Bakhtin, Intertextuality, and Adaptation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, p. 78.

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- [14] Messiaen, *TMLM*, trans. John Satterfield (Paris: Leduc, 2001) [orig. 1944], p. 35.
- [15] For more on this, see Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2017).
- [16] On Symbolism, see Allison Morehead, *Nature's Experiments and the Search for the Symbolist Form* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017). On the Boulez second piano sonata, see Peter O'Hagan, *Pierre Boulez and the piano: A study in style and technique* (London: Routledge, 2017) and *Pierre Boulez: Conversations with Célestin Deliège* (London: Eulenberg, 1976), pp. 40-42.
- [17] Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography," p. 46.
- [18] Boulez, "Composition and Its Various Gestures," p. 98.
- [19] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 40-41.
- [20] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Masumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 174-177.
- [21] Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*, p. 63, citing André Leroi-Gourhan, *Milieu et techniques* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1945), p. 364.
- [22] Boulez, "Invention, Technique and Language," (1976), in *Music Lessons*, p. 21.
- [23] Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*, p. 64.
- [24] Stiegler, *Technics and Time 3*, pp. 151-153.
- [25] This commonly-understood term is derived from Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 30.
- [26] Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*, pp. 152-153.
- [27] See part three of Antonio Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling, and the Making of Cultures* (New York: Pantheon, 2018).
- [28] Esther Thelen, "The Central Role of Action in Typical and Atypical Development," in Ida J. Stockman, ed., *Movement and Action in Learning and Development: Clinical Implications of Pervasive Developmental Disorders* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2004), p. 71.
- [29] Deleuze, "The Fold," trans. Jonathan Strauss, *Yale French Studies* 80 (1991), pp. 227-247.
- [30] See also Christophe Corbier and Sylvie Douche, eds., *L'enseignement de Maurice Emmanuel* (Paris: Delatour, 2020).
- [31] Messiaen, Fonds Messiaen (BnF): Res Vma ms. 1982 (A).

[32] Boulez, "Invention, Technique and Language," in *Music Lessons*, p. 5.

[33] Boulez, "Idea, Realisation, Craft," (1977-1978), p. 21.

[34] Boulez, "Memory and Creation," (1988-1990), p. 464.

[35] Boulez, "Memory and Creation," (1988-1990), p. 464.

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