

## On animating sounds

I have for some time been building upon a series of compositions as a means of developing a technique that is somewhat akin to cellular animation.<sup>(1)</sup> A fragment of music, or cell, is repeatedly presented with small and progressive changes occurring in each repetition. The aim is that the listener hears each repetition in relation to the previous one, thus building a network of continuously morphing relations.

Despite apparent parallels with American minimalism, this technique differs starkly in terms of its material and methods of development. The primary emphasis is on space and movement which is achieved via the use of carefully managed periods of silence framed by single attacks or miniature motives. The expansion and contraction of these spaces are manipulated via series of ratios which determine the size of a space relative to its size in the previous cell. In this way, one can determine to what degree the expansion of a space and hence movement of an object is to be sensed by the listener. Whilst it is possible to have much discussion about whether one perceives the sounds as moving or the silences as expanding and contracting, this method nevertheless allows time to be used as a structural component at a meso level without explicit reference to or negation of a pulse.

Each sound within a cell is considered as an independent object which moves in relation to other objects and is therefore given its own character in terms of pitch, dynamic, attack and timbre. These characteristics not only distinguish one object from another but also create a multilayered network of relations by which individual objects can be grouped together to form subsets. Via this multilayered network, sounds are able to give birth to new sounds which, as offspring, share some but not all attributes of the parent. Due to physiological and historical circumstances, the relationship between layers is hierarchical with pitch as the most dominant class. With this in mind, for the sake of clarity, I have allowed for sounds only to give birth to sounds of the same pitch class. I find it a satisfying side effect of this policy that, precisely because of its dominance, pitch's macro-structural role is reduced to that of a canvas upon which other elements are painted.

The motivation for developing this method was borne out of the frustration experienced in earlier attempts at the metrical notation of musical ideas which were conceived outside of a metric framework. One found oneself in the impossible position of trying to make subjective, yet quantitative, decisions about durations which, in performance, were to be heard without reference to pulse. As I see it, this problem is symptomatic of a larger issue whereby, in many compositions, the temporal experience of the music is at odds with the means of notation and hence performance. This result is the creation of a partition between the experience of the performer and the listener via a hidden layer of underlying metrical structure. As Adorno wrote;

“In traditional listening the music unfolds from the parts to the whole, in tune with the flow of time itself. This flow – that is to say, the parallel between the temporal succession of musical events and the pure flow of time itself – has become problematical and presents itself within the work as a task to be thought through and mastered”<sup>(2)</sup>

Whilst I can't claim to have resolved this issue within these compositions, - indeed the experiential gap between performer and listener is widened here - I have managed to create a context for rational decision making with regards to duration.

**Simon Katan 2005**

1 this includes lahal halla allaha lalahala, mono om nomon onom, and yawa waya ayawyawa.

2 Adorno Theodor 1992: p271 *Quasi una ficta*, trans. Rodney Livingstone London: Verso