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Imaginary Musical Radicalism and the Entanglement of Music and Emancipatory Politics

Federico Reuben

The relationship between music and politics in the discourse of creative practitioners is often reduced to assertions of causality between specific musical works or aesthetic traits and particular political actions or ideologies. The association between the musical avant-garde and emancipatory politics (and their perceived common failure to fulfil a historical destiny) is evidence that a unidimensional understanding of the interconnections between these two practices can have a saturating effect on musical reception and creation. A direct result of this reductive approach is the emergence of an artistic category that could be labelled, imaginary musical radicalism—a creative approach in which artists replicate musical strategies of the avant-garde movements, detached from their original modernist vision (Rancière). This article proposes a heuristic and multidimensional approach, based on a radical historicist analysis (Rockhill) of musical and political practices as an alternative model for the creative practitioner working at the intersection of music and politics.

Keywords: Music, Politics, Aesthetics, Avant-garde, Jacques Rancière, Gabriel Rockhill

In this article, I will consider the complex and often conflictual relationship between music and politics, focusing particularly on the entanglement of the avant-garde movements with leftist emancipatory politics. My aim is to analyse the relationship between these two practices and the dominant ideologies that are associated with this link today. I will examine these questions from the point of view of a creative practitioner engaged primarily in the areas of music and sound, with an interest in the intersections between music and politics. I will therefore introduce and propose concepts and ideas that will hopefully be useful to other creative practitioners with similar interests. I will start, however, by briefly addressing the curiously tense response with which creative practitioners engaging with theory are often greeted.

A Hysteric Self-analysis

In the opening pages of *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998/2005), Alain Badiou points to the complex relationship that exists historically between art and philosophy, comparing it to Lacan's pairing of Hysteric and Master:

We know that the hysteric comes to the master and says: "Truth speaks through my mouth, I am *here*. You have knowledge, tell me who I am." Whatever the

knowing subtlety of the master's reply, we can also anticipate that the hysteric will let him know that it's not yet *it*, that her *here* escapes the master's grasp, that it must all be taken up again and worked through at length in order to please her. In doing so, the hysteric takes charge of the master, "barring" him from mastery and becoming his mistress. Likewise, art is always already there, addressing the thinker with the mute and scintillating question of its identity while through constant invention and metamorphosis it declares its disappointment about everything that the philosopher may have to say about it. (Badiou, 1998/2005, p. 1)

According to Badiou, historically art and philosophy have a relationship of both mutual idolatry and suspicion. The artist-hysteric idolises philosophy, believing that it may have the potential to reveal her own truth to herself, as the philosopher-master gazes at art's seductive force capable of creating knowledge and constantly reinventing itself. The same reciprocal relationship is at work in their mistrust: the artist-hysteric is suspicious of philosophy's ability to grasp her condition, while the philosopher-master has reservations (sometimes even expressed as censorship) about the deceptive nature of art's motives.

As a creative practitioner in the areas of music and sound, attempting to engage with theory, I often feel myself to be (following Badiou's analogy) a *hysteric in a master's disguise*. My claim is that the creative practitioner engaged in theory—as a divided self—has to play both roles, while knowing that her condition as hysteric dominates. This is the position creative musicians are usually faced with when attempting to write critically, contextually and conceptually about their work, or about the work of other musician-hysterics. It is a contentious position to be in, as it unsurprisingly draws suspicion from both musicians and theorists alike—they mistrust the disguised-hysteric as master and the creative musician's (naïve or pedantic) transgression into theory. These reservations surface from a feeling of unease, as the suspicions inherent in the pairing of art and theory are embodied and made evident within a singular schizophrenic voice. The value, however, of the musician-theorist concept (musician disguised as theorist) is precisely that it reveals the critical mess intrinsic to creative practice that is aware of music's intersections with other forms of thought, where musicians take inspiration from, and engage in, self-reflection through creative (mis)appropriation and (mis)representation of theory. In other words, the schizophrenic self-analysis of the musician-theorist discloses how theory can become useful and productive to musicians, if music is to interact with other spheres and remain critical and social.

Rhizomatic Conjectures: The Intersections Between Music and Politics

It is precisely the interaction between the musical and political spheres that I would like to engage with here as *hysteric in disguise*. As a musician interested in this link, my aim is to examine the interconnections between the two spheres that are relevant to my practice and to today's musical and political contexts. In this analysis, of particular concern will be the relationship between contemporary music and emancipatory politics, and their potential to establish a common, radical project. However, before delving into the complex interconnections between contemporary musical and political practices, I will first consider broader questions that pertain to the relationship between music and politics. The idea is to establish a theoretical framework that will support the understanding of the link between the two spheres.

In *Radical History and The Politics of Art* (2014), Rockhill gives an erudite examination of the conceptual complexities intrinsic to the terms *art* and *politics*. Rockhill identifies both art and politics as 'variable theoretical configurations and constellations of practices that are identified as artistic or political within variegated societies at diverse points in time' (p. 15). Through a reading of Wittgenstein's work,¹ Rockhill argues that the words *art* and *politics* have 'no definitive conceptual feature unifying all of their uses' (p. 17). However, he wishes to avoid falling into pure 'linguistic relativism in which terminological and conceptual use endlessly fluctuates' (p. 17). Rockhill refuses to accept that *art* and *politics* are *transcendental ideas*, ideas that pretend to grasp the common property of general terms and are defined just once, synthesising all social use, and transcending social and historical processes through a 'metaphysical guarantee to meaning' (pp. 19-20). He argues that transcendent ideas are illusions and that general concepts like *art* and *politics* are instead *immanent notions*.

Unlike transcendent ideas, immanent notions are part and parcel of specific sociohistorical practices within a particular conjuncture. Since they emerge in unique fields of activity, they are bound up with distinctive cultural matrices, which themselves are dynamically negotiated and renegotiated between various forms and levels of agency[...]. In the case of key words like art and politics, immanent notions actually function as veritable concepts in struggle, or nodal points in a social battle bereft of a final arbiter. This does not, however, mean that individual speakers can arbitrarily define all of their terms in any way that they choose, or that they can capriciously skip between cultural contexts as in a game of anthropological hopscotch (Rockhill, 2014, pp. 20-22)

The challenge that Rockhill sets himself is to come up with a type of analysis that examines the variable theoretical configurations and sociohistorical points of conjunction between the

immanent notions of *art* and *politics*. By history he does not mean a traditionally fixed, linear, selective or reductive conception of history, but rather a Deleuzian understanding of history, where three dimensions—the vertical (temporal), horizontal (spatial) and stratigraphic (social)—interact in a multidimensional and ever-changing constellation. Rockhill also warns of the limitations of theories of art and politics that ‘seek to reduce these contending agencies to a simplistic social logic of determinism and freedom, individual and society, cause and effect, and so forth’ (p. 55). He proposes a theory of multidimensional agency as an analytic of aesthetic and political practices that avoids the reduction of the complex social systems of production, circulation and reception of art to a causality between singular agencies of art (specific works, materials or actions) and politics (parties, ideologies or movements).

From Rockhill’s work one can therefore determine that if there is a relationship between music and politics, it is not in the guise of simple causal relationships between permanent concepts, transcendental ideas or ontological illusions. The word *music*, like *art*, is a variable concept whose usage covers a field of practices that converges with that of politics through different modes of interaction in a multidimensional sociohistorical field. At the same time, *music* is a variable receptacle of different practices, thoughts, affects, percepts, actions and forces that constitutes a particular sociohistorical framework with provisional conceptual lines and distinct nodal points of interrelation with politics. I will later analyse the distinguishing modes of interaction that characterise the interventionist concepts *music* and *art*, but first I will examine the problematic link between emancipatory politics and music.

Music and Emancipatory Politics: The Shortcomings of a Unidimensional Approach.

A unidimensional understanding of the relationship between the immanent notions of *music* and *politics* reduces their sociohistorical complexity to an ontological illusion, based on the false assumption that a singular agency in music has the potential to produce specific political consequences directly. Moreover, the musician who ascribes to this delusion is at risk of becoming isolated from music’s social contexts, and being disillusioned by his intention to affect the political sphere through a single musical feature, work or action.

The tension between a unidimensional and a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between music and emancipatory politics emerged at different points in the history of the musical avant-gardes in the twentieth century. This friction was particularly

present in circles of composers who were involved in leftist politics, and who strived to find ways in which their music could carry a more overtly political message. One of the consequences of this desire to articulate politics through music was to make simple links between musical qualities and techniques, and political ideologies and movements. Arnold Schoenberg already observed this phenomenon in 1949 regarding his 12-tone technique:

It has become a habit of late to qualify aesthetic and artistic subjects in terms borrowed from the jargon of politics. Thus mildly progressive works of art, literature or even music might be classified as 'revolutionary' or 'left-wing', when they only evolve artistic possibilities. On the other hand, old-fashioned products are called 'reactionary', without any clarification of what its antonym might mean in contrast. No wonder, then, there are people who call my method of composing with twelve tones 'bolshevik'. They pretend that in a 'set of twelve tones', upon which such compositions are founded, since there is no tonic nor dominant, every tone is considered independent, and consequently exerts equal functions. (Schoenberg, 1984, p. 249)

Similar simplistic connections have been made between musical qualities and political ideologies and structures. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, Cage's music became the focus of criticism on the basis that it bore little relationship to a leftist emancipatory political project. One of the criticisms raised against his music was the claim that indeterminacy was unable to convey a political message.² The problem of evaluating indeterminacy for its capacity to carry political content, however, is that it follows the assumption that a one-to-one relationship exists between a musical technique or quality and its potentiality to carry a distinct political message. In *Stockhausen serves imperialism* (1974/2006), Cardew also attacked Cage's music based on its 'empty' character:

Cheap Imitation (1970) is based on a work by Satie. The rhythm of the original is retained, the notes are changed. Cage here contradicts the interdependence of all aspects of structure. Any content, as well as the dynamism that is characteristic of 'saying something', is automatically lost if one aspect of the language is systematically altered. But the resulting emptiness does not antagonise the bourgeois audience which is confident of its ability to cultivate a taste for virtually anything. The appreciation of emptiness in art fits well with imperialist dreams of a depopulated world. (Cardew, 1974/2006, p. 157)

From this statement, it is possible to trace a reductionist logic that attempts to link a specific musical characteristic to a particular political and economic ideology. Cardew's claim that the appreciation of the musical character of *Cheap Imitation* fits the ideology of imperialism is speculative, and follows a unidimensional approach linking music and

politics that relies on the use of permanent concepts and ontological illusions. Throughout the rest of his book, one of the prevailing criticisms Cardew raises against Cage and Stockhausen is the immersion of their music in bourgeois culture and, consequently, their complicity with imperialism (Cardew, 1974/2006, pp. 155-173). Cardew's analysis is based on the cultural superstructure in which this music operates. His examination looks at the social context of the music and its function within broader cultural and institutional apparatus. The limitation of Cardew's analysis is that it follows a traditionally fixed understanding of history and social stratification. However, this analysis is deliberately utilitarian as a consequence of the influence that Mao's thought had on Cardew's perception of bourgeois culture. As a consequence of this utilitarian view, Cardew sometimes ignored the sociohistorical complexities of the music he condemned, and relied on a reductionist understanding of the link between music and politics.

From these examples, it is possible to see that various composers in the twentieth century strived to establish relationships between avant-garde music and emancipatory politics. Nevertheless, some of these attempts rely on reductionist reasoning that presupposes one-to-one relationships between musical and political practices. The impact this association had on the development of avant-garde music should not be overlooked, particularly as it relates to the unfolding of the musical aesthetics of composers like Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolf and Frederic Rzewski, who are known for their leftist political inclination.

Rancière (2000/2004) has commented on some of the shortcomings that came as a result of the misleading notion that a one-to-one relationship exists between the artistic avant-gardes and an emancipatory political project. He has suggested that the idea of the 'crisis of art' during the twentieth century—and its association with the end of *modernism* and the avant-gardes—is related to a simplistic connection that has been made between artistic and political emancipation (pp. 27-28).

Rancière has argued that one of the shortcomings of *modernism* is the 'desperate attempt to establish a "distinctive feature of art" by linking it to a simple teleology of historical evolution and rupture' (p. 28). In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, he argues that the 'crisis of modernism' came as a result of two interrelated misunderstandings. The first one is the association of the break from figurative representation, with what he calls the *aesthetic regime of art*—a mode of identification and articulation of the arts that asserts art's singularity, freeing it from its own rules, hierarchies, genres, etc. (p. 23). The *aesthetic*

regime therefore breaks from the mimetic barrier that characterises what he calls the *poetic regime*, which identifies the arts by their own *substance* through representation. The confusion therefore comes from misunderstanding the break of a distinct feature of art (figurative representation—or tonality in music) with a distinct identification of art (art in the singular, capable of reconfiguring its mimetic barriers). A leap outside *mīmēsis* therefore is not a specific refusal of particular features of art (p. 24).

The second misunderstanding comes with the association of the *aesthetic regime* (the aesthetic revolution as this regime becomes visible—as the ontological illusion of the autonomy of art) with the fulfilment of a destiny specific to modernity, embodied as political (Marxist) revolution (p. 27). The failure of both the political revolution and the modernist motive of refusing singular features of art (tonality, pitch, references to traditional music) contributed to modernity becoming:

something like a fatal destiny based on a fundamental forgetting: the essence of technology according to Heidegger, the revolutionary severing of the king's head as a severing of tradition in the history of humanity, and finally the original sin of human beings, forgetful of their debt to the Other and of their submission to the heterogeneous powers of the sensible. (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 27)

According to Rancière, postmodernism first emerged as a realisation of the failures of modernism, and as an attempt to destroy its theoretical edifice, but quickly became something else:

the joyful, postmodern artistic license, its exaltation of the carnival of simulacra, all sorts of interbreeding and hybridisation, transformed very quickly and came to challenge the freedom of autonomy that the modernist principle conferred—or would have conferred—upon art the mission of accomplishing. (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 28).

Postmodernism therefore, up to a certain point, declares the 'end of illusions' in attempting to establish a link between music and emancipatory politics.³

As a consequence of the misunderstandings associated with modernism and postmodernism, the dominant position today in western music is characterised by a sceptical and often cynical attitude regarding music's potential to accomplish anything new, or to establish a link with emancipatory politics. This attitude is evident in the following statement by Alain Badiou, where he attempts to describe the current state of western concert music:

Today, the music-world is negatively defined. The classical subject and its romantic avatars are entirely saturated, and it is not the plurality of 'musics'—folklore, classicism, pop, exoticism, jazz and baroque reaction in the same festive bag—which will be able to resuscitate them. But the serial subject is equally unpromising, and has been for at least twenty years. Today's musician, delivered

over to the solitude of the interval—where the old coherent world of tonality together with the hard dodecaphonic world that produced its truth are scattered into unorganized bodies and vain ceremonies—can only heroically repeat, in his very works: ‘I go on, in order to think and push to their paradoxical radiance the reasons that I would have for not going on’. (Badiou, 2006/2009, p. 89)

Badiou has attributed this situation to a type of disentanglement between art and philosophy that occurred as a consequence of two developments particular to the twentieth century: the first is the saturation of three inherited schemata that historically have linked the two spheres; the second is the closure that has come as a consequence of the avant-garde’s focus on only one hybrid schema, which is in fact a synthesis between two schemata: *didacto-romanticism*.

Badiou (1998/2005) has argued that, historically, the link between art and philosophy can be synthesised through three possible schemata: didacticism, romanticism and classicism. The *didactic* schema sustains the thesis that art cannot produce truth. In this schema, art is in essence *mimetic* and presents itself as the semblance of truth. Plato’s argument is that art has to be subjected to surveillance by philosophy so that truth remains external to art—education therefore plays an important role as it regulates art’s purpose (p. 2). In the *romantic* schema, the main thesis is that art alone is capable of producing truth. In the romantic schema, art accomplishes only what philosophy can point towards—art as an absolute subject contains truth (p. 3). In this schema, art itself educates in that it teaches ‘the power of infinity held within the tormented cohesion of a form’ (p. 3). The *classical* schema, like the *didactic* schema, sustains the thesis that art is incapable of producing truth. The classical schema, however, does not see this incapability as a threat—art is innocent, as it simultaneously is not truth and does not claim to be truth. Aristotle’s thesis places art outside knowledge—it designates it to the treatment of affect and passion. In the classical schema, the appreciation of art is based on that of ‘liking’. (p. 4)

According to Badiou, the focus of the twentieth century avant-garde was a focus on a synthesis between the *didactic* and *romantic* schemata. They were *didactic* in their determination to destroy art and in their condemnation of art’s inauthentic and bourgeois character. At the same time, they were *romantic* in their conviction that art would be reborn as absolute—the avant-garde’s desire for art to be a subject of truth through its own destruction and resurrection. Badiou attributes the ‘crisis of art’ in the twentieth century to both the saturation of the three schemata and to the avant-garde’s focus on the mediating schema of *didacto-romanticism* (pp. 7-8).

Imaginary Musical Radicalism

The discourses associated with modernism and postmodernism today do not propose new schemata linking art and philosophy, or new ways of thinking about the interconnections between music and politics. As a consequence of this saturation, a category of music practice seems to be emerging that I will call *imaginary musical radicalism*.⁴ This category refers to an attitude that replicates musical strategies of avant-garde movements, while remaining detached from their original vision. Here, I am referring to Rancière's understanding of the modernist vision that can be synthesised by what he calls the *strategic* and *aesthetic* types of avant-garde. The first type is characterised by an abstract and militant notion of a movement that symbolises a force that chooses a historical direction and ideological position: the embodiment of a type of subjectivity (political or artistic) to a specific form (a party or an artistic movement). The second type of avant-garde is rooted in Schiller's model of aesthetics as a projection of the future (Rancière, 2000/2004, pp. 28-29). *Imaginary musical radicalism*, therefore, refers to the practice of imitating or recreating musical and artistic procedures associated with avant-garde movements, yet disconnected from their original *strategic* and *aesthetic* radicality. The strategies that these emerging practices imitate can also be associated with the deterritorialising force of the *aesthetic revolution*, however occurring at a different sociohistorical and conceptual juncture. *Imaginary musical radicalism*—returning to Rancière's terminology—invets the artistic procedures of provocation, disruption, and redistribution that rendered the *aesthetic regime* visible, into the representational logic of the *poetic regime*. Moreover, the radicalism of these practices is imaginary: the strategies by which the historical avant-garde redefined *what music is* during the last century, no longer have the same destabilising effect today, as they have now been assimilated into music's sociohistorical and conceptual frameworks.

At the same time, by imitating the strategies of the avant-garde—and therefore suggesting a link to the original illusory association with a radical political project—*imaginary musical radicalism* poetically represents, either deliberately or unintentionally, current conditions in western politics, particularly in relation to the dominant ideologies of liberal democracy and global capitalism. Firstly, it points to a standstill common to both contemporary western music and politics, which is characterised by a lack of creativity in proposing new ways of distributing sensible forms and practices that can produce viable radical change (alternative musical or political systems). In addition, *imaginary musical*

radicalism elicits the absence of any real *strategic* desire for an alternative radical political movement in the west, by displacing artistic practices that were once considered as part of the avant-garde from their original context into isolated reproductions and simulations outside any collective force or concrete artistic movement. These practices also make evident the futility of traditional forms of protest in late capitalist societies in the west, by restaging actions and procedures that once called into question and opposed the musical establishment, but are now tolerated and absorbed by the permissive postmodern spectacle. Finally, these practices demonstrate that the strategies of provocation, disruption, redefinition and redistribution that once were associated with subversive attempts to destabilise the musical *status quo*, have now been neutralised and commodified through their assimilation by prominent art and music institutions. The recontextualisation, institutionalisation and ultimate commodification of these strategies reveal the late capitalist logic by which these institutions operate. More broadly, they show how the *aesthetic regime* (and music's illusion of autonomy) has been functionalised by these institutions in today's diversified global market.

Some of the work by Mark Applebaum could be considered imaginary musical radicalism. The particular feature of Applebaum's work that relates to this notion is the reproduction and institutionalisation of what Rancière calls the *aesthetic regime*. Applebaum's work embraces the avant-garde notion of the composer or artist as not being limited by the activities traditionally ascribed to the various artistic disciplines. According to this logic, art is defined as an occupation that can redefine its own forms of activity and rules. Applebaum adheres to this idea and in his practice wanders across various activities that would traditionally be understood as different occupations. During a TED (Technology, Education, Design) talk filmed at TEDxStanford, Applebaum demonstrates, through examples of his own work, several activities that are part of his practice, which he labels as different occupations (Applebaum, 2012). What is interesting about Applebaum's work, and sets it apart from the original avant-garde artists that made this notion visible (Duchamp, Cage, Beuys, etc.), is that it embraces the accomplishments of the aesthetic revolution and, at the same time follows the representational logic of the *poetic* regime. His work is representational in that it adheres to existing musical practices—he imitates and reproduces well-known strategies of twentieth-century western music. Moreover, he utilises the same strategies of redistribution and redefinition common to the avant-garde movements, however without making any reference to their history. Regardless of the

diversity of activities that his practice embraces, his work has been absorbed easily into contemporary music and art institutions: his visual works have been exhibited at art institutions, his music has received performances worldwide at prestigious institutions and he has received major commissions by established ensembles.⁵ Applebaum's work shows how the twentieth-century concept of the artist/musician as an occupation that redefines its own forms of activity has been subsequently reproduced and institutionalised.

Johannes Kreidler's work also fits within the *imaginary musical radicalism* category. Some of his work utilises and reproduces the avant-garde's strategies of provocation and disruption. For example, Kreidler's Donaueschinger action (Kreidler, 2012) and the destruction section from *Audio Guide* (Kreidler, 2014) restage or imitate actions that could be associated with the Fluxus movement—several Fluxus artists are known to have been involved in actions consisting of the destruction of musical instruments.⁶ Kreidler's work, however, operates outside the original avant-garde's function of destabilising conventional ways of making art that can be associated with the aesthetic revolution. In today's social context, Kreidler's actions have a very different effect, and can be understood differently—one could argue that the two works by Kreidler represent poetically the futility of traditional forms of protest in late capitalist neoliberal societies. Moreover, the Donaueschinger action, in particular, makes evident the institutionalisation of protest—Kreidler was commissioned and paid to perform this action by the Gesellschaft für Neue Musik.⁷ The destruction section in *Audio Guide*, on the other hand, has a different effect in its relationship to politics. In this section, Kreidler clearly makes a reference to Nam June Paik's *One for Violin Solo* (1962), however, he recontextualises, accelerates and amplifies the destruction of violins (over a hundred violins are destroyed). Instead of the calculated, committed and deliberate action of the original, Kreidler's is hysteric—there is a sense of hopelessness associated with this hysteria that could be linked to the current condition of saturation and closure in western music and politics. As we watch this uncalculated, violent and pointless destruction of violins, we are aware that this action, from its inception, is going to be artistically and politically futile. Kreidler's work, like Applebaum's, also does not give explicit references to the original avant-garde artists from whom he appropriates. Furthermore, his actions function differently from the original work by the avant-garde artists he emulates, in as much as the strategies of disruption and provocation that he reproduces have, for some years now, been assimilated by the institutions, and the artistic and cultural contexts, in which he operates.

Some of the work by my artist collective *Squib-box* (De la Cour, A., Luck, N. & Reuben, F., 2010), like Kreidler's work, makes use of strategies of provocation and disruption that could be associated with the avant-gardes. *Live Colonoscopy* (2012) is a performance that projects a video of a colonoscopy procedure of one of the members of the group, while simulating an endoscopy on another member. While the endoscopy is simulated, microphones are inserted into the performer's mouth, while they are being fed different food items that look like contents of the stomach. The performance is accompanied by a live improvisation where musicians interact with the sounds produced from the feeding. The performance ends with the 'patient' vomiting the food that has been fed to him during the musical improvisation (Squib-box, 2012). This performance imitates strategies of provocation that were utilised by artists associated with Fluxus and Viennese Actionism.⁸ However, as with the case of Kreidler, *Squib-box*'s performance does not have the same function of rupture that the original avant-garde work once did. The radicalism of *Squib-box*'s work is imaginary, as the strategies of 'action art' have been now assimilated culturally. Another feature of *Squib-box*'s work is the imitation and reproduction of postmodern strategies like appropriation, humour, satire, elements of kitsch and bad taste, and site-specificity, and their inclusion in seemingly provocative and disruptive performances.⁹ What makes this work interesting is that it fails to be shocking, and by doing so, makes apparent that the shock value of the original avant-garde has now faded as its strategies have been commodified and assimilated by contemporary culture. The bad humour and lack of seriousness and consistency of this work also point towards a condition of disbelief, scepticism and confusion resulting from the lack of aesthetic direction that the postmodern spectacle offers.

The work by Applebaum, Kreidler, and *Squib-box* that I have examined can be considered as *imaginary musical radicalism*. What all of these creative music practices have in common is that they all imitate, reproduce and restage strategies associated with twentieth-century avant-garde movements, however removed from their original context. They utilise strategies of provocation, disruption, redefinition and redistribution associated with the aesthetic revolution in different sociohistorical conditions—their radicalism is imaginary, in that they operate within the mimetic barrier of today's contemporary music and art practices. This work also does not bear a clear relationship with the original *aesthetic* and *strategic* radical motivations of the avant-garde, but instead passively represents the current conditions in western politics as discussed earlier. These practices

also show how institutions have now assimilated the notion of the musician-composer as autonomous from music's own subject matter. It is also interesting to notice that all of these practitioners present themselves as radical, but without any reasonable proof; they often rely on bad taste and comedy, and embody symptoms that could be associated with late capitalism: narcissism, obsession, paranoia, delusion, hysteria and schizophrenia. *Imaginary musical radicalism* perpetuates the current condition of western music and politics, revealing it through the futility of its own (imaginary) radicalism. Furthermore, it is defined negatively in its relationship to the *aesthetic* revolution (it inverts the strategies of the avant-garde from the *aesthetic* to the *poetic* regime) and it does not propose any new ideas by which a link could be established today between music and emancipatory politics.

Towards a Multidimensional Radical Historical Analytic of Music and Politics in Creative Practice

The dominant positions in music practice today do not propose new schemas or approaches towards linking music and emancipatory politics. Recent developments in critical theories of art, politics, and aesthetics, however, offer new perspectives to understanding how the practices of music and politics may converge and interact. Rancière's work on politics and aesthetics has opened new discussions¹⁰ about the interconnections between the two spheres, and has made a useful conceptual distinction between the *politics of aesthetics* and the *aesthetics of politics*. Through his notion of the *distribution of the sensible*, he has made explicit the link between art and politics through the idea of aesthetic distribution—forms of inclusion and exclusion in the sensible order (sense perception) that parcels out places and forms of participation (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 85). There are also positive conceptual oppositions in his work that at the same time reveal points of conjuncture between the two practices. The differentiation between the *strategic* and *aesthetic* notions of the avant-garde, for example, also points to the connections between them. At the same time, this connection makes evident the link between the political and aesthetic dimensions of art and reveals a point of conjuncture in the relationship between art and (the aesthetics of) politics. He also makes these relationships more explicit by comparing different types of political and artistic distribution—the analogy of *archi-* and *meta-politics*¹¹ as connected to the *strategic* and *aesthetic* avant-gardes (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 30). Another interesting link between music and politics can be identified in Rancière's idea of visibility, in relationship to the *distribution of the sensible*, which, according to him, delineates the 'visible and

invisible' (Rancière, 2000/2004, p. 13). Both music and politics ultimately deal with what is *audible* or *inaudible*, or who is represented or not in musical and political systems. Rancière's work therefore emphasises the duality in a community's visibility between what he calls the police order and politics¹² as a question of aesthetic distribution. Visibility is of course also related to Rancière's notion of democracy, as being the 'supplement' to the logic of the police (Rancière, 2010, pp. 33-37). Rancière's work, however, up to a certain point, still follows the determinist logic that art and politics relate only through the abstract notion of the *distribution of the sensible*. Rockhill has argued, 'one of the core problems in Rancière's project is that he largely—although not entirely—removes art from its social inscription in his analysis of its relationship to politics' (Rockhill, 2014, p. 181). Rockhill's criticism is legitimate, nevertheless in my opinion his own work diminishes the role that abstract relations in the aestheticisation of art may have in establishing links with politics: the potential of *suggestion* as a juncture of nodal points, through the abstraction of aesthetic experience—paradoxically through the ontological illusion that there is a simple relationship between art and politics.

The contributions by Rancière and Rockhill enable one to consider a multidimensional, radical historical analytic of musical and political practices as a heuristic form of mediation between creative music practice and emancipatory politics. Through an analysis of the multiple agencies of music and politics in the sociohistorical field, it is also possible to conclude that the postmodern theory of the 'end of illusions', in establishing a link between music and emancipatory politics, is in itself an illusion. In order to move forward from the shortcomings and misunderstandings that can be associated with modernism and postmodernism, a multidimensional approach, I propose, should be favoured over the unidimensional understanding of the interconnections between music and politics. In other words, creative practitioners should avoid subscribing to the idea that there is a privileged link between music and politics, in order to avoid false illusions about their connection, particularly as it relates to notions of self-reflection, autonomy, commitment, action, production and distribution. For creative music practitioners interested in this link, it is therefore important to examine artistically and theoretically (either explicitly or implicitly) the variable sociohistorical points of conjuncture between music and politics, through a radical interpretation of history (Rockhill, 2014, pp. 36-44). Music practices that favour the multidimensional approach, therefore, should be aware of, and creatively engage with, the variable theoretical configurations of *music* and *politics*, as well

as with the various structures at play in music practice (institutions, communities, governments, markets, etc.) and their insertion in the cultural and political fabric of contemporary society. Another important consideration is that music is not a single agency (music as a work or action, or as the direct embodiment of an artist/musician's subjectivity) that is inherently political outside the sociohistorical framework. The reception of music is therefore vital in its connection to politics—musicians cannot determine *a priori* the links their practice will have with emancipatory politics, just assess its potentiality.

Creative practitioners interested in engaging in this form of mediation should attempt to distinguish and analyse the modes of interaction that characterise the interventionist concepts *music* and *art*. In other words, they should ask what is contained in the variable receptacle *music* at specific sociohistorical nodal points. They should also differentiate what the variable concepts *music* and *art* might mean in contemporary society—for example the definition of *music* in western culture still carries a strong link with what Rancière calls the *ethical regime* (music's function in relationship to a community's *ethos*). What are called the fine or visual arts, on the other hand, only start with the representational logic of the *poetic regime*. The term *art* in the singular is mostly associated in contemporary art with the *aesthetic regime*. The variable concept of *music*, therefore, today encompasses all three regimes, whereas what is associated with the arts or *art* only refers to the *poetic* and *aesthetic* regimes. Consequently, it is important to think about the repercussions this may have in terms of music's reception and insertion in society, particularly as it relates to music that lies within the *aesthetic regime*.

A multidimensional radical historical analytic of musical and political practices allows music practitioners to examine the rhizomatic conjunction between these two practices heuristically. By studying the points of interaction (nodal points in *space-time*) between music and politics, this form of mediation looks beyond the binary social logic characteristic of the unidimensional approach that prevailed in twentieth-century modernism and postmodernism. A multidimensional approach also opens the door to new areas of creative and theoretical enquiry that can be explored further by creative music practitioners.

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¹ In his reading of Wittgenstein, Rockhill mostly refers to *The Blue and Brown Books* (1958) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953).

² In an interview conducted by William Duckworth, Christian Wolf describes the questions that arose at the time in relationship to the link between indeterminacy and politics: 'The whole question of how indeterminacy relates to politics is one that was raised, the argument being that the indeterminate element in the music made it incapable of carrying a message. (One can argue around it, saying that the openness itself was a political message).' (Duckworth, 1995, pp. 203-204)

³ This argument is of course related to Lyotard's idea of the 'end of grand narratives' characterised by the rejection of the simple historical determinism of modernist thought—paradoxically through the same determinist logic of rupture.

⁴ This category is not directly related to Peter Osborne's interpretation of imaginary radicalisms as connected to a work's illusion of autonomy and the radicalism of its imaginary; see Osborne, 2007.

⁵ Applebaum's *Metaphysics of Notation* (2010) has been exhibited at arts institutions including the Cantor Arts Center and the Schneider Museum of Art. His music has been performed at prestigious institutions and he has received commissions by Kronos Quartet, Wien Modern Festival, Banff Centre for the Arts, Stanford Symphony Orchestra, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, amongst others. See Applebaum (2001), for a longer list of works and performances.

⁶ Some of these Fluxus artists include Nam June Paik, Philip Corner and Annea Lockwood; see Higgins (2002, pp. 49-54) and Lockwood (2015).

⁷ See Pace, Kreidler, et al. (2012) for a fascinating discussion about this action that originally took place on Facebook.

⁸ This performance is similar to Viennese artist Otmar Bauer's work *Zeigt* (1969). In this work Bauer drinks a bottle of wine in a typically bourgeois setting, and then throws up. He then consumes his vomit, which provokes him to throw up again. He then repeats this action several times. See Bauer (1969).

⁹ See for example, Squib-box (2011). See, De la Cour et al. (2010), for more examples of Squib-box's work.

¹⁰ The discussions on Rancière's work on politics and aesthetics are too many to cite here but a good example is Rockhill (2014). In music, see for example Moreno & Steingo (2012).

¹¹ See Rancière (1995/1999, pp. 61-93).

¹² What Rancière refers to as the police order, or la police, is what constitutes the recognised political and social bodies in a community (what is visible), in contrast to politics, which in this context means the sections of society that are not recognised or represented (what is invisible).