Approaching creativity

This presentation asks a series of questions about what we mean by creativity, and raises issues on ways of thinking about what performers and composers do. Below are 4 questions that point to different areas of work on creativity – ideas and methods – to act as starting points for the discussions during the day.

Two reasons for asking these particular questions:

1) This is an opportunity in the first few months of the project to continue to address fundamental questions about creative practice and to get a sense of the way creativity is viewed and valued by the researchers, composers and performers at the workshop who share a commitment to greater understanding of creative processes. One can imagine that the nature of the day to day work in these different arenas of work commits people to rather different perspectives.

2) The second reason is one that is internal to the project. On the one hand, in the fieldwork so far, there has been a fairly tightly focused analysis of the social, musical and material interactions that go on between agents in face to face situations; this sort of work obviously has its background in disciplinary areas such as psychology of performance, ethnomusicology, but also a range of approaches that trace their lineage back to the micro/real world/social inquiry of the Chicago School.

But the project is also committed to understanding such creative practices not just over the period of preparation and rehearsal but as they emerge out of a particular socio-historical period and cultural ideology. So while, there is a legitimate concern to pay attention to creativity in part as a live process, enacted materially, bodily; the study must also pay attention to its cultural weight within contemporary Western performance and how the detail of such practices might be contained within and shaped by larger forces. All this seems to require some acknowledgement of the complexity around the term creativity and the relationship between what could be called micro- and macro- understandings.

The first question under discussion might be:

- **What do mean by creativity in its technical and broader cultural dimensions?**

The attempt at psychological understanding of creativity began in earnest in the 1950s running alongside research into intelligence. In the attempt to systematise creativity, tests were developed [eg, the Torrance test], and controlled experiments were set in train that measured, isolated and organised creativity. One can see the results of this sort of work in a number of creativity research agendas, notably Czsiksentimihalyi's work on flow and the plethora of organisational/management journals that deal with creativity in the workplace, an explicit instrumentally rational approach to creativity - *how can we sell more things, how can we do this better?*

Psychological research into musical creativity has had a number of agendas too, in some ways trying to demystify the skilled behaviour of players but in so doing it has tended to focus far too much on the individualistic elements of being creative,

analysing the expressive patterns that musicians bring to a piece and the modelling the cognitive foundations of these sorts of behaviours. I am suggesting that these sorts of approaches can be represented by the term 'technical'; as it were, we accept the basic warrant that this sort of work **is** creative, and our questions stem from this.

There is no attempt here to frame all scientific understanding of creativity as beset with ideological problems, and the project is very interested in the technicalities, the technology of being creative, but it is the case that much of this sort of work makes huge assumptions about creativity without acknowledging the values that surround the term. We are all aware of this in discussions of music and creativity. The celebration of autonomous genius and other romantic notions of authorship, the seemingly eternal descriptions of students as being 'musical' or not – all have been critiqued and yet they seem to continue to lurk around the research questions on creativity in performance. How do we frame creativity, as it were stepping outside the warrant. This leads to a set of sub-questions:

- **To what degree is creativity to be understood as ordinary or exceptional? The work of the everyday or radical innovation?**

This foundational question about creativity has particular resonance in our thinking about creative practice between composers and performers, exceptionally skilled practitioners operating within an art world that has innovation at its centre. Raymond Williams famously suggested that 'culture is ordinary' – can we think of creativity in this setting as ordinary? This seems to be something of the approach that Tim Ingold takes in his work on creativity; creativity and innovation are not products of high culture but a process that through the mechanism of cultural improvisation is woven into our everyday life as well as overt cultural production such as music. Ingold questions why we automatically assume that the architect is creative but not the builder yet without the builder, the building remains an idea and not a fact. Ingold suggests that to talk about innovation is read creativity backwards, focusing on the product rather than the process and in talking of builders and architects, he also raises questions of cultural ownership.

- **In what ways is it the subject of ownership?**

This raises further questions and in particular, two themes of importance for questioning how musicians and composers 'own' their creativity

  - First at a horizontal level - How musical role affects the sense of input, control and ownership within the collaborative process?

  - At a vertical level, How do composers and performers feel a sense of ownership of their musical materials, technologies in relationship to a tradition? How much are their ideas their own?

- **What methods do we use?**

My final question is about method. If we accept that creativity is not just about technical process, and that there can be a strong element of ideological framing

around such a term, do we answer questions about creativity best by acceptance or suspicion of the discourse, practices that surround it?

And this matters not just for our discussion, a central question around ethnography is the extent to which the responses that researchers get from participants are often seen as unproblematic.

How do we best get at 'what is going on'? How can observation, interview, archive work best be coordinated to make sense of these collaborative processes?

So I am going to stop there and just to sum up

- o **What do we mean by creativity as a technical / cultural process?**
- o **To what degree should we think of creativity as innovation or everyday practice?**
- o **In what ways is creativity subject to ownership?**
- o **What methods do we use?**

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