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How musicians use recordings in discourse and in praxis *– in the perspective of an anthropological dynamic concept of culture*

Introduction

Listening to music and recordings have become a "taken-for-granted" part of everyday life and part of everyday culture. There is music all around us and music is being played in many different contexts; in shops, in the car, at concerts etc. In some instances the music is a form of background to other things we are doing, as when we are driving in the car while listening to music. In other instances, such as in concerts, listening to music is primary as it is the "only" thing we do. In some instances we can decide the music we want to listen to on our own, in other instances it is others who choose for us. But the ability to play recordings of music and the way this may influence the listener and the musician, is very different in late modernity from what it was 100 years ago, when recordings were only listened to by the few who had the money to buy them.

Recordings are special, because they can retain the sound of music long after it was played. They make it possible to listen to music independently of where and when it was recorded, and they make it possible to hear and rehear music. To the individual player it means that they for the first time can hear their own playing and this enables reflection and change of playing style, and an evaluation of the change. At the same time records make it possible to separate the recording and the listening. One may sit on Greenland and listen to recordings made in Samoa, or listen to recordings of a player who has long been dead.

That musicians listen to recordings in a variety of the contexts described above was apparent in the round "table" discussion held at CHARM Symposium 6, Sept. 2009.

In this paper we look at how recordings (of all kinds) are used by musicians, and if and how this may change musical performance. For the musician recordings are special in that they use them like any other member of society, but also that listening to records, of the musician's own playing or others musicians play, may play a part in relation to the professional role the of musician and the way musical performance in general changes.

Our aim is to look at the ways musicians use recordings, and it turns out that the actual use is most often described in discourse – that is *verbally*. Musicians tell about how they use recordings, or they talk together about recordings in order to evaluate and play recorded pieces. So our analysis is of text on music and musical performance rather than the music itself.

Recordings may: be listened to for work or pleasure, they may be reflected on – put into discourse, they may be used in *praxis* (to recreate and change musical culture). Further recordings create identity to the player, and they are part of music as a cultural tradition.

Music in everyday life is usually what the phenomenological sociologist A. Schutz (Schutz 2005; Schutz 1970) would call 'taken-for-granted', the term indicates that music is not something that we usually reflect deeply on when we listen to recordings.

But recordings have the potential of being brought from the everyday taken-for-granted into the reflected either individually or collectively. Because they can be played over and over, they are perfect for reflection. But what might be the result of this reflection for musical performance? Could it be to play like the recording or to play different from the playing on the recording? Probably the answer would be both, but in different contexts. For the pupil it could be learning to play like the performer on the record does, or becoming one of an ensemble (like in 'music minus one') , whereas for the musician listening to recordings it could be to reflect on one's own style in order to change it.

We want to see music as culture in the present day anthropological way: that culture is recreated and created anew in one and the same process – a dynamic concept of culture used in today's social anthropology, a perception of culture very different from earlier definitions of culture. In a dynamic concept of culture, changes take place continually, but at a pace where the culture by its practitioners' is perceived as coherent and meaningful. This process of change takes place in an interplay between discourse and praxis, that is how one talks about and reflects on changes in everyday practice, while the actual changes take place through a non-discursive practice in everyday life – here the playing.

Learning to play is to become socialised into a musical culture that exists before and beyond the individual, something that is done through practice and praxis. But playing is also about developing one's own style of play, which may be different or totally new. Either in small steps or drastically, musical culture is undergoing constant change.

Material

The empirical material that we have used has either been musicians talking on how they use recordings or videos showing recordings. We see these as naturally occurring thoughts on the use of recordings. In doing this we do not intend to say that these are not related to a context as they always will be, but it is not us that made the context, as in for instance the interview. This is both liberating and limiting, and we implicitly recognize the difference between discourse and praxis.
Becker says on this approach, that "by situating the researcher in the everyday context in which artwork is created, ethnographic approaches such as participant observation and face-to-face interpersonal encounters help researchers better understand the relative ordinariness of art worlds in which social actors collectively produce culture through collaborative activity" (Becker, quoted in (Grazian 2008: 49). We aim to find the *emic*, or informant's view through their practice. In our work we have a constructivist approach where the work has progressed as interplay between empirical material, analysis, and theoretical perspectives, that is as a complex process.

When considering musicians and recordings, there are different actors, roles, and statements. The actors may be: a performer, a teacher, a producer, a listener, an informed listener, or a musicologist.
Furthermore, these actors may play various roles in a given situation or at different times: instructing, performing, being interviewed, or volunteering a comment: verbal or written, stating specific aims, listening, criticizing, or editing a recorded performance.

The statements may be: straight from the mouth of the speaker, witnessed by a third party, or hearsay.

Musicians and recordings

The discourse on music – and here specifically regarding recordings – takes the form of verbalisations – musicians' written and spoken words and others' conclusions on these words. For verbalisation to work there has to be a common nomenclature, but musicians also sometimes resort to gestures or giving musical examples, in other words praxis. However, we know from phonetics that demonstrative pronunciation may be very different from pronunciation in connected speech and in a different environment – hence the praxis is also at times discursive.

The receiver of the discourse can do several things: accept the discourse as a framework for reflection and/or classification or use it as a basis for comparing to praxis as expressed in performance and on recordings. A strong enough personality may in her discourse convince the receiver that the praxis is actually in accordance with the discourse, whereas a receiver starting from praxis or not under the spell may arrive at a completely different conclusion.

Specifically regarding musicians and recordings, these may enter into the discourse in several ways. First of all the musician may state that she performs something in a particular way or aims for something particular in her recordings, and her recordings support or deny this statement. Secondly, she may state that she intends to sound like a particular recording. Or she may indicate that she never listens to recordings of her own, or of others, but her recordings may provide a different picture.

Listening to own recordings

Most of the statements by performers regarding recordings relate to their personal and private experiences of the recording situation.

The violinist Efrem Zimbalist gave extensive interviews to his biographer (Malan 2004), and on p. 138 we find the following regarding the recording in 1915 of the Bach Double Concerto with Fritz Kreisler “without being afforded the opportunity of listening to a playback. He [Zimbalist] was appalled by the heavy portamenti he had employed in the slow movement. ‘I thought I was being very expressive’, he grimaced in recollection, moving his left hand in an exaggerated imitation of the slides. ‘But I was young. What a pity Fritz didn't tell me how awful it sounded!’”

Leopold Godowsky's biographer (Nicholas 1989) had access to his correspondence, and on p. 211 we find: 14 September 1926 to Frieda (his wife): “I did much work for the Angelus records - still I have 17 rolls to correct yet”. This brief statement carries enormous weight: we learn that Godowsky recorded piano rolls, and that such rolls were edited.

Susan Tomes is a very reflective artist and makes the following remark (Tomes 2004: 27) that better than any remark specifically directed to recording as such expresses one important aspect of recordings:

“If the Orlando Quartet's bodies had disappeared, and music issued magically from the instruments alone, I don't think it would have made any difference to the way I heard them, or to my admiration of their musicianship. But if the members of the Domus became invisible, I should think about thirty per cent of the attractive features

of our playing would be lost. Is this good or bad?" Tomes actually talks about two kinds of listening, i.e. with and without visual stimulus.

Hans Swarowsky (1899 - 1975) taught conducting and "classical" performance practice at Hochschule für Musik in Vienna 1946-75, (notable pupils Claudio Abbado and Zubin Metha) and also left his own recorded legacy. In a posthumous book (Swarowsky 1979) originally encouraged by Richard Strauss he reflects on many essential concepts, on p. 82: "Nothing is so educational for an orchestra's performance discipline as the necessary attention of each individual player during the manufacture of a record. The strict precision of "High Fidelity playing" should under all circumstances be the "style" of the orchestra! It is an unlimited advantage to have an own studio. Tape recordings should be made of concerts as well and played back to them. This is the best way to recognize occasional imprecisions in the performance." And he also considers the selection of good orchestra players: "A great model for this are the Wiener Philharmoniker who since its creation has only recruited members that are pupils of their own members!" (Swarowsky 1979: 83)

The praxis of using recordings actively ("takes") in creating a recorded work has been a universal since the invention of the tape recorder. In the fundamental and groundbreaking re-creation of the Ring cycle for the gramophone medium we have the added advantage that for promotional purposes Decca issued one whole disc of snippets of the collaborative effort of recording *Tristan und Isolde*, i.e. the discourse mixed with praxis in the control room. The narrator was the producer himself, John Culshaw. Sound examples 1) through 3) condense the experience:

> 1) Culshaw: "After the take, it wasn't quite right, and we had to analyse why."
>
> 2) Culshaw: "Everything *is* difficult. So you have to go over everything again to sort out the fine detail and find out just how near or how far you are from what the composer wanted". Solti demonstrates with singing voice and gestures.
>
> 3) Solti: "I am so glad for it, it is so important, the beginning of the record." Culshaw's comment at the end: "Wagner never heard it as good. That's encouragement, anyway."

Just listening to the goings-on in the control room it becomes very apparent that Solti's behaviour in listening back is not different from his behaviour on the rostrum during rehearsals.

Musicians use recordings for comparison, reflection and evaluation. Any recording may in principle inspire to reflection. But the reflection has to be understood in a context where it to the individual musician is a question of becoming better in a "strive towards perfection" (quote from participant at CHARM Symposium 6, Sept. 2009).

Socialisation

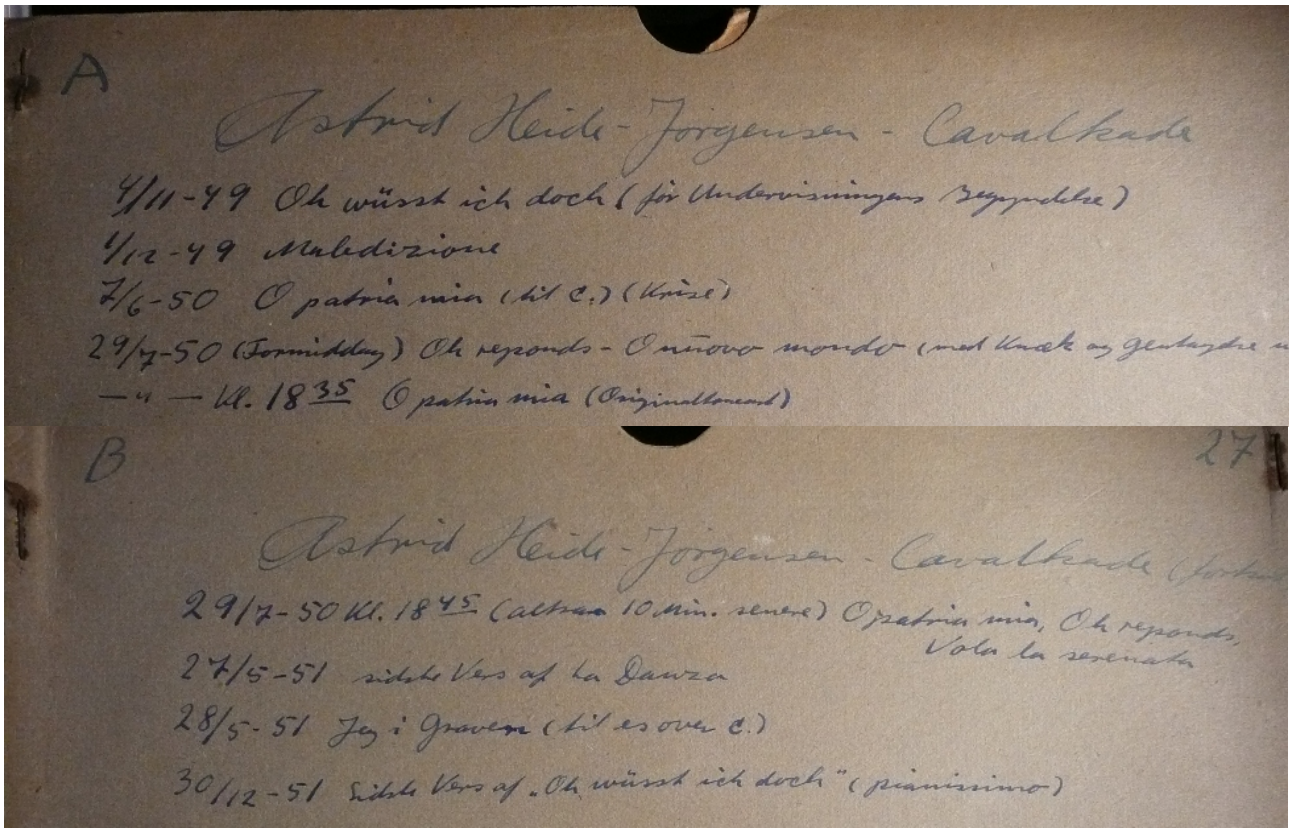
Socialisation it the process through which the individual learns to become culturally competent, in this case learns to play an instrument and play with others.

The pianist Marta Argerich describes how she first listened to recordings as a child, and how they influenced her musical taste. Furthermore she explains how Friedrich

Gulda, who was her teacher for a year, made recordings of her that she was made to listen to, in order to improve her playing. And in a video presented in “Evening Talks” (DVD 2008) we see a video of her in her teens practicing at the piano, with a running tape recorder in the background. The point is that for the musician there are several separate arenas where music is created and consumed. Something reflected in the panel discussion at CHARM Symposium 6, Sept. 2008.

The advent of the instantaneous recording disc (“lacquer records”) enabled many technically minded vocal instructors to improve their tuition. Not the least letting the pupils hear their own singing voice was very important. From a small collection of discs left as recorded heritage from a Danish singing instructor active at least between 1945 and 1955 we can determine one approach to this new medium. He used it in three ways: audition (“test”) of a prospective pupil, recording for instant playback and critique, followed by further recordings under strict maintenance of the recording conditions, and re-recording of the recordings above for establishing development over time.

> Sound example 4) demonstrates the spoken announcements followed by singing (translations by GBN).
> “Recorded 4 November 1949 by Astrid R.” + singing [*GBN note: before tuition started*]
> “Astrid H. 29 July 1950 at 18.35” + singing [*GBN note: change of marital status*]
> “Astrid H. 29 July 1950 at 18.45. The settings of the apparatus are unchanged.” + singing



Jazzman's academy
Grazian, who both studied jazz, via ethnographic fieldwork, and was himself a jazz player, describes how recordings are used as part of a process of enculturation to become a good jazz player. He writes "on Wednesday night a number of experienced saxophonists would take me aside to instruct me in basic playing techniques like improvisational soloing. These lessons would frequently expand into general lectures on artistic development such as the importance of listening to old blues records and attempting to replicate their solos and riffs during practice sessions …." (Grazian 2008: 53).

In relation to jazz the described socialisation is both verbal, but also to a great extent tied to performance. The description of Chicago Jazz shows how this culture was a continuation in that "the structure of the blues has consistently relied on stanzas of twelve measures or "bars" organized into three four-measure lines played in a derivation of the major scale called the *blue scale*"
(Grazian 2008: 51). But at the same time the content in the texts that were sung to the music changed from human suffering to sexuality and infidelity.

The process of socialisation within this musical tradition and which has been called 'jazzman's academy' is the jam session, in which the socialising has been described as follows: "It is here that he learns tradition, group techniques and style…Here it is more meaningful to speak, not of course of study, grades or degrees, but of apprenticeship, ordeals, initiation ceremonies, of rebirth…His instructors are his fellow musicians, especially the acknowledged masters, and his recognition of manhood depends or their acceptance of his ability" (Ellison quoted in Grazian p.52).

Grazian points to the way socialisation within jazz is both discursive and instrumental (by showing/playing or indicating the right way to do play). Likewise Cottrell's description of the way to become a professional classically trained musician illustrates how it is a process of socialisation in which the individual is enculturated into music and the culture of music (Cottrell 2004). Furthermore he describes various elements in this enculturation, through which the individual learns a culture, gets a cultural belonging and becomes part of a community with its symbols, relations and discourse.

Grazian writes that "most professional musicians either have the formula for this transposition committed to memory, or the talent and experience to enable them to figure it out immediately, playing by ear after listening for a few seconds" (p.54). Faulkner cites an extract from an interview with a tenor saxophonist regarding what it means to know a tune. They talk about a specific melody (which brings us closer to praxis than the question: "how do you know a melody?") The melody is (Coltrane's Giant Steps) .. and the saxophonist explains "..the more I played it I could play it the way I play blues….It worked, it got to that level in my subconscious, like when you play a blues now you don't have to think…that is when you really know a tune, when someone says, 'let's play Stella in B' and you just blow on it, and you don't think about the chord changes" (Faulkner and Becker 2008: 18).

Ian Pace gave a similar reply at Symposium 6, when he was asked about his special way to perform Brahms and whether he still did it, he replied: "It is something I do without thinking about it" (CHARM Symposium 6, Sept.2008).

This socialisation into a form, style, and idiom occurred the traditional "human" way, and Ellison's experience in jazz is typical. However, recordings provide a different path to achieve the same purpose. Instead of merely presenting a recording as a benchmark, *music minus one* (originally a trademark for this kind of publication) provided a pre-recorded accompaniment with the correct number of bars of rest for solos to play along with in private. Sound example 5) belongs to this type of accompaniment record that was first introduced in the 1930s. It should be noted that there is a gradual development from this type of record, in which a musical sound is expected to emanate from the live soloist, via records "in correct dance tempo" to instruct ballroom dancing, (no sound, but correct physical movement), to the ordinary entertainment records used for private dancing.

Conducting

The art of the conductor is to energise the players into creating a sound that fulfils a number of criteria. Many conductors wrote about their reflections, but very few wrote about the importance of recordings, the influence of the intervening recording medium on the experience of the listener. Alois Melichar (1896 - 1976) was the first to do this, and certainly much earlier than his contemporary Swarowsky. He was the house conductor for Deutsche Grammophon and recording director for e.g. Richard Strauss as a conductor. He was never considered an important conductor and more known for his well-argued dislike of Schoenberg et al. He was the first to reflect publicly on the influence of the record medium on performance. His fundamental work "Musik-Interpretation für die Schallplatte" (Melichar 1929: 804-816) is now largely forgotten and perhaps never remembered outside Germany. It was written at a time when he already had some experience and had lived through the transition from acoustic to electrical recording, which he perceived as a major step ahead. Sound example 6) shows his practicing of his teaching of the need for balance in the recorded orchestra. There can be little doubt that his complete conducted work ought to be analysed the same way as the Solti-Culshaw collaboration over the Ring cycle, (CHARM Symposium 2, Sept. 2005; David Patmore).

Thinking further

Recordings have already been used in research to study and analyse practice. Peter Weeks (1996: 247-290) used recordings of rehearsals in order to do an ethnomethodological study of correction talk and Amanda Bailey is using video recordings to study the interplay of composer and musicians during rehearsal of a new composition.

It is interesting that Peter Weeks' research indirectly illuminates the interplay or tension between the score (culture as tradition) and the playing of the score (as an expression of the process of cultural change). Our way of thinking cultural change may also be found within musical research. As when Daniel Leech-Wilkinson states that "we can think of a performance style as a manner of making music that is temporary, only apparently stable, that changes gradually all the time, and that responds to changes in the wider world" (Personal communication, 2008).

Listening is central to music. For the pupil listening to the teacher, for one member of an orchestra listening to another, a process which Alfred Schutz defines as "tuning in on the other", a process in which playing together and the sense of community it creates (which Victor Turner would term *communitas*), is central, and where the individual's wishes for musical expression seem to disappear (Turner 1969). The

conductor listening to the orchestra playing and the ensuing “correction talk” is another element connecting listening, playing, and change.

That music and playing is discursive is discussed by Sybil Barten (1992: 53-61), when she describes the significance of discourse in the instruction of playing. Her analysis underlines the significance of metaphors, idioms, and analogies, that is, all the uses of everyday language. (Identical reflections can be made in relation to the recordings).

Records – artefact or agent?

Our point of departure for our analyses here is the social situation as it is enacted in relation to the use of recordings in different contexts: in relation to instruction, reflection on own play, reflection when playing together with others etc. The recording is at one and the same time an artefact entering into relations with the persons using it. This way of perceiving the recording is not new in relation to music, working in relation to other significant artefacts such as the music and the score, but it is interesting for the anthropologist to look closer at the way in which we understand these artefacts.

Things, artefacts have always been a part of anthropology. The first anthropologists would bring artefacts back from the people they worked among in order to illustrate the studied culture. In his book on participant observation Spradley comments on the way he perceives culture as an interplay between cultural behaviour, cultural knowledge, or cultural artefacts (Spradley 1980: 5). Spradley’s understanding is that the handling and use of artefacts happens in a singular process and give access to cultural rules not overtly presented, the earlier mentioned *emic* view, which is the anthropologists’ interest. Culture is “a shared system of meanings, is learned, revised maintained and defined in the context of people interacting” (Spradley 1980: 9). In this view Spradley is in line with later anthropology, which perceives culture as being recreated and created anew in one and the same process.

Objects (artefacts) are present; they can be described and used. According to Spradley, acts incorporate the use of objects, just as different goals may imply the use of different objects (Spradley 1980: 82). But Spradley does not perceive the actual artefacts as having in themselves agency on the social situation they are a part of.

This is what Latour (2005) does, when he perceives objects/artefacts as potential agents i.e. having agency. It is Latour’s point that objects have to be perceived as just as important as living creatures in creating relations and agency. Latour’s ANT (actor, network, theory) is concerned with social relations and networks but ”make *objects* participants in the course of action” (2005 :70).
In this context it means that we have to bring the objects into the description as well as the agency they have in social interactions.

Seeing artefacts analytically is what Henara, Holbraad, Wastell,(2008: 1-233) do when they claim that anthropology needs to look at artefacts as more than material culture. They want anthropology to look at artefacts as analytical tools, and ask how objects encountered in the field might provide the terms of their own analysis.

The recording is an artifact, a thing. But as we have shown, the record is also something that may create reflection and change. Using Latour we conclude that

recordings are agents in their own right able to make people reflect, act and create changes.

Latour writes that "to be accounted for objects have to enter into accounts" (2005: 79). "If no trace is produced, they offer no information to the observer and will have no visible effect on other agents. They remain silent and are no longer actors: they remain, literally, unaccountable (ibid).

In a dynamic concept of culture changes take place continually, but at a pace where the culture by its practitioners' is perceived as coherent and meaningful. This process of change takes place in an interplay between discourse and praxis, that is how one talks about and reflects on changes in everyday practice, while the actual changes take place through a non-discursive practice in everyday life – here the playing.

Conclusion

The question we looked into was if and how musicians use recordings. Recordings exist and are used in a variety of ways. They are one way of making reflections and cultural change possible. We feel that this topic might very well be something to explore further, preferably in a trans-scientific forum – that is mixing researchers from several fields in order to move knowledge and science further by pooling resources and knowledge, in order to transcend the individual scientific field.

There is no more fitting way of ending this brief discourse than by listening to Culshaws' final remarks and Solti's thanks after the accomplishment of the Tristan raw tapes - sound example 7):

> Culshaw: "The recording of a work like *Tristan* is a corporate effort depending on the willingness, the cooperation, and understanding of the cast, the conductor, and the recording crew. It should be, and in this case we believe it was, in the service of the composer. To re-create rather than reproduce. To reveal, rather than represent, his *Tristan und Isolde* in a medium unknown to him".
>
> Solti: "... wirklich viel Arbeit hinter uns ..... ."

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Sound examples

1)-3), 7) excerpts from: "The Birth of an Opera: Tristan und Isolde"
Narration: John Culshaw
Decca DEM/SET.204/8

4) excerpts from vocal instruction 1949-50

5) excerpt from *Studies in Swing No. 2* "The Japanese Sandman" Rhythm Section (Without solo Sax.)
Parlophone R2189 (1936).

6) excerpt from "An der schönen blauen Donau": Walzer I. Teil (Johann Strauss)
Alois Melichar mit dem Philharmonischen Orchester, Berlin
Polydor 10598-A

7) excerpt from final remarks by Culshaw