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Strands of the Future: France and the birth of electronica

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Summary

The early history of 1970s electronic rock music, or electronica, often centres on the innovations of Brian Eno, Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk, whose creative roots are identified as in avant-garde modernist and contemporary music (e.g. Luigi Russolo, Edgard Varese, John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Schaeffer). German, British and American artists have gained wide recognition for their roles in this history, but French artists who made important contributions to developments in electronica have arguably been overlooked. This study suggests this is due to a general antipathy to French rock of the 1970s, both inside and outside France (Looseley : 9, 45-46), and an antagonism to the progressive rock genre demonstrated by music journalists (Sheinbaum, 2002) and implicit in the priorities of earlier academic studies of popular music (Hebdige, 1979).

This study analyses the work of Pulsar, Richard Pinhas / Heldon, and Jean-Michel Jarre. It suggests that these artists, though having diverse creative agendas, each produced music that was more than a simple imitation of 1970s British progressive rock. In different ways, they attempted to transform and challenge the conventions of Anglo-American pop and rock music. They forged a creative path that looked outside the French context for inspiration, while creating music that connected to the twentieth century French tradition of electronic music - from Messiaen to Boulez to Jean-Jacques Perrey. Rather than viewing this music as being created in the shadow of Eno, Robert Fripp and Pink Floyd, this article suggests that it may well be a fruitful exercise to excavate and re-evaluate French electronic rock music of the 1970s. With the recent growing success of French Techno, it seems an appropriate time to reconsider earlier French electronica, as it has yet to be adequately explored either inside or outside the French context.

In *Kraftwerk: Man, Machine and Music* (2001: 74-75), Pascal Bussy describes the remarkable early success of the 'godfathers of techno' in France. The Anglo-American record buying public had ostensibly (but temporarily) written off Kraftwerk's 1975 success with 'Autobahn' as a novelty hit. However, in France, the band had a phenomenal impact, and in summer 1976, the single 'Radio-Activity' from the experimental and esoteric album of the same name, was a hit with sales of 1 million. French receptiveness to such electronic sounds should be no surprise as

there was an ‘indigenous’ 20th century tradition of electronic music. Edgard Varese’s experimentation with new sonic and musical sources, Olivier Messiaen’s use of the Ondes Martenot, and Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry’s *musique concrète* (‘non-musical’ sound manipulated with record decks and tape ‘cut-up’ compositions), placed France at the forefront of sonic and electronic musical experimentation. Furthermore, Pierre Boulez’s electronic sound laboratory IRCAM, opened in 1977, demonstrated a public commitment to 20th century contemporary electronic music.

But what of popular electronic music? Arguably, Frenchman Jean-Jacques Perrey’s 1960s Moog, Ondioline and *musique concrète* compositions were a precursor of later artists working in electronic popular music. But it is usually Varese, Schaeffer and Henry (alongside Stockhausen and Cage) who are cited as antecedents of electronic experimentation in rock and dance music; from the Beatles, Pink Floyd and The Who, through to Kraftwerk, Tangerine Dream, Klaus Schulze and Brian Eno, and on to Electro-pop (Numan, Foxx, Depeche Mode), hip-hop, dance and ambient musics in the Anglo-American context.

Looseley (2003:190) suggests this developmental slide of electronic music, from the modernist avant-garde to rock to techno, is viewed with suspicion by the pioneers – as the populist inf(lection) of a culturally radical form. Diederichsen (2002 : 22-23) also claims there is a mismatch between the ‘sound *creation*’ of ‘classic’ electronic music and the ‘*administration of sounds*’ by contemporary techno artists. However, in the history of electronica the high modernist art music/electronic popular music opposition is far from clear.

The recent growth and success of home-grown French techno and house music represented by ‘French Touch’ artists/DJs/producers (e.g. Laurent Garnier, Air, Daft Punk, Alex Gopher and Etienne de Crecy), arguably demonstrates a new cultural confidence and a wider acceptance, in France and the UK, of music existing at the interface between French and Anglo-American music. However, other French artists involved in developments in electronic popular music in

the last 30 years are little known or sidelined. I would suggest this is due to the marginalisation of European rock in the Anglo-American context, and the links these artists have to the 1970s progressive (or prog) rock genre which until recently has figured little in the academic study of rock (with Moore (1993/2001) being one of the few exceptions). In France, the oversight is arguably due to the obsession with *chanson* as representing all that is (and can be) authentically French, without considering the possibility of an 'indigenous' 1970s French rock tradition (Looseley, 2003). Contemporary techno and electro in France exist in an indeterminate trans-cultural space, and the music cannot be dismissed as an American blight on French music as French 'techno' musicians have developed a musical vocabulary that has self-assuredly adopted and adapted US and UK dance music. Similarly, 1970s French electronic prog rock should be re-evaluated to consider if it also demonstrates evidence of appropriation and innovation rather than imitation.

Prog rock has been neglected as a field of academic study (Holm-Hudson: 1) ever since the establishment of the Year Zero rhetoric of punk, and is inextricably linked in the popular imagination to decadent images of ELP, Pink Floyd and Yes. Yet, within the rock music of the 1970s, low key avant-garde experimentation by Henry Cow, Peter Hammill, Robert Fripp and Brian Eno stood in opposition to the excesses of stadium rock. These musicians felt intellectualism and cultural political engagement could be developed through aesthetic practice, by probing the affective nature of minimalist ambient works as well as investigating the textural possibilities and boundaries between sound, noise and music. Yet, this counter-cultural and transformative dimension of prog rock is rarely documented in popular rock histories. (Stump, 1997)

Prog rock is a diverse genre. Jerry Lucky (1998 : 120-121) attempts a definition arguing it embodies, among other things, long, carefully constructed songs, loud and soft passages with musical crescendos, synthesizers and Mellotrons, extended instrumental solos and the inclusion of non-rock formats (classical, jazz, folk, world and avant-garde music). However, the classical

or symphonic dimensions evident in this description do not account for some of the brutal or minimalist sonic experimentation found in the work of Eno, Fripp and Hammill.

In 1970s France, musicians and rock artists were drawn to British prog rock as music, spectacle and political project. It has been argued that

‘To French audiences, US & British music represented energy and protest, while local product, still suited to the French variety show, began to look old-fashioned and corny... Even if [the audience] didn’t always understand the words they identified with the sentiments, creating a sort of cultural consciousness completely divorced from any French roots’.

(Breatnach *et al.*, 2000 p. 50/51)

As such, through British prog rock, French artists developed a creative cultural consciousness that was dissident rather than conventional – even Pink Floyd promoted an anti-consumerist, individualist and pro-left message of sorts. Ironically, by looking to Britain for inspiration, French artists began to find their own ‘voice’ – inspired by but not always in obeisance to British artists. They also re-connected with the early French avant-garde precursors (Schaeffer, Varese) who had influenced British rock musicians in the late 1960s. In this respect, through prog rock French musicians were actually *rediscovering* their modernist ‘French roots’ rather than divorcing themselves from them.

Furthermore, Robert Wyatt of Soft Machine argues that prog rock had more vitality outside Britain due to public support and better access to the music, suggesting that in the 1970s,

‘...on the Continent they really did have lots of weird little radio stations [and] they had a much more anarchic network of alternative musical dissemination...Independence was a strong idea. [In Italy

and France] a lot of concerts were promoted by local authorities [and] arts councils ... That meant you could be neither classical or pop music – it gave you space, and a lot of groups on the Continent used it (Wyatt qtd. in Stump: 122/23)

As such, it may well have been outside of the UK that prog rock had its greatest impact, and it developed locally to reflect the artistic and political concerns and voices of disparate European nations and regions. France may not have had the 'weird little radio stations' until after 1981, but it did have an underground gig circuit developed by Giorgio Gomelsky, supporting bands such as Magma and Gong, as well as progressive imports such as Can, Art Bears and Supersister. (Patterson, 2003). As such, France was a nodal point in a European prog rock network whose politics were informed by the post-60s growth of a global cold war and counter-cultural politics that opposed conservative nationalism, and political and cultural imperialism.

However, the question of the 'authenticity' of the progressive 'voice' of French rock is fraught with complexity. American rock journalists felt that British prog rock's classical pretensions compromised rock's 'purity' (Sheinbaum, p.28-29). Anglo-American audiences on the whole resisted European rock with a few successful exceptions (e.g. Tangerine Dream), arguably due to their shaky grasp of English and rock idioms. Prog rock's evident embrace of synthesizers betrayed the centrality of the guitar as the authentic rock icon. In France itself, rock was often viewed either as a form of creeping Americanisation and therefore 'inauthentic' as 'un-French', or as an Anglo-American form French artists could not hope to reproduce. Looseley (2003 p.45) identifies this attitude in Bollon's 1981 analysis of the 1970s as the era of 'the big sleep' in French pop and rock music. Bollon argued 'French rock is rock made by the colonised'. Prévos (1991 p. 192) seems to deny the existence of French rock at all in the 1970s, citing Trust and Telephone as bands who gave birth to 'French pop-rock music' by adapting Anglo-American rock around 1980. As such, *1970s-French-electronic-progressive-rock* would seem, from all

accounts, to be a pale imitation several times removed of a predominantly British genre that was widely considered to have betrayed the authentic roots of American rock and roll.

Instead of dismissing this music it is time to excavate and re-evaluate it and to acknowledge French artists who provide links between Varese, Schaeffer, Henry and the electronic musicians, French or otherwise, of today. It is also important to highlight their diversity. The 'progressive' nature of prog rock was inflected differently by artists with diverse and competing creative and political *transformative agendas*. If this music was 'progressive', where was it intending to progress to, and what did it hope to transform in the process?

Contrary to Bollon and Prévost's pessimism, there are many artists who created 'progressive' electronic music in France in the 1970s (e.g. Zed, Lard Free, Clearlight/Cyrille Verdeaux, Red Noise, Didier Bocquet, Hydravion, Clearlight, Space Art), as well as others who incorporated electronics into their sound (e.g. Magma, Ange, Christian Boule and multi-national Gong). This study will consider three examples that represent distinct versions of French progressive electronic rock and will attempt to identify the diversity of their music.

Pulsar

Pulsar were one of several mainly instrumental French symphonic rock bands of the mid-late 1970s (others are Atoll and Shylock), who found an amount of commercial and critical success. Keyboards dominated the sound of these bands who used EMS VCS3s, Moogs, polyphonic synthesizers and Mellotrons alongside traditional rock instrumentation with sparse vocals. They were typically influenced by British bands (Yes, Pink Floyd, and King Crimson) and classical composers (Debussy, Stravinsky and Mahler) (Asbjørnsen: 145)

Gross (1991) writes that Lyons band Pulsar began their musical lives in the 1960s as 'Soul Experience' playing American R 'n' B cover versions in youth centres and parties. In 1968, marking changing times and musical priorities, they became 'Free Sound' and developed a new

improvisational approach to performance. They had an epiphany when attending a Pink Floyd gig in Lyon in 1970. Pink Floyd were at this stage an experimental, free improvising space rock band with impressive light and slide shows, and for a time Free Sound performed mainly Floyd cover versions alongside their improvisations. In 1971, they changed their name to Pulsar to denote a new intention to create original compositions. In 1974, after building a reputation playing many gigs in and around Lyon, Pulsar signed to an English label, Kingdom (due to lack of interest from French labels, sceptical of home-grown prog rock) and released *Pollen* in 1975.

In Pulsar's music, we hear a keyboard heavy electronic sound, with French and English vocals in between long, languid and melancholic symphonic instrumental sections. Over their 1970s albums they used increasingly complex analogue synthesizers but refrained from aping the decadent musical virtuosity of Keith Emerson (ELP) and Rick Wakeman (Yes). Pulsar seem largely to use synthesizers for their sonic and textural possibilities, and when they carry a melody, they are deployed with a restraint rarely found in symphonic prog rock. However, Pulsar are a 'conventional' prog band, aspiring to middle-class musical values (Gross, 1991) to transcend rock and pop's populist roots. This was arguably a conservative transformation of rock, which reconfigured and reinscribed rock through the adoption of classical music norms and conventions. It was music that seemed to aspire to middle-class cultural capital, implying rock did not itself have cultural value – that is, it could only be legitimated through an aspirational stance.

However, Sheinbaum (2002) argues that prog rock existed on a spectrum between rock and classical music that operated through 'tensions, frictions and incompatibilities' and that no clear synthesis was ever made between these binary musical value systems. Prog rock's aspirations did not result in an elimination of rock idioms. Pulsar's transformative aspirations created music in process, travelling through divergent modes of musical practice without creating a final definitive fusion. To criticise its prog rock aspirational orientation is therefore too simplistic, as

are most critiques that pit middle-class prog rock against other musical forms (e.g. punk) (Albiez, 2003).

Pulsar's music feels oddly prescient due to its analogue textures, now so familiar in contemporary electronic ambient and dance musics. Most of all, Pulsar created an electronic soundscape that Air, from *Moon Safari* (1998) through to *10,000 Hz Legend* (2001) unwittingly revisit in their nostalgic trawl through 1970s analogue technology and their quest for 'progressive' innovation. This may be due to their shared influences (e.g. Pink Floyd). James (2003 p. 244) shows Air's discomfort with such an analysis, but convincingly demonstrates the disingenuousness of their 'anti-prog' stance.

Pulsar, though often labelled a 'French Pink Floyd', were arguably more successful in exploring the textural possibilities of electronic sound than Pink Floyd. This may partly account for Pulsar's creative and commercial success, particularly on their second album *The Strands of the Future* (1976). Pulsar increasingly gained recognition in the French press, with reviews in *Best, Rock 'n' Folk* and *Rock en Stock* insisting on the originality and authenticity of their sound (Gross 1991). With this support, unlike many of their contemporaries, they signed to a French label (CBS France) and released *Halloween* in 1977 as punk broke and CBS had a management re-shuffle. Pulsar were soon viewed as 'old-fashioned' and lost label support. (Asbjørnsen: 217)

Punk and several American rock journalists (Sheinbaum, 2002) explicitly questioned whether the transformative agenda of prog rock, as deployed by Pulsar, was anything other than musicians trying to 'wear their parents clothes' and adopt alien anti-rock musical and cultural values rather than use rock music to change the world. This kind of analysis is flawed, and with Richard Pinhas, this criticism is far from correct.

Richard Pinhas / Heldon

Whereas Pulsar looked to Pink Floyd and Mahler for inspiration, Richard Pinhas undertook an intellectual assault on rock music conventions, incorporating the theory (and spoken vocals) of Gilles Deleuze and his own philosophical project on the relationship between time and music. Pinhas, who in the 1960s was tutored by Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze, was a former philosophy professor who gave up academia for rock music, but continued his philosophical inquiry with the band Heldon and in solo electronic albums. Pinhas explicitly referenced the assaultive rock of King Crimson/Robert Fripp ('In the Wake of King Fripp' from *Allez Teia* (1975)) and released Heldon albums on his own label, recorded in his home studio (often straight to stereo tape). He dismissively argued his music was only French because made there, that he had more empathy with the 'English national sentiment' and no interest in American music (Gill, 1980). David Bowie, a fan of Pinhas, considered collaborating with him on "*Heroes*" (1977), and by the end of the 1970s Pinhas was a friend of Kraftwerk, Eno, Fripp and Wyatt.

Pinhas constructed minimalist, ambient compositions - originally inspired by Eno and Fripp's *No Pussyfooting* (1973) - which transformed over Heldon's 1970s albums into an increasingly uncompromising industrial soundscape, using a combination of synthesizers, sequencers, guitars, live drums and treated tapes. The most brutal of these albums, a precursor of the industrial rock of Nine Inch Nails and Ministry, is *Un rêve sans conséquence spéciale* (1977). In the 1990s, Pinhas claimed Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails was as artistically important as Eno in the 1970s, suggesting Pinhas recognised in Reznor a kindred creative spirit (Polizzi, 1994).

Pinhas, also drawn to electronic minimalism, released *Rhizosphère* (1977) - a solo electronic album with live drums, dedicated to Philip Glass. Pinhas felt Glass, Stockhausen and Wyatt's Soft Machine, alongside Fripp and Eno, were crucial to his philosophical work on 'musical-time relations'. Pinhas characterised this, saying,

My first rapport with musical-time relations was with Soft Machine – that

made a very big impression on my music. I continued with the work of Philip Glass. I realised that repeating the same thing, only changing the accent when you play, can change the listener's perception of ... time (Gill, 1980)

Pinhas was committed to the view that rock music was a valid forum for transformative critical, philosophical and creative exploration, and though he recognised the importance of classical music in the past, he felt it irrelevant to the future of music. He stated:

One of the most important things is that I am a rock musician. I don't think any other music apart from rock is important. The last big creator in music was I think Messiaen. But his music hasn't changed since the 40s or 50s. And I think if anyone is to take the place of contemporary music, it should be Fripp and Eno. (Gill, 1980)

Pinhas's philosophical work on time, repetition and the eternal was close to that of his friend Deleuze, who appeared on Heldon's *Electronique Guerilla* (1974). They both argued that art, science and philosophy potentially transform life (Colebrook 2002: 12). As such, music can disrupt, rupture and transform experience by pushing at the boundaries of common perception in a process of 'becoming'; by continually creating the challenging and unfamiliar, to demonstrate a process and trajectory of constant escape from the fixed and conventional.

Pinhas's commitment to pushing instrumental electronic rock into increasingly extreme sonic exploration and the oppositional nature of his music demonstrated that, unlike Pulsar, he was committed to a radical transformative project, but one that was not located in a specific ideology. In this way, he shares much with Fripp's continual anarchic search for new modes of musical expression. Pinhas's layered, minimalist, repetitive sequenced synthesiser loops, and his improvised, highly distorted, sustained and brutal electric guitar sound created music that

moved beyond traditional song structures. Pinhas therefore created music as *sonic philosophy* that was in the process of becoming, internally structured, developmental and challenged expectations and the conventions of rock music.

Pinhas and Deleuze's legacy for contemporary electronic music is perhaps best understood through the 1996 tribute album *In Memoriam Gilles Deleuze*, released by the German label Mille Plateaux. This album samples fragments of Heldon and Deleuze, and contains tracks by Intelligent Dance Music (IDM) artists Alec Empire, Oval, Mouse on Mars, Scanner and DJ Spooky. One could argue that it is Pinhas's consistent championing of Deleuze (through to the present), and the efforts of Mille Plateaux label head Achim Szepanski, that have encouraged some contemporary electronic musicians to eschew formulaic dance music for more cerebral work - music that contests the notion that electronic music must be synonymous with the visceral pleasures of dance music.

Jean- Michel Jarre

Jean-Michel Jarre is probably the most commercially successful electronic artist over the last 30 years, selling 35m albums in just the first decade after his international success with *Oxygène* (1977) (Prendergast : 310). Despite, or perhaps because of this, Jarre is rarely discussed in histories of electronic music. This is arguably due to his possession of a surfeit of cultural capital without any corresponding subcultural capital – in other words, Jean-Michel is deeply uncool!

The Jarre documentary *Making the Steamroller Fly* (1998), and Jarre's official web site, Jarre.net, provide useful biographical detail of Jarre's upbringing and career. Jarre, son of French film music composer Maurice Jarre, was born in Lyons. He had little contact with his father who was in Los Angeles when he was growing up, but through his mother, France Pejot, he met jazz musicians as a child at the Paris jazz club, 'Le chat qui pêche' (including Chet Baker). He played in pop/rock bands in the 1960s, introducing SW radio and tape composition into the performances of his band, The Dustbins, while studying classical music at the Paris

Conservatoire. In 1968, he joined the Groupe de Recherches Musicales, studied *musique concrète* under Schaeffer and Henry, and released a single 'La Cage' the same year. In the early 1970s, he composed electronic music for the ballet *AOR* performed at the Paris Opera and Opera Garnier, wrote music for Nestlé and Pepsi commercials, jingles for radio and TV, and released an experimental electronic album, *Deserted Palaces*. In 1973, he created the soundtrack for the film *Les granges brûlées* and had a minor hit with the Jean-Jacques Perreyesque 'Zig Zag'. He also composed music and lyrics for French singers Christophe, Patrick Juvet, Gerard Lenorman and Françoise Hardy.

Jarre, without apparent discrimination, undertook most commissions or projects that came his way to bankroll his own electronic compositions. This is crucial to explaining his invisibility in electronic music history, as he did not indisputably invest in critical modernist music, prog rock, or purely commercial music. He therefore courted neither rock nor avant-garde 'credibility'. He felt comfortable, then and now, in working across the fields of musical production. He is not a classical composer (though *Chronologie* (1993) has orchestral and choral sections), not a jazz composer (though *Sessions 2000* (2002) is jazz oriented), not a pop or rock musician (though he often identifies himself as such), not a world musician (but has recently experimented with this), not a folk musician (though the crowds attending his gigs suggest a populist appeal and sensibility) or an avant-garde artist (but worked with the pioneers of *musique concrète*). He is an entirely inconvenient subject.

With the breakthrough 1976 *Oxygène* album, it is difficult to imagine what kind of critical vocabulary music journalists could deploy to understand Jarre. At that time, electronic rock music really did sound as strange as an alien space communication, and Jarre's music was often used to connote this in BBC2 Horizon science documentaries in the UK. *Oxygène* was a DIY concept album, produced on modest home equipment, and released independently. *Oxygène* has sold 15 million copies to date. Jarre had an international hit single with 'Oxygène 4' in 1977

and, like Kraftwerk, found the USA receptive, but confused, by his electronic sound (Oxygène could be found on the US classical, jazz and rock charts) (Jarre.net, 2003).

Jarre's electronic compositions are archetypally prog rock. Though not usually identified as such, his work clearly belongs to this milieu. Weinstein (2002) suggests that:

Progressive rock is rather less than a genre and a lot more than one, too ... its defining feature is not a set of concrete sonic elements, such as particular rhythms or instrumentation. Instead, progressive rock is distinguished by a conceptual trope: the appropriation of non-popular musical forms ... the sources are “classical music”, jazz and avant-garde music (Weinstein p.91).

This clearly applies to Jarre, and in common with other prog rock musicians, he adopted the classical romanticist/modernist conception of the artist – perpetuating the notion of the tenacity and dedication of the single-minded genius who produces innovative and unique work through the mastery of a medium (in his case emerging synthesiser and electronic music technologies). However, he is dismissive of the relevance of classical music to his work, saying ‘I have got my degree in classical music ... but who gives a shit?’ (Scott 2000).

The ambition and scale of his performances since 1979 have arguably only been matched by those of Peter Gabriel, Pink Floyd and U2. Jarre’s projections and light shows performed across the cityscapes of Houston, Paris, Lyon, London Docklands, and Moscow could leave him open to accusations that his music little matters in his attention to visual spectacle – a criticism that arguably could also be levelled at progressive musicians throughout the 1970s.

Jarre’s drive to continually innovate in his modes of composition and performance through employing new technology while nostalgically referencing the accordion and the music of

French fairgrounds also marks the romanticist/futurist dichotomy found in the work of Yes and Pulsar. Dugdale (2002) argues his nostalgia is particularly French and marks a musical return to memories of 1950s French dance halls -specifically in his fascination with the Rhumba.

Jarre does not make music in a Pinhas-like drive to question and politically transform contemporary perception and hegemonic thought, but he does use it for traditional and liberal political causes. Jarre embodies the rock musicians' dilemma described by Toynbee (2001) – between the contradictory struggles for individual artistic success and the utopian drive to transform the world. As a UNESCO good will ambassador, and in promoting his 1995 Concert pour la Tolérance at the Eiffel Tower, Jarre became a fully-fledged member of the global rock aristocracy (Peter Gabriel, Sting, Bono) who perhaps use music as a platform for a liberal, but hardly counter-cultural, political message while simultaneously furthering their individual status.

Jarre's music is populist, and has a melodic immediacy, steady rhythmical, percussive urgency and emotional dimension that is arguably alien to oppositional prog rock, and Detroit/Berlin inspired versions of techno. Unlike Pinhas or Pulsar, his music has mainly relied on electronic instrumentation, incorporating rhythm machines and sequencers with short, song-like tracks, in side-long musical movements. The hit status of 'Oxygène 4' was as much to do with its dance/disco appeal as its melodic content.

Jarre retains links to the (post-modern) avant-garde, collaborating with Laurie Anderson on *Zoolook* (1984) and *Métamorphoses* (2000). In many respects, Jarre is the ultimate post-modern artist. He employs a form of cultural bricolage, celebrates surface texture, spectacle and hybridity, and works across the fuzzy boundaries of high and popular culture, pop and classical music, and rock and dance music. He arguably has enough remaining commitment to the 1960s avant-garde 'electronica' to make his work interesting and demonstrably evolutionary. For

example, on *Zoolook* his debt to *musique concrète* (and ambivalence to his French musical identity) was clear in his exploration of

a form of music which can tell a story without words, because words in French don't work in rock music – if there was a new Maurice Chevalier who came from Chicago, or an Edith Piaf from Brighton, they wouldn't be accepted in France... (Jarre qtd. in Tobler 1997).

Zoolook sampled speech fragments from many languages in a musical work emphasizing rhythm, timbre and texture rather than meaning. On *Métamorphoses*, he has recently discovered the sonic experimentation that Pro Tools software offers the contemporary musician, explaining it in *musique concrète* terms saying:

I used a lot of samples as building blocks for this new album, I sampled myself ... the Fairlight ... my coffee machine ... I was using my Walkman earphones as a microphone and recording the results. (Scott, 2000)

Jarre tellingly dedicated his 1997 sequel to *Oxygène*, *Oxygène 7-13*, to Pierre Schaeffer.

Jarre treads a creative path removed from the accelerated generic and sub-generic micro-revolutions of dance music, but also attempts to forge connections with it. As James (2003 p. 308) argued, Jarre has had little influence on contemporary French techno and electro. However he has been the subject of two collaborative remix projects – 1995's *Jarremix* (released to coincide with the Concert for Tolerance – mixes by Laurent Garnier, Sunscreeem, Slam, Black Girl Rock and Bruno Mylonas) and 1998's *Odyssey through O2* (with remixes by Tetsuya Komuro, Apollo 440, DJ Cam, Loop Guru, Resistance D - mixed by Claude Monnet). These albums are collaborations rather than tributes and demonstrate Jarre's and dance artists' willingness to meet each other halfway.

When asked if he felt Jarre whether had an influence on French dance music, Monnet suggested: ‘Yes and no at the same time – yes because he had the intelligence to make his music cross over from the underground, but also no because his music is very similar to Trance music which is more a German or Belgian speciality’ (Monnet 2003). There is also a respectful but tangible reluctance to claim Jarre as an influence in DJ Cam’s and Apollo 440’s sleeve note contributions to these albums, suggesting ambivalence to Jarre. However, Jarre is a precursor of contemporary electronic pop and dance music, and is an originator and innovator whether by historical accident or genius. The reluctance of musicians to claim Jarre as an influence, although he probably introduced synthesised electronic music to many of them, is perhaps due to the ‘cooler than thou’ world of dance music, where there is little or no subcultural capital to be gained by aligning oneself to Jarre.

Conclusion

In the histories of electronic music, these artists remain more or less anonymous. If their marginalised position is due to being too popular and visible (Jarre), too avant-garde and invisible (Pinhas) and too outdated though now oddly contemporary (Pulsar), we need to examine the processes of ‘authentication’ that canonise only certain areas of Anglo-American and French popular music. These artists made important interventions in electronic popular music, and it should little matter that the cultural imaginary of their music was more international than local, or that their influence may be elsewhere than France. Nationalist discourse creates borders that music was never contained by. And, given that prog rock has continually returned in all but name in alternative rock (math rock (Cateforis 2002) and post-rock), IDM, and Radiohead, it is time to reconsider prog rock, the diversity of its musics, its disparate transformative agendas and its crucial role in electronic music history.

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