

Ezra Pound and Antheil: Modernist Music and Avant-garde Identity in England

Yolanda MORATÓ
Universidad Pablo de Olavide, Sevilla

The London cradle

Before George Antheil, born Georg Johann Carl Antheil (1900-1959) in Trenton, New Jersey, took Paris by storm with his horns and bells, he was already developing a free-composing technique which, to a large extent, may tie in with the literary Modernism that was flourishing in England. Although Antheil had studied in New York under Ernest Bloch's guidance, he started his true career in 1922, when he went to Europe—first to London, then to Berlin and finally to Paris, where he settled in 1923. Antheil recalled in his polemical autobiography, *Bad Boy of Music* (1945), that his trip to Europe was a matter of sheer chance. While he was reading the American musical trade papers in middle February 1922 he came across the name of a well-known impresario, Martin H. Hanson, who 'was going to Europe in late May'.¹ By matching this information with the piece of news where Leo Ornstein announced he was leaving Hanson's management, Antheil realized Hanson was on a trip to Europe to find a pianist who could act as a replacement of his former client. Excited about this prospect, Antheil went back to his parents' house in Trenton, where he rehearsed sixteen to twenty hours a day. However exaggerated his memoirs may be, he must certainly have practiced hard enough, for he soon gained Hanson's attention. 'Whenever one of my hands became swollen or bloody—he wrote—I merely placed it into one of the handy bowls of water' (BBM 14) he had set on two low tables at each side of his piano chair.

Not long after, in June 1926, sixteen synchronized player pianos caused uproar in the auditorium of the Paris Théâtre des Champs Elysées where Antheil performed his *Ballet mécanique*. A year later, on April 10, 1927, it was performed again in New York at Carnegie Hall, with its percussion, airplane propellers and electric doorbells. Antheil spent ten years in the French capital before going back to the United States. It was the most productive period of his musical career, the time when

¹ George ANTHEIL, *Bad Boy of Music*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1945, p. 14. Quotations from Antheil's autobiography will be referenced in the text in brackets with the initials *BBM*, followed by the page number.

he met the most relevant figures of the European avant-garde, and, without a doubt, the decade he was to be remembered for long afterwards. Still, while it is a fact that many of the most remarkable writers and artists from the United States landed in Paris in the first quarter of the twentieth century in search of a better future, it should not be forgotten that London was a decisive stage in the flourishing of Modernism in the Arts. From James Joyce to Ezra Pound, during the war many alliances with patrons, editors and publishers emerged in London cafés like Café Royal and the restaurant The Eiffel Tower; and in high society parties, given by hostesses such as Lady Rothermere, Lady Cunard and Lady Ottoline Morrell, whose sponsorships helped to develop many editorial and artistic projects during the war years.

There is a lack of consensus when establishing the musician's background, apart from the well-known biographical facts of his life and his work in Paris. For composer Aaron Copland, '*a great deal of nonsense has been written about George Antheil*'. Copland defined the coexistence of three Antheils, as it were; the one '*concocted by the musical journals*', '*the Antheil of the high-brow, literary magazines*', and, finally, '*Mr. George Antheil's Antheil who, strangely enough, is hardly less a figment of the imagination*'.² Whether the influence of high-brow literary magazines was truly effective or not is difficult to state, but Modernist techniques are present, or at least adapted, in his work. In a letter that Antheil sent Pound in May 1925, the musician had openly admitted to the American poet: '*My four-hour opera is very much influenced by yours. Same technique*'.³ On March 31, that same year, from Rapallo, Pound had written a twenty-five page letter to Henry Allen Moe of the Guggenheim Foundation asking him for financial help for four artists: Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot, George Antheil, and Marianne Moore.⁴ Considering the work of these authors in poetry, prose or musical composition, it seems logical to posit that they were working along the same lines or, at least, that they shared a view of modern aesthetics.

The brief period between George Antheil's beginnings as a musician in the United States and his successful establishment in the French capital is worth a deeper analysis since, even if only for a year or two, American poet Ezra Pound thought Antheil represented the missing piece in his concept of Modernism—multicultural in its origins, though geographically attached to England thanks to artists born in America. Pound was aware of an English Musical Renaissance; however, he had noticed that music was somehow detached from other forms of Art. Contrary to fellow European radical movements (i.e. Futurism), London groups such as avant-garde Vorticism did not include among their artistic experiments the musical developments taking place on the island. In this regard, Music did not receive the same attention as Literature, Painting or Sculpture. In his work *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, published in Three Mountains Press,⁵ Pound claimed that

² Quoted in Richard KOSTELANETZ, *Aaron Copland: a Reader: Selected Writings 1923-1972*, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 194.

³ Quoted in Ira B. NADEL, *Ezra Pound in Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010, p. 311.

⁴ Noel STOCK, 'Ezra Pound and the Sense of Responsibility', *Modern Age* vol. 5, n° 2, Spring 1961, p. 174.

⁵ Three Mountain Press was one of Paris Modernist publishing houses, founded in 1921 by American journalist William Bird. English poet Nancy Cunard bought the manual printer and

*There had, and has, been extremely little critical examination of music; I mean detailed examination of melodic line, structure, etc; comparable to Landor's examination of Catullus; or questioning as to whether a given work contains rhetoric, padding, undue repetition, etc.*⁶

Despite Pound's complaints, lack of analysis did not mean lack of interest in music. The capital offered concerts and plays every night, and Stravinsky's ballets performed in its theatres were very much appreciated by a modern public. In *Bad Boy of Music*, Antheil recalls his manager telling him: 'I'll take you to London and arrange one concert at Wigmore Hall. If it is successful, you'll go to Berlin to polish up your Beethoven with Schnabel. If it isn't, you'll come back to America and forget it' (BBM 15). As Juan Manuel Viana has recently recalled in *El Modernismo Musical en Inglaterra*⁷, the first years of the twentieth century were the cradle of new musical era in Britain. London's Wigmore Hall opened in 1901, the London Symphony Orchestra was created in 1904 and, attesting of the development of recording, the magazine *The Gramophone* was launched in 1923. That same year Ezra Pound had already published his first book of essays on Antheil. Previously, from 1917 to 1920, he had worked as a music reviewer for the London publication *The New Age*; writing under the pseudonym William Atheling he wrote a collection of the eccentric music reviews.⁸ Nadel has argued that Pound's notion of atonality and its connection with Literature was 'in sympathy with the aesthetic of vers libre.'⁹ while from the point of view of one of the specialists on Stravinsky, Richard Taruskin, there was a natural way by which Pound developed his interest in musical compositions.¹⁰ Through the study of poetic versification in thirteenth-, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century poets (namely Guillaume Le Vinier, Dante, Cavalcanti and Villon) Pound reached an understanding of rhythmical patterns. Fisher pinpoints that

his musical settings of the poetry of François Villon (1431-?) provided him a laboratory in which to experiment with rhythm. While setting Villon, he discovered the melodic cell and specific uses for the interval

its accessories from Bird in 1927. Thanks to this acquisition, Cunard founded The Hours Press, which published the first work by Samuel Beckett.

⁶ Ezra POUND, *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1924, p. 38. Quotations from Pound's *Antheil* will be referenced in the text in brackets with the initial A, followed by the page number.

⁷ Juan Manuel VIANA, *El modernismo musical en Inglaterra*, catalogue of the exhibition *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)*, February 2010, Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2010.

⁸ Curiously enough, Ezra Pound got his pseudonym from William the Atheling (c.1102-20), heir to the thrones of England and Normandy who died in the wreck of the White Ship. He was considered the hope of reconciliation between the French and the English.

⁹ Ira B. NADEL, *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001, p. 240.

¹⁰ Richard TARUSKIN, *The Danger of Music: and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, pp. 181-183.

*of the octave. These discoveries became the structural building blocks for his opera Cavalcanti.*¹¹

For Brad Bucknell, Pound's 'musical-literary theorizations begin as early as the collection of essays called *I gather the limbs of Osiris, 1911-12, and form an important dimension of his thinking during the imagist and vorticist phases of his career and beyond.*'¹² Pound had arrived in London in 1908, and already in 1913 he had taken a step further with his famous haiku-like composition 'In a Station of the Metro', printed for the first time in the April issue of *Poetry* and then again in August in *New Freewoman*. The special arrangement of his two lines and their punctuation has been described as 'identical with the aural suggestion produced by a musical score':

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

*The apparition of these faces in the crowd :
Petals on a wet, black bough.*¹³

In the case of George Antheil, his first concert in London must have been successful, for he then went, as promised by his manager, to Berlin and later on to Paris, where he settled. Recollections of his performance in London are rather vague and mostly based on anecdotes. In his autobiography, Antheil recalls an elderly lady who was seating in the front row at this first concert, with 'an enormous ear trumpet in her ear', and who would smile whenever he played Chopin and a Mozart sonata. However, when he 'played some Schönberg and some pieces of my own' (BBM 10), she started shaking the ear trumpet, putting it back to her ear and looking sour, until she finally left Wigmore Hall. Margaret Anderson, who had met Antheil in Bernardsville, New Jersey, also narrated the composer's experience in London in her autobiography, *My Thirty Years' War* (1930), changing some names and events while doing so and creating, therefore, another version of the same episode. The co-editor of *The Little Review* thought 'Antheil was ready for Europe before any of us' and remembered how

*He advertised for a promoter and found one in Philadelphia—Mrs. Edward Bok. He decided to become a virtuoso within three months. He did. [...] George went directly to London where he gave a concert before a discriminating audience, including Harold Bauer, but he was too frightened to do his best. He then went in to central Europe where he began to create sensations.*¹⁴

¹¹ Margaret FISHER, *Ezra Pound's radio operas: the BBC experiments, 1931-1933*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002, p. 23.

¹² Brad BUCKNELL, 'The Mother of Us All. Modernism, Literature and Music', in Astradur EYSTEINSSON and Vivian LISKA, *Modernism*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007, p. 518.

¹³ Quoted in Jean-Michel RABATÉ, *1913. The Cradle of Modernism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 64.

¹⁴ Margaret ANDERSON, *My Thirty Years' War*, New York, Covici, Friede, 1930, p. 238.

As in many autobiographies, subjective elements tend to be problematic. On the one hand, it is almost impossible to discern whether Antheil did his best in his London concert or if he was truly frightened as Anderson confidently stated. An important aspect of her recollections has to do with the displacement of Antheil's sources of inspiration towards the East since, consciously or unconsciously, it acknowledges a Central European identity within the core of Modernism and avant-garde developed by Americans in Europe. At a deeper level, Antheil's new musical patterns differed from those explored at the time by composers such as Russolo or Stravinsky, who embodied the avant-garde aesthetics of their respective countries. As Margaret Fisher remarked, in Antheil's compositions there were '*irregular meters that were considerably more elaborate than Stravinsky's benchmarks of the period—Le sacre du printemps (1913) and L'histoire du soldat (1918)*'.¹⁵ Rabaté has explained that the main difference with his precursors from the pre-war years was based on

*[T]he urge to free themselves from the preordained rules of classical harmony, and to reject the cult of vertical and horizontal polyphonic integration that had obtained at least since Bach. To do so, they had either to look for earlier models, as Debussy did at one point, to opt for radical primitivism, as Stravinsky seemed to be doing, or to uproot systematically the whole musical language of tonality.*¹⁶

Antheil seemed to have decided on this last option, if we take into account his fight against tonality and harmony. When reflecting upon the significance of his metres, and both on his independent style and on the impact national aesthetics could have on music, the musician recalled in his memoirs:

So in those first early days in Europe I discovered that I was manufacturing a highly volatile product. What might charm New York or London might just as easily explode in Berlin or evaporate in Paris. All great European cities had critics in them who believed in something utterly different from their neighbours, and who had also trained their separate publics to believe in what they believed. If, therefore, a man's highly personal music succeeded in one country, that fact might well prejudice another country because, frankly, the other country's critics knew that the former's were 'all wet,' and wrote accordingly. (BBM 56)

This lack of belonging to one definite place, school or trend—'*the most adulterated vicious nonsense*', according to Antheil (BBM 54)—offered Pound the possibility of marketing George Antheil as he had previously done with Wyndham Lewis, James Joyce or Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. By 1923, Lewis had fallen out with Pound, Joyce had found financial help thanks to Sylvia Beach's venture to print *Ulysses*,¹⁷ and Pound had already written a book about the French sculptor, *Gaudier-*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Jean-Michel RABATÉ, 1913. *The Cradle of Modernism*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 24.

¹⁷ In fact, one of the five remaining original copies of James Joyce's *Ulysses* typescript

Brzeska: A Memoir (1916). Pound was in Paris to defend his protégé during the performance of *Ballet mécanique: 'Vous êtes tous des imbéciles!'*, Pound cried.¹⁸ Certainly Antheil came in perfect timing to form an integral picture of Modernism.

A Vorticist identity?

Vorticism was an avant-garde movement, born and developed in England between 1913 and 1914, whose main forms of expression were Literature (i.e. essays, plays, poems and novellas), Painting and Sculpture. Because of the date in which the first number of its magazine *Blast* was published (June 1914) and given its strong debt to Cubism, many have related the movement to Futurism. In fact, F. T. Marinetti's tours around Europe promoting his bombastic experiments have been considered as the origin of Vorticism. On the other hand, the First World War has also played a very important part in the definition of the English movement. Wyndham Lewis, painter and writer, and its main leader, T. E. Hulme, a philosopher, and Gaudier-Brzeska, who had established himself in London some years before, went to France with the army. Both Gaudier-Brzeska and Hulme were killed in France in the Great War.

In London, Ezra Pound, who officially gave the name to Vorticism and acted as a sort of agent for many writers and artists, was trying very hard to give some new impulse to the movement, which had been disintegrating little by little since the outbreak of the war. However, among his group of rebellious artists, Pound was missing a musician to match the effort. As Hugh Kenner remembered in his influential *The Pound Era* (1973), the American poet had '*worked at music, an extension of his 1917 work on Arnaut, and welcomed George Antheil as a Vorticist composer come late ('The Vorticist Manifestos of 1913-14 left a blank space for music... There wasn't any vorticist music available')*'.¹⁹ Antheil represented, thus, that missing piece, the necessary figure to complete the whole picture of the avant-garde movement he had labelled and promoted. And like Wyndham Lewis, a self-proclaimed 'Enemy', Antheil had adopted the quarrelsome spirit of those who had previously met in The Rebel Art Centre. As can be read in the title of his autobiography, twenty years after meeting Pound, Antheil considered himself the '*bad boy of music*'. That meeting between Pound and Antheil took place shortly after he had arrived in Paris, on June 13, '*to attend the premiere of Igor Stravinsky's Les Noces*':

With his Romanian belle amie Boski Marcus, he took rooms above Sylvia Beach's landmark Left Bank bookshop, Shakespeare and Company. Short and slight, with clipped blond bangs that made him look even younger than his twenty-three years, Antheil met avant-

Schemata belonged to George Antheil. See R. A. GEKOSKI, p. 25, <http://www.gekoski.com/cats/cat30.pdf>, accessed on 20 December 2011.

¹⁸ James LANGTON, «Hand out the earplugs, cue the propellers», *London Daily Telegraph*, 19/11/1999, <http://www.antheil.org/LondonTelegraph.html>, accessed on 20 December 2011.

¹⁹ Hugh KENNER, *The Pound Era*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1973, p. 389.

garde composer Erik Satie and ‘that Mephistophelian red-bearded gent, Ezra Pound,’ at a tea honoring Anderson and the actress Georgette Leblanc.

Ezra began to take Antheil to Olga’s flat to practice. Olga suggested Pound’s initial interest in her was her mother’s piano—for Ezra, she insisted, work came first. Antheil soon set to composing a violin sonata for Olga, determined to make the music, he wrote Ezra, ‘as wildly strange as she looked, tailored to her special appearance and technique. It is wild, the fiddle of the Tziganes . . . totally new to written music . . . barbaric, but I think Olga will like it . . . it gives her more to do and show off with than the other sonatas.’²⁰

Pound’s keen interest on new rhythms, not necessarily dictated by the poetic canon though implicitly contained in major works he was to adopt and adapt, developed more and more throughout these years. If we turn to the structure of Pound’s treaty on Antheil, which is divided into three sections, we can observe that the central chapter gives the collection its title. The fact that this chapter appropriately begins with the word *retrospect* in brackets reveals its author’s plan to encompass a whole theory under the analysis of one author. By incorporating Music into the Vorticist programme, Pound was completing the much sought-after discipline that he needed to encompass an all-inclusive theory under one single avant-garde movement:

there was in contemporary music, at that date, nothing corresponding to the work of Wyndham Lewis, Pablo Picasso or Gaudier-Brzeska. Stravinsky [sic] arrived as a comfort, but one could not say definitely that his composition was the new music; he had a refreshing robustness; he was a relief from Debussy; but this might have been merely the heritage of polish [sic] folk music manifest in the work of an instinctive genius. (A 37)

As in the case of Painting, where Lewis had advocated for a surface, static art to encapsulate Pound’s concept of vortex as the point of highest energy, the American poet advocated for a similar conception in Music. ‘*The early students of harmony were so accustomed to thinking of music as something with a strong lateral or horizontal motion—Pound observes in Antheil—that they never imagined any one, any one [sic] could be stupid enough to think of it as static*’ (A 11). That static nature of Music was silence. Nevertheless, there were some points of disagreement. As advanced, given the context and date of the development of Vorticism, the English movement was soon assimilated to Italian Futurism. The second form of disagreement had to do with the architectonic element in Vorticism.

For almost a century, many theorists have equalled the essence of Vorticism to that of Futurism without realizing that, however similar at first sight, their principles were essentially opposed. Where Futurists looked for movement, Vorticists found a standstill. If Futurists such as Pratella and Russolo were aiming at ‘*absolute*

²⁰ Anne CONOVER, *Olga Rudge and Ezra Pound: ‘What Thou Lovest Well...’*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.

polyphony’ and *‘noisisim,’* respectively, Vorticists were thinking of static levels in their artwork, which were closer to those explored by Cubism. And, in fact, while Russolo advocated the concept of noise as an exclusive feature of modernity (in his view, silence dated back to antiquity), Pound was in search of metres developed precisely by the masters of that remote past. Therefore, it is evident that, by rejecting modern music, Lewis was trying to avoid, as much as possible, being taken as a Futurist. Or in Pound’s words, he *‘was part of the general vorticist stand against the accelerated impressionism of our active and meritorious friend Marinetti’* (A 38). The possibility of getting closer to Futurist experiments through music made Lewis reluctant to embrace any composer for his group.²¹

Lewis did enjoy Antheil’s innovations, though he accused Pound of replicating the same situation he had experienced ten years before. In *Time and Western Man* (1927), Lewis warned his readers against Pound’s interventions at any point:

The Blast situation, on a meaner scale, repeats itself. Pound is there with a few gentle provençal airs, full of a delicate scholarship and ‘sense of the Past,’ the organizer of a musical disturbance. The real business is done by a young musician, Antheil, of a fiery accomplishment and infectious faith in the great future of jazz. (As I don’t know the first word in musical composition I can say nothing about Antheil’s work except that from what he has played to me I have got considerable pleasure.) Not only a typical Pound-situation is thus set up, but (as I see it) a typical ‘revolutionary’ situation of the bad type.

*If Antheil is as interesting as I (quite ignorantly) believe him to be, and if he is really aiming at something new, the quality of Pound’s championship, or his personal motives, would not concern us; though it is a question if his support is at any time more damaging or useful.*²²

The aesthetic and ideological division between Futurism and Vorticism was not always clear; in fact, the debate continues to our days. But, at least in theory, each of them ran in different directions. The emphasis on terminology was an asset for Pound, who remarked that

it is a very good sign that Antheil is annoyed with the term ‘architecture’ when this term is applied to music. The sensitive nonmusician had been content with this term; the sensitive manipulator of verbal rhythm has been content with the phrase

²¹ For Matthew RILEY, *‘Lewis objected to the Russian Ballet because it reflected too directly its fashionable audience. It was a “faithful mirror of the High-Bohemia... the perfect expression of the society Proust has immortalized,” [...] yet in 1920 Lewis had collaborated with Walton and Sacheverell Sitwell on a ballet project for Diaghilev. Perhaps Lewis was simply being a shrew opportunist in 1920... Vaughan Williams could never accept the “sham serious really decadent and frivolous attitude of the [Russian Ballet] toward everything”’, British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010, pp. 89-90.*

²² Wyndham LEWIS, *Time and Western Man*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1927, p. 39.

thematic invention; Antheil has emphasized the term ‘mechanisms.’ (A 41)

By the end of 1920 Ezra Pound was closely working in London with concert pianist and vocal coach Agnes Bedford on a one-act opera, *Le Testament de Francois Villon*, a project that ran until the summer of 1921 in Paris. George Antheil would come and play his part in late 1923 recalculating ‘*the metrical divisions of the opera in “fractional notation,” the time signatures ranging from 1/8 to 25/32, to account for all possible syllabic durations and patterns of sounds in Villon’s words*’.²³ This version confirms their teamwork and is known as the 1923 Gold Score.

Although this was the beginning of fruitful cooperation between Pound and Antheil, there were soon voices against the American poet’s musical enthusiasm. In his introduction to the reprinted edition of Pound’s *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, Ned Rorem remarked that ‘*Pound’s intellectual knowledge about music far surpassed his practical knowledge*’.²⁴ And, in Vincent Sherry’s analysis of Pound’s involvement in music criticism, the critic detected certain inaccuracies, and even contradictions, in the poet’s theorizations of what a sound is.²⁵ Even Antheil, in letter to Pound quoted by Sherry, questioned his excessive recurrence to Literature and the Visual Arts: ‘*In music there is nothing else, except TIME AND SOUND, and the physical and psychic CONCEPT of these vibrating the human organism. Anything else is literary*’.²⁶ The place silence occupied, in Music as in Literature, had yet to be defined.

Time, rhythm, silence

Harmony no longer occupies a central place in the conception of modern music in the twentieth century. As Brad Bucknell has pinpointed when analyzing Pound’s idea of music, ‘*harmony is no longer to be guided by rules for the simultaneous occurrence of pitches, rules which are based upon tonal relationships established by position within a scale, but rather by temporality as such*’.²⁷ Comentale and Gasiorek detected how attention to conventional musical notions such as harmony and melody shifted to more and more important elements like rhythm and the intervals between notes. In fact, in the early months of 1913 Wittgenstein had carried out experiments searching for ‘*the role of rhythm in musical appreciation in*

²³ Margaret FISHER, *Ego Scriptor Cantilenae: The Music of Ezra Pound audio CD liner notes*, Berkeley, CA: Bay Records, 2001.

²⁴ Ned ROREM, ‘Introduction’, p. 3, in Ezra POUND, *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1969.

²⁵ Vincent SHERRY, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and Radical Modernism*, New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993, p. 182.

²⁶ This fragment belongs to an undated (1923-24?) and unpublished letter from George Antheil to Ezra Pound, in Beinecke Library at Yale University, quoted in Vincent SHERRY, *op. cit.*.

²⁷ Brad Bucknell, *op. cit.*.

*a laboratory at Cambridge.*²⁸ Authors from different fields, from Philosophy to Poetry, attempted to deconstruct musical patterns in order to reach more profound levels of understanding and theorization.

As guided by a sort of literary formalist trance, Pound had bought various musical instruments during this period in order to bring his theories of music deconstruction to practice. From Arnold Dolmetsch he had purchased his own clavichord. In fact, for R. Murray Schafer, Dolmetsch is Pound's seminal influence in music, and perhaps even stronger than Antheil's.²⁹ However, Pound never acquired what he probably most needed: a formal education in Music. Since his days as a music critic, he resorted to an unorthodox vocabulary that puzzled readers. He wrote on a Frank Bridge composition as '*a sort of pee-wee-pee-wee sound, with a hang and drag in it*' and defined César Franck as a musician who '*believed that if you could keep up some sort of bim-bim-bim-ation long enough you would end by exciting the auditor.*'³⁰ It is thus reasonable to expect certain mistrust about his book on Antheil.

Despite all odds, George Antheil and Ezra Pound, two masters in dealing with *horror vacui* in their compositions, had managed to control the most important element in a rhythmical pattern: silence. Their emphasis on time signatures, barring and fractional notations led them to conclude there was an implicit, inherent element to Music that needed more attention. And although Pound's work has received several forms of criticism, it cannot be denied that he was among the first to formulate a theory of silence.³¹ *Antheil* by Ezra Pound opens with a very significant quotation:

The element most grossly omitted from treatises on harmony up to the present is the element of TIME. The question of the time-interval that must elapse between one sound and another if the two sounds are to produce a pleasing consonance or an interesting relation, has been avoided. (A 9)

This transition, which Pound called TIME, encompasses silence as a crucial element. For Leon Botstein, Pound '*with Antheil's help, created patterns of speech of extreme complexity that defied conventional musical notation.*'³² Partly due to asymmetry in rhythm, as Pound had practiced in his poetry, but also to the silent intervals that were used to achieve this, harmony had come to an end. If poetry could be divided into three elements according to the play of image (*phanopoeia*), music (*melopoeia*), and meaning (*logopoeia*), silence was definitely an essential

²⁸ Quoted in Edward P. COMENTALE and Andrzej GASIOREK (eds.), *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006, p. 42.

²⁹ R. Murray SCHAFER, *Ezra Pound and Music*, New York: New Directions, 2008.

³⁰ Quoted from Humphrey CARPENTER, *A Serious Character. The Life of Ezra Pound*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988, p. 314-5.

³¹ John Cage would bring this theory to the extreme in his piece '3'44'', which was performed for the BBC.

³² Leon BOTSTEIN, 'James Joyce', *American Symphony Orchestra*, http://www.americansymphony.org/program_notes/james-joyce, accessed on 20 December, 2011].

aspect in *melopoeia*. Therefore, in considering the role of harmony, Pound stated, one should not only take into consideration the duration of the notes, but also the time-intervals between them. Proud of his findings, Pound shared his theory with four people (Antheil was among them), and he included their answers in his treaty:

- 1.—Antheil: had known for some time that the duration of the notes and the duration of the time-intervals between them made a difference to the way the harmony sounded.
- 2.—A violinist: had not thought of the matter but tried various combinations of notes and found that my statement applied.
- 3.—Author of a work on Einstein: approved the treatise; thought it ought to be longer; doubted whether the statement was true for all possible combinations of notes.
[...]
- 4.—Then there was the gent who found the treatise interesting but who (as who should prefer to study the circulation of the blood from corpses exclusively) preferred to study his harmony ‘separate,’ i. e. static. (A 22-23)

If in 1923 Stuckenschmidt summarized the style of Antheil’s Berlin piano pieces as ‘a most lively polyrhythmical homophony’,³³ some decades later specialists have noted significant discoveries in his music, among them, the success of the incorporation of ‘lengthy silences as compositional material within a movement of a piece of music. The effect is hypnotic: here are driving, rapid, mechanically precise rhythms and throbbing assaults on every key of the instrument, frighteningly juxtaposed with sonic vacuums.’³⁴ Antheil’s sonatas are composed of these planned assaults, which were designed to function within sound and soundless time segments.

Some decades later, in 1953, Hollywood actress Hedy Lamarr, Antheil’s widow, and KPFA’s Charles Amirkhonian discovered a set of three player piano rolls of *Ballet mécanique* in its original longer version (the 1953 revised version lasts about 15 minutes in performance). Antheil’s notations were used by the Pleyela Company to recreate his 1924 version but were also applied to technology.³⁵ Talking about how to improve radio control for torpedoes, Lamarr and Antheil created ‘frequency hopping’, a strategy to disguise messages sent at split-second intervals between frequencies, which in turn are synchronised between the transmitter and the

³³ H. STUCKENSCHMIDT, ‘Umschau: Ausblick in die Musik’, *Das Kunstblatt*, Vol. VII, 1923, p. 221.

³⁴ *KPFK Folio* (Radio station), April 72, 1960, pp. 13-14.

³⁵ A similar case could be quoted in Painting. During the First World War, Vorticist painter Edward Wadsworth, who had been educated in Munich as an engineer during 1906 and 1907, worked in the Camouflage Section of the British Army. His designs were then used as patterns for battleships and his supervision of over two thousand boats was very successful in avoiding boats being intercepted.

receptor. This invention did not receive full credit until some decades later, but it is a good illustration of how Antheil's silence patterns could be put to good use.³⁶

Though Antheil's experiments with music were finally applied to defend his own nation, the American musician never felt his compositions were attached to a particular country. While in *National Music and Other Essays*³⁷ (1934), Ralph Vaughan Williams had declared that the art of Music was the result of the expression of the soul of a nation, for Antheil, Music had neither borders nor nations:

every time I was to cross a border, my music, like my money, would change value. In one country it would be highly inflated. In another highly deflated. Still in each place it would still be the same piece, the same notes, the same sound. But this would not be my predicament alone. It would be the predicament of all composers whose music crossed nationalist boundaries. (BBM 56)

It was precisely Antheil's free spirit—going from one country to another, absorbing influences to turn them into his own—which likely led Pound to think he could make, retrospectively, a Vorticist figure out of him. After all, and leaving apart his own experiments, George Antheil's performances had clear British references. His 3-act opera *Volpone* was his tribute to playwright Ben Jonson, and the setting for *Two Odes* had been based on the composition by poet John Keats. But, as his autobiography confirms, Antheil was ready to forget certain names when necessary, to leave behind the countries where he had been warmly welcomed and praised, to move from one interest into another. His intellectual curiosity was limitless, his musical identity very unlikely to be bound to a single project. Antheil, the musician with an international identity who had toured the western world, was in fact an American artist who adapted to Anglo-American avant-garde when it was fashionable and returned to American musical trends later on when the historical avant-garde was over. His collaboration with the film industry, for instance, was reflected in his 'Third String Quartet' in its slow movement. In other pieces, such as the 'Allegretto', he encompassed folk reminiscences while he based his 'Allegro giocoso' on mechanistic rhythms opening with certain folk airs. Like Ezra Pound's other protégé, Wyndham Lewis, Antheil rejected his belonging to the historical avant-garde when it was reaching its end, went back to the United States in search of a new public and pretended his friendship with Ezra Pound had been a trick of destiny. However, Pound's *Cantos*, letters and books expose the cradle of what had developed in London during pre-war and war years, the essence of the 'Make it New' motto, the protagonists of a future that, in Lewis's words, never materialised.³⁸

Bibliography

³⁶ Hans-Joachim BRAUN, 'Advanced Weaponry of the Stars', *American Heritage*, vol. 12, n° 4, Spring 1997, <http://www.americanheritage.com>, accessed on 20 June, 2011.

³⁷ Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, *National Music and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.

³⁸ Wyndham LEWIS in his first autobiography, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937, p. 258.

- ANDERSON, Margaret C. *My Thirty Years' War*. New York: Covici, Friede, 1930.
- ANTHEIL, George. *Bad Boy of Music*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1945.
- BOTSTEIN, Leon. 'James Joyce', *American Symphony Orchestra*, 2011, accessed on 20 December, 2011. URL : http://www.americansymphony.org/program_notes/james-joyce.
- BRAUN, Hans-Joachim. 'Advanced Weaponry of the Stars'. *American Heritage*, vol. 12, n° 4, Spring 1997, pp. 10-17.
- BUCKNELL, Brad. 'The Mother of Us All. Modernism, Literature and Music', pp. 513-529 in Astradur EYSTEINSSON and Vivian LISKA (eds.), *Modernism*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007.
- CARPENTER, Humphrey. *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988.
- CONOVER, Anne. *Olga Rudge and Ezra Pound: 'What Thou Lovest Well...'*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.
- COMENTALE, Edward P. and Andrzej GASIOREK, (eds). *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006.
- FISHER, Margaret. *Ezra Pound's Radio Operas: The BBC Experiments, 1931-1933*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002
- . *Ego Scriptor Cantilenae: The Music of Ezra Pound audio CD liner notes*. Berkeley, CA: Bay Records, 2001.
- FORD, Hugh. *Four Lives in Paris*. Berkeley, CA: North Point Press, 1991.
- GEKOSKI, R. A. *Rare Books and Manuscripts. Catalogue 30*, <http://www.gekoski.com/cats/cat30.pdf>, p. 25, accessed on 20 December, 2011.
- KENNER, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1973.
- KPFK Folio* (Radio station). April 1972, 1960, pp. 13-14.
- KOSTELANETZ, Richard. *Aaron Copland: a Reader: Selected Writings 1923-1972*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 368 p.
- LEWIS, Wyndham. *Time and Western Man*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1927.
- . *Blasting and Bombardiering*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937.
- NADEL, Ira B. *Ezra Pound in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- . *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001.
- OJA, Carol J. 'Women Patrons and Crusaders for Modernist Music: New York in the 1920s', pp. 237-254 in Ralph P. LOCKE and Cyrilla BARR (eds.). *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists since 1860*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997.
- POUND, Ezra. *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*. Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1924.
- . 'George Antheil'. *The Criterion* vol. 2, n° 7, April 1924, pp. 321-331.
- RABATÉ, Jean-Michel. *1913. The Cradle of Modernism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- RILEY, Matthew. *British Music and Modernism, 1895-1960*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010.
- ROREM, Ned. 'Introduction' in Ezra POUND, *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1969.
- SCHAFER, R. Murray. *Ezra Pound and Music*. New York: New Directions, 2008.

- SHERRY, Vincent. *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and Radical Modernism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.
- STOCK, Noel. 'Ezra Pound and the Sense of Responsibility'. *Modern Age*, vol. 5, n° 2, Spring 1961, pp. 173-178.
- STUCKENSCHMIDT, H. 'Umschau: Ausblick in die Musik'. *Das Kunstblatt*, vol. 7, 1923, p. 221.
- TARUSKIN, Richard. *The Danger of Music: and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- VAUGHAN WILLIAMS, Ralph. *National Music and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- VIANA, Juan Manuel. *El Modernismo Musical en Inglaterra*. Madrid: Fundación Juan March, 2010.