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Review Articles

Messiaen, Loriod, Birds and Bees

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Yves Balmer, Thomas Lacôte and Christopher Brent Murray, *Le modèle et l'invention: Messiaen et la technique de l'emprunt*. Lyons: Symétrie, 2017. 617 pp. ISBN 9782364850453.

Roderick Chadwick and Peter Hill, *Olivier Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xii + 234 pp. ISBN 9780511843679.

Amid the storeys of closed stacks on Paris's rue de Louvois sits a short, stubby stick, tenderly ensconced in a box. A souvenir of a trip to Assisi, it bears the handwritten label: 'exact colour of the Franciscans' robes!'[1] The stick, along with the rest of the Fonds Olivier Messiaen–Yvonne Loriod (150 linear metres of manuscripts and notebooks, photographs and letters, books and posters, the accumulated artefacts of two extraordinary lives), was transferred to the music department of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereafter BNF) in 2015.[2] The enormous size and hoardish profile of the donation present unique challenges for librarians and scholars alike. In this respect, the collection resembles Messiaen's teeming *Treatise of Rhythm, Colour and Ornithology* (hereafter *Traité*), the pedagogical summa left unfinished at his death and posthumously assembled into seven sprawling tomes.[3] This resemblance is no coincidence: both the archives and the *Traité* were compiled by Yvonne Loriod herself, the virtuoso pianist whom Messiaen met when she became his student at the Paris Conservatoire, and who was his chief interpreter from the 1940s, his companion throughout the 1950s, and at last his second wife from 1961. Loriod spent much of the 18-year period between Messiaen's death and hers painstakingly compiling her husband's musical and material heritage (along with her own) for our future benefit, careful to leave no stone unturned.[4] Notwithstanding the impressive pace at which the BNF is inventorying, cataloguing, stamping and digitizing the collection (for consultation within the library only), it will take many more years before the totality of the

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[1] Marie-Gabrielle Soret, 'Le Fonds Olivier Messiaen, présence des oeuvres pour piano', paper presented at the Nineteenth Festival Messiaen du pays de la Meije: 'Le piano selon Messiaen', La Grave, 23–31 July 2016.

[2] Marie-Gabrielle Soret, 'Olivier Messiaen le défricheur', *Chroniques de la BNF*, 75 (2016), 23.

[3] Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie (1949–1992)*, 7 vols. (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1994).

[4] Incidentally, the archive contains an actual collection of stones gathered by Messiaen and Loriod from around the world.

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Fonds Messiaen–Loriod is available to researchers; in the meantime, each visit to the reading room is rewarded with fresh batches of documents sure to stimulate scholars interested in Messiaen, and equally those studying the various institutions of twentieth-century musical life which intersected with his world.[5]

The two books under review, both published in December 2017, thus enter the scene at a propitious moment, inviting us to take stock of current trends in Messiaen research and to imagine future frontiers. Each study is collaboratively authored, and both sets of authors possess distinct claims to Messiaenian authority. On the French side, Yves Balmer and Thomas Lacôte are both professors of analysis at the Paris Conservatoire, where the inaugural professor in that discipline was Messiaen himself; Lacôte, moreover, is titular organist at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité in Paris, a post occupied by Messiaen for his entire professional life. They are joined by Christopher Brent Murray, who completed his dissertation on the development of Messiaen's musical language in 2010;[6] and through their prolific research over the last decade, the three represent a rising generation of Messiaen research coming from France. Across the Channel, the connection to Messiaen is not institutional but personal: Peter Hill, who has recorded Messiaen's complete piano works, studied closely with Messiaen and Loriod during their lifetimes, and co-authored what remains the most thorough biography of Messiaen.[7] In this most recent study, he is joined by Roderick Chadwick, an accomplished pianist specializing in Messiaen and new music, who is on the teaching faculty at the Royal Academy of Music in London. The practical musicianship of all five authors – whether as pianist, organist or composer – is conspicuous throughout the books, to their credit.

That is, roughly, where the similarities end. The books represent distinct epistemological approaches to Messiaen scholarship. The French volume, as thick as it is ambitious, seeks to expose and explicate a compositional method that undergirds – unifies, even – Messiaen's musical language; the English volume, slimmer in profile and more modest in scope, focuses upon the composer's monumental mid-career piano cycle *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (1956–8), viewed from a variety of perspectives. The French volume was completed, its authors note, in the absence of Messiaen's sketches, which were made available only after the manuscript was submitted to their publisher (p. 581);[8] the English volume, in contrast, benefits from the authors' privileged access to copious *cahiers* of Messiaen's birdsong transcriptions.[9] You would be forgiven for assuming the opposite – Balmer, Lacôte and Murray aim, even without sketches, concretely to retrace the composer's creative process and intentions, while Chadwick and Hill refer to sketches somewhat ornamentally within their movement-by-movement readings.

Wedged uneasily between these divergent approaches is Messiaen's own writing – a frustrating foil facing any scholar of his music. Starting as early as the 1930s, Messiaen fashioned his image

[5] The contents of the archive, as they continue to be inventoried, can be viewed at <https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc1019742>.

[6] Christopher Brent Murray, 'Le développement du langage musical d'Olivier Messiaen: Traditions, emprunts, expériences' (Ph.D. dissertation, Université-Lumière Lyon 2, 2010).

[7] Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, *Messiaen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

[8] The only exception to this are the sketches of one work, *Visions de l'Amen*, which had been held in the BNF since 1950 (*Le modèle et l'invention*, 8).

[9] Peter Hill has been working with these *cahiers* for over a decade.

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through his journalism,[10] his pedagogy and a variety of compositional paratexts (programme notes, prefaces and remarks in interviews). His startlingly polemical music criticism, plus the precocious publication of a compositional treatise (*Technique of my Musical Language*) while relatively junior, helped him earn a cult-like following, and no shortage of notoriety, during the 1940s.[11] The abundance of text Messiaen produced provides a mixed blessing to musicologists. On the one hand, Messiaen's explanations of his modal and rhythmic techniques, for example, facilitate description of his music; on the other hand, the terms of such description, and thus comprehension, are defined by Messiaen himself, whose composerly authority looms over alternative readings.

Analysts and biographers have had to decide whether – or, to what degree – to accept Messiaen's own terms of analysis. There have been several scholarly efforts to distil and expound Messiaen's compositional logic, variously collating his theories of mode, rhythm and harmony or his writings on time, theology and birdsong. Given the chaotic and bloated presentation of the *Traité*, such scholarship has played a certain role in communicating Messiaen's ideas, not least to an anglophone audience. Analysts have frequently used Messiaen's commentary as a starting point for extrapolation. Such might characterize, for example, the approaches of Vincent Benitez, who relates the composer's late use of serial techniques to his readings of Bergson and Bachelard on time, or of Timothy Cochran, who connects Messiaen's recurring description of a Debussian rhythmic technique to kindred moments in the composer's own oeuvre.[12] Both of these studies highlight interesting, sometimes unexpected, resonances that add depth to our appreciation of Messiaen's compositions by linking them to the internal logic of his musical thought.

Historians, on the other hand, should seek to go beyond clarifying Messiaen's writings. They need not decide whether to 'accept' or 'reject' Messiaen's paratexts as analytical gospel, but rather should read Messiaen's paratexts more obliquely – by seizing upon disjunctures between his analytical logic and historical evidence, or by locating those aspects of his music which are unaccounted for in his voluminous writings. We might call such approaches 'resistant' readings of Messiaen's texts – in contrast to 'assenting' readings, which may either wholly parrot Messiaen's own analyses or provide original insights while remaining tethered to the terms of Messiaen's own thought.[13] Of course, questioning the relationship between author*ship* and

[10] See Stephen Broad, *Olivier Messiaen: Journalism 1935–1939* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[11] Olivier Messiaen, *Technique de mon langage musical* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1944). The main controversy surrounding Messiaen during this decade, particularly in reaction to the perceived dissonance between his rapturous musical results, his extravagant procedural methods and his outspoken Catholicism, became known as 'Le cas Messiaen'. See Hill and Simeone, *Messiaen*, 142–75. On another major controversy into which Messiaen was drawn, see Leslie Sprout, 'The 1945 Stravinsky Debates: Nigg, Messiaen, and the Early Cold War in France', *Journal of Musicology*, 26 (2009), 85–131.

[12] Vincent Benitez, 'Reconsidering Messiaen as Serialist', *Music Analysis*, 28 (2009), 267–99; Timothy Cochran, '"The Pebble in the Water": Messiaen, Debussy and the Meaning of Rhythmic Contrast', *Journal of Musicology*, 31 (2014), 503–40.

[13] I am loosely appropriating the concepts of 'resisting' and 'assenting' readership from Judith Fetterley's landmark literary study, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978).

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author*ity* is nothing new.[14] But resistant readers do not simply reject the author's testimony, even when it is incomplete or falsifiable; instead, they seek evidence of a fuller truth in a text's interstices and inconsistencies. Such resistant engagements with Messiaen's writing have been rare – and the extent to which resisting Messiaen's text bears fruit will be a recurring theme of the following discussion, taking the two books in turn.

'Finding our honey'

One of the significant breakthroughs in the work of Balmer, Lacôte and Murray comes from their fundamentally sceptical approach to Messiaen's posturing prose. Their self-avowed 'profoundly renewed reading' (p. 17) of Messiaen's 'theoretical edifice' provides the clues which allow the authors to reverse engineer what they call the 'technique de l'emprunt' ('borrowing technique'). Poring over 'thousands of pages' of programme notes, short press interviews and other clippings in addition to the published writings of Messiaen (p. 113), the authors are able to observe the 'evolution' of a writing style increasingly rich in 'technicity' and 'speculation' as the composer develops his own complex analytical lexicon (p. 18). Such a shift in rhetorical complexity correlates naturally with Messiaen's increasingly experimental compositional technique; but it is also through his prose that he forges his distinct public personality – 'flamboyant, Protean, hieratic', to use Allen Forte's *mots justes*.[15] Messiaen's texts represent more than a description of his musical outlook – like those of many voluble artists before him and since, his words contribute to his performance of a compelling artistic identity.

So, what is Messiaen's 'borrowing technique'? In a sense, it is hidden in plain sight. Chapter VIII of *Technique of my Musical Language*, 'Melody and Melodic Contours', exhibits the rudiments of the method. He excerpts short melodic fragments from *Boris Godunov* (Mussorgsky), 'Solveig's Song' from *Peer Gynt* (Grieg) and 'Reflets dans l'eau' (Debussy), as well as a few examples from folk song and plainchant. Following each of these fragments come examples from Messiaen's own compositions, showing those same melodic contours, but with their rhythms distorted and their intervals refracted through Messiaen's 'modes of limited transposition', disguised beyond easy recognition. In Chapter XIV, devoted to harmony, he similarly demonstrates how chord progressions from Debussy and Ravel sneak their way into his own compositions. In both chapters, Messiaen employs the same metaphor – 'finding our honey' ('trouver notre miel') – to describe how one might extract (*ab*stract, even) appealing musical materials (a melodic contour, a chord progression, etc.) from their source context, in order to repurpose them through composition. The 'honey' was famously mocked by Bernard Gavoty, organist, critic and contemporary of Messiaen, when he contributed to the 'cas Messiaen' polemic in 1945. Citing the expression, Gavoty continues:

> It's like reading an alchemist's recipe book: I take the first three notes from *Boris Godunov*, I retrograde them, I turn them into a harmonic progression, I deform it rhythmically by adding half-unit values,

[14] For a recent reference on confronting the writing of composers, containing articles on Messiaen among many others, see *Écrits de compositeurs: Une autorité en questions*, ed. Michel Duchesneau, Valérie Dufour and Marie-Hélène Benoit-Otis (Paris: Vrin, 2013).

[15] Allen Forte, 'Olivier Messiaen as Serialist', *Music Analysis*, 21 (2002), 3–34 (p. 3).

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> I take inspiration from a harmonic inversion of the third bar of 'Reflets dans l'eau', I unleash upon it all a terrifying cascade of chordal appoggiaturas, and I obtain the second theme of my *Corps glorieux* or one of the governing themes of my *Regards* … One hardly exaggerates.[16]

While Messiaen's predilection for borrowing musical elements was well attested by readers of the *Technique*, Balmer, Lacôte and Murray's new study is revelatory in at least two broad respects: first, the authors demonstrate that, far from 'exaggerating', Gavoty's caricature hardly scratches the surface of an elaborate, systematic and lifelong process by which Messiaen generated music from borrowed materials. The borrowings which Messiaen made explicit in his writings were merely the 'tree which hid the forest' ('l'arbre qui a caché la forêt'; p. 33); and while he often left clues that suggest the presence of borrowings, he equally often deployed obscurantist red herrings to mask his musical models.[17] Second, having glimpsed the extent of the 'borrowing technique', they frame it as a common denominator among Messiaen's compositional methods, constituting an innovative approach to musical unity. I will now elaborate on these two points.

To showcase the thoroughgoing 'borrowing technique', the authors organize the book into three cross-sections. First, they survey Messiaen's approach to borrowing melody, harmony and rhythm respectively, each parameter subject to a different suite of recompositional procedures. It is in this section that the authors reconstruct what Messiaen called his 'deforming prism' (*Technique*, p. 46) – the toolkit of modal, rhythmic and harmonic techniques with which he transformed his borrowed materials. Moreover, they introduce the concept of 'emprunts croisés' or 'crossed borrowings', whereby borrowings are superimposed, becoming one another's filter: two chords from *Les noces*, mapped onto a rhythmic pattern from *Pelléas et Mélisande*, form a passage in 'Montagnes' from Messiaen's song cycle *Harawi*, for example (pp. 106–8).

The second and largest section, with ten chapters, is organized according to Messiaen's principal sources, ranging from plainchant to Honegger with detours in India, Korea and Peru. These chapters were designed so that they could be read individually, and versions of three of them have been published separately in English over the past few years;[18] reading them in sequence, one occasionally trips over repetitions, reiterations and dense cross-referencing. In each of these chapters, the authors unravel increasingly convoluted borrowings. Sometimes they are aided by paratextual hints, as when Messiaen mysteriously, misleadingly, writes that a

[16] Bernard Gavoty, 'Musique et mystique: Le "cas" Messiaen', *Études*, 10–12 (1945), 26–7. Quoted in full in *Le modèle et l'invention*, 20.

[17] Nevertheless, others before Balmer, Lacôte and Murray have been privy to a range of Messiaen's borrowings, without ever studying the practice in depth. See, for example, Julian Anderson, 'Messiaen and the Notion of Influence', *Tempo*, 63/247 (2009), 2–18.

[18] The most thorough distillation of the authors' methods and findings other than the book, and in English, can be found in Balmer, Lacôte and Murray's 'Messiaen the Borrower: Recomposing Debussy through the Deforming Prism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 69 (2016), 699–791; versions of other composer-orientated chapters have been published in their '*Un cri de passion ne s'analyse pas*: Olivier Messiaen's Harmonic Borrowings from Jules Massenet', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 13 (2016), 233–60; and 'Jolivet Revisited: Messiaen's Borrowings in the Incantatory Works of the 1930s', *André Jolivet: Music, Art and Literature*, ed. Caroline Rae (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 188–205.

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given passage 'evokes' the 'style' of another composer or 'follows the rules' of an Indian 'jâti', when in fact those passages are not vague allusions but copies of a precise source. At other times, the authors' scrupulousness leads them to discoveries unheralded by the composer in any way. Particularly impressive is the recognition of an oblique melodic borrowing from Webern's *Variationen für Klavier*, op. 27, in the closing flourish of Messiaen's *Messe de la Pentecôte* (pp. 300–8). This particular borrowing can now be corroborated in sketch materials; the decision to map Webern's pitches onto these final bars apparently came quite late, a product of the mostly rhythmic 'research' Messiaen was conducting in the late 1940s.[19] One must imagine the brute thoroughness required to unearth this type of allusion without those sketches at hand, aided perhaps by the authors' tactile familiarity, as instrumentalists, with the repertory.

Despite the vast number of borrowings highlighted in these chapters, this central section is not an exhaustive repository of specimens. Messiaen's notebooks not only substantiate the borrowings identified here, but also allude to myriad others through litanies of potential sources: 'continue this idea with a love theme (of great harmonic tenderness Massenet, Wagner, Debussy) (see end of Götterdämmerung)', he scribbles regarding an idea for his *Vingt regards*; later on, '… all in F♯ major. Form: (see Musette in Rondeau by Rameau and Berceuse Chopin) …'.[20] Now that Messiaen's notebooks are accessible, a live database would be better suited for cataloguing borrowings, and would be an efficacious resource as more researchers continue digging into the archive.

But these chapters of *Le modèle et l'invention* deliver something more valuable than an inventory. Balmer, Lacôte and Murray's sweeping panorama evinces the variety of Messiaen's borrowing practices, exposing in turn the mercurial relationship between his public assertions and the compositional evidence. The extent of his own reliance upon certain source repertories – the French Baroque or the Second Viennese School, for example – belies his vocal scepticism of 'neoclassicists' or 'serialists', while his unwavering reverence towards Debussy and his increasingly ostentatious designation of rhythms with Sanskrit labels exaggerate his indebtedness to particular sources over others, and attest to the care with which he courted canonicity and cultivated mysticism. The audacity of his unacknowledged borrowings from contemporaries (Jolivet, a frequent character in Messiaen's sketchbooks, above all) compels us not only to reconfigure the dramatis personae of twentieth-century art music, but also to confront grey areas of creative propriety in which Messiaen's silence resounds.

At times these chapters ask the reader to meander into thick weeds of Messiaen arcana. Several borrowings are located not in published works but in pedagogical materials, such as the '71 harmonic formulas' that Messiaen wrote and assigned to his pupils, recovered from Boulez's student notebooks at the Sacher Foundation. The inclusion of these cases reflects the authors' emphasis on Messiaen's process (as well as the sheer thoroughness of their research); but readers may be relieved to reach the third, work-centred section, which contains four analyses of short excerpts from Messiaen's compositions that feature a staggering density of

[19] BNF, Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod, RES VMA MS-1494, 'Messe de la Pentecôte, pour Orgue: esquisses préparatoires (ca. 1950)'; see also RES VMA MS-1982 (2), 'Notes (textuelles et musicales), esquisses, brouillons rassemblés: Premières recherches pour les Quatre études de rythme'. These latter notes suggest that Messiaen's interest in the *Variationen* was in part due to his reading of the work's opening in terms of non-retrogradable rhythms.

[20] BNF, Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod, RES VMA MS-1491, 'Cahier de travail, dit "Cahier Vert"', pp. 62, 83.

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borrowings. Alongside Messiaen's own commentaries, the authors demonstrate the contrast between Messiaen's process and his prose. In a memorable example, they show how an entire passage from the *Turangalîla-symphonie*, featuring melodic borrowings from Ravel and Jolivet, is structured upon an extended rhythmic passage also borrowed from Jolivet; they highlight the intricacies of Messiaen's combinatorial process and observe how simultaneous borrowings, not always hermetically independent, interact and inflect each other. Why then, they ask, does Messiaen devote his own analysis of this passage to the rhythms in the percussion, which are generated by a quasi-serial procedure that does not even complete its cycle, and appears to adorn the passage as an afterthought? Identifying such borrowings conditions us to read Messiaen's analyses in a paranoid mode – the incompleteness of the quasi-serial cycle must not be accepted as an idiosyncratic anomaly, but rather as a tell, prompting closer scrutiny. The authors gesture further in this direction by referring to passages which, analytically or rhetorically, glint with potential to be rife with borrowings, but which the authors were unable to trace themselves (see, for example, pp. 456–9, 522).

Through these examples it becomes clear that Messiaen's apiological metaphor is not just about finding one's 'honey', but about cross-pollination: it is through the combination and superposition of existing musical materials that Messiaen produces 'original' music. A challenge for musicologists, then, becomes honing analytical insights that transcend trainspotting. The authors begin by complicating metaphors for Messiaen's formal style as 'mosaic' or 'surrealist' (p. 468). Balmer, Lacôte and Murray prefer to shift the focus: instead of viewing Messiaen's borrowing technique as a compilation of sundry snippets, they argue that Messiaen's 'deforming prism' acts as a '*unifying* prism' (pp. 53, 474). In other words, by filtering musical materials through the 'prism' of his modal, rhythmic and harmonic techniques and procedures, Messiaen makes disparate musical inputs cohere, bearing his stylistic stamp. This deconstruction of the opposition between 'juxtaposition' – the term levelled against Messiaen by Boulez – and 'composition' becomes the central problematic of their analyses.

This manoeuvre is key to the authors' pivot away from previous Messiaen scholarship, and it brings us to a second major premiss: that through unificatory transformations of borrowed materials, Messiaen's music mediates between two ideal types, collage-like juxtaposition and organic composition (p. 473). As the 'prism' takes the spotlight, the material which passes through it, whatever its provenance, becomes (almost) subsidiary. In this sense, the authors provide an escape from the question of 'influence' that has impeded some previous studies of Messiaen borrowings (pp. 115–18). On the one hand, a verbatim rhythmic borrowing from Debussy, for example, exceeds the realm of absorbed 'influence' – it is, to use the book's titular term, a 'model', hand-selected and deliberately integrated.[21] On the other hand, a musical language formed principally of borrowed models risks rebuke in a compositional atmosphere that favours 'originality', and when assessed by analytical tools calibrated to measure 'organicity'. By proposing the 'prism' as Messiaen's crucial creative innovation, the authors attempt to insulate his music from such implications. One might question, therefore, the decision to invoke such long-standing discourses of 'organicity' and 'unity' in framing their analytical approach (pp. 473–9). Given the paucity of evidence that Messiaen ever thought, analytically or compositionally, in these terms, the suggestion that he effectively

[21] For one perspective on the difference between musical 'models' and 'influences', see Richard Taruskin, 'Review: Revising Revision', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 46 (1993), 114–38 (pp. 117ff.).

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complicates these concepts seems somewhat gratuitous. The argument that Messiaen uses his prism to 'homogenise the heterogeneous' musical materials that he borrows is persuasive in itself (p. 469).

As the deforming prism becomes central to Messiaen's technique, his hotchpotch of source materials risks appearing incidental. If the essence of Messiaen's musical language is his transformational process (the authors even suggest that *Technique of my Musical Language* is a 'treatise of transformation' (p. 92)), then how do we 'interpret' the sources he continually tapped as models? The authors, loath to posit facile interpretations of borrowings (p. 326), leave this question largely open (with a few exceptions for borrowings from Massenet and plainchant); future scholars will no doubt be tempted to read more meaning into Messiaen's choices of models. It is plausible that his selections simply correspond to his personal tastes – fetishes, perhaps, given how often he returns to the same abstracted fragments, combined into what Anthony Pople has called 'an accretion of magic ingredients'.[22] As more borrowings emerge, it will be productive to continue considering how Messiaen portrayed or suppressed his musical debts. If Messiaen's analyses were idiosyncratic, reading with an eye towards the potential for a performative dimension yields insights into his relational preoccupations – into how he positioned himself within the musical milieux of which he was a part. Thus the authors astutely read his analysis of Stravinskian rhythms in terms of Indian 'deçî-tâlas' as evidence not so much of how Messiaen perceived Stravinsky's music, but rather of how he legitimated his own rhythmic experimentation by affiliating it with the elder composer: 'Messiaen thus attempts to present his argument as logical by founding it on the authority of Stravinsky, who could not be further removed from the rhythmic thought of ancient India' (p. 90).

In spite of the promising illuminations that the prism-centred approach yields, it would be wrong to conceive of the deforming prism as a clear and closed system. Where are its limits? The authors address this, referring occasionally to 'gestural borrowings', which belong to a murkier realm of intertextual reference, falling between the cracks of the prism's primary deformational parameters alongside form and timbre (see, for example, pp. 148, 568–73). But to me the more intriguing boundary cases arise where transformational techniques are themselves derived from borrowings. The book touches on several instances. One example is the 'valeur ajoutée' (Messiaen's system of deforming rhythms by augmenting certain notes by half their value), which the authors link to his analysis of a table of rhythms sourced in a reference chapter on Indian music and borrowed liberally by the composer from the 1930s onwards (pp. 347–51). Another case (already well known) is the way in which Messiaen derived his technique of 'personnages rythmiques' from a passage in Stravinsky's *Sacre du printemps* (p. 98); the 'personnages rythmiques' are then applied, in turn, to other rhythmic borrowings. The authors might have made more of how these cases could complicate the identity of the 'deforming prism' itself. Conditioned by the very borrowings they deform, Messiaen's transformational procedures adapt to and incorporate the materials he inputs, so that the prism is a product of borrowings, just as the borrowings are a product of the prism.

From this sort of infinite regress emerges another line of enquiry, which mostly lies beyond the scope of Balmer, Lacôte and Murray's study – namely, where did the 'deforming prism' come from? This question concerns the relationship between Messiaen and his predecessors.

[22] Anthony Pople, 'Messiaen's Musical Language: An Introduction', *The Messiaen Companion*, ed. Peter Hill (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 25–50 (p. 47).

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By demonstrating how that which scholars have habitually described as Messiaen's 'influences' are more pointedly his 'models', the authors leave open the question of whence his 'borrowing technique' developed and how his parametrized approach to richly researched models fits within traditions of French composition. It can no longer suffice to reduce Messiaen's 'influences' to the list of inspiring sources with whom he chose to associate himself; his approach to past musical models should prompt further research into how composition was taught and transmitted in the major Parisian institutions. If anything, the 'borrowing technique' bears close kinship with musical movements Messiaen tended to shun. Balmer, Lacôte and Murray ask, provocatively, whether Messiaen is 'neoclassical' (pp. 450–4); in light of recent research into 'historical interplay' in French composition, it is certainly worth reconsidering Messiaen's combativeness towards his 'neoclassical' contemporaries.[23] A bolder suggestion would be that there is even reason to revisit Messiaen's hostility towards jazz: 'Personally, I've never had any affection for jazz,' he explained to Claude Samuel in an interview. 'I'm sorry to say it, but I think that jazz is a "thief", whose "innovations" are, in reality, borrowings from previous symphonic music.' The authors quote Messiaen's jazzphobic diatribe in an effort to explain the composer's more tepid embrace of Ravel than of, say, Debussy (p. 202). But in this atypical moment of 'assenting' reading, they miss the most delicious irony of Messiaen's remark – that the very terms with which he impugns a genre precisely describe his own technique.

Avian borrowings

Birdsong is conspicuously absent from *Le modèle et l'invention*, yet it might represent another liminal case of the 'deforming prism'. For such a graphocentric composer, borrowing from birdsong posed a learning curve, prompting Messiaen to hone his transcription technique over the 1950s. Thus his birdsong style developed – from the minimal mediation of *Réveil des oiseaux* through the integration of birdsong with a fuller range of techniques in *Catalogue d'oiseaux* – over the ensuing decade. By the time Messiaen began work on the *Catalogue*, his transcriptions were becoming increasingly assimilated into his musical style; as Chadwick and Hill show, the 'boundary between research and composition was becoming indistinct' (p. 39). Trawling through Messiaen's sketches, Chadwick and Hill trace a birdsong's plasticity as it morphs from hasty transcription into coloured, pianistic gesture (see, for example, pp. 45, 156). These step-by-step transformations allow us to 'listen to Messiaen listening', to adapt Peter Szendy's phrase.[24] In light of Balmer, Lacôte and Murray's study, we might even posit that they show Messiaen adapting birdsong to his 'deforming prism', or vice versa; similarities between Messiaen's transformational treatment of birdsong and that of other musical ingredients may lead towards a reply to the question once posed to Hill by Alexander Goehr: 'Why do birds sound like birds, but Messiaen's birds sound like Messiaen?'[25]

[23] See, for example, *Historical Interplay in French Music and Culture, 1860–1960*, ed. Deborah Mawer (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), which includes a chapter on Messiaen by Christopher Dingle, 'Commission and Omission: The Canon According to Messiaen' (pp. 214–32).

[24] Peter Szendy, *Écoute: Une histoire de nos oreilles* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2001).

[25] Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, *Olivier Messiaen: Oiseaux exotiques* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

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Because of the two books' contrasting approaches and complementary source repertories, much can be gained by consolidating their insights. Let us take an example from *Catalogue d'oiseaux*: the 'nuptial flight of the kingfisher', a fleeting passage from 'La bouscarle'. These bars constitute the culminating example of Balmer, Lacôte and Murray's chapter on Messiaen's borrowings from Debussy. Three different Debussian borrowings, each having been individually disassembled in great detail over the course of the chapter, are shown to coalesce into this sweeping flourish (pp. 171–2), the densely layered borrowings all the more impressive given the passage's brevity. Chadwick and Hill, meanwhile, provide a peek at the kingfisher's musical fledging in Messiaen's sketches. They reveal that Messiaen's structural ideas for 'La bouscarle' took initial form in prose – 'a little piece for a bank of a river', as he jotted in a 1957 *cahier*. Messiaen then detailed the sequence of natural events that would animate the movement, including instructions for further research: 'Reflections of the green water of the Charenton – blue and green (azure/emerald) flight of the kingfisher – Look for polymodality for the blue and green' (p. 128). In a separate note he added further detail: 'virtuoso passage: nuptial flight of the kingfisher – *long*!' (p. 131). Their account is embellished by the reproduction of a dizzying page from his notebook (p. 127). Combining the perspectives of both studies, we can now push our understanding further: for instance, Messiaen links 'polymodality' to the multihued kingfisher and the river; polymodality, meanwhile, is precisely the term used by Messiaen to analyse one of his most cherished harmonies, the 'Golaud chord' from *Pelléas et Mélisande*[26] (the harmony that becomes the basis of a sequence in the completed passage), adding sense and depth to Messiaen's borrowing.[27] Moreover, the first appearance of the same 'nuptial flight', Chadwick and Hill point out, 'recalls the undulating figuration of Chopin's *Etude*, Op. 10, no. 10' (p. 132). This observation, proffered parenthetically and qualified by the authors as 'incidental', reads a bit like a non sequitur; but in light of Messiaen's penchant for cross-pollination and his frequent gestural borrowings from another Chopin étude (see *Le modèle et l'invention*, 568–72), the connection seems more plausible and perspicacious than the authors may even have realized.

The centrepiece of Chadwick and Hill's book is a movement-by-movement commentary through the entire *Catalogue*. This is flanked on one side by chapters contextualizing the *Catalogue* within Messiaen's career and charting the work's genesis, and on the other side by a chapter on the work's performance, with particular focus on complete recordings.[28] The book's organization therefore resembles Hill's previous study of Messiaen's *Oiseaux exotiques*, co-authored with Nigel Simeone (see above, n. 25). It also reflects a broader tension within the book's conception: on the one hand, it is an interpretative reading, offering viewpoints that the authors – as pianists, and as a biographer and student of Messiaen – are uniquely able to provide; on the other hand, as one of the first studies of Messiaen's sketches, it contains

[26] See, for example, Messiaen, *Traité*, vi, 58.

[27] Chadwick and Hill also catch one of the borrowings from Debussy in this passage (p. 61). In addition, they point out that there was an earlier, discarded version of the kingfisher's flight (p. 126); a glance at this earlier version, which is not described in the text, would add to this reconstitution of Messiaen's process.

[28] The context offered in this book is largely confined to Messiaen's life and immediate orbit. For a recent study situating the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* alongside other musical-ornithological 'soundscapes', see Rachel Mundy, *Animal Musicalities: Birds, Beasts, and Evolutionary Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), chapter 7.

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much empirical information about the *Catalogue*'s creation. Consequently, the book oscillates, sometimes sharply, between source study and speculative criticism. It can be jarring to swerve from the nuts-and-bolts accounting of the contents of sketchbooks to a suggestion such as that 'La buse variable' might represent Messiaen's first wife's declining health: 'the slow orbits of the buzzard evoke her worsening condition (crescendo) and growing distance from her family (diminuendo)' (p. 158).

The central chapters are organized so as to reconcile competing foci on process and product. Arranged roughly by order of composition (which took place in two main 'waves'), the authors trace Messiaen's zigzagging itinerary through his diaries and notebooks as he sets about capturing the varied ecosystems of the French regions. Given that Hill has written more broadly about Messiaen's birdsong notebooks elsewhere, here the sketches are presented from the perspective of the completed cycle, and therefore represent just one angle of their work-centred approach.[29] Even so, there are abundant treasures. The authors reproduce a dozen miniature passages from Messiaen's sketches to show how he composed in modular blocks, arranged and assembled during composition (p. 51; see also p. 129). They reveal the importance of commercially recorded birdsong alongside his live transcriptions (pp. 41–6). And from their examination of notes he took on the island of Ouessant, off the coast of Brittany, they are able to speculate that it was there that Messiaen hatched the idea of integrating other environmental sounds, such as wind and waves, alongside birdsong – a defining characteristic of the *Catalogue* (p. 48).

At certain moments, however, the work-orientated perspective becomes a trap. The authors, intimately familiar with the *Catalogue* and with general traditions in Messiaen scholarship, nevertheless leave inconsistencies unchecked and miss opportunities to probe incongruities. They begin their analysis of the *Catalogue*'s opening movement, 'Le chocard des Alpes', by asking, 'Why does a cycle that heralds a discovery of new forms, a return to tonality as a major structural force and an assertion of artistic freedom courtesy of the birds begin with a stern, atonal Alpine evocation?' (p. 71). But this begs the question, as though the *Catalogue* is (or even *could be*) a 'return' to anything. Comparison of Messiaen's techniques in the *Catalogue* sketches – including his repetitive prose instructions regarding form and structure, his method of composing in blocks and his excitement over a variety of quasi-serial techniques – could instead open up a reading that emphasizes continuities, rather than reinforcing contrasts, across the traditional periodizations of Messiaen's career.[30] Similarly, they accept Messiaen's public contention that his 'great formal innovation' in the *Catalogue* was to reject any 'antique or classical mould' (p. 57), even though a few pages earlier they cite formal plans from his sketches for 'L'alouette lulu', complete with 'exposition', 'development' and 'coda' (p. 50).

[29] See Peter Hill, 'From *Réveil des oiseaux* to *Catalogue d'oiseaux*: Messiaen's *Cahiers de notations des chants d'oiseaux*, 1952–59', *Messiaen Perspectives 1: Sources and Influences*, ed. Christopher Dingle and Robert Fallon (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 143–74. According to Hill, there are more than 200 surviving birdsong notebooks. For another example of a study of Messiaen's birdsong transcriptions which is decentred from any specific work, see Hollis Taylor, 'Whose Bird Is It? Messiaen's Transcriptions of Australian Songbirds', *Twentieth-Century Music*, 11 (2014), 63–100. The full collection of notebooks of Messiaen's birdsong transcriptions is now being made publicly available through the BNF's digital portal, <https://gallica.bnf.fr>.

[30] Such continuities are highlighted in Cheong Wai-Ling's reading; see her 'Symmetrical Permutation, the Twelve Tones, and Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*', *Perspectives of New Music*, 45/1 (winter 2007), 110–37.

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Embracing Messiaen's general tenor at face value rather than at a critical remove results in some circularity. Regarding his 'influences', they revisit some of his general thoughts on time, colour and Debussy, and summarize: 'Messiaen thereby evokes time by being evocative, as well as by simulating events in their succession' (p. 64).

Some of the authors' hermeneutical conclusions appear insufficiently justified given the analyses they provide. For instance, in their description of two superimposed 'personnages rythmiques' – repeated cycles of rhythms with partial augmentations and diminutions – the authors segment the right-hand cycle into 13 repeating units and the left-hand cycle into a 'less disciplined' 11-unit rhythm riddled with exceptions and 'rarities' (p. 76). They conclude on this basis that 'the *Catalogue*, a cycle in which twelve-note music is a recurring presence, therefore opens with an abstract dance around the number 12'. In a footnote, they concede that reading the left hand as a 19-unit rhythm, beginning on the ninth value, yields a more 'consistent' *personnages* procedure, but with one persistent anomaly (p. 76, n. 11). However, they do not observe that the left-hand procedure has no inconsistencies at all when read as a 19-unit rhythm starting from the *first* value (as would seem most obvious); in light of this more straightforward reading, their numerological interpretation appears convoluted, or at least improbable.[31]

The authors' commentary on each movement begins by reproducing Messiaen's own published preface in translation. However, in two cases ('La rousserolle effarvatte' and 'La bouscarle') the 'translations' contain unmarked additions, omissions and reorderings. As an example, the sentence 'La nuit est solennelle comme une résonance de tam-tam' is translated with imagery found nowhere in his original preface: 'Cymbals, gongs and trombones – interspersed with a confusion of sounds from the marsh – mark the solemnity of night' (p. 110). What happened here may be to do with late-stage musical revisions made by Messiaen, after which he did not update his preface (p. 113); the authors, therefore, seem to have brushed up the preface for him by reordering the sequence of events and adding imagery to correspond to markings between the staves throughout the movement. But since they do not declare to have done so, students or scholars without access to the scores will have no reason to suspect that the translated text is not necessarily Messiaen's original, especially as the French source is not reproduced. In these moments of revision, the authors might instead have seized an opportunity to draw conclusions about Messiaen's paratextual methods and practices from the discrepancies between his words and musical evidence.

The authors are at their strongest when they incorporate perspectives from their experience of playing Messiaen's piano music. The opening serial passage of the cycle, for example, yields a sensitive embodied insight; here, Messiaen's representation of the menacing alpine mountainscape is 'not just an aural metaphor: the topography of the keyboard feels mountainous to the pianist, who has swiftly to navigate the peaks and gullies of black and white notes with regular movements of the forearm' (p. 72). Another highlight is Hill's consolidated recollections from working with Messiaen, including references to his own diary entries from their first meeting in 1986 (pp. 187–92). These precious memories, in which the composer is

[31] Another questionable analysis is the claim that the passage labelled 'gust of wind over the sea' in 'Le traquet rieur' is a 12-note passage. On the basis of this analysis, they conclude that the work is 'a coherent piece of music that works towards its goal via a synthesis of tonal and twelve-note means' (p. 176); however, there is no way to segment it into a 12-note passage, and the authors admit that their premiss applies (only) to 'nearly all' the degrees of the scale.

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painted as generous, humble and open-minded, provide a counterpoint to Messiaen's public persona (think back to those adjectives chosen by Forte).

Furthermore, Chadwick and Hill must be commended for frequently turning the lens towards Loriod. She becomes the central focus of their final chapter, as they survey recorded versions of the *Catalogue*, paying particular attention to her 1959 and 1970 complete recordings, and justly characterize her as a 'vital member of the 1950s avant garde' (p. 181). Her recordings, always endorsed by the composer, have inevitably accrued a special benchmark status, of which performers of Messiaen may feel the weight. 'Is there a danger of idealising Loriod's performances?' the authors ask; 'Perhaps' (p. 187). But their analysis of the substantial differences between Loriod's recordings, as well as their survey of other complete recordings, including several by other students of Messiaen and Loriod, effectively combat the idea of a definitive version.[32]

The arrival in the scholarly spotlight of Loriod, who is doubly disadvantaged by composer- and male-centred biases in the musicological academy and by her own self-effacing character behind her husband, is long overdue.[33] Her role in the creation of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, however, is essential from start (she chauffeured Messiaen as he traversed the country) to finish (she championed the cycle in the decades that followed and cultivated a subsequent generation of performers). Her pianistic technique afforded Messiaen hitherto unthinkable possibilities in keyboard composition, and the extent of the emotional support she provided during his first wife's protracted illness is something we may fully glean only when the most privately sequestered documents of the archive see the light of day. Moreover, Loriod, through her compilation of the collection (and of Messiaen's *Traité*), is instrumental to the construction of Messiaen's persona; any attempt to dismantle this persona must reckon with the edifice she built.

The Messiaen–Loriod collection offers further correctives to this imbalanced coverage, which should become a priority among scholars working through these papers. For one, the collection contains manuscripts of Loriod's own compositions from the 1940s, when she was in Milhaud's class at the Paris Conservatoire. These works, none of which were ever published, are a trove of experimentalism. Her Berceuse (a movement from *Pièces africaines*, 1943), visually arresting with its arched calligraphy, contains abundant *valeurs ajoutées*, augmented-fourth leaps and other features suggesting a familiarity with some of Messiaen's compositional techniques. But the currents clearly flowed both ways: in another movement, 'Râga', Loriod composes a rhythmic pedal using bongos; in doing so she prefigures Messiaen's own rhythmic pedals in the percussion-laden *Turangalîla-symphonie* – and early sketches for *Turangalîla* show that Messiaen's original instrumentation featured bongos as well.[34]

[32] Twelve complete recordings are included in the survey. A noteworthy absence is that of Pierre-Laurent Aimard, another pianist who has made Messiaen a cornerstone of his repertoire, whose recording of the *Catalogue* was released only in March 2018, after the publication of Chadwick and Hill's study.

[33] The fact that all five authors of the books under review (plus the reviewer) are men suggests that the musicological patriarchy runs especially deep in Messiaen studies, and should stimulate reflection and activism among those of us in this area. A few studies focus on Loriod's 'influence' on Messiaen, on the margins. The most important of these is Christopher Dingle, 'Yvonne Loriod as Source and Influence', *Messiaen Perspectives 1*, ed. Dingle and Fallon, 197–210. Dingle's closing quotation of Loriod speaking in the third person is quintessential: 'Yvonne Loriod does not exist without Messiaen.'

[34] BNF, Fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod, RES VMA MS-2145, 'Pièces africaines // Yvonne Loriod'; RES VMA MS-1539, 'Symphonie-Tala // brouillons pour Turangalila'.

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Despite Messiaen's exuberant indebtedness to her pianism, never does he acknowledge his obligation to Loriod the composer. Let us once more be 'resistant' readers, aided this time by archival evidence. Leafing through Messiaen's sketchbooks, reading his notes-to-self, his debts become increasingly clear. In one note he writes, 'Make a mixture of Ravel chords superposed in different keys and rhythms, like the lines in Pièces en Souffrance';[35] here, he must be referring to Loriod's *Pièces sur la souffrance* (1944).[36] Amid sketches for the *Vingt regards*, he jots, 'Make accumulations of diverse lines, very fast (see souffrance ***L***) – and combinations of extraordinary rhythms in râgas (see délire ***L***)', before going on to suggest further rhythmic models from Debussy, Jolivet and Stravinsky.[37] Never does he spell out her full name, denoting her with an elusive cursive capital. Outlining ideas for 'Noël', he goes one initial further: 'recapitulation of the theme with changes of *all rhythmic values*, *changes of register* to all the notes – (Alb. Berg and Y. L.)'.[38] And so Loriod, more than a 'muse', becomes one of the *composers* in Messiaen's pantheon of models, and one of those sources whose importance, like that of Jolivet, Messiaen effectively suppressed in his own self-fashioning.

To conclude, it is worth emphasizing that both of these books offer valuable and novel approaches to studying Messiaen and his music. *Le modèle et l'invention* contains an especially impressive wealth of discoveries. It is essential reading for scholars of Messiaen, and despite being prepared without access to sketches, it provides vital background for researchers preparing to consult Messiaen's archives. But its potential contributions extend to broader musicological and methodological discussions and debates – questions of 'influence' and musical intertextualities, of the relationship between analysis and composition, and of how to grapple with a composer's writings. The authors' keen attention to the discrepancies between Messiaen's myths and his music lays the foundation for future work by historians and analysts alike, and exemplifies how musical analysis, conceived broadly, can contribute uniquely to historical research. Some of their most valuable insights are, regrettably, perhaps inevitably, buried in the book's densely analytical chapters; but more often than not, the thoroughness of analysis pays its own dividends. *Olivier Messiaen's Catalogue d'oiseaux* provides a multi-faceted reading of one of Messiaen's most substantial works, integrating conception through performance, as its authors may be uniquely positioned to do. Their attention to Messiaen's evolving style of transcribing and composing around birdsong will stimulate future studies of Messiaen's *style oiseau*, and their pianistic perspective allows fresh apprehensions of the cycle.

The expanding Messiaen–Loriod archive will deliver many further revelations in the years to come, and many of those discoveries will serve themselves up very easily. But as we revel in it, let us take care to be vigilantly 'resisting' readers – we will be rewarded with richer understanding for doing so.

[35] BNF, fonds Olivier Messiaen et Yvonne Loriod, RES VMA MS-1492, 'Cahier de travail, dit "Cahier Rouge"', p. 19.

[36] *Ibid.*, RES VMA MS-199: 'Liste d'oeuvres composées entre 1943 et 1946'.

[37] *Ibid.*, RES VMA MS-1491, 'Cahier de travail, dit "Cahier Vert"', p. 66. These titles refer to movements from her *Pièces sur la souffrance*.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

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