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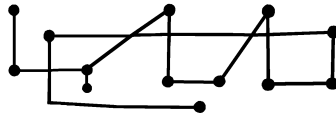
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SPLIT CENTERS: GAMELAN FUSION POST-MULTICULTURALISM



PETE STEELE

THE PERFECT FUSION

*P*USER BELAH (UNSTABLE CENTRE) TELLS the story of a “perfect” fusion gone wrong. In this 2003 work for two complete Balinese *gamelan*, composer Michael Tenzer dramatizes a tumultuous confrontation between two opposing musical entities. As a work of “fusion,” Tenzer presents this confrontation as an archetypal encounter between a musical “self” and its “Other.” The work blends aesthetic and cultural affinities, combining American modernism, Balinese genres *gong kebyar* and *gong gede*, *mbira* music, and South Indian rhythmic forms. At first, the two ensembles trade phrases delicately. As the piece progresses, their disparate sensibilities eventually merge into a unified musical entity. However, this union is short-lived. Their intercultural entanglement is soon interrupted by a traumatic rupture. As a result, the ensembles spiral off into melodic and rhythmic isolation, playing radically different material at opposing tempi. In traditional gamelan music, the final stroke of the large *gong wadon* symbolizes both spiritual and cosmological balance. In Tenzer’s work, the *gong* players leave the stage prematurely, implying a fundamental inability for the two music-cultural systems to reconcile.

Hybrids are often celebrated as the quintessential postcolonial form. Scholars have argued that hybrids confound simplistic binary relationships, and forge an indeterminate “third space” that has the potential to subvert political and cultural hegemonies (Bhabha 1994). In the middle to late twentieth century, musical hybrids emerged as an artistic response to the tectonic shifts in global power and cultural awareness at the end of the colonial era. As such, musical hybrids embody the gradual destabilization of European and North American hegemony, and serve as exemplary symbols of a more integrated postcolonial world.

Indonesian gamelan music has long been a source of inspiration for composers of fusion music. Composers Colin McPhee, John Cage, Lou Harrison and Steve Reich were particularly influential in shaping the voice of gamelan in such fusion projects. For many, this newfound appreciation of non-Western music carried the potential to subvert and even undo colonialism’s enduring legacy. McPhee paved the way for gamelan music as a way to reform elitism in Western art music (Wakeling 2010).¹ For Harrison, Reich and others gamelan provided alternative modes of composition and collaboration (Alves 2001; Humphreys 2001).

Like its predecessors, *Puser Belah* also frames hybridity and intercultural encounter as highly charged phenomena. But rather unlike its predecessors, it does not focus on the emancipatory potential of fusion. Moreover *Puser Belah* highlights the destructive potential of fusion to further reify polarized notions of cultural difference. In his own program notes, Tenzer questions whether truly transcendental fusions can even take place (Tenzer in Koskoff 2008, 4). In doing so, his work challenges the humanistic assumption that intercultural interaction inevitably yields greater human empathy. Far from an outlier, Tenzer’s commentary on intercultural incommensurability echoes prevalent themes in several contemporary fusion works for Balinese gamelan.

The following article looks at these works as they reflexively interrogate the multiculturalist’s desire to “fuse.” In particular, I focus on recent compositions by composers Wayne Vitale, Michael Tenzer, Evan Ziporyn and Andrew Clay McGraw. These works are deeply intercultural both in form and content. The composers have been deeply steeped in Balinese music and are thus well positioned to raise pointed critiques concerning the ethics and politics of intercultural interaction. In these pieces “fusion” and “intercultural encounter” are framed as complex and often paradoxical acts, demanding simultaneous identification with the “Other,” while remaining ever cognizant of its immanent difference. This tension between identification and alienation is played out to varying degrees.

I interpret these works using several analytical tools. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek writes of ideology as a discursive form that distorts the true nature of material and social relationships and is structured around the desire for a necessarily impossible objective (Žižek 1989). Žižek describes the object cause of this desire in terms of Lacan's "*objet a*." This object is the ineffable phantasmatic quality that one searches for in the Other and is a primary organizing principle of fantasy. However, *objet a* is of no inherent substance. It exists only to structure one's desire. If desire is satisfied, *objet a* evaporates like a mirage and the fantasy is destroyed, leaving a traumatic schism in its wake (Žižek 2007, 48–50). Already this description bears strong resemblance to Tenzer's *Puser Belah*. In Tenzer's work the object cause of desire is the "perfect fusion," the idealized union of two disparate cultural entities. It is thus no coincidence that they are polarized into inimitable and irreconcilable aesthetic worlds at the precise moment they fuse. Several of the works discussed below frame fusion as a similarly impossible goal. These works may be seen as a critique on the nature of fusion and hybridity. While fusion connotes synthesis, this "coming together" is often fraught with political tensions, power dynamics, gaps of knowledge and creative misunderstandings. However, they also challenge to examine our own assumptions about the nature and efficacy of fusion and hybridity in the contemporary arts.

BALINESE MUSIC IN AMERICA

Balinese gamelan left an indelible mark on American music in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and several meaningful studies of its lasting impact have emerged over the last ten years. Several scholars have looked at issues of appropriation, representation and affinity in Javanese music abroad (Perlman 1994; Diamond 1998; Miller 2005; Cohen 2010). In her work on Javanese gamelan in Great Britain, Maria Mendonça locates "*communitas*" as central to the "pan-gamelan" experience (2002; 2011). Two recent studies examine the contemporary popularity of Balinese gamelan as a subcultural phenomenon both in and out of academic contexts (Lueck 2012; Clendinning 2013). Most literature on Indonesian music abroad is divided into pre- or post-WWII brackets. Matthew Cohen describes performances by both Balinese artists and Bali-inspired Westerners on the American concert stage from the early twentieth century through the 1950s and ends just prior to the development of the first world-music programs. Massive

changes in geopolitics following the Second World War have likely made it difficult for scholars to reconcile both colonial and postcolonial representations of Balinese music abroad. The end of WWII also instigated an epistemic rupture in the humanities and social sciences. In ethnomusicology, it is also the point at which scholarship moves away from grand narratives of musical evolution to geographically focused area studies buoyed by cultural relativism (Nettl 2010, 83).

The first major “fusion” work for gamelan and Western instruments was Colin McPhee’s *Tabuh-Tabuhan* (1936). The work is now considered a landmark of musical hybridity. Credited as the first Western composer to bring “authentic” Balinese music into the symphonic form, McPhee introduced Balinese music to American audiences as a quintessential representative of “the new” (Young 1986, 56–57). For McPhee and other American modernists, Balinese gamelan was everything European music was not. Balinese gamelan was praised for its emotional detachment and its integration into the daily fabric of Balinese life. As such it provided an ideal “Other” to the perceived excesses and elitism of European Romanticism.² While it was not unusual for modernist composers to borrow material from non-Western traditions, McPhee’s work received special recognition. Very few of his contemporaries could boast eight years of field experience, living with indigenous artists while transcribing and studying their music. McPhee’s groundbreaking work is regarded as a major intellectual antecedent to the music of Steve Reich, Lou Harrison, Evan Ziporyn, Michael Tenzer, and others (Oja 2004, xi).

Despite McPhee’s unprecedented immersion into Balinese culture, he was not a performer of Balinese music. Stringent cultural mores and constant monitoring by the Dutch authorities greatly restricted European interactions with the Balinese (Pollmann 1990). Most of his transcriptions were done at the piano with the help of musical assistants, I Made Lebah and I Wayan Lotring and others. This changed after WWII, when a number of funding institutions were established to support the study of non-Western art forms in the United States. These organizations include the David and Flora Hewlett Foundation (longtime supporters of gamelan *Sekar Jaya*), The Asian Cultural Council, The Ford Foundation, as well as countless local, and university sponsored organizations. In some cases, government support of international arts initiatives was indirectly linked to the Cold War as the United States sought to shore up relationships with potential allies. (McGraw 2013, 220)

The emergence of these financial lines is co-synchronous with the development of North American ethnomusicology in the late 1960s

(Lueck 2012; McGraw 2013). These institutions created an entire generation of American scholar-performers deeply immersed in non-Western performance traditions. The American Society for Eastern Arts (ASEA) sponsored by Samuel Scripps was particularly foundational for students of East and Southeast Asian musics. These artists (among them Steve Reich, Kathy Foley, Phillip Yampolsky, Lisa Gold, Jody Diamond, and others) remain active and influential exponents of Balinese traditional music in the United States.

In the latter quarter of the twentieth century, Balinese music was reimagined through academic world music programs. Thus post-colonialism, civil rights, the expansion of higher education, theories of cultural relativism, and multiculturalism all played a large part reframing American attitudes towards Balinese music performance.³ Ricardo Trimillos argues that world music performance ensembles endeavor to create a nuanced understanding of musical traditions through “strategic essentialism.” However at the same time, curated presentations run the risk of exhibiting a “staged authenticity” that reinforces superficial notions of cultural difference (Trimillos 2004, 39). Some argue even further, that an institutional will-to-difference sustains these goals, thus reifying cultural boundaries rather than eliminating them (Agawu 2003, 174). This paradox resonates with cultural theorists, who critique the ideology of multiculturalism on a larger scale (Žižek 1997; Modood 2008).

Presently, there are Balinese gamelan ensembles in most major cities in the United States as well as several hundred more groups worldwide. Balinese music is performed with ever increasing frequency in concert halls, clubs, bars, art galleries, and street corners. American *gamelan* groups are also growing increasingly experimental in their approaches to Indonesian musical forms. In New York City, the “Gamelatron” performs new works for traditional Balinese gamelan instrument by computer-operated robots. MIT’s *Gamelan Galak Tika* has constructed a nearly complete Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar* fashioned from plastic, played by humans, and emitting a cornucopia of electronically manipulated *musique concrète*.

FROM RELATIVISM TO MULTICULTURALISM

In the latter half of the twentieth century, cultural relativism and liberal multiculturalism were both crucial to shaping the aesthetics of North American gamelan performance. According to founding ethnomusicologist, David McAllester, “At the time, we considered that we

were the real discoverers of the World of Music” (McAllester 1979, 179). This was partially inspired by “the relativism of anthropology, the global travels of WWII, and the ethical commitment of the Peace Corps” (180). In a manner, not unlike the Hindu evocations of early American transcendentalists, he writes, “We saw ourselves as a kind of Brahmanic Trinity of the Arts: we would be the Destroyers of ethnocentrism, the Preservers of rich cultural heritages around the world, and the Creators of rich cultural understanding. We were eager to assuage the trauma of three centuries of colonialism.” (180).

Both the altruism and the optimism of McAllester’s statements are reflected in gamelan fusion works from the 1970s. Composers like Lou Harrison and Barbara Benary were at the forefront, presenting a holistic union of Indonesian and Western aesthetics. In 1978, composer Barbara Benary wrote, “There comes a delightful point beyond which it no longer seems to matter whether one is using ethnic music or serving it; it can become so familiar that it no longer seems, ‘ethnic’” (Benary in McAllester 1979, 185). Such optimism regarding the potential of fusion to yield entirely new means of human understanding also comes on heels of Mantle Hood’s seminal pedagogical model, “bimusicality,” which promotes the idea that non-Western musical fluency may be acquired through intensive study.

However, directly beneath this celebratory surface (one which remains promulgated through the marketing and promotion of world musics), deep anxieties regarding the ethics of appropriation have never been far off. Balinese music scholar and composer Evan Ziporyn discusses how, in the early years of the American group *Gamelan Sekar Jaya*, some members were vocally opposed to composing for Balinese instruments. He jokingly refers to the attitude as, “Balier than thou.”

While in later years, it would become something that people could argue about, back then the whole vibe was, ‘Suweca wants us to do this, so we do this. . . . this is how we sit, this is how we dress, this is how we play this piece, this is how we do an offering.’ . . . Every single thing was just an attempt to replicate some idealized version of the way, the ‘Balinese’ did it” (Ziporyn interview Dec. 19, 2011).⁴

Recreating a sense of Balinese authenticity through prayers, offerings, and dress remains central to Balinese gamelan performances in the US. Though stringent attitudes towards composition have relaxed.

Ziporyn, *Sekar Jaya* founder Michael Tenzer, and composer Wayne Vitale were among the first composer/scholars to compose extensively

for Balinese gamelan. Each began their compositional experiments with Balinese music in the 1980s through collaborative projects with Balinese artists. Both Tenzer and Vitale worked with teacher and master drummer I Wayan Tembres. For Vitale the impetus to compose initially arose from a desire to explore Balinese music's inner logics. Through composition, he could explore the ways in which melodic, rhythmic, and textural layers combine to create a coherent musical effect (Vitale, personal communication [hereafter, p.c.]).

In twenty-first century Indonesia, intercultural collaboration has become commonplace and nearly cliché. They often function as a valuable form of cultural capital by arts institutions under sponsorship from the government offices and NGOs. As such, contemporary Balinese *kolaborasi* are often padded with politically and economically motivated discourse on cosmopolitanism and economic development (Sudirana 2011). However in the early 1980s, such collaborations were pioneering events in a new artistic climate. As discourses on multiculturalism and cultural relativism were being put into praxis through rapidly expanding world music programs and arts funding organizations, Bali was also experiencing a new commercial and intellectual openness resulting from "New Order" cultural policy. These policies placed greater emphasis on both cultural diplomacy and cultural tourism (Ramstedt 1992, 82).⁵

AMERICAN WORKS FOR BALINESE GAMELAN

Following a successful and influential tour to Bali in 1985, *Sekar Jaya's* profile as the world's premier exporter of the Balinese performing arts was established. Balinese gamelan works by Vitale, Tenzer, and Ziporyn are currently well known in Bali. In some cases, they are even taught to composition students at the *Institut Seni Indonesia* (Arts Institute of Indonesia) in Denpasar. An exemplary collection of these works is found on the New World Records recording, *American Works for Balinese gamelan* (1995). These works present serious and in some cases bold and uncomfortable attempts at enacting and defining the complexity of intercultural negotiation.

Tenzer is a central figure in the development of Balinese music performance in North America. By the early 1990s, he had already composed several works for Balinese gamelan with both American and Balinese groups. As a student at Yale and UC Berkeley, he was educated in the twilight of musical modernism, not more than a few years before minimalism and ethnomusicology reorganized the aesthetic

concerns of western art music.⁶ As such, the aesthetics of modernism form an important part of his aesthetic. Specifically, he espouses the belief that rigor, in the form of strict compositional determinacy, nonrepetitive form, and melodic and harmonic complexity constitute “great works.”

It was the presence of these modernist musical features that first attracted Tenzer to Balinese music. In order to illustrate his loyalty to modernist aesthetics, he offers this lighthearted comparison between his works and the work of his contemporary, Evan Ziporyn: “Whereas somebody like Evan would look at Balinese music and say, ‘oh cool, there’s all this repetition, I think I’ll get into that,’ my thought was, ‘there’s all this repetition, I gotta get rid of that!’” (Tenzer interview Feb. 19, 2011). As such, Tenzer’s pieces often feature an intentional linearity, which obscures points of musical repetition. While certain musical themes do reappear, motives are often melodically transformed or rhythmically altered. One example can be found in the piece, *Banyuari* (1992). One of *Banyuari*’s musical legacies is a complex interlocking figuration (*kotekan*) written in quintuplets. This melody first appears in the latter third of the piece (10:01). After a brief interlude, the same core melody (*pokok*) appears again, but as an even sixteenth-note figuration (see Example 1). Since *Banyuari*, melodic experiments with non-duple subdivisions have become prevalent in Balinese *Tabuh Kreasi Baru* (new instrumental works).⁷ Another, prophetic musical moment in *Banyuari* comes in the form of a drum solo based on a *Karnatak* drumming pattern that features a metric modulation. About a decade or so after *Banyuari*, Indian/Karnatak drumming became a prominent source of inspiration in experimental Balinese *kreasi*.

Vitale’s work on the same record, *Khalayan Tiga*, is performed by members of *Sekehe Gong Abdi Budaya* from the village of Perean and is the only work performed by a Balinese group. Vitale first heard the group on a series of cassettes published by Bali Records. He was so struck by their intensity, speed, and precision that he literally wore out the cassettes on a trip to Europe (Vitale p.c.). To an ear familiar with Balinese idioms, *Khalayan Tiga* clearly pays homage to the formal aesthetics of Balinese *kreasi* from the late 1970s through the 1980s. This strategy of *homage* through the self-conscious appropriation of recognizable Balinese motives is characteristic to many of Vitale’s earlier works. His first piece, *Sekar Panca Warna* features motivic gestures iconic in the work of several major Balinese composers including I Wayan Berata (notably the pieces *Kosalia Arini* and *Tabuh Pisan Bangun Anyar*) and I Nyoman Windha. The title *Khalayan Tiga* refers

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "BANTUARI (1992) QUINTUPELET KOTEKAN". The score is written for a five-part ensemble, with each part represented by a separate staff. The notation is complex, featuring a mix of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines. The top staff of each system is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff of each system is written in bass clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The music is characterized by frequent use of slurs and accents, particularly over groups of notes, suggesting a focus on specific rhythmic or melodic motifs. The overall structure is a quintuplet, meaning it consists of five measures or phrases.

EXAMPLE 1. BANTUARI (1992) QUINTUPELET KOTEKAN

to the realization of “three fantasies” surrounding the genesis of the piece (Perlman 1994, 2). The first of these was to meet the musicians he had admired for so many years. The second was to learn their repertoire (which he did upon visiting Peraan in the early 1990s). His third was to write for them. Vitale describes his time in Peraan as one of the “top” musical experiences of his life (Vitale p.c.). In some parts of the world, musical masters are as inaccessible as celebrities. Yet in Bali it is tremendously easy (provided one can afford the plane fare) to meet, study with, and befriend one’s musical idols. In the experiences of many of American artists and students, Balinese artists are often flattered by the interest and are genuinely eager to share both their time and expertise. Thus Vitale’s “fantasia” expresses a mixture of both the excitement and awe inherent to these treasured moments.

Both Vitale and Tenzer’s works were written in the early 1990s, which was also a discursive “heyday” for liberal multiculturalism. State-sponsored multiculturalism traces back to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1971 (Modood 2008, 16). However it became a popular, if not ubiquitous, topic among policymakers, political theorists, and other academics in the 1990s (Taylor 1997; Bhabha 1998; Gutmann 2003; Kymlicka 1995). Tenzer and Vitale’s works approach fusion and hybridity with an optimism similar to that found in the statements by Benary and McAllester above. However while relativism focuses on cultural similarities, liberal multiculturalism emphasizes an appreciation of pure difference.

Parekh (2010) describes multiculturalism as a worldview rather than a coherent political movement.⁸ He describes multiculturalism operating on several basic tenets. First, “human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world.” Secondly, each culture has “different systems of meaning and visions of the good life.” And finally, “every culture is plural.” As such multiculturalism embraces both the “inescapability and desirability of cultural plurality.” (238–240). For many scholars, recognizing and affording unique benefits to cultural groups is a crucial aspect of putting multiculturalism into action (Taylor 1997). Amy Gutmann describes liberal multiculturalism as a belief in autonomy and political recognition for all human individuals while fully embracing and acknowledging cultural differences (Gutmann 1992). As a worldview, multiculturalism assumes that human conflict can be reduced to a lack of awareness and understanding between cultural groups. Therefore by simply encountering the Other and appreciating difference, we develop empathy. Multiculturalism assumes that intercultural contact necessarily results in tolerance and that difference *as such* is inherently positive (Nagle 2009, 8).

This sentiment is present in much early gamelan fusion work and is also ubiquitous in intercultural artistic collaborations. For example, the Asia Pacific Performance Exchange (APPEX) promotes their work as an “homage to multiculturalism” (UCLA CIP 2003, 3). According to their website, the APPEX format, “demonstrates how cross-cultural collaboration can provide artists a more informed understanding of Asia and America as well as valuable insights into their own worldview” (APPEX website). Thus APPEX presents multiculturalism as a form of artistic praxis. Collaboration is a vehicle by which artists learn to appreciate the Other, thus positively affecting their own perception of cultural diversity.

SPLIT CENTERS: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF FUSION MUSIC

Evan Ziporyn came to Balinese music slightly later than Tenzer and Vitale. His first gamelan composition was a collaborative work with Balinese composer I Nyoman Windha. At the time, Ziporyn was still reticent to write music for Balinese gamelan, feeling that he lacked sufficient knowledge to compose “Balinese” music. While working with Windha, Ziporyn tricked himself into composing by imagining the saxophone quartet as a substitute for dance choreography that had accompanied an earlier version of the piece. By envisioning the saxophone parts as separate from Windha’s music, he was able to interact with the music on a conceptual basis without necessarily “fusing” (Ziporyn interview).

Ziporyn’s *Aneh Tapi Nyata* (“Strange But True”) also expresses a certain uneasiness towards intercultural forms. Written for a combination of Western and Balinese instruments, *Aneh Tapi Nyata* describes the awkwardness, embarrassment, and alienation experienced by musicians striving for deep knowledge of another tradition. In the vocal text (Example 2), the optimism of multiculturalism’s postwar promise has faded away while the specter of colonialism emerges as a transfigured reminder of former conflicts.

Aneh Tapi Nyata is one of the first pieces by an American composer to describe both insecurity and skepticism towards the multiculturalist mandate. In it, he speaks of a suppressed guilt and spiritual void that tacitly motivates the postcolonial desire for reconciliation. In *Aneh Tapi Nyata*, the American desire for spiritual connection emerges as a response to our own spiritual depravity. In a society dominated by capitalism, our first instinct is to buy it back (as in the lines, “These days, my tradition is gone. Where can I buy it?”), thus reducing

Apa arti dunia ini?	What does it mean, this world
Mengembara,	that I see?
cari Jamu Pantas	Find a tonic for a foreigner
tamu untuk mengobati ngeri.	that can cure my anxiety.
Zaman Kami hilang tradisi,	These days my tradition is gone—
mana beli?	where can I buy it?
Kalau bisa minta sisah dari banten	May I ask for the leftovers from your
masih asli.	authentic offerings?
Baru tiba membuka kopor saya;	Newly arrived, I open my suitcase;
Di dalam selalu soal ikut jalan.	All my problems have come
Aneh tapi nyata: lagu barat dinyanyi	for the ride.
diiringi campuran begini...	Strange but true: a Western song
Berkumpul sampai terpisah	accompanied by this mixture—
Sementara peleburan	Gather together until forced apart
Manis, asem, terserah penonton.	A momentary fusion
	Sweet or bitter, it's up to you.

EXAMPLE 2: ANEH TAPI NYATA
VOCAL TEXT WITH COMPOSER'S TRANSLATION

intercultural encounter into a hollow exchange of commodities. Despite altruistic intentions, Ziporyn recognizes that political, economic, and spiritual disparities persist. The resulting narrative is similar to that of *Puser Belah* with a “momentary fusion” that ends with both entities “forced apart.”

Bali's cultural tourism industry further complicates the terms of intercultural encounter. Balinese means of “boundary maintenance” segregate cultural forms meant for indigenous peers from staged and monetized cultural forms meant for touristic consumption (Picard 1990, 38). These boundaries are readily apparent to any student who has travelled to Bali and studied Balinese music firsthand. As an example, pedagogical methods and standards are drastically different for foreign students, and foreign students must engage in different forms of reciprocity to compensate Balinese teachers. When teaching Balinese students, teachers may not ask for money at all. In return a

Balinese student is expected to assist the family in other ways (ceremonies, house maintenance, etc. . . .). However most tourists are transient in the lives of Balinese teachers and thus cannot be expected to meet long-term obligations. According to one Balinese teacher I Gusti Komin Darta, money is the most efficient and effective alternative (Darta p.c., 2010). While boundaries between “culture for self” and “culture for Other” are by no means immutable, they do reinforce a separation between Balinese and non-Balinese students striving for a mastery of Balinese art forms.

This gap is one of many in the intercultural terra. And such gaps have meaningful repercussions when discussing hybridity and intercultural collaboration more broadly. To what extent are we allowed (or do we allow ourselves) to, “truly cross cultures?” (Cohen 2010, 4). Is it a simple matter of will and intention, or must we engage in more concrete forms of reciprocity? Intercultural collaborations can be powerfully subversive; however, Ziporyn reminds us that various forms of cultural baggage inevitably “come for the ride.”

CRITIQUING MULTICULTURALISM

Ziporyn’s critique of intercultural interaction addresses the cultural and material inequities that inhibit processes of fusion. Some scholars argue that these issues are an unintended consequence of multiculturalist ideologies. While multiculturalism insists upon universal human rights and dignities, it also frames social relationships paradoxically because it requires the recognition of universal sameness while *simultaneously* acknowledging immanent difference (Gutmann 1997). This contradiction is central to identity politics. We are to identify with our “others” as human beings endowed with the same rights and privileges as ourselves. However we must also assume a measure of inscrutability towards the “other” because we cannot ever fully identify with their individual and cultural circumstances. We risk exoticizing, objectifying and exploiting others if we fail in *either* pursuit. Even though we must identify with all individuals of all cultural backgrounds we also are required a certain degree of alienation from them. Brian Nagle describes this conflict between identification and alienation as multiculturalism’s “double bind” (Nagle 2009).

In the twenty-first century, scholars have been more pointed in their criticisms. Kenan Malik argues that, “multiculturalism has helped to segregate communities far more effectively than racism” (Malik 2001). Others argue that the celebration of diversity has created “ethnic fiefdoms” which are forced to compete with one another for limited

economic resources in the form of public aid. This leads to increased resentment between minority groups rather than understanding. Multiculturalism thus “erodes the pan-ethnic solidarity needed to sustain societywide economic redistribution” (Nagle 2009, 10). Nagle also presents several cogent arguments on multiculturalism’s flaws as theory. He goes on to write, “The idea that multiculturalism can provide the basis for intercultural dialogue unfortunately appears to reduce cross-community contact to an appreciation of alterity, an encounter with ethnic difference which at best leaves the respective parties with a heightened respect for the ‘other’” (11). Multiculturalism helps unify individual ethnic identities through political recognition yet alienates them from one another. For Malik, this ultimately “imprisons us in a human zoo of differences” (Malik 1996, 150).

Malik’s “imprisonment” appeals directly to the sense of alienation conveyed in these American gamelan works. Tenzer’s *Puser Belah* offers several salient examples. The piece is scored for two complete Balinese *gamelan semaradana* (a total of nearly 70 musicians). It was taught to members of *Sanggar Cudamani*, *Gamelan Genta Bhuana Sari*, *Gamelan Sekar Jaya* and members of the Vancouver-based ensemble *Gamelan Gita Asmara*. In an article for a Canadian New Music journal, *Circuit*, Tenzer writes, “*Puser Belah* means, roughly, ‘split navel’—for the Balinese the human navel is the centre of the body, analogous the centre of the cosmos. To split it (a violent image) is to render the cosmos unstable” (Tenzer 2011, 3). He also offers the following summary for the piece as a whole,

The two *gamelan* begin as separate entities (read: cultures) acting without consciousness of each other, playing in different densities, floating in coexistent layers of unmeasured time. No gongs sound. Little by little they become mutually aware through passages of shared pulsation and thematic alignment. Elements of both cooperation and conflict coalesce but synchrony is sporadic. Gongs emerge to mark separate and irregular periods of coordination. At last, the two *gamelan* play together in a fully cyclic format where all elements integrate and fuse. But this relationship ruptures explosively. Conflict returns on a canvas of conflicting pulsations and periodicities, indeterminate pitch, and the full withdrawal of gongs. (Tenzer 2011, 3)

Tenzer openly describes this work as an attempt to unify a persistent rift between his Balinese and non-Balinese cultural sensibilities. Performed as an intercultural encounter between two entities, both the

catastrophic split and resulting chaos aptly describes two subjects caught by their desire to fuse with another and the disastrous consequences of fusion. In Tenzer's work the gong cycle functions as the arbiter of identities, which are either in or out of sync. The "full withdrawal of gongs" at the end of the piece thus signifies a complete breakdown in their relationship.

The pinnacle of their entanglement, as well as a brief moment of idealized fusion, are symbolized during the middle section (*pengawak*), which is immediately followed by the cataclysmic rupture. This musical event serves multiple symbolic functions. On one level, Tenzer wishes to aurally signify the bombing of two Balinese nightclubs in the heavily touristed city of Kuta, an event which had taken place less than one year before *Puser Belah's* performance. Here he draws a clear analogy between his inner psychological experience of a cultural incommensurability and the tragic bombing.

It was soon after the Bali bombing that Balinese journalists and cultural critics began reconstructing the event in terms of a failed intercultural interaction. These writers believed that Bali had sold itself out to foreign developers thus corrupting the purity of their cultural essence (Lewis and Lewis 2009). This spawned an entire movement dedicated to the restoration of Balinese cultural values (*Ajeg Bali*).

The piece ends with two gamelan in irretrievably separate musical spaces. One gamelan continues on with a frantic interlocking *kotekan*. Tenzer's use of indeterminacy enhances the listener's sense of melodic and cosmic instability. The other gamelan plays a slow, plaintive melody in unison at an entirely different tempo. *Puser Belah* does not only reflect a core belief in the impenetrability of cultural difference between an individual and his Balinese others. More crucially, it reflects an impenetrable difference within one's own subjectivity. Tenzer is not as troubled by the unknowability of the Balinese "other" as he is by the unknowability of his own self. Thus while globalization has allowed for increasingly mobile and malleable, transnational identities, there is an underlying suspicion that one's affinity to a particular aesthetic necessarily detracts from identification with another. This is perhaps sustained by a core anxiety that our fractured multiplicities do not necessarily add up. And such notions appear contrary to the promises multiculturalism seems to make.

A HOUSE IN BALI (2009)

Evan Ziporyn's recent opera also dramatizes the anxieties of intercultural collaboration. This time it does so through a critical look at the life and work of composer Colin McPhee. Both the title and the libretto are taken directly from McPhee's own memoir. Ziporyn highlights the tension and miscommunications between the McPhee and his Balinese interlocutors. He also calls attention to the persistent fetishization of the Balinese by Western artists and scholars.

Billed as a "cross-cultural opera," the work features substantial artistic contributions from several major Balinese artists including, I Dewa Ketut Alit, I Nyoman Catra, Ni Desak Made Suarti Laksmi, and dancer/choreographer Ni Kadek Dewai Aryani. Alit, a founding member of Bali's internationally known *Sanggar Cudamani*, and currently the director and founder of *Gamelan Salukat* (Example 3), has garnered widespread attention from composers, artists, and scholars around the world for his experimental approaches to Balinese gamelan. His works have been the focus of several scholarly publications, more than any



EXAMPLE 3: *GAMELAN SALUKAT* PERFORMING ZIPORYN'S *HOUSE IN BALI*

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE SOUTHWORTH

living composer in Bali today.⁹ He also has a longstanding relationship with Ziporyn and has taught at MIT on and off for the last seven years. Both Catra and Laksmi are faculty members at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Denpasar and Aryani is one of Bali's most sought after performers of both traditional and experimental dance.

Performances were met with mixed reviews. *A House in Bali* was praised as “syncretic” and “bicultural,” acknowledging Ziporyn as a “spiritual descendent” of McPhee.¹⁰ Reviewers credited Ziporyn for navigating the musical and cultural worlds of Bali and early twentieth-century Euro-America with aplomb, from the practical details of tuning and orchestration to more complex aesthetic negotiations. Other reviews were less favorable, describing the plot as either incoherent, or absent all together. A *New York Times* reviewer wrote that the “Western characters never amount to more than ciphers,” this was “further diminished” by the visual presentation (Smith 2009).

A House in Bali has also been critiqued for embodying power asymmetries between the Western and Balinese performers (McGraw 2013, 232). Contemporary Balinese artists often speak about continued Western “theft” and objectification of Balinese culture (ibid.). In other contexts, I Dewa Ketut Alit is particularly vocal about the detrimental effects of tourism on the Balinese arts. In numerous personal conversations, he has spoken to me of the ways in which Balinese musicians are tacitly influenced by touristic tastes. For Alit and other artists, the lines between cultural tourism and culture for its own sake are increasingly blurred.¹¹

A House in Bali generated heated discussion in Indonesia and in the United States for its allusions to Spies's and McPhee's alleged pederasty. While Spies's pederasty is a better-known fact, McPhee's sexuality has been a topic of speculation.¹² The facts of McPhee's personal life, including his divorce from anthropologist Jane Belo and his intense mentorship of the young Balinese dancer Sampih, have fed into these associations. Ziporyn addressed the topic publicly both on the gamelan listserv as well as in a series of blog entries after its US premier. He writes,

Every reader I know who has read McPhee's memoir—walks away from it asking the question that begins this essay. And none of us walk away knowing the answer. As has been said to me dozens of times by dozens of interested parties, ‘the real McPhee story is what's NOT in the book.’ So it seems to me that any honest rendition of that encounter, AND of McPhee's account of it—should explore that exact ambiguity. (Ziporyn 2009)

Whether fact or fiction, Ziporyn's inclusion of McPhee's alleged pedophilia poignantly serves as an allegory for the violent and perilous nature of "fusion" through intercultural interaction. *A House in Bali* describes itself as a "tragic romance" (*HiB* press release, 2010). McPhee's desire for the untamed and vigorously youthful Sampih encapsulates the Western fascination for Bali as the personification of individual liberty through hedonism. As such, Sampih embodies the *objet a*. The pedophilia taboo intensifies the impossibility of their literal and metaphoric aesthetic fusions. Like *Puser Belah's* cataclysmic "bombing" following the sublime fusion of the *pengawak*, attaining the *objet a* leads to a deepened rift between self and other by splitting at the very core of one's own desire.

The individual fates of McPhee, Spies, and Sampih corroborate this message. Dutch authorities arrested Spies for immoral behavior. On his way to the Netherlands to face prosecution a Japanese vessel attacked his ship and he was killed. After fleeing his own prosecution from the Dutch, Colin McPhee divorced his wife and descended into alcoholism (Vickers 2009). Although these details do not appear in the opera, Sampih (still in his 20s) was murdered after a successful tour to the United States. While the crime remains unsolved, some speculate that Sampih's international fame had drawn ire from jealous contemporaries.

McPhee's awkward encounters and misunderstandings with the Balinese clearly describe Ziporyn's own anxieties as McPhee's "spiritual descendent." An anxiety of things "lost in translation" is evident in Ziporyn's work dating back to *Aneh Tapi Nyata*. What is lost in translation is all the more terrifying for being so. It opens up an incalculable void, the measure of which cannot be accounted for. This leaves open the prospect that in missing anything, one misses everything. Ziporyn ponders whether or not such situations are surmountable given their current political and commercial configurations.

Tenzer's music has also been criticized for its use of Balinese musicians and its impact on Balinese compositional practices. Some members of *Gamelan Cudamani* have said that Tenzer's music inadvertently pressures Balinese composers into writing music that is increasingly complex. Regarding this and other issues surrounding power dynamics, Tenzer writes,

I too have obsessed about the power asymmetry and felt that awkward sense of being unjustifiably puffed up. For me it was especially acute around money issues because over the past decade I have been able to bring off some fairly expensive projects there, and to pay people well to play my modernist, ultra-complex music.

People find it curious and rewarding to learn but only the most hardcore musicians love it. Nevermind that I made the musicians into mercenaries for my compositions. I was haunted by a hollowness, a sense of unjustifiable privilege that detracted from the value of my art. (Tenzer 2009)

Tenzer articulates what was implied in the *Aneh Tapi Nyata* text regarding the transactional nature of intercultural collaboration. While masterful Balinese artists may spend a lifetime in obscurity, nearly any Western composer of gamelan is given credit just for “showing up.” (Ziporyn in McGraw 2013, 323). What in this case is an ideal partnership between Balinese and non-Balinese artists while pervasive cultural and economic asymmetries lay between them? Some have suggested that an equitable system, in which both parties have equal say at all points in the artistic process, could alleviate such tensions and help restore some balance. However such an arrangement would likely yield entirely new works with vastly different aesthetic and conceptual trajectories. Sarah Weiss also notes that such apparent solutions can create further epistemological problems. Through a discourse of post/anticolonial reconciliation via the equitable collaboration of Eastern and Western artists, there is an inherent risk of positioning authenticity as a superficial “cloak of protection from political attack” (Weiss 2009, 218). One possible solution may be to accept the impossibility of fusion as in the last work discussed below.

FUSION OF THE ABSURD: IRONY, HUMOR, AND THE SECOND GENERATION OF BALINESE FUSION MUSIC

Sikut Sanga was written for the New York–based gamelan ensemble *Dharma Swara* and premiered at the Bali Arts Festival in 2010. The performance context was unusual for a North American gamelan group. That year, *Dharma Swara* was the first ever non-Balinese ensemble to perform as part of the *Parade Gong Kebyar* (Gong Kebyar Exhibition).¹³ Composed for a *mebarung* (a competitive “battle of the bands”) between *Dharma Swara* and a Balinese group representing the Balinese regency of *Jembrana*, McGraw’s work explicitly calls attention to the non-Balinese identities of the American performers by interjecting quotations from well known American songs, like “New York, New York” and the theme from the “Price Is Right.” Performed for a largely Balinese audience that was largely unaware of the source material, these overtly non-Balinese references create a sense of distance

between the American performers and the audience. The end of the piece features an extended “mash-up” of several Balinese works played in succession. The Balinese audience’s reaction was palpable, indicating some awareness of the irony McGraw wished to convey. As such, these purposefully mishandled musical quotations satirized *Dharma Swara*’s status as non-Balinese wannabes performing at Bali’s most prestigious venue.

As a result, his work frames the fusion encounter in markedly different terms than in the previous two works. This may also be read as a shift in the subject’s relationship to desire in the fusion context. While still impacted by the perception of insurmountable difference between Balinese and American cultural identities, McGraw critiques the impossibility of the multiculturalist mandate through humor, irony, and pastiche. I would argue that this intentional aesthetic distancing from “Balineseness,” is an attempt to subvert the desire to “go native” through musical fusion.

While previous works entertained the notion of a “perfect fusion,” McGraw overtly denies the possibility of such commensurability. He recognizes the desire to fuse, but dismisses it as an ill-fated illusion. McGraw is himself a scholar of Balinese music, yet he describes the knowledge that scholars acquire as a kind of “cultural autism” (Interview 2/8/2011). Even with extensive fieldwork and a so-called “deep knowledge” of Balinese musical tradition, scholars encounter such knowledge out of context and are thus unable to grasp a larger cultural whole. In adopting this position, he muses that foreign players of Balinese music are doomed to a necessarily incomplete (and also hilariously awkward) picture of things. The use of parody in *Sikut Sanga* presents a synecdochic critique of “going native.” He is reacting to the celebratory discourses of multiculturalism, which presume that contemporary artists are disengaged from the bonds of neocolonialist structures. McGraw’s work thus highlights the naiveté of Western artists and scholars who claim to know Balinese sound structure on its own terms.

In looking at McGraw’s work, there appears to be a palpable, ontological shift moving from the “first” generation of Balinese fusion to the “second.” This may be read as analogous to an intellectual climate shift from structuralism to post-structuralism. While structuralist models espouse cultural relativism, they also pessimistically rely on forms of cultural determinism. This model suggests that Balinese and American individuals derive from distinctive, closed, and mutually exclusive cultural systems. As such, fusion fails because of the lack of commutability between these autonomous structures. However,

McGraw frames the failure of fusion differently. Through irony, he emphasizes the gaps, the void of meaning in intercultural interpretation. *Sikut Sanga* may be read as an attempt to distance oneself from the desire of becoming Balinese by mocking one's attempts to do so.

His use of irony critiques the fallacy of multiculturalism through its staunch assertions of "un-Balineseness." As such he tacitly endorses the existence of an ineffable and authentic Balinese cultural identity. With cases of "cultural autism" there is an untraversable gap of meaning, which is not present for the Balinese. It suggests that there is a culturally holistic position in those who are "non-autistic." These are the Balinese "insiders." This Balinese *authenticity* that is ineffable to us non-Balinese wannabes thus serves as an "object cause of desire." In this way, he emphasizes the function of Balineseness as an impossible goal, highlighting the persistence of the gap rather than the chaos of encounter. In this way, *Sikut Sanga* does not reframe the fundamental character of intercultural encounter. It does however illustrate a significant alteration in its dynamics by emphasizing the distance between the subject and their desire.

CONCLUSION

While fusion is often promoted as an idealized means to global unity, its frictions, rifts, and fractures remain under-explored. This essay interprets the renewed skepticism towards the intercultural encounter in contemporary North American works for Balinese gamelan as a critique of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism and Balinese music have had parallel lives since the latter quarter of the twentieth century. Both acquired momentum during the late 1970s and both have seen their ideological suppositions challenged in the first decade of the 21st century.

We have examined the structure of multiculturalism's paradox in contemporary political theory and cultural studies, borrowing interpretive models from Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, and found they correspond strongly to issues of representation and identity in contemporary works for American gamelan. In these works, both authenticity and unfettered identification are presented as unattainable objects of desire. And the pursuit of these ideals appears to end only in disaster. In more pragmatic terms, it also arises as a direct response to mutual anxieties regarding the ethics of intercultural interaction. In McGraw's work, the intercultural encounter is portrayed less violently than in works by Tenzer and Ziporyn. Instead he relies on humor and irony to satirize the subject's desire to fuse. This attempt to distance

oneself from desire subverts the more problematic aspects of multiculturalism, yet it nevertheless preserves the notion of unified ethnic identities as mutually exclusive properties. All of these compositions do important work by questioning and exploring the contemporary relevance of multiculturalism while furthering the search for deeper intercultural experiences.

NOTES

1. See also Oja (2004), Lechner (2008) and Wakeling (2010) for more detailed discussions of Balinese music's role in promoting American modernism.
2. Lechner raises the issue of whether Balinese music was really the "Other" in this case. He says, "Was it the non-Western person, or was it the other musician of his own society who was stuck in the European styles of the nineteenth century? The reality of 'Oriental music' itself was only represented in order to win an argument that was internal to his own community of composers." (Lechner 2008, 26).
3. I realize that the same could be said for other local traditions which have "gone global" through world music programs. However, I will not be comparing the Balinese music situation with other musics, here. Scholars have approached these issues from a variety of perspectives. Some approach the issue from the "affinity group" model (Mendonça 2002; Lausevic 2007; Lueck 2012). Some focus on the performance of Asian musics by Asian Americans (Wong 2004; Hahn 2007; Zheng 2011). The edited volume *Performing Ethnomusicology* (Solis 2004), and various articles from Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) explore the politics of musical ethnography and composition.
4. "Suweca" refers to Sekar Jaya co-founder, the Balinese artist and composer, I Wayan Suweca.
5. For more on New Order policy and the Balinese arts, see Ramstedt (1992), Picard (1990), McGraw (2005), and Umeda (2007).
6. Interview 2/19/11.
7. I Dewa Putu Berata's *Lemayung* (2005), Andrew McGraw's *Cara Landa* (2004), and I Made Subandi's *Ceraki* (2005) are all examples.
8. Similar sentiments are echoed in Bhabha (1998) and Hall (2000).
9. For detailed discussions of Alit's work see Vitale (2002), McGraw (2005 and 2009).
10. Siegel (2010), Littlejohn (2009).
11. I Dewa Ketut Alit personal communication.

12. Spies was arrested by the Dutch government for immoral behavior but died before he could be prosecuted.
13. In prior years, this event has been billed as a *Lomba Gong Kebyar*. (Gong *Kebyar* Competition). While concerts are still held in the competitive *mebarung* format, they are no longer formally adjudicated. These on-going concerts are part of the larger *Pesta Kesenian Bali* (Bali Arts Festival). It was incorrectly reported in *Dharma Swara's* promotional materials and in subsequent profiles in *The New York Times* and on NPR that the group was the first ever non-Balinese to perform at the Arts Festival. To my knowledge, the first non-Balinese, Balinese gamelan group to perform at the Arts Festival was *Sekar Jaya* in 1985. Since then dozens of gamelan groups from the US, Japan, England, and elsewhere have performed at the Arts Festival. However, *Dharma Swara* was the first of these groups to perform in the prestigious *Gong Kebyar* Exhibition.

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