

THE TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF THE AINU – NEW APPROACHES AND FINDINGS

– Report on a research project on Ainu music, Hokkaido, Japan, 2004 –

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Introduction

This essay is the outcome of a portion of a larger research on Japanese traditional music I have started in 2001 and yet ongoing. My personal interest in that subject springs from the idea that traditional art forms can be a valuable source of inspiration for new music. Accordingly, the fields of investigation, and the subsequent analytical approach I have undertaken, are meant to face primarily artistic issues. Nonetheless, talking about *inspiration*, we have to be aware that it cannot be conceptually reduced to a mere “hint” or “suggestion”, as is often the case for many commercial music products. Of course, anyone is free to feel “inspired” by anything he/she likes, but I prefer to invest the term *inspiration* with a more significant and authentic meaning: *inspiration* is “the *process* of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially creative.”¹ The *process* is that series of steps taken in order to achieve a particular end, and it is often a clue to distinguish between professional and naïve art. It goes without saying that research activity is certainly a crucial part in the course of a responsible creation.

Not always the creative imagery can be properly shown, since it is at times mysteriously complex; but, on another level, the acoustic events (i.e., a concrete sound) and the musical structures (i.e., the form, the rhythm), possess features – acoustic and morphologic – that can be analysed. It is usually not within the competence of ethnologists or ethnomusicologists to discuss subjects such as the

texture and physicality of sound, or timbre and perception of acoustic events. In fact, these are elements of the domain of experimental composition, actually the field where I wish to offer my contribution. The contents of my research are embedded in the title of this essay: as I am a composer and music researcher, I will not address here issues that lie outside my field. However, I would be delighted if this paper could be helpful also to anthropologists working on Ainu music.

I have been afraid I might have faltered in view of the complexity and novelty of my task; to hold music know-how and abilities for research sometimes is not enough. Indeed, I am indebted to the people and institutions that helped me during this research. I wish to express my gratitude to professor Fabio Rambelli of Sapporo University, for his many suggestions and competent assistance; I am grateful to Sapporo University itself, which hosted me as a visiting researcher. I would like to acknowledge Rohm Music Foundation for granting me a Research Fellowship. Thanks are due to the Hokkaido Library for showing me precious material. My warmest thanks also to Yuasa Joji, emeritus professor of the University of California and outstanding Japanese composer: professor Yuasa's encouragement and support have been very helpful to me. I dedicate this work to my wife, Sayuri, with love and deepest gratitude; my entire program of research in Japan would have been unthinkable and fruitless without her enthusiastic encouragement and unflinching support.

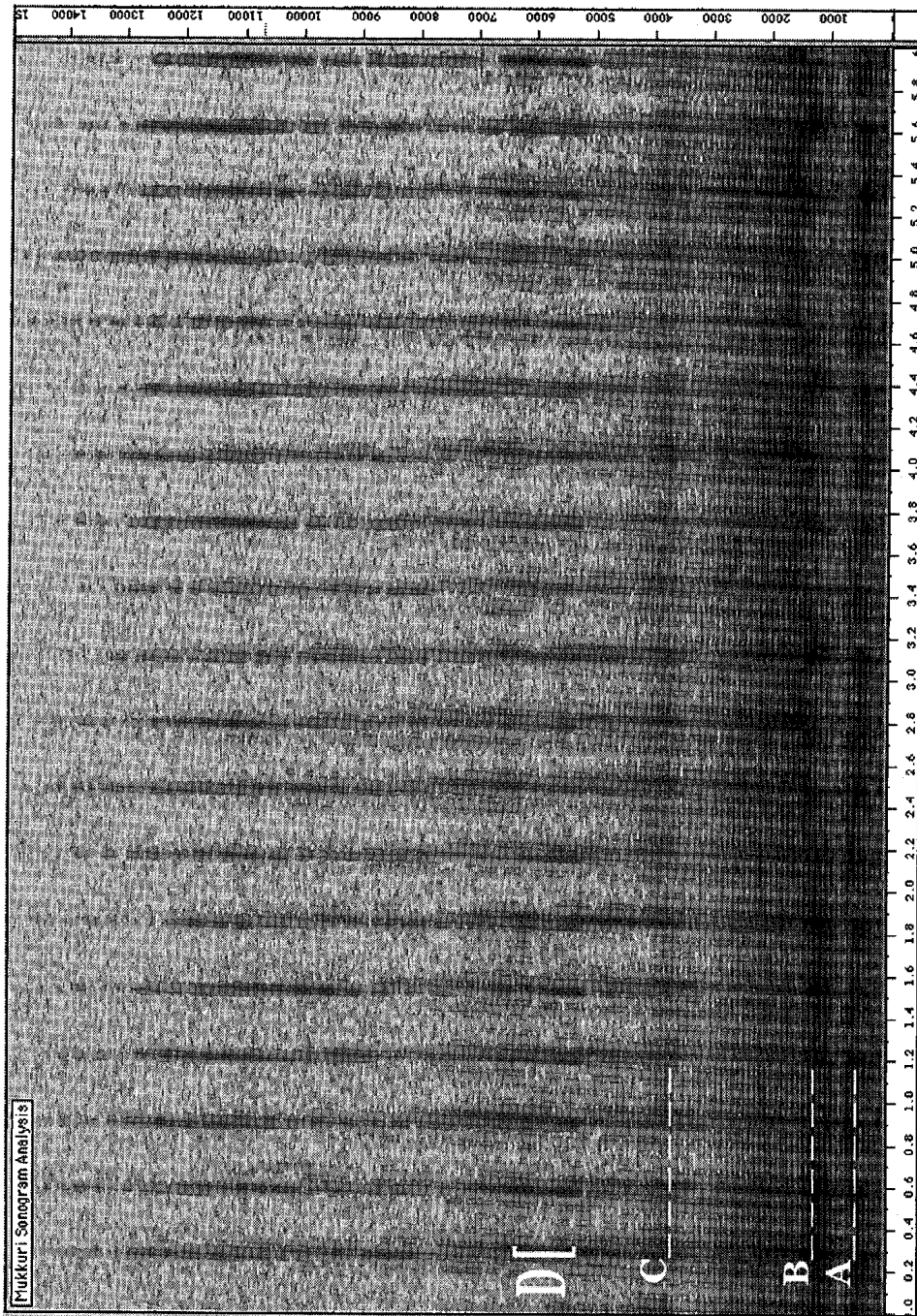
Significance of the audio material

Becoming familiar with music — be it classical, contemporary, or ethnic — is not an effortless task, and indeed having audio material is an asset. Recordings are a major issue for those cultures where written music is not well developed or inexistent. Being that the case of the Ainu, audio material is in our time the best way to recall their oral tradition. Audio material turns out to be indispensable for music research also because “in a completely pre-literate society the oral tradition

is not (merely) memorised, but *remembered*. Thus, every telling is fresh and new, as the teller's mind's eye re-views the imagery of origins or journeys or loves or hunts".² Because of the nature of oral music, tremendously vulnerable and easy to get spoiled, we cannot perhaps *remember* the Ainu music anymore, but we can try to grasp as best as we can what *was remembered* not too long ago. In fact, in the 1960s one of the last extensive investigations on Ainu music was carried out by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) specifically with the purpose of preserving and transmitting what was defined in that occasion a "vanishing cultural heritage."³

The recordings I studied, which range from the 1920s until our days, clearly show that a *change* (and in some recent cases even a *loss*) in *musical information* has occurred during the years, mainly in *timbre* and *sound colour* [e.g. the formant frequencies, viz. groups of emphasised harmonics arising from resonances in the vocal column], *pitch* [e.g. untempered pitches, viz. tone or semitones related by not equal size intervals], *articulation* [e.g. a variety of dynamics and agogic accents, staccatos, flatterzunge (tongue rolling), etc., implanted in guttural, nasal or open sounds] and *rhythm* [e.g. sound profile on the time axis]. These *nuances*, that aural transcription into staff notation often fails to fully express, reflect the underlying aesthetics of an ethnic culture, their morphology, "details" we cannot pass over.⁴

To avoid terminological misrepresentations, I had to clarify within square brackets the meaning of the above terms I wanted to be emphasized. Musical terminology must not be solely reduced to the logic of the staff notation commonly used to transcribe ethnic music for the convenience of study.⁵ In fact, most transcriptions of Ainu music, even those done with undoubted commitment, concern only *monophonic tunes* described as "folk songs" having the typical features of "primitive songs."⁶ This practice reveals the tendency to constrain ethnic musical cultures into the Western system of proportional note values (for example, quarter note = half of a half note). The 5-line staff notation is unsuitable also to fix



Sonogram analysis used to render the formants (sound spectra) of mukkuri visible. x=time (0.0-6.0 seconds); y=frequency (0-16000 Hz). The characteristic sound of mukkuri is produced by the "counterpoint" of frequency bands: A (stable, 500~Hz), B (oscillating, 1500~Hz with upward projections of energy), C (quasi-stable, 400~Hz), D (feeble harmonics, 5500~/6500~Hz), plus very feeble upper harmonics. Distinguishing trait is also the wavy shape of the partials. Estimated fundamental sound: ca. 93 Hz. |©Carlo Forlivesi|

the quarter of tones (quarter tone = half of a half tone), which are a constitutive part of ethnic music.⁷

At a first glance, most of the recent performances of Ainu music, including live performances and commercial recordings, differ on various grades from older versions featured on early audio material. Just to give a few examples, the way of singing has become as softer and *melodious* as pop lyrical music, and the fine fluctuation of the original pitches, not just arising by individual peculiarities,⁸ have been *tuned up* accordingly to the western temperate scale; most probably, these changes have been influenced by western music spread all over the world by mass media such as radio and TV. In this respect, I identify the hidden phenomenon of the unconscious *care* for the “pleasant” voice and the “correct” pitch, which has more or less entangled the music of ethnic cultures in modern times. Such a *care* is a social issue that arises by the *goûtes bourgeois*,⁹ a typical nineteenth-century social fancy categorically out of the concerns of the Ainu before, since their *aesthetic perception* and *sense of beauty* was not the same as ours (a rule that applies basically to any non-western culture). Ainu language itself abounds of onomatopoeic expressions describing different types of sounds, and in verbs depicting loud rumbling and roaring noises.¹⁰ Original songs – often sung with nasal voice or guttural glissandos, and *embellished* with onomatopoeic sounds, cries, noises and even burps¹¹ – with their primitive energy, are far from embarrassing the Ainu people of the epithet “Ebisu”.¹² Accordingly, their music has been progressively *tamed* not to offend the *civilised* ears, finally (and regrettably!) offering the image of the Ainu as a *reformed* and *modern* people. The Ainu who were involved in early recording sessions might not yet have been affected by that *polishing* phenomenon that instead gradually took on in the following years.

Western music, which spread all around the world since the last century via the mass media, has caused a deleterious environmental impact over the *ecosystem* of traditional musical cultures, producing at times unpredictable *mutations*.¹³ The supremacy of western music went along with colonialism since the sixteenth

century, and contributed in spreading European archetypes (such as Christianity) and culture. Before Western expansion and the following westernisation of Japan, Japanese culture had a strong influence on the Ainu (and vice versa). In the 1960s, NHK researchers stated that “(Ainu) lyrical songs with musical refrain “yayshama” and songs of lamentation (iyohaiochisi) have developed, and they have undergone such great changes under the influence of Japanese folk songs that they may now be said to be a part of them.”¹⁴ In this context it must be remembered that the Ainu were as populous and strong as the Japanese people at the time of the founding of the Yamato dynasty (ca. AD 250 - 6th-century), and Ainu’s shamanism had had equivalent forms in early Shinto.¹⁵ Contact with the Japanese resulted in a decline in the population of the Hokkaido Ainu around the middle of the eighteenth century due mainly to the effects of contagious diseases,¹⁶ and brought the final collapse to the Ainu culture during the 1920s.¹⁷ Hence, being the oldest traceable recordings dated in the course of that *collapse* one might wonder to what extent recordings of Ainu music have to be considered *genuine*. As I mentioned before, music is tremendously vulnerable because of its abstract nature. Who wouldn’t be delighted to know how Bach played his own compositions? But, we can just try to *recreate* it with approximation: we can learn from Bach’s scores and from the treatises of his age, or *reinvent* his musical world as Glenn Gould did with personal solutions but definitely marvellous artistic results. In any case, a “Jurassic park” of music nowhere exists (fortunately perhaps!). That being said, what we can try to do is to trace a shape from the few pieces of the puzzle we hold, making a comparative analysis of the sources we have in order to detect in them what we may think are genuine elements. Early recordings of Ainu music show several morphological features that grow gradually weaker or even partially vanish towards the recent years (such as the characteristic vocal timbre and the polyphonic textures), and therefore these features might somehow allow us even to look backwards and make hypotheses on an original musical dimension of the Ainu.

*A summary of the audio recordings I examined for comparative study*¹⁸

There are several recording collections that contribute to the conservation and study of Ainu music. I list here only the material I examined for my research. I apologize if I do not quote here collections that might be equally valuable.

1) Anthology of Ainu Myth by Shigeru Kayano

萱野茂のアイヌ神話集成

Kayano Shigeru, an Ainu who was born in Niputani village in 1926 in the Saru area, is one of the leaders of the Ainu revival. His recollection and translation of the Ainu lore is remarkable.

This collection is composed by 11 CDs, 1 videotape, and related texts. The lyrics are translated in Japanese, but the volume is issued with a helpful summary in English.

The collection is ordered as following:

CDs 1-3: Kamuy Yukar (Songs of the Gods)

CDs 4-6: Uepeker (Prose tales)

CDs 7-9: Yukar (Heroic Epics)

CDs 10-11: Material version I (Pray for god) & Material version II (Songs in daily life)

Almost all the recordings date back to the 1960s and '70s, with the exception of two Yukar dating 1947 (in CD 10).

CD 11 contains a compilation of very fascinating pieces which include tongue-twisters and spells, aphorism-like fragments of the Ainu culture. – I find this CD absolutely fascinating. For the post-Cage generation and after Anton Webern's bold path of severe brevity, sonic icons (granules or modules or motives) that were in the past frequently neglected, acquire the right to enter the realm of music, and have become an aesthetic in itself.¹⁹ Especially appealing for a research having creative issues, these sound-miniatures conjure up more basic motivic figures, marriage of sound, grain and icon.

2) Kubodera collection

Kubodera Itsuhiko, a renowned scholar of Ainu culture, spent large part of his life collecting material about the Ainu. An impressive collection of about a hundred open reel tapes is stored at the Hokkaido Library. As they were privately recorded before World War II, apparently in a makeshift way, they cannot compete for audio quality with the coeval recordings of NHK. The tapes I studied (recordings made in 1934) are unfortunately of poor audio quality and a noticeable noise level generally prevents an accurate listening.

3) 世界民族音楽大集成 – World Music Gala Collection 3

アイヌの歌と踊り [Songs and dances of the Ainus]

This one-CD compilation is a good selection of the key *topics* of the Ainu music, including canon and dance music, *ionnokka* [cradle song], *yaikatekar* [love song], a piece with *mukkuri* (jaw's harp), and an amusing *tapukar-sakehau* [drinking song]. Its strong points are fine audio quality remastering and educational goal. The sleeve notes to the CD, only in Japanese, provide the reader with concise but useful information. Though recording locations are mentioned, regrettably no recording session date is marked. The World Music Gala Collection 4 is dedicated to the Yukar of Ainus.

4) NHK (the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation) audio documentation.

NHK has embarked several times on the enterprise to record the music of the Ainu.

a) アイヌ伝承音楽 [Ainu Traditional Music], 1929 (S 4)²⁰

Two open reel tapes (back-up of the original support), available at the Hokkaido Library. Among the most precious pieces of Ainu music audio material, it includes rare polyphonies with multipart textures I couldn't find in subsequent recordings. I will use it as a point of reference for my considerations in the following section.

b) NHK 放送文化研究所

アイヌ歌謡集 [Anthology of Ainu Songs], 1947- (S 22-)

I was able to listen to this interesting anthology at the Hokkaido Library. It was on cassette tapes (back-up of the original support) and, unfortunately, the bad audio quality of the tapes discourages the listener. Despite that fact, I did take notes of some pieces, most notably a touching *inonnoitak* (a pray) I could not ignore: beyond the role of researcher, the daily surveying of data should not make one forget a keen sense of humanity, the fact that we are often looking *in* and *through* other people's life with all its dramas and uniqueness.²¹ Recorded in 1947 (S22.10.3) in Kushiro Akanmura Fubu Shinai Kotan by a 81 years old man by the name of Ôi Anramu [大井アンラム翁], this pray sung with frail voice and aloofness, and without the slightest trace of western metric and harmonic sense, preserves its *authentic*²² imagery and gestalt.²³ Understandably, the old man sang in a low range and with dim gradations of volume. His *performance* is not lyrical and *emotional* but introverted and concentrated, slightly blurred by a noticeable noise level. Now the recording acted as a source of inspiration rather than a confining structure, *un objet trouvé*²⁴ [a found object] from a musical heritage – rather than an *outcome* – that for a large part can be “exploited” for its symbolic function. Able to touch a chord of individual creativity, it becomes thus conspicuous from the perspective of a creative research.

c) アイヌ伝統音楽、日本放送協会、S40

NHK, Ainu traditional music, 1965 (explanations by G. Sarashina, transcriptions by K. Tanimoto and Y. Matsuda)

Recording sessions: 1961-62 (S36-37)

A report on the condition of Ainu music in the early 1960s, this important volume contains 450 transcribed pieces (into 5-line staff notation)²⁵ with accompanying explanations. The technical description of the dances and the musical instruments of the Ainu are particularly interesting.

5) Miscellanea: educational audio material, recent commercial recordings, etc.

Ainu extended polyphonies

There are some common misrepresentations about the music of the Ainu. I will list three of them here. The first is that Ainu music is mostly considered to be monophonic, a collection of plain tunes, which traditionally may be sung with approximation; accuracy would not be necessary – it is said – because among the Ainu there were no professional performers. Next, it is thought that the Ainu do not sing polyphonic textures, except for simple canons. Finally, music is an activity basically for women, and men usually do not get involved with it (some occasional exception apart, such as worship music, “task which was tabooed to women.”)²⁶

If this image might reflect the common impression of a *show* of Ainu music today, the circumstances in the past must have been considerably different, and the early recordings of the NHK (1929) testify it. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation had an obvious interest in recording the music of the Ainu, but – unfortunately – academic scholars were not paying enough attention to follow up that initial endeavour, also probably because it was out of their range of interests – the term *ethnomusicology* was still far from being created.

The only scholars to commit themselves to studying Ainu culture were specialised in linguistics. Therefore, their interest aroused from the texts of the Ainu folklore and dialects, and they made inquiries according to the perspective of their academic subjects. People such as Batchelor, Hattori, Chiri Mashiho and Yukie, Kindaichi, Kubodera, to name just a few, worked extensively focusing on the text of epics and/or grammar. Donald L. Philippi, a disciple of Kubodera, regrets that “no research has been done about the techniques used by reciters in combining the words of the text with the melodic lines. In fact, practically nothing at all is known about the melodies used by the reciters. Very few recordings of Ainu epic songs are available.”²⁷ Ainu songs were studied and reported primarily for their verbal contents and not for their musical qualities, causing an unwitting but considerable loss for any further musical study. I assume that music without lyrics

(or where the text is irrelevant, such as onomatopoeias or patterns of a few repeated words) was not taken into consideration, hence awareness of it also decreased. That is why music was not a research subject in the first stages of the twentieth-century studies on Ainu culture.

Imekanu, who was a native speaker, by her death in 1961, had filled a total output of 124 volumes of Ainu epics consisting of more than 20,000 pages.²⁸ If we try to figure out from her work an imaginary match “Ainu language vs. Ainu music”, at a first glance music seems to be the loser, a *disadvantaged* art if compared with language that emerges much more prominently. But, an interesting witness at the turn of the last century, Bronislaw Pilsudski²⁹ wrote: “Their [Ainu] lore of eloquence, of speeches, and of *song*, is quite astonishing, and has already been remarked by several travellers”.³⁰ Pilsudski gives us a precious tip: Ainu tradition was one of the richest and most interesting oral cultures on both verbal communication and song. We easily can deduce that an equal wealth between the body of texts and music should exist.

The 1929 NHK recording features five short but quite elaborated polyphonic pieces sung by men. Around one minute each, they actually belong to the same *semantic family* with little (but interesting) differences. At that time, these might have sounded “just” intricately devised onomatopoeias, and the transcribers of epics “ignored” them as a consequence. But we can distinguish at least one more reason that left those pieces unnoticed: the problem of *classification* (or categorization), first and foremost the comprehension and assessment of that *phenomenon* from the perspective of the semiotics of culture and – above all – of the acoustical/musical perception. Our ears are just the beginning of an extremely complicated mental circuit that includes organic decoders, comparators, buffer stores and converters. On the importance to updating our analytical (and cognitive) criteria and adapt them to the *systems* we examine, Simha Arom in his important study on the instrumental polyphonies of Central Africa wrote: “Par définition, toute analyse d’un phénomène culturel est irrémédiablement un acte réducteur.

Il ne saurait en être autrement si l'on considère, avec Gilles-Gaston Granger, que "toute tentative pour connaître quelque chose de l'homme doit d'abord passer par une réduction de l'expérience à un système de marques corrélatives" (Granger 1967:2). Dans une telle perspective, la description pertinente du fonctionnement des polyphonies centrafricaines en tant que *systèmes* implique donc d'une part la mise au jour des marques corrélatives qui les fondent, de même que l'explicitation des critères en vertu desquels il est légitime de les considérer comme telles; la description exige d'autre part l'examen des différents plans et niveaux auxquels ces marques opèrent dans la réalité."³¹

The five polyphonic pieces sung by Ainu men are recorded (and so categorised) among "Shiryô" [material] – a way to avoid classification. At that time the concept of *polyphony*, which is alien to the Japanese traditional music, was defined only through western music, and the term was often used interchangeably with *counterpoint* (viz. the great Palestrinian and Bachian traditions), which is not properly correct since polyphony refers generally to music consisting of two or more distinct lines, while counterpoint refers to the compositional technique involved in the handling of these lines. Counterpoint is in fact distinctive of the *written* (and composed) music and, according to the philosopher Karl Popper, "astonishing achievement", "unique", and "decisive step" of the European culture.³² "Counterpoint is the most characteristic element in Western music and a major *distinguishing feature* between the music of the West and that of the Orient and primitive people."³³

Our present concept of *polyphony* should not be the same: it extricated itself from counterpoint during the twentieth-century and was widely expanded in the last decades.³⁴ Anton Webern's "What is the *musical material*? The *sound*."³⁵, which was written in 1932, took some decades before being well understood in the musical world, but it later caused an important change of course in musical research and creation. Furthermore, new subjects such as acoustic phenomenology and psychology of perception had given a radical turn to the study of ethnic musical systems. But in the 1920s, terms such as isorhythm,³⁶ cluster and ostinato

patterns shifting (morphological qualities we can distinguish in different extents in ethnic music) were far and away out of music scholars' concern. We cannot blame them if they could not categorise the intricately devised polyphonic textures of the Ainu, that anyway – and providentially – they recorded.

I have identified several reasons that brought the practice of the Ainu extended³⁷ polyphonies to an end. Let us focus on four main points.

1) During an informal talk, a man of Ainu ancestry mentioned that Ainu culture increasingly suffered from the mopes, obviously because of historical events: the expressions of *joy* and *social recreation* experienced the most the after-effects of confinement and restrictions until it reached a critical silence. If, as I suppose, the polyphonic textures sung by men were basically expression of happiness and skilful social entertainment³⁸ (a polyphony itself is a *collective* and *organized* form of art with a precise *hierarchy*), the opinion of that man would explain the disappearance of those polyphonies, and even suggest that an even more flourishing musical lore existed. (In this regard it would be interesting to study the relation between social hierarchy and polyphony among the Ainu).

2) Onomatopoeic polyphonies found worldwide prove that humanity enjoys the same *topics* over and over. While I was climbing Mount Shirayu from the side overlooking Lake Akan, the pieces I had listened to during the previous days came instinctively to my mind. There I understood many of the onomatopoeias embedded in Ainu music.³⁹ I just missed the frightening cries of wolves and bears, which I could not have faced with the same braveness as the Ainu hunters did in the past... I then realised that onomatopoeic textures inexorably lose importance outside the natural acoustic milieu where they generated. "In the Ainu tales it is gods and animals who speak in the first person as well as human beings, and the several worlds of sense-experience and imagination are *knit together*."⁴⁰ Urbanization takes over – eco-onomatopoeias lose their *humus* and fade away. For

the urbanised Ainu no *geographical reason* subsisted in the last century to *imitate* (and correspond with) the voice of nature (and gods!) so radically anymore.

3) In order to estimate an hypothetic range of difficulty of the Ainu music, from plain songs to polyphonic textures, once more we can make a similitude with epics: “while the shorter, less complex mythic epics could be memorised and sung easily by anyone, the memorisation of the lengthy heroic epics, with their specialised formulas of dictation and antiquated language, would require special skill and long preparation.”⁴¹ Similarly, to sing the five little Ainu polyphonies I found on the NHK recording, the performers need an adequate training and proficiency; not everybody is up to that task. That musical genre disproves the common idea that Ainu music can be generally sung by anybody: instead it advocates the theory that the Ainu acknowledged music skilfulness and education (these concepts must be evidently understood according to the social and cultural parameters of the Ainu). Because of their complexity and qualification, polyphonic textures are a *weak link* in the generation-by-generation chain, and susceptible to changes especially when not *written*; that is precisely the case of the Ainu polyphonies which, at the best of my knowledge, have never been transcribed and properly analysed.

Somehow a quantity of music often gets lost, particularly when belonging to an oral culture, because there remain so few people able to perform or receive it.

4) As I mentioned above, the misclassification of the extended polyphonies contributed to their *academic* oblivion and discouraged supplementary investigation and recollections.

Several further issues concerning these “Ainu extended polyphonies” remain to be discussed, and here again I must confine myself to dwelling upon only a few of the more compelling questions about this important aspect of Ainu music, which is a dramatic departure from traditional monophony or plain canons. - Which should be the proper way to transcribe those textures?⁴² - May we suppose

that *variations* in the polyphonic textures are a kind of *improvisation* over a *style*? - Do they lack textual/verbal implications (i.e. material transmitted exclusively as musical *data*)? - If not, which is the role of the language and its function? - How onomatopoeias (including timbres and articulations) encode the phonetic/referential signs? - Do parallelism with other Ainu songs exist?⁴³ - From who and when did the Ainu get to know this type of polyphony? - Did they created these *systems* and/or developed them on their own? - Can we recognize implicit links with Japanese music?⁴⁴ - Had the performers of these polyphonies to be arranged so to obtain any particular sound spatialization effect?⁴⁵ - Was any device used in order to modify the vocal timbre?⁴⁶ - Can we theorise that the extended polyphonies sprang up - or got influenced - from a practice of Ainu musical instruments (tonkori and mukhuri) and then adopted by vocals?⁴⁷ ...

Several other issues lie out of my competence, and probably the Ainu themselves during the last century might no longer have been able to furnish satisfactory explanations.⁴⁸

Anyway, there is no doubt that the five little polyphonies I have found go very much beyond the received model of *canonic form* commonly recognized as the limit of the Ainu musical complexity. These devised textures, in which the vocal lines (three or more layers) overlap in rapid succession, produce an acoustic illusion that comes alive with a universe of onomatopoeias – in this case it would be better to say a forest with all its organic and metaphysical implications: “shouts and refrains – which they may be considered as development of imitations of cries and growls⁴⁹ of wild animals which primitive people worshipped in primitive times.”⁵⁰ Sense-experience and imagination are acoustically interweaved with a musical logic and a formal organization. Transcending the threshold at which every single voice can be perceived separately, the Ainu extended polyphonies are part of *systems* that “seem culturally to point north rather than south or west”⁵¹. Fascinating are in this regard the studies on the Repunkur (the people of the sea) and the Okhotsk culture.⁵²

Finally and once more, we can apply to the Ainu music the considerations

that Donald Philippi makes about their epics: "Like the wood carvings made by the Ainu men and the weaving and embroidery done by the women, the oral literature shows high aesthetic qualities and has a long history of development obviously going back over many centuries."⁵³

Is a new cultural creative approach to the music of the Ainu achievable?

Non-western music has always aroused the curiosity of western composers. From the *Alla turca* [in the Turkish manner] style often used by the classics to Debussy's assimilation of gamelan orchestra, in the last century Western composers have increasingly come into contact with, in particular, the music of India, Bali and Japan. The most recent borderless influences of ethnic cultures over the contemporary art are hard to be mapped, and even harder it is sometimes to pass a judgement on their outcomes.

Among its many creative impacts on western culture, ethnic art was a distinct influence on contemporary music in Europe and America, with radically different achievements.

In America this trend developed under the name of minimalist music, originating in New York City from the late 1960s. A group of composers – Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Cornelius Cardew, and Frederic Rzewski – was influenced by the music of various ethnic and exotic regions, including India, Bali and West Africa. Compositions inspired by ethnic music incorporated elements from Indian Ragas, African drumming, Balinese gamelan, Middle Eastern chanting, and American Indian dances. In minimalist music, the refusal of traditional form and harmony goes well with the acquirement of non-western elements, from where composers extract simple harmonic or melodic patterns and highlight them through repetition. Minimalist composers also exclude the treatment of development in favour of explorations of timbre and rhythm, largely unfamiliar to western audience. The American minimalist school reject the characteristic complexity of mid-20th-century musical structures, preferring to create small

variations and expansions or contractions to the basic motivic elements (i.e. a single chord, a brief musical motif, a spoken exclamation).

On the opposite side of the minimalist thought, composers like György Ligeti (*1923) looked out over the ethnic traditions, from the cutting edge of European music, to enhance and extract embedded complexity and peculiarities. Ligeti's musical language tends to adapt the western instrumentation to the issues of non-western music (i.e. harmonic and inharmonic fields, polyphonies and polyrhythms). Likewise, Karlheinz Stockhausen (*1928) did not avoid complexity in his attempt to exploit the potentialities of the Japanese performing arts and Buddhist music. His endeavour and subjective considerations flourished in new compositional ideas – morphological processes and time issues – with cosmological connotations, emblematic of Ethnic cultures, which he merged to his musical creation.

From both perspectives, American and European, ethnic music well fits to be a mine of inspiration and musical material to be exploited.⁵⁴

I have no confirmed report that avant-garde composers ever focused their attention on the Ainu traditional music,⁵⁵ probably because of the little attention musical research has always paid to it.

As a composer myself, I have been intrigued by the re-discovery of the Ainu extended polyphonies – as well as the study of other morphological features of the Ainu monophonic music. I will present an exhaustive account of my creative ideas on the Ainu music for a subsequent article. Here I briefly give some considerations that developed directly out of the comparative analysis I did between Ainu music and contemporary composition.

When we talk about creativity and ethnic cultures a problem of demarcation exists. Disorientation and misunderstandings often arise. In a typical instance, during my research in Hokkaido, whenever I told to people that I am a *contemporary music* composer interested in Ainu music, they took me for a *pop music* composer. Astonished, I wondered why. Actually, a number of musicians

in Hokkaido (it seems they claim to be of Ainu ancestry) are creating “new Ainu music” by mixing together Ainu tunes and pop styles such as jazz, reggae, new-age and so forth (in some case this music is played with “Ainu instruments”). Some musicians reshape Ainu tunes, so as to sound karaoke-like songs, or invent *pseudo*-Ainu melodies for public performances or recordings. Obviously, the remarkable peculiarities of the authentic music of the Ainu examined above have been jettisoned. Artistic results have scarce connection with the original Ainu culture, since they are designed to be commoditized for tourism. In Lake Akan I intentionally inquired about recordings of Ainu music: then, commercial CDs made by Ainu (?) musicians playing saxophones, keyboards and so on, were constantly showed to me. A souvenir shop owner told me that the “people of Ainu ancestry” do not like anymore the *old* Ainu songs, which are performed nowadays only for touristic consumption, and recommended me some *cool* CD of the “new Ainu generation” ...

Probably this phenomenon has issued from social problems. Lisa Hiwasaki, in her analysis about Ainu identity notes that “tourism has given rise to creative responses in the Ainu culture, influencing its cultural development” and “attention gained through tourism can be focused on the urgent political and social issues facing the Ainu today.”⁵⁶

While there would be no severe harm if some musician *recreate* a fanciful new Ainu music to facilitate social attention, the fact that it turns out to be a musical *product* offered to tourists instead of the “less popular” *Ainu old music* (so in preference to the genuine tradition) is a critical misrepresentation. Such practice if broadly accepted might seriously endanger the image of Ainu ethnic culture.

Having said that, the reader can gather how my artistic stance towards the application of new creative criteria to ethnic music (Ainu music in this case) is very different. Although I don't ignore *inspiration*, I advocate a cultural and intellectual approach to artistic creation. Personally, when I embark on a new composition related to traditional or ethnic music, I value above all the respect of

the morphology of the musical culture I'm approaching, which includes its sound peculiarities as straight expression of that people's tradition and sensitivity. By way of example, I'm at present working on some monophonic Ainu songs with the aim to magnify their underlying peculiarities: my artistic concept springs from the idea that an original acoustic profile can be the source for computer elaboration and morphological shaping. A further project will involve the Ainu extended polyphonies I discovered and Ainu instrumental music.

Modern approaches to the study of ethnic cultures and the use of ethnic music elements in contemporary composition are significant for our civilization, as they combine knowledge of traditions with living creative imagination. In this respect, I believe that Ainu music has great potentialities to be approached from creative perspectives, and Ainu traditional culture can therefore contribute to a sensible growth of human art.

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- 1 Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inspiration
 - 2 Donald L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, 1979, foreword by G. Snyder, vii.
 - 3 "At present traditional Ainu culture, including language, customs and manners, remain only as memories among a small number of Ainu elders. A similar change has also taken place with their folk music, which is now on the verge of extinction as the old Ainus gradually pass away". 日本放送協会、アイヌ伝統音楽、S40 [NHK, Ainu traditional music, 1965, explanations written by Sarashina Genzo, transcriptions by Tanimoto Kazuyuki and Matsuda Yuki], p. 565.
 - 4 Everybody can easily figure out how awful would be a composition of Mozart if played with an altered rhythm, performed on instruments having improper timbre and subtly distorted pitches... We ought to treat with no less consideration ethnic music from an acoustic/musical point of view.
 - 5 "Staff notation is ill-equipped to cope with non-Western scales and tunings, with music to which the idea of the "note" (a stable, sustained pitch) is foreign, or with music whose subtlety lies as much in delicate gradations of volume or timbre as in pitch and rhythm.", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Adaptation to non-European

music, *from* musical notation.

- 6 日本放送協会、アイヌ伝統音楽、S40, p. 565.
- 7 Béla Bartók, the famous Hungarian composer, tackled this problem in the first part of last century, when he had to transcribe Serbo-Croatian and Romanian folk songs; not by chance, he was a composer and pianist, as well as a researcher of ethnomusicology, and as such sensitive to methods that can reveal a high level of interpretation by the performer. Other transcribers, as an alternative of staff notation, have used graph paper to draw a curve of pitch against time. A more complex use of staff notation includes the advanced notational techniques, a range of supplementary symbols developed by the experimental composition.
- 8 “Ainu folk songs are often sung with a great many rhythmic variations of a very unstable musical interval. This is not a melisma as an important element of the rhythmic line, but it has such character as to be considered “trembling voice” arising from individual peculiarities of singing. Therefore, in transcribing Ainu folk songs, such minute variations were omitted and only the basic sounds are recorded”. Ibid., p. 565.

Though the theory of *individual peculiarities* plays an important role in analysing ethnic music (incidentally, which kind of musical performance is not affect by the *individual peculiarities* we generally call *interpretation?*), it is not sufficient in order to rationalize the fine fluctuations of value we have to cope with. Vocal nuances are often a composite imitation of natural sounds, a physical adjustment/adaptation to the acoustic of the local aural environment.

- 9 [the bourgeois taste].
- 10 Donald L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, 1979, p. 33.
- 11 Details can be found below in the footnote 49 and correlated paragraph.
- 12 夷 [savage, barbarian]
- 13 Japanese traditional music as well had suffered a similar event, when western music arrived in Japan about a hundred years ago. Several Japanese traditional musicians started to write pieces (even sonatas and concertos) on Japanese instruments, which are not tempered, so the European called the result “à la japonaise” . Vocal music and some instruments (e.g. the koto and shakuhachi) were deeply affected by that phenomenon, while other instruments kept on playing more or less *uncontaminated*. This was the case of the biwa, which is unsuitable to be tuned in equal temperament (on a biwa a C major chord does not sound at all like a C major because of the distinctive attribute of the biwa’s harmonics: the notes C-E-G are quite different, which obliges one to make a different kind of music). For that reason biwa was near to fall into disuse. Tanaka Yukio, successor of Tsuruta Kinshi, told me that in the past only one Satsuma biwa-maker was active in all Japan.

- 14 日本放送協会、アイヌ伝統音楽、S40, p. 565.
- 15 Britannica Encyclopaedia, Music before and through the Nara period, *from* East Asian arts.
- 16 Kodama Sakuzaemon, Ainu minzoku shi, vol. 1, p.6.
- 17 Donald L. Philippi, Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans, 1979, p. 3.
“During the 1920s and 1930s there were still many Ainu who had been alive during the last half of the nineteenth-century, when the traditional life was maintained, and the Ainu language was still spoken in many homes. There were during the 1920s and 1930s many excellent folklore reciters. However, even then it was being predicted that the Ainu language would die completely within a few decades. By the 1940s the native culture was virtually at its last gasp.”, Ibid., p. 15.
- 18 Note: I do my best to provide good information in this chapter. However, since some information was drawn almost completely from other sources, I cannot be responsible for their accuracy.
- 19 Modern-day icons include the sounds that accompany the start-up of Windows or Mac.
- 20 An LP issued by NHK in 1938 should exist and contain the same or similar recordings I listen in to the open reel tapes. At present, I have not yet verified this information or compared the recordings.
- 21 The history of the Ainu is, as often happened to minorities, a record of appalling events, having some similarities with the native Americans in the United States. Our impressions are derived from a study of a past tradition that was not without difficulties handed down from father to son.
- 22 The term *authentic* is here used as related to or denoting an expressively appropriate and significant form originated by a mode of human life.
- 23 The word Gestalt is used in modern German to mean the way a thing has been gestellt; i.e., “placed,” or “put together.” There is no exact equivalent in English. “Form” and “shape” are the usual translations; in psychology the word is often rendered “pattern” or “configuration.”
- 24 A philosophical approach to the aesthetic object stating that *objets trouvés* are artworks since the artist’s perception of them as such make them so. In my instance, a Hegelian form/content peculiarity nonetheless subsists and therefore upgrades the content of my evaluation. Furthermore, I don’t assert that the *objet trouvé* (and so this recording) is a work of art itself, but I consider the *objet trouvé* as germinal and not conclusive.
- 25 On the issues of transcription and notation I have already talk in the previous chapter.
- 26 Donald L. Philippi, Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans, 1979, p. 44.

- 27 Ibid., p. 40.
- 28 Kindaichi Kyôtsuke, *Ainu jojishi yukara shu*, vol. 3, p. 2.
- 29 Bronislaw Pilsudski was a Pole who spent several years in Sakhalin and the Maritime Region. He made important studies of the Sakhalin Ainu language and folklore. He also made a trip to Hokkaido in 1903.
- 30 B. Pilsudski, *Materials for the Study of the Ainu Language and Folklore*, 1912, p. X.
- 31 Simha Arom, *Polyphonies et Polyrythmies Instrumentales d'Afrique Centrale*, 1985, vol. 2, p. 385. [By definition, any analysis of a cultural phenomenon is irremediably a reducing act. It would not be differently if we consider Gilles-Gaston Granger's statement: "any attempt to know something of the man must initially pass by a reduction of the experience to a system of correlative marks" (Granger 1967:2). From such a point of view, the relevant description of the operation of the Central African polyphonies as *systems* as a result, implies on the one hand the setting at the updating of the correlative marks which found them, as well as the clarification of the criteria in virtue of which it is legitimate to regard them as such; description requires in addition the examination of the various scheme and levels to which these marks operate in reality.]
- 32 Popper's writings on music are especially important to outline the development of the European musical evolution and modern mindset. Karl Popper, *Unended Quest; An Intellectual Autobiography*, 1976, cap. 11-14.
- 33 *Britannica Encyclopaedia*, counterpoint.
- 34 Compositions of Béla Bartok and György Ligeti are especially important to understand the development of the idea of polyphony along the twentieth-century.
- 35 Anton Webern, *Der Weg zur Neuen Musik*, 1960, chap. 1.
- 36 Term coined around 1900 by the German musicologist Friedrich Ludwig.
- 37 I here use the word *extended* to distinguish these polyphonic textures from the widely known two-voice polyphonies and simple canons.
- 38 "Massive acculturation eloquence was regarded by the Ainu as one of the chief mainly virtues." D.L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, 1979, p. 21.
- 39 Culture does not consist only in knowing *things* but primarily in a direct experience. In Lake Akan I started intuitively a field research on the musical intervals of the Ainu music comparing them with that natural *soundscape* (such as birds' chant, cicadas' panning effect, etc.).
- 40 Donald L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, 1979, foreword by G. Snyder, vii.
- 41 Ibid., p. 25.
- 42 Paradoxically, to transcribe a piece of Bach would be easier, or at least more convenient, because Bach's music presupposes an established style born in and

- from the musical writing framework.
- 43 Parallelism is often constructed among the Ainu songs, and I'm almost sure it is also the case of polyphonies. I do hope to get the chance someday to enrich the present research with additional results, notably with an important musical analysis in the specific of the morphology of the extended polyphonies, which as far as I know, has never been made.
- 44 A form of 間の手掛け声 ("ainote kakegoe"), rhythmically constrained, can be constantly traced in the looped *hoquetus*-like patterns of these polyphonies. Though it might not be derived directly from Japan - we can also suppose the reverse could be true - it is a clear link with the Japanese traditional music.
- 45 From the monoaural recordings hard is to understand if a sound spatialization subsists. Anyway, a perceptible gradation of the volume and balance of the voices brings me to consider this issue.
- 46 e.g. "Ainu throat game performers create strange effects by singing into each other's mouths." William P. Malm, *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments*, 2000, p. 257 (pls. 82).
- 47 I have formulated this theory after the study of the Ainu instrumental music from the early recordings; in particular the pieces for two of a kind contain important elements to support this theory, i.e. the characteristic mukhuri's phase shifting effect with interpolation of sudden asymmetric figures, and the tonkori's interlocking. A process of *agglutination* of diverse independent elements, both vocal and instrumental, could be the *core* of the extended polyphonies. Unfortunately only a few recordings of instrumental music are left - the recent *new-age*-like "revival" of these instruments which affects mostly the repertoire for tonkori has specifically very little to do with the original versions.
- 48 Donald L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, 1979, p. 9.
- 49 The loud belch brought up in the middle of the third polyphony sounds, deliberately or not, as an *appropriate* onomatopoeia in the musical framework (in a movie it would be called "sound-effect").
- 50 日本放送協会、アイヌ伝統音楽、S40, p. 565.
- 51 Britannica Encyclopaedia, Music before and through the Nara period, *from* East Asian arts.
It is known that the Ainu culture has some correspondence with the Inuit and other peoples of Eastern Siberia.
- 52 Donald L. Philippi, *Songs of Gods, Songs of Humans*, 1979, pp. 40-44.
- 53 Ibid., p. 50.
- 54 *Use* doesn't automatically mean *abuse*.
- 55 Donald Philippi - remembered more for his book translations of Japanese texts

such as the Kojiki, the Norito, and the Ainu Epics (his text is often quoted in this essay) – in 1981 put out under the pseudonym of Slava Ranko one electronic music record titled **Arctic Hysteria**. I was told that the album often alludes to Cage and Eno, minimalism and world-music. It seems Philippi made many hours of tape music. He was for sure familiar with the music of the Ainu, but I don't know if that is also expressly referenced into his recordings. I'm at present trying to gather more information on this subject.

- 56 Lisa Hiwasaki, *Ethnic tourism in Hokkaido and the shaping of Ainu identity*, 2000.