

Bricolage in the Music of Elena Kats-Chernin

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The mature output of Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin exhibits a proclivity for referencing a variety of sources including Klezmer, composers of the western canon and jazz. In pieces such as *The Schubert Blues* and *Iphis*, fragments appropriated from pre-existing works and genres (referred to here as 'found objects') are juxtaposed with one another and integrated into a new structural whole. When I interviewed Kats-Chernin in 1998, I asked her about parody, appropriation and the absurd in music. Since that time my perspective of the composer's work has shifted from the frame of parody to that of *bricolage*. It was only a few months ago when I re-read my transcript of the interview that I was struck by how Kats-Chernin's words resonate with my most recent analytical viewpoint. Significantly, her comments highlight the necessity for a single term to denote the type of appropriation evident in her output. I would argue that the term *bricolage* meets this need.

Bricolage is a term that has been used widely in the fields of anthropology, literary criticism, cultural studies and, indeed, music. It is generally accepted that Claude Lévi-Strauss was the first to use the term in his account of myth creation in totemic cultures.¹ A theorist in the field of structural anthropology, Lévi-Strauss notes that in French a *bricoleur* is 'someone who works with his hands and uses devious means [in order to complete the task at hand] compared to those of a craftsman.'² The *Collins Robert French Concise Dictionary* defines *bricolage* as 'odd jobs' or 'tinkering about.' Weidenfeld and Nicolson, translators of *The Savage Mind*, note that there is no term in the English vocabulary that is equivalent to *bricoleur*. They offer the expression 'Jack of all trades' as a close relation, but draw a distinction between this and the 'English 'odd job man,' or handyman.'³ The former of these implies a lack of commitment to any particular area of specialisation. The latter, I would argue, is more restricted in its definition, in that a handyman is generally one who carries out a range of domestic maintenance and repairs.⁴

¹ Examples of totemic cultures are the Thompson River Indians, the *Iroquois*, and the *Yukhagir*. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (1966; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972).

² Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* 16-17.

³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* 17.

⁴ Indeed, in French, *bricolage* is used often in this sense. But Michel Butor, a French writer who in his work blurs the boundaries of literature and painting, describes this as 'the vulgar aspect of *bricolage*.' He states: 'Most men are *bricoleurs*. To tinker about [*bricoler*], they use the tools which are furnished them by department store chains...The other level is the invention of material. This is what I would like to call the gathering of significant objects, the recovery of what has been eliminated, thrown out...This is the phenomenon of the quest for lost objects, for the disdained object to which we will give a new life and a new dignity; we will be forced to look at it in a different way.' See Martine Reid, 'Bricolage: An Interview with Michel Butor,' trans. Noah Guyrn, *Yale French Studies* 84 (1994): 26.

A *bricoleur* tends to collect elements 'on the principle that "they might always come in handy."⁵ Just like a 'Jack of all trades,' the *bricoleur* employs any of the elements that he or she has acquired over time to complete the task at hand. This may involve bending or even breaking the 'rules' in which a particular element is bound. These are the 'devious means' as described by Lévi-Strauss.

Lévi-Strauss elaborates upon how a *bricoleur* draws his or her material from the surrounding environment:

His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.⁶

Genette adopts the term *bricolage* in his discussion of structuralism in literary criticism. He identifies the function of a critic with that of a *bricoleur*, explaining that he/she constructs new discourse from the 'debris' of pre-existing literary endeavours.⁷ That is, from a structuralist perspective the critic pulls apart literary works into their smaller component parts, whether these be quotations, themes, or turns of phrase, and rearranges these elements within the context of new theory. Of course, as stated by Lévi-Strauss, the *bricoleur* is by very nature limited in the materials that he or she works with. In the case of the critic, he/she is restricted to the existing body of literary discourse.⁸ Indeed, my role as a musical analyst, prising out quotations of Kats-Chernin's works and piecing them together in order to support my theory, has much in common with the function of a literary critic. Each of us constructs new meaning from a pre-existing, finite 'universe' of signs.⁹

Bricolage has also been adopted by scholars in the field of cultural studies. John Clarke, in his work on post-war youth subcultures, emphasises the role of an object's history in the generation of new meaning. He describes the process of *bricolage* in semiotic terms:

Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and, within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the *bricoleur* re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse,

⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* 18.

⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* 17.

⁷ Gérard Genette, 'Structuralism and Literary Criticism,' *Modern Criticism and Theory*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1962), ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) 64.

⁸ Genette, 'Structuralism and Literary Criticism' 64.

⁹ Genette, 'Structuralism and Literary Criticism' 65. In regard to the creation of new meaning, Jean Duffy writes: 'Even as he acknowledges the limits of his materials, the *bricoleur* produces new patterns, whose semantic multivalence springs from the relationships between the parts and cannot be reduced to the significance of the sum of the parts' ('Cultural autobiography and *bricolage*: Claude Simon and Robert Rauschenberg,' *Word and Image*, 13.1 [January-March 1997]: 92). He argues that the processes of French author Claude Simon resemble those of a *bricoleur*: 'he is drawing upon pre-existing materials and combining these elements into new meaningful arrangements' (92). Often the materials used by Simon are memories of his own life experience. Duffy adds that Simon's work is littered with 'literary, pictorial, mythological, historical and religious' references (93).

using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when the object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed.¹⁰

There is for all intents and purposes a range of meanings, or a discourse, to which an object belongs. The *bricoleur* tends to place a found object in a context that resides outside pre-existing discourse. That is to say, he/she uses the significant fragment in a way that is unfamiliar to an observer's understanding of it, as the new application has no historical precedent. Tension is created between the new context and the pre-existing identity of the found object. This tension develops into new discourse, as described by Clarke.

A contemporary example of subcultural *bricolage* is found in rock music fashion of the late 1980s/early 1990s. Lead guitarist of the group Guns n' Roses, Slash, turned the top hat into a symbol of rebellion. On the subject of his top hat, Slash is reported to have said:

Listen, I'm not saying I was the first rock'n'roller to wear a top hat onstage. But look, man, CC [DeVille, Poison guitarist] is the type of guy who probably didn't even know what a top hat was until he saw me wearing one. You know, I caught up with him one night in the Rainbow, and I told him quietly, 'If I ever see you wearing a top hat onstage again I'm gonna shoot you...' I tell ya, he freaked, man! And I mean, I don't own a gun...wouldn't know how to use one if I did. And I'm really not a violent guy at all. I just felt something had to be said. Sometimes you gotta draw the line for people.¹¹

In this quote, Slash conveys his deep sense of association with the top hat. With each public wearing,¹² he invests more of himself (his image and reputation) into this object, tacitly endorsing it as a symbol of his (public) identity. Historically, men have worn top hats with suits at formal occasions. They came to be emblems of respectability, wealth and gentlemanly status. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Darcy epitomises all things gentlemanly.¹³ His wearing the top hat reinforces dominant and historically constructed associations with status and chivalry. However, worn by a 'bad boy' rock musician who embodies everything that is anti-establishment and 'low-life,' the top hat is enriched with a new layer of meaning. It is turned into a site for the contestation of class, morals and status. In the same way that the 'Teddy Boys' of the 1950s over-turned the 'Edwardian Look' by combining it with unrelated accessories such as the 'bootlace tie' and 'brothel-creepers,' so too Slash appropriated an accessory associated with the upper class and made it his own, filling the object with the concept of rebellion, and in turn expressing opposition to the dominant class. As a result, associations of sex, drugs and leather-clad masculinity are mapped onto one's inherited understanding of this significant object.

In terms of music, *bricolage* can describe the appropriation of physical items from the immediate environment for use as sound-producers, as well as the incorporation of less tangible elements in the form of quotation and allusion to pre-existing works or styles. In an article

¹⁰ John Clarke, 'Style,' *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed S. Hall and T. Jefferson (London: Hutchinson, 1976) 177.

¹¹ Mark Futterford, *In Their Own Words: Guns n' Roses* (London: Omnibus Press, 1993) 56.

¹² For example, Slash is shown wearing his top hat in video clips for *Sweet Child O' Mine*, *Paradise City*, *Welcome to the Jungle* and *November Rain*.

¹³ *Pride and Prejudice* was made into a serial for television by the BBC in 1995.

humorously entitled 'Bricolage: There's a Twang in Your Trash,' R. Murray Schafer considers the potential for 'junk sound sculptures' (the musical version of Duchamp's 'ready made'¹⁴) to give old objects a new lease on life.¹⁵ For example, Schafer built a large structure from discarded pieces of farming equipment. There was a part from a cream separator, a plate from a disc, a horse-tooth rake, an old chair frame, suspended brass tubes, springs and nails. To achieve the sound he desired, Schafer located the nodes on the metal objects. He then hung the objects with wire connected to their nodal points so that when struck they would resonate. The items were positioned in a way that would allow them to brush against one another when the giant 'mobile' was put into motion. This is a very clear example of *bricolage*. The composer appropriated objects from his immediate environment and used them in a way that was not originally intended. Interestingly, Schafer made music from materials that in their original function, he argues, would have generated 'noise pollution'.¹⁶

The second form of musical *bricolage* involves quotation and paraphrase. I would argue that *bricolage* is a hallmark of postmodernism. It is important to outline here my own understanding of this often debated term, which I see as being characterised by self-reflexive appropriation and an ostensible disregard for the borders of extant categories. The postmodern composer frequently draws from the past, whether the element be tonality, a stylistic gesture, or indeed, literal quotation. He/she re-interprets the past and explores 'old territories' to create new spaces. Thomas disputes the argument that postmodern composers aim simply to revitalise or 'salvage' musics of the past.¹⁷ Rather, there is a strong tendency in their works to overturn all historical significance of such found objects. It must not be thought, however, that overturning the pre-existing meaning of a sign is the same as wiping it out altogether. For as others (such as Clarke) have noted, the listener can only recognise the transformation of a reference if, and only if, he or she is first able to conceive of its history. Indeed, Thomas reinforces the richness that the postmodern process of *bricolage* brings to a work, due to the pre-existing significance of quoted material. In Thomas's own words:

the material of postmodernism refers to the whole history of musical signs, both the eroded historical-cultural residue of its original contexts and also the new meanings which the composer, in recontextualising it, assigns it.¹⁸

In politico-cultural terms, the project of postmodernism is to highlight the constructedness of received cultural norms (such as 'history,' 'gender' and 'race') all of which are bound up with systems of power and otherwise run the risk of being taken for granted. In her convincing account of postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon posits a 'paradoxical' binarism of 'complicity and critique',¹⁹ complicity with 'power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot

¹⁴ An example of a readymade is Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) in which two found objects, a bicycle wheel and a wooden stool, are attached to each other. The fusion of these two otherwise unrelated items generates new meaning.

¹⁵ R. Murray Schafer, 'Bricolage: There's a Twang in Your Trash,' *Music Educators Journal* 66.7 (March 1980) 32-7.

¹⁶ Schafer, 'Bricolage' 35.

¹⁷ Gavin Thomas, 'Musica e musica,' *Musical Times* 137.1 (January 1996):13.

¹⁸ Thomas, 'Musica e musica' 13.

¹⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989) 11.

escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine.²⁰ To quote further from Hutcheon:

It [postmodernism] is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or 'subvert,' and, the mode therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic—or even 'ironic'—one.²¹

Hutcheon's model of 'complicity and critique' is applicable to the music of Elena Kats-Chernin. There is a sense in works such as *The Schubert Blues* and *Iphis* of basking in the aesthetic 'glow' of inherited musics, but in a way which unsettles a listener's taken-for-granted associations with those found objects. *Bricolage*, a mode of postmodernism, functions to bring into question pre-existing musical 'norms.'

On the subject of American music, Garry E. Clarke notes that the rise of postmodernism was marked by a revival of tonality and cites the minimalism of Philip Glass as but one example.²² Hutcheon reinforces the construction of minimalism as postmodern and adds to this broad category the music of Lukas Foss and Luciano Berio for their considerably ironic references to tonality.²³ Both scholars draw attention to the postmodern pre-occupation with reaching an audience. In words that suggest a reaction against the arguments of Milton Babbitt,²⁴ Clarke writes: 'Composers made *communication* an important priority and did care if the audience listened.'²⁵

The exchange between James Koehne and Warren Burt in volumes 44 and 45 of *Meanjin* exemplifies the contestability of issues surrounding modernism and postmodernism.²⁶ Koehne draws attention to what he perceives as an exodus from the *avant garde* condition in the 1980s. He references the music of Arvo Pärt, Toru Takemitsu, John Adams, Steve Reich and, in particular, Richard Meale. In his response, Burt questions Koehne's representation of the *avant garde* as a musical identity. His main complaint appears to be Koehne's narrow use of the expression, highlighting the 'confusion...caused by the use of terms which describe both musical styles and attitudes towards them.'²⁷ In a later article Burt highlights the extremes to which one can apply postmodernism to music, drawing analogies between 1960s minimalism and postmodern dance and sculpture, and between Iannis Xenakis and postmodern architecture. He reinforces the arguments of Hutcheon, asserting that appropriation should only be considered postmodern when it is 'political/social' in tenor.²⁸ Benjamin Thorn

²⁰ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 4.

²¹ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 1.

²² Garry E. Clarke, 'Music,' in Stanley Trachtenberg, ed., *The Postmodern Moment: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovations in the Arts* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985) 162.

²³ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 9.

²⁴ Clarke lists Babbitt's article, first printed in 1958 in *High Fidelity* under a title not intended by the author, 'Who Cares If You Listen?' *High Fidelity* 8 (February 1958): 38-40, 126-27.

²⁵ Clarke, 'Music' 162.

²⁶ *Meanjin* 44.3: 397-404; *Meanjin* 45.1: 129-36; 137-40.

²⁷ *Meanjin* 45.1: 130. Burt also takes issue with the conception that *avant garde* composers were not concerned with audience communication. In a footnote he sets out his interpretation of Babbitt's article (printed in *High Fidelity* 8), asserting that the composer was misrepresented by the journal's use of the title 'Who Cares If You Listen?'

²⁸ Warren Burt, 'Essay on Postmodernism,' *Sounds Australian* 33 (Autumn 1992): 22.

problematizes the notion of an 'unambiguous' postmodern music,²⁹ emphasising that most postmodern compositions and performances exhibit at least some 'impeccable modernist antecedents.'³⁰ Furthermore, he disputes the postmodern trait of 'appropriation and citation' on the basis of its 'long tradition within music.'³¹ I would question Thorn's proposition that the *Hooked On Classics* records of the 1980s (Thorn cites J.S. Bach's *Minuet in G* set to a 4/4 rock beat) constitute instances of postmodern appropriation, for, in accordance with the arguments of Hutcheon, the recontextualisation here lacks the necessary ingredient of critique.³²

There has of course been much debate in recent decades concerning issues of appropriation in its many forms. Composers who reference the music of non-western cultures have been accused of exploitation, as discussed by Neil Currie.³³ His definition of appropriation is particularly open, regarding all music as having 'its origin in sound that is external and so all composition commences with appropriation.'³⁴ He notes that structures, too, can be referenced from extra-musical sources, such as landscape and literature (citing the music of Peter Sculthorpe and Raffaele Marcellino as examples).

At this point it is necessary to clarify the relationship between *bricolage*, parody and pastiche. There are two questions that pose something of a dilemma: (i) can all quotation be described as *bricolage*?; and (ii) are the terms *bricolage* and parody interchangeable? It is not my intention to limit the boundaries of the aforementioned categories. Rather, I aim to provide a context for *bricolage* and most importantly, to demonstrate the potential usefulness of this term. Neither parody nor pastiche adequately describe the processes employed by Elena Kats-Chernin.

Parody may be defined in several ways. Broadly speaking, it can mean 'humorous exaggerated imitation of author'³⁵(caricature), or 'a form of satirical criticism.'³⁶ In the discipline of music, parody manifests itself in different ways. It can either be serious or humorous in tone. In the case of serious parody, the author tries to align his or her own material with the source. The signification of the found object is valued and incorporated into the new work; its original meaning is revered. Regarding parody and *contrafactum*, Robert Falck writes:

When a melody or a whole composition is reused, altered or unaltered, the result is a parody or a *contrafactum*...If the borrower is a poet or musician who lived before about 1500, what is produced is likely to be called a *contrafactum*, if an eighteenth-century musician is the borrower, it is usually called parody.³⁷

²⁹ Benjamin Thorn, 'Why Postmodern Music Is Impossible,' *Sounds Australian* 33 (Autumn 1992): 42.

³⁰ Thorn, 'Why Postmodern Music' 41.

³¹ Thorn, 'Why Postmodern Music' 41.

³² Hutcheon disputes Baudrillard's assertion that television represents a 'paradigmatic form of postmodern signification,' for the reason of its 'unproblematized reliance on realistic narrative and transparent representational conventions.' She describes it as 'pure commodified complicity, without the critique needed to define the postmodern paradox' (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 10).

³³ Neil Currie, 'Issues in the Appropriation of Sources for Musical Composition,' *Sounds Australian* 30 (Winter 1991):15-18.

³⁴ Currie, 'Issues in the Appropriation' 15.

³⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, ed. R.E. Allen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 534.

³⁶ 'Parody,' *Encyclopædia Britannica*, ed. Warren E. Preece (Chicago: Benton, 1974) VII, 768.

³⁷ Robert Falck, 'Parody and Contrafactum: A Terminological Clarification,' *The Musical Quarterly* 65.1 (January 1979): 1-2.

Falck proceeds to shed light on the historical application of these terms. Whilst both pertain to the substitution of texts in pre-existing songs, parody has been used more broadly in recent times to connote 'ridicule',³⁸ and *contrafactum* is most likely a 'neologism'.³⁹ There is some debate, however, over the propriety of using the term parody to describe twentieth century musical practices. Michael Tilmouth and Richard Sherr note that the term was not used in connection with music until the late sixteenth century, and borrowing in the Renaissance period was characterised by the incorporation of 'the whole substance of the source'.⁴⁰ In particular, Tilmouth and Sherr problematise the nature of borrowing by Stravinsky⁴¹ and Maxwell Davies, stating that:

A creative engagement with earlier music, as opposed to mere pastiche, has been one of the concerns of 20th-century music. But again, works like Stravinsky's *The Fairy's Kiss* and *Pulcinella*, though exhibiting the kind of interaction of composer and model that was characteristic of 16th-century parody, at the same time indulge a stylistic dichotomy far removed from it. The remoteness in style of the model from that of the idiom in which it is placed in works like Peter Maxwell Davies's Taverner fantasias, which represent a preoccupation with music based on borrowed material, similarly engenders a conflict foreign to the total synthesis that was the aim of 16th-century parody.⁴²

In the case of satirical parody, rather than maintaining the integrity of the borrowed gesture, the composer makes use of it in such a way as to ridicule a particular work, composer or style of composing.⁴³ For example, in the fourth movement of *Concerto for Orchestra*, Bartók satirises the march from Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony*. According to Robert Winter the Russian composer's popularity was a source of irritation to Bartók. Shostakovich's theme is quoted merely in passing, with deliberately no attempt to re-create the original context of the reference. Compounding the sense of ridicule is the sudden 'interruption' and subsequent 'dismissal' of the march theme.⁴⁴ Satirical parody and *bricolage* are similar insofar as both processes function to undermine the authority and to disrupt the integrity of the original source. There is, however, an important difference between the two. Firstly, I would argue that *bricolage* does not have to be satirical or humorous. Secondly, *bricolage* tends to permeate entire works. That is to say, the *bricoleur* weaves found objects into the texture of a piece so as to create a rich and continuous fabric. Satirical parody, on the other hand, may be evident merely in isolated sections of a piece, as in the fourth movement of Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*.

³⁸ Falck, 'Parody and Contrafactum' 3.

³⁹ Falck, 'Parody and Contrafactum' 18.

⁴⁰ Michael Tilmouth and Richard Sherr, 'Parody (I)', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Laura Macey, 2 August 2001, <<http://www.grovemusic.com/grovemusic/home>>.

⁴¹ In *Pulcinella*, Stravinsky undertakes appropriation of eighteenth-century style, as well as the music of Pergolesi. Composition of the *Twelve Trio Sonatas* has since been attributed to Domenico Gallo (Helmut Hucke & Dale E. Monson, 'Pergolesi, Giovanni Battista', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Laura Macey, 17 August 2001, <<http://www.grovemusic.com/grovemusic/home>>).

⁴² Tilmouth and Sherr, 'Parody (I)'.

⁴³ Michael Tilmouth, 'Parody (II)', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Laura Macey, 17 August 2001, <<http://www.grovemusic.com/grovemusic/home>>.

⁴⁴ Robert Winter, *Music For Our Time* (California: Wadsworth Inc, 1992) 652.

Generally speaking, pastiche refers to the more faithful replication of extant pieces or genres. Historically the term has had several connotations. In relation to architecture, Frederic Jameson asserts that pastiche is similar to parody, but without an *agenda*,⁴⁵ and Margaret A. Rose observes that 'neither pastiche nor parody can be said to be exclusively post-modern, but they can be used in post-modern works for a variety of post-modern purposes, or not used at all.'⁴⁶ In Europe in the eighteenth century, *pasticcio* involved the combination of pre-existing opera airs by different composers into a new context. The term has also been used to describe an opera with music written by several composers. A case in point is *Muzio Scevola* (1721) for which Mattei, Bononcini and Handel each composed one act.⁴⁷ According to Scholes, in painting and literature the term is used to describe a work that is an imitation of another artist or author. In our own time this definition of pastiche has become commonplace within the discipline of music. For example, the work of Peter Schückely (P.D.Q. Bach) might be described as pastiche of composers of the western canon (such as J.S. Bach, Mozart and Beethoven).

Of course, parody, pastiche and *bricolage* are by no means mutually exclusive. There are some cases of appropriation that are impossible to describe in terms of only one of these categories. For example, Peter Maxwell Davies's treatment of material borrowed from Taverner's *Gloria Tibi Trinitas* mass in the *Taverner Fantasias* blurs the distinction between reverent and irreverent parody.⁴⁸

True to the dictionary definition of *bricolage*, Kats-Chernin's aesthetic is comprised of a multitude of disparate references that are *seemingly* 'thrown together' to create a new work—a propensity no doubt influenced by her experience as a composer of theatre music, a genre proliferated by *dichés* employed for the purpose of communicating meaning to an audience. The appearance of *ad hoc* construction, I would argue, is merely superficial. Integration of found objects into the musical whole is at the fore of Kats-Chernin's compositional process. She highlights the necessity to go beyond superficial treatment of pre-existing musical signs. Integration is perhaps the main difference between *bricolage*, and its relative, collage (visual arts).⁴⁹

Kats-Chernin: There's something about superficiality that I just cannot stand. So when it's done just for the purpose of a gag then it just doesn't mean anything for me. So if I do it, I do it with pretty much full-on speed or full-on conviction.

⁴⁵ Frederic Jameson in Margaret A. Rose, 'Post-Modern Pastiche,' *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31.1 (January 1991): 26-38.

⁴⁶ Rose, 'Post-Modern Pastiche' 32.

⁴⁷ Percy A. Scholes: *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 10th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 766.

⁴⁸ Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After: Directions Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 154.

⁴⁹ Generally speaking, collage is less about integrating old materials to form new meaning and more about spontaneous improvisation with materials that are immediately available. On collage, Hughes writes: 'Before it is anything else, collage is play. The rules of the game are subsumed in what is available—the mailing paper, matchboxes, cigarette packs, chocolate wrappers, stickers, and other stuff in the unstable flux of messages and signs that pass through a painter's studio. Pushing them around on the paper is pure improvisation, a game with educated guesses played out until the design clicks into some final shape' (Robert Hughes, *The Shock Of The New* [London: Thames & Hudson, 1991] 161). In temporal mediums, such as film and music, montage is perhaps a close relation of collage. In film, images are presented in a sequence. For example in *Strike* (1924), a scene depicting workers being shot is juxtaposed with images of cattle being slaughtered. In Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929), the word 'knife' is repeated over and over in the sound track to convey the paranoid thoughts of a young woman (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 6, 1974, 1009). Unlike collage, however, a montage is usually comprised of thematically related units.

blue notes. The composer claims that she was not conscious of this process when she wrote the piece. According to Kats-Chernin, *The Schubert Blues* was written when she was 'feeling down,' thus the word 'Blues' in the title relates primarily to the mood of the work.⁵¹

The reference to *Death and the Maiden*, stated in the first seventeen bars of *The Schubert Blues*, constitutes paraphrase. Rather than quoting the material exactly, Kats-Chernin derives only the melody and situates it in the uppermost register of the piano with the addition of pitch clusters. Despite the presence of these dissonant clusters in the new context, the sense of there being a tonal centre remains strong. Kats-Chernin expands upon the melodic motive presented in the first three bars of Schubert's music: the first four bars of *The Schubert Blues* are occupied with ascending and descending stepwise motion using only the first three degrees of the scale (with the addition of clusters at the end of the second bar). Introduction of the leading note is reserved until bar four. Example 1 shows the 'found object'—a quotation of Schubert's music—in its original context.

Ex. 1. Schubert: *Death and the Maiden* (D531) bars 1-7

Example 2 shows the first seventeen bars of *The Schubert Blues*. The tonal centre here is C. Pitch clusters are used in place of functional harmony.

Ex. 2. Kats-Chernin: *Schubert Blues* bars 1-17

⁵¹ Telephone conversation with the composer, 15 July 1998.

With a modulation to the key of *f* minor having been well established by bar 112, the paraphrase of the melody extracted from Schubert's music is reiterated (bar 118). Instead of transposing the found object to the key of the new tonic, *F*, Kats-Chernin imports the melody with the key in which it was first stated in bars 1-17, namely *c* minor. Recontextualisation in this way produces a dramatic effect. That is to say, with the implementation of the new tonic (*F*) in the chordal accompaniment, the pitches *C*, *D* and *E \flat* in the right hand part of bar 112 are now perceived as the dominant, submediant and flattened seventh respectively. Indeed, the intervallic integrity of the found object is disrupted. Similarly, pitch class *B* (bar 122) is heard as a flattened fifth (as with the minor third, *A \flat* , and minor seventh, this is a 'blue' note). As a result of this recontextualisation, Kats-Chernin deposits new meaning into the reference to Schubert's music. She effectively positions this found object within the previously unrelated soundworld of blues harmony. Example 3 shows the paraphrase of *Death and the Maiden* superimposed above a chord progression in *f* minor (note that the melody has not been transposed to the key of *f* minor). The fragment of Schubert's music is paraphrased in octaves above the cyclic chord progression in the left hand. Reference to the fragment is not exact, but the original set of pitches and overall contour are adhered to.

Ex. 3. Kats-Chernin: *Schubert Blues* bars 118-128

Example 4 gives a comparison of the blues scale in *F* and the pitches contained in the appropriated fragment superimposed above the new tonic, *F*. The intervals which characterise the blues scale are the minor third, diminished fifth and minor seventh (see bar 119 [*E \flat*], 122 [*B \flat*], 132 [*A \flat*]).

Ex. 4. Comparison of blues scale and its appropriation

Thus, the appropriated fragment of Schubert's music is turned over due to the manipulation of tonal hierarchy. Just as one observes changing patterns of light and colour through a

kaleidoscope as it is moved, so too Kats-Chernin reveals intervals that when heard through the filter of a new tonal centre are characteristic of the blues scale. The relationship that Kats-Chernin forges between the tonal paradigms of Romanticism and the blues is of a most integral, indeed intimate nature. The latter is embedded within the former, yearning to be uncovered. Integration of disparate elements into a new whole is at the heart of Kats-Chernin's procedures. The composer acknowledges that (re)fabrication is a significant aspect of her aesthetic when she says: 'I do recycle, I must say, I mean I recycle not my own, but a lot of other people's.'

In *Iphis*, her first opera, fragments of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as references to the genres of tango, silent film and Klezmer are all 'recycled.' These are examples of found objects. In the following quotation, Kats-Chernin expresses her approval of this term. She also explains that the process of collecting found objects is often unconscious:

Stanley: In a paper that I wrote recently I talked about tonic-dominant relations in *Tast-En*. Because it's such a feature, I described that as a 'found object.' Is that a fair way to ...

Kats-Chernin: You can say that, because I believe—how do you make your music true to life? Right? We always are told artists have to reflect the life today, and they have to reflect all around us, and so found objects in music are also something that's around. When I put on the radio I hear something and it goes around in my head, I'm like a sponge—I absorb. It could be pop music, it could be anything. It could be some funny voice that I absorb as well. I can't avoid that, it's just part of me. Only because of that feature I have in me, I'm writing music I can write. It's always, always some kind of accidental thing.

That the process of collecting found objects is a 'kind of accidental thing' is a view held by scholars such as Lévi-Strauss. Recalling his definition from earlier in the paper, objects are acquired throughout the course of one's general experience. In Kats-Chernin's words, this might be as simple as remembering the sound of someone's voice. Found objects are collected for their potential to be useful in the future. Characteristically, the *bricoleur* has no definite intention for the eventual application of significant fragments at the time when they are gathered. This is not to say that the *bricoleur* always collects unconsciously. There may be occasions when he/she is more deliberate in his/her effort to store away an object for future employment. For example, in a phone conversation with Kats-Chernin,⁵² I mentioned safety pins in my explication of *bricolage*. She immediately commented on the potential for these words as a title.⁵³ The incorporation of found objects is, as Kats-Chernin puts it, a way of making one's music 'true to life.' *Bricolage* is an open process, for, instead of continually quoting oneself, the *bricoleur* recycles fragments that are widely accessible and potentially familiar to the listener. Of course, this process does not completely exclude the re-fabrication of one's own music. For instance, the motive representing the character of Lidgus in *Iphis* is closely related to a progression from *The Schubert Blues*. Compare the progression at the beginning of *Iphis*, shown in example 5, with that shown in example 3, above.

⁵² 23 September 1999.

⁵³ As far as I know, she has not yet put this title to use.

Ex.5. Kats-Chernin: *Iphis*, overture bars 1-6

The musical score for Ex.5, Kats-Chernin's *Iphis* overture bars 1-6, is presented in a standard orchestral format. It includes parts for Flute (Fl), Clarinet (Cl), Percussion (Perc), Piano (P-no), Violin (Vln), Viola (Vla), Violoncello (Vcl), and Double Bass (Db). The tempo is marked 'Grave'. The percussion part includes Gong and Cymbal. The piano part is marked 'mp'. The string parts are marked 'mp' and 'non-vib'. The score shows the first six bars of the overture.

Kats-Chernin's words resonate with those of Terence Hawkes, who argues that the 'improvised' structures produced by the *bricoleur* 'serve to establish homologies and analogies between the ordering of nature and that of society, and so satisfactorily 'explain' the world and make it able to be lived in.'⁵⁴ In effect, Hawkes highlights the proclivity of the *bricoleur* to mirror patterns (whether they be visual, verbal, aural, or behavioural) that are present in his/her surrounding environment. Indeed, any process that involves the imitation of structures in the extra-musical habitat is a way of making one's work 'true to life.'

As Kats-Chernin points out in the following quotation, the musical objects that she has 'found' or collected over time are symbolic of her personal history. Her collection is unlike that of any other *bricoleur*:

Kats-Chernin: A lot of things only happen because I work with found objects. It's become a condition in me, because I just think that I'm passing through this life—I'm not here for ever—so I might as well leave a history behind. So when people look back and say, 'ah, she wrote that because she was fed with all that information'—Rachmaninoff, Mussorgsky, Shostakovich, Stockhausen—it's all in one pot, because I'm the one who had all this music. Other composer[s] would have heard maybe all this plus some Japanese music, or maybe some Indian music, and I've got all this Russian and Jewish [influence]. I'm quite a unique person, just as somebody else is unique. So the combination that I've got, nobody else will. I can't help that. We all are very different.

⁵⁴ Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977) 51.

The composer argues that there is an enormous difference between appropriating found objects and simply plagiarising:

Kats-Chernin: I don't think it's a bad thing. My sister hates that—she hates when she hears something even of my own in another piece, she says 'that's plagiarism,' and 'don't do it, it sounds, don't you have, you know, other ideas?' And so it's not the point of having other ideas—I have loads and loads of other ideas. But I want to use something that's there. It's my conscious choice. And it still will be new, and I do say it in some way that I know it's not going to be anybody else's way of saying it.

The overriding difference between appropriation and plagiarism pertains to the intention of the composer. That is, a *bricoleur* appropriates found objects according to their potential to be recognised and interpreted by a listener in the context of a new work. A listener's understanding of a piece can only be enriched if he/she is able to identify the origins of a reference and then to experience the tension produced by the recontextualisation of that found object. The aim of the plagiarist on the other hand is to lead a listener to believe that a quotation is in fact the product of his/her own creative endeavour.

Without actually using the word *bricolage*, Kats-Chernin describes the process of placing a found object within an unrelated context:

Stanley: Being Russian-born, do you think that this idea of the absurd and the tradition of parody and wit...obviously that must have been some sort of an influence?

Kats-Chernin: Well I don't know. Obviously those composers—Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Kabalevski, and lots of other people you don't even know probably here—Schnittke—they always make fun of themselves in their music, and I just don't do it—I don't do it intentionally. It happens automatically because as soon as I state something, I like to overthrow that statement. That means I challenge my own statements. I put it into an absurd context. It's kind of making it unreal, you know? I mean absurd is for me something unreal and in the wrong placing. It's like you see something, ah, a person with the most incredible wig in an incredible costume in a suburban subway. I mean it's totally absurd. You see something not fitting.

Kats-Chernin's use of the phrase 'in the wrong placing' suggests the collision of associations tied to a pre-existing source and a new, distant context, and resonates with the discourse of *bricolage*.

Heeding the caution of Roland Barthes,²⁸ it has not been my intention here to privilege the composer's own articulation of the creative process over the works themselves. It is enlightening to document Kats-Chernin's perspective in the context of my own analysis—her words do resonate with the theory of musical *bricolage*. Nevertheless, the proliferation of external references in pieces such as *The Schubert Blues* and *Iphis*, and the way in which these are 'called into question' as a result of (often) radical juxtaposition with other found objects is indicative of *bricolage*. Indeed, a term endowed with a plethora of inherited meaning itself, *bricolage* vibrantly conveys the semiotic wealth that is a defining feature of the music of Elena Kats-Chernin.

²⁸ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).