

Aspects of Otherness in John Adams's *Nixon in China*

This article explores the relationship between the music of John Adams's *Nixon in China* and the action taking place on stage. At many points throughout the opera, these forces are at odds, creating dramatic moments that often heighten the previously established sense of sarcasm and reverse the expected narrative roles of the characters. This is achieved by manipulating the Other in a unique manner as to not directly reference Chinese music, but rather juxtapose culturally neutral music with easily recognizable Western topics and genres.

When commenting on his music for *Nixon in China* (1987), John Adams stated, 'at no point in this opera did I want to write fake Chinese music' (Daines 1995: 118). Instead, Adams cleverly used diatonic harmonies in non-tonal (also read as non-functional) progressions. Timothy A. Johnson highlights many of these non-functional triadic motions in neo-Riemannian space, focusing specifically on shifts in and between hexatonic cycles (Johnson 2011). Unlike Johnson, however, the present study moves beyond the triadic transformations that permeate the surface of the music to examine the myriad of differing styles that Adams has incorporated in the opera. While certain neo-Riemannian transformations, including motion between hexatonic poles, help to avoid the creation of 'fake Chinese music', it is ultimately their combination with other stylistic references that create a discernible Other, that is, an external entity within the sphere of the opera. Indeed, the varied harmonic systems present in *Nixon in China*, when compared with the opera's staging and narrative, support, augment, and even occasionally subvert the action on stage, helping to shape our understanding of the opera.

Nixon in China interacts with, or comments on, a long tradition of exoticist representations of 'the East' (from which Adams wishes to distinguish himself). The conception of Otherness in the context of such operas was borne out of a postcolonial view of works saturated with exoticism. By way of summation, Ralph P. Locke provides this description of the plot of Orientalist operas:

A young, tolerant, brave, possibly naïve or selfish, white European tenor-hero intrudes (at risk of disloyalty to his own people and to the colonialist ethic with which he is identified) into mysterious, dark-skinned, colonized territory represented by sexy dancing girls and deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, thereby incurring the wrath of the brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain (bass or bass-baritone) and blindly obedient chorus of male savages (Locke 1991: 263).

While Locke goes on to show how Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* is an atypical example of this paradigm (especially in comparison to the operas coming out of France around the same time), many of the traits described are present in *Nixon in China*. Richard Nixon himself takes on the role of the 'white-European tenor', who once opposed any relationship with China and may encounter 'disloyalty' at home as a result of his visit. Though Nixon enters not a colonized territory of the United States, China is represented by 'sexy dancing girls' during the ballet (Act II, Scene 2), and the role of Chairman Mao's wife, Chiang Ch'ing (Jiang Qing, or 'Madame Mao' as she is referred to in the opera), is

voiced by a coloratura soprano, perhaps an extreme version of Locke's lyric soprano as she also assumes the role of the 'brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain'.

Adams's opera also responds to other twentieth-century takes on non-Western topics in opera, including humorous representations of the exotic in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* and more serious explorations of the Far East in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*. In the case of *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini fused Western and Japanese musical elements in such a way that all audiences were able to sense an Other, as the resulting music sounded neither completely Western or non-Western (Cheng 2009). In contrast, *The Mikado* sharply juxtaposes, rather than blends, Western and orientalist idioms, thereby eliciting a humorous effect that perfectly suits a comedy, the fictional Japanese setting of which merely functioned as a foil upon which to criticize British government and institutions.

Also relevant for *Nixon in China* is Susan McClary's discussion of Bizet's use of exotic elements in *Carmen*. According to McClary, 'Bizet composed most of his "exotic" music not through instinct or by virtue of his borrowing from ethnic sources, but rather by means of well-developed signs that he and his audiences shared, as do most contemporary listeners' (McClary 1992: 54). Bizet did some research into Spanish musical idioms while writing the opera, but McClary emphasizes that the aim was to create music that sounded Spanish to a French audience, even if it was not authentically so. In fact, Bizet often recycled his coded ethnic music in different scenarios, substituting 'a piece that was originally supposed to sound Russian in Brazil or in the Orient' (McClary 1997: 120). Bizet's imagination of the exotic, therefore, was much more important to the success of his exotic operas than a strict recreation of exotic sounds.

The problem to which Adams posed himself was to create a sense of Otherness without resorting to traditional markers of *chinoiserie* (pentatonicism, high-register instrumentation, imitations of Chinese instruments, etc.) or anything that resembles these markers. Despite the opera's similarities to Locke's summary of Orientalist opera, *Nixon in China* provides a musical atmosphere where representations of China are absent. This, coupled with the fact that there are also few examples of traditional Western idioms, raises an interesting question: from where does our sense of Otherness emerge if neither it nor a Self is clearly defined? Indeed, the audience is often awash in a sea of harmonies that are foreign not in the context of a West/Far East dichotomy (as with *Madama Butterfly*) nor as a result of a shared code of exotic idioms (as with *Carmen*), but of something else entirely. The generic language of *Nixon in China* consists of traditionally Western harmonies (triads and other extended tertian sonorities) arranged in non-typical progressions (best described with transformational, not tonal, theory).¹ When against this background Western idioms emerge in the form of functional chordal progressions or Classical topics, a sense of Otherness appears despite the lack of any references to Chineseness for comparison. Indeed, it is the rarity of these common-practice idioms that causes them to become a marked event in the context of the opera, signaling a strong

1 Transformational theory (or neo-Riemannian theory) describes motion between triads in which a pitch moves by a half-step or whole-step. There are three basic transformations that can occur: Parallel (P) keeps the root and fifth of a triad and moves the third by a half-step (C major → C minor); Relative (R) keeps the major third of the triad and moves the other tone by a whole-step (C major → A minor); and Leading-tone (L) keeps the minor third of the triad and moves the other tone by a half-step (C major → E minor). These three basic transformations can be used in any combination, resulting in compound transformations. For example, PLP would describe three transformations all occurring simultaneously (C major → G# minor). A fourth transformation, known as SLIDE, is also commonly referenced, though it moves both the root and the fifth of the triad by a half-step while keeping the third (C major → C# minor). For more on the history and mechanics of these transformations, see the special issue on Neo-Riemannian Theory of the *Journal of Music Theory* 42/2 (1998).

sense of alterity. In other words, the musical Other in *Nixon in China* has little to do with China or the 'non-West', but is defined by the appearance of a familiar Western idiom in a context of what can be described as culturally neutral music.

The clearest examples of Othering at work in *Nixon* come from the grand dinner scene at the end of Act I and the ballet scene in Act II. Both scenes elicit a sense of Otherness through a dialogue between music, narrative, and staging, yet each achieves this sense differently. The narrative of the grand dinner revolves around the notion of cooperation between the United States and China, the possibility/feasibility of which is constantly questioned by Adams's score. The ballet narrative, which is derived from one of the eight model works (*yangbanxi*) that constituted the officially sanctioned repertoire during the Cultural Revolution, is fundamentally altered from its original conception (in a diegetic sense) by the intrusion of the Nixons into the story, which is supported by the appearance of clear Western topics and progressions in the music. The result is both a serious and satirical commentary on the actions taking place in the opera.²

Adding further complication to this opera's notion of Otherness is the 2011 Metropolitan Opera restaging of the work. Though directed by Peter Sellars, who also directed the premiere performance in 1988, and remaining mostly unchanged, the new production introduces two seemingly subtle alterations to the staging that have significant consequences for the Other. In an interview during the live broadcast of the opera, Sellars explained that the changes were made to better accommodate new information about the characters that was not known during the original production (Adams 2012). This article, then, seeks to accomplish two goals. The first is to tie the diverse musical styles and structures directly to the narrative and staging of the opera. The eclectic, collage-like music discussed here helps to shape and support not only a heightened sense of sarcasm, but also a dramatic reversal of the traditional narrative roles of protagonist and antagonist. The second goal is to determine what effect the changes in the 2011 staging have on these sarcastic and narrative events. Both pursuits are aided by following the Other as it progresses throughout the opera.

The Banquet (Act I, Final Scene)

The final scene of Act I centers on the events of the grand state dinner held in honor of the Nixons' arrival in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The scene as a whole is meant to be a representation of the actual state dinner as it took place, and focuses on US-PRC relations. The scene breaks down into four sections consisting of the Nixons' arrival at the dinner, a speech by Premier Chou En-lai (Zhou Enlai), a complementary speech by President Nixon, and a final grand chorus of cheers to toast the speeches and the event itself. A summary of the narrative and musical events of these subsections is shown in Table 1.

While Johnson addresses most of the music in this scene in his study of *Nixon in China*, he breaks up his discussion into separate and disjunct sections: the opening and closing sections of the final scene of Act I are discussed as a unit, whereas the arias presented by Nixon and Chou are discussed separately. By separating the scene in this manner, the full extent of the sarcastic narrative is easily missed. Furthermore, Johnson's discussion

2 I am not the first to suggest the satirical nature of many scenes in this opera. Daines (1995) and Johnson (2011) both allude to this narrative technique, especially in the last scene of Act I, which I discuss in further detail below. William Guerin (2010) discusses Act III of the opera in terms of stylistic register as a means to elicit sarcasm. There, he parses out both the stylistic and political registers in the opera, aligning them with one another and connecting certain style/political associations with individual characters; Mao Zedong, his wife, and Chou occupy the higher registers both politically and stylistically, while the Nixons and Kissinger occupy lower registers through most of the opera. The inversion of these associations, however, results in sarcasm.

Table 1
Summary of Styles and Harmonic Structures, Act I, Scene 3.

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Description	The arrival at the banquet	Premier Chou's aria	President Nixon's aria	"Cheers!"
Style	Smarmy, jazz-like setting	Stately and reserved	Energetic, almost fidgety	A resounding, full chorus
Harmonic structure	Triadic transformational motion with added extensions	Triadic transformational motion with root motion by tritone	Triadic root motion by thirds	Triadic transformational motion set with large leaps between harmonies

of the music in this scene is almost entirely relegated to surface-level harmonic motion, often omitting any stylistic commentary. In contrast, the following discusses the scene as a whole by way of its use of divisive elements and styles across all domains (musical, visual, and narrative), focusing on the role of sarcasm throughout the scene.

The arrival of the Nixons at the state dinner takes place entirely outdoors, as is made evident by the pantomimes of both characters and the overt discussion of the current weather. Johnson discusses the music of this entire scene strictly in terms of the transformational relationships contained within (Johnson 2011: 40–42). However, the style and idiomatic qualities of the music have as great an impact on the proceeding of the opera as the transformations themselves. Example 1a, for instance, shows that the opening measures of music contain a simple alternation between $G\sharp$ minor $^{\flat 7}_7$ and a C minor $^{\sharp 13}_9$ harmonies. These extended tertian harmonies are reminiscent of jazz or blues style, yet their use here lends this passage a smarmy quality, more evocative of a nightclub than a reception at an important diplomatic event. Example 1b reimagines this progression as simple triads by removing the extensions, and the resulting harmonic shifts through P and L transformations become clear.³ In other words, the individual harmonies suggest a popular style, while the transformations that link them together suggest a learned style. Therefore, a musical hybrid emerges, referencing both popular and learned styles simultaneously while not belonging entirely to either. While this reinforces the idea of opposition, it also sets up the dramatic and sarcastic moments to follow in this scene.

A purely narrative sense of sarcasm emerges a short while later as the Nixons and Premier Chou begin to escalate their talk about the weather. Some of this banter is shown below:

CHOU: The pressure's falling fast. I feel it in my bones.

RICHARD AND PAT NIXON: At least this Great Hall of the People stands like a fortress against the winds.

PAT NIXON: It stands against the winds,

RICHARD AND PAT NIXON: whatever their direction.

CHOU: I doubt that Spring has come.

PAT NIXON: Take a deep breath and you can taste it. It's the truth. Although there's more snow still to fall the Spring's as good as here.

RICHARD AND PAT NIXON: The Spring's as good as here.

3 PL transformations form part of a hexatonic cycle, which feature prominently in the ballet scene at the end of Act II.

Example 1a

Opening measures of Act I, Scene 3.

Example 1b

Opening measures with non-triad extensions removed, revealing PL transformation.

Example 2

Pastoral accompaniment with heroic vocal setting in Act 1, Scene 3.

The political undertones of this small talk about the weather are obvious. Again, we are presented with an outlier that is not quite one thing, and not quite something else. While saying one thing but meaning something else is a fairly common literary technique, the same idea is not often heard in musical contexts. Indeed, with the opening hybrid music aligned with this narrative double-entendre, the opera is overwhelmed as these devices transform and solidify into total sarcasm across multiple domains in the opera. Example 2 illustrates that at the end of this first part of the scene, the music has abandoned the smarmy style of the beginning in favor of a pastoral accompaniment fused with a

triumphant, almost heroic vocal setting as the Nixons sing 'yet the West wind heralds spring'. The music, after originally introducing the notion of sarcasm to the scene, has now assumed a new role in supporting the sarcastic intensity of the narrative. Even Premier Chou, earlier introduced as a stately and reserved character, cannot resist a small sarcastic jab, stating, 'I doubt that Spring has come'.

The next section features an aria by Premier Chou. He speaks of the shared, common struggle that both nations have endured as they came of age:

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends,
we have begun to celebrate the different ways that led us to this mountain pass,
this summit where we stand.
Look down, and think what we have undergone.
Future and past lie far below half visible.

We marvel now that we survived those battles, took those shifting paths,
blasted that rock to lay those rails.
Through the cold night uncompromising lines of thought
attempted to find common ground where their militias might contend,
confident that the day would come for shadow boxers to strike home.

We saw by the first light of dawn the outlined cities of the plain,
and see them still, surrounded by the pastures of their tenantry.

On land we have not taken yet innumerable blades of wheat salute the sun.
Our children race downhill unflustered into peace.
We will not sow their fields with salt or burn their standing crop.
We built these terraces for them alone.

The virtuous American and the Chinese make manifest their destinies in time.
We toast that endless province whose frontier we occupy from hour to hour,
holding in perpetuity the ground our people won today from vision to inheritance.

In short, Chou's words seek to highlight the similarities between the two countries. However, the music provides an interesting contrast to Chou's message of unity. Johnson's discussion of this aria notes that the harmonies initially consist of B \flat major triads and E dominant seventh chords. He equates this tritone relationship to Chou's initial nervousness. When SLIDE (a combination of R, P and L) transformations appear later in the aria, Johnson connects this to Chou becoming more comfortable with the venue and his speech (Johnson 2011: 246). Examples 3a and 3b present brief excerpts from Chou's aria, showing the prevailing harmonic motion throughout.

While SLIDE is present in the final moments of the aria, it is the presence of harmonies separated by PL and a tritone that are most telling. The tritone is the largest possible distance between two harmonies in tonal space, and while PL transformations represent a fairly parsimonious progression, the simultaneous presentation of both harmonies creates a biting dissonance between B \flat minor and F \sharp minor triads. Together, these harmonic relationships represent large distances and stark contrasts, whether they are in tonal or transformational space, and seem to contradict, or in some way subvert, the message of unity espoused by Chou.⁴

4 Harmonies whose roots are separated by tritone can also be considered in transformational space via an RP cycle. Furthermore, the harmonies lie on the poles of the RP cycle, which would still elicit a sense of the harmonies being far removed from one another. But as RP cycles do not manifest in any other meaningful way during the opera, this relationship between harmonies is best considered in tonal space.

While the ideas set forth in Chou's aria appear to be heartfelt, yet ultimately unattainable from the music's perspective, Nixon's aria that follows is in many ways an empty shell of Chou's sentiments. Nixon is clearly preoccupied not with the burgeoning relationship of the two countries, but with how history will remember him:

Example 3a

Root motion by tritone in Premier Chou's aria.

278

Chou

La - dies and gen - tle men. com - rades and friends,

B^bM — tritone — E⁷ — tritone — B^bM

Example 3b

Simultaneous sounding of harmonies separated by PL.

319

Chou

Through the cold night

F[#]m

B^bm

Mister Premier, distinguished guests, I have attended many feasts
but never have so enjoyed a dinner,
nor have I heard played better the music that I love outside America.
I move a vote of thanks to one and all whose efforts made this possible.

No one who heard could but admire your eloquent remarks, Premier,
and millions more hear what we say through satellite technology
than ever heard a public speech before.
No one is out of touch.
Telecommunication has broadcast your message into space.
Yet soon our words won't be recalled while what we do can change the world.

We have at times been enemies, we still have differences, God knows.
But let us, in these next five days, start a long march on new highways,
in different lanes, but parallel and heading for a single goal.
The world watches and listens.
We must seize the hour and seize the day.

Lines such as, 'Yet soon our words won't be recalled while what we do can change the world' serve to not only comment upon Nixon's obsession with his own legacy, but also

to downplay the skillful and carefully crafted rhetoric from Chou's aria. As Johnson states, 'Nixon ... seems ever mindful of the importance of the media coverage of this event, to an extent that almost overshadows the event itself' (Johnson 2011: 248). This is, in many ways, the most straightforward part of this scene in terms of the relationship between music and narrative, as the Nixon we see and hear is largely unencumbered by the scene's otherwise overwhelming sense of sarcasm. Additionally, the music during this speech is different from Chou's music in almost every way. Example 4 provides a small excerpt, illustrating the faster tempo, rapidly repeated triads and seventh chords replacing arpeggiated triads, and substituting root motion by fifth for root motions by third. Johnson also acknowledges that during Nixon's speech, the harmonies of E minor and C major are often used. Other than the L transformation that connects them, Johnson shows how these harmonies represent the People's Republic of China and the United States of America throughout the opera (Johnson 2011: 37–38).

Example 4

Excerpt from Nixon's aria.

Example 4 shows a musical score excerpt for Nixon's aria. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 144. The score includes a vocal line for Nixon and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "Mis - ter Pre - mier, dis - tin - guished guests,". The piano accompaniment features rapidly repeated triads and seventh chords.

Nixon's speech moves directly into a rousing chorus of 'Cheers', largely prompted by the energetic nature of Nixon's aria. Of course, the cheers themselves are in celebration of not only the speeches that were just heard, but also of the idea of closer relations between China and the United States. But true to the overall sarcastic thrust of the scene, the music indicates something else. Example 5 shows the opening chord progression from 'Cheers'. Johnson meticulously documents the various triadic transformations in this scene, commenting specifically on the use of C major and E minor triads that universally signal the US and China respectively (Johnson 2011: 42-49). Of particular note, however, are not the transformations, but how Adams orchestrates the triads. Note in particular the large, disjunct leaps from harmony to harmony. In fact, many of these triad transformations, while relatively close to each other either in pitch-class space, are quite distant in *pitch* space. Thus, while the libretto and style of this last section indicates a jubilant celebration in the coming together of these two countries, the music's voice-leading reveals just how far apart these two countries remain. The music, then, is offering a sarcastic commentary on this final section of Act I.

Example 5

Piano reduction of 'Cheers!' chorus from the end of Act I, Scene 3.

Example 5 shows a piano reduction of the 'Cheers!' chorus. The score consists of five measures of chords. The chords are labeled as GM, B^bM, DM, E^bM, and EM.

Also of interest is a comparison with this final chorus and Chou's aria from earlier in the scene. Both present conflict between a narrative of unity and cooperation on the one hand, and music that thwarts those very ideas on the other. Chou's aria presents ideas largely as conceptions of a possible relationship between the US and China. Similarly, the music supporting Chou is conceptual in that the large distances and dissonances described above occur in pitch-class space, rather than *actual* pitch space. 'Cheers', in contrast, is an actual celebration of the supposed unity already attained between the two nations, and likewise, the music exhibits distance (as sarcastic commentary) in *actual* pitch space with harmonies that are relatively parsimonious in pitch-class space.

From this scene's entirety, we can observe how an initial blending of music and narrative creates the notion of sarcasm that can be traced for the rest of the scene. However, the sarcasm present in this scene is a distant memory during the ballet in Act II. It is here that the music and the narrative conspire to alter our perception of a traditional narrative struggle between protagonist and antagonist. Indeed, this scene successfully transplants the role of the villain onto the intended hero of the story.

The Ballet (Act II, Final Scene)

The last scene of Act II presents a re-imagining of an actual ballet the Nixons attended during their trip, i.e., *The Red Detachment of Women* (1964), one of the model works that dominated the Chinese stage and media during the Cultural Revolution. Chairman Mao's wife, Chiang Ch'ing (Jiang Qing, or 'Madame Mao' as she is referred to in Adams's opera), choreographed the ballet. Johnson describes this scene of the opera and the original ballet upon which it is based in great detail (Johnson 2011: 221–241). However, the juxtaposed use of harmonic systems within this scene is not fully addressed, and its consequences for the Self/Other relationship in this scene bears further exploration. As originally conceived, a slave girl, Ching-hua, attempts to escape from her master, Lao Szu, only to be caught, beaten, and left for dead.⁵ A passing soldier from the Red Army finds Ching-hua, shelters her from a storm, and encourages her to join the Army's corps of female soldiers, the Red Detachment of Women. After joining their ranks, she is encouraged to seek revenge for her enslavement by killing her former slave master. The moral here, of course, is that the weak can rise above the strong by acting together, overthrowing the tyrants of the pre-Communist era. However, in the highly fictionalized version of the opera, as the Nixons become involved in the story, the carefully crafted Communist fable unravels, causing irreparable shifts in the plot's notion of hero and villain.

The music for this scene deliberately contains a number of different styles. As Adams explained:

I had read that during the Cultural Revolution it was the proper thing for a committee to write a piece of music...My ballet music, which is of course an essay in horrific kitsch, is an attempt to make a score sound as if a committee wrote it (Daines 1995: 119).

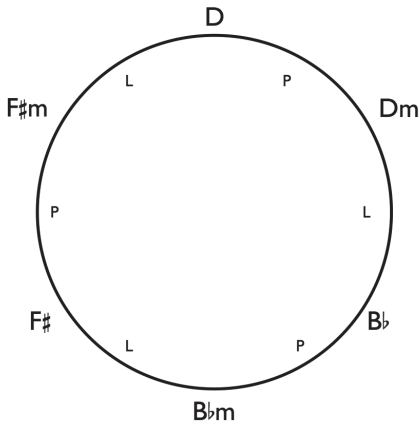
Everything from a march to *Sturm und Drang* and pastoral topics are featured. And with the varying styles comes an interesting juxtaposition of harmonic organization, ranging from tonal sounding tonic-dominant relationships to sections better explained by transformational theory. And not just any transformations – for the majority of this scene, the music restricts its harmonic motion to a single hexatonic cycle, shown in

5 Incidentally, Lao Szu is played by the same actor who plays Henry Kissinger in the rest of the opera, a point made clear by Pat Nixon herself, asking at one point, 'Doesn't he look like you know who?' This choice by Sellars not only links Kissinger to the tyrannical Lao Szu, but also foreshadows the eventual involvement of the Nixons themselves in the ballet.

Figure 1.⁶ Motion through this cycle can be quite striking, especially when moves directly between hexatonic poles are presented.

Figure 1

The southern hexatonic cycle as heard in Act II, Scene 2.



As made well-known by Richard Cohn, motion between what we now refer to as hexatonic poles (a compound PLP transformation) has long held associations with the uncanny, situations that are evocative of supernatural or other-worldly phenomena (Cohn 2004). However, in the present case, the motions between hexatonic poles often do not indicate something uncanny, but rather simply help to reinforce a musical Other. Example 6 shows a small section of music from the opening.

Example 6

From the opening of Act II, Scene 2.

Note that in addition to the triads that typically make up a hexatonic cycle, Adams, as he did with the music in the last scene of Act I, occasionally adds sevenths and other extensions. While motion between hexatonic poles does occur in this example (between Bb major and F# minor), there is no direct motion between them. Indeed, the Bb major triad acts more as a temporary goal in this progression; a short move away from D minor on the greater journey towards F# minor (Johnson 2011: 219).⁷ Therefore, any uncanny effects or Other representations are diminished. However, as the scene continues, we are presented with direct motion between these poles, shown in Example 7.⁸ This direct motion across the hexatonic cycle begins to define a sense of Other for the ballet scene.

6 Cohn (1996) provides further insight into the organization and usage of hexatonic cycles in late-Romantic music.

7 Johnson notes that a Bb major triad acts as a main harmonic center in this scene, even though it is only briefly a goal of harmonic motion in this example.

8 Though not shown here, a few measures later, the reciprocal PLP transformation occurs from F# minor back to Bb major.

Example 7

Motion between hexatonic poles in Act II, Scene 2.

B^bM ————— PLP —————> F[#]m
(Hexatonic Pole)

Example 8

SLIDE transformations in Act II, Scene 2.

Bm ————— (SLIDE) —————> B^bM ————— (SLIDE) —————> Bm ————— (SLIDE) —————> B^bM

Motions involving SLIDE also occur here. During the opening measures, which are dominated by harmonies from the southern cycle (Figure 1), two non-cycle harmonies, F major and B minor, appear as a result of SLIDE. Example 8 shows a particularly gratuitous use of SLIDE that alternates between B minor and B^b major. In fact, this is the highest concentration of the SLIDE transformation in the opera up to this point. SLIDE, like the previous motion between hexatonic poles, are comprised of conventional triads, but organized in tonally unusual ways, thus helping to shape the musical Other.

When we are finally introduced to the Red Detachment about half-way through the scene, the harmonic language takes an unexpected turn toward functional tonality. Example 9 shows the strong root movement by fifth between A major and E major. This is the only place in the scene to feature such strong tonal connections between harmonies, a stark and quite jarring contrast to the hexatonic and SLIDE saturated music that had come before (Johnson 2011: 235).⁹

Example 9

The march of the Red Detachment of Women with root motion by fifth, signaling a strong tonic-dominant-tonic progression.

AM ————— EM ————— AM

9 Johnson posits that the appearance of such strong functional music upon the arrival of the Red Detachment is meant to simplify the harmonic language to something more familiar and common; a song for the common working class. However, in the absence of any Chinese timbres within this harmonic context, the use of tonic-dominant progressions must be conceived as a marked Other in an otherwise heavily saturated transformational context.

In addition to these juxtaposed harmonic structures, there are also differences in the way those harmonies are stylized. Take for instance Example 9 from above, which is styled as a march. Example 10 shows a short segment of the after-storm music, and while harmonically this music is structured as hexatonic, it is also reminiscent of a pastoral topic, featuring long bass pedals with simple triadic arpeggiations in the other voices. This music is very similar to the accompaniment heard earlier in Example 2.

Example 10

The pastoral 'after storm' music.

In the end, the Other in this scene emerges from the 'kitsch' Adams was intending to produce. With all of the variations in harmonic organization and musical styles, it is difficult to pin down a single, unifying Other. Indeed, one needs to step back from the scene and broadly examine the context in which the music is placed. Most of the scene can be discussed in terms of triadic transformations (primarily consisting of hexatonic and SLIDE motions), but for only one brief moment, the tonal march, do we get something reminiscent of a functional progression *and* a Classical topic. The after-storm music of Example 10, while pastoral in style, is still tied to the previous music by its hexatonic harmonic system.¹⁰ The march, then, becomes the primary outsider, the Other in a vast array of styles and systems.

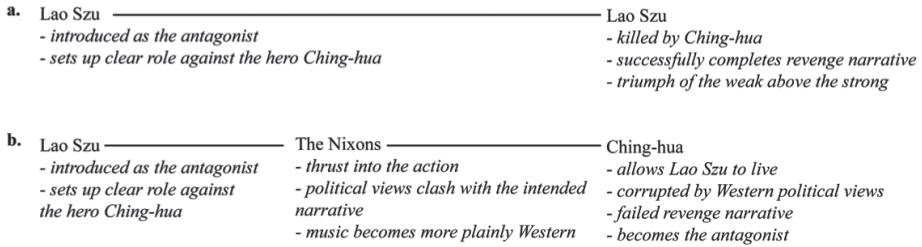
On stage, the notion of Other is flexible and constantly shifts along a identifiable trajectory. Thinking back for a moment to the original ballet on which this scene is based, the Other would have simply been, and remained constantly, the tyrant, the villain who will eventually be killed by the heroine, Ching-hua. However, in this altered ballet, things become less clear-cut. As the Nixons begin to interfere with the story, the role of Other shifts from Lao Szu to the Nixons themselves. The Nixons are quite literally out of place not only in the Communist narrative, but also as unexpected members of the ballet production. As they continue to meddle with the characters in the ballet, yet another shift occurs as their Otherness is slowly fused onto Ching-hua, the intended heroine. The precise moment of fusion comes when the Nixons, not the passing soldier, shield Ching-hua from the storm. The role of Other ultimately rests with Ching-hua, as when the climactic moment of revenge arrives, she fails to kill Lao Szu. The corrupting Western influence, symbolized musically in the tonal march of the Red Detachment and visually by the Nixons, eventually manifests itself in the refusal of Ching-hua to follow through with the plan. Though tonic-dominant harmonic models are well-known in China, and as such are not an automatic signal of Western culture, this tonal march specifically signals the West (and all of the ideologies associated with it) as it is the first new music heard after the Nixons successfully protect and revive Ching-hua. Ultimately, this ironic reversal, where the heroine slave girl becomes the outsider, the Other, is too much for Madame Mao as she promptly overtakes the ballet, turning the entire production into an impromptu political rally. In yet another twist, the instigators of this entire event, the Nixons themselves, escape any punishment, even though all counter-revolutionaries present are severely beaten. After all, by the end of the scene, their Otherness has been completely transferred to Ching-

¹⁰ Though not fully an Other, this music is clearly a step in that direction, as the march comes directly after this moment in the scene.

hua, seemingly absolving them of any wrongdoing. Figure 2 summarizes the transference of Other over the duration of the scene. Figure 2a simply shows what should have occurred (if the Nixons had never joined the narrative), and Figure 2b summarizes the movement of the Other from Lao Szu to Ching-hua.

Figure 2

The Other Trajectory. (a) shows the intended role of Other during the ballet, and (b) summarizes the transference of Other as a result of the Nixons' influence on the narrative.



The Effects of Restaging

The perception of Otherness in opera is contingent upon more than just the music, requiring an examination of the visual and narrative elements as well. The preceding discussion has done this by incorporating primarily the text and music of the opera. The result is a more complete picture of the opera and how perceptions of Otherness can shift and change during the course of its performance. However, what happens if some part of an opera is changed in a subsequent production? This would seemingly have ramifications as to the role and perception of Otherness in the opera. In the case of *Nixon in China*, two alterations from the original production stand out in the 2011 Metropolitan Opera production. The first is the moment of climax during the ballet. As discussed earlier, the Western influence of the Nixons upon Ching-hua prevents her from carrying out her revenge, shooting her gun in the air as opposed to Lao Szu. But the 2011 version makes a significant change. Instead of firing bullets in the air, Madame Mao insistently motions for Ching-hua to shoot Lao Szu, which she ultimately does. The libretto and music remain unchanged. Of course, this alters the Self/Other relationship as acted out in the original 1987 staging. Since the interactions between the Nixons and Ching-hua remain unchanged until this point from the original production, what has changed between 1987 and 2011 that would cause Sellars to fundamentally alter the staging of this climactic event? In an interview with Thomas Hampson between acts during the live broadcast of the opera in February of 2011, Sellars provides the following clue:

THOMAS HAMPSON: China is such a dominant force in the world today. Has that had a bearing on the reworkings of this opera?

PETER SELLARS: Well, I mean, obviously we now know about, from Mao's doctor, all kinds of shocking things that just nobody knew in the 80s when we made this piece. There's been Tiananmen Square, there's been lots of history, and so of course I've changed the piece a lot. But how beautiful to do a world-wide broadcast on the day [Hosni] Mubarak has stepped down. You know, and to really have the chorus say 'the people are the heroes now' (Adams 2012).¹¹

11 Sellars is referencing a line from the opening chorus of opera, in which the Chinese people, gathered and awaiting the arrival of Air Force One, sing about the revolutionary ideals central to Communist China. The broadcast, occurring in the middle of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011, allowed Sellars to connect the Chinese revolutionary message to that of the people of Egypt.

Sellars's specific mention of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, an event where the PRC government massacred at least several hundred of their own citizens, may explain his decision to alter the end of the ballet. In this new staging, the newly ordained member of the Party (Ching-hua) must, despite the rising influences of the West (the Nixons), stamp out insurrection whatever the cost to human life.

The second change from the original production has to do with Premier Chou. Though not discussed in this article, the final aria of the opera features Chou singing about his 'Endless Wakefulness'. Johnson discusses this aria in great detail (Johnson 2011: 151–159).¹² We now know that Chou was suffering from untreated pancreatic cancer during the time of the Nixon trip and died shortly after. Sellars worked this into the 2011 production in many ways, mostly by having Chou progressively exhibit the pain associated with pancreatic cancer. Again, no changes to the music or libretto were made. However, during the final scene of the opera, a flag is draped over Chou, symbolizing his death. After a few minutes, though, Chou rises from his death and sings his final aria. A truly uncanny event for certain, yet no musical use of a hexatonic pole accompanies this supernatural event. In context, however, the entire last scene is dream-like, featuring a spry, light-footed Mao who dances effortlessly with his wife, so a character rising from the dead is fair game. What it does do is give added meaning to the aria's notion of an 'Endless Wakefulness', a waking state that, for Chou, seems to transcend the very notion of death itself.

The issues raised by this restaging of *Nixon in China* reveal the inherent problem of incorporating non-music elements into an operatic analysis. Any changes made to only the visual elements causes any previous analytical work to become fixed to a particular production. And just as a director's changes to the staging of an opera act as his or her own commentary, so too must the analysis of an opera be flexible in order to accommodate the changes of subsequent productions. This, however, is not meant to discourage such endeavors, as the fruits of a comprehensive examination of the opera far outweigh the consequences of an analytical discussion focused on a specific performance. In addition, it allows for a better comparison between stagings of the same opera over time. As demonstrated here, seemingly small changes in staging (given the grand scope of the opera) can have considerable consequences as to a scene's interpretation.

Despite the lack of any Chinese or other non-Western music, a palpable Other can be sensed throughout the entire opera. Adams, perhaps not comfortable trying to replicate authentic Chinese melodies, instead created a harmonic foundation void of Western or non-Western connotations. This in turn allows those brief moments of Western music (discussed here in the form of harmonic progressions and Classical topics) to be heard as outsiders in an otherwise culturally neutral musical setting. Indeed, the Other in *Nixon in China* results from the combination of the various stylistic and harmonic elements at work, providing sarcastic commentary and altering expected narrative expectations throughout the opera.

12 Johnson acknowledges that productions since the original have depicted Chou's death in this final scene, but his analysis only focuses on the original production, 'depicting Chou at the end of a long restless night only thinking about death.'

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