



SEZIONE III: ECOLOGIE DEI PROCESSI, ETNOGRAFIE DELLE PASSIONI

Passion Attendance: Becoming a “Sensitized Practitioner” in Japanese Court Music

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Ethnographers in the field are often confronted with discrepancies between the fine embroidery of abstract speculation and the tangled up quality of lived experience. Because in research the two aspects are not neatly separated but largely coexistent, theorization is moulded and remoulded as fieldwork unfolds. From this point of view, the long debate in anthropology on ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ can be (re)read as a struggle to transport understandings earned through contact with research participants into the more notional contexts in which ethnography is written up (Geertz 1974; Wikan 1991; Fetterman 2008).

This article is an example of how similar translations can result in transformations of the very intellectual tools of anthropology. Starting from a few considerations on the influential notion of embodiment, I will advocate an apprenticeship-based methodology in the context of Japanese performing arts. Drawing from fieldwork research conducted with Nanto gakuso, a group of amateur performers of court music (*gagaku*) based in Nara (Western Japan), I will explore three different dimensions of apprenticeship, linking them to three corresponding processes that are at the same time important theoretical nodes for an anthropology of practice².

First of all, I consider the “enskilment” (Ingold 2000b) of *gagaku* practitioners, showing that members of Nanto gakuso do not refer to themselves uniformly as ‘amateurs’, ‘practitioners’ or ‘group members’, but rather shift among these and other terms on the basis of the competence they assign to one another and of the context in which they are inscribed. Secondly, I focus on an instance of “emplacement” (Pink 2009: 29-35, 63-81), the constitution of a specific relationship with

¹ Fieldwork was conducted between April 2013 and March 2014. I wish to thank the Japan Foundation for making additional research possible in the course of 2015 and 2016, as well as my advisors in Kyoto, The Netherlands and Italy: Professor Itō Kimio, Professor Alison Tokita, Professor Kasia Cwiertka and Professor Bonaventura Ruperti. I also wish to thank the group Nanto gakuso for welcoming me warm-heartedly not once but twice (so far).

² This research is methodologically and theoretically guided by an attempt to enhance the participatory component of ‘participant observation’. Accordingly, it was influenced by similar endeavors within ethnomusicology (see especially Terauchi 2011) and the sociology of music (Hennion 2001; 2015; Hennion and Gomart 1999; DeNora 2000). Although not of primary concern here, the overall approach is also informed by phenomenological reconsiderations of the practice of ethnography (on which, see Ingold 2011a; Feld 1996) and by research strictly related to the so-called Actor-Network Theory (see in particular Strathern 2004; Law and Mol 2002; Law 2004; Mol 2003; Viveiros de Castro 2015).



the physical site where the practice takes place. Finally, building on philosopher Annemarie Mol's work on practice as a site for the "enactment of reality" (2003: ix), I investigate the centrality of 'attendance' in regard to weekly rehearsals, highlighting the overlapping of both aspects of 'physical presence' and 'caring for' in the ways practice is articulated by Nanto gakuso. I conclude by showing that the notion of 'passion attendance' can be effectively mobilized to encompass the three processes of enskilment, emplacement and enactment.

Introduction: Apprenticeship, Embodiment and Japanese Performing Arts

Ever since Thomas Csordas's trendsetting (and award-winning) article was published more than twenty-five years ago, the concept of embodiment has nearly become what the title of that famous piece advocated: "a paradigm for anthropology" and "for the study of culture and the self" (1990: 5). Indeed, the development of a burgeoning field variously referred to as 'anthropology of the body' or 'of the senses'³ demonstrates that a significant portion of the discipline now focuses on the body as "a way of inhabiting the world as well as the source of personhood, self, and subjectivity, and the precondition of intersubjectivity" (Mascia-Lees 2011: 2).

One of the strongest tenets of this approach is the need to challenge long-established ontological and epistemological oppositions as mind and body, subject and object, abstract and concrete. Attempts to transpose such stances into ethnographic practice have resulted in new conceptualizations that transcend the notion of the body as "a natural self-contained entity organized by mechanically functioning internal organs" (Lock – Farquhar 2007: 2).

Recently, original contributions from cognate disciplines have both drawn from and helped further reshape the debate: for instance, under the influence of Csordas's notion of "somatic modes of attention"⁴ and Bourdieu's notion of habitus, ethnomusicological reflections have suggested that in Brazilian capoeira hearing might be culturally predetermined by intercorporeal "bodily patterns of responsiveness and attentiveness" (Downey 2002: 504). Other relevant examples of how the theme of the body has evolved in ethnographic contexts include Sklar's exploration of "movement's kinetic

³ Representative authors include David Howes, Constance Classen and Paul Stoller. The work of Sarah Pink is profoundly influenced by this approach (2009). For an insightful critique, see (Ingold 2011b).

⁴ Defined as "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (Csordas 1993: 138).



qualities” as a crucial aspect of embodiment in dance⁵ (2008: 103) and Ingold’s radical reconsideration of our ways of inhabiting the world on the basis of the “dynamic synergy of organism and environment” (2000a: 16).

In spite of its potential for exciting developments, this increasingly vast and diverse research field⁶ is sometimes weakened by the widespread tendency to take the concept of culture for granted, failing to define or problematize it, and thus leaving open the problem of exactly how one’s sense experience can be “already refined by a cultural agent actively constructing his or her perceptions” (Downey 2002: 488)⁷.

For this reason, Ingold’s work on how humans and non-humans are in meaningful, mutual interaction with the environment can be taken as a point of departure for analysing *localized* (that is, contextualized and site-specific) instances of embodiment (2000a; 2011a). Ingold suggests that “slicing up” different sensory modalities make little sense: as he so eloquently put it, “the world we perceive is the same world, whatever path we take, and in perceiving it, each of us acts as an undivided centre of movement and awareness” (2011a: 136). Such a view lays the foundations for a truly phenomenological ethnographic research on embodiment, unhampered by the burden of placing too much importance on the concept of culture. Moreover, underlining the intertwining of one’s movements and his or her perception of the environment paves the way for more in-depth analyses of the role of space and place in research.

In recent anthropological research, issues connected to the quasi-paradigm of embodiment are increasingly explored together with an overall effort to come to occupy similar ‘places’ to those of research participants (Pink 2009: 2). In fact,

“by attending to the sensoriality and materiality of other people’s ways of being in the world, we

⁵ The importance of the kinesthetic qualities of movement to all kinds of research on sensation and embodiment should not be underestimated. Studies of different sensory modalities not only resonate with each other, but also dismantle the way in which we ordinarily conceive of the senses as entirely distinct ‘channels’ of perception. Confront the following passage from Downey’s analysis of hearing/listening in capoeira: “music makers may perceive rhythms, pitches, and melodies as much from muscle and joint placement, motion and tension, as from the sounds produced by their actions” (2002: 488).

⁶ For useful overviews, see (Lock – Farquhar 2007; Mascia-Lees 2011).

⁷ Important developments in anthropology move in the opposite direction, debunking the “great partition” (see Steners 1994) that opposes nature and culture and showing new ontological paths to follow (see especially Descola 2013).



cannot directly access or share their personal, individual, biographical, shared or ‘collective’ memories, experiences or imaginations. However, we can, by aligning our bodies, rhythms, tastes, ways of seeing and more with theirs, begin to become involved in making places that are similar to theirs and thus feel that we are similarly emplaced” (Pink 2009: 40).

Similar considerations bear special implications with regard to the practice of participant observation, since conducting fieldwork always implies both an element of being *with* others and of being *somewhere* (see Maso 2001; Low – Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). This has led Sarah Pink to advocate an “emplaced ethnography” that “attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment” (2009: 25) – a theoretical standpoint that closely resembles Tim Ingold’s approach.

As a specific method for conducting fieldwork, apprenticeship links emplacement to the process of “enskilment”: being a novice and having to deal heavily with the issue of skill acquisition, the researcher is soon bound to realise that his or her learning processes are inseparable from a specific ‘doing’ that invests the body as it is “embedded in the context of a practical engagement in the world” (Ingold 2000b: 416). One useful way to interpret the resulting ‘understanding in practice’ is to see it as an instance of learning “as a situated activity” (Lave – Wenger 1991: 29). This particular approach further highlights “the embodiment of capacities of awareness and response by environmentally situated agents” (Ingold 2000a: 6).

From what I have said so far, it should be clear that a mutually constitutive bond exists between enskilment, emplacement and embodiment, three processes that occupy a prominent position when apprentice-based research is carried out reflexively. In such cases, ethnographers enter specific “communities of practice” and are confronted with the problem of establishing (and later renegotiating) their more or less “peripheral participation” within that community (Wenger 1998; Lave – Wenger 1991). Therefore it can be stated that through reflexive apprenticeship-based research participant observation is reconsidered on the basis of a “social theory of learning” whose building blocks are the concepts of *competence* and *participation*, tightly woven together in the *practices of social communities* (Wenger 1998: 4-5).

In the field of Japanese performing arts, a well-established tradition of ethnomusicological analysis



continues to survey the dazzling variety of living musical phenomena⁸, and recent research has focused on many of the above mentioned theoretical and methodological issues. But unfortunately, even though these studies are often informed by anthropological preoccupations they tend to dismiss the issue of the researcher's "situatedness" (Vannini 2008) as simply one among many elements in a broader approach directed toward the study of "the music itself" (Hennion 2012: 249). More overtly reflexive analyses have focused on such themes as the embodied transmission of traditional dance (Hahn 2007) and the importance of issues of place and space in music-making (Hankins – Stevens 2014). "Sites of music transmission" (Keister 2008: 240) have also become objects of research.

Perhaps the most relevant example of an ethnographic study concerned with "embodied knowledge" is Tomie Hahn's *Sensational knowledge* (2007). The book seeks to "reveal how a culture's transmission processes prioritize practitioners' attendance to certain sensoria [...] and how the transmission of sensory knowledge can shape dancers" (2007: 5). Although it very successfully portrays the "taking in of sensory information to train the body" (Hahn 2007: 163), Hahn's work is somewhat limited by its naïve reliance upon unproblematized constructions such as "Japanese culture" and ideologically constructed notions such as "a Japanese way of knowing" (2007: 1) and "a Japanese sensibility" (2007: 5). Rather than taking such concepts for granted, it would be more effective to confront the question of how the very practice of so-called 'traditional performing arts' comply with or defy the stability of widely shared assumptions on what exactly constitutes the "Japaneseness" of this or that cultural product.

With regards to Nō theatre, Fujita focused on how a "practical" approach to teaching and learning is aimed at cultivating the "corporeal" dimension of practice, rather than at instilling abstract notions in the mind of practitioners (2013, see especially 309-312)⁹. However, as in Hahn's case, he sometimes relies on outdated ethnographic conceptualizations and invokes as analytical tools ancient philosophical principles that might bear little significance to younger generations of Nō practitioners (2013: 311, 318-320).

⁸ For a comprehensive overview of the traditional repertoires, see Tokita – Hughes 2008.

⁹ Keister similarly notes that "what is most highly revered in traditional Japanese music is not an abstract conception of the past, but the very concrete and particular way of doing tradition – a ritual process – that produces practical knowledge" (2008: 240).



Although similar works indicate a growing attention toward embodiment in Japanese performing arts, researchers need to confront and dismiss dangerous orientalist and self-orientalist views that stand in the way of a more effective analysis of the relationship between body and practice.

In the case of Japanese court music, too, explorations of these topics are at an embryonic level. Early researchers occasionally acknowledged the practical training received during fieldwork (Harich-Schneider 1953: 49-50; Garfias 1960: 16), but only insofar as this could bring legitimization in a field often obscure to outsiders. Since these initial studies, research by non-Japanese and Japanese alike has remained predominantly historical, increasingly influenced by the so-called “Picken school” (Hughes 2010)¹⁰. Even a recent study of a group of practitioners active in Osaka tackles the issue mostly from the point of view of its social history, leaving largely unexplored the present circumstances and the direct experience of being trained in the music (Terauchi 2013).

Overall, a rather conservative approach continues to characterize the choice of research topics, and methodologies tend to depend on disciplinary affiliations. One notable exception is Takuwa’s recent comparison of ancient treatises with the living tradition of *Jūnidan bugaku* in Morimachi (Shizuoka prefecture), a ceremonial performance that includes local variations of *gagaku* dances (2012: 59). Although the body does not hold a special place in the analysis¹¹, this work is based on thorough fieldwork research, and represents an example of how mixed methods may offer new ways of looking at traditional performing arts.

Researchers have also started to investigate non-traditional spaces of court music performance, focusing on the social life of *gagaku* beyond the geographical confines of the Japanese archipelago (Terauchi 2015). Even though a new generation of scholars has started to innovate the field, the themes of situatedness, amateurship, place-making and the embodied transmission of knowledge are notably absent from the intellectual panorama of Japanese court music.

On Becoming Many: What is a Gagaku Practitioner?

A general consensus identifies *gagaku* as a bundle of different repertoires comprising orchestral pieces (purely instrumental or accompanying dance), arrived in Japan (through the Silk Road)

¹⁰ In this context, the most important contribution in English has been that of Steven G. Nelson (see 2008a; 2008b).

¹¹ Bodily movements are the subject of another, more markedly historical research project (Takuwa 2003).



between the 6th and the 9th century from Tang-period China, the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula, and South-East Asia (see Endō 2013: 14-15). Over the course of its long history, *gagaku* has been consistently (although not constantly) performed within the imperial court, among aristocrats and members of the imperial family. For this reason, it is strongly associated with that institution and is often referred to as ‘Japanese court music’.

This association with power eventually led to a dynamic opposing centre and periphery, with complex claims to authenticity on both sides. At the same time, the transfer of the capital to Tokyo in 1868 and the creation of a centralized Office of Gagaku (*Gagakukyoku*) in 1870 have deeply affected the transmission of the music: as it is performed today, *gagaku* is thus “largely the result of a systematization of the late nineteenth century” (Nelson 2008a: 37). Such modern developments brought about a double imbalance, particularly evident in today’s Japanese society: not only is the number of *gagaku* professionals restricted to the twenty-odd individuals of the official Music Department of the Imperial Household in Tokyo (the official representatives of the entire genre), but several pre-existing lines of transmission and performance in Western Japan have been relegated to the status of local epiphenomena¹².

In the 21st century, the world of *gagaku* is therefore an ‘ocean of non-professionals’, encompassing various degrees of involvement, proficiency and recognition. Mapping the field is a demanding task that has yet to be undertaken, but a tentative topography (and typology) would have to include: students’ groups at local universities; citizens’ associations active in the preservation of specific items of cultural heritage; groups affiliated directly with certain shrines or temples; semi-professional groups who record and perform in Japan and abroad, and many more¹³.

Given its centennial relationship with the Kasuga grand shrine and the Kōfukuji temple (two of the most important religious institutions of Nara), the group Nanto gakuso would certainly deserve a place in this ‘atlas of *gagaku* practice’. The group claims to be the heir of an ancient *gagaku* family, the Koma clan, and to be carrying on the tradition of one of the so-called “three offices of music”,

¹² This is evident from the fact that such “local versions” of *gagaku* are often designated as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties by the Japanese government, whereas ‘central’ *gagaku* is the only one to which the label of ‘folk’ does not apply (see Lancashire 2013).

¹³ Compare Diego Pellicchia’s typology of Nō theater amateurs:
<http://www.wochikochi.jp/english/relayessay/2014/01/noh-amateur.php> (Accessed on: 17th June 2016).



an early-modern expression designating three important sites of *gagaku* performance in the Kansai region¹⁴ (Nelson 2008a: 47).

From such claims to the past, it is clear that history and location significantly increase the cultural capital of Nanto *gakuso* as a local group of practitioners. And yet, its current organizational set-up is very much the product of 19th-century Japan: founded (as Nara *gakukai*) in 1876, it was renamed and reorganized several times after the Second World War, until it became Nanto *Gakuso Incorporated* in 1968 (Kasagi 2008: 68-69).

Given the ambivalent tension between past and present, becoming a practitioner in the group signifies first and foremost being inscribed in a complex trajectory encompassing historical and geographical determinations. This in turn generates a “feeling of connection to an imagined pre-modern time and place” (Keister 2008: 260).

More importantly, however, I want to suggest that participation in Nanto *gakuso* also entails “a negotiation of ways of being a person in that context” (Wenger 1998: 149) – which implies much more than any simple sense of belonging. Two examples from my apprenticeship-based fieldwork will illustrate how an “identity of competence” (Wenger 1998: 175) emerges through concrete processes of *enskilment*, and how this identity cannot be reduced to preassigned social roles. The examples concern individuals with varying degrees of proficiency, to show that becoming a practitioner is not a process that ends when mastery is attained.

A few months before I left Japan in 2014, members of Nanto *gakuso* asked me to present my research during one of the normal weekly practice nights, held on Saturday from 7 to 8 pm. They did so because the exact scope of my presence was not always easy to grasp: at times they would see me playing the transverse flute (*ryūteki*) with the other ‘beginners’ (*shoshinsha*) during the first evening class from 7 to 8 pm, while other times I took pictures, scribbled notes and recorded during the ‘regular members’ (*ippansha*) class, from 8 to 10 pm (see Tab. 1).

¹⁴ The other sites being the Shitennōji temple in Osaka and the imperial palace in Kyoto.

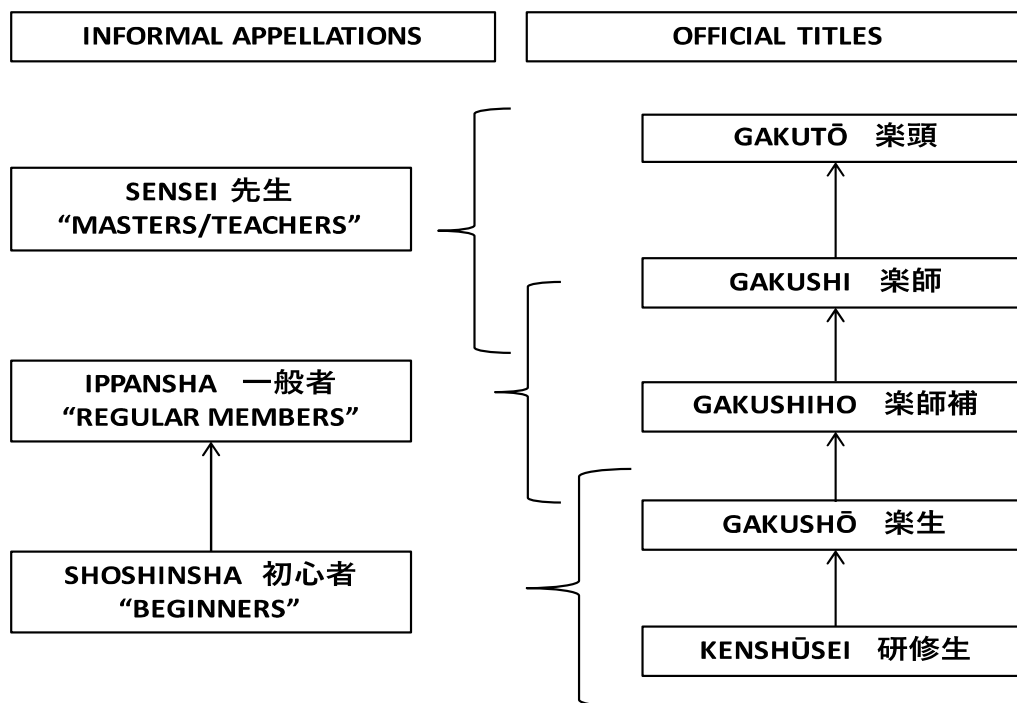


Table 1: Formal and informal titles and appellations that make up the structure of Nanto Gakuso. Adapted from Kasagi 2008.

The prospect of talking about my ongoing fieldwork with the very subjects of the research was troubling: should I make clear that my work focused specifically on amateur practice, in so doing ‘showing my hand’ and pointing the spotlight towards them? How was I to explain my interest without portraying the amateurs in derogatory terms as *non*-professional, as if they were missing something? I finally decided to seek for the advice of another group member, a key informant whom I knew would contribute competently.

When I explained to him that I understood the word amateur as close to its etymological meaning of ‘someone who loves or cares deeply about something’, and that my theoretical perspective followed “a French sociologist” (Antoine Hennion) in defining amateurs in the broadest possible way as “‘users of music’, that is, active practitioners of a love for music, whether it involves playing, being part of a group, attending concerts or listening to records or the radio” (Hennion 2001: 1), he urged me to opt for the term *amachua* rather than using the word *jissensha* (literally, ‘practitioner’). He said: “I think if you explain a little bit the special meaning the word has for you, *amachua* will be better than *jissensha*. Many people will be confused if you use *jissensha*, it’s not a very natural



term” (male amateur, ca. 30 y/o).

On another occasion, a member of the group had told me: “Only the court musicians can eat from playing *gagaku*. We are *gagaku enthusiasts (aikōka)*, but we don’t really think about becoming professionals” (male amateur, ca. 40 y/o). *Aikōka* would indeed be the closest translation for the world amateur, since it incorporates two characters that express love or passion about things or persons and is often used in the sense of ‘aficionado’, ‘devotee’. However, my interviewee was using the term quite differently: he meant to suggest that even though his group could not be compared with professional performers, this did not imply that they were any less interested in and passionate about court music. It is equally worth noting that publications on Nanto *gakuso* written by its leader also specify that “all the members of Nanto *gakuso* have their own professional activity, and none of them makes a living from performing court music alone. In other words, *they are not professionals (puro)*” (Kasagi 2008: 68; emphasis added).

Considering the various appellations employed by these and other research participants, two observations can be made. First of all, group members seem to employ a sort of ‘differential rational’ that ‘blocks out’ the overtones implied in the use of the other terms at their disposal, thus conveying more precisely a specific kind of self-identification *vis-à-vis* a larger reality, be that the world of *gagaku (aikōka)*, the opposition of professionalism and amateurism (*amachua* VS *puro*), or the specificity of being a practitioner (*jissensha*). In other words, by choosing to resort to a particular word to describe themselves, practitioners may indirectly emphasize what they are *not* (as if they were saying “we are amateurs, *not* professionals”), or stress one key aspect of their activity (“music *lovers*”) thus making clear the world of court music they specifically identify with (“we are music *lovers*, we are not in the music business”). Secondly, members of Nanto *gakuso* do not subscribe to a simple definition of what it means to be a *gagaku* practitioner: they can be described as ‘amateurs’ because the flexibility with which they refer to themselves enables that definition to become one of the available forms of self-description.

A second example revolves around the special meaning of the role and term *sensei* (which can be roughly translated as ‘teacher’ or ‘master’) in the context of Nanto *gakuso*’s activities. Every week, flute players receive instructions from a *sensei* who leads the class, sitting behind a long desk and giving indications on how to play certain passages or concerning other technical details of the



performance. He has to be a regular member, middle age male¹⁵ not part of the *Rijikai*, the group's administrative structure composed entirely by members who hold the title of *gakushi* and who are *always* referred to as *sensei* (see Tab.1). I emphasize that members of the *Rijikai* are *permanently* identified as *sensei* because this sets them apart from the weekly 'teacher', who is also *temporarily* addressed using the same term. In other words, the latter's role does not correspond uniformly to the vertical structure of the group. This 'temporary teacher' is appointed on the basis of a pre-established rotation, so that every week a different regular member can lead the class, effectively learning how to teach.

On a superficial level, this simply has to do with the peculiar polysemy of the word *sensei*, which commonly denotes someone who has reached a high level of proficiency in a skill, art or other field of practice. However, this does not exhaust the significance of the phenomenon: within Nanto *gakuso*, in fact, it is the 'identity of competence' accorded to the person, rather than his title or rank in the hierarchy, that determines the negotiated meaning of the word *sensei*.

In a light conversation with a female practitioner in her forties, I stated noticing that she referred to one of the younger 'regulars' using the term *sensei*, even though he never led the weekly classes. As is customary in Japan, different members of the group commonly resort to a range of suffixes to be added to other persons' surnames, in so doing signalling varying degrees of respect, proximity or intimacy. For example, older members call the younger ones *-kun* (as in Yamamoto-kun), while for people of roughly the same age it is customary to use *-san*. There would be nothing especially noticeable about this, if it was not for the fact that among members of Nanto *gakuso* the term *sensei* is clearly used not only in relation to seniority, but also to make an assessment of other members' perceived mastery of the art – in other words, as a means to express the mutually assigned to and constantly renegotiated identity of competence.

My experience with Nanto *gakuso* thus indicates that the process of becoming a *gagaku* practitioner does not so much rely on assuming a specific identity, as much as it is a process in which members learn to identify with more than one pre-established social construct. In a very concrete sense, for example, an amateur can at the same time be and not be a *sensei*, depending on

¹⁵ Although in the case of the transverse flute and mouth organ classes women never lead the practice, this is not rare in the case of the oboe *hichiriki* classes.

the identity of competence he or she is assigned by others.



Fig. 1. Okeikoba. The practice room. Picture by the author.

'Spacing' Practice

Recent research indicates that physical and social behaviour can change due to “the social construction of the space” (Keister 2008: 256), while the meaning of a place can be constituted through bodily presence (Vergunst – Ingold 2006: 77). For this reason, the architectural features of the environment in which court music is practiced are connected with the contents and methods of music transmission, and must be analysed in conjunction to the demeanour of the practitioners. In this section, I will try to offer an example of how the peculiar use of a confined site, the practice room or *keikoba*, can contribute to instilling a certain “sense of place” (Feld – Basso 1996) or, to put it differently, to the ‘emplacement’ of *gagaku* practitioners.



The first impression when entering the practice room used by Nanto gakuso's flute players is one of dignified simplicity: *tatami* floor; rice paper over sliding doors (*fusuma*); a small, long table used by the lesson's appointed 'teacher'; a number of cushions amassed next to the table (Fig.1). In the same building, two nearly identical rooms are used by the other practitioners, while dancers exercise in an open space between the rooms. This simple setup is highly functional: when group rehearsals are held, two of the rooms are 'fused together' by moving the sliding doors; the dancers can then use the central space as a miniature stage, facing the orchestra. While this arrangement may appear of little relevance, I maintain that it actually participates in the overall experience of *gagaku* practice, contributing to the transmission of specific educational values.

The space of *gagaku* practice is very different from the typical European solfège classroom studied ethnographically by Hennion (2015: 221-244). In that case, rows of desks are prearranged in front of a musical instrument, often a vertical piano, transforming the room into 'a classroom', a term that "names the underlying function of this space" (Hennion 2015: 222). In the case of Japanese court music, however, thick, squared cushions (*zabuton*) are used in place of seats and desks. The physical orientation of the classroom is marked by the presence of a low table, the only piece of furniture punctuating the space.

The grid of seats and desks in the solfège classroom "gives material reality to the hypothesis that there is a homogeneous plane, which allows us to use the same units to evaluate different elements which have been defined a priori according to the same parameters" (Hennion 2015: 223). By contrast, the educational topology of *gagaku* maintains different, more ambiguous mediators. For instance, the relative absence of furniture does not necessarily imply a greater freedom of movement or the interchangeable nature of different spots within the room. On the contrary, certain regularities can be observed. Among beginners, those who need to learn the most invariably sit in the front rows of cushions, closer to the teacher, and this may or may not coincide with an age distribution of the practitioners. For regular members, the situation is more complex: in general, 'old-timers' tend to sit in the back, but certain members occupy the same spot consistently, possibly to mark specific power dynamics or even personal attitudes toward other practitioners (revealed in part by the very fact that according to one's position in the room certain persons are 'pushed out of view'). 'Veteran' members (*sensei*), invariably occupy the row(s) to the back of the room. Their



demeanour is telling: one of them never uses a cushion; another answers his phone and sometimes smokes cigarettes (something that would be unthinkable for a 'normal' member). In general, the masters move around more often and more nonchalantly than other practitioners, and spark conversations among one another rather freely.

When it comes to the researcher, 'outsider' par excellence, other dynamics come into play. No doubt under the influence of Euro-American commonplace uses of the classroom environment, I tended to occupy the back of the room, sitting in front of the older masters, while actively trying to find a place that would provide the highest degree of 'invisibility' allowing me to regulate as needed the observation end of the 'participant observation' scale¹⁶.

One day while playing during the regular members' class I felt a not-so-gentle tapping on the back. As soon as I turned, one of the older masters told me emphatically: "Go sit in the front!", accompanying his suggestion with a vivid hand gesture. While trying to do so in the least conspicuous way, I realized not so much that I had been making a 'mistake' for months in choosing my seating spot (a fully conscious and intentional choice at that point of my fieldwork), but rather that my peripheral participation was being renegotiated by the members of the group that had the power to do so. In a sense, then, the intimation to occupy the front rows was not so much a reprimand, as a sign of further inclusion.

Similar anecdotes are no doubt extremely common in cases of fieldwork conducted within a group, and especially so when it comes to apprenticeship. In this specific instance, the episode shows that fieldwork always consists of *inhabiting* certain places with one's body and that for this reason directing one's attention toward the relation between space, bodies and interactional dynamics can have profound impacts on the researcher's findings.

As these observations indicate, even the apparently simple, flat and fluid organization of the practice space that characterizes Nanto gakuso can be 'conductive' of different ways of inhabiting the space, affecting the emplaced dimension of practice. The lesson place is also the most important site of generational contact (see Keister 2008: 239)., and as such it plays a role in the continuous remoulding of tradition. In other words, the *keikoba* is not simply the arena for the transmission of a codified set of values, but also a true actor in processes of both emplacement and

¹⁶ For a typical example of such a 'gradual' interpretation of participant observation, see Bernard 2006: 347-349.



enskilment: therefore, learning what place to occupy in the practice room is inseparable from learning how to conduct oneself in a specific context of practice.

Attending

Annemarie Mol's anthropological work on the atherosclerosis of the lower limbs provides abundant ethnographic evidence for an audacious philosophical thesis: "if an object is real this is because it is part of a practice. It is a reality *enacted*" (2003: 44; emphasis in the original). Indeed, there is a performative quality to practice: its objects are not independent of their context, rather they are "*enacted in practice*" (Mol 2003: 152; emphasis added). While on the one hand this naturally leads to a keen interest on materiality, on a more radical level Mol's observation recasts the whole anthropological inquiry in terms of what could be called a "praxiography", the ethnographic study of practice (Mol 2003: 31-33; see also Law 2004: 59).

Interestingly, Mol's theory leads us not too far from recent developments in the sociology of music, increasingly inclined to study music's role "as it is woven into the tapestry of social life through the informal singing of songs, the pop concert, the car radio, the jukebox, ambient music, organizational music, amateur music production, singing, whistling and humming, and the playing of records, tapes and CDs" (DeNora 2000: 159) – in a word, devoting more and more attention to practices. According to this view, the music lover is not the passive end of a pre-existing process largely dictated by societal and cultural dispositions (a model famously put forth by Pierre Bourdieu). Rather, (s)he shifts from activity to passivity, acquiring the skills necessary to modulate or "condition" a form of attachment to the music (Hennion – Gomart 1999: 242-243). In this context, an aspect that has received less scholarly attention is the degree to which practice can be understood in terms of attendance. Here we can turn to Japanese court music for some concrete examples.

Gagaku's weekly rehearsals on Saturday nights and, once a month, on Sunday, are commonly referred to as '*okeiko*'¹⁷ by practitioners. The following exchange is very common among group members, revealing in its triviality.

A. - Have you been to *okeiko* last week? What did you do?

¹⁷ O- is a honorific prefix.



B. - Yeah I went, but we only did two pieces. You didn't miss on much.

Such apparently unremarkable everyday conversations are not meaningful because of their content, and tend not to stand out. However, they reveal that the word with which amateurs refer to *gagaku*'s 'rehearsals' is *okeiko* rather than, for example, *jissen*, the word used by sociologists and anthropologists to translate the English term 'practice' (e.g. Tanabe 2003)¹⁸.

We have already discussed the fundamental importance of the practice room, *keikoba*, and the flexibility with which practitioners identify themselves on the basis of a mutual identity of competence. What I would like to suggest here is that rather than holding a mental image of what the practice is about, thinking of themselves as 'practitioners of *gagaku*', members constitute their practice by *attending (to) okeiko*. In the case of Japanese court music, then, it would be possible to talk about 'communities of *keiko*', adapting our conceptual tool to the vocabulary of research participants. That this has some significance to the way ethnographers think about the enactment of reality in practice is perhaps most evident from one specific aspect of Nanto *gakuso*'s *keiko*: mobility.

For several months, I have been going to the weekly rehearsals by train, with a small group of practitioners who live in Kyoto. Some of the most meaningful moments of my fieldwork thus took place on the way home when, after 10 pm, I found myself caught up in a moving form of ethnographic hanging out. One night, halfway home on a train, a woman in her forties sitting next to me reflected, talking to herself as much as to me: "I love playing at shrines, out in the open. But I also like *okeiko*. I mean, the feeling is different, but I like going every week, I think it's really something good to be doing". Months before, I had interviewed the mother of two young children, who had joined Nanto *gakuso* only recently. She had told me: "It's really good for us to come and play. The children learn a lot about respect and manners, but it's also fun: *the more we come the more we feel in a familiar environment*" (female practitioner, ca. 35 y/o).

Conversations like these point to a constitutive link between passion and attendance¹⁹. In fact, for

¹⁸ Indeed, this is true of virtually all Japanese performing arts, *jissen* being the etic term used by analysts, in contrast with the emic term *okeiko*, commonly used by amateurs and professionals of a certain art form. It would be rather odd to hear the latter refer to their activities in terms of *jissen*, while *okeiko* is a widely shared term.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of the importance of passion in the sociological analysis of music see Hennion 2015.



many members of Nanto gakuso attending *okeiko* means not only ‘going to rehearsals’, but also cultivating the attachment they feel towards *gagaku*. I believe that rethinking the concept of enactment in terms of ‘passion attendance’ can highlight the way in which practitioners share and shape their practices. The concept also resonates with the dynamics of becoming a member of a community of practice, or, as I have suggested to call it, a community of *keiko*: between the “formalized behaviors in the ritualized atmosphere of a lesson room” that “socialize individuals into a group that physically demonstrate[s] its loyalty and respect” (Keister 2008: 249) and the pressures of a “discipline of belonging” (Wenger 1998: 208), there may lie a softer way of enacting equally durable forms of attachment: “the more we come, the more we feel”.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show how insights gained in the field can modify or, to use a word that resonates with the musical jargon, modulate theoretical concepts. I have started with an outline of the quasi-paradigm of embodiment as the basis for an apprenticeship-based methodology. I have then moved on to the issue of “enskilment”, claiming that becoming an amateur is a process tightly bound to the negotiation of a shared “identity of competence” (see Wenger 1998). Next, I have considered the role played by the practice room (*keikoba*) in complex dynamics of “emplacement”. Finally, I have focused on how members of Nanto gakuso understand the “enactment” of practice in terms of attendance.

Certainly, the notion of ‘passion attendance’ reflects the overtones of becoming “sensitized practitioners” (Hennion 2015) within a general *trajectory* of embodiment. In this sense, enskilment, emplacement and enactment are not separated processes, but dimensions of practice that co-occur and shape it as it unfolds through the bodies of the amateurs. The fact that such processes can be re-conceptualized on the basis of what members of Nanto gakuso have to say about themselves is an indication that researchers should continue to refine the ways in which their own practices can resonate with the practices of others.



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Abstract – IT

Questo articolo esplora tre diverse “modulazioni” di altrettanti concetti antropologici, modificati dal contatto con specifici momenti di ricerca sul campo. Viene presa in considerazione la pratica della musica di corte giapponese (*gagaku*) nel contesto del gruppo di amatori Nanto Gakuso, attivo a Nara, esplorando esempi di “enskilment”, “emplacement” ed “enactment” attraverso la traiettoria paradigmatica dell’incorporazione (*embodiment*). Propugnando una metodologia basata sul cosiddetto ‘apprendistato’, l’articolo introduce la nozione di ‘passion attendance’ (‘partecipazione passionale’), per descrivere come gli amatori della musica di corte giapponese articolano la propria passione. L’articolo suggerisce che questo concetto possa essere utile a riassumere diversi processi simultanei, allo stesso tempo rimanendo fedele alle concettualizzazioni e auto-descrizioni dei praticanti. In questo modo, gli strumenti analitici impiegati dal ricercatore possono risuonare più pienamente con le esperienze vissute degli altri partecipanti alla propria ricerca.

Abstract – ENG

This article investigates three different “modulations” of anthropological concepts, modified by contact with specific circumstances in the field. It looks at the practice of Japanese court music (*gagaku*) within Nanto gakuso, a group of amateurs active in Nara, and explores instances of “enskilment”, “emplacement” and “enactment” from the overall paradigmatic trajectory of embodiment. Advocating an apprenticeship-based methodology, the article puts forth the notion of ‘passion attendance’ to describe how lovers of Japanese court music articulate their participation. Ultimately, the article suggests that the concept can be useful in summing up different co-occurring processes, while remaining close to practitioners’ self-descriptions and understandings. In this way, the analytical tools employed by the researcher can resonate more fully with the lived experiences of his or her research participants.



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