

사유와 소리의 계층적 갈등: 콕토-사티 발레 프로젝트 [파라드]를 중심으로

A Stratified Conflict between ‘Artistic’ Thoughts and ‘Realistic’ Sounds: Focusing on the Cocteau – Satie Project, Parade

김경화 Kyoung-hwa Kim
한양대학교
Hanyang University

국문요약

이 연구는 소리에 내면화된 사회적 취향과 정체성, 혹은 권력 관계가 예술에 어떻게 나타나는지에 대한 관심으로 시작되었다. 음악 작품을 구성하는 물리적 재료로만 여겨지는 소리 재료에도 사회, 문화적 취향이나 그 안에서 작동하는 계층 관계가 존재한다는 것을 20세기 작곡가 사티 <파라드>(Parade)를 중심으로 살펴본다.

<파라드>는 보드빌 극장이나 음악 홀 밖의 사이드 쇼를 표방. 통속적인 거리의 엔터테인먼트를 엘리트 예술에 도입한 아방가르드 작품이다. 이른바 ‘저급’ 취향이라 여겨지는 일상의 소리 재료를 활용하여 ‘고급’ 예술에 도전하는 아방가르드적 사유를 발전시킨다. 이 연구는 사티가 그의 예술적 사유를 발전시키기 위해 사용한 소리 재료에 주목한다. 일상의 소리, 길거리 쇼에서 사용한 온갖 소란스러운 음악, 재즈 등의 재료에 이미 내면화되어 있는 사회적 취향, 고급의 사유와 저급의 사운드 사이에서 작동하는 계층적 갈등, 그로부터 발현되는 의미 등을 살핀다.

Abstract

This study was started from the interest of how social taste and identity, or hierarchical order that are internalized in sounds are revealed in art. This research is going to look into the fact that there are social and cultural taste or preference even for the sound materials that are considered as a musical or physical element, and how one’s social class gets revealed on the basis of Parade by Erik Satie, an Avant-gardist of the 20th century. Parade is an avantgardistic ballet where a vaudeville or the variety sideshows outside a music hall was brought in, and where low art form such as street entertainment was also introduced in high art. Using sounds from everyday life that are regarded as so-called common or ‘low taste’, the challenges to ‘high art’ and develop avantgardistic thought. This study is going to look into the cause of stratified conflict that was revealed in Satie’s artistic ideas and realistic materials. Also, it seeks to find paradoxical relation-

ship between the reality and artistic world, so to speak, high art form. This study focuses on the Cocteau and Satie's radical ballet, Parade in 1917 to analyze their Avantgardistic attempt.

It was a very sensitive issue when it comes to 'high' and 'low' culture in the early 20th century music. Over many years of music history, there has been a binary structure between 'high and mainstream culture' focusing on bourgeois elite concert halls and 'popular and low culture', and it was impossible to be reconciled that this structure reached to an extreme in the early 20th century. Surely a valuation of music and stratified classification might not only be an outcome of bourgeois elite culture that used to take the lead of musical world, but also a consequence of fixated social consciousness. Classifying culture as 'high' and 'low', derived from Bourgeois, could also be the result of practice of valuating art based on the aesthetic concept and autonomy of art which also means 'art for art's sake'. With the development of technology, fast growing and extensive spread of popular music, and, in response, the criticism of music deepened this radically dichotomous structure.

American composers from the early 20th century such as Gershwin and Copeland successfully crossed the boundaries between popular and elite music. French composers such as Debussy, Ravel and Satie also used popular music like Cakewalk or Ragtime. In addition to that, there was not only the declaration of noise art by Luigi Russolo, but also an attempt to imitate noise from everyday life in a musical way by some composers like Edgard Varese and Honegger. This kind of phenomenon could be the consequence of composers' constant interest of the discovery of new musical materials and fresh sounds. However, those popular elements or sound materials that are considered as low level of taste became the most important acoustic tools for some Avant-garde composers to oppose to the conventional institution and traditional aesthetic attitude or to even ask questions to art itself.

This study was started from the interest of Erik Satie's Avantgardistic challenge. While his musical style and materials are from something popular or even low, substantial parts of his ideas and intention are speculative and radically based on elitism. Therefore, this study is going to look into the cause of stratified conflict that was revealed in his artistic ideas and realistic materials. Also, it seeks to find paradoxical relationship between the reality and artistic world, so to speak, abstracted form. This study focuses on a radical ballet, Parade in 1917 to analyze his Avantgardistic attempt.

In 1917, Parade was premiered in Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. As a ballet production, the scenario was by Jean Cocteau, the music was by Satie, the sets and costumes were designed by Picasso and choreography was by Leonid Massine. It already sounds very interesting just with the fact that famous artists collaborated for this art work but the idea beneath the work is far more remarkable. Parade means to lure the crowd outside music halls to play variety sideshows. The subtitle of this work, "Ballet réaliste," was named and promoted by Cocteau. It sought to bring common street entertainment into aristocratic ballet in France. This ballet is composed of characters such as a Chinese conjurer, acrobats, a little American girl and other carnival performers. The characters in the ballet go about their business without any particular story line or dramatic event. A Chinese conjurer does magic, acrobats perform acrobatics, a little American Girl, a character of a silent film, does a pantomime of a silent film.

This ballet was radical in many different ways. It seemed quite surprising when low culture which seemed more suitable for music halls, vaudeville or street performance appeared on the high art scene but Cocteau's scenario was even more shocking since he dealt with something routine and a trivial story line instead of having a dramatic event or development. The sets and costumes by Picasso were designed as if an enormous Cubist painting was alive and moving around, and especially the exaggerated costumes made of cardboard made a dancer almost impossible to move and perform properly. Satie parodied an image of sounds from everyday life and used mechanically repeated ostinato patterns, exoterically popular music of the then and even realistic sounds as a musical instrument in his music such as siren, pistol shots, steamboat whistle and typewriter.

It was also controversial when it comes to the discordance among each artistic part that comprises of this ballet. It is typical for all the components of ballet to coexist harmoniously: music is composed based on the plot, the sets and costume design visually embody the image of the ballet, choreography and dancers' gestures combine all of these so that the audience can resonate with it. However, this ballet is far from organically harmonizing with each component. In fact, all the components of this ballet - music and plot, the sets and costume designs and choreography - were very independent and, rather, separated with each other. It was almost inessential for Satie to make music with Cocteau's scenario, and so for Picasso. It seems that incongruity of artistic components of this ballet is what Parade is actually looking for.

Daniel Albright, a cultural historian, stated that "Parade's charm is a function of the dissonance among the arts that constitute it."¹⁾ He also pointed out that this ballet is the very first example which shows spectacle where "constituent arts refuse to fit together into trans-mediating chords," and it "created a theatrical experiment in interference patterns among artistic media."²⁾ When the ballet was premiered, it became Succès de scandale just like Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring, and it is still a subject of controversy among critics. Most Parisian audiences disliked Parade. First of all, they were opposed of pandering to low level of taste which was not suitable for their noble heritage. Furthermore, they were disgusted by the way-too-ordinary-and-primitive-story-line that makes them feel silly and foolish. Moreover, the costume made of cardboard which makes dancers difficult to move and perform and continuous collage of disjointed action and movement might have made the audience even more confused and hard to understand. In fact, the biggest controversy back then was whether it was the right time to put this work on the stage or not.

While The Great War reached the height where people were suffering heavy losses and bloody disaster, the fact that this innocent-but-cynical ballet consists the lowbrow music and vulgar humor was humiliating. This can be related to the social participation of art or an artist's social responsibility. Were they living in an ivory tower that they decided to present this way-too-playful and provocative work at that period? What should art be in the phase of social chaos and extreme brutality of war? The then critics expressed their rage and shock towards this humorous-looking and escapism-like art.³⁾

Even until now, this issue doesn't speak with one voice. Howard Goodall, a British music historian and a journalist, has criticized this artwork where it turns a blind eye to the reality and just enjoys intellectual play. On the other hand, Daniel Albright has a different point of view and says Cocteau must have known what kind of response they would get if they put this ballet on stage during the bloody war. That is why Albright also described Parade's way of dealing with the reality of a war as "cultivated apathy." Albright said, "In 1917 the noises of war were never far from the ears of Paris," and during that period, instead of keeping silent on this horrific terror, Cocteau actually had a "mute" gesture to defy the expression. The point where it seems rather apathetic to the savage reality and the fact that it lacked in the participation and responsibility of art when it comes to the reality seem very cynical, and they are "one of the profoundest artistic responses to the Great war."⁴ From Albright's point of view, Parade boycotts current events or displays every broken emotional tissue caused by the horrific reality as it is.

Cocteau asked the whiny audience of that period, "Can't art be beautiful without an intrigue of mysticism, of love, or of annoyance?" He recalled Petrushka which made a huge success from Theatre du Chatelet several years ago and satirically said as follows. They would have been pleased "If the acrobat had loved the little girl and had been killed by the jealous conjuror, killed in turn by the acrobat's wife, or any of thirty-six other dramatic combinations."⁵ "So banal, he implied, had notions of high art become in the wake of romanticism, and so depraved were the expectations of its audience."⁶

Parade is in line with many layers of artistic issues. First of all, as Cocteau mentioned, it is "realistic" ballet since it rejects the conventional narratives and deals with issues from everyday life unlike traditional ballet where they consist of myth, legend or fairy tale such as Giselle, Swan Lake and even greatly extended piece like The Rite of Spring. Also, Parade is Paris street ballet where it incorporates kind of a "cubist collage" of modern society and embraces complicated and noisy spectaculars using popular culture such as music hall, Ragtime, themes from American movies, circus, steamboat whistle, siren, pistol and typewriter which is sound from everyday life. Just as Guillaume Apollinaire who coined a new term "sur-réalisme" in order to explain this work, this ballet became a starting point of surrealist art, a new current of Avant-garde.⁷ Above all in Parade, both 'low' art (circus, sideshow) and 'high' art (ballet) are paradoxically mixed, and it even

shows an awkward alliance. This could be the core issue of Avantgardistic challenge where it rejects the system and authority of art and most importantly, the art itself. Interestingly, this tendency was also Satie's central aesthetics attitude.

When Cocteau was in despair because of a miscarried collaboration with Stravinsky⁸⁾ he conceived three different dances as part of his new ballet after listening to Satie's Trios morceaux en forme de poire. These three dances, later on, get expanded and become Parade's 'Chinese Conjuror', 'A Little American Girl' and 'Acrobat.' After listening to Satie's music, Cocteau believed that Satie was the right composer who could embody his new ballet as music. At that time, Satie was already a mature composer that his aesthetic tendency was well-known in the Paris musical world.

Satie who dropped out of Paris Conservatory and worked as a café pianist in Montmartre had been associated with popular music scene since his early days. He accompanied various satirical Cabaret Songs at a café concert and participated in playful experimental plays like a shadow play which was usually performed at a cabaret stage. Back then, cafes and cabarets in Montmartre were not merely a meeting and drinking venue where music is just in the background. These places were actually used as miniature theatres for an experimental work as well. Satie absorbed various popular songs at these places in his younger days, interacted with experimental artists and paved his way for artistic creation. Meanwhile, Satie was also highly interested in modern Paris' sonic environment.⁹⁾ In the late 19th and early 20th century in Paris, full of exciting, creative and stimulating soundscape was being formed. As a hub of art and culture, various cultures were exhibited and performed on stage in many countries of Europe, as well as Russia, America and Asia. Popular entertainments such as circus, music hall variety and silent movie also gained popularity. From sounds from everyday life produced by street music and musicians to all kinds of noises of the city and popular music, soundscape of Paris became a crucial source of his inspiration. However, instead of simply using these sounds as a mere resource to create music, those sound materials became the most important foundation to challenge and satirize the convention of those days and the authority and systems of art and to develop Satie's aesthetic thinking.

Satie's music and his artistic thought could be described as a word, 'paradox.' In his music, he confuses the audience using various kinds of ways – mixing simplicity and sophis-

tication, humor fitting in with grief, making familiar music something strange, musical elements coming across with non-musical elements, confusing something ordinary with something artistic (special), something academic and popular being jumbled ironically, reversing background sound and the main theme. These effects become more concrete in a collage-like juxtaposition of, as a musicologist Allan mentioned, Satie's unique 'characteristic mosaic structure' and musical components. This irony which is revealed in a collage of inconsistent and conflicting components creates kind of a noise making effect which disturbs a listener's awareness. This is, in turn, extended to an Avantgardistic challenge where problems of established awareness and value system are raised and overthrown. Satie's artistic thought, in other words Avant-garde, was born in this paradox. The more interesting thing is that Satie used popular components and non-musical elements that had been excluded in classical music (also an academy of music, highbrow music). He used them to range over the tradition of high art and intellectual tradition of an academy, and eventually to revolt against them. He developed his own artistic thought by mixing the sound materials that were formed within the framework of stratified thinking and by giving confusion in its framework itself. These characteristics that are shown in Satie's music must have been very attractive to Cocteau. A paradox was a topic which was Cocteau's favorite and specialty. The core theme of Parade is also a 'paradox' – a paradox between foretaste and feast-to-come, a paradox between sideshows and main events, a paradox between outside spectacle and inside one, a paradox between reality and artistic world, a paradox between popular entertainment and high art, and finally, a paradox between comedy and tragedy. Exposing the truth in a grotesque and ridiculous situation must be the essence of a paradox, and this ballet is so. Parade creates paradoxical relations among various issues and displays them to disturb and confuse the audience. It was the mark of this ballet to make the audience to rethink about the problem and the actual meaning in a state of perplexity and discomfort but wouldn't it be the actual purpose of this ballet? Perhaps, this ballet must have targeted the art traditions, cultural order and authority that had been formed by the bourgeois elites and eventually, the high art itself. This Avantgardistic goal is also exactly what Satie had pursued in terms of his aesthetic thought. That is why this goal could have been clearly delivered through using paradoxical elements in his music.

Art is not reality and reality cannot be art. However, art makes the reality to be shown and gives the audience a chance to imagine. In that sense, art can be described as an alternative reality (so-called “virtual” nowadays). However, there are various ways of revealing the problems of the reality in art. Just like how Schoenberg showed in his expressive atonal music, the issues or pain of the reality can be expressed intensely in a very straight forward way. Also, art can be exposed through dealing with the social irregularities and contradiction just as what Kurt Weill had done. Or art can shock and revolt the established order and values of the society, culture, and art itself while implying a paradoxical situation at the same time, just like how Cocteau and Satie showed in their work.

Now, let’s think again whether it was to right timing to create this ballet back then. Think about this ironic situation – there is an ongoing tragedy of the war out there but the stage keeps going on as if they don’t care about the reality just to keep their splendid tradition of high art or to seek for new spectacles. What kind of question did Cocteau and Satie want to ask the audience and critics? They must have focused on how to satirize this kind of paradoxical situation of the society while facing the confusion of the reality and irregularities of art. Doesn’t this mean that they actually revealed the irony between art and reality in an artistic way through having extreme trials; neutralizing all the artistic values that had been established for a long time, and dismantling all the hierarchical order and relations in them?

NOTE

- 1) Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 186.
- 2) Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 185-186.
- 3) Howard Goodall, *The Story of Music* (장호연 역, [하워드 구달의 다시 쓰는 음악 이야기]), 344-345.
- 4) Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 197.
- 5) Jean Cocteau, *A Call to Order*, trans. Rollo H. Myers (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1926), 25.
- 6) Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 4. “Music in the Early Twentieth Century” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 562.
- 7) Daniel Albright (ed.), *An Anthology of Sources Modernism and Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 320-321.
- 8) Back then, a young Avantgardist Cocteau tried to collaborate with Diaghilev’s beloved composer Stravinsky to

respond to Diaghilev's challenge, "Astonish me!" Cocteau introduced his upcoming ballet David – a story of David and Goliath from the bible – and convinced Stravinsky to work together but Stravinsky had a mere interest in the project and even felt unpleasant due to his disturbing persuasion. Eventually, the Cocteau-Stravinsky project was failed.

9) Caroline Potter, Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer and His World (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 48-49.