

INTRA-OEUVRE CHARACTERISTICS AS INDICATORS OF AUTHENTICITY

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Ange (1986) was the first researcher to perform a quantitative analysis of the *oeuvre* of the metamusic group The Anachronisms. Ange contended that his work confirmed Herpes' non-quantitative analysis of the same *oeuvre* (1985), an analysis which supposedly demonstrated that the *oeuvre* was "authentic."

The phenomenon of the popular entertainer who proclaims herself to be unsullied by commercial considerations is of course not new, but it is now rare. Perhaps part of the anachronistic quality of The Anachronisms' *oeuvre* is its ability to inspire this claim.

However, Ange's operationalization of the analysis of authenticity favoured by the Herpesian Tendency in musicoethnology is without analytical value. Ange declared The Anachronisms' *oeuvre* to be authentic because no relationships existed between its characteristics. At best Ange should have claimed only that the null hypothesis of inauthenticity had not been disproved. Since failure

to disprove the null hypothesis may simply be an artefact of sample size, and since Ange's sample of performances was small (N = 94), this claim is unimpressive.

The hypothesis favoured by the Neo-Dialectical Tendency in musicoethnology is that the concept of authenticity is an artefact of a bourgeois society in which false consciousness reigns (Alters & Dye, 1974). The bourgeois individual, deprived of collective resources which would lend meaning to his life, uses the psychological defence mechanism of denial to deny the truth: that she is the pawn of mighty corporate forces, that her life is not her own, that it is constructed to be of value to others rather than to herself. Faced with a choice between joining with others to fight their oppression or persuading herself that her life is somehow worth living, she chooses the latter option.

To test this hypothesis, we will turn Ange's analysis on its head. We will accept his analysis of authenticity and attempt to demonstrate, using a larger and more comprehensive sample of performances, that the characteristics of the *oeuvre* are related.

METHOD

Data. With the co-operation of one of The Anachronisms (Zither, personal communication, 2002) a database was constructed of the instruments used by the four chief members of The Anachronisms on 210 recorded performances made between 1981 and 2002, of the performers of the lead vocals on these performances, and of the authors of the lyrics of the songs sung in these performances. To maximize the validity of the dataset, songs whose lyrics were written by lyricists other than one of the four long term members of The Anachronisms

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were excluded from it, as were performances which did not include vocals. The lyricist was known for all 210 performances, the lead vocalist for 209, and instrumentation for 135.

Instrumentation was recorded in the following categories:

- acoustic and classical guitars
- keyboards
- violin
- steel guitar
- electric guitar

These were the instruments most frequently used by The Anachronisms. Other instruments were excluded because their infrequent use would have made the detection of relationships between variables difficult.

The criterion for statistical significance was a probability by chance of less than .01.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the numbers and percentages of songs whose lyrics were written by each of The Anachronisms or by the group collectively; no songs were written by any combination of 2 or 3 members of the group.

Table 1

Numbers and Percentages of Lyrics Written by
Each Member or by the Group as a Whole

Lyricist	No.	% of 210
Carlos	37	18%
Herpes	96	46%
LaPaunche	30	14%
Zither	15	7%
Collective	32	15%

The distribution in Table 1 is significantly different from the distribution one would expect if each of the sources of lyrics were equally likely to be recorded.

Table 2 on the next page shows the most frequent subjects of The Anachronisms' lyrics.

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Table 2

Numbers and Percentages of Lyrics
about the Most Frequent Subjects

Subject	No.	% of 210
Non-political social commentary	57	27%
Politics	46	22%
Love	41	20%
Individual existence	36	17%

Some examples of non-political social commentary are “Great Big Rolls,” “I Wanna Be Blond,” “Say Goodbye to the One-Eyed Monster,” and “I Really Love Me.” Examples of political commentary are “Re-election Reggae”, “We Are Tories,” “Putin and Blair,” and “Sensational and Humiliating.” Examples of love lyrics are “Maggie T.,” “Love Sow,” “I’m the One for You,” and “Dam Ugly Feet.” Examples of lyrics about individual existence are “This is Not My Body,” “Prom Sluts from Mars,” and “Who Will Smell My Feet for Me?.”

Comparison of authorship with subject revealed significant differences in the frequency with which the individual members wrote about the most frequent topics. Specifically, Carlos Carlos was more likely than the other members to write about politics, and less likely to write about individual existence. Seventeen of Carlos’ 37 lyrics 46% were about politics, while only 17% of the 173 other lyrics by individual members were about politics. None of Carlos’ lyrics were about individual existence.

Comparison of authorship with lead vocal performance showed that the authorship of songs performed by lead vocalists differed between members of the group. Three of the four members – Carlos, Herpes, and LaPaunche – were most likely to perform their own songs, but Zither was most likely to perform lead vocals on songs composed by the other members. The percentages of songs composed by their lead singers ranged from 31% (Zither) to 82% (Herpes). Zither was most likely to perform lyrics composed by Herpes; in fact, over half his lead vocals (19 of 35) were on performances of Zither lyrics.

The majority of three of the four members’ songs – Carlos’s, La Paunche’s, and Zither’s – were performed by their composers. However, a majority of Herpes’ songs (48 of 95) were performed by other performers. The percentages of songs performed by their composers ranged from 50% (Herpes) to 76% (Carlos).

Figure 1 on the next page shows the average number of five types of instruments used by the four long term members of the group on 135 performances.

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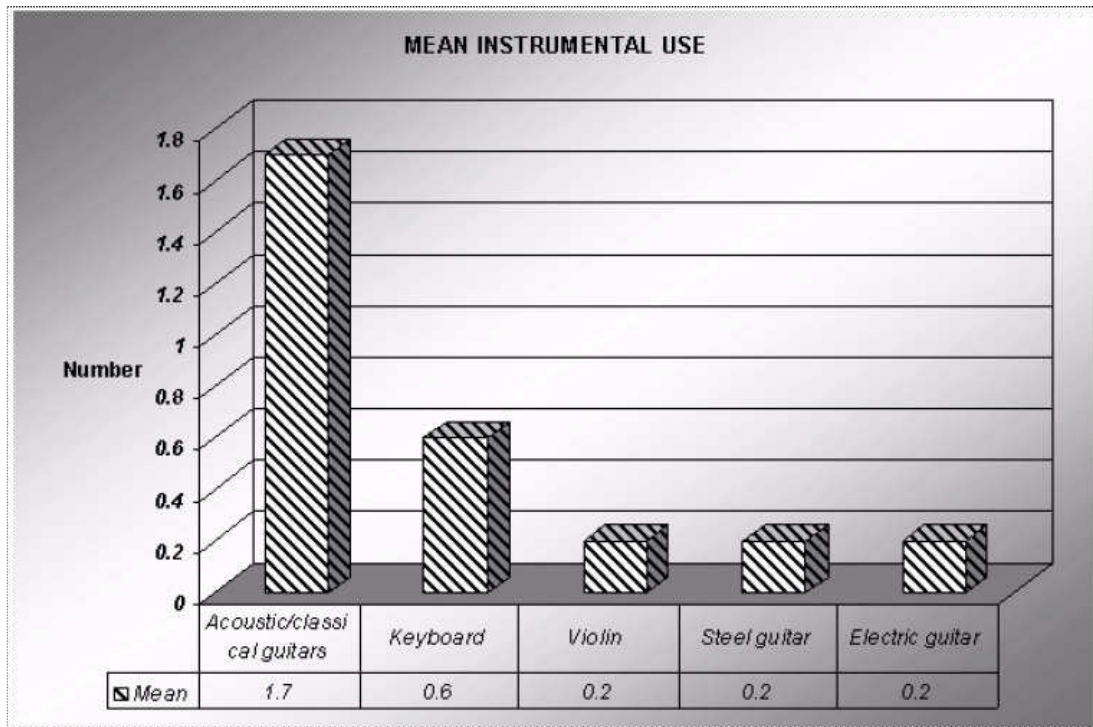


Figure 1. The average number of five types of instruments used by the four long term members of the group on 135 performances

Acoustic and classical guitars constituted 57% of the instruments played by the four long term members on the 135 performances for which instrumentation was known. Instrumentation was not related to lyricist or lead vocalist.

To investigate differences over the course of The Anachronisms' career, the data were divided into earlier and later halves. Because there were fewer data about instrumentation, songs classified to the second half of the instrumentation dataset could be in the first half of the other datasets.

Use of the steel guitar was less frequent in the second half of the instrumentation dataset. Steel guitar was used on 23, or 35%, of 67 performances from the first half of the dataset, and on 4 (6%) of the performances from the second half.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study demonstrate that Ange (1986) could only assert that the Anachro-oeuvre was authentic because he failed to look at the parts of it which were inauthentic. He did not investigate changes in instrumentation over time, and failed to notice the change in the frequency of use of steel guitar.

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If the change in frequency of use of the steel guitar were balanced by some compensating change or changes in the use of other instruments, an argument could be made that the *oeuvre* changed to maintain authenticity. However, in the absence of compensating changes we can only argue that it was changing. If it was authentic to begin with, it therefore would be getting less authentic. However, if it was not authentic to begin with, then the *oeuvre* could be getting either more or less authentic.

The additional evidence collected by the current study confirms that the *Anachro-oeuvre* is not authentic. There is a clear division within the group in the likelihood of writing about politics and about problems of individual existence. The authentic approach includes all aspects of human existence – that is, it is political. Existence is not individual, it is collective, and writing about problems of existence as if they were individual is inauthentic. Therefore the Carolingian part of the *Anachro-oeuvre* is clearly more authentic than the Herpesian, La Paunchian, and Zitherian parts. Carlos Carlos has written more lyrics about politics than the other members, and none about individual existence. Carlos may in fact be taken as a model of the authentic performer.

There is also evidence of an exploitative class structure within the group. Sid Herpes functions as if he were a capitalist. Most of his song lyrics were sung by the other members of the group. That is, his capital – song lyrics – is used to provide work to proletarians – the other members – from which he extracts unearned benefit. Although he tries to conceal this fact by writing under pseudonyms, Herpes betrays his capitalist ambitions by his insistence on being billed on The Anachronisms' CD covers as "The Maestro". Dulcimer Zither is particularly victimized in this arrangement. While the other members are most likely to sing their own lyrics, he is most likely to sing Herpes'! Zither has had to sacrifice his own creative work in order to indulge Herpes' bourgeois narcissism.

We see, then, that within The Anachronisms there is an Axis of Authenticity. Carlos Carlos is at the authentic pole of this axis, while Sid Herpes is at the inauthentic pole. The deleterious effects of Sid Herpes on the group are clear – it is he, for example, who is responsible for the decline in use of the steel guitar. For The Anachronisms, the path to an authentic *oeuvre* is easy to find. Oppose the bourgeois tendencies of Sid Herpes! Oppose the inauthentic individualism of Sid Herpes! Oppose capitalist exploitation by Sid Herpes!

Oppose Sid Herpes!!!

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