

Music and Simulation

Writing alongside Baudrillard, it is possible to think (in the realm of music) of ‘performance’ as ‘simulation’ [1]. Since “to simulate is to feign to have what one hasn’t” [2], to perform is to feign the ‘reality’ of music, a reality which is never ‘real’ outside of the play of simulation. In the presence of musical composition (which is always already there), there is no longer music. Indeed, with the emergence of sound (which is always already there), there is no longer music.

Remaining with Baudrillard: the ‘western art music’ performance is no longer that of a ‘piece of music’. Instead, the performance is hypermusic: the generation by musical techniques derived from music that is not musical. The ‘piece of music’ (embodied in the composition) no longer precedes its performance, nor survives it. Since the performed precedes the piece of music, the *difference* between the ‘piece of music’ and its sonic realization disappears. What disappears with performance is the sonic realization’s musicality (as well as its composition), without which the music itself disappears. The sound of a performance no longer has to be musical, then, since it is no longer measured against the forms of ‘western art music’. In fact, since it is no longer placed within a musical canon, it is no longer music at all. It is hypermusic: the product of a synthesis of musical techniques in a canon without history.

“To dissimulate is to feign not to have what one has” [3], so that to study the score of a composition is to dissimulate music. Studying the composition produces musicality in it, even though it presents the ‘study’ (the process of studying) as something other than music. Thus, formal analysis - banalysis [4] - leaves the music intact: the music is always clear, it is only masked by the score; whereas performing music threatens the difference between the score and the performance by risking exposure of the fact that music itself is nothing more than a performance.

What of music and discourse? Beethoven's music has only ever been its own discourse. Had we been able to believe that discourse only *described* the music of Beethoven, there would have been no reason to destroy the discourse's musicality by insisting on its separation from music. If Beethoven's music is only discourse, that is to say reduced to the descriptions that attest its genius, then the entire canon becomes weightless; it is no longer anything but a musical performance: not unmusical, but a musical performance, never again exchanging in music, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.

It would be interesting to see whether a musical institution would not react more repressively to a performance of non-music for a graduating recital (a talk, for example) than to an unmusical performance itself. For an unmusical performance only upsets the order of things, the aesthetics of the institution, whereas a performance of non-music (a talk, perhaps) interferes with the very principle of music. Unmusicality is less serious for it only contests the effectiveness of the institution. Talking (non-music) as performance is more dangerous to the music institution because it always suggests that music itself might be nothing more than a performance, more than a 'talking'. "Everything is metamorphosed into its inverse in order to be perpetuated in its purged form [...] Every situation speaks of itself by denial, in order to attempt to escape, by performance of its antithesis, its real ambivalence" [5].

Performance is characterized by a precession of works already performed, and their orbital circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of performing. Musical theories, discourses, and compositions no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of musical canons; a single work may even be engendered by all the canons at once. A genuine composition no longer exists, just as music no longer exists.

Contemporary composition is itself hypermusic. It retains all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is nothing more than its scaled-down refraction. Thus the hypermusic of performance is expressed everywhere by the music's striking resemblance to itself. Performance of a composition is nothing but the object of a social demand. Completely expunged from the aesthetic dimension, it is dependent, like any other object, on production and mass consumption.

It is clear, then, that the simulated tension between music and performance, between the composition and its realization, serves to mask the fact that there is no tension, that they are equidistant from a reality that is not 'real', but only a simulacra. They are the "map that precedes the territory – *precession of the simulacra*" [6].

Endnotes:

[1] This reading explores the possibilities of transferring Baudrillard's discussion of 'simulation' and the (impossible) Real to a consideration of 'musical performance' and 'music'. To this end, Baudrillard's syntax is frequently appropriated into the text unannounced. Justification for this, if it is needed, can be found in Baudrillard's own use of false quotation at the beginning of the essay, where he announces his own thoughts as Ecclesiastes'.

[2] Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra and Simulations" trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman in *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster, ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, [1981] 2001, p.170.

[3] Ibid.

[4] I use this term, aware of its pejorative connotations, to refer to analysis that functions by ‘banning’ analysis outside of the score. That is, analyses that depend on limits that they fail to acknowledge.

[5] Baudrillard, Jean. “Simulacra and Simulations” trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman in *Selected Writings*, Mark Poster, ed. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, [1981] 2001, p.180.

[6] Ibid, p.169.