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M.A. Thesis

**CONCEPT, THEORY AND IDEOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE  
AND PERFORMATIVITY IN XX CENTURY MUSIC**

**(Beyond Musical Work: The Performative Practice of Music of Erik Satie, Fluxus, John Cage, La Monte Young and John Zorn)**

What does it take for musicology to reconstitute its object of study – music – into a performing art, along the lines of performance studies of theater, performance art, modern and contemporary dance, ballet and opera? Why is Western musicology still confined to the scientific and humanistic horizon of *musical work*, while the status of musical work is not only challenged in some musical practices of 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also exceeded and dissolved by new media and new technologies in the popular and mass culture today? What are the musics of the last century that brought about a conceptual and programmatic shift from work to performance, whereby music is constituted in performance, and the work represents only its by-product or side-effect?

A wide-reaching rhizomatic web would be needed to comprehend the heterogeneous multitude of concepts and phenomena, composers and subjects of listening, cultures and ideologies, which transgressed the frame of musical work since the period of historical avantgardes. From the Futurist *noise* to the Bauhaus inventions of mechanical music, from Fluxus, the New York School, the Scratch Orchestra and experimental practices in Britain, all pivoting around John Cage, to the early American minimalism; from Glenn Gould's move to the recording studio to Kronos Quartet's art of album production; from the musical theater of Meredith Monk to Laurie Anderson's stardom spectacles; from *musique concrète* to the new experimental electronic, computer and DJ performance - it seems as if in all periods, from historical avantgardes through neoavantgarde to postmodernity and recent globalism, the hegemony of musical work was pierced through by various forms and concepts of performative practices.

I have chosen to focus on five formations marking the paradigm shifts from *musical work* to *performative practice of music* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 'furniture music' (*musique d'ameublement*) by Erik Satie, with ramifications in both his piano and stage music; the Fluxus practice of naturalizing music for intermedia scores and events; the total systems of chance and indeterminacy (John Cage) and just intonation (LaMonte Young); and the composition of a

bastard, self-organizing, *desiring machine* in the plural practices of John Zorn. These composers and artists are examined as extravagant and isolated figures rather than as pioneers of schools. They do not *make* a historical continuum in the definition of performative practices, their cross-references being sometimes strong and explicit, and other times erratic. My intention was neither to introduce them as representatives of ‘performativity’ as such, as if performativity involved a specific medium, genre, style and technique, nor to emphasize a monographic approach with the exclusivity of their authorial poetics. Testing if their practices could lend themselves to an analysis of the procedures of performativity exceeding the musical work, I could produce both the problematic of performative practice and the method of its theorization.

The text is structured in two parts. In the first part, “An Essay in the Theory of Musical Work and Dominant Viewpoints in the Ontology of Music”, I argue against Lydia Goehr’s claim that musical work is an open concept departing from her analytical theory of the ‘imaginary museum of musical works’. All characteristics with which Goehr defines musical work as an open concept, in my view of their pragmatic usage – that is, in the regime of regulating history as well as current institutional framework – close the concept. Goehr regards them as family resemblances, subsidiary concepts which enabled the historical emergence of musical work around 1800, and my analysis substantiates their regulatory role vis-à-vis the musical canon: composition as the status of artifact and product (the myth of *ex nihilo* creation, signature, copyright), distinction between composing and performing (score and material retrievability of work in performance, specialization in musical professions), establishment of the *Wertreue* ideal, the form, the specifically musical, and the conception of musical unity. Critically examining formalism, organicism and the methods of formal-structuralist analysis, I elaborate the role of the ideology of individualism in founding the essentialist approach to defining music. Individualism has an ideological role in the formation of musical work in so far as the end of analyzing musical unity means providing the autonomy of form and representing lost unity for the subject of a post-Enlightenment world without God. The way a composer conceives of formal unity produces evidence of a possible autonomous world of the individual, of a coherence of individual choices which guarantee objectivity and *telos* to her individual ‘being’ represented by her work.

Musical work and forms of musical unity are not immanent or given, but they result from a cognitive process urged by a social need to understand music. However, music can be – as Philip Bohlman suggested – something other than an object of thought or something other than something thinkable, it can also be a practice outside musical thinking. Such a radical stance put forward by an ethnomusicologist points to a plurality of musics and functions they have in

societies of mass-consumption. Musical work is, therefore, only one of the concepts and frameworks of music available today, and I theorize it as an historical, projective concept employed as a *speech act* or *performative*, an utterance which in or by issuing the act of uttering *does* something, instead of only *saying* something, describing or reporting on something. Arguing against essentialist approach of defining the sufficient and necessary properties of music, such being purported by the doctrines of formalism, organicism and formal-structuralist analysis, I introduce a proceduralist approach whereby musical work entails a set of rules for a *happy performative* (according to the theories of J.L. Austin, John Searle and Shoshana Felman). Performative practices of music twist, disrupt, transgress, or betray the rules for a happy performative, whereby the rupture of normalcy is more performative than the reassertion of the tautological character of convention in the performative ‘musical work’.

In the second part, “Paradigms of performative practices”, I discuss and analyze the performative procedures of transgressing musical work in Satie, Cage, Fluxus, Young and Zorn. Each of these paradigms unfolds with a secondary plane of theorization. So, I attribute to Satie’s procedures the agonistic character of performative (J-F. Lyotard) and interpret ‘furniture music’ against the background of *Belle époque* and aesthetic of indifference emerging in Satie’s poetics of the everyday. The equation of music and intermedia event in Fluxus is illuminated by the utopian transfiguration of the everyday in the society of abundance in 1950-60s. Apart from the specific contextualization of Cage’s peculiar subjectivity in cold war, with the juxtaposition of Cage, Rauschenberg, Cunningham and Johns to the machismo actionist painting and abstract expressionism represented in Pollock, Motherwell, De Kooning et al., I chose to put both Cage and Young in the perspective of liberal individualism – the ideology developed in the American pragmatist radical thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In the chapter “John Zorn: machines of performance”, I tackle several aspects of Zorn’s activities: identity of the composer (genre as territory, identity as alterity and bastardization), vicissitudes in composing, arranging and performing, ending with the special focus of schizoanalysis, naturalized from the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, on the composition *Cat o’ nine tails* in respect of ‘desiring production’, ‘intensity’, ‘speed’ and ‘multitude’.

All five paradigms are constituted by differences in the categories of performative practice I establish: status of musical work, relationship between performance and composition (the contingency of performance in the identity of work and score-specification), and process of autonomization of performance in regard to perception, reception and institutional protocols. Consequently, in conclusion of this study, a *dispositif* of performative practice is distinguished so

as to enable further inquiry to focus, specialize and produce problematics beyond the discourse on musical work.

Translated by the author