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Score, Record, and Bytes: Influence of Musical Medium on Analysis

ABSTRACT

Background

KH000//Kopimashin is an art installation created by the co-founder of the website Pirate Bay, Peter Sunde <konsthack.se/portfolio/kh000-kopimashin/>. Made with a Raspberry Pi, an LCD display, and Python code, Kopimashin makes one hundred copies per second of an audio track of Gnarly Barkley's 2006 hit single, 'Crazy'. At the bottom of the display shows 'amount of copies created and the dollar value it represents in losses for the record labels (Downtown Records / Warner Music), currently represented by USD 1,25 per copied piece' (Sunde 2015). Extending the copyright holder's claim *ad absurdum*, Sunde seeks to 'bankrupt' the recording industry by inflicting millions of dollars of damages on the record label.

Fig. 1. KH000 // Kopimashin

Beyond the obvious criticism of the current copyright law, Sunde's installation raises questions about the ontology of musical work (Goehr 1992) as it relates to the post-industrial society of abundant self-same copies. Does the duplicated audio track qualify as another iteration of a musical work? What is the relationship between the musical copyright and work? Does the non-physical nature of an audio file change the ontological status of music? And finally, what is the role of an analysis of the music without a physical medium? Similar questions regarding the ontology of musical work had been raised by numerous musicologists and philosophers in relation to the history of copyright law (Lütticken 2002; Barron 2006), the performance-oriented ontology (Davies 2009; Cook 2013), the rise of the recording industry (Ashby 2010), and the ontological status of improvisation (Alperson 2010; Kania 2011; Love 2016) to name just a few.

This presentation is in dialog with the earlier writings by taking seriously the medium of musical work and how its physical form may shape the way the music is conceptualized.

In particular, I argue that the musical works that are mainly bought and sold in physical forms (i.e., a score or a recording) are predisposed to be 'conceptualized metaphorically' as an industrial product (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Considering the genealogy of contemporary analytic methods of tonal music in light of the rapid industrialization of the Western world, the binary logic of music analysis (e.g., consonance/dissonance, tension/resolution, structure/embellishment) echoes "desiring-machines" of Deleuze and Guattari, a concept that epitomizes the capitalist society's tendency to reduce any production as an outcome of the factory-like process (1983; 1987). As the way we acquire music shift from purchasing physical mediums to non-physical ones (e.g., streaming services, nightclub), the metaphor weakens. As a result, the conventional tonal language of music analysis no longer provide meaningful description of the musical work.

My talk demonstrates how the analysis of music without a physical medium might require a different epistemological ground through an analysis of two DJ-mix sets. Afterward, I will compare the analyses of this type and the conventional analysis whose primary domain of distribution is a physical score to proffer the difference in the narratives for each analysis.

Aims and repertoire studied

The primary aim of my research is to construct a new foundation for analytic methods that corresponds to how music is consumed today. I show that non-physical music should not be analysed regarding the function of its internal component because it is no longer conceptualized as an industrial product. Instead, drawing from Foucault's three epistemes (1970), I argue that music in the new medium are better understood in terms of the Renaissance episteme, namely resemblance and similitude, to describe musical components to their intra- and extra-musical counterpart.

Methods

As a demonstration, I analyze two DJ mixes: '28 Roses' by DJ Mitsu the Beats and '0181' by an electronic musician Four tet, focusing on the resemblance of their sampling of a jazz musician Joe Henderson's 'Black Narcissus'.

Implications

My analyses demonstrate that an analysis of music without a physical medium requires an entirely different epistemological framing. My research also shows that socio-economic implication always underlies the methodology for music analysis.

Keywords

Musical cognition, EDM, Musical ontology, Musical epistemology, Copyright law.

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