

THINKING ON THE CHANGING REPRESENTATION OF MUSIC ON CYBERSPACE

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Abstract

This paper addresses the emerging concept of cyberization of music through a particular focus on the changing representation of music. In this context, the first part presents a historical overview on the representation of music for a better understanding of today's digitalization of music. The second part revolves around the intertwining relationship between technology and society and its impact on cultural preferences and taste in music. The last part focuses particularly on the emerging concept of cyberization of music and questions the ways it transformed the musical representation. The evaluations expose an ever-changing musical representation in our contemporary era, with a lack of live interaction where music followers tend to be influenced by the shared view of the others. Since there is no single and absolute correct way of analyzing the cyberspace for it has become an overarching term used to describe a multitude of aspects of the new communication technologies, the evaluations herein wishes to contribute to the interpretation of music on cyberspace.

Keywords: Cyberspace, music, cultural transformation, technology

SİBER ALANDA MÜZİĞİN DEĞİŞEN TEMSİLİ ÜZERİNE DÜŞÜNMEK

Özet

Bu makale literatüre yeni bir kavram olarak giren müziğin siberleşmesi konusunu müziğin temsilinin dönüşümü üzerinden ele almaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, ilk olarak günümüzde müziğin dijitalleşmesini daha iyi kavrayabilmek için müziğin temsil edilme biçimleri üzerine tarihsel bir değerlendirme sunulmaktadır. Makalenin ikinci kısmı teknoloji ve toplum arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkiyi ele alıp, bu ilişkinin kültürel tercihler ve müzik beğenileri üzerindeki etkileri üzerinde durmaktadır. Son bölüm ise, müziğin siberleşmesi kavramına odaklanarak kavramın müziğin temsili üzerindeki dönüştürücü etkisini sorgulamaktadır. Değerlendirmeler, günümüzde müzik takipçilerinin sanal olarak paylaşılanlardan etkilendiği bir ortamda, gerçek

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ve canlı bir etkileşimden yoksun ve sürekli dönüşen bir müzik temsili açığa çıkarmaktadır. Yeni iletişim teknolojilerinin farklı boyutlarını tanımlamada başvurulan kapsayıcı bir kavram haline gelen siber alanı analiz etmenin tek ve kesin doğrulukta bir yöntemi bulunmadığından, buradaki değerlendirmelerin siber alanda müziğin temsilinin anlamlandırılmasına katkıda bulunması ümit edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siber uzay, müzik, kültürel dönüşüm, teknoloji

Introduction

Contrary to the common rhetoric of the new media, technology is not a recent concept. Even though, music and technology have always been closely associated since the first musical instruments were constructed, the impact of technology on music has come to the forefront within the past few decades. The new communication technologies and the Web 2.0 era entirely transformed the ways we experience music. The phenomenon of digitalization of music marked a milestone in the ways music is composed, represented, distributed and consumed. The main aim of this paper is thus to question the emerging concept of cyberization of music and to think critically on the changing nature of its representation.

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The history of music that runs parallel with social history serves to identify, verify and classify the methods that make up the body of musical representation. The term musical representation includes both explicitly and implicitly the cooperative links and conventions that contribute to the realization of a music performance. In other words, musical representation corresponds to a specific ‘art world’, as described by Becker (1997), consisting of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of a work of art. For the sociologists studying art, who are mainly interested in the process of production and representation of an artistic piece, whether a movie, a novel or a symphony, the political economy of the social environment in which they are produced and represented matter the most, especially from a macro-sociological point of view. From this perspective, this essay aims to shed light onto the recent phenomenon of cyberization of music. The first part of this paper offers a historical overview on the representation of music. Then the second part examines the recent social implications of the problematic relationship between cyberspace and society. The third part questions the mechanism of the circulation of digitalized music within the scope of cyberization of music.



A Historical Overview on the Representation of Music

The theories concerning the history and the theory of music is generally based upon the ways the music is composed and represented. Within almost less than a century, the theories on the social and cultural aspects of music began to focus more and more on newly found phenomena such as the impact of artificial intelligence on music. One of the earliest and systematic theoretical framework developed Weber (1958), concerned the technical, economic, and social interrelations between modern music, its instruments and its wider social surrounding. His successors and many other music sociologists also believed that at relatively early cultural levels of human civilizations, alongside purely personal, emotional or aesthetic enjoyment of music there appears music designed for socially significant and practical requirements.

The trajectory of the Western art music that puts forth the changing social uses and functions of music has a remarkable impact on the cultural study of music. For instance, the music of Antiquity was performed both as entertainment and artistic performance in addition to being an important part of religious ceremonies. The division between religious and secular music of the Roman Empire were enlarged upon different styles during the Middle Ages following the rise of polyphonic music. Music continued to develop and evolve into truly an art form, reflecting the clarity, realism, and awareness of the Renaissance era. The following centuries' social and political changes had more apparent impacts on music. For instance, the first half of the Baroque period was characterized by the domination of the aristocracy, whereas the second half of it was designated by the democratization of music especially with the opening of public opera houses and concert halls. The music showed emotional restraint and refinement during the following Classical era, which coincides with a significant historical period of revolutions and declarations of independence. Then, 19th century Romanticism was marked by a spirit of individuality and personal freedom, during which the emphasis shifted from the restraint and formal discipline of the Classical point of view to the emotionalism and individualism. Subsequent to post romanticism and impressionism, the 20th century contemporary music became a scene of artistic revolution mostly against European over-



refinement, symmetry in art, consonance and tonality, where artists began to emphasize self-expression and art as technique rather than as an expression of feeling. These attitudes led to abstraction in art and music, and to a long period of adjustment to the new styles for artists and their audiences. The same period witnessed simultaneously the rise of popular music sphere. This brief history of Western art music presented above (Yates 1994; Say 2006) propounds both explicitly and implicitly the interdependence between the representation of music and the development of technology.

With the advent of music industry, the ‘composition’ of music started to be replaced by the ‘production’ of music where the contribution of numerous social actors mattered and overshadowed the role of gifted and genius musicians. Music industry then gravitates to draw from non-familiar, non-western, local and indigenous styles, and started to present new genres on various different music scenes, such as jazz, rock and roll, pop, hip-hop, techno, etc. The history of music not only proposes an unending dialogue between the present and the past but also manifests the need to change and adapt to the social milieu where the music is produced and represented. The music industry, inevitably and strongly affected by the digital revolution, now collaborates with various different digital platforms and needs what cyberspace has to offer.

Technology, Cultural Preferences and Cyberspace

Communication, as an essential sustenance of a society, is the transfer of information from one individual or group to another, whether in speech or through the mass media. Wright (1959) explains that mass media is directed toward relatively large, heterogeneous, and anonymous audiences where messages are transmitted publicly and the communicator tends to be within a complex organization. Today, the mass media composes of traditional media and the new media. The latter expands continuously in a global system of interconnectedness. In this regard, the term cyberspace refers to an information space in which data is configured in such a way as to give the user the illusion of control, movement and access to information, which links together a large number of users that operates in a feedback loop to the operator (Featherstone and Burrows 1995, p.2). Many scholars agree on the fact that it then offers a ‘virtual reality’, an artificial environment and forces the social actors to engage in a ‘computer-mediated communication’. Cyberspace is also capable of creating a milieu for the expression of the self and manifestation of the identity, where one can choose among tons of



different competences, interests, capacities that s/he has, and combines them in different ways, sometimes by regenerating its components.

In this sense, the term cyberspace becomes an object of study, especially within the scope of sociology of communication. Since cyberspace has become a catchall term of different types of electronic communication, aside from social media tools, online news, virtual reality environments, it includes streaming audio and video. One of its most prominent social implications is the construction of web-based communities depending on similar taste in music and in other cultural preferences. Social-networking sites, music sharing sites, blogs, live Internet broadcasting, are among those new cultural communities that are electronic, networked and interconnected.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlight certain terms in order to better understand these social and cultural characteristics of cyberspace and the complex social relations it produces. One of those concepts is ‘social networking’ suggesting the grouping of individuals together into specific groups, using online networking services. ‘Social bookmarking’ on the other hand, is a way of sharing, organizing, searching and managing web pages on the Internet. Internet signifies new ways of doing it globally through the process of coming together toward a common point. Yet, the social actors of the new media, from different social classes, social strata, with different economic, social and cultural backgrounds, display the characteristics of a ‘consumer’ who also tries to be a ‘producer’ because anyone can produce and deliver content to a public audience. Within this framework, people tend to share their musical productions as well as their musical preferences on cyberspace.

Towards a Cyberization of Music

The interlinked relationship between technology and music can be seen through the crystallization of new forms of representation of music on cyberspace. The cyberization of music, as a recent phenomenon and an attempt to make sense of digitalized music, has both social and cultural dimensions. As the growth of the Internet and the progress of multimedia technologies, millions of songs have become omnipresent and accessible in digital multimedia



data format. Concerning the latter, the algorithms for the retrieval of MP3 music objects and the appropriation of this new immaterial format have been subjected to interdisciplinary academic researches (i.e. Lui and Tsai, 2001; Magaudda 2011, Alderman 2008). MP3 as a digital compression technology in the sequel of vinyl, cassette and compact disc, entirely transformed the ways music is represented and distributed. This new storage of music, virtual and intangible, enabled a multifaceted and fragmented musical representation. Music streaming applications using large amounts of music data such as on-line music stores, digital music libraries and Internet radios, among many others, started to provide users a supposedly unlimited power of listening.

Music recording takes part within the main title of digital arts, which also include videos, writings and other crafts. It unavoidably raises questions concerning copyright, privacy and security issues. The problems of sustainability and public awareness engagement with arts on the Internet are among other current issues. The questioning of the aesthetic value in it yields to a critique of new media art rather from the perspective of sociology of art. Yet, all kinds of musical acts within new media have their own set of protocols and rituals that can briefly be wrapped up by two major acts; typing and mouse clicking. These newly adopted and highly performed social actions eventually lead the way to cybernetics. Cybernetics, as defined initially by Norbert Wiener (1954), refers to any self-regulating system that is set up by a stimulus and response through continuous feedback. As part of the representation of music, musical performance forms a cybernetic system in media and promotes an exchange between the musicians' actions and audience responses. However, it can be seen that in the case of music on cyberspace there is a temporal disconnection between performers and the audience, whereas in live concert halls or venues, the audience and stage personae are simultaneously performers making up the body of the musical representation.

Concerning the outcomes of this cyberization process, Lichty (2000, p.352) points out that the absence of live intercommunication results in a simulacrum of performance pieces. In other words, a cybernetic analysis of musical representations and technologically based performances result in the lack of live and real-time interaction between on-stage performers and audience members and of cognitive feedback between audience and performer. Further outcomes with regard to this process concern the change in the ways people listen to music. When we ask to ourselves today, 'why do we like what we like?' the answer might probably



be shaped by the mechanism of cybernetics, which also depends highly on the ‘shared’ views of the others. Most or least liked songs, music genres, music styles as well as the labeling of subcultural or ethnic sounds illustrate these shared representations. These categories and labels are now being continuously redefined and reconstructed without a need to base upon a solid point of artistic reference.

Some statistics from around the world and from Turkey may help to expose this growing prevalence of musical representation on the Internet. For instance, Spotify⁵ is one of the most popular online music streaming websites with its 160 million users and 71 million registered users in 61 different countries in 2017. As a cyber musical platform, it offers more than 2 billions of playlists, composed of different music genres of many different styles, ranging from classical symphonic music to jazz, from rock to pop, to folk or ethnic music. Concomitantly, Turkish Statistical Institutes’s Report⁶ on cultural life in Turkey points out that almost 54% of online cultural activities are composed of audio files (both uploading and downloading music) and include various different types of musical productions. Another report (2017) points out that, the teenagers and young adults choose to listen to Internet radio, with a percentage of 24% and 25% consecutively. In addition, listening to music from online music streaming websites is very common for young people, 32% for teenagers and 27% for young adults. And finally, sharing one’s recorded music and/or musical performance online is highly practiced by young people, 26% for teenagers and 21% for young adults. These numbers demonstrates the increasing rates of cyberspace musical activities. As a result, we can infer that cyberization of music is not only changing the ways the music is represented, but it is also reshaping the musical preferences and cultural tastes.

Conclusion

In our contemporary era, with the means of mass communication and the new media any composed musical piece can be immediately standardized by means of mechanical recording and circulated through a supposedly unlimited nebulous scape of the worldwide web. The already problematic difference between art music, folk music and popular music, implying a

⁵ <https://press.spotify.com/us/about/>

⁶ <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=24693>



distinction between highbrow and lowbrow art forms have now been taken over by a cyber representation of music on an interface, denoting the recognition of a brand new music sphere.

We had been experiencing the end of the modernist metanarratives concerning the sphere of art and culture. Cyberpace has introduced further complications into this discussion in our contemporary era. On one hand, there are many different social actors who wish to preserve the system of music industries of the previous century. Yet, on the other hand, there are others who see the online music streaming and digital performances as a gift of cyberpace.

Today, each minute, thousands of music files, mostly free of charge, are searched for, listened to, liked and shared by billions of users. This has been considered as a convenience for consumers but a hassle for record companies, and the end result reveals an irreversible cultural transformation.

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