

Séminaire du GREAM

Misha - Salle Europe

Vendredi 15 février 2019

9h30 - 11h00

Dimitris Exarchos
(Goldsmith,
University of London)

Notation as Interface

Notation often operates in much more complex ways than simple representation, thus undermining the usual notion of a direct relationship between score and performance. Music notation is a complex interface that functions beyond the boundary between composer and musical idea, or between 'work' and performer. As a tool for composition, as a set of instructions for performance, or as an object of analysis, the score can be seen as a text, a form of writing, taken in the general sense, that of Jacques Derrida's *archewriting* or Jean-Luc Nancy's *exscription*. These philosophers subscribed to a so-called 'linguistic turn' in the humanities and the arts, according to which writing is no longer considered subordinate to speech, thus overturning the classical privileging of *speech*—speech here standing in for a metaphysics of 'being-as-presence' (Derrida). The score is not merely a written-out 'song' that a composer has conceived (performance here being considered the musical analogue to speech).

One important aspect is the juncture of notation, not only with composition, but also with improvisation—the later conceived as correlative to the former. What are the *limits* between the two? How can notation be employed in order to invoke improvisational textures and structures; in other words, how can notation be viewed as part of compositional material and strategy, beyond mere transcription? To the extent that it functions as interface, notations



operates on multiple limits, between sound, performance, composition, analysis, 'silent' listening, etc. Not unlike Nancy's concept of exscription, notation lies outside of what it inscribes. This relates to many aspects of performance practice; for example, in complex music, there is often a long process of learning, during which the performer has to carefully develop strategies in order to produce the sound-world invoked by the score. The work of Roger Redgate has exemplified such considerations and creatively questioned the limits of notation. In that respect, his work bears the influence of Brian Ferneyhough, who indicated that 'to notate the work is at one and the same time to listen to its echo'. Generalising on this, notating can be thought of as an attempt to trace a specific instrumental technique; and as such it is relatively removed from the sounding of the work.

This further raises issues of the ontology of the work in relation to aspects of flexibility in performance. In order to arrive at such questioning, one needs to (re)define the key concepts involved: notation and improvisation in relation to both composition and performance. On the other side of the Atlantic, philosopher Stanley Cavell provides a very useful definition of composition and improvisation and their interaction. His conceptualization enables us to consider notation to be the interface also between composition and improvisation; an interface that is at the same time a set of instructions for performance, compositional material, and instrumental technique. This contribution will attempt a theorisation of notation as interface by relating Redgate's practice to the aforementioned concepts.

Dimitris Exarchos is a theorist and musicologist specializing in contemporary music. He has published in books and journals on twentieth-century composition, theory, and analysis. He has delivered talks in the UK and abroad, organised symposia (Xenakis International Symposium; Notation in Contemporary Music; Compositional Aesthetics and the Political) and curated concerts and events (Southbank Centre, Goldsmiths, Migrant Sound). His research explores the themes of temporality, notation, and materialism, on the intersections between philosophy, aesthetics, analysis, and composition; his analytical work includes computational and mathematical approaches. He is currently Visiting Research Fellow at the Contemporary Music Research Unit, Goldsmiths.