

Jeongwon Joe and S. Hoon Song

**ROLAND BARTHES' 'TEXT' AND ALEATORIC
MUSIC: IS THE 'BIRTH OF THE READER'
THE BIRTH OF THE LISTENER?**

Abstract : The history of Western classical music and the development of its notational system show that composers have tried to control more and more aspects of their compositions as precisely as possible. Total serialism represents the culmination of compositional control. Given this progressively increasing compositional control, the emergence of chance music, or aleatoric music, in the mid-twentieth century is a significantly interesting phenomenon. In aleatoric music, the composer deliberately incorporates elements of chance in the process of composition and/or in performance. Consequently, aleatoric works challenge the traditional notion of an art work as a closed entity fixed by its author.

The philosophical root of aleatoric music can be traced to poststructuralism, specifically its critique of the Enlightenment notion of the author as the creator of the meaning of his or her work. Roland Barthes' declaration of "the death of the author" epitomizes the poststructuralists' position. Distinguishing "Text" from "Work," Barthes maintains that in a "Text," meanings are to be engendered not by the author but by the reader. Barthes conceives aleatoric music as an example of the "Text," which demands "the birth of the reader."

This essay critically re-examines Barthes' notion of aleatoric music, focusing on the complicated status of the reader in music. The readers of a musical Text can be both performers and listeners. When Barthes' declaration of the birth of the reader is applied to the listener, it becomes problematic, since the listener, unlike the literary reader, does not have direct access to the "Text" but needs to be mediated by the performer. As Carl Dahlhaus has remarked, listeners cannot be exposed to other possible renditions that the performer could have chosen but did not choose, and in this respect, the supposed openness of an aleatoric piece is closed and fixed at the time of performance. In aleatoric music, it is not listeners but only performers who are promoted to the rank of co-author of the works.

Finally, this essay explores the reason why Barthes turned to music for the purpose of illustrating his theory of text. What rhetorical role does music play in his articulation of "Work" and "Text"? Precisely because of music's "difference" as a performance art, music history provides the examples of the lowest and the highest moments in Barthes' theory of text, that is, those of Work and Text. If, for Barthes, the institutionalization of the professional performer in music history demonstrates the advent of Work better than literary examples, the performer's supposed dissolution in aleatoric music is more liberating than any literary moments of Text. This is because the figure of music--as performance art--provides Barthes with a reified and bodily "situated" model of the Subject.

Key-Words: Roland Barthes, Post-structuralism, Aleatoric music.

Traditionally, Western art has been a field in which chance had little or no role to play. By making decisions about what to choose and what to discard, artists create order out of chaos, and consequently, the role of chance is supposed to be reduced in the process of creating order. If one traces the history of Western art music and the development of its notational system, it is revealed that composers have tried to control more and more aspects of their compositions as precisely as possible. Total serialism represents the culmination of compositional control. Given this progressively increasing compositional control, the emergence of chance music, or aleatoric music, in the mid-twentieth century is a significantly interesting phenomenon. In aleatoric music the composer incorporates elements of chance in the process of composition and/or in performance.

The presence of chance elements is not entirely new in aleatoric music. Whether or not is intended by the composer, chance has been an inherent element in any kind of music: it is impossible for a composer to determine perfectly all aspects of his or her composition, especially in its realization. Even in electronic music, which has been regarded as music in which the composer can totally avoid any unintended results, something different from what is determined by the composer can be introduced. For instance, sounds may be distorted in the process of reproduction, according to the acoustical condition of the concert hall or the quality of the reproducing equipment. In this respect what makes aleatoric music unique is the fact that chance elements are not accidentally introduced but consciously intended by the composer. However, aleatoric music is not unprecedented in the intentional use of chance elements. Dice music of the eighteenth century is an example of the early practice with chance. In this music, a certain aspect of a composition—usually the ordering of measures—was decided by throwing dice. Although major composers of the eighteenth century such as Mozart and Haydn were believed to practice dice music, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that chance operations emerged as an important compositional method.

Increasing concern with chance and indeterminacy is part of a general movement in twentieth-century philosophy, science, and other arts as well as in music. In physics the deterministic theory of Newton's action-reaction mechanics was attacked by Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum physics, which admits the possibility of chance events at the level of subatomic particles. In art, open-form works, such as graphic-notation in music and Alexander Calder's mobile sculpture in visual arts, exploit the aesthetics of indeterminacy by letting the final product be determined by chance. In so doing, these open-form works resist the traditional notion of an art work as a closed entity fixed by its author.

This resistance not only reflects the general trend of the increasing concern with indeterminacy in the twentieth century. Its theoretical root can be traced to a particular philosophical and linguistic development known as

poststructuralism, specifically its critique of the Enlightenment notion of the author as the creator of the meaning of his or her work. Roland Barthes' declaration of "the death of the author" epitomizes the poststructuralists' position. Distinguishing "Text" from "Work," Barthes maintains that in the "text" meanings are to be engendered not by the author but by the reader.¹ This essay critically examines Barthes' notion of aleatoric music in light of his theory of "Text." We will argue that Barthes' conception of the aleatoric music listener as "the co-author" of a piece is problematic considering the complicated status of the listener who, unlike the literary reader, does not have direct access to the "Text" but needs to be mediated by the performer.² Furthermore, we will explore the rhetorical role of music in Barthes' general theory of text.

The Death of the Author, "Text," and Aleatoric Music

Poststructuralists' re-examination of the author was stimulated by their critique of the Enlightenment notion of the human being as rational, autonomous, and subjectively willing. Nietzsche and Heidegger are regarded as the two godfathers of poststructuralism because of their strong mistrust of human reason and objectivity.³ Like Nietzsche and Heidegger, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida conceive the true human subject as fragmentary, passive, and incoherent. Foucault depicts the human being as "a caged animal" caught in a prison of language, because the human beings have direct access to reality only through language.⁴ Viewed from this perspective, all human knowledge and reality are only linguistic conventions, not absolute truth.

¹ Hereafter, "Work" and "Text" will be capitalized when they are used in Barthes' technical usage.

² Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1977), 163.

³ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 272; and Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 172. Calinescu says:

Neither Heidegger nor Gadamer uses the term postmodern, but many of the current philosophical discussions of postmodernity refer to their thought as a source and frequently go back to Nietzsche, whose impact on Heidegger is well known. Little wonder then that, in the United States and elsewhere, Heidegger is occasionally seen as the "first postmodern".

Vattimo describes Nietzschean and Heideggerian philosophy as "weak thought" (*il pensiere debole*), in direct opposition to "metaphysics" or "strong thought" – a thought that is "domineering, imposing, universalistic, atemporal, aggressively self-centered, intolerant in regard to whatever appears to contradict it." In Vattimo's view, this "weak thought" of Nietzschean and Heideggerian philosophy is typically "postmodern" and marks "the end of modernity."

⁴ Joyce Appleby, Margaret Jacob, and Lynn Hunt, "Postmodernism and the Crisis of Modernity," in *Telling the Truth About History*, (New York: W.W. and Norton, 1994), 213-216.

Poststructuralists further undermine the absolute status of human being and truth by challenging the Cartesian logocentrism that language can express the truth of reality. In poststructuralists' linguistic and semiotic theories, the traditional unidirectional relationship between the signifier and the signified is de-stabilized. The arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified was already a focal point of structuralists' theories. But the structuralist procedure of seeking out recurrent elements and their patterns is aimed at the discovery of the "rationality," assuming the existence of the "essential truth" in the Text, and thus remains within the logocentric tradition.⁵ Derrida's critique of structuralism was:

*In Western and notably French Thought, the dominant Discourse - let us call it structuralism - remains caught, by an entire layer, sometimes the most fecund, of its stratification, within... metaphysics-logocentrism.*⁶

For Foucault, structuralism, is merely the last attempt to represent the world as if it were made to be read by man. Foucault said, "structuralism may have realized the death of Enlightenment man, but not the death of a subject-centered discourse."⁷ Poststructuralists' critique of human subjectivity has consequently shattered the traditional notion of the author as the owner of his or her work, as the originator of the meaning of his or her work. Barthes' declaration of "The Death of the Author" epitomizes poststructuralists' skepticism about the traditional authority of the author.⁸ In the wake of the author's death, Barthes has proposed a new definition of literature:

*a discursive game always arriving at the limits of its own rule, without any author other than the reader, who is defined as an effect of the writing game he activates.*⁹

Barthes' theory of "Text" in distinction from "Work" further undermines the traditional value attached to the author. While the meaning of the "Work," Barthes contends, is closed and fixed by the author, a "Text" is:

*not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.*¹⁰

⁵ Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader* (Boston: Routledge, 1981), 4-16.

⁶ Quoted in Young, *Untying the Text*, 15.

⁷ Young, *Untying the Text*, 10.

⁸ Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1977), 142-148.

⁹ Donald Pease, "Author," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and T Thomas mc Laughlin (Chicago: the university of Chicago press, 1990), 112.

¹⁰ Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 146.

Traditionally, there have been many battles for a true meaning, a definitive meaning, of a Work intended by the author. In Text, however, meanings are to be found not in its origin but in its destinations, not in its production but in its reception, not in the author but in the reader, since a Text is produced, in Barthes' terms, "in the space of the relations between the reader and the written." Traditionally, the reader just consumed a Work as a passive receiver, but in a Text, the reader is no longer a mere consumer but becomes an active co-producer of the Text.¹¹ Barthes demands that "the birth of the reader" must be at the cost of the death of the Author.¹²

In his article, "From Work to Text," Barthes discusses aleatoric music as an example of the "Text" which invites the birth of the reader. Barthes does not use the term "aleatoric music," but his description makes it obvious that the kind of "post-serial music" he has his mind is aleatoric music.

*We know that today post-serial music has radically altered the role of the 'interpreter', who is called on to be in some sort the co-author of the score, completing it rather than giving it 'expression'. The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration.*¹³

Indeed, one can find a strong parallelism between John Cage's philosophy of aleatoric music and Barthes' concept of Text. In Barthes' theory, the Text is a "methodological field, experienced only in an activity of production." In other words, it is a process rather than a thing, productivity rather than a product.¹⁴ Likewise, Cage views that musical composition is not an object but a process, just as the world and our lives are. "The world, the real," Cage notes, "is not an object. It is a process."¹⁵ Cage is not concerned with specific results of composition, for any results obtained from the process are just as valid as any other to him. Instead, he pursues "to let sounds go wherever they would go, and to let them be whatever they are."¹⁶ This attitude demands to minimize compositional control, and in so doing, undermines the role of the composer in the activity of making music, in the similar way that Barthes and other poststructuralists challenge the absolute authority traditionally given to the author. In some works, Cage completely abdicated compositional control and subjectivity. In his operatic series, *Européras*, for instance, Cage did not compose a single note but instead asked his singers to choose their favorite arias from various pre-existent operas to fill up the entire space of the opera. This opera's total dependence on quotation yields a further affinity to the Barthesian "Text."

¹¹ Barthes, "From Work to Text," 163-64.

¹² Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 148.

¹³ Barthes, "From Work to Text," 163.

¹⁴ Young, *Untying the Text*, 31.

¹⁵ John Cage, *For the Birds*, (Boston: Marron Boyars, 1981), 80.

¹⁶ Cage, *For the Birds*, 74.

Reflecting the poststructuralists' mistrust of originality, Barthes contends that the "text" is fundamentally a "tissue of quotations."

*The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture..., the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original.*¹⁷

In spite of these resemblances, however, Barthes' postulation of aleatoric music as an example of text is problematic when viewed from the perspective of the relationship between the Text and its reader. This is because of the non-unitary status of the reader in performative art. In musical performance, the reader of a Text can be both performer and listener. Unlike literary readers, listeners do not have direct access to a "text" but need to be mediated by the performer. Given this, the Barthesian "birth of the reader" needs to be re-examined both from the listener's points of view and the performer's points of view.

The Comparative Status of the Performer and the Listener in Aleatoric Music

First of all, let us examine different types of aleatoric music, since each type engenders a different status of the performer with respect to his or her relationship with a "Text," a musical score. At the broadest level, aleatoric music can be divided into three groups. In the first type, the chance element is involved only in the process of composition, and every parameter of a work is fixed before the moment of its performance. Cage's *Music of Changes* (1951) is an example of this type of aleatoric music. In this piece, the composer selected duration, tempo, and dynamics by using the *I-Ching*, an ancient Chinese book that prescribes methods for arriving at random numbers. Only pitches were determined by the composer. Similarly, Iannis Xenakis used probability theories to determine the microscopic details in many of his compositions, including *Pithoprakta* (1955-56), the literal meaning of which is "actions by means of probability." This work comprises of four sections, each of which is distinguished from the others primarily by textural and timbral characteristics, such as glissandi and pizzicati. The sectional division at the macroscopic level and the collective characteristics of each section are designed and controlled by the composer, but the individual components of sound are generated by mathematical theories. For instance, when Xenakis chose glissandi and pizzicati as the main sonic events of the second section, microscopic details, such as which pitches and dynamics to use, were determined by probability theories, in the similar way that Cage used *I-Ching* in *Music of Changes*. In this type of aleatoric music, composers allow elements of chance to occur only in the process of composing, and the results obtained from this process are notated without

¹⁷ Barthes, "The death of the author," 146.

allowing the performer to change the written score. The role of performers and listeners remains as passive as in traditional music. A counterpart of this type of aleatoric music in visual art would be Jackson Pollock's "action painting," which is created by pouring or dripping paint onto the canvas in a spontaneous manner. A chance element is incorporated at the time of painting, but what is presented to the viewers is a fixed and finished object.

The second type of aleatoric music incorporates chance elements in performance. The composer provides notated events but their arrangement is left to the determination of the performer. Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* (1956) is an example. This work contains nineteen events which are composed and notated in a traditional way. The arrangement of these events, however, is not determined until the performer decides prior to the performance. Earle Brown's *Available forms II* (1962) is intended to be performed in the same way, except that in this piece the conductor is asked to "spontaneously" decide the order of the events at the very moment of performance (EXAMPLE 1). This work is composed for two orchestras, which are to play simultaneously. The score for each orchestra consists of four pages. Each page contains either four or five musical events, each of which differs from each other in its sound characteristics, such as articulation, density, contour, timbre, etc. In order to perform this work, the conductors, working independently of each other, choose one combination of the given events. As the title suggests, each performance is meant to be one of the available realizations of the piece. This piece was inspired by Alexander Calder's mobile sculpture, which consists of several parts that move in space, continuously changing their spatial dispositions before the viewers' eyes, yet not losing its identity as a single work because of the limited relationships among its parts.

The third type of aleatoric music contains the greatest degree of indeterminacy. In this type, traditional musical notation is replaced by visual or verbal signs which instruct or only suggest the ways a work can be performed. Graphic score pieces are examples of the third type. In Earle Brown's *December 1952* (1952), lines and rectangles of various lengths and thicknesses replace traditional musical notes (EXAMPLE 2). The lines and rectangles may read as implying direction, loudness, duration, and pitch. The performer chooses how to read the sonic implications of the graphic signs. Similarly, Morton Feldman's *Intersection No. 2* (1951) for piano solo is written on coordinate paper. The squares viewed horizontally represent a time unit, while three vertical squares in each row suggest relative pitch levels - high, middle and low. The number in a box tells how many keys are to be played. The performer determines what particular pitches and rhythms to play. (EXAMPLE 3). Christian Wolff's *Duo for Pianists, II* (1958) has only a verbal indication for a broad limitation, such as the use of pianos with no silences between the two performers. The beginning and the ending of the piece are determined by the situation under which performance takes place.

The score of Cage's *Variations II* (1961) shows both graphic and verbal notations. It consists of eleven transparent plastic sheets: six of them contain the drawing of straight lines, one line for each sheet, and each of the remaining five sheets carries one black dot. The composer provided the performer with the verbal instructions for how to create scores by using the given sheets and how to realize the scores (EXAMPLE 4). There are many ways of creating a score for this piece, and many more ways of realizing it once it is created.

In the second and third types of aleatoric music, it is not listeners but only performers who are promoted to the rank of co-author of the works. At the moment of performance, listeners hear only a rendition chosen and fixed by performers; the openness of aleatoric music is closed and fixed at the time of performance. Carl Dahlhaus has remarked upon this closed openness on the listener's side:

By "open forms" one understood, first, pieces in which individual section are fixed and unalterable, yet where the sequence of the sections is variable and left to the performer. The variability is, however, aesthetically fictitious. For the listener it does not exist; he does not relate the version he is hearing to other possible ones the performer could have chosen but did not choose. What is a variable form on paper is fixed in performance; and insofar as form is a category that refers to the perceivable result and not to the method, "open form" is not "open."¹⁸

Cage's *4' 33"* is known as the most radically indeterminate in the repertoire of aleatoric music. The notation of this piece has only a verbal indication, which specifies broad aspects of the piece, such as the number of section and the total length of the work. The word, "tacet" written between the roman numeral marking of each section indicates that performers should be silent during each section (EXAMPLE 5). In David Tudor's premiere of *4' 33"*, he indicated the beginnings and the endings of three sections by closing and opening the keyboard cover, respectively. What Cage intended in this silent piece was to make the audience experience the sounds from their environment. He has noted:

You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement (in the premiere). During the second, raindrops began pattering the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out.¹⁹

Cage's *4' 33"* certainly invites the audience to engage, through its own sounds, in the making of the work as co-author and performer. David Tu-

¹⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 261-22.

¹⁹ Quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., "Ur-Conversation with John Cage," *Perspectives of New Music* 25 (summer 1987): 97.

dor's performance was indeed a ritual, in which the moments of composition and performance collapse and the audience create and experience together what Barthes called "textasy," "an ecstatic loss of the subject in a textual coming."²⁰ This type of "textasy" can be found in Robert Rauschenberg's "all white paintings," which are often regarded as a visual counterpart of Cage's 4'33". These paintings are nothing but empty white canvases, waiting for shadows cast by spectators. Spectators complete the work by becoming the objects on empty canvases, and in so doing, they become co-author of the work.

In Cage's 4' 33", however, the role of the listener as a co-author is only conditional. Although performers are asked to remain silent by the indication of the word "tacet," this silence is overridden by Cage's verbal instruction, which reads, "However, the work may be performed by an instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time."²¹ During David Tudor's monumental performance, the audience was invited to fill up the temporal space of the piece with its own sounds, and thus became a co-author and a performer of the piece. But if a performer fills up the duration of 4'33" entirely with his or her own music, then the listener would remain as passive as in the performance of any traditional, non-aleatoric music. It is the performer who decides whether or not to give participational space to the listener.

This privileging of the performer has been a major target in the criticism of Cagean aleatoric music. Xenakis pointed out that in the open-form compositions, it is the performer who is promoted to the rank of composer by the composer himself, and thus the result is a substitution of authors.²² Morton Feldman has discovered the same flaw.

*After several years of writing graphic music I began to discover its most important flaw. I was not only allowing the sounds to be free—I was also liberating the performer.*²³

As Feldman, Xenakis, and Dahlhaus indicated, what one sees at the wake of the author's death in aleatoric music is the birth of the performer, not the birth of the listener, as Barthes conceived.

²⁰ Quoted in Young, *Untying the Text*, 32.

²¹ John Cage, 4' 33" (New York: Henmar Press Inc., 1960). In the second version of 4'33" (1962), Cage further loosened the performing restrictions of the work by defining it as a "solo to be performed in any way by anyone" (see Example 6). Peter Pfister made one of its realizations at his electronic studio in Switzerland.

²² Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music: Thought and Mathematics in Composition*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992), 38.

²³ Morton Feldman, *Essays* (Kerpen: Beginner Press, 1985), 38.

The Figure of Music in Barthes' Theory of Text

Our goal is not to refute Barthes' theory of text by simply upholding the difference in performance art, especially in music. Rather, a deeper implication of performance art's provocation can be entertained by asking what role this "difference" played in Barthes' decision to turn to musical examples. That is, what rhetorical role does music play in Barthes' theory of text?

Our answer in a nutshell is this: Barthes' theory of text is irreparably burdened by a paradoxical tension, to which music provides a rhetorical solution (precisely because of its "difference"). The tension is between the para-historical and historicism; between, on the one hand, Barthes' defining of the Text in a transphenomenal sense, as an experience that transcends historically specific authors, text-artifacts, and readership, and, on the other, his need to demonstrate the same through historically-situated instances of authors and texts. In short, it is the problem of discussing the trend towards authorlessness in terms of the history which is demarcated by authors. Let us elaborate this tension.

Time and again, Barthes warns that the removal of the Author is not merely a historical fact or explainable by "declaring certain literary productions in and others out by virtue of their chronological situation."²⁴

For, the Text is a certain primordial law of the sign that has been exerting its force always already. He opens "The Death of the Author" by speaking of this timeless relation between writing and the subject:

*Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every voice, of every point of origin... As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin.... No doubt it has always been that way.*²⁵

For him, it is only the Work which is a historical phenomenon, a product of historically identifiable regimes of institutional and ideological forces. Specifically, the phenomenon of Work coincides with the bourgeois democracy in the West, the high point of the capitalist ideology with its worship of the prestige of the individual, where a work of art is "consumed" with the stamp of the Author. From this view, the instance of the Work is but the bourgeois democratic ideology's momentary interruption of the timeless force of the Text. Then, the birth of the reader is in fact a re-birth.

Having so defined the Text only as a negatively historical phenomenon, is opposition to the epoch of the Work, the question of where the Work stops and the Text begins becomes a hopelessly elusive logical problem for

²⁴ Barthes, "From Work to Text," 156.

²⁵ Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 142.

Barthes; once he explains the birth of the Author (or the Work) within history, showing its undoing outside the history becomes an impossible task. And Barthes slips repeatedly: while the moment of the Text is supposed to be recognized as nameless, ownerless instances, he tells us time and again that its name in fact is Mallarmé, Genet, Proust, etc.; he cannot do without the heroes of conscientious interventions in the ideological regime of the Work, towards the Text. In sum, Barthes vacillates between having the “birth of the reader” as an innovation and as a return (to the primordial ways of writing / reading relation that has been “always that way”); simultaneously as a historical phenomenon (identifiable by such and such authors) and as a para-historical, authorless law of the sign.

How does music intervene in this paradox? First of all, we have to recognize that music is not a marginal subject in Barthes’ theory of text. It is through music, not through the literary tradition, that he reveals the most straightforward and specific examples of the Work and the Text; through music history, he reveals the most tangible “chronology” of where the Work stops and the Text begins. However, as we will show presently, the specificity Barthes purchases through musical example concretizes but at the same time disrupts the entire logic of his theory of text.

We argue that music’s “difference,” which prompts Barthes to seek in it the examples he is reluctant to articulate within the literary tradition, lies precisely in its irreducible presence of the performer. First, the musical scene provides him with an ideal example for the historical lapse into the Work, for the institutional intervening of the performer in music palpably demonstrates the growing distance between the “author” and the “reader.” In contrast, vis-a-vis the literary tradition, Barthes largely remains silent about what actual changes in the textual form and its relation to the reader took place with the advent of the Work—while he liberally discusses the ideological milieu surrounding the change. He relegates this task to musical examples, as it were. In music, he observes, this era is characterized by the degradation from the music that is played, which he calls *musica practica*,²⁶ to the music that is passively listened to. In this era, practicing amateurs who listen as one would play, once numerous in the previous age, disappear. Instead, between the composer and the listener, there intervenes the professional performers and music critics who assign upon themselves the task of interpreting “the soul” of the Genius behind a piece of work that supposedly remains inaccessible to amateurs. In short, the trend of the Work in music has momentarily suspended the para-historical phenomenon of *musica practica*.

Second, a sociological and historical specificity thus purchased, Barthes discusses the emergence of musical equivalent of the Text with far less

²⁶ Roland Barthes, “Musica Practica,” in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: The Noonday Press, 1977), 149-154.

inhibition (than in his discussion on the literary tradition) towards naming the historical author. His para-historical stance virtually disappears, and Barthes is more willing to entertain the idea of the moment of musical Text as a historical epoch: it coincides with aleatoric music that he described as “post-serial music.” “Today aleatoric music has radically altered the role of the “interpreter”, Barthes declares.²⁷ Just as the reading of the “modern” text consists not in passive receiving but in writing anew, he continues, “the modern listener ... puts oneself in the position... of an operator, who knows how to displace, assemble, combine, fit together...”²⁸

Then, how does he explain the sudden irrelevance of music’s historical intermediaries, especially the performer, in aleatoric music? Here, Barthes becomes ambivalent. After the above optimistic pronouncement that it is we, the listeners, who are playing the “modern” musical scores, he quickly adds: “though still it is true by proxy.” Here, in this swift qualification, we get a glimpse of Barthes’s hesitant yet evident desire to collapse the experience of the listener onto that of the performer; that is, his desire to see aleatoric music as a sort of “return” of *musica practica*. What warrants this return of an unmediated relationship between the performer and the listener? Is it “in the score,” so to speak? Or is it in the social setting? How is such an unmediated relationship conceivable today, when we are in fact even more inundated, than the age of the Enlightenment itself, with the electronic and commodity mediations of the images of the composer as individual hero, the charismatic performer, and the recording as a perfect performance of a piece? This kind of “sociological” calling into question is inevitable given Barthes’ allowing of a historical specificity via aleatoric music. But he remains silent on such an essential detail.

Towards the very end of the same argument, Barthes admits in passing that this—the “birth of the listener” with aleatoric music—is an ideal picture, a “utopia.” Why does he suddenly lapse into a prescriptive mode when it comes to the question of the music listener? It is as if Barthes resorts to “utopia” precisely because he is secretly aware of the fact that, as we have been at pains to show, the epoch of aleatoric music is no less Author-centered (from the point of view of the listener), that this epoch is thick with institutionalized intermediaries such as the performer. It is as if Barthes, after inscribing the advent of the performer as a historical and sociological phenomenon, tries to wish it away from the aleatoric music. The musical example, with its tangible institutionalization of mediators, illuminates Barthes’ rhetoric but only to bite back in the end.

Drawing on the above observations, we conclude that in Barthes’ theory of text, music serves as the lowest and the highest examples. At the lowest,

²⁷ See note # 13 above.

²⁸ Barthes, “Musica Practica,” 153.

music history demonstrates the clearest case of the trend towards consumption, i.e., the severance of the "author" from the "reader" by the intervention of the professional performer. At the highest, aleatoric music is an ideal example of the Text, much more than any literary text can be. The two, the lowest and the highest, are inseparably locked in Barthes' logic: it is precisely because music is haunted by the irreducible intervention of the performer that its supposed absence in aleatoric music is liberating. How liberating? The latter, for Barthes, is the moment when the performer fuses with the listener – i.e., the *musica practica*. It is interesting that in his literary examples (of "the modern text"), such a "transference" of performativity predominantly concerns the author; hardly ever the reader. (Thus his extolling of Mallarmé's "authorless" language play, Brecht's "distancing," etc.) When it comes to the reader's performative empowerment, Barthes resorts to hopelessly abstract and "intangible" phenomena such as "intertextuality." But from the model of *musica practica* – the sensual and bodily merger of the performer with the listener, the playing and the hearing – he finds a much more reified and "situated" *mis-en-scène* of the ideal readership. Such is the role of music in Barthes' theory of text.

– a shorter version of this paper was presented at the 16th Congress of the IMS in London, 1997-

Example 1: Earle Brown, Available Forms II

The image displays a complex musical score for Earle Brown's *Available Forms II*. The score is arranged in a vertical stack of staves, each labeled with an instrument or section. From top to bottom, the staves are: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in E-flat (Cl. Eb), Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. Bb), Bass Clarinet (Bass Cl.), Bassoon (Bn.), Horn (Hrn.), Trumpet (Trp.), Trombone (Trb.), Harp, Piano, Orchestral Strings (Orch. S.), Marimba (Marim.), Timpani (Timp.), Xylophone (Xylo.), Vibraphone (Vib.), Timpani (Timp.), Violin (Vln.), Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The score is characterized by its dense, overlapping notation, with many notes and rests written in a way that suggests a complex, multi-layered texture. There are several large, hand-drawn circles and lines that group different sections of the score, highlighting specific musical ideas or structures. The notation includes various rhythmic values, dynamic markings (such as *pp* and *ff*), and articulation marks. The overall appearance is that of a highly detailed and intricate musical composition.

Example 4: John Cage, Variations II

SIX TRANSPARENT SHEETS HAVING SINGLE STRAIGHT LINES, FIVE HAVING POINTS. THE SHEETS ARE TO BE SUPERIMPOSED PARTIALLY OR WHOLLY SEPARATED ON A SUITABLE SURFACE. DROP PERPENDICULARS FROM THE POINTS TO THE LINES (WHERE NECESSARY TO EXTENSIONS OF THE LINES). MEASURE THE PERPENDICULARS BY MEANS OF ANY RULE, OBTAINING READINGS THEREBY FOR 1) FREQUENCY, 2) AMPLITUDE, 3) TIMBRE, 4) DURATION, 5) POINT OF OCCURRENCE IN AN ESTABLISHED PERIOD OF TIME, 6) STRUCTURE OF EVENT (NUMBER OF SOUNDS MAKING UP AN AGGREGATE OR CONSTELLATION). A SINGLE USE OF ALL THE SHEETS YIELDS THIRTY DETERMINATIONS. WHEN, DUE TO 6), MORE ARE NECESSARY, CHANGE THE POSITION OF THE SHEETS WITH RESPECT TO ONE ANOTHER BEFORE MAKING THEM. ANY NUMBER OF READINGS MAY BE USED TO PROVIDE A PROGRAM OF ANY LENGTH. IF, TO DETERMINE THIS NUMBER, A QUESTION ARISES OR IF QUESTIONS ARISE REGARDING OTHER MATTERS OR DETAILS (E.G. IS ONE OF THE PARTS OF A CONSTELLATION ITSELF A CONSTELLATION, OR AGGREGATE), PUT THE QUESTION IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT CAN BE ANSWERED BY MEASUREMENT OF A DROPPED PERPENDICULAR.

COPYRIGHT © 1961 BY HENMAR PRESS INC., 373 PARK AVE. SO., NEW YORK 16, N.Y.

Example 5: John Cage, 4'33"

I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4' 33" and the three parts were 33", 2' 40", and 1' 20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by an instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.

FOR IRWIN KREMEN

JOHN CAGE

Copyright © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., 373 Park Avenue South,
New York, N.Y. 10016, U.S.A.

Example 6: John Cage, 4'33" No. 2

0 00

SOLO TO BE PERFORMED IN ANY WAY BY ANYONE

FOR YOKO ONO AND TOSHI ICHIYANAGI
TOKYO, OCT. 24, 1962

John Cage

IN A SITUATION PROVIDED WITH MAXIMUM AMPLIFICATION (NO FEEDBACK), PERFORM
A DISCIPLINED ACTION.

WITH ANY INTERRUPTIONS.

FULFILLING IN WHOLE OR PART AN OBLIGATION TO OTHERS.

NO TWO PERFORMANCES TO BE OF THE SAME ACTION, NOR MAY THAT ACTION BE
THE PERFORMANCE OF A 'MUSICAL' COMPOSITION.

NO ATTENTION TO BE GIVEN THE SITUATION (ELECTRONIC, MUSICAL, THEATRICAL).

10/25-62

THE FIRST PERFORMANCE WAS THE WRITING OF THIS MANUSCRIPT (FIRST MARGINATION ONLY).

THIS IS 4'33" (No. 2) AND ALSO PT. 3 OF A WORK OF WHICH ATLAS ECLIPTICALIS IS PT. 1.

COPYRIGHT © 1962 BY HENMAR PRESS INC., 375 PARK AVE. S., NEW YORK 46, N.Y.

Џионџвон Џо и С. Хун Сонџ

"ТЕКСТ" РОЛАНА БАРТА И АЛЕАТОРИЈСКА
МУЗИКА: ДА ЛИ ЈЕ "РОЂЕЊЕ ЧИТАОЦА"
И РОЂЕЊЕ СЛУШАОЦА ?

(Резиме)

Разликујући «текст» од «дела», Барт тврди да у додиру са «текстом» читаоци, а не аутор, треба да створе значења. За њега је алеаторичка музика пример «текста» који захтева «рођење читаоца». У овом раду се критички преиспитује овакво Бартово схватање, са нагласком на анализи компликованог статуса читаоца у музици. Читаоци музичког текста могу бити и извођачи и слушаоци. За разлику од читаоца књижевности, музички читалац нема директан приступ «тексту», јер он мора бити посредован извођачем. У алеаторичкој музици се само извођачи, не и слушаоци, промовишу у ранг ко-аутора дела.

У раду се разматра и питање зашто се Барт окренуо музици да би илустровао своју теорију текста. Управо због «различитости» («difference») музике као извођачке уметности, историја музике пружа примере за најниже и највише тренутке Бартове теорије. Ако, по њему, институционализација професионалног извођача у историји музике показује успон Дела боље него што је то могуће на примерима из књижевности, претпостављено ишчезавање извођача у алеаторичкој музици делује у већој мери ослобађајуће него било који моменти у књижевном Тексту. То је стога што представа музике – као извођачке уметности – пружа Барту постварен и телесно «ситуиран» модел читалаштва који он није био у стању да нађе у књижевној традицији.

UDK 78.01 Barthes R. : 781.24.03