

PERFORMING ELECTRONIC DANCE MUSIC: MIMESIS, REFLEXIVITY AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF LISTENING¹

“PERFORMANDO” A MÚSICA ELETRÔNICA DANÇANTE: MÍMESE; REFLEXIVIDADE E A COMODIFICAÇÃO DA ESCUTA

Carlo Nardi¹

ABSTRACT

Recent changes in the economy of music have induced some musicians in the electronic dance scene to adapt their repertoire to concert performance. However, this conversion is far from being unproblematic, as electronic dance music, being based on additive operations, programming and merging of roles, resists, to an extent, live performance. I will then examine some of the strategies that musicians adopt in order to bring into the performance an element of actuality, focusing on the sensorial implications of this process. The stage concert, however, challenges not only the modes of production, but also the ideology of club culture, which is based on participation and inclusiveness. Mimesis, as a means to establish contact with the audience through identification, allows overcoming the division drawn by the stage. On the other hand, reflexivity, as a way to acknowledge the different roles at play, counteracts the role of mimesis and restores the distinction between audience and performer, thus substantiating the condition that prompted this transformation and that entails, in the first place, the commodification of musical experience.

KEYWORDS

Electronic dance music; reflexivity; mimesis; intersensoriality; commodification; performance.

RESUMO

Modificações recentes na economia musical induziram alguns músicos da cena de música eletrônica dançante a adaptarem seus repertórios para a performance de concerto. Entretanto, essa conversão apresenta seus próprios problemas, uma vez que a música eletrônica dançante baseada em operações aditivas, programações e na fusão de papéis, resiste a uma extensa performance ao vivo. Pretende-se examinar algumas das estratégias que

1 Associate Lecturer at the University of Northampton. His work has focused on the use of technology from a sensory perspective, authorship in relation to technological change, coercive music practices, the organisation of labour in music-making and Indian film music. In 2011 he was elected General Secretary of IASPM, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music. INGLATERRA E-mail: carlo.nardi@northampton.ac.uk

músicos estão adotando a fim de trazer para a performance um elemento de atualidade, focando nas implicações sensóreas desse processo. O concerto no palco, contudo, desafia não apenas os modos de produção mas também a ideologia da cultura “club”, que é baseada na participação e inclusividade. A mímese, como meio de estabelecer contato e identificação com a audiência, permite superar a divisão imposta pelo palco. Por outro lado, a reflexividade, como forma de dar conhecimento dos diferentes papéis desempenhados, se contrapõe ao ato mimético e restaura a distinção entre audiência e músico, comprovando assim a condição que levou a essa transformação e que implica, em primeiro lugar, a comodificação da experiência musical

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Música eletrônica dançante; reflexividade; mímese; intersensorialidade; comodificação; performance.

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2007 media hype followed the announcement that Madonna would depart from Warner Bros. by 2009 to sign a \$120 million, ten year contract with the Californian events company Live Nation². This move, soon followed by U2, Shakira, Jay-Z, and many others, did not come as a surprise to music business insiders, as soon as music companies realised that the best way to recover from the losses in record sales was – beyond the collection of copyright³ – the promotion of live events.

Unsurprisingly, this shift has since affected a large sector of the industry, including independent labels and their signed artists. Accordingly, we are assisting to a growing involvement in live shows also in the electronic dance scene, notwithstanding the fact that club culture originally used to define itself against the institution of the stage concert and in favour of the democratic and participatory context of the dance floor. Now and then, the ideological battle between club culture and rock manifests itself in the media: in 2003 magazines and newspaper spread the news that the previous year turntables had surpassed guitars in annual sales (e.g. DEMBY, 2003); since that time, supporters of club culture often cite this event as a sign of paradigmatic change in popular music and culture. However, as distinctions in style and taste between rock or pop and electronic dance music (EDM) started to fade out, this assumption has lost its momentum. The point is that the ideology of club culture is constantly being renegotiated in relation to changes in the modes of consumption, technology, market regulation and corporate strategies. In this article I will deal with one of these processes of transformation, namely the shift of EDM from the dance floor to the stage⁴.

During extensive fieldwork, which between 2005 and 2009 brought me in contact with music operators in the Berlin club scene (NARDI, 2012), I detected a tendency for music labels

and promoters to renew their catalogue and include more bands to the detriment of DJs. To mention an example, in 2008 the DJ/producer team Jazzanova, which also manages the Berlin music label Sonar Kollektiv, rearranged some mainly sample-based songs from the label's catalogue; a newly formed band, the Sonar Kollektiv Orchester, subsequently recorded and performed live this repertoire.

While a closer look at the economic grounds of this shift would require more space, the purpose of this article is to analyse how music that was originally conceived to be programmed rather than performed in real time is reinvented for a live show. In particular, I will focus on the sensory aspects of this process, which involve the development of mimetic strategies furthering interaction between the performer and the audience. At the same time, a reflexive process, in which the roles of performer and audience are acknowledged and reinstated, counteracts mimesis, thus substantiating the economic logic that, in the first place, motivated this reinvention.

FULL-BODIED MUSICAL EXPERIENCE BETWEEN MIMESIS AND REFLEXIVITY

It is generally assumed that electronic music shows, even when the musicians are actually performing on stage, can be quite boring if there is no cue for the audience to acknowledge the actuality of the performance⁵. Someone may state that this feeling is a consequence of the presumed primacy accorded to sight in our culture. However, it is my aim to demonstrate that attempts to enrich a performance with non-aural sensory stimuli are not essentially aimed at offering a spectacle to the eye, as if it were not possible to appreciate music without a visual counterpart or representation. More precisely, as Franco Fabbri argues, "no musical event is 'pure' enough to exclude the other four senses and overall to exclude the thick network of linguistic and behavioural codes that weaves together every human activity" (FABBRI, 2008: 356, translation mine). As a matter of fact, there is evidence that, for instance, visual stimuli can enhance aural communication (see e.g. MUNHALL et al, 2004; SOTO-FARACO, 2004; MCANGUS TODD, 1999). In other words, sensory perception functions as a holistic system that requires coordination between the different senses and that looks for sensory consistency in the external world. Marshall McLuhan revived the medieval concept of the sensorium as a human receptacle of external stimuli symbolising a unified system of perception (MCLUHAN, 1961) – which calls for a reconsideration of the separation of the senses as it has been enforced by modern science (NARDI, 2007).

In this exposition I will propose that, in order to establish a relationship between the performer and the audience, a full sensory engagement is required on both sides of the communication axe. Such an intersensory process implies a restoration of the actuality of musical gesture as a means to involve the audience in the performance. In this process the

eye can play a crucial role, but in the end it is the participation of the whole sensing body that is required. As a result, a performance of EDM, in order to make sense for a popular audience, necessitates mending the split between the production of a sound and its reception, and I suggest that reflexivity, or reflexiveness⁶, and mimesis, although they may work in opposite directions, are key-concepts in explaining this process.

Reflexivity involves "an entity acting back upon itself" through the "process of taking the role of the other and of seeing the self from the other's perspective" (ROSENBERG, 1990: 3). This is how, according to symbolic interactionism, human beings establish and maintain contact with the social world and become aware of their social self. If we extend the periphrasis "seeing the self" to "sensing the self", what is relevant for this discussion is the role of reflexivity in the embodiment of social relations (see PAGIS, 2009).

While on stage, musicians, through a process of embodiment, produce signs that express and enact the performer's role. I suggest that sensorial consistency and intersensory balance are the conditions that make this process intelligible for the audience, providing a self-explanatory image of the roles at play.

The main contradiction between mimesis and reflexivity is that the first, demanding identification, tends to blur roles, and the second to support them. A stage show as an institution reproduces social distinction; aim of the performance is to overcome it by giving the audience the impression of being part of the show, hence reinstating the inclusive ideology of EDM. The concept of mimesis then allows surpassing the spatial gap between the stage and the stalls, supplying the eye with the capacity to transform sight into an instrument of contact between the audience and the performer through the mediation of performative gesture, or, in cognitive terms, motion perception.

The concept of mimesis demands a theoretical explanation. Plato, writing in the Republic, Book III about different styles of poetry, compared mimesis to diegesis in terms of a series of oppositions: while diegesis involves narration, detachment, transformation and signification, mimesis is characterised by imitation, embodiment, immanency and representation. Mimesis, rather than *telling* a story, *is* its enactment and in doing so it establishes a peculiar relationship where linear and causal models are questioned.

Michael Taussig interprets the healing wooden figures of the Cuna, made in the image of the white conqueror, as a form of magical thinking where an object assumes the likeness of something to affect what it is an image of (TAUSSIG, 1993: 2). As a matter of fact, mimesis, as a special form of communication that overturns common temporal and logical categories, is neither rare nor confined to magical thinking. A great deal of socialisation, especially in the first years of life, happens through mimesis (see e.g. KUGIUMUTZAKIS,

2005; GOLDMAN, 1998; STERN, 1985); an example would be baby talk, where it is not apparent who is imitating whom. So, firstly mimesis encourages understanding through imitation: gestures, inflections, expressions, cultural patterns are grasped by means of bodily imitation or simulation⁷. Secondly, it disobeys linear temporality and suspends causal logic: mimesis, bouncing like reflexivity between action and reaction, allows a mutual exchange rather than a unidirectional transmission of information, imbuing social interaction with dynamism. Finally, it places emphasis, rather than in the content of communication, in the act of communicating and, hence, in the establishment of a relationship.

However, as we will see later, just as the choice to go live is guided by economic motives, the pursuit of a mimetic relationship with the audience is primarily instrumental and, therefore, functional in the commodification of the process of music listening in the new social context of live EDM.

MODES OF PRODUCTION IN EDM

EDM is characterised by the layering of different tracks recorded either through music programming, performance or, more often, a combination of both. Music programming involves the additive and asynchronous (or step-time) inputting of tones, tone parameters, effects, envelopes, etc., through sequencers, samplers, drum machines, virtual instruments, and so on. In the most extreme case, gesture is not directly related to the production of sound, not only temporally (synchronisation) but also in terms of intensity, intention, dynamics, and, in general, all those features of sound that are in a causal relationship to body movement. More often, digital audio workstations, or DAWs, allow the integration of asynchronous and real-time performance, therefore incorporating gesture in the recording. So, in a sense, rather than radically erasing performance, sequencers, samplers and DAWs mediate and delay the rapport between human gesture and sound. This mediation includes also the adoption of MIDI grooves and other forms of automatic quantisation that simulate natural gestural features of musical performance.

Multitracking consists of the recording of several layers of sound at different times so that one single musician can perform different instrumental parts in the same song. Multitracking, hence, rationalises production saving labour force and, hypothetically, reducing costs. However, this is only one of its implications that have been already discussed to a certain extent (e.g. WARNER, 2003; THÉBERGE, 1997; GOODWIN, 1992). Here I want to point out two aspects related to the model of collaboration that multitracking makes possible. First, fewer performers can do what, in a live setting, would require a higher number of musicians. As a consequence, when performing on stage, it may be necessary to hire additional musicians, use a backing track and/or to change the instrumentation. Second, it is worth noting that a musical product – being it a recording or a concert – is the outco-

me of a collective and socially distributed process of creation (SORCE KELLER, 1996) that exceeds the most obvious authorship of performers or songwriters. In the case at hand, a musician that programs a beat on a sequencer, plays a Hammond groove on a MIDI keyboard and adds delay to a sampled vocal part, is unwittingly collaborating with those who have developed those instruments and those who have performed, recorded and edited those samples. In EDM, the collective nature of composition is quite marked, due to the role of sample and loop libraries, MIDI files and presets. In this regard, Théberge stresses the convergence, in current popular music, between production and reproduction: while creating new music, performers are also consuming recorded music (THÉBERGE, 1997).

If schizophonia consists of a split of sound from its source by electroacoustic transmission (SCHAFER, 1968), multitracking leads to a split between the different social actors involved in the production of a musical piece – a condition that, translating Schafer's metaphor to a social level and paraphrasing Durkheim, I would call, *phonomie*: differently than working in a band, an ensemble or an orchestra, musicians collaborate with invisible colleagues with whom they share nothing but a very feeble relationship; technological constraints provoke a breakdown in the traditional social bonds between music makers, who are thus alienated from each other in terms of aesthetics, values and economic opportunities. This interpretation, however, should not be generalised, as those same changes can be read as an opportunity for many musicians to widen their network of knowledge and influence.

EDM pays extraordinary attention to sound. Some features, like the four-on-the-floor kick drum or simple recurring harmonic structures, may be rather standardised⁸, while the manipulation of timbre, on the other hand, often brings to particularly creative results. Through the normal workstation of an electronic dance musician, which includes a sequencer, a mixer, a sampler and a sound processor (frequently integrated within a single unit, the DAW), it is possible to isolate timbre from the other musical parameters. More precisely, this workstation allows operating independently on different musical parameters – for instance, manipulating the timbral components of sound while leaving intact rhythm or pitch, hence achieving yet another kind of schizophonia. As a consequence, gesture is further detached from the sound it produces: actions like turning a cut-off filter knob on a synthesizer or raising a fader on a mixer are surely related to the production of sound, and yet, at least for the layperson, detached from more familiar associations such as plucking, strumming, picking, twanging, thrumming or blowing on an instrument.

Musical gesture is not only unintelligible, but also minimised. It is quite common for electronic musicians to play long tones or pads, rendering any developmental aspect of sound through delays or frequency filters. This means that a performance would be less interesting for the audience and, more relevantly, that the spectators would find it harder to make

sense of its actuality. To overcome this limitation, DJs have developed a standard set of body movements that club-goers can instantly recognise and set in relation to the sounds they are conventionally associated with. Besides that, sound is clearly related to human movement on the dance floor, where, according to some, the actual performance of EDM takes place: "Human movements making visible what machine sounds are making audible" (PEIXOTO FERREIRA, 2008: 18).

Processing and editing are ordinary in popular music recordings, even though the extent of technical mediation is rarely fully acknowledged as that would defy the idea of authenticity and the presumption of artistic autonomy, on which a clear division of roles between "artists" and "craftsmen" is based (KEALY, 1979). In EDM, as we have seen, the manipulation of sound through technological devices is not only an essential trait, but also one of the main criteria defining the skills and talent of music makers.

Returning to the concept of schizophonia, we must consider the symbolic association between sounds and their natural sources – concrete entities with specific perceptible traits – that sampling and, before that, sound recording call into question (see e.g. CHION, 1994). This means at least two things: any recordable sound can be promptly incorporated in a musical piece and, secondly, common instruments can be used to reproduce, or to interface other instruments with which they do not have any (cultural) affinity. One of the consequences of this discontinuity consists in the estrangement that can be perceived when what we hear does not correspond to what we see⁹, thus negating sensory consonance.

Samplers, as we have seen, have allowed a complete detachment between timbre and the other musical parameters, so that any sound can be pitched or organised rhythmically in ways that are not known in the acoustic world. This has brought to deep changes in the aesthetics of music production, even though not to the extent that someone could imagine. In fact, we may question why certain associations – for instance the unrealistic, but clearly iconic sound of brass section played on digital synthesizers and used to mimic its acoustic counterpart – are still maintained. In this sense, any cultural associations between visual and aural objects, and between analogue and digital sounds, are undergoing constant change, and yet sometimes tend to crystallise themselves in fixed forms (MIDDLETON, 1990: 90). At any rate, live performers are generally aware of the cultural acceptance of those associations and have to cope with it.

A final aspect that I want to pinpoint is the role played by the computer screen, unavoidable in the recording studio and often necessary in live performances. Specifically, the screen absorbs the gaze of the performer, who will consequently lose eye contact with those around him or her. Similarly, sound engineers and DJs need to keep an eye on the mixer or the record grooves. As a matter of fact, these machines demand also sight and

not only tactile or motion perception; not that the latter are indifferent, but, rather, are not sufficient to operate them properly. This has an important implication: motion perception is a crucial element of contact between the performer and the public, so that its absence will impair the communication between the two. More precisely, the audience's notice of motion signs mediates between the actions performed on stage and their reception. On the other end, when the performer's sight is focused on a screen, a device or the pages of a music score, there is a disruption, in semiotic terms, in the triadic relationship between performer, performance and audience.

Summing up, the production of EDM breaks the consequentiality between a performance and its sonic output, between body movement and rhythm, between gesture and sound. This is the result of various kinds of mediation that are rooted in aesthetic values, economic pressures and technological constraints. As a consequence, there are issues that musicians need to address before adapting their repertoire to a concert setting. While some may consider it pointless to undertake this operation and feel safer in the context of the club, we are assisting to a tendency among musicians in the EDM scene to devise a product that can be performed by real musicians, with real instruments, in real time.

MIMETIC STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE

In order to make live EDM compelling for a popular audience, performers adopt various strategies. The first practice that I am going to illustrate is the use of visual signs that are not directly related to the production of sound but rather function as a complement to it. This ranges from dance or visual media to an exaggeration of the gesture associated to music performance. In this latter case, as I have previously hinted, music performers convey the idea that any body movement that they enact is necessary for the production of sound. Performers, hence, associate sound and motion, offering visual kinetic clues to the audience. Moreover, this effort provides the performance with a sense of immanence, justifying the staging of something that could have easily be played-back by a machine. Here the construction of live authenticity is linked to other issues, such as stardom: what is displayed on stage is not just the performance but also the performer's body¹⁰.

Another visual complement consists of the use of videos, motion graphics and light-design, all features that enhance music performance with a spectacle for the eye¹¹; a particular instance concerns the use of software which allows to interface video and audio signals so that a single performer can control both outputs, synaesthetically, in real time.

This said, I need to specify that just as visuals are a complement to the music, it may also be the other way round either for performers, the audience or both. In other words, there is reciprocity between the two and, again, we can split seeing and listening only analyti-

cally. Depending on our research goal we may decide to focus on one sense rather than the other; however, intersensoriality and sensory consistency imply that the sonic/aural and the motional/visual are performed and, most of all, experienced at the same time¹².

In the context of the club this complication is absent due to the typical configuration of the environment and its corresponding social structure. With either music conceived for the dance floor or ambient music, attention is diverted from the performer to the surrounding space. As a matter of fact, the club implies the construction of a particular social space whose proxemics defies the typical stage setting and suggests inclusion, rather than differentiation or subordination. This however does not mean that there is no environmental mediation between the two counterparts. Likewise, the partially concealed position of the DJ may be in disagreement with the overriding presence of the guitar hero in rock music, yet the differentiation between the roles of performer and club-goer, far from being removed, is simply neutralised by the ideology of club culture.

A different kind of negation of the functions of the performance can be found in Kraftwerk, which, by placing the machines on the foreground and converting the performer into an automaton, emphasise the absence of the live element on stage. In doing so, they use the visual clue of the lack of (human) motion to deny the human in the production of sound.

A strategy that, differently than the preceding examples, focuses essentially on the production of sound, involves the achievement of real-time control on devices originally conceived of as sound reproduction systems or asynchronous and additive processing tools. Here come to mind the transformation of the turntable into an instrument in its own right (Katz, 2012; 2010; FIKENTSCHER, 2003), the conception of the recording studio as a creative tool rather than a mere technical apparatus (KEALY, 1979) and, more recently, the adoption of vinyl emulation software, haptic interfaces, and software for live electronics that allows for the performance of several editing and processing operations in real time¹³.

A compromise entails the combination of programmed electronic music and live performance: in this case, the use of a recorded backing track can bring clear advantages for the musicians; to name two, this combination verges the sound of the performance on the sound of the recording, hence pleasing those listeners that have become acquainted with a certain sound quality; moreover, it allows reducing the number of performers on stage.

For the reasons above outlined, musicians may find this compromise insufficient, choosing then to rearrange their electronic repertoire for a live band, like in the example of the Sonar Kollektiv Orchester.

After this glance at some of the different strategies available to make EDM come alive, I will analyse the process of transformation of both a repertoire and a mode of production from an embodied perspective, highlighting the role of sensory consistency and coordination in establishing a mimetic contact between performer and audience and that of reflexivity in challenging that contact.

COORDINATION OF THE SENSES AND SENSORY CONSISTENCY

The cultural study of the senses, that more recently has brought together academics from different areas under the umbrella of sensory scholarship (e.g. HOWES, 2005; BULL; BACK, 2003) contends that music, and sound at large, are experienced through the whole body – an intelligent body that does not simply react to external stimuli or act as a medium between the world and the brain, but has been socialised to select and construct a “world of sense” (CLASSEN, 1993). By doing this, the senses allow us to exceed the physical boundaries of our body, so that tools or external objects – a car, a musical instrument, a mountain echoing our voice – become appendixes of our body (SERRES, 1998) or prosthetic devices extending what the body can do (DENORA, 2000).

Neuroscience and psychology teach us that sensing takes place in our body; at the same time, sensing transcends physicality to merge us with the world. This merging is possibly the first step in the ontogenetic processes of psychological development and socialisation. Julia Kristeva coins the concept of “semiotic chora” to describe “the body in language wherein the subject blurs with the object, the child with its mother. The *chora* is a pulsational force of bodily drives invested in but developing before the acquisition of language per se, before syntax and the sign proper, but essential to their functioning” (cited in TAUSSIG, 1993: 36).

A similar “pulsational force” possibly manifests itself at any stage of development, especially in relation to non-verbal communication and through the related processes of mimesis and reflexivity. With mimesis I intend a common mode of communication that exists before language and, more importantly for the purpose of this article, beyond language. The social world is acknowledged and understood first of all by the act of imitating it – a fundamental process of knowledge, without which human development would not be possible.

Regarding reflexivity, there is evidence that the synchronisation of movements between individuals is key in coordinating social interaction (e.g. KENDON, 1970). For this reason the reflexivity of non-verbal communication, providing ongoing feedback and regulating expectations, is the sine qua non of interaction (e.g. GOFFMAN, 1961). In this sense, music, rather than being simply listened to, is embodied through an active exchange of sensory,

and therefore symbolic, information; in order to understand this experience, scholars, accordingly, need to undertake a “full-bodied understanding” of culture (HOWES, 2005: 1).

As noted earlier, the paradox of mimesis consists of the illusion that the effect can control the cause. For this reason mimesis has often been associated to magical thinking (TAUSSIG, 1993). At any rate, the presence of mimesis in human interaction is quite common: as also the concept of reflexivity suggests, actions are not always ordered linearly in a clear and established chain of causes of effect, but take the shape of a more complex web of actions and reactions where the actors involved, and sometimes also social analysts, often struggle to determine a starting point.

Mimesis and reflexivity, however, aim at two different goals: merging for the first, differentiating for the second. Mimesis allows putting ourselves in someone else’s shoes, while reflexivity helps us construct our identity, and that of others, through the process of interaction. The stage show entails both, and performance, as mediation between performer and spectator, can be read as the pursuit of a balance between inclusion and distinction.

The stage, as a historical institution, at least in the modern Western world, seems to negate a full sensory engagement: darkness and restraint characterise the audience and mark a distance with the performer, objectifying a division of roles between the two that also affects the senses. Moreover, forcing human beings to sit and stay quiet during a performance – let alone denying them the fun of participating – might appear like a castigation, an expression of the requirement for the aristocrat and then the bourgeois to sacrifice – at least in public – the pleasures of the body on behalf of spiritual elevation, by means of displaying a respectable discipline of the body.

However, what cannot be achieved through direct participation, it can be simulated through stage representation. Interestingly, Aristotle considered seeing as an organ of tact (STEWART, 1999); drama provides an illustration of this: through processes such as mimesis or catharsis, the spectator, rather than simply attending to a show, identifies with the performer on stage, rather than being the recipient of unilateral communication, takes part in the act. Concerning this special faculty of sight, Taussig, inspired by Benjamin, argues: “The staging, the magician, the drug, combine to convert the eye into an optical means of *contact* in a stunning example of distracted tactility, all with the aim of changing the realities espied and hence contacted” (TAUSSIG, 1993: 58)¹⁴. This faculty is not a remnant of the past, but is encouraged by modern technology: “The surfacing of ‘the primitive’ within modernity as a direct result of modernity itself, especially of its everyday-life rhythms of montage and shock alongside the revelation of the optical unconscious that is made possible by mimetic machinery such as the camera and the movies” (ibid.: 20).

However, also the other senses can play a similar “tactile” function: why should not hearing or taste be capable of instituting similar forms of contact? Conversely, touch – perhaps the first sense to come to mind when thinking about contact – can mark such different situations as affectionate hugging, patient-physician relation, and sexual harassment, thus establishing, neutralising or negating contact altogether¹⁵.

In order for mimesis to work in a stage representation, rather than only some form of visual communication, I argue that a coordination of the senses, and, correspondingly, a sensory consistency are required. If sound and vision are “out of synch”, the least that can happen is that the relationship between performer and audience may be negatively affected. In this regard, Franco Fabbri mentions the embarrassment among the public attending Renzo Piano’s stage production for Luigi Nono’s *Prométeo* (FABBRI, 2008: 350-2). Here the unorthodox disposition of the stalls forced the spectators to sit facing each other, hence diverting the attention from the orchestra. The unconventionality of the situation, and, feasibly, the uneasiness of the sensation of being looked at, combined with the effort to avoid eye contact, suggest that sensory synchronisation is not merely temporal, but mainly cultural, that is, it depends on the familiarity of the situation and the feelings, norms and expectations culturally associated to it.

What I want to stress is not so much the necessity of a visual stimulus in order to enjoy music: a blind person of course can enjoy music as much as a seeing person. The point is that when music is listened to also the other senses are involved: the perception of heat, the perception of vibrations, equilibrium, etc.; not always there is full acknowledgment of the multiplicity of the sensory experience involving music, and as a matter of fact absolute music as an abstract idea pre-existing the world of the senses tends to erase even hearing from musical understanding.

The audience, as a physical entity – its sounds, heat and movements – contribute to this sensorial wholeness, providing a sense of being in place that imbues the performance with actuality. In brief, an entire and rich sensuous universe is required for music to be enjoyed. What really count are the sensory coordination and the consistency of this wholeness. In fact we may have many senses (by the way: how many?), yet each of us has only one body to experience music.

Moreover, it is not possible to switch off the senses that, at a certain moment, are not the primary focus of our attention. A deep and exclusive focus on one sense would require (and in its turn stimulate) a huge capacity of imagination – trait that seems to be hardly achievable for contemporary human beings, caught-up in a saturated and pervasive web of stimuli. On the other hand, a rich and diverse sensory stimulation is key not only in our relationship to the world, but also in contributing to a correct functioning of our mental

faculties. Laboratory experiments have proved that a body that is deprived from external sensory stimuli will tend to generate hallucinatory sensations.

Drugs can exert a similar effect, enhancing one single sense or increasing concentration on one selected stimulus. Oliver Sacks describes the clinical case of Stephen D., who woke up one day to find his senses of smell and touch enormously amplified by the abuse of cocaine: "He experienced a certain impulse to sniff and touch everything ('It wasn't really real until I felt it and smelt it') but suppressed this, when with others, lest he seem inappropriate. [...] 'It was a world overwhelmingly concrete of particulars', he said, 'a world overwhelming in immediacy, in immediate significance'. Somewhat intellectual before, and inclined to reflection and abstraction, he now found thought, abstraction and categorisation, somewhat difficult and unreal, in view of the compelling immediacy of each experience" (SACKS, 1985: 150). Stephen D. had an extraordinary sensory faculty, but could not make sense of it because of a lack of experience due to the subsidiary role of, and even the stigma attached to, smell and touch in his culture.

Summing up, we learn to sense the world "properly", that is, according to dominant sensory models (HOWES, 2004: 51 et seq.); at the same time, we aim at sensory consistency, correspondently to what psychologists call cognitive consonance. When a body is overwhelmed by different and inconsistent sensations the possibility itself of a mimetic contact is at stake¹⁶.

THE CULTURAL DISSONANCE OF LIVE EDM

I have tried to demonstrate how musicians in the electronic dance scene aim at establishing a mimetic relationship with their audience. This design seems to imply a higher degree of participation of the public in music making, and yet participation has to remain confined within conventional social roles. According to my argument, music production with a DAW, characterised as it is by asynchronous programming, multitracking and editing, can be better described as diegetical. We have seen that this lack of immediacy and reflexivity is an obstacle when taking EDM to the stage. However, the distinctions implied by diegesis are not completely erased: authorship and the institution of copyright require a detachment between author, public and work of art as a consumer object – in its turn, the outcome of previous work and not of a contingency. Getting straight to the point, the artist needs to justify the existence of an entrance ticket.

Notwithstanding evident differences in the social and environmental setting, clubs share significant similarities with rock concerts. Although the proxemics of clubs defies frontality, the DJ still occupies a position that demands attention, marking a clear boundary between performer and public. EDM, like rock music, displays ostentatiously technological devices.

Virtuosity – on turntables, mixer or other devices – is common and is often connected to a gender bias. Accordingly, stars and promoters are mainly male while women generally play subordinate roles. Marketing, while reproducing the ideology of club culture, supports traditional forms of commerce that involve the branding of stars and lifestyle construction through specialised magazines, television channels, and advertising. Finally, costs related to musical equipment (including record collections) entail the exclusion of the many who cannot afford it.

Sarah Thornton, by detecting the presence of discrimination along lines of gender or economic status, shows that the democratic stance of club culture is largely ideological (THORNTON, 1996). If in the context of the club these aspects are not necessarily manifest, the staging of EDM, whilst reproducing attributes of traditional rock shows, makes them immediately visible. Of these aspects, virtuosity, gendering and stardom are probably the subtlest, and the changed proxemics the most obvious. As a consequence, the staging of EDM in a certain way betrays the ideological nature of club culture. In other words, while going live in order to establish a contact with their audience, musicians apparently contradict the egalitarian character of the dance floor.

For all these reasons, there is a potential cultural dissonance between the participatory ideology of club culture and the institutionalised practice of concerts. One of the functions of mimesis is to counterbalance the now evident polarisation between performer and audience. The mimetic relationship that the performer installs with the audience is aimed at suggesting that the latter possesses some control over the performance: mimicry affects the mimed so that spectators sense themselves playing on stage, thus resolving the incongruity between the need for inclusion and the institution of the stage show. Inclusion however is constrained by the economic logic that initially asked for this physical translocation.

To conclude, as long as sampling and DAWs have blurred the boundaries between production and reproduction, and digitalisation has dematerialised musical products, musicians in the electronic dance scene choose to challenge the ideology of club culture and transfer their activity to the stage. I have read this choice as a way to retrieve authorship over sound¹⁷: since sound cannot be profitably appropriated and marketed through phonograms, musicians and their business partners try asserting their rights over the places where music is consumed. In other words, if digitalisation has partially freed music consumption from the control of music labels, increased investment in live music will re-establish pre-existing claims over music as an exchange product.

The case of EDM, as a music born to be exchanged and consumed through phonograms, is paradigmatic: in order to be recommodified, it has to be transformed into something else, challenging its identity in the process. Mimesis, hence, comes to the rescue of music

business, restating the ideology of club culture in a changed context: sound is produced in real-time allowing the audience to acknowledge its immanency while preserving its status as a commodity. This means that the same economic dynamics that pushed musicians to change their practices will define the extent of those same practices. Mimesis opens possibilities, but the actualisation of these possibilities depends on other structural factors that inform the relationship between performer and audience. Constraints are always present: mimesis is historically ingrained in roles, expectations, and social stratification so that it can have different functions and can sustain or undermine different social constructions.

In a sense, I embrace Benjamin's and Taussig's idea that modern technology can foster simpler, pre-rational forms of knowledge and communication, hence reconsidering the assumption that rationalisation necessarily connotes technology. On the other hand, expanding their idea, I suggest that the forms of this mimetic process cannot pre-exist the actual social structures that characterise the modern world, most notably its peculiar model of rationalisation: the recommodification of music imposes constraints to the musical experience that are not immanent, but preordained by the social system in which actors participate and which defines their roles and aims.

The function of technology is neuralgic: as Benjamin prompted, one of the main aspects of the "resurgence of mimesis in modernity" is its mediated character, yet there are unequal degrees of access to this mediation. In other words, the consideration of a mediated setting suggests that mimesis, in the process, does not actually erase hierarchies, but rather transfers the attention from the object – the record – to the process – listening.

(ENDNOTES)

- 1 An early version of this article was presented at the conference *Analysing the Musically Sensuous*, held at the University of Liverpool on Saturday 22 November 2008. The title of the paper was "Missing Sense: The Mimesis of Live Electronic Music".
- 2 Article on NME, 2007.
- 3 This involves licensing of copyright-protected works for use in television, cinema, video games, websites, DVDs, etc.
- 4 Live EDM is only one of many changes that club culture is undergoing. To mention another one, see MONTANO, 2010a on the role of EDM festivals in moving the club scene from night to daytime.
- 5 This may concern also the DJ performance, see MONTANO, 2010b.
- 6 "It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind" (MEAD, 1934: 134).
- 7 This mirroring capacity can be explained through a distinction between 'cold' and 'hot' cognition: "In ordinary cognition, we grasp the states of others, including their motor intentions and feelings, through inference: we see a smile and recognize it as an expression of happiness; we witness someone reaching to grasp an object and we recognize their intention to pick it up. Such 'cold' cognition contrasts with the 'hot' cognition enabled by the mirror system, where the neural mirroring response triggered by the sight of the smile or the grasping gesture involves a kind of imaginative mimicking or simulation of the action, rather than a mere categorization of it" (SMITH, 2012: 94).
- 8 This of course is another generalisation, as EDM is a constellation of genres, or subgenres, showing profound stylistic differences. Furthermore, being aimed at making people dance, much of its creativity is employed in the "technological modulation of the sound-movement relation" (PEIXOTO FERREIRA, 2008: 18).
- 9 Sherry Simon describes the surprise of seeing a countertenor for the first time: "The mismatch between body and voice continues to exert a particular power. It's as if the visual dissociation, the breaks with naturalism, frees the listener to hear the voice as separate from the body" (SIMON, 2004: 110).
- 10 At the risk of sounding obvious, clearly what is happening on stage is not necessarily the main reason why people attend concerts, as social events perform several functions beyond entertainment.
- 11 On the emergence of new form of interactivity fostered by the distribution of knowledge related to audio/visual technologies, see GHOLZ, 2011.
- 12 The intersensory experience of a performance is also explored through interfaces that translate signals between different domains, from common audio-to-light modulator circuits to more complex systems that translate gesture to sound, such as the Music via Motion (MvM) framework (NG, 2004).
- 13 Unsurprisingly, the music industry has been investing consistently on this sector, as proven by the proliferation of music software and hardware interfaces in the past years.
- 14 Gertrud Koch, referring to cinema and glossing Adorno and Benjamin, suggests that in this mimetic process "the gaze is directed towards objects which the hand tries to grasp but fails to reach" (cited in TAUSSIG, 1993: 35). Taussig comments: "This provides a vivid notion of optical *tactility*, plunging us into the plane where the object world and the visual copy merge" (ibid.).
- 15 For a cultural history of touch, see CLASSEN, 2005.
- 16 Registering the pathological effects caused by the voluntary use of fragrances and scented products in Canadian malls, Christopher Fletcher introduces the notion of dystoposthesia to describe "an incompatibility of the bodies with the space they inhabit. It is a sickness that is characterized by highly divergent physical, affective, and behavioral 'reactions' to an equally broad list of environmental triggers" (FLETCHER, 2005: 380).
- 17 It is only ironic that the same musicians who use certain sounds and claim them as their own are not the persons who generated them at first, or occupy just a peripheral position in a long chain of production, which originates where company strategies are planned, recording copyrights are negotiated, patents over formats and media are deposited, etc.

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