

Session 5

Mediality and Mediatiation

1. MODES OF MEDIAL PERFORMANCE

Two aspects of mediality:

- a) ‚materiality‘: in poetry, verbal utterances are ‚encoded‘ in the medium of writing, lyrics are ‚encoded‘ in the medium sound (see session 4)

- b) medium as an “institutionalised system involving an organised channel of communication with a specific performance value and social relevance” (Faulstich 2004, 12, my tr.).

the interdependence of a) and b)

Four types of media according to their degree of technological saturation (Faulstich 2004, for an English intr. see Voigts-Virchow 2005, 20-22):

Primary (face-to-face, no technology involved)

Secondary (technology involved in production – esp. print media)

Tertiary (technology involved in both production and reception – analogue media such as telephone, radio, cinema or television)

Quaternary (digital technology involved – computer, multimedia, e-mail, WWW)

!! Most new medial developments have not led to the displacement of older technology, but to a situation of cumulative coexistence of multiple medial formats !!

MEDIUM OF LYRICS	quaternary	sound recording on CD, DVD-audio, MP3, etc	live event, digital playback	digital video / film representing performance	digital video / film without performer(s)
	tertiary	sound recording on cylinder, shellac, vinyl, tape, etc.	live event, analogue playback	video / film representing performance	video / film without performer(s)
	secondary	lyrics/score in songbook, booklet, etc.	(performed sheet music, karaoke)	representation of performer(s) in songbook, booklet etc.	artwork / design in songbook, booklet etc.
	primary	live event, invisible performer(s)	live event	live event, virtual performer(s)	artwork / design of stage / setting
		zero	primary	secondary	contextual/ersatz
VISUAL PRESENCE OF PERFORMANCE					

2. LIVENESS VS. RECORDEDNESS

Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Die Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004)

‘production – work – reception’ (as in traditional theatre / drama studies)

vs. ‘*mise-en-scène* – event – aesthetic experience’ (in performance studies)

The aesthetics of ‘events’ is based on:

the “**bodily co-presence of performers and audiences**” which inevitably engenders a “**self-referential and continually changing feedback loop**” (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 58, my tr.).

feedback loops may be suppressed (e.g. Wagner, first Bayreuth Festival 1876: primary mediality / zero visibility) or encouraged (e.g. jazz performance), but **always matter in liveness**

Three effects:

- **interaction:** “where human beings physically meet, they react to each other, even if this is not always perceptible to eyes and ears. It is not possible not to react to one another” (ibid., 67, my tr.).
- **temporary constitution of communities** which cannot “be conceived as ‘fictional’, but as the emergence of a social reality” (ibid., 90, my tr.)
- **potentiality of physical contact (touch, sight, etc.)**

Human medium (still) necessary to keep up feedback loop (cf. Gorillaz project, 2005 Manchester concerts - primary mediality / secondary visuality)

3. THE PHELAN – AUSLANDER DEBATE

What is the status of live events in a thoroughly mediatised culture?

Peggy Phelan (1993):

“Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.” (Phelan 1993, 146)

Eric Bogosian (1994)

Live events are “medicine for a toxic environment of electronic media mind-pollution. [...] Theatre is ritual. It is something we make together every time it happens. Theatre is holy. Instead of being bombarded by a cathode ray tube we are speaking to ourselves. Human language, not electronic noise” (Bogosian 1994, xii).

Any clear distinction between ‘liveness’ and ‘recordedness’, however, is problematic:

Donald Sassoon (on aristocratic audiences in the 18th century):

Their behaviour reflected the absence of any profound interest in the performance. To have an idea of the degree of attention pre-1800 audiences paid to what they were watching or listening to, we should consider not modern audiences, but the relatively relaxed and distracted way in which people watch television: they speak on the telephone, they go to the toilet whenever they feel like it, they make themselves a drink, they eat, they talk loudly, [...] and then abruptly switch the set off when they are tired and bored. (Sassoon 2006, 233).

!! The increasing cultural valuation of live performances over the course of the 19th century has emerged not necessarily in opposition to, but often in close dialogue with the increasing technologising of music !!

Philip Auslander (1999)

Rock in the 1960s and 70s was hardly, as some rock fans would claim, built on “a relation of opposition in which the live was seen as the authentic and the recorded as inauthentic. Rather, authenticity was produced through a dialectical or symbiotic relationship between live and mediatized representations of music” (Auslander 1999, 160)

Excursus: Recordedness and the Visuality of Performance

Effects of the emergence of sound recording around 1900:

- music becomes ubiquitous in everyday life, both public and private
- sounds are freed to travel across time and space, leading to an hitherto unknown simultaneity of historically and culturally specific acoustic material
- music enters the capitalist logic of production and consumption in hitherto unknown degrees, leading to continuing battles over the ‘ownership’ of music between artists, a small oligarchy of record companies, intermediaries and consumers
- the experience of songs and lyrics (initially) becomes a purely auditory experience suddenly severed from the primary visual aspects of their performance

Does ‘zero visibility’ lead to the ‘disembodiment’ of music, or rather to alternative models of visuality?

Simon Frith (1998):

“the simultaneous emergence around the turn of the century of the telephone, the gramophone, and the radio meant that people became accustomed, for the first time ever, to hearing a voice without a body (previously such an experience would have meant the supernatural, the voice of God or the evil). But, of course, in practice we don’t hear telephone or recorded voices like this at all: we assign them bodies, we imagine their physical production. And this is not just a matter of sex and gender, but involves the other basic social attributes as well: age, race, ethnicity, class – everything that is necessary to put together a person to go with a voice.” (Frith 1998, 196)

Even if music is a product of an elaborate studio recording which could never have existed as an organic performance:

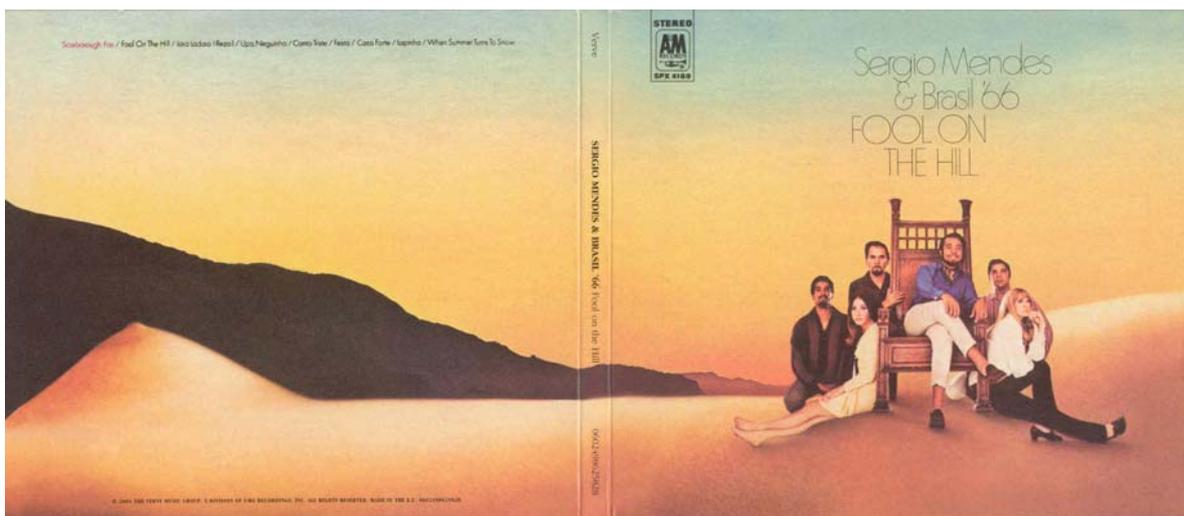
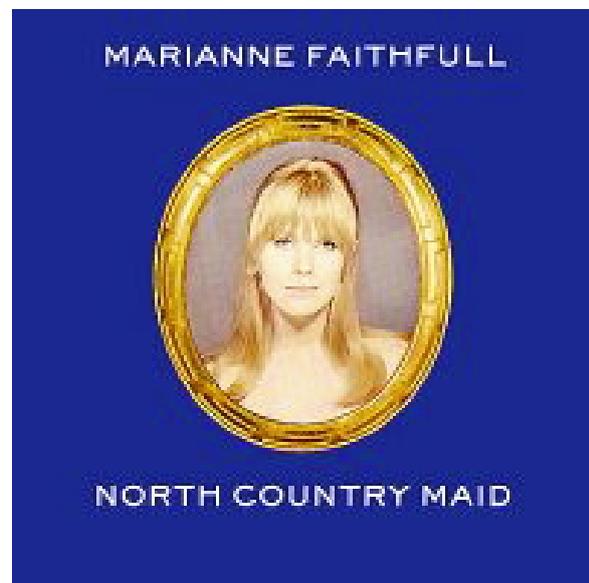
“I listen to records in the full knowledge that what I hear is something that never existed, that never could exist, as a ‘performance,’ something happening in a single time and space; nevertheless, it is now happening, in a single time and space: it is thus a performance and I hear it as one.” (Frith 1998, 211)

→ From live ‘performance arenas’ to ‘imagined’ performance arenas

→ The need of alternative visual keying to promote “genre-normative modes of listening” (Stockfelt 2004)

→ The rise of secondary visuality, or visual *representations* of performances or performers in music

Case Study: Three covers of albums containing “Scarborough Fair”



Back to Philip Auslander (1999)

At least in rock music, with the recording as the original blueprint for ‘authentic’ sound, live performances aspire to simulate the recording rather than providing a space for opposing the culture industry.

- ‘live’ events are increasingly produced for the media (esp. television)
- liveness has been invaded by recording and reproduction technology without which the simulation of studio sound would be inconceivable (in pop, studio-recorded playback becomes the norm, interrupting the ‘feedback loop of liveness’)

Complications after the arrival of music video

(Queen, *Bohemian Rhapsody* in 1975, media status after MTV is launched in 1981)

five formats of promo videos:

(1) Performance clips (based on musicians performing and lip-synchronization), (2) visual flood clips (high cut frequency *montage* and disparate images), (3) pseudo-narrative clips (which mix performance and *montage* of narrative sequences), (4) narrative clips, which illustrate a song’s story, often narrated by the lead vocalist [...], (5) *avant-garde* art clips (focussed on merging image and music rather than on advertising the performance). (Voigts-Virchow 2005, 67-68, italics in the original)

Dominance of 1, 3 and 4 in rock:

Auslander writes that

“[v]ideo is the primary experience of music in a mediatized culture”

“music video works to authenticate sound recordings in much the same way [...] as when live performance was the main guarantor of authenticity” (Auslander 1999, 92-93).

“A relationship that had previously centered on a couple became a threesome: live performance of rock did not cease to exist, but was reduced to replicating and, thus, authenticating, the *video* rather than the music” (ibid., 160, emphasis in the original).

Most live performances today are not ordinary events (Phelan), but essentially simulations of a simulation, doubly refracted from their mutable digital model.

What is liveness, then: pure simulation (Auslander) or the last resort of authentic, ‘auratic’ experience (Phelan)?

- **live events are always determined by mediatised discourses, but they also always retain the possibility for (unpredictable) feedback effects between audiences and performers**
- **there is generic variation regarding the proportions of recordedness and liveness:**

“jazz and classical music, recorded and live performances are considered separate art forms. No concertgoer, for example, would expect the flutes in Khatchaturian’s Second Symphony to be louder than the brass, as they are on Stokowski’s recording [...], and jazz fans expect the music they hear live to feature spontaneous inventions and improvisations different from those on recordings.” (Auslander 1999, 81)

also within rock, very different performance conventions apply (Romantic vs. Modernist authenticity, vgl. Session 3)

- **recent modes of live performance (deejaying, on stage sampling, etc.) re-enter recorded sounds into the feedback loop of liveness. ‘Serious’ combinations of ‘romantic’ strategies and ‘modernist’ assemblage are possible.**

Works Cited:

Auslander, Philip (1999). *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bogosian, Eric (1994). *Pounding Nails in the Floor with my Forehead*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Faulstich, Werner (2004). *Medienwissenschaft*. Munich: Fink/UTB. Frith, Simon (1998 [1996]). *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP.

Fischer-Lichte (2004). *Ästhetik des Performativen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Phelan, Peggy (1993). *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sasson, Donald (2006). *The Culture of the Europeans, from 1800 to the Present*. London: HarperCollins.

Stockfelt, Ola (2004). “Adequate Modes of Listening.” Simon Frith, ed. *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1: *Music and Society*. 4 vols. London and New York: Routledge, 375-91.

Voigts-Virchow, Eckart (2005). *Introduction to Media Studies*. Stuttgart: Klett.