

Investigating participation in the formation of indeterminate music: example of Cage's *Solo for Piano* (1958)

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Disciplinary background A. Background in sociology

Weber proposed the theory of rationality through his observation of Protestantism, and subsequently suggested that rationality is derived from an individual expression of preferences, value standards, behaviours and purposes (Habermas, 1984). He then applied his own notion of rationality to Western music to dissect music formation at notational, structural, instrumental and societal levels (Weber, 1958).

Disciplinary background B. Background in musicology

Indeterminate music demonstrates its indeterminacy in the creativeness of the composer, as well as the openness of the musical work and realisations of the performer and listener respectively. Their tripartite participation can be termed as incorporating poetic, neutral and aesthetic levels (Nattiez, 1990; Clarke, 2016). The musicological studies of graphic score and the indeterminate music of Cage mostly concern realisation and interpretation, while the exploration of rationality has been limited to the translation and explanation as per *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music* (1921).

Abstract

(1) To extend the theory of rationality further by applying it to indeterminate music to observe how an individual's participation affects the formation of music on notating, performing and appreciating levels, citing *Solo for Piano* by Cage as the primary example.

(2) To investigate the transformation of rationality in the 18th and 20th centuries by comparing different participatory forms of individuals in *Prelude in C Major BWV. 846* by J. S. Bach and *Solo for Piano*, Cage, then to suggest the revision accordingly.

In the 20th century, avant-garde musical form was composed and appreciated differently, through the participation of the composer, performers and listeners alike. As Cage permits performers to complete their freedom of choices (Iddon, 2013), the musical work is tightly interwoven with their participation, thus never the same. How should one analyse music with regard to the new formation? The theory of rationality is one constructed by observations of individual actions: it consists of purposive, value and formal rationality, which means that this theory can reflect purposes, intentions and the sense of value of people, to examine how an individual ultimately participates in the musical work. The exploration of new musical formation is bilateral; indeed, when delving into the individual participation a revision of rationality is revealed. Weber proposed rationality in the middle of the 20th century, but he did not have the chance to apply this theory to indeterminate music and graphic scores; the theory did not develop well afterwards. As such, this paper intends to delve into the tripartite participation discovering new musical formation on notating, performing and appreciating levels, and propose discourse surrounding a revision of rationality within indeterminate music.

Interdisciplinary implications. This paper seeks to demonstrate how rationality in the tripartite participation of indeterminate music will bring out not only a new viewpoint of musical analysis

through the sociological standpoint, but also refine the theory of rationality from the musicological one. In light of these developments, more research possibilities into indeterminate music are provided; in the meantime, an intertwined relationship within the two disciplines will be revealed.

References

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