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FROM SACRIFICE TO TELEMATIC:
ON MUSIC AND RITUAL

INTRODUCTION

Music offers a multifaceted lens through which we can examine the concept of rituals. Whether experienced in concert halls, bars, or echoing through the streets, music performances represent clear examples of rituals. These performances are *symbolic practices* that foster connections among people, creating a profound sense of community. Rituals extend beyond the confines of the concert hall; they encompass individual instrumental practice, a composer's creative process, and even the exchange of ideas about music in academic papers or casual conversations. The ritualistic essence of music is deeply ingrained in its fundamental role as a social system capable of generating communication and meaning within a temporal dimension. Music functions as a semiotic system, establishing various domains of interaction that produce sociocultural axes of resonance, thereby nurturing a sense of community. Music as a ritual creates shared harmonies and rhythms, physical embodiments, and corporeal performances that are genuinely felt and solidified. Music rituals, conveyed through sound, performance, narratives, and diverse discourses on music, construct embodied knowledge, memory, identity, and social bonds.

In the contemporary world, the neoliberal regime has established a form of dominion wherein data and information, rather than human bodies and energies, exert significant influence over social, economic, and political processes. The pervasive digitization of society has fundamentally transformed our perceptions, our relationships with the world, and our communal existence.

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Processed by algorithms and artificial intelligence, information flows freely through open networks, rendering the structures of mass media obsolete. Digital communication undermines the public sphere, which traditionally served as a space for exchanging symbolic forms and externalizing ritualistic interactions. Consequently, the information regime isolates individuals, leading to the gradual erosion of rituals.

THE EROSION OF RITUALS IN THE NEOLIBERAL AGE

In his investigation into the genealogy and fading of rituals, Byung-Chul Han underscores the profound significance of rituals in human life. He defines rituals as "symbolic techniques for making oneself at home in the world," transforming the experience of 'being-in-the-world' into a sense of 'being-at-home' (Han 2019, 10). Rituals are characterized by repetition, serving as a means of recognition that guarantees durability and a feeling of permanence. Rituals create stability, rendering the world a reliable place. They represent time in the same way that a home represents space, making time inhabitable. In today's world, molded by *data* and *information*, symbolic perception has dwindled, leading to a loss of lasting temporality and ritualistic notions of time. Data and information lack symbolic potency, rendering recognition and repetition unattainable. Digital communication proliferates, fostering connectivity while undermining communal bonds and isolating individuals. Symbolism, as a medium for forging communities, is steadily fading away. In contemporary society, those images and metaphors that once imbued existence with meaning and community, grounding life and conferring stability, have dissolved into a realm of symbolic emptiness. The neoliberal regime of capitalism that dominates society sacrifices duration in its pursuit of heightened production and amplified consumption. The experience of time's passage dwindles, and contingency proliferates. Society becomes increasingly fragmented and narcissistic.

In the ensuing sections, we will scrutinize the relationship between music and ritual through the perspectives of various authors who reflect on the evolution of music's symbolic practices in politics and economics, the impact of modern technology on artistic creativity, and the collaborative architectures of the information society.

ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN NOISE AND MUSIC:
ATTALI'S MODEL OF MUSICAL SYMBOLISM

In his exploration of the dichotomy between noise and music, Attali develops a comprehensive model of musical symbolism, delineating the historical evolution of music into four distinct categories—*sacrificing*, *representing*, *repeating*, and *composing*. Attali emphasizes that music's essence lies not in communication but rather in its profound symbolic potential. Instead of tracing its origins to linguistic communication, Attali suggests that music's roots are embedded within the context of ritual and sacrifice.

He articulates this dichotomy by asserting that noise serves as a destabilizing force, creating disorder and chaos, while music offers the means to control noise. Attali eloquently encapsulates this concept: "Noise is a weapon and music, primordially, is the formation, domestication, and ritualization of that weapon as a simulacrum of ritual murder" (1985, 24). This notion underscores the essential role of music in taming the disruptive forces of noise, harkening back to primitive societies' use of the simulacrum of sacrifice to establish social order and political integration.

Attali further contends that music possesses a prescient quality, capable of anticipating societal shifts. Each time society undergoes transformation, music emerges as a means of averting the eruption of violence. The modern manifestations of music rituals, including classical music concerts, electronic dance music, and rave events, echo the historical ritualization of violence, albeit in different forms.

This concept of music as sacrifice bears a notable influence from Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology, particularly regarding the interplay between music and myth. Lévi-Strauss posits that music and myth transcend the confines of articulated speech, constituting temporal languages that negate time itself. As Lévi-Strauss eloquently puts it, both music and myth function as "machines for the obliteration of time" (1969, 16). Beneath the surface of sound, music explores the listener's physiological time, converting irreversible time into a unified, synchronous entity, free from historical constraints. Tarasti (1979) also delves into this connection between music and myth, providing further insights into their intertwined nature and their role in shaping human understanding and experience.

Lévi-Strauss acknowledges that his foray into structural analysis of myths was inspired by his encounters with music, particularly through works such as Wagner's operas, Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and Stravinsky's ballet *Les*

Noces. These musical experiences immersed him in a state of temporal suspension, where music's internal organization arrested the passage of time, offering a glimpse of immortality (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 16).

From the category of *sacrificing*—the simulacrum of ritual death—the music went over to the category of *representing*—the simulacrum of exchange and harmony. Representing is based on the logic of the market and money. Music becomes a form of representation of the economic order, the "affirmation of a possible harmony in exchange" (Attali 2001, 109). The code of representation requires a system of measurement for the organization of harmonious exchanges. The tonal system accomplishes this, articulating an abstract system of harmonic functions capable of creating and resolving conflicts. Binary codes, rooted in oppositions such as consonance/dissonance or tension/relaxation, not only manifest differences in individual notes and chords but also in narratives that symbolize conflict in the social reality.

Music accomplishes a double function within this framework: on one hand, it must create harmony in society through consonance—for example, to simulate suffering; on the other hand, music has to excite and seduce, thereby producing dissonant noise. This duality in music's role, with its harmonic combinatorics and the exacerbation of individualism, ultimately led to a rupture in the process of representation. The extreme dissonances introduced into the tonal system, exemplified by figures like Wagner and Schoenberg, shattered the foundations of the tonal system and heralded the rise of a power founded on a technocratic language and a code of cybernetic repetition. Music shifted its focus towards the realm of sound matter, embracing a model of creativity based on probabilistic and combinatorial codes rather than the traditional codes of consonance and dissonance. As a result, music entered the calculated universe of atonality, serial music, electroacoustic music, and computer-generated music.

The third category, marked by the keyword *repeating*, revolves around sound recording. Recorded music, serving as a consumable object, reshapes individuals' relationships with music. Through recording, music morphs into a personalized simulacrum of individuality, as Attali poetically describes it: "the gramophone becomes like the altar of a personalized sacrifice" (Attali 2001, 180). This reproduction of music fosters uniformity across diverse media, offering "repetition in a society that talks so much about change, silence in the midst of so much noise, death in the heart of life" (120).

Moreover, repetition assumes a central role in contemporary musical creativity, exploring the realms of sound reproducibility and connectivity.

Digital technology enhances and broadens compositional techniques grounded in repetition. Concepts like the "loop", originating with *musique concrète* and popularized by electronic music apparatus like drum machines and sequencers, epitomize how automaticity and repetition influence musical ideation. Musical repetition also takes the form of symbolic processing, accumulating musical information, with an abundance of classical pieces and popular songs accessible on the internet, collectively constructing a reservoir of shared musical memory.

The fourth and pivotal category in Attali's (2001) framework is *composing*. Here, Attali espouses an optimistic vision of the future, heralding a new era, unbounded by traditional modes of thought. This era, as he envisions it, will neither herald a return to ritual nor rekindle the spectacles of the past, both of which have succumbed to the dominion of repetition. Instead, it will usher in an entirely novel political-economic paradigm. Attali posits that music will play a central role in this transformative process, with composition taking precedence.

In this emerging era, Attali foresees a flourishing of creativity within the digital domain, where "composition" will be an act of pleasure—musicians reveling in the delight of their own creations, improvising, and sharing their compositions beyond the constraints of the market (226). Composition, in this context, emerges as a form of resistance against societal repetition. Attali cites examples like free jazz, reggae, and rap as musical movements that challenge the relentless cycle of repetition by asserting the right to improvisation.

In the contemporary capitalist landscape, the relentless pursuit of accumulation engenders an inundation of information—an additive process that blurs the boundaries of closure and completion. Digital communication fosters connections rather than relationships. Attali fervently hopes that music will serve as a catalyst for new organizational forms, devoted to the pleasure of music-making, emancipating itself from the compulsion of production. In this reimagined landscape, music consumers will concurrently become creators, manipulating databases, molding sounds, and crafting music, akin to virtual DJs. These exchanges will transpire within non-commercial structures. Attali echoes Cage's perspective, wherein the composer relinquishes the desire to control sound and endeavors to discover ways to allow sounds to exist autonomously, rather than as vessels for preconceived theories or human emotions (Cage 1961, 10). This vision heralds the autonomy of sound and democratizes music knowledge and communication, challenging the conventional notions of composition's exclusive domain.

Additionally, Attali critically views the logocentric and absolutist convictions prevalent among 20th-century avant-garde composers, emphasizing their belief that composition is an acquired knowledge inaccessible to broad audiences. He contends that this notion correlates with the concentration of power in music. However, he hopes that the ongoing process of digitalization will not only decentralize power but also eliminate the distinction between composition and improvisation, thereby further democratizing music knowledge and communication.

AURA AND APPARATUS: BENJAMIN'S EXAMINATION OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

In this groundbreaking analysis of the emergence of the mechanical reproduction era, Benjamin delves into the essence of art's *authenticity* within the realm of ritualistic practices. According to Benjamin, art's inception lay in its service to rituals, initially within the magical and subsequently within the religious context. The unique quality of an authentic work of art is its *aura*, deeply intertwined with its ritualistic purpose. Benjamin meticulously outlines the process through which modern technology gradually erodes the aura surrounding works of art.

The erosion of the aura traces its roots back to the Renaissance, where the ritualistic function of art began to be supplanted by the secular worship of beauty. This transition persisted for three centuries until the advent of photography, which marked the first major revolution in technical reproduction and challenged the concept of the "authentic" work of art. For Benjamin, the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* emerged as a response to the loss of authenticity, establishing a kind of art theology—a pure celebration of artwork detached from any social function.

One way to understand the ritualistic role of art is through the lens of the body. Religious rituals occur in specific physical settings, in the presence of physical bodies. When art detaches itself from religion, the artwork becomes an autonomous object, eventually taking on the role of an *ersatz* for religion. The aura of an artwork arises from this simulacrum of religious content, a content that gradually vanished as art itself transformed into a "profane" ritual. Reproductive technology replaces physical presence with virtual presence, spawning its own rituals.

Benjamin suggests that modern technology, exemplified by photography and film, brings about a revolutionary transformation. It liberates art from the shackles of authenticity and the ritualistic function linked to location and original utility. This liberation empowers the audience to engage actively in the creative experience. The technical apparatus penetrates deeply into reality; in film, for instance, the actor performs not directly for the live audience but for the camera. The camera does not merely present the actor's performance but enacts its own performance through a combination of shooting and editing techniques. To appreciate the actor's performance fully, the audience must empathize with the camera's performance. Benjamin emphasizes that this new form of creativity can flourish if artistic aesthetics critically explore the potential of the apparatus, preventing it from becoming an object of veneration.

Han draws parallels between Benjamin's insights into the impact of the movie camera in shaping an "optical unconsciousness" and today's information regime. The camera, as an analog device, exposes micro-movements and actions of the actor, unveiling a psychoanalytic unconscious realm typically concealed. According to Han, big data and artificial intelligence serve a comparable role as a "digital magnifying glass", influencing our behavior below the threshold of consciousness: "The information regime takes hold of those pre-reflexive, instinctual, emotive layers of behavior that precede conscious actions" (Han 2021, 20).

However, Benjamin also acknowledges the alienating potential of art in the age of technical reproduction. Film, in particular, exemplifies resistance to the removal of the cult function of artwork, introducing a new kind of illusion that scatters and fragments the audience's attention. In the essay's epilogue, Benjamin shifts from optimism to caution, envisioning a future overshadowed by the specter of emerging fascism. He highlights the violation of the masses and the co-optation of the technical apparatus as interconnected consequences of society's fascist trajectory. The technical apparatus becomes instrumental in producing ritualistic values, serving the fascistic aim of reintroducing aesthetics into political life. Benjamin starkly declares, "All effort to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war" (1977, 168). Here, he cites Marinetti's manifesto on the Ethiopian war, which celebrates the beauty of war machinery and the aesthetics of violence. War, in this context, is intended to offer artistic gratification through the altered sense perception brought about by machinery and technology. For Benjamin, fascism represents the apex of the "l'art pour l'art" ideal. Self-alienation within fascism reaches such extremes that the destruction of humanity itself becomes an aesthetic experience.

TELEMATIC CHAMBER MUSIC:
A PARADIGM OF COMMUNICATION

The telematic paradigm, as I discussed in "Sound, Truth, and Paradigm" (Chagas 2021), embraces the intricate complexity of communication born from the convergence of telecommunications and information processing in our contemporary society. According to Flusser, telematic communication possesses the transformative potential to revolutionize our modes of interaction. Telematics has the unique ability to counteract entropy—the inherent randomness rendering information unpredictable—by converting historical and discursive thinking into dynamic dialogue. Back in the early 1980s, on the cusp of the internet's emergence, Flusser envisioned telematic dialogue as a playful game, a collaboration between humans and apparatuses dedicated to the systematic generation of information. Within this utopian vision, freedom manifests as a struggle against entropy, liberating individuals from the dominion of the machine.

Flusser (2011, 162) proposed chamber music as a model for dialogic communication, both in general and specifically within the realm of telematic communication. He contended that traditional chamber music, a pre-industrial form of communication, foreshadows the role of technical apparatuses. Chamber music performance necessitates multifaceted interactions among musicians, their instruments, and their surroundings, shaping communication and, ultimately, sound production. Inspired by this chamber music paradigm, Flusser characterizes telematic performance as a dialogue between "musicians" and "intelligent memories", devices that serve as both transmitters and receivers of information, all with the aim of synthesizing novel insights. However, unlike traditional chamber music, which unfolds linearly through themes and variations, telematic dialogue embraces simultaneity, multiplicity, and ubiquitous communication. Chamber music thus stands as a paradigm for creativity within a telematic society.

Flusser's model of telematic dialogue represents an attempt to synthesize two distinct forms of communication: (1) chamber music communication transpires in a physical medium where bodies produce gestures translated into sound, and (2) electronic music communication occurs in a virtual medium where apparatuses generate programs translated into sounds or images (Chagas 2014, 11). Unlike traditional chamber music, structured as a sequence of linear events, such as themes and variations, telematic dialogue occurs in simultaneous time and space, with all participants in various locations making

decisions related to themes and variations simultaneously (Flusser 2011, 163). In this perspective, the foundation of telematic music communication isn't an original score but a program—a set of rules soon to be replaced by reprogrammed memories, which musicians will employ for improvisation. Flusser blurs the distinction between composition and performance, highlighting that his telematic communication model seeks to reconstruct an "experience of presence" stemming from the performative nature of improvisation, while the role of music composition recedes into the background.

Flusser's telematic communication metaphor aligns with Attali's vision, emphasizing self-discovery through creative exchanges and fostering mutual appreciation in society (Attali 2001, 279–80). Heidegger's (1977, 8) perspective further enriches this discussion, as he argues that modern technology's impact extends beyond resource allocation to include human beings. He contends that technology replaces historical consciousness with a second-order magical consciousness, driven by technical apparatuses that simplify culture to its most basic forms.

Additionally, Ascott's insights from the 1960s (2003, 109–56) emphasize the potential for artistic collaboration facilitated by electronic networks, particularly in remote locations, fostering interactive art and interdisciplinary efforts. The telematic paradigm transcends physical boundaries, extending the mind into unpredictable configurations of thought and creativity, contributing to the emergence of global awareness. Ascott's metaphor of a telematic embrace symbolizes how it draws individuals together and connects them, offering the potential for an infrastructure that facilitates spiritual interchange and global harmonization (245). In this way, Flusser's, Attali's, Heidegger's, and Ascott's ideas converge within the telematic paradigm, envisioning transformative communication and cultural interaction.

Notably, the number of individuals interested in making music online has significantly grown since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed worldwide social isolation measures. Although "network music" or "telematic music" have been areas of research and musical exploration for a few decades, they've only recently become accessible to a broader audience. Through the fusion of music performance and algorithms, telematic music encourages composers and performers to actively delve into phenomenological aspects of music *listening* and *consciousness*. The use of the internet for musical communication raises numerous questions, spanning from the technical aspects of telematic performance, including latency, delay, and rhythmic synchronization, to fundamental inquiries about how we perceive sound,

construct temporal awareness of sound, and shape auditory imagination by linking individual sounds to a temporal continuum (Chafe 2021, 62).

How do we perceive sound? How do we construct a temporal awareness of sound? How do we cultivate an auditory imagination by connecting individual sounds to a temporal flow? Furthermore, from a sociological perspective, telematic music facilitates cultural interchange and artistic collaboration on a transnational scale, offering the potential to virtually unite communities and counteract the isolating tendencies of digital society. This raises some intriguing questions: What are the implications of this model of telematic dialogue when viewed through the lens of music? Can telematic performance be seen as a contemporary iteration of musical ritual?

CONCLUSION: LISTENING AND RESONANCE

Listening is an inherent, shared human activity—a ritualistic engagement with our acoustic environment. It serves as a means to construct a sense of self and maintain our fundamental connection to others. Humans exist within a world constantly in motion, filled with vibrations that extend beyond the auditory realm. Our bodies and minds, both consciously and unconsciously, resonate sympathetically with the various elements and energies of our surroundings. This sonic environment represents an unbroken continuum of vibrations, creating a space filled with resonance, expansions, and reverberations. Within this milieu, the act of listening transforms the listener into a locus of resonance. To listen is to embark on a quest for potential meaning, all while navigating the vibrational realm saturated with incessant feedback loops, both internal and external. Jean-Luc Nancy (2002, 31) aptly termed this complex interplay "resounding".

Our comprehension of music implies the capacity to enter this resonating spatiality, negotiating meaning by projecting ourselves toward *others*. Listening to music becomes a method of community building. As Han posits, "today's crise of community is a crisis of resonance" (2019, 19–20). Resonance is not merely a reflection of the self; it inherently incorporates the dimension of the other. It signifies accord, harmony. However, our perception of listening is increasingly shaped by algorithms and intelligent systems that corrode resonance, redirecting us inward, isolating us, and fostering narcissism. Rituals traditionally bind communities, uniting them in the tranquility of shared silence. Yet today, the noise of compulsive communication

replaces that silence. Han suggests that the disenchantment of art is a symptom of collective narcissism, which impedes the experience of resonance. The erosion of ritual profanes life, reducing it to mere survival. Contemporary society oscillates between increasing brutality and heightened moralization. In Han's words, "Morality is formless" (84). In response to this trend, we must expand the realm of resonance, a space where we can truly listen to others, and champion an *ethics of beautiful forms*.

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Summary

This paper explores diverse perspectives on the relationship between music and ritual. It begins by addressing Han's intriguing question regarding the disappearance of rituals in the data-driven neoliberal era. Subsequently, it examines Attali's model of symbolic categories, tracing the evolution of music from primitive society's rituals to modern digital expressions. Further, it investigates Benjamin's views on art's transformation through mechanical reproduction and Flusser's concept of telematic dialogue in contemporary creativity. It is underscored that listening transcends mere solitude; it's a ritualistic engagement ingrained in our collective human experience. Music, as a medium of resonance and harmony, has the power to combat the decline of traditional rituals and foster an *ethics of beautiful forms*, transcending the isolating noise of compulsive communication in contemporary society. The paper concludes by asserting that reinterpreting ritual values through music enhances our understanding of art and offers avenues to combat self-centered tendencies fostered by neoliberalism.

Keywords: ritual; symbolic practices; information society; telematic; resonance