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MUSIC 256A

Chapter 4 Reading Response

After reading Chapter 4, the quote that stuck in my mind the most was “(Interesting) sound is motion (over time)” (Page 168). In some ways, this is similar to the section in Chapter 3 about movement in relation to time, and how an arrow (or any other object) is never really moving over a time frame of 0. These two ideas are different, but they both comment on how without time, there is no change, no movement, and nothing interesting. In this case, if the music isn’t changing and moving, it is like the arrow, but instead of a lack of motion, there is a lack of interesting behavior. On the same page, Ge also writes, “Static sounds, no matter how complex at a given moment, get invariably and profoundly *boring*. *Interesting* sounds are the *evolution* of something *in* the sound.”(Page 168). I agree with this, but I think it raises some interesting questions. Without a doubt, I believe that every single sound, using any frequencies, tone, harmony, etc. will become boring if it stays static. However, it is also true that some sounds are much more interesting and listenable than others. For example, in traditional music alone, there are some chords that are much more exciting than others. For example, a major triad? Boring. A diminished 7th? Mysterious and fun! A French augmented 6th? Not my taste, but certainly more interesting than a major triad. Then you can add different tones and textures to make it even more interesting, and this is all without considering time. It’s surprising that certain static sounds can be more interesting than others, and then in a way, the passing of time diminishes that interest, until nothing static is interesting any more.

The other topic I want to talk about is Homebrew. I am very familiar with Homebrew, as I’ve listened to in multiple classes with Ge, and I know he loves this piece. In fact, I think he said at one point it was the reason he decided to do computer music. But to be honest, I’ve never had the same reaction to it that Ge had, and after listening to it again today, I think I’ve finally realized why. One of the great things about music is how many different genres and styles of music there is, and especially in the streaming age, everyone can find music that speaks to them. For me, I don’t like music without singing. I feel like the human voice conveys emotion so well, and while it’s nice to hear a guitar or piano, what I’m missing is *emotion*. That got me thinking even more about something else mentioned in this chapter: “With a digital computer, we can , in theory, generate *any* sound…”(Page 166). I understand theoretically why this is true, but I find it *impossible* to believe that a computer can generate something with as much passion as a human voice. Yes, it can replicate it, and it does a great job at doing that (thank goodness a computer can replicate the human voice, because otherwise we wouldn’t be able to listen to recorded music!). But can a computer create a passionate sound? Can a string of 0s and 1s emulate emotion? I have a hard time believing it can, and that makes me feel good. Jean-Claude Risset said “Why use a computer? …To do things you couldn’t do *without* a computer”(Page 163), and I agree, I think that’s a wonderful goal to have when computing. I *also* think this can be applied to the human voice. We are still capable of things computers can’t do, and may never be able to do (such as feeling emotions). The computer can do so many wonderful things, and we shouldn’t take that for granted or forget about it, but we also shouldn’t forget that we have some power over the computer as well.