

Life is Serious; **ART SERENE**

Biography

Andrija Pavlović a.k.a. Andy Pavlov is a pianist, composer, producer, researcher, innovator and professor born in Belgrade (Yugoslavia). He finished his studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock, Germany and PhD studies based on “Quantum Music” project at the Faculty of Music Arts Belgrade. He is a professor at the Department of Scenic Design, Faculty of Technical Sciences in Novi Sad, Serbia. He has taught and given masterclasses and workshops at the University of Cincinnati, the University of Illinois, Chicago, Goldsmith’s University, London, the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Rostock, and NUS Singapore, among others. From 2001 he is engaged in multimedia and conceptual art.

He is the co-founder of the piano duo LP Duo (www.lpduo.com), named one of the 8 best piano duos at the biggest world competition for two pianos, Miami Dranoff Two Piano Competition, in 2008. From 2004, LP Duo won 30 international prizes and performed over 300 concerts in Europe, the USA and Asia at renowned venues including: Carnegie Hall New York, Kennedy Center Washington, Royal Danish Opera and Theater Copenhagen, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and NUS University Singapore. LP Duo released 12 albums and are the co-founders and presenters of the pioneering art & science project “Quantum Music” (www.quantummusic.org).

Together with a group of engineers and quantum physicists, LP Duo invented a new musical instrument - the Duality Portable Hybrid Piano. Andy’s albums are released by Universal Music Group, Donemus The Netherlands and Sweet Sensation (www.sweetsensationmusic.com). In 2022, he was Kavli Artist in Residence at TU Delft, the Netherlands where he established art & science dialogues and worked with the scientists on the “Beyond Quantum Music” project.

He is composing music for theater shows, TV, movies, dance choreographies.

THE LIFE AND ART OF REPETITION – “REPETITION IN MUSIC - REAL AND IMAGINARY SPACES OF SCENE DESIGN”

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Abstract

In this paper, we will explore the concept of repetition in music and its impact on creating invisible, subjectively imaginary spaces in scene design. Repetition serves performers and listeners as a means of subtle transition, a transcendence from the real, material, spatial, everyday world into the emotional, sensitive, and intellectual realm, where subjective-imaginary worlds become places of extended spaces of scene design. Repetition is primarily a consequence of natural laws, as well as the human need to create and organize spaces both around and within themselves. From John Cage's perspective, could repetition in everyday life already be considered an art form in itself?

Music is an art governed by empirically proven physical laws of acoustics which acts as a bridge between the inner (psychic) and outer (material) worlds. The need for repetition is not only the foundation of life, making it tangible, but also the foundation of music as a ritual where “to repeat” serves a higher purpose. A sufficient number of specific repetitions opens the possibility of breaking free from the enchanted cycle of repetition, thus allowing the “liberation”, and other forms of experiences.

Thanks to the role of repetition, life and art intertwine and cannot be fully separated. How does music, through its repetitiveness, lead us beyond to imaginary worlds of scene design? Where and how does the everyday life “end” and art begin? And what role does scene design play in that process? In this paper, we will examine the mechanism of repetition that enables this transition, whether in classical, popular, avant-garde or minimal music of the 20th century. Furthermore, we will attempt to expand the existing meaning of scene design to encompass the imaginary, inner spaces (of performer/listener) “produced” by repetitiveness, from which it becomes possible to create new (material) scenographies.

Keywords: repetition, music, time, scene design, performing arts

1. INTRODUCTION

The entire nature, the entire history of the planet and life on it, consists of cycles that regularly repeat, and that is what we see, feel, and know. What we observe and what guides us. Rain, snow, warm, cold, “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring”!¹ Repetition is all around us as well as within us. Our body and nervous system, our cells, have their own patterns of behavior, birth, and decay—eternal changes. They have their own metabolic repetition. “Panta Rhei.”² Flow and change, repetition, define life. Aliveness. The moment everything stops, it would mean that life itself has ceased. For a human, that would mean death and eternal silence. This is why the emergence of music is not surprising—that wondrous organization of sounds that initially allowed people not to feel alone and later to thank to the Gods. Music has primarily helped people, and continues to help them, to express the inner, invisible world through an abstract yet intensely sensory realm. That is why music has always been considered, even before the current peak of materialistic-rationalistic civilization, the highest form of mathematics³ that directly influences and flows through our senses, connecting the Body, Spirit, and Soul. Music reminds us of our essential nature and brings us back to our origins, where reason and intuition become one, and the inner and outer experience merge into a symbiosis through sensory perception.

In this paper, we will first examine repetition in music through some historical examples. Then, we will present the idea of “expanding” the concept of scene design into mental and imaginary spaces, ultimately posing the question of whether and where a work of art begins and ends. In other words, does art transcend or blur the boundaries between life and art, and if so, where and how?

2. REPETITION IN MUSIC: EXAMPLES THROUGHOUT HISTORY

In Werner Herzog’s documentary film *Herdsmen of the Sun*,⁴ we follow the life of the Wodaabe tribe of the Sahara (fig. 1). This is a nomadic tribe that still, in modern times, lives in a way that illustrates the possibilities of how the life of prehistoric people/tribes looked like, living in the harmony with the laws of nature’s repetition (earth, sun, and the changing of the seasons). However, what interests us here is something else—the way women in this tribe choose men, their future husbands. This involves a musical and theatrical ritual called *Yaake*, a performance under the open sky where men, dressed in costumes and wearing makeup, dance and sing in a highly rhythmic and repetitive manner to attract the attention of women and be chosen. Such a ritual not only contains patterns and repetitions but also features extended performance duration (*Yaake* is part of the Guérewol festival, which lasts for a week).



Fig.1. Wodaabe tribe (photo from the Werner Herzog’s movie)

In Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Prelude No. 2 (Fig. 2), we observe a clear sense of repetition, expressed

1 “Spring, Summer, fall, Winter...and Spring”, the movie by South Korean director Kim Ki-duk: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0374546/>

2 “Everything flows”, Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, late 6th century BC

3 Ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras believed that the numbers are behind everything in the Universe: <https://www.vermontpublic.org/vpr-classical/2015-05-04/timeline-002-pythagoras-and-the-connection-between-music-and-math>

4 “Wodaabe – Die Hirten der Sonne”, 1989. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098669/>

through rhythm, uniform sixteenth notes, and their movement, while each bar follows a harmonic change. This kind of musical architecture and repetition gives Bach's music a special sense of universality, timelessness, and the ability for the listener to fully, and very fast, "connect" with the musical piece. Through repetition, the listener seemingly paradoxically "steps out" of the piece itself and embarks on an emotional or imaginary journey (or both simultaneously). It's as if Bach managed, perhaps more than others, to capture the DNA and very essence of music, whose journey is fundamentally (Spi)Ritual.



Fig. 2. *Well-Tempered Clavier, Prelude no.2 (first two bars of the composition)*

"Bolero" is an orchestral work by Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) from 1928, which is considered perhaps as the first minimal music composition, even though the concept of minimalism in music only emerged later, during the 1960s. This musical work begins with a rhythmic figure played on the snare drum. This rhythm will remain identical until the very end of the composition. Then, the flute initially plays the characteristic melody, inspired by Sufi music melody⁵, which is later repeated by other instruments (clarinet, bassoon, oboe, etc.) with almost no or very slight variations, gradually building the piece by expanding the orchestral sound over the next twenty minutes until it reaches its full climax. The result is usually complete exhilaration in the audience. The scene design of "Bolero" was conceived as a ballet performance, with the action taking place in a Spanish tavern, although the composer himself expressed the desire and gave instructions for the piece to be performed outdoors, mostly in front of industrial warehouses, in order to emphasize the mechanization of the world and the new industrial civilization that was under construction at the time. In terms of repetition and the compositional process in music, Ravel was following a path similar to that depicted by the German director Fritz Lang in his silent film *Metropolis* just a year earlier (1927)—futurism and mass production.⁶

The work "Vexations" by Erik Satie (fig. 3) is essentially a single motif, written in 1893-1894, most likely for piano or keyboard instruments. The piece contains one instruction: the motif must be repeated 840 times, which can result in a performance lasting up to fifteen hours. Satie did not publish the work during his lifetime, and it was first printed by the American composer John Cage in 1949. The piece was then premiered in 1963.⁷

The composition "Canto Ostinato" (1976-1979, fig. 4) by Dutch composer Simeon Ten Holt (1923-2012) was written for two or more pianos or keyboard instruments and consists of 106 patterns (small cells). Performers are given the freedom to choose which part of the pattern to play and how many times to repeat it. The work has become a cult piece in the Netherlands, evidenced by sold-out concerts in the largest and most important concert hall in Amsterdam, the Concertgebouw.⁸ A documentary film titled "Over Canto"⁹ was made about the piece, in which various people testify that listening to "Canto Ostinato" profoundly changed their lives.

5 Sufi music refers to the devotional music of the Sufis, inspired by the works of the Sufi poets like Rumi, Hafiz and others. <https://www.barbican.org.uk/s/sufimusic/>

6 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0017136/>

7 This is a more recent example where the pianist Igor Levin, performs „Vexations” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uu_03mUPgHU

8 For the past twenty years, LP Duo has been performing "Canto Ostinato" in the most unusual scene design settings (standard concert halls, on a boat, in a tram, outdoors, "lying down" concerts, etc.). In last two years, pianists Sonja Loncar and Andrija Pavlovic (a.k.a. Andy Pavlov), together with Dutch pianists Jeroen and Sandra Van Veen, performed four sold-out concerts at the prestigious Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, each time receiving standing ovations from the audience. <https://www.concertgebouw.nl/concerten/5282568-canto-ostinato-met-jeroen-en-sandra-van-veen-lp-duo>

9 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2160325/>

NOTE DE L'AUTEUR:
 Pour se jouer 840 fois de suite ce motif, il sera bon de se préparer au préalable, et dans le plus grand silence, par des immobilités sérieuses.

♩ Très lent

♩ A ce signe il sera d'usage de présenter le thème de la Basse

THÈME

Fig.3. Erik Satie - “Vexations” (sheet music)

CANTO OSTINATO
 voor toetsinstrumenten
 1976 - 1979

Simeon ten Holt

staccato, legato
 non legato

staccato, non legato, legato con pp, senza fine

Fig. 3. Canto Ostinato (first page of the composition)

In the song “Hey Jude”¹⁰ by The Beatles, something unusual happens for the pop music format, which is typically limited to around three minutes—reflecting the technological spirit of the time, specifically the so-called radio format. Within this format, the music industry “competes” for the attention of its listeners. A typical pop song follows this structure of repetition: introduction, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, “bridge,” and a final chorus with an optimal ending: the “outro.”

However, in “Hey Jude”, after four minutes (the entire song lasts eight minutes!), a repeating vocal section starts with the syllables “na-na-na.” This motif lasts for four bars and is repeated for the next four minutes (half of the entire song). In this way, the song builds repetitively and dynamically over time, utilizing the collective, choir-like singing of the audience together with the band members themselves.

10 The single was released in 1968, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_MjCqQoLLA

3. MUSIC, REPETITION, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF SCENE DESIGN

Music has changed throughout history in response to shifts in society and culture, but it has certainly retained at least two defining characteristics—ritual and repetition. Regardless of the experiments that took place in the 20th century, such as the emergence of twelve-tone technique, serialism, or the “silence” of John Cage, it is undeniable that repetition in music is ubiquitous. It provides the listener with an obvious, deeper, unconscious, and automatic connection through structures made up of repeating musical patterns.

This connection with the musical work—whether through live performances or later through audio and video recordings—is the first and most fundamental benefit of repetition and recurring musical forms (patterns), where the unity between performer and audience is established. Beyond this, there are further, more subtle and intangible connections that occur individually—both in the performer’s and the listener’s inner worlds: emotional and imaginative.

Repetition in music leads to a shared ritualistic experience, but its impact depends on the focus and attention (listening) of both the performers and the listeners. The quality of listening paradoxically leads the participants of the music ritual to a state of detachment from the very same musical material. This detachment transports them into emotional and imaginative realms, which we can interpret as an expanded concept of scene design—fields where unforeseen experiences, sensations, thoughts, or feelings may arise. In these realms, entire “scenes” can be projected onto the inner plane, or the “mental canvas” of the performer and the listener.

This is the very purpose of the ritual, and repetition helps activate the imagination and “inner projection” through the “time” function of the music. Once music, as a medium, takes the primary focus through listening, the mind is “engaged,” which allows other sensations and impressions—sometimes even very old, nearly forgotten memories, thoughts, and emotions—to appear on the mental canvas. These projections create a scene design within the individual’s mind.

In fact, the “mental canvas” we speak about is located in the frontal part of our brain (the frontal lobe), and we are most conscious of it when we close our eyes, even slightly. This mental canvas is already a kind of a stage, an empty set where our thoughts are projected, creating various forms of scene design.

From the perspective and experience of the performer, we could compare the process of musical performance to a (long) journey, where the performer acts as the driver, transporting passengers (the audience). During this long drive, the music makes the “landscapes” pass by, and the driver’s brain and nervous system slowly “take over” the journey, making it almost automatic (the mind is occupied). Meanwhile, the performer receives new impulses (scenes) projected on their mental canvas.¹¹

Something similar happens with the audience (the passengers); however, in this process, there is one key difference: the audience does not perform the piece, but actively participates in its performance by listening. Through listening, they also create new, potential scene designs, which continue to unfold even after the concert ends. These new experiences, ideas, and mental projections can potentially materialize in different areas of life—whether professionally or privately—long after the ritual has concluded.

In this way, repetition in music, paired with its ritualistic and meditative effects, extends the concept of scene design beyond the physical stage to the mental, emotional, and imaginary planes, where each participant—performer and listener alike—co-creates an evolving, dynamic experience.

4. WHERE DOES A MUSICAL (ARTISTIC) WORK BEGIN AND WHERE DOES IT END?

In 1952, pianist David Tudor performed perhaps the most radical composition in the history of music, *4’33”*¹² by composer John Cage. In this composition, the pianist sits at the piano and for four minutes and thirty-

11 “My space, it’s time”, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

12 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWVUp12XPpU>

three seconds does not play a single note. During this time, the performer and the audience sit in “silence,” and everything that happens in this time period is considered a unique performance and a new work. The audience and the performer together, again and again, create a new composition, listening to the sounds of the surrounding environment, which are never the same. This radical work opened new perspectives on the question of sound and music. Through this piece, John Cage wanted to show that, every sound, no matter what it is, is sufficient in itself—that every sound is already music. For Cage, sound as it is, “discovered” by listening, is enough and beautiful. It is like a small choreographic miniature that does not need to have any particular meaning but exists as it is.¹³ In this way, everyday life becomes a stage where we can find countless solutions for scenography, if we choose to do so—if we choose to observe, or in this case, to listen.

On November 8, 1991, artist Miroslav Mandić, known for his conceptual works, began his artistic project “Ruža lutanja” with the idea of walking around the Earth. The work, or rather the act of walking, started at the grave of poet William Blake in London and lasted for ten years. This project resulted in a literary novel, diary, which represents more conventional form of art. However, the greater attention is drawn to the act of walking itself, a process that is not just spatial but also temporal. Through this act, the artist, in his own words, became a “Citizen of Earth.” By walking an average of twenty kilometers a day, Miroslav Mandić covered the distance of the Earth’s circumference. Through the artist’s diary, landscapes and characters unfold along this unique journey, where life itself becomes art and art becomes life. This artwork continues to gain resonance as time passes.

In the example of “Ruža lutanja” we can observe that an artwork, an action, begins first with the decision (a personal decision, a personal act), followed by its external shaping and communication to the public, and then by existing within the temporal continuum of the work. Over the course of the journey, the work first changes the artist himself and then the audience—those he meets along the way and later all those who hear about the work or read the novel-diary. There is also a completely inexplicable, metaphysical level to this work, which “operates” in its invisibility. It lies in the power of the personal act and decision made by the artist - a ritual to which he unreservedly surrenders his life.

5. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERFORMER’S PERSPECTIVE

“In June 2024, together with visual artist Sun Mandić, I performed a piece titled *24 Hours*, in which Sun drew while I improvised on the piano during the period of 24 hours. The entire work took place in the studio of Serbian painter Djordje Stanojevic. With almost no preparation, I embarked on what might be the most challenging performance I have ever done, one that I agreed to intuitively after an invitation from artist Sun Mandić, following screening of the film “Ryuichi Sakamoto - Coda”¹⁴ at the “Jugoslovenska kinoteka” in Belgrade, Serbia. The *24 Hours* performance began at 2 PM (June 2, 2018). The first six hours felt like I was playing six concerts, each an hour long. This was roughly the pattern I repeated, and the audience would clap at the end of each hour and take a break. After these six hours, I felt like I had “spent” all my creativity. Some of the audience left, some stayed, and new people arrived. At that point, I would simply place my hands on the piano and let them “draw” a new melody or pattern on their own. The hardest part for me came during the so-called “wolf hour” (the middle of the night, around 3 AM). At that time, I felt like I had hit a wall. My own wall, and I had nowhere to go except to continue placing my hands on the keys and see what my unconscious mind had to say. The most patient members of the audience stayed, some went to sleep, and the freshest ones arrived excitedly around 6 AM the next day. The performance ended at 2 PM the following day (June 3, 2018), in a deeply cathartic mood, for which the audience, who stayed for the entire 24 hours, was largely responsible. An emotional feeling of a great achievement enveloped both me and everyone present. The journey into the unknown had succeeded. The goal had been reached. We had ritualistically embarked on a journey whose act, above all, would be remembered, especially by those who were there. And then, much like in the work “Ruža Lutanja” by Miroslav Mandić, it seemed as though there was an echo, a capsule, an invisibility that

13 “There are two things that don’t have to mean anything, one is music and the other is laughter.” Emmanuel Kant, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y&t=1s>

14 <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6578572/>

allowed the work to continue living on. The boundaries between life, art, imagination, the external, and the internal had been erased.” — *Excerpt from the Diary of Andrija Pavlović*

“On September 5, 2024, 6:30 AM, together with my wife, Lidija Andonov, I set off by car from Berlin to the little town of Punat on the island of Krk, Croatia. Around 9:30 AM, we passed the bypass around Dresden, then by noon we were in Prague, which is always crowded. Up until Dresden, I’m struggling. I’m extremely sleepy. After Dresden, my mind is “enough occupied” with the driving, as if some inner passion, sweetness, and an unprecedented sense of satisfaction begin to take over me, and images and ideas start to rush onto my mental projection screen. We are heading toward Ceske Budejovice. We are surrounded by hills, fields, and greenery. There is no highway here, so we are moving along the main road, driving much more slowly. We reach Linz (Austria) only around 3:30 PM. Austria is full of tunnels. A molehill. We arrive in Graz at 6:00 PM. Here, we can already feel the scent of the Balkans. In Zagreb, we are at 7:30 PM, and we reach Punat, Krk just a few minutes before 10:00 PM.” — **Second excerpt from the diary of Andrija Pavlović**

6. CONCLUSION

If we examine the previously mentioned works, we can see that they all share a common component—time. The work with time, or the experience of being within a specific period (perseverance), along with the repetition of certain actions, allows the performer and/or observer (the audience) to step out of their comfort zone and “venture” into the unknown. This precisely serves as the starting point for exploring the field of imagination and “mental scenography”, which we can view as an “extension of the scene design concept”.

In the works of John Cage, Miroslav Mandić, Sun Mandić and Andrija Pavlović, we observe that these artistic pieces are pre-determined in their titles, methods of execution, and “path” (clearly made decisions by artists before the work starts), while their results are left to the process itself. The process and the experience, in fact, become the result. In these examples, the life and artistic processes are completely intertwined and almost inseparable.

In contrast to the previously mentioned artistic works, excerpt no. 2 from Andrija Pavlović’s diary is not an artwork in itself. It is not pre-determined; the author did not make any prior decisions. Instead, there is simply a need for the journey itself, followed by the emergence of presence (focus) and a careful observation of the journey’s process, which is later written in the form of a diary. Thus, within the context of this work, it eventually takes on the form of artistic valorization. Thus, (and now presented within the context of this work), it later takes on the form of artistic valorization.

The attention in this case, even in the seemingly ordinary instance of a long drive, did not arise on its own. It was facilitated by the repetitive action over an extended period of time (15 hours of driving) and the necessity to “endure” this action. The moment the “driver” after hours of restlessness and discomfort, accepts the situation as it is, he somehow becomes “liberated” from that very situation. New processes and sensations within him gradually begin to unfold. That time is no longer “lost time” that one wants to “skip”, reduce or avoid; it transforms into quality time in which imagination, new ideas, or different realizations are set into motion.

In life, we are faced with the sense of the passage of time, as well as the constant chain of repetition (Indian: “samsara”).¹⁵ Listening, seeing and experiencing a particular artwork can help our attention and presence become a valuable daily habit, where we are aware of the stages of the scene design we see around us or those projected onto our inner “mental canvas.”

Contradictorily, attempts to break free from the chain of repetition are only possible if we fully surrender to and dedicate ourselves to that very chain of repetition - when we are present and patient in these processes, and when we observe them with special attention. Only in those moments do life and art become absolutely “ONE”.

“It is clear that the essential thing, both in heaven and on earth, is long-term and unidirectional submission:

15 “Samsāra” is a Sanskrit word that means “running around in circles.”

from this, over time, something emerges that makes it worth living on this earth, such as virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirit, something that transforms, something refined, mad, or divine.” — Friedrich Nietzsche (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*)

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